A BREATHE FROM THE FLUTTERING EDGE

A Project

Presented to the

Faculty of

San Diego State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Fine Arts

in

Art

by

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Fall 2016
SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY

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Sep 14, 2016
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ABSTRACT OF THE PROJECT

A Breath from the Fluttering Edge
by
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Master of Fine Arts in Art
San Diego State University, 2016

The Thesis Exhibition, A Breath from the Fluttering Edge, was held in the University Art Gallery in the School of Art and Design at San Diego State University between April 11th and April 21st, 2016. This writing project is a reflection of the processes, influences and philosophies that affected my development as a graduate student, artist and human being.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The support I had during my master’s studies was crucial in helping me complete my thesis body of work. I have immense gratitude for all the people who stood by me and offered their guidance and kindness. I would first like to thank Sylvia Valenzuela and Paul Kaplan who welcomed me into their home with angelic warmth. I will be forever grateful for your friendship, mentorship and nurturing—you are truly the stuff of legends. I would like to thank my family for their support. I especially thank my mother Stella Hastie and my father Allan Hastie for their love and encouragement. I would also like to give a special thanks to Peri Good and Jeff Kaplan for their generosity.

To my friends and fellow graduate student cohort, I thank you for the laughs, comfort and stimulating conversations. I am very grateful to The San Diego State faculty, whose valuable, diverse expertise enabled me to grow as an artist. I thank Richard Keely for his support and amazingly intuitive guidance. I will always greatly appreciate your keen insight and depth. I thank David Hewitt for his intelligent, kind and encouraging counsel. I thank Michele Burgess for her helpful and wise direction. I also would like to thank Marie Draz for her instruction on philosophy, which enriched my artistic studies. In addition, I would like to thank other Art faculty professors with whom I shared critiques and classes: Matthew Hebert, Eva Struble, Gail Roberts, Richard Burkett, Sondra Sherman, and Carlos Castro. Finally, I would like to offer a huge thank you to Jim Cavolt, whose assistance with building and practical matters proved to be a godsend. Thank you.
INTRODUCTION

I came to San Diego State University after obtaining my BFA from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, North Carolina. In fact, my journey started in Barranquilla, Colombia, where I was born. Then when I was three years old, I immigrated with my parents to the United States, where I was raised in a bi-cultural world: having Colombian influences at home while experiencing the American cultural forces in the community. My parents valued art and encouraged me to respect its power, giving me the tools to experiment as a young artist. Yet, their personalities were distinct as my mother was a poet, writer and my father was a scientist. I can’t help but wonder if the paradoxes in my upbringing were a source for my thesis work in which through a series of paintings and sculptures I investigated the integration of dualities. My investigation led me to discover how art can be an experiential vehicle to hold the opposing forces in duality, while at the same time, give way to new energies of potentiality. Nonetheless, whatever brought me to this work, I will discuss here in this thesis my journey, process and reflections on my masters studies at San Diego State University.
CHAPTER 1

THERE WAS LIGHT

A couple of months before entering graduate school, I saw the James Turrell retrospective at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, LACMA. James Turrell, as one of the primary artists of the California Space and Light movement, was receiving national recognition for his work in light installations and plays on perception. The colorful beauty of his light installations invited the viewer to recognize the subjective dynamics of visual experience. Then, a couple months into graduate school, Robert Irwin, the other prominent artist of the California Light and Space movement, came to speak at SDSU. I feverishly read through Irwin’s famous biography Seeing is Forgetting the Name of the Thing One Sees by creative non-fiction writer Lawrence Weschler. In the book, Irwin speaks about his journey from the reduction of pictorial space towards an experiential presence. It was a crash course in the California Light Space movement and a lovely introduction to the history of California art. I was surrounded by the white, magical and intense California light and given firsthand experiences of these remarkable artists.

