

A NEW HOME

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Abstract

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Being a product of your environment, limitations of exploring ones' self and discovery of your own essence become very apparent by not exploring your surroundings. One would never know the beauty of a sunrise cresting the horizon if they spent their life sequestered to the windowless dwelling of an urban interior. Conversely, you would never know the beauty of a ray of light cutting through the vertical forest of skyscrapers if they doomed themselves to live in a suburban metropolis. As an active member of a culture built on appropriation, the question begs to be answered; are you limited by your own sphere of life? Life becomes a self-prescribed autobiographical memory of places people identify with. Felt memories, experiences, smells, visuals, visceral experiences that you hold on to, things that over time you compile that equate to you: your person, your character, your voice, your temperament, your opinion, your intellect.

The human experience of place becomes the vehicle and access we use to synthesize and absorb our surroundings. This experience may present itself in many tactile natures from the sole participant to communal experience, as well as from active to absent participant. Regardless, by inflicting limitations on the volume of experiences in life, this reduces the richness and diversity within ones' self.

Connection through your surroundings can be one form of identity, as well as identity through an address or a structure or region. Memory can equally help to serve as method of identity, a comparative tool to situate yourself in place you find yourself. Identity implies that there is a set standard quality, or circumstance, distinguishing factors, or likeness that acts as the ability make a comparison. How you identify yourself can be equally essential as to how you identify yourself with your surroundings. Possibly a systematic approach to organize how you self-identify may not be the appropriate tool. Experience, especially a felt, bodily experience, building cognitive and affective relationships, is an instance where the translation of each space will not evoke the same response so your place identity might vary, as well as the same place may evoke opposing results. Take a thunderstorm for instance may spark memory of fear, the unknown, or a phenomenon outside of your control where as others might relate that event with a place, not related to a reactional emotion to the phenomena.

Home, likely the first, most influential foundational in ones' life, it is the control by which all other experiences, places, and identities are compared to, as the key to learning ones' identity. As home grows farther away, or the tangible "place" of home disappears, or loved ones identified with home are inaccessible, the idea of home becomes increasingly abstract. Home is no longer a domestic dwelling or an association with a street or city but becomes detached from "place;" feelings that through affective memory transport you to this place. This feeling can be

resolved through the idea of *topophilia* and place attachment. *Topophilia* being this strong sense of place, occasionally mixed with cultural identity. I argue that home is equally as much youthful attachment to place, as it is more importantly assorted felt experiences at differing geographic locations independent of built environments or participants. So, home, however abstract it may be received, is no longer is a carbon copy or reflective memory of childhood but now is now a distilled place one identifies with; a spatial or singular experience of content, euphoric bliss, and an affective, generally positive connection to another place, and time. This concept of home no longer requires others, no memorization of an arrangement of place, of family, of community, or even contributing human factors. Home in being, the here and the now, it is a participation in being enveloped in your surroundings; home is the moment you transition from observer to participant. Home is now a gesture, a material, visual cues that reference familiar, nostalgic responses to heterogeneous scenarios and materials channeled through a felt experience. Home is an emotive, content moment, where connection to your immediate environment registers with past experience and identity to specific places and parameters. Having an attachment with the thread of home, not in the idea of dwelling, but as an emotive affective response to physical surroundings can now define home, anonymously represent place even in a moment in one's life.

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INTRODUCTION

This project aims to investigate the affective relationship to place, specifically by decoding the changing concept of home; in regard to place attachment and place identity through the changing dynamic of home away from domesticity and specifically in places devoid of people in a built and natural environment. Through sculpture, photography, installation, light, and drawings I seek to better a developing grasp onto what place, why place, and how place can have such a profound and precipitating effect on any individual.

