MASTER OF FINE ARTS
THESIS EXHIBITION

SCHOOL OF ART
COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS
UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
In a landscape reminiscent of childhood
among animals and hunters
forests and changing seasons
unending cycles remind us that everything is a matter of life and death.
We forget the ways that we are connected to the land
until a man dies during the winter and we have to wait for the ground to
thaw before we can bury his body.
Frozen in artifice, eventually we become the animal.
Until then, we wake every morning in ritual
and find ways to reconcile what it means to be alive.
The Story of the Heavens

19th century lithograph, elk antler specimen

2’x2’ wall mount and pedestal
IDENTITY, AND THE LUXURY OF EVOLUTION

I was first my mother’s favorite son, her only son. I was my Oma’s Grandson. I drew with pencils and crayons because they loved me and loved the pictures I made. I watched my mother marry a man who loved me too and loved the pictures I made. I became a first grade student who didn’t know how to read. I was a candidate for Ritalin. I homeschooled. My mother helped me become literate and the whole time, I drew my pictures. I graduated high school and went to college so I could draw my pictures better.

Before I knew I wasn’t going to be a pro athlete and before I knew I wasn’t as gifted at math and before I knew who girls were I knew my paper and the pencil I made marks with. My first memories are presenting drawings to my family members. I did not know any visual artists; I did not know art theory. I did not know about the color wheel or about post modernist thought. I knew that my drawings were praised and approval came with making marks on paper. They originated in simple self-expression. Batmobile, Superman, Ninja Turtles, and Transformers were rendered endlessly. Later, double-decker airplanes with lots of huge turbines and dozens of windows were rendered. Inspired by looking at picture books from the library. These fictional drawings came from my mother taking me to the library to help teach me to read. I loved without equal Stephen Biesty’s cross-section books. I leafed through classical architecture books and big art books because they too like Biesty’s were in the oversized bookshelves. I grew up drawing everyday, with many phases in subject matter, from houses with bricks and mouldings individually rendered to giant robots inspired by my afternoon television shows. I look at my book Identity and it comprises many different passions and memories from my childhood. The fur covers, aside from representing the hide of the characters within my pages, satisfies my fingertips now, just as Dorothy Kunhardt’s Pat the Bunny did when I was learning my vowels and consonants. The fully rounded world my characters traverse is strengthened by the medieval world found in Biesty’s cross-section book on Castles, which would lead me no doubt to my favorite childhood strategy computer game, Age of Empires. The luxury homeschooling gave me was the time and freedom to become an expert at my toys, my books, and my imagination.

I raised ants and praying mantis. I cultivated orchids and watched caterpillars become…moths. I played with Legos for hours, alone, happily. All activities from my childhood play a significant role in the development of my storytelling, my imagination and my skill. The inspirations for my book started before bad grades, before failure, before I knew how to read. The world within Identity and the Luxury of Evolution is a representation of my life and daily process. I use the depiction of a single day to walk the viewer through my regular thoughts and practices, from waking up and needing breakfast to going to the market and celebrating music and physical fitness. The “Luxury of Evolution” is a two-fold meaning. Firstly, I am aware that I am made to evolve from and withstand all of life’s non-lethal “problems,” and I thankfully have. Secondly, I use the book to show my hope for a standard of elevated luxury in my life. That if I eat a piece of fruit, it is the best fruit I could have chosen. If I have a dog, it is the healthiest most obedient kiss giver there ever was. My hope of having a house, it will be an amazing tree house by the water. The musician in my mind will make music about success, raising your friends up and ignoring the people that seek to bring you down. If I had to accomplish these things without the luxury of living in an industrialized society, without electricity, without a truck bringing delicious fruits from far away, without a gas powered automobile to travel in, how would I live? What would it look like? Who would I live with and what would I eat? I drew the answers to these questions.
I believe that through interpretation of the ways we experience the natural world, we further consider how we want to live in our own environment. The places we go to experience nature are built on in order for us to explore it as safely and conveniently as possible. Raw nature is too frightening or difficult to access and interpret for the majority of us.