In my studio work, perhaps from my newfound inspiration, I had intended to create unemotional, minimalist pieces with a take on optical perception. Paradoxically, the opposite happened. Under the guidance of Michele Burgess, artist and print-making teacher at SDSU, I began making a series of abstract, charcoal drawings that sprung forth complex, spontaneous markings from a source of tumultuous inner landscape. I also experimented with abstract painting on canvas. Unsatisfied with working on canvas, as I seemed to become tight and woven like the texture of canvas itself, I finally settled with working on simply wood panel. Studying woodblock printmaking with Burgess, she introduced me to wood carving tools to make markings. It opened up a whole new language as the physicality of the marks led to raw, textured imagery. One day in my studio, I decided to take the technique of carving
into the woodblocks and apply it to one of my paintings. From then on, a new physical layer entered into my two dimensional work that expanded the depth and texture of the surface.

By the end of my first year, I was also delving into sculpture, which, initially, was very challenging to me. I could feel my brain struggling to create artwork in three dimensional spaces. Richard Keely, respected sculpture professor at SDSU, gave us, his students, challenging assignments. In particular, one assignment stood out to me: to make a sculpture predominantly out of an intuition one week and predominately out of intellect the next week. This assignment played itself out many times more throughout my studio practice as I struggled to integrate my heavily-used intuitive side with other approaches. For example, the notion of building was a foreign concept to me, and I profusely thank artist and SDSU technician Jim Cavolt for assisting me as a naïve builder. Yet, like adding dirt to water to make mud, I felt it necessary to integrate these more structured, materially challenging ways of creating into my practice. Subsequently, I became interested in the integration of all sorts of levels of dualities, and these elements constituted the foundation for my studio practice for the remaining of my master’s studies.
CHAPTER 2

STUDIO PROCESS

Sculpture presents an artist with a maddening creative prospect because, rarely, would a sculpture just happen. With a painting, it is easier to track and less terrifying to potentially destroy the work, because another layer can be added without too much physical consequences. Yet with sculpture, envisioning the first layer is almost impossible; you must do it physically and contend with the decision you made, reworking it until you’re satisfied. I learned early on, begrudgingly, that often objects need to age for some time in my studio, in order for me to study its material essence and to feel more comfortable, and, hence, courageous working with it. I often begin physically working with a material by setting it next to other objects to discern material relationships. As a slow worker, I prefer the patient rhythm of creation. Rushing feels dishonest and controlling as I feel like sometimes pushing an object too fast towards completion breaks the organic process of visual language wanting to come forth. Usually at some point, I have the flash of a form, color or structure appear in my mind either from sketching or investigating materials. Material mock-up and tests are helpful to slightly envision my idea before I commit to its implementation.

What idea am I after for the materials to transform into? It is a question whose answer I prefer to leave somewhat mysterious to me as I am working on it; yet, I keep certain ideas in mind, like lighthouses directing me into the unknown. The mystery I am seeking to ground in the art object is for the artwork to have a presence and for the combination of dualistic natures to turn into something altogether new.

The materials that attract me usually have a lively quality: airiness, a sense of light, quirky shapes, or an organic viscous nature. In my work, each material requires a unique approach and process to achieve transformation. Many times, instead of following a traditional craft, I end up inventing my own process. Other times it is necessary, for instance, when making a wood form, to buckle down and stick by practical building rules. In creating a
structure, the very making of the structure itself becomes an important energy-conscious force in the object. A mixture of building backwards with half of an idea in mind is essential to me as the piece can come into existence in a more fluid manner. It is a precarious situation not only for me as the builder, but also for the object itself, as it physically reflects the tension of a structure built for stability on one hand, but built with an inherent sense of movement, perhaps leading to breakage. This precariousness is perhaps felt in the viewer as delicate, on the brink of instability, as indeed the piece is impregnated with a sense of potentiality for flight or destruction. How the object arrives towards this precarious manner isn’t pre-designed in the studio in any linear way; it often comes naturally into being after I consider different choices and materials and choose what most echoes to me.

