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Pyxidis Echo Lacuna

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Pyxidis Echo Lacuna

Jessica Weathersby



Thesis submitted to the College of Creative Arts
At West Virginia University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of

Master of Fine Art
In
Printmaking

Sergio Soave, Chair
Jennifer Blazina
Robert Bridges
Robert Anderson

Division of Art

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2003

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Works, Meditative

Abstract

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The intention of the work that supports this thesis is to provide a space for the viewer to suspend the exterior world and move into a space where he or she finds a line of questioning and a cyclic experience that ultimately leads to self-reflection. The microcosm and macrocosm enlarged and reduced, respectively, to human scale, allow one to experience this phenomenon in conversational dialog. By conflating the limits of the universe, the participant becomes omniscient within this configuration of large printed works on paper. Texture, line and variant translucent color provides the viewer with a multi-sensory experience. Interaction of the viewer with the installation activates the space with movement, light and distorted shadows. This metaphorical reflection provides an isolated experience within an architectural structure that addresses issues of the role of humanity as well the role of the individual affecting the space.

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Acknowledgements

My deepest appreciation goes to my committee, Robert Bridges, Bob Anderson, Jennifer Blazina and especially Sergio Soave, and to my fellow graduate students. Thank you to my friends who gave me a hand or an ear, my family for believing this of me. To my father, who crossed the country twice just to be here for me, thank you.

"If a poet looks through a microscope or a telescope, he always sees the same thing." Bachelard, p172.

Although the existence of mankind is arguably arbitrary, significance is achieved in the pursuit of life. By making work that is self-reflexive, the viewer sees evidence of the self in an isolated and complex space intermingled with the microscopic and astronomical. The body of work occupies a physical space, yet suggesting an impossible space within the work between the forms represented in the work and both denies and celebrates the paper on which the information is printed.

Imagery is derived from both nebulous magnitude and minute nuclei and presented in the same ephemeral space contained within the surface of the paper. By removing the telescope and the microscope, the viewer becomes a direct voyeur of the interaction of these forms. The similarities of these repeated forms, serves as evidence that the infinitely small and large are related. Thus, providing the viewer with the notion that man is not the unit of measure of the universe. Artists and poets alike look at the world as subject matter, mirror and comment on what is happening in the society. They examine aspects of the world similar to the scientist making discoveries through a microscope or telescope. This voice of altruism is where the artist provides an active service to society. This is not unlike the 'tourism' that Lucy Lippard speaks of in her 1999 publication,

On The Beaten Track, " a willingness or desire on the part of the tourist to stretch, literally, past her own experience, to lean forward in anticipation, engagement, amazement, or horror." p2.

The intention of the work that supports this thesis is to provide a space for the viewer to suspend the exterior world and move into a space where he or she finds a line of questioning and a cyclic experience that ultimately leads to self-reflection. This metaphorical reflection provides an isolated experience within a structure inside an architectural structure that addresses issues of the role of humanity as well the role of the individual affecting the space.

As a printmaker with access to modern technological advancement, expanding processes, personal innovation and discovery, I have created a body of work that engages the viewer in an intimate dialog. The work insists upon the viewer's interaction to activate the work, rather than work that is simply observed. The viewer's interaction with the body of work in the space creates an experience that resonates with centrality.

Peering through the lens of a microscope, the observer is immersed in the universe of the infinitely small. These forms exist independently and coexist within every other organism. Images of these forms are viewed by those curious, wondering and generally of the scientific persuasion. In some circles, the role of the artist, like the scientist and the poet is to present a fresh and innovative idea and connection with the known

universe. I am exploring the connections between the molecular and astronomical and where mankind finds a place within this set. Bachelard writes,

"...sometimes the transactions between the small and large multiply, having repercussions. Then when a familiar image grows to the dimension of the sky, one is suddenly struck by the impression that, familiar objects become the miniatures of a world. Macrocosm and microcosm are correlate."
p170.