My photographs document the places where we get away, where we convene with nature. Often during a visit to wilderness parks we are welcomed by a Visitor Center with displays that mimic what we are about to experience in the wild. This information is, of course, helpful and insightful, but it also is another way of directing our experience. When we have made our way to the park we are guided by trails and signs and guardrails. These guides, again, make the experience easier and perhaps more interesting, but they do not allow us to have an unmediated experience, or to wander as our own free will would move us.

I am not arguing for the dismantling of these systems, I find them a comfort and wholly necessary for the education of the public and the conservation of natural areas. Still, I believe in the necessity for examination of our constructs and reflection upon our own education and experience in the natural world.
I see a tragic intimacy in one’s need to treat their virtual self with as much attention as their physical selves. I focus on the connection of computers to our bodies and how we constantly utilize them as conduits to project edited, ideal versions of ourselves. Ancient Greek sculptures have eroded through time, becoming “imperfect,” yet the sculptures still retain ideals of beauty. I recognize a parallel between our increasingly passive physical forms and the sculptures; we become anxious as we invest time molding ourselves into the idealized self we wish to portray on social networks.

The desire to better myself is never ending. I draw a connection to the constant reconstruction of cathedrals, to my endless cycle of hope to one day become perfect. Gothic cathedrals depict the lasting divine glory of God. However, this perpetual state of rebuilding comes with the cost of ever-present scaffolding, shrouding their bodies. I’m drawn to the juxtaposition of the makeshift frameworks and platforms, bandaging the idealistic facades. Cathedrals, like our bodies, are always in that uncomfortable in-between.
(far left) Vision of Rehabilitation
(below) installation view
Woodcuts 40" x 58"
I grew up in a place where the imprint of local waterways highly influenced the division of the landscape. After living in a much drier city in the American Southwest, I find it hard to adjust to the rational order intended by its grid. Moving through such a space invokes abrupt interruption and uniform regulation, hindering flow of natural thought and movement.

South Louisiana, where I was raised, is overrun with multiple channels of water. The division of the land surrounding the water is a patchwork of irregular boundaries imposed over the years by local and State authorities. There is an absence of the continuity and grided segmentation, found in most contemporary American cities. Instead, the landscape is divided in a way that adheres to the water cutting through it, resulting in the curving rhythm of the river extending itself beyond the confines of its channels. This extension is echoed in the roadways that mimic the meandering flow of the water as they wind their way around the layered boundaries.

In my paintings, I am looking for the harmony between order and flow that I experienced growing up. My process consists of alternating between the application of fluid gestural brushwork and the loosely ordered repetition of linear shapes. I allow these two elements of mark making to come together as I build the space. Painting enables me to link my understanding of the landscape’s connection to water and my desire to create the balance of this connection in my work.
After the Coulee
Acrylic on Canvas 6' x 5'4"

Red Divide
Acrylic on Canvas 6' x 5'4"
Currently my work examines the transitory and homeostatic characteristics of fluidity in their potential to provoke philosophical inquiry. Building machines that embody the dynamics of fluidity substantiates the infinite, and results in situations that push our thinking into the metaphysical realm. Here our perception of the nature of all things becomes less habitual and more contemplative.

These sculptures are fabricated primarily in wood and steel, and use mechanical elements that conceptually are an extension of myself such as motors, pulleys, and other hardware. In their antiquated, analog construction, they contain my personal reverence for the intrinsic qualities of form which questions the faith that an object exists solely by our definitions through communication and understanding of function.