WHY PLACE

Prior to the act of making, thinking, and enveloping myself in making work, there is always a moment, seemingly photographic in nature, seconds that last for hours, burned like filtered light into the light sensitive emulsion that is my memory. Everything I yearn to explore emanates from a place. A very specific place with very particular triggers that resonate like a low echo in a cavern. Almost like folk lore, these relationships to place are a spoken element, either through words or through visual representations that speak of how I recall and interpret my relationship to place. But place is so vague and so understood that it actually has almost no meaning. The example below embodies the difficulty and universal nature of “place”:

*“Think of the ways place is used in everyday speech. “Would you like to come round to my place?” This suggests **ownership** or some kind of **connection** between a person and a particular location or building. It also suggests a notion of **privacy** and **belonging**. “My place” is not “your place” – you and I have different places. “Brisbane is a nice place.” Here “place” is referring to a **city** in a common sense kind of way and the fact that it is nice suggests something of the way it looks and what it is like to be there. “She put me in my place” refers to more of a sense of **position** in a **social hierarchy**. “A place for everything and everything in its place” is another well-known phrase that suggests that there are **particular orderings of things in the world** that have a socio-geographical basis. Place is everywhere. This makes it different from other terms in geography like “territory,” which announces itself as a specialized term, or “landscape” which is not a word that permeates through our everyday encounters.”*

-Cresswell, Place: An Introduction (7)

Cresswell makes note of this in “Defining Place” by simply stating, “place is everywhere,” simply because it has so many meanings but later clarifying that geographer John Agnew outlined three fundamental aspects for what he defines as “parameters of place” as a “meaningful location”

1. Location.
2. Locale.

3. Sense of place.

Cresswell agrees here by understanding this definition of place accounts for most examples, as well as inserting that this definition parallels other concepts such as “space” and “landscape” which are occasionally substituted (9). I look back into the places that have inspired my work through a graduate career and mostly so these three aspects aide in clarifying place in the time where I reflect and attempt to digest why certain experiences of place stand above others. To understand the simplicity of home, a “place” masked by varying degrees of attachment, some positive, some negative; one needs a firm grasp on “place” to better understand qualities and variable reliant on others to make this homogenous ideal. Six qualities said to harmoniously define a place, having place generating qualities are as follows: access/connection, comfort/amenity, vibrant/active, identity/personality, harmonious, and social/friendly. In attempts to map how these qualities align with my own experience I mapped many places that resonate for several of these six qualities (Fig. 1) The locations generally arise from places in nature, some far from the presence of others and some in public domain.