One looks at the stars and by comparison becomes minute. One looks at an amoeba and encapsulates the entirety of the universe. The simultaneity of these limits, the infinitely large and small, challenges the unit of measurement and relation of man to the universe on a hierarchical scale. Within this dichotomy, man is reduced by the comparison of the universe and enlarged from the stature of a particle. This suggests that human existence is arbitrary and significance is found in the pursuit of life. If the ratios of the large and small approach the scale of man, both the universe and molecule become as immediate as the perceiver. The conversation of the visual language between these forms changes drastically with the passing seconds. The poet Paul Claudel writes, " I was shown an entire nestful of still embarrassed suns in the cold folds of the nebula." Conflating " a nestful of still embarrassed suns" decreases the role of mankind to that of the minute. The microscopic miniature suggests an interior space, while the gigantic suggests an exterior space. Altering the scale of the forms to that of a human creates an

alternative space. One where both the interior and exterior landscape coexist at a predetermined scale, which changes with impulse.

Pyxidis Echo Lacuna incorporates multiple definitions implied by each term of the title. *Pyxidis* is the Greek possessive case for the constellation Pyxis and translates as mariner's compass. Ship navigators looked to the stars to find familiar configurations of stars to determine position, seeking direction by evaluating the vast. The hand-held compass is magnetically prone to point to the North Pole. This unseen cyclic force is reverberated in the shadows projected on the walls of the gallery. *Echo* commonly refers to sound bouncing off and returning from a distant wall, suggesting a larger space. More pertinent to the discussion are the literal notions of image and shadow reverberation, as well as the metaphorical self-centering. *Lacuna* is a Latin term meaning, 'that which is hidden', and 'that which is sought'. Here is a space created, which is activated by the interaction of the seeking viewer. The reflexive title suggests that one finds his or her direction within the hidden center. This is both metaphorical and literal, also based in the contained interior and the endless exterior landscape.

Interaction of the viewer with the work activates the space with movement, light and distorted echoes of the human form. In the exhibition space, mankind is no longer a measure of all things, simply a participant in the universe. Diagrammatic

forms, throughout the work, reference orbital, cyclonic motion characteristic of both particles and the very universe. The microcosm and the macrocosm enlarged and reduced, respectively, to human scale, without aide of the microscope or telescope, allow one to experience these phenomenon in a conversational dialog. Questions of humanity's place and role in the respective known universe reverberate in the shadows on the work and walls. The evidence surrounds us and patiently waits to be discovered.

The installation of works that support this thesis within the set of the exhibition *Pyxidis Echo Lacuna* follows a non-traditional exploration and exploitation of printmaking media. Texture and nuances of the thick and thin veils of ink within the delicacy of varnished mulberry paper provide both fleeting and finite linear information. The translucency of the paper allows color and form to function in a way that denies the paper. The experience of the work in the space becomes ephemeral. Multiple plates are charged both in relief and intaglio. Color, density, space and line are dialects of a language used to coax the evolving nature of the progressive work. Printing, hand coloring and varnishing the paper, achieve a more immediate and ethereal surface quality in the work.

The exhibition is comprised of thirty-one, eight-foot translucent works on paper with a multitude of printed

information. The translucency of the individual print is achieved by generously applying litho varnish to the surface of the paper. Information is printed on both sides of the paper. Cable runs from wall to wall to wall at twelve feet from the floor, creating a ceiling level where the lines run tangent to an elliptical oculus. The printed pieces of translucent paper hang from this wire system. Referencing natural and manmade architecture, bring forth the isolated constellation. Each piece hangs skew to the other works, and placed with enough space for a person to move through. The gallery is minimally lit with three sets of two lights up lighting the prints from the floor, projecting dramatic shadows of the work and individuals on the other pieces. The projected shadows suggest that this space is a small part of a larger entity that continues in every direction, out from the center. The space becomes a metonymy for an infinite space reaching beyond the walls of the gallery. The luminosity of the work in the gallery designates an ethereal and otherworldly space.

Upon entering the foyer of the gallery, the viewer is presented with one translucent print in even light, providing an example of what is to be found in the main space of the gallery. This print is offered to the viewer as a singular example to the



viewer of the grouping of the main space. The nuances of color, line and the translucency are provided for the viewer's examination. This print activates the space of the foyer and is examined by the viewer yet does not create the dialog of the thirty prints in the main space.