While I’m working on a sculpture, I am also working two dimensionally on a painting. Working simultaneously serves several purposes: one is to have an opportunity for immediate flow and energy from mark-making as it is much faster in the two dimensional realm. Second, working on the two mediums stirs up connections and sketches of abstract forms, line and color in a meditative manner, bringing them forth into consciousness in an intuitive, layered manner. These forms are also reflected in the sculptures; yet, while working on them simultaneously, a dialogue opens up between the two dimensional and three dimensional realms— one informing the other, circling and reflecting without exact points of origin. Sometimes I notice a linear form in a sculpture coming up in a painting, or vice versa. Only after the budding art pieces have unconsciously dialogued enough amongst themselves, do I feel comfortable making a conscious decision to translate one shape or form to explore in the other corresponding dimension. Yet, the majority of the connections happen naturally, from simply showing up at the studio, engaging with the work and respecting its pace of creation.

With the paintings, the first layer is the first breath and every other mark is a reaction to the sense of the first breath. Color plays a pivotal role as I choose colors intuitively; nonetheless, I remain aware of the color’s influence on the energy system of the painting. Beginning first with washes of color over the whole wood panel, I commit to create the foundation of the painting. For a sense of grounding into the physical reality, this first layer is honored and included— the painting has already been born. There is no turning back. Later, I begin to incorporate carving into the wood with hand tools, creating texture and adding
powdered pigment into the grooves of the carved-wood markings. Towards the end of the painting, if it’s called for, I would then use a trim router to make straight, indented lines, contrasting with the raw erratic nature of the previous hand-marked lines. Yet, all the while, the process must not feel formulaic or familiar; each painting calls for something different, and most paintings call for sincere artistic courage at some point. Otherwise, having only safe, formulaic steps will reflect in the energy of the painting and deem it calculated, dull and lifeless. Vividness and movement occur when I am willing to let the painting lead me into its own spontaneity.

Thus, the studio process is for me a study of how materiality can express the heart of my work, in which I use abstract form, lines, shapes and color to express an essence of life, biological systems and spirited movement (See Plate 1 and 2). Ultimately, it is a momentous call to awaken from the familiar vein of dualistic thinking and peek into an otherworld in which a constant shifting of dualities creates an energetic chamber in which the life energy that created those very dualities is honored and the mystery can be renewed once again.
CHAPTER 3

INFLUENCES

As much as the ideas of the remarkable work of Robert Irwin were immensely inspiring—his sense of presence and perception—my quirky sense and need for the journey of discovery were still awaiting me. Irwin is engaged in a prolific journey through art and much can be learned and taken from it. But to try to take his torch and run with it deems troublesome. For one, his steps from reduction to abstraction to not creating art at all to collaborative work to installations were all unique to him and his development as an artist. He has broken fertile ground and much can be learned from him, but it feels inauthentic for me to inhabit his visual language without the experience of the steps myself. Plus, physicality and materiality were calling to me, as was my clumsy and often strange interaction with the physical dimension. And soon, at my door arrived the next influences I was looking for.

RICHARD TUTTLE

Richard Tuttle, an American contemporary sculptor and painter, struck me as an abstract, quirky, and extremely intelligent artist with an almost out-of-touch mind. His use of form and color had deep connections with my own use of materials. Studying him and his interviews helped validate my innate sense of the peculiar, which felt natural to me, but often times it didn’t translate clearly enough to others. In validation, there lies a sense of freedom, as the energy of doubts of not being quite sure who you are gets redirected to being even more sure of who you are.

Tuttle also had interesting ideas and language that I could relate to:

I mean nobody could tell me how to do the craftsmanship on this piece, it really comes from inside… an aspect of my work is its food for your inner life… for the health of the society we have to invent a system that produces freedom. The way it works is that the artist does something that society would never do, and then it slowly gets brought in. Then the art historians come in and weave it into the world. (“Richard Tuttle: Reality & Illusion” 00:01:34)
The notion of craftsmanship coming from an inner life was refreshing to me as it combined imaginative, ethereal qualities with physical materials in a truly creative way. Tuttle created his own technique for his particular expression. Indeed, in honoring the needs of the creative self in whatever craft method comes forth, freedom arises and integration of the new spiritual energy gets directed into the society.