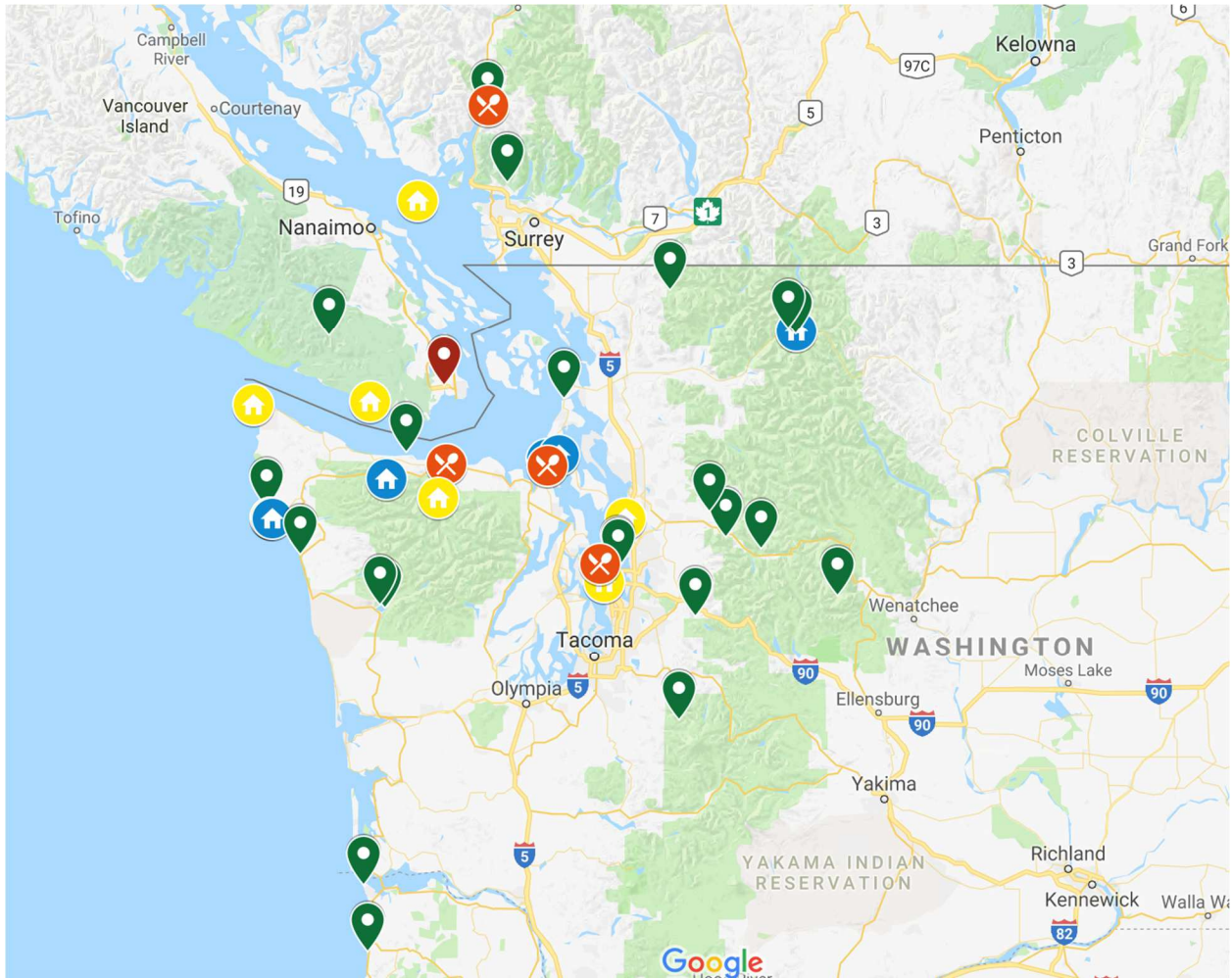


Fig. 1 (google mapping of locations visited in 2016, 2017)

Upon stumbling across these and attempting to define and decipher the means by which this list was created, these qualities are all that of places that we as humans' dwell or occupy to some capacity. I am not interested in this. This research is not interested in how we can design attributes and qualities to become ergonomic to the human condition. Although intriguing, it seems to be much simpler to design around parameters and have success in creating places that are meant to have very calculated effects. My interests are much more on the unintentional, much more about the affective relation we have with very wide array of places and distill this

down to essentials to what creates this bond. This attachment to place and these qualities create bonds beyond pleasantries, instances that can and does happen in the absence of others, out of the range of cell phones, beyond where interior walls create comfort, and internally

So, for interest of wondering how the place (dwelling) can be designed to create a specified result, the question arises can these six factors carry over to a place I am defining as a “New Home.” This access and connection, said to have a visual and physical connection, and belonging to their setting is troublesome. For those such as myself intrigued and connected to anomalies found in nature, or in passing are often those that cannot be accessed. In this scenario it is in fact the lure of things such as fog, sunrises, natural qualities of light or cavernous voids that contribute to attachment to place which oppose access and still create connection.

An interesting perspective is to imagine place as self. If place embodies self, or if you are attracted to places that embody characteristics of self this again is another way to interpret a newer concept of home. Relocation at varying ages strips some forms of identity and connection to something felt like home, they question begged to be asked that if places you connect with merely are a reflection of one’s self. Places of comfort would then essentially become a self-portrait. Attributes that align with either interests, skills, lifestyle, occupation or culture can all be abstractions of the personal traits that you can seek comfort in or find community within similar to the idea of home. These attributes can be things so innate to humans that it goes unnoticed, but it should be known that the ocean for instance has a dramatic effect on your temperament. Writer Wallace Nichols has coined the term “Blue Mind: a mildly meditative state characterized by calm, peacefulness, unity, and a sense of general happiness and satisfaction with life in the moment” (Nichols 49). This moment of satiation with your surroundings and being could be the place, “A New Home.” Instead of familiarity of a dinner table, evening sitcom with

the family or the comfort of a childhood bedroom, possible a Blue Mind is what best defines the moment I am connected with while in transit.