My work considers this reverence for form to be inherent in the subconscious mind, where we recognize significance in all form even if that significance may ultimately be mute within an existential framework. Better understood is rational, linear reflection, with the mind re-examining different conditions and elements put in place. By provoking the conscious and subconscious in tandem, I seek to evaporate the user defined purpose of an object, leaving only form and fluid together in a state of poetic, irrational interaction.
To The Chain: Your Burden Is Unending
Wood, Metal, Chain, Olive Oil
8' x 3' x 2'

To The Chain: Your Burden Is Unending (Details)
Wood, Metal, Chain, Olive Oil
8' x 3' x 2'
The American Imagery Bank is a conceptual platform meant to serve as a singular source for our national iconography. Its objective is to research, expand, and redefine America’s visual identity through artist/viewer interaction, woodcut blocks, and art. My process is heavily driven by a desire to interact with people and share creative experiences. To accomplish this, various questions are posed at americanimagerybank.com, where interactions begin. Participants create submissions that go through a selection process, symbol creation, and are later added to AIB’s woodcut inventory for future use.

Inspired by currency and flags, this body of work is meant to recreate American imagery by guiding the interested participants and presenting personal meaning in a formalized and public manner. I combine AIB woodcuts and giclée to create monoprints where the artist and viewer can occupy the same conceptual and literal space. The symbols featured in each print serve as metaphors for individuality whereas the landscapes represent identity on a shared level. Combining and layering these symbols and landscapes allows for the meaning of the work to mutate, changing with each print’s specific combination. This flexible approach seeks to symbolically break down the artist/viewer hierarchy and allude to democracy within each artwork.
The Great Eraser is an interdisciplinary artwork that combines elements of performance, installation, sculpture, and video art. The cross section of a large and nearly 400-year-old tree lies at the heart of the piece. At regularly scheduled intervals, the artist enters the site and dons the coveralls and work boots. A nametag sewn to the coveralls reads “The Great Eraser.” He sits down on small stool, takes a long, red-handled rasp from a weathered box and proceeds to sand away at the rim of the tree section. A closed circuit, bird’s eye view of the tree-ring section is projected onto a nearby wall. A single dark line drawn directly onto the wall overlaps this image and indicates the original diameter of the tree. The real-time projection of the ring section recedes from this master outline as The Great Eraser continues his work. He moves around the mounted wooden disc on his stool until all of the material within a single marked section of rings has been removed—but no more. The Great Eraser utilizes the poetic action of systematically destroying a nearly 400-year-old tree ring as a symbol of broader environmental destruction. Humans’ shortsighted and insatiable utilitarianism of natural resources results in the tragic and seemingly unstoppable ruin of the natural world. The Great Eraser is an agent of this reality. He carefully collects the “ashes” of erasure and saves them in specially created urns—for postternity, contemplation, memorialization, and forgiveness. The vials not only contain the literal remnants of the tree ring’s body, but also symbolically hold the events that occurred during that portion of its growth—all of the wars fought, products manufactured, people born, technologies created, and species lost. A kind of anthropomorphic, incongruity pervades. The Great Eraser’s actions as he destroys, collects, preserves, and then destroys again. This acts in part as an analogy for continued over-exploitation of the natural world, which coexists with our increasingly detailed understanding of this fact, and the nostalgic reverence we hold for the ecosystems we obliterate. Special thanks to the Laboratory of Tree Ring Research and the Scientific Glass Lab at the University of Arizona for materials and information that contributed to this work. Any opinions expressed or interpretations derived from The Great Eraser do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the Laboratory of Tree Ring Research or its personnel. The LTRR is a research unit at the College of Science at the University of Arizona and does not endorse or support any political, religious, or social agenda.
The Great Eraser (detail view)

The tree cross section, hand-smithed scrap steel, reclaimed glassware, cork, digital video, video projection, acrylic paint, coveralls, boots, rolling stool, wooden tool box, various hand tools

Dimensions variable
The 8 Greatest Paintings In The World

This artwork began with a random poll that I conducted. The question was framed this way: What great paintings do you believe the majority of people would recognize?

The paintings thought to be the most important were produced between the years of 1498–2928, which means that the last great painting is at least eighty-five years old. Some have never moved and others have been sold to private collectors. All are heavily guarded. The original works are seen only by those privileged by economic status and cultural awareness. These paintings serve only their own space.