**Museum of Jurassic Technology**

David Wilson, the creator of the Museum of Jurassic Technology (MJT) in Culver City, California, worked in the animation sector of Los Angeles in the 1990s, whereby one day working in the woodshop, he came under an avalanche of ideas which led to his founding the mysterious MJT. The MJT is such a fascinating and unique place, and it intrigued me immensely on many levels. It teeters loosely on the brink between reality and fantasy to where one feels as Lawrence Weschler expresses, a sense of freefalling (*Mr. Wilson’s* 23). Also, its interconnecting threads of theater, perspective, optical vision, and the peripheral vision of obscure scientists leave one wandering around like a bug in a maze, eager to find the answer. But the beauty is inside those walls with the strange, often broken exhibits that allow one to marvel at the mysteries of the world and the relentless, wonder-eyed people who went to great lengths to try to discover them. As if sensing the pressurized feeling of the need for an answer, Wilson’s marvelous outside tea garden on the roof sets us all free to just be in the beauty and reacquaint ourselves again with the marvel of world-existing fully without answering questions. It was there on the roof where I broke with my familiar categorizing and pigeonholing of reality. As a baby crawled alone up the steps of the garden and birds flew out of cages, a hallucinogenic affect came over me, and even though the parent soon came after the baby and the birds fluttered about their own business, the strong hold of supposed certainty had been temporarily broken. The world was anew.

**Pierre Huyghe**

Another intense art experience came soon after and echoed a language similar to the MJT’s in an altogether different way, taking me farther into this sense of open ended existence. I was lucky to attend the French conceptual artist Pierre Huyghe’s retrospective on its last weekend of opening after a friend artist told me I needed to go. As I arrived to the entrance, I encountered the first piece titled *Name Announcer* (2011). To my surprise, the
gallery guard asked me my name and yelled it as I walked in. Immediately after this event, I found myself immersed with a video in a room with an aquarium, which I later found out was the film *The Host and the Cloud* (2011). I sat entranced for hours, attempting to unpack and dissect the film which gave just enough loose strings of narrative to keep me on the edge. At times the neon lights turned on, interacting with the film’s scenes; in addition, a man and a dog that appeared in the film wandered around the exhibit. Walking off to other rooms to further investigate, I kept circling around the retrospective from film to sculptures back to revisiting pieces I had seen: Live bees formed the head of sculpture; a dramatic fog-and-light show took place on the stage of a mini theater; eerie apocalyptic imagery was shown in the film *Human Mask* (2014), in which a monkey wears a human mask in an abandoned restaurant. At one point, I remember passing someone almost at rhythmic intervals and for a moment thought: “Wait, am I the exhibit as well?” I walked away that day from Pierre Huyghe’s mind-blowing retrospective, not entirely sure what art form I had just seen. It was beyond my comprehension of object, themes and isolated pieces.

Later, reading Pierre Huyghe’s writings, he validated my sentiments. He spoke of his work as an auto-generating system—an organism that interconnects with itself and the environment—living, breathing and starting its life at the beginning of an exhibition. He spoke of being interested in the idea of the exhibition, not as being a closed final environment of an artist’s work, but as the beginning for the artwork to come to life. Also, playing with the notion of dualities—namely, culture and human beings—he focused on being in a “non-knowledge zone” that resists fixed interpretation (Nathan). Going beyond relational aesthetics, Huyghe creates an immense container that holds multiple dualities operating at far reaching points: the Cambrian age, the post apocalyptic future-culture imitating culture, nature undisturbed.
CHAPTER 4

FORCE OF NATURE

Other influences from artists and sources of experience are too many to name here. Yet one source I consciously connected to for its unlimited potential was nature. Specifically, the wind as it breezed across my skin and made the plants sway back and forth; I stilled myself into a meditative state soaking in its fresh, movable energy. Still slightly heartbroken since childhood after the wind was explained to me in mechanistic terms of air pressure, I try to hold the spirit of its otherness, this immateriality brushing against materiality. The sway of the plants calls forth a rhythmic vitality, and in my moment of gazing, I sense the awe of this physical, atmospheric container of life we all exist in. The other specific source of nature that I consciously connected to existed, not in the physical realm, but also as an image in my mind. In fact, throughout the workings of the thesis, I would connect to the image of lava from an erupting volcano pushing up through two beveling planes of land. This image returned to me again and again as I worked through each piece, like a unifying lighthouse to ensure the pieces evolved with similar, yet distinct spirits.