CONNECTIVITY AND ACCESS

Aside from the connection to earth this mentality goes well beyond connecting deeper with nature or a built environment, some find comfort in a number of other scenarios that are certainly new but as to be expected progression of community. Many millennials find comfort in the absence of people as well, but more so in their mobile device. Many people are attached to a cyber personality or community rather than a physical one. An overwhelming amount of people develop a social media persona that far exceeds their physical manifestation. If you step back to understand what draws people together or connects people in this scenario you might start by thinking of fire. You would be hard pressed to go to a campground and not see folks huddled around a fire ring in some progression of either enjoying the experience or trading a story. And thus, the origins of folklore. If one imagines this moment to be the first place, situated, that is a connection of people and place and conveying experience you can fast forward through progressively more modern formats. From fire, which might have the most longevity through colonization and Westward Expansion in the United States. Towards written messages, wire, to radio, and onward through newer formats of telecommunication. If fire was the creator of informal community, then radio in 1906 marked the newest form of connection, with the first wireless communication. The comical visual of a family huddled around a box listening to broadcasts is equally as modern in its time to looking down the rows of modern public transit and noticing every person enveloped in their personal devices. Both as innovative and current as

technology allows in the moment shows differing formats of comfort and community. But still this doesn't quite explain the comfort when encountering the natural and built environment and the bonds created in these moments, although it does show there is a very fluid notion of community and an ever-changing definition of how it transpires, and how we access this place.

PLACE IDENTITY

If you relate yourself to your surroundings or experiences, then your identity is a direct reflection of environment. "Since the individuals place-identity mirrors a physical world, the continuing recognition of that world over time gives credence to and support for his or her self-identity" (Proshansky 79). Proshansky goes on in this publication "Place-Identity" that your relationship to your surroundings, and the index of experiences influence your response to the physical world. So essentially the record of past influences the future, not on in your response to environment but also your acclimation to place. Profoundly claiming an emergence of place-identity as stating:

"What emerges as "place-identity is a complex cognitive structure which is characterized by a host of attributes, values, thoughts, beliefs, meanings, and behavior tendencies that go well beyond just emotional attachments and belonging to particular place."

-Proshansky, Fabian, Kaminoff (77)

This quote truly embodies my attachment to place, how I identify with place, how “home” is this complex structure characterized as such, but in a current state has changed. The essence of home has the ability to remove itself from a structure and be fluid, existing where ever you find meaning and attributes that resonate from within to create commune and comfort.

ENVIRONMENT

My interests in the making, and in the resonance that place and moments that echo within me is not in the mimetic or didactic devices. To understand this, first what is environment, or more importantly how and I defining it and building from this definition. Environment is a set of affordances, not a system but set of possibilities British anthropologist Tim Ingold has done an amazing job at defining environment in ways that full embody my understanding of such. “Defining environment as landscape or habitat whose constituent objects are defined in terms of composition rather than function (Ingold 2). This took me a second to unpack and grasp but to define environment via its composition is another avenue that operates to define my own experience, whereas I’m not interested in “tree” or “arch” but rather I’m interested in environment that is characterized by what these components create.

The intent is not to recreate, to generate or to reproduce a place or moment, the intent is to distil the place down to the essential element; the object that creates the resonance, the voice that produces the echo in all actuality I am in fact performing appropriation of place in the most genuine form. I find the activator of an environment and create work that embodies that trigger or that lure to elicit connection.