The illumination of the interior structure within the actual architecture of the gallery becomes apparent. The adherence of the installation to the configuration of the original space creates a dichotomy between the sanctuary and the containment within the walls of the gallery. The dramatic shadows that project both enlarge and multiply the space that is suggested by the installation. By negating the architecture, the work becomes a metonymy for an infinite space that is both interior and exterior. This interior constellation configuration moves subtly with air currents.

The work hangs as a gathering of individual works engaged in a visual and metaphorical dialog. The translucency of the work allows for imagery and color to migrate from other prints through the surface and experience of the most immediate print. The varnished mulberry paper not only harkens back to an extensive tradition of meditative scrolls and Asian landscape painting found in temples, but also a skin-like texture and luminosity.



Meditative scrolls similar to those utilized in Asian temples and shrines, resonate and suggest a sacred space or sanctuary. In ancestral temples, scrolls are hung vertically on the wall with prayer and meditative and ritualistic suggestion. The Eastern landscape painting floats on the vertical rice paper unaffected by gravity. Employing the vertical format and Asian papers, I am suggesting this same self-reflection of the interior and exterior landscape. The format also suggests doorways to alternate interior and exterior dimensions. This is a space that is activated by the viewer's physical interaction and intellectual contemplation. The work is arranged like that of a gathering of shared knowledge and abstract information. Creating a space that evokes the idea social structure begins the viewer on a path

of discovery. This exploratory pursuit is based on the pretext that a change in the smallest unit will affect change in the structure's entirety. The metonymy implied is that of the atom or molecule to represent the universe and all quantities within these limits.



The conflation of the infinite exterior space and the interior landscape of the mind and body, allows one to find evidence of both within. This bodily reference is integral in that the skin is the barrier that separates the interior and exterior of the body. The skin is a container that conceals the interior landscape of the body and records experience in the form of scars. This parallels the skin as a container and that of the sacred space or temple. Thus, expanding on the metonymy of interaction and meditation, the skin reference necessarily integrates the viewer into the

installation. This equivalence of the varnished paper to skin is evident in the thickness of the ink-based information and the space created within the luminosity of the paper. The surface of the work, like skin, is a record of the interaction of the interior and exterior forces. The imagery, both linear and textural, like that of a fresh tattoo, is printed on both the inside and the outside.



The separation of the printed layers is only the thickness of the paper. From the strong, directional lighting and the changing perspective of a moving viewer, the space between the layers appears to be greater than the actual thickness. The simultaneity of the imagery reads from the front and back. When the print is viewed when backlit, white ink appears dark and surrounding areas glow. If the viewer is on the same side as

the light, (from the outside), the ink line is white and surrounding areas assimilate visual information from the prints on the interior. The experience of the work changes dramatically as one moves around the piece and through the space.

Printmaker and Installation artist Judy Pfaff addresses issues of place and the interior and exterior landscape. The installation of this body of work suggests on a broad level, as with Pfaff, both an interior landscape, "charting humanity's place in the universe", and on an individual basis for one seeking direction.



Ear to Ear, Pasadena, CA, 1996.

From the curator's statement of the XXIV Bienal de Sao Paulo, Miranda McClintic writes on the [Landscape of Judy Pfaff.](#)

Judy Pfaff's engaging installations are inspired by their physical and social surroundings. Pfaff adopts images, materials, and rhythms from specific places, adapting an immense vocabulary of natural and geometric forms to chart humanity's place in the universe.

Her installations relate directly to human experience, while the work I present is directly affected by and reciprocates the viewer's experience.

Movement within the installation exists literally in the movement of the viewer through the body of work, illusionary in that the color and shadow move across and through the pieces themselves and the shadows created on the walls suggest rotation. The viewer moves through these breathing pieces, air currents become repercussions of the path taken. This resonance creates a ripple in the space. When many individuals are in the space, the prints rustle like excited particles. Color from one print is visually absorbed through the translucency of the paper. Echoes of others in the space are detected by each viewer. Multiple shadows projected from people interrupt the imagery, superimposing the human form on to the work. As more people enter the space the shadow forms on the walls move around the gallery, creating a compass-like rotation. This reinforces the idea of the central axis, which resides in the center of the space under the oculus.