The common thread between the two images of wind and volcano is the stirrings of life waking up and the forces engaging with each other to become anew. The continental philosopher Michael Foucault, in his essay *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History* talks about the sense of emergence as “an entry of two forces” (84). Therefore, my play with dualities in the paintings and sculptures—all containing a layer of Earth biology juxtaposing with linear forms—brought forth a sense of otherness: indeed, an emergence. It could also be said, that in Foucault’s terms, I am actually focusing on a state of pre-emergence, the moment right before the forces “leap from the wings to center stage” (84). This pre-emergence state of potentiality has a sense of implied movement, pointing to an elsewhere about to be found and the tension of the new buckling its way out. In the piece *Inside the Bloom* (See Plate 3 and 4), a tall cocoon shape, with neon-green lines inside, echoes the sense of a foreign, strange egg.
Another piece *Untitled* (See Plate 5) has a further sense of expansion taking flight as the clear dome has linear glass rods bursting forth with viscous pink and black forms on the end. The form in *Untitled* has the macro-expansion of the dome and micro-expansions of the rod forms—both layers of expansion that give way toward emergence.

As I am interested in the notion of pre-emergence, another layer just as important is the interconnecting systems created among materials that are all in the state of pre-emergence. The source of nature and biology fits naturally in this layer, as nature and biology are essentially millions of open systems. In fact, my own intense marveling at the MJT and Pierre Huyghe’s exhibition was largely in part due to the fact that the works were themselves open systems; each had complex, interconnecting parts that the viewer had to trace to discover. Yet, like an infinite puzzle—the open-endedness of the system—both Wilson and Huyghe resisted closing the system with a finite answer. Therefore, one was left with the energy at play, not being able to end its life energy with one supposed correct answer. So as I discussed in my studio process, I set an intention to have the works interconnect. Yet, in my method for this work, I preferred a loose coherence, loose enough to give each piece a distinct voice, yet tight enough so the viewers, upon reflective study, could begin to make the connections themselves. By making the connections almost a surprise, even to me as the maker, allows me to practice the joy of stretching my own edge of human understanding. Simply put, if a viewer doesn’t instantly “get it” and feels uncomfortable, the work gives the viewer space to connect elements to make sense of the whole. Yet the whole, as an open system with a receptive boundary, allows for the potential of new energy to arise, hence coming back to emergence.

The potentiality seen in my work is revealed by a tension of linear shapes, compositional rhythms, and expanding organic forms signaling movement. For instance, in *The next iceberg* (See Plate 6 and 7), a blue abstract shape sits over a dirt-covered rectangular form. The texture of glass on the form looks to be hovering, floating among the surface. One side of the shape, angled in a triangular form, points to the other side of the room. The idea of elsewhere is imminent as the floating element and angled movement toward another space works simultaneously to elicit a feel of a beyond. For the piece, I was inspired by the existential philosopher Lewis Gordon. In the essay “A ‘Determined’ Attitude
That Involves Lying to Ourselves,” he wrote about the existential journey of never quite pinning the self down:

As a freedom, I seem to have nowhere to settle down. Wherever I land is always posed as an object to me and is therefore not identical with what I am. I am like a figure attempting to stay afloat on the Arctic Ocean by hopping from ice cap to ice cap—always facing the possibility of sinking and never facing the condition of standing still. (37)

The “hopping from icecap to icecap” could be interpreted as a metaphorical image for existing in a constant flow of pre-emergence (37). There is a tension between elsewhere and the sense of momentarily landing still. The self is free and alive when movement is allowed to travel a gentle, balanced course.