“it may seem obvious, but is often forgotten, that an environment can only be defined relative to a being or beings whose environment it is, whether a single individual, a local or regional population, or an entire species.” -Tim Ingold

Ingold defines environment(place) as such and this sets the person up to be equal participant in place as the other components that are present and that to understand environment it is clearly relative to its surroundings; a contributor. My travels, my experiences, and the moments I reference in my work harness this in a very specific capacity. I am a part of this environment, I am as essential as all other things present that this is what defines the difference between a voyeur and a participant. The most fantastic experiences occur in defiance and inability of interference. Sunset, hail, light dancing behind waves, these all occur despite the will to exist.

NATURAL VS BUILT

That is the grace and elegance of being a patron in specific moments. Our perception of beauty and intrigue is equally as important in this participation in environment. Figure 1 shows heavily compacted snow creating ice caves that like the tides have ebbs and flows, expanding then melting slowly eroding and ever changing. Architecture has the ability to mimic nature in interesting ways and create similar aesthetics, and design often sources material, design, economies, and strategies from occurrences in nature. In comparison it's hard not to see the natural environment impact in the built, and how natural environments are evocative of built environments. Figures 1.1-1.4 show comparisons where I have encountered two differing places,

bound to one another through my experience, aesthetics, qualities of light and simply through the power of place.

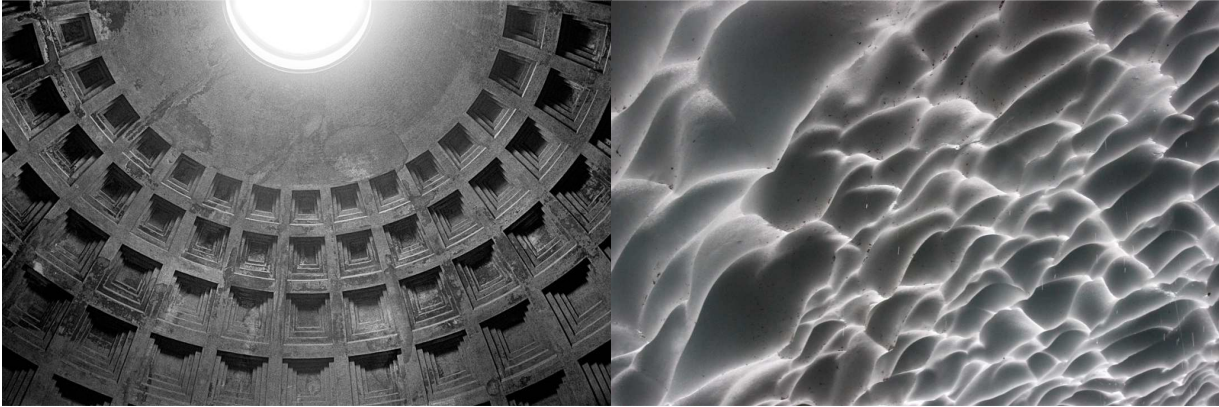


Fig 1.1 (personal photos Pantheon, Italy; Ice Caves, WA)



Fig. 1.2 (personal photos Havana, Cuba; Rialto Beach, WA)