The interior space of the installation is a compass, a place where everything moves through and revolves. This space reflects human persona and the desire for make sense of the surroundings magnified to a physical realm. This is where one goes to consider himself and where one might fit in the larger

universe, by examining the interior metonymy. A hand held compass uses an unseen magnetic force to direct the pointer to the North Pole and implies a central axis of the planet. The rotation of cyclonic storms, such as tornados and hurricanes, not unlike the rotation of the earth, is a convergence of centripetal force, inertia and gravity. This condition is a metaphor for how one finds himself in the environment. There is a center like the eye of a storm.

Immensity is within ourselves. It is attached to a sort of expansion of being that life curbs and caution arrests, but which starts again when we are alone. As soon as we become motionless, we are elsewhere; we are dreaming in a world that is immense. Indeed immensity is the movement of motionless man. Bachelard, p184.

Within the architecture of the installation, the individual print attains a private dialog with the viewer. Each piece has separate, poetic and spatial concerns, and shares with the viewer, like the privacy of receiving a precious secret. The architecture grants the privacy of a sacred space and the translucency of the work maintains a visual continuity.



The experience of the exhibition is residual as the viewer leaves the gallery. Light, texture, color and subtlety are repercussions. Though the gallery is dense with work, the viewer retains an uplifting and soothing resonance. The exhibition is a multi-sensory experience, where memory is established from the viewer moving through the space between these tactile pieces. The journey out of the space compels the viewer forward, yet harkens a return.



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Lippard, Lucy R. On The Beaten Track. New York: The New Press, 1999.

Stewart, Susan. On Longing. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993.

Phillips, Lisa. Terry Winters. New York: The Whitney Museum of American Art, 1991.

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SELECTED EXHIBITIONS (*Solo Exhibitions)

2003 **Pyxidis Echo Lacuna**, Paul Mesaros Gallery, West Virginia University, MFA Thesis Exhibition, Morgantown, West Virginia.*

Southern Graphics, Revolution and Representation, Portfolio Exchange, Boston, Massachusetts.

2002 **Spread the Word**, Museum in the Community, Hurricane, West Virginia.

The Question of Travel, University of Michigan.

Southern Graphics, Print Gumbo Portfolio Exchange, New Orleans, Louisiana.

2001 **Line-Up**, Mesaros Galleries, West Virginia University.

Southern Graphics, Border Crossings Portfolio Exchange, Austin, Texas.

2000 **Propulsion**, 8306 13th Ave NE, Seattle, Washington.*

1996 **Resolution**, Bloch Gallery, University of Montevallo, BFA Exhibition, Montevallo, Alabama.*

EDUCATION

M.F.A., West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia, anticipated May 2003.

Pratt Fine Arts Center, Seattle, Washington, 1998-9.

B.F.A., University of Montevallo, Alabama, 1996.

RELATED WORK EXPERIENCE

Graduate Teaching Assistant, Drawing 111, Drawing 112, West Virginia University, 2002- present.

Graduate Technician Print Shop, West Virginia University, 2002- present.

Graduate Assistant, Mesaros Galleries, West Virginia University, 2001-02.

Graduate Assistant, Art History, West Virginia University, 2000-01.

Teaching Assistant, Pratt Fine Arts Center, Photo-lithography, The Stone Press, Seattle, Washington, 1998-2000.

Tutor, Art History and Art Awareness, University of Montevallo, Montevallo, Alabama, 1993-1996.

AWARDS AND HONORS

Tuition waiver, West Virginia University, 2000-03.

Assistantship, West Virginia University, 2000- 03.

GEO Grant, West Virginia University, 2001.

Partial scholarship, University of Georgia, Cortona, Italy, 2001.

RELATED EXPERIENCE

Southern Graphics Council Conference, (open portfolio) Boston, Massachusetts, 2003.

College Art Association, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 2002.

Southern Graphics Council Conference, New Orleans, Louisiana, 2002.

Southern Graphics Council Conference, Austin, Texas, 2001.

May-mester, University of Georgia, Cortona, Italy, 2001.

International Print Symposium, Cortona, Italy, 2001.