However, this begs the question: why movement? What about movement that leads to the abstract language of the stirring of life? To answer this question fully, we would have to understand the origins of life and the role of movement, but, alas, that is unattainable at the moment and beyond human comprehension. Yet, there are basic tenets of knowledge we can turn to. For one, inanimate rocks that are studied in the solar system and on Earth are immobile and do not have the animate properties of innate movement. We categorize that which is living to that which moves on its own—hence movement is correlated to life. Also, on a microscopic level scientists have found that enzymes are the engines of life because they speed up biochemical processes (Johnjoe and Al-Kalili 63). Lastly, the one component of open systems in nature, such as a cell membrane that does not make it a closed system, is the boundary around the system that allows new materials to come through. Inherent to this boundary crossing is movement—going from one area to another. This separation insinuates an underlying duality: from here to there.
Duality is defined as two separate categorized entities: sun-moon; male-female; death-birth. Many artists focus on the interchange and play between a duality. Irwin focuses on phenomenal and pictorial experience; Huyghe on nature and culture. In my thesis, I focused on multiple dualities: organic-synthetic; still-moving; expanding-contracting (See Plate 8 and 9). What makes duality interesting to play with is that the edge between the two areas is often teeming with potential and curious tension. Ambiguously, by not holding completely one side over another, certain analysis remains hovering, never getting to quite pin down one side over another. For a physical parallel, an ecological phenomenon called “edge effect” reveals that the boundary between two habitats has greater biodiversity than inside the habitats themselves. For example, between a forest and meadow, plants that need sunlight and shade converge, creating more life, activity and animal species (Magura 23). Therefore, through the overlap and play of two realms there are stirrings of growth and movement of life. The complex diversity of the dualities of the edge in-between realms invites an energy of curiosity. In my thesis, Homage to morning and The before Arch celebrate the edges of duality reflected in the morning twilight and doorways (See Plate 10 and 11).

The continuous back-and-forth vibration lends itself to consider the stillness in our reflective reaction and to question what that could be. If it is not this and not that, then, what is that which is still? Or to put it in another way: what is the fulcrum among the two ways in which the pendulum swings? Here, a momentary vision of triality has come into view. Duality, being put to dance on its edges, occupies a strange twilight space in which the opposite of duality emerges (See Plate 12). Western concepts get nervous around challenging duality and ingrained modes of thought haven’t yet allowed a specific language or theory to take the notion completely by the reins. Nonetheless, we remain fascinated by it—fascinated
when the usual categorical behaviors get crossed: when the sun gets eclipsed, when the moon becomes a giant orange super moon in the sky. Thus, I turn to Zen for hints of understanding. Alan Watts, British philosopher and writer, outlines several concepts in *The Way of Zen*. Braham, the all one, whose root word is to grow, signifies a creative activity. Yet the concept of Braham for Westerners can be confusing because it is defined in terms of what it is not rather than what it is. However, to explore that concept in relation to other terms can be helpful. For example, *maya* is understood as the world of duality: up and down, light and dark, while *moska* is understood as the liberation from *maya*. Watts explains:

> For the manifold world of facts and events is said to be *maya*, ordinarily understood as an illusion which veils the one underlying reality of Braham. This gives the impression that *moksha* is a state of consciousness in which the whole varied world of nature vanishes from sight, merged in a boundless ocean of vaguely luminous space. Such an impression should be dismissed at once, for it implies a duality, an incompatibility, between Braham and *maya* which is against the whole principle of Upanishadic philosophy. For Braham is not One *as opposed* to Many, not simple *as opposed* to complex. Braham is without duality (*advaita*), which is to say without any opposite since Braham is not in any class or, for that matter outside any class. (38-39)

He goes on to say that the world of classification is precisely *maya*. Thus, the riddle of duality being solved as one unitive measure loops back into itself as being opposed to duality.

> To say, then, that the world of facts and events is *maya* is to say that facts and events are in terms of measurement rather than realities of nature… it will thus be east to see that facts and events are as abstract as lines of latitude or as feet and inches… Facts come in pairs at the very least, for a single body is inconceivable apart from which the space it hangs… This point of view is somewhat startling, and even quite hard to understand, for those long accustomed to think that things, facts and events are the very building blocks of the world, the most solid of solid realities. In trying to grasp its meaning one must try to put aside the various “idealistic” philosophies of the West which it is so often confused- even by modern Indian Vedantists. For the world is not an illusion of the mind in the sense that -to the eyes of the liberated man (*jivanmukta*) - there is nothing to be seen but a trackless void. He sees the world that we see; but he does not mark it off, measure it and divide it the same way. He does not look upon it as really or concretely broken into separate things and events. He sees that the skin may just as well be regarded as what joins us to our environment as what separates from it. He sees, furthermore, that the skin will be considered as joining only if it has first been considered as separating, or vice versa. Thus his point of view is not monistic… To join is as much maya as to separate. For this reason both Hindus and Buddhists prefer to speak of reality as “non-dual” rather than “one,” since the
The concept of one must always be in relation to that of many. The doctrine of maya is therefore a doctrine of relativity. (39-40)