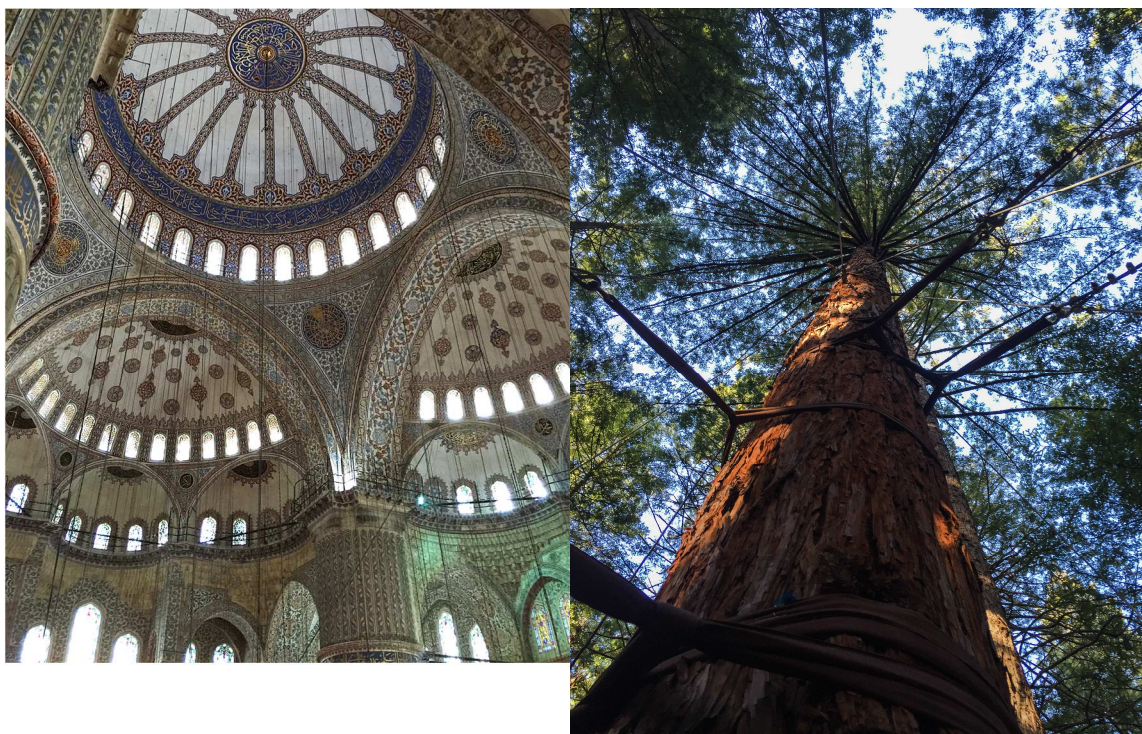


Fig 1.3 personal photos (Istanbul, Turkey; Taupo, New Zealand)



Fig 1.4 (personal photos Olympic Peninsula; Glasgow, Scotland)

But this beauty, as Kant defines it as “purposive without purpose” (Kant 219) to toggle between aesthetic beauty and cognitive beauty. This ice for instance, similar to Kant’s’ take on a sunset exists not to achieve an aesthetic, and almost out of our own control to fully encapsulate the experience but we perceive things that exist as beauty with no attempts to intentionally appeal to aesthetics.

Considering my interest in place and extracting the most active or present attributes to place this lends itself to material vernacular, and formal vernacular. Materially speaking my drive is to introduce something so familiar such as concrete that there is not only a given understanding of volume and mass but there’s also a relationship a viewer has with these materials. A vernacular, something so inherent to understanding that the relationship exists without prescribed parameters. They have an understanding of where they are found, what is constructed of these things and this unspoken transference of knowledge goes without explanation. Piers, infrastructure, foundation, anchor, obstacle, reinforcement are all things that are triggered with material choice of concrete and leaving the material to show what it is, to convey these occasionally subconscious connections.

That might be the most evident connection, when it almost goes unnoticed, as the very immediately has a visual connection to a piece purely through their own experience which is that amazing part of minimalism is allowing the leeway to give the viewer liberties in understanding the working in reference to personal perceptions. That is the strength of the work, aligning yourself in an installation in a manner that is very personal and very connected to your own memory. Again, as Ingold describes the environment is defined in terms of who environment it is, not by the viewer. In the moment you see yourself in a place with you as a participant and no

longer a viewer now the work is essentially yours and the experience is unique to your experience as much as the work is a visualization of my own experience of place.

MFA THESIS: TRANSFORMING LAND

My thesis work explores three differing moments of home, connected by also very different investigations of what contributes and what that place looks like (Fig 2). Moments that resonate through memory, through material and offer insight to how I navigate my own affective relationship to locations with no geographical locations as well as very concise moments and places in my life.