That said, the majority of these paintings have been seen in textbooks, as reproductions on walls, or on coffee mugs. They appear in calendars, posters, films, computer screens and smart phones. Unfortunately, most people will never experience the actual art works.

This interactive piece is an active dialectic on materialism; an example of the visual decay that technologies have fostered with respect to prominent works of art. Decay occurs through endless proliferation of paintings, some attaining icon status in popular culture. Two inherent paradoxes of serial expansion and plurality of proxy are dilution of reverence and loss of contemporary identity. These objects of art have been institutionally or culturally elevated to an extraordinary status, and yet by their extension in number have become less available. Here, the spectator is invited to question the transitory importance and meaning that these paintings may have and reassess these images as part of a contemporary landscape: fragmentary, subjective, and glitched.
The 8 Greatest Paintings In The World

The 1st Greatest Painting
- "A Dance in the Rain" by Banksy
- Paint on wood
- 8' x 8'

The original object meant to be photographed by viewer only.
Since I was eighteen I have lived in many different cities such as Suzhou, Beijing, Nanjing, Xi’an, Hangzhou, and most recently, Tucson, Arizona. I believe that every city has its own characteristics and that the inhabitants are unconsciously influenced by them. Gaining an understanding of the unique regional inflections of any city that I reside in is important to me as a means of self-inquiry. The photographic methods which I have developed to illustrate this concept can be seen in my three-part series, Time, Light, Place: Tucson.

Instead of realistic representation, time, light and color have played the greatest parts in my work. The reason I do not photograph concrete scenes or objects is because selecting single moments and sites would be too simple a representation of the interesting, complex, and meaningful theme of my work. For me, the abstract colors on the surfaces of my work actually dive much deeper than most representational images, leading viewers to an introspective experience.
Inkjet print, clear film, acrylic glass, aluminum, wood

Time, Light, Place: Tucson
Early animal psychologist Jakob von Uexküll (1865–1944) cares for the animals he describes. He writes about them delicately, but in such depth and with such specificity that we are transported smoothly into their realm. His scholarship resonates with me and accompanies biology and pseudoscience in fueling my work.

“Here we may glimpse the worlds of the lowly dwellers of the meadow. To do so, we must first blow, in fancy, a soap bubble around each creature to represent its own world, filled with the perceptions which it alone knows... the world as it appears to the animals themselves, not as it appears to us... the self-world of the animal.”

Uexküll holds that the self-world, or the Umwelt, emanates from every organism’s sense organs and represents the extent of its sensory field. The overlap of two animals’ respective Umwelten is the ideal extract for investigation, as denoted by the icon above each illustration of intimate interspecies relationships. Each pair of animals exhibits symbiosis; the living together of unlike organisms.

Below each symbiotic pair, another icon is distilled whose form represents the two animals’ spatial interaction. These distillations are projected three-dimensionally into forms that solidify the animals’ interdependency—how their lives cross into one another.
Bobtail Squid and Bioluminescent Bacteria
Pigmented Inkjet Print from Graphite Drawing 24” x 34”

Projection of Shared Space: Light Organ
ABS Plastic 5” x 3.5” x 2”
I am always planning and moving. I've never been good at staying inside and slowing it down. I grew up in the woods of Kentucky and Ohio shooting a bow, starting fires and paddling boats with siblings. Our family had a special loud bell to call us in for dinner.

This work combines my childhood life of play and current activities of adulthood here in a suburban landscape carved out of the Sonoran Desert... sex in the kitchen, taking out the trash; etc. The song "Little Boxes" describes the type of person that comes from these residential stands of houses, also, someone I may already be or will become. Will I mature into one of the mass-produced likenesses of every other graduate suburbanite? As I grow older I'm scared to think about less play and more work. This work embodies my excitement, wonder and anxiety about lives once lived and the one I'm living today.