The long tradition in Eastern thought of grappling with the slippery, mysterious concept of non-duality can serve as a helpful contrast to Western habits of dualistic thinking.

Another way to see how humans have dealt with duality in the Western thought is in the history of alchemy. Influenced by the East and early philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, alchemists believed in the concept of the “universal Mind” in which “nature is whole, mind is whole, knowledge is one” (Aromatcio 19). Their studies of the transmutation of metals and the movement of celestial bodies always had the intention of achieving spiritual purity by resonating the dualistic harmonies with “universal Mind” through a concrete form. Using an allegorical projection on material, they were respected for the practice of turning lead into gold and for seeking the philosopher’s stone. Techniques such as distillation and reduction were used on materials such as sulfur and mercury. Through the mysterious work with the materials, the alchemist worked to achieve spiritual purity. The principal goal of alchemy is the union of opposites, the resolution of pairs into a third thing that partakes of their original natures and is something new. The notion of time in alchemy “does not follow a linear progression (from the birth of the universe towards a single future apocalypse), but rather continually turns in upon itself, always pregnant with the universal spirit” (30).

It is interesting to note that without knowing the specifics of alchemy much of the methodologies of my thesis work contained many parallels. For instance, in alchemical texts there was often deliberate confusion, and the reader had to go through many hoops to try to make connections (Aromatico 45). Likewise, in my thesis work, I didn’t intentionally try to confuse the viewer; yet, it was important for me to create pieces that would elicit from the viewer a sense of discovery and a desire to make connections (See Plate 13, 14 and 15).
CHAPTER 7

LINKAGE AND INTEGRATION

The paradoxes and challenges of duality as seen in language by the alchemists and Zen Buddhism point to an ancient struggle. However, in my research I found modern Western thinkers also circling around the very same mysteries of going beyond duality. It is quite fascinating that even in today’s world, the same concepts of chasing duality echo in art and theoretical writings. In fact, I have often asked myself why, as a 21st century artist, am I making this work? What integrative need am I tapping into? To begin, for a more accessible modern term, the word “integration” can be brought into awareness. Integration is defined as the “linkage of differentiated elements” (Betz and Kimsey-House 28). In linkage, there is connection of separate components to one another. Differentiation is defined as “the process by which parts of a system become specialized, unique and individualized in their growth and development” (28). Integration calls us “to stand in a paradox: to know and value each part of a system, and also continually to link the parts together” (29). For example, the physical duality of the left and right hemispheres of the brain set a stage for a tension in which one can dominate the other. It is well noted that the left hemisphere which regulates order and measurement dominates current Western society. However, linkage to right brain processes such as creativity and holistic thinking is fragmented and strained at best. This is most obviously seen in the subjects of art and science, considered as opposites. Were the alchemists the last Western group to consciously attempt to link the two? Are modern-day artists experimenting with duality carrying the torch of integration?

With the alchemists mostly gone, few resources are left to steer the modern integration of the paradoxical relationship between art and science. Drawing the weakened links to our attention, the late Art Historian José Argüelles warns:

Wisdom precedes art as art precedes science. Wisdom is consciousness of being itself; it cannot be qualified, conditioned or defined, for its intrinsic to being itself. Art is the reflexive state of wisdom; it is the natural and spontaneous expression
of being. Science is the way of materially implementing the reflexive state of wisdom. In awakened human consciousness, these three form a unified whole. But in our time science precedes art, and the practice of art precedes the realization of wisdom and the three are no longer related as a unified system of knowledge…. the state we live in is the utter reversal of man’s nature. (83)

Here, Argüelles presents the three-way relationship of wisdom, art and science—Wisdom being the fulcrum and foundation to hold the space for art and science to link and differentiate back and forth. However, with the domination and extreme differentiation of the left brain, little space is allowed for wisdom; this condition results in isolation and disconnection from the whole. By not being open to linkage with other elements, growth is stunted and possibilities are limited. Without holding the paradox, full integration and renewal are out of reach.