Fig 2 (Solo Thesis Showcard)

My solo show investigates a deeper look into two specific places that influence me, and places that made me recognize the nature in architecture and the architectural component and possibilities in natural environments. Lucy Lippard writes about the simplicity and the complicated nature of simple things, in her own infatuations about a gravel pit in “Undermining: A Wild Ride Through Land Use,” and this was a book that made me think more into what simple encounters resonate and change your outlook on your surroundings. Her encounter with the mining and manufacturing of gravel and the landscape created through this process might be creating new landscapes that gorgeous in their own right. This mentality of a secondary product, unintentional made me ponder what suburban communities with their rhythmic construction of simple architecture mirrors (Fig 3). I began to think about classical architecture and how it is perceived and these massive structures, rooted in the earth, grounded not only physically showing their dominance but also fortifying their relevance in society as grand and monumental for the institutions they house. Thinking more about negating this solidity, I was more interested if they structure is erased now you’re left with this canopy of roofs.



(Fig. 3) Suburbia (public domain image)

There are now new strata, a new terrain atop the existing topography. This terrain, when veiled or masked like many of Christo and Jeanne-Claude works (Fig 4.) not only accentuates the existing land but most certainly creates a new as well as gives an amazing new ability to digest the terrain through scale.



(Fig 4.) "The Umbrellas" Christo and Jeanne Claude (www.christojeanneclaude.net)

My work in "Gabled Grounds" attempts to satisfy both avenues and create a new topography through distilled linear formats of gabled housing (Fig. 5,6). Similar to Lippard, it's a product of process that I'm drawn to which Christo and Jean-Claude have again and again created in many

works that draw interest to place through scale, passage, traversing and a newer understanding of a space.



(Fig. 5) “Gabled Grounds” solo thesis documentation



(Fig. 6) “Gabled Grounds” solo thesis documentation

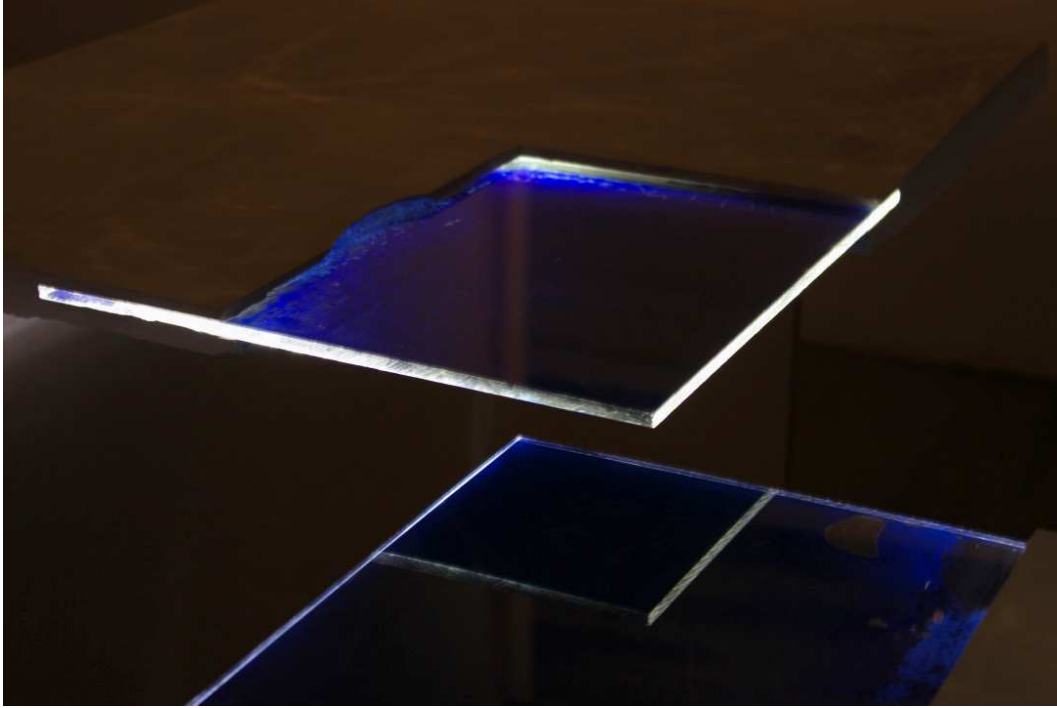
This installation combines many layers of information, some more apparent than others but in the objects resides three levels of strata with the lighting contributing to a fourth. Where the feet meet the ground creates a very concise and purposeful delicacy to the objects, very much opposing the classical architectural method of rooting and grounding structures into the earth further pushing this idea of canopy and floatation. The feet being the first, and their connection of materials from wood to metal being essentially a horizon line that floats and meanders through the installation. The new formed topography atop the objects is minimized through linear steel and capped off by the lighting. The lighting is a small but effective move to lower the ceiling and create a vertical limitation in the space similar to a cloud ceiling.