What limits the understanding of the full result of integration in our everyday language is the indefinable “wisdom of being” Argüelles alludes to. How can wisdom possibly be defined? We integrate intellect/intuition, rational/irrational, and mind/body, but one must revisit the notion that true presence lies beyond both dualities. Irwin elaborates:

The fact is that any form of knowing whether intellectual or gut level is a conceptual compounding, an abstraction drawn on, but not the same as, or inclusive of, direct perceptual experience, and any concept/abstraction we elect or expand on is either naïve or dishonest if it fails to acknowledge that it is preceded by this direct perception. Every knowing will begin and must at times return here to this source, it is our root in the world. (67)

Therefore, one role of the modern artist is to instill opportunities of direct perception by presenting paradoxical, ambiguous forms, hopefully leaving the viewers with fewer opportunities to attach themselves to a certain form of knowing. Most of our everyday objects have been pre-categorized for us, and it remains easy to forget that we are dealing with measurements of knowing and not direct knowing. As an artist, I hope to create work that even I cannot truly categorize and know, leaving a door open for new information. With less forms of knowing to attach to, an openness to deepen perception can begin to arise. Irwin continues:

Our perception of things is neither open nor free- it is instead the same shape as those conceptual abstractions we have come to hold for organization: we are given to this organizing and structuring circumstantially….We have come to seek this uniform, clear picture of the world because we have accepted the idea that it must be clear. In clarity we have supposed a resolution, or ideal, and it is this idea of resolution that we lose sight of our broader awareness, for resolution implies
that we need/can draw all things to fit one logic, or perspective of form of knowing....This need for clarity/order runs deeper than its practicalities for practice and its motivation lies in our need to avoid the implications of a expanding complexity, for it is in the labyrinths of complexity that we come to risk the clarity that seems to guarantee our sanity, but it is also in this complexity that we must seek our potential. (68)

Perhaps one thing we can take from Irwin here is that in the opening to potential we can risk ourselves to move towards a wisdom that continuously expands, never landing too still on one iceberg.
CONCLUSION

In all, this awareness of duality allows for another spiritual, mindful force to open up. Like a moth to a flame, I have been attracted to the alchemic processes in my thesis work to breathe life into its edges. As an artist, I recognize I could be tapping into a deeper societal need as the political, social, environmental, spiritual and human elements at play can be prone to loop and struggle to expand. Yet, like the alchemist, I realize this play of integration and expansion projects also back on to the nature of myself and my growth as a person and an artist. The journey has been challenging yet rewarding. Many times I was steeped in the discomfort of uncertainty, yet I slowly surrendered to the mysterious creative process. Art has a beautiful way of reminding us of possibilities and shifting perceptions. I look forward to continuing my work and flexing my edges.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX

PLATES

Plate 1. *Between the bees and the cave*;
Mixed Media and Acrylic on Wood Panel
Plate 2. *We came through a sea of ages*;
Mixed Media and Acrylic on Wood Panel
Plate 3. *Inside the bloom*;
Acrylic, Fiberglass, Cotton
Plate 4. *Inside the bloom* (Detail)
Plate 5. *Untitled*;
Acrylic, Glass, Foam, Ink
Plate 6. *The next iceberg*;
Wood, Glass, Paint, Dirt
Plate 7. *The next iceberg* (Detail)
Plate 8. *Path is, is not*;
Mixed Media and Acrylic on Wood Panel
Plate 9. *Path is, is not* (Detail)
Plate 10. Homage to morning;
LED lights, Cotton
Plate 11. *The before arch*;
Aluminum, Paper Mâché, Ink
Plate 12. *Volcano void*;
Wood, Paper Mâché, Glass, Ink, Dirt

Plate 13. Installation View
Plate 14. Second Installation View

Plate 15. Third Installation View