As a second partition of my solo thesis exhibit there is the work “Featureless Void” where I am again very captivated by place or site and another location that resonates with me and a moment of reflection, of feeling one with my surrounding and an affective bond that connects me to this place. This work references the Bonneville Salts flats and again similar to Lippard I became interested in investigating the how and why of such a gorgeous place. Reading the novel “A Field Guide to Getting Lost,” Solnit also has been to this same location and had felt experience defining as a “featureless void,” which the gallery wore this name from. Again, a place of phenomena creates the opposing effect of the suburb, the salt flats are so flat and endless the curvature of the earth almost seems to be visible. The salt is hard to touch and textured like concrete, so the imagination wandered and all one can imagine is what if. What if modern construction/architecture navigated the space. How would this occur (Fig. 7).



(Fig. 7) “Featureless Void” Solo thesis documentation

By injecting this potential, it not only scales the space and helps me attempt to understand the vastness of the place but also serves to give the viewer and understanding of how I envision possibilities. Sculptural work accompanies four images of the Salt Flats and again attempt to understand the space, most specifically the partition of the flats that are utilized for distilling the water for the salt dissolved in it (Fig. 8). Utilizing light to activate acrylic these flat renderings of satellite images of the flats abstract the use of gravity to fill the pools and color in the pools to aide in the evaporation process.



(Fig. 8) “Featureless Void-Pools” Solo thesis documentation

This solo thesis show, “Transforming Land: Site Inspired Transfiguration” in both of its components (Gabled Grounds, Featureless Void) explore my own attachment to place, this moment of content connection to site; “A New Home.” Understanding the duality to place attachment and how I am transformed by my surrounds as well as how the land it altered in its making both form bonds to experience.

GROUP MFA: A VOLUPTIOUS SURRENDER

In every scenario whether it’s sports, or television, sitting at a café, or participating in classroom discussion there are two fundamental ways to take part: participant and observer. For my experiences, the moments that inspire my work I consider only the places, moments, and

fragments that occur when I am one with the environment, built or natural. The title for my piece included in the 2018 MFA Henry Exhibition stems from a book gifted to myself from a studio mate. The book sat with me for 4 months where it took a flight to Las Vegas to finally take part in some reading where I found a profound sentence that resonated and fully embodied the moment my work references.

“To lose yourself: a voluptuous surrender, lost in your arms, lost to the world, utterly immersed in what is present so that its surroundings fade away. In Benjamin’s terms, to be lost is to be fully present, and to be fully present is to be capable of being in uncertainty and mystery.”
- Rebecca Solnit *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*

In her own words as well as Walter Benjamin’s she completely actualized the photographic, singular moment my work strives to capture. This openness, the vulnerability that occurs in these moments for me, this energy and comfort of community that exists through “home.” Monumental task to achieve in one sentence as it may be, simply enough stated in a book gifted to me because of my love to explore and traverse land.

In a very honest confession this is appropriation at its finest, and at no cost. I am pulling directly from a place and inserting that completely into my work. “Appropriation, attachment, and identity refer collectively to the idea that people invest places with meaning and significance and act in ways that reflects their linkage with places. Appropriation means that the person is transformed in the process of appropriating the environment.” (Altman 5) Here Altman is connecting identity to place and what you invest into a place where is precisely my motives and

talks of the moment of being transformed. Again, the exact effect of my experiences and the root of my motivations to recapture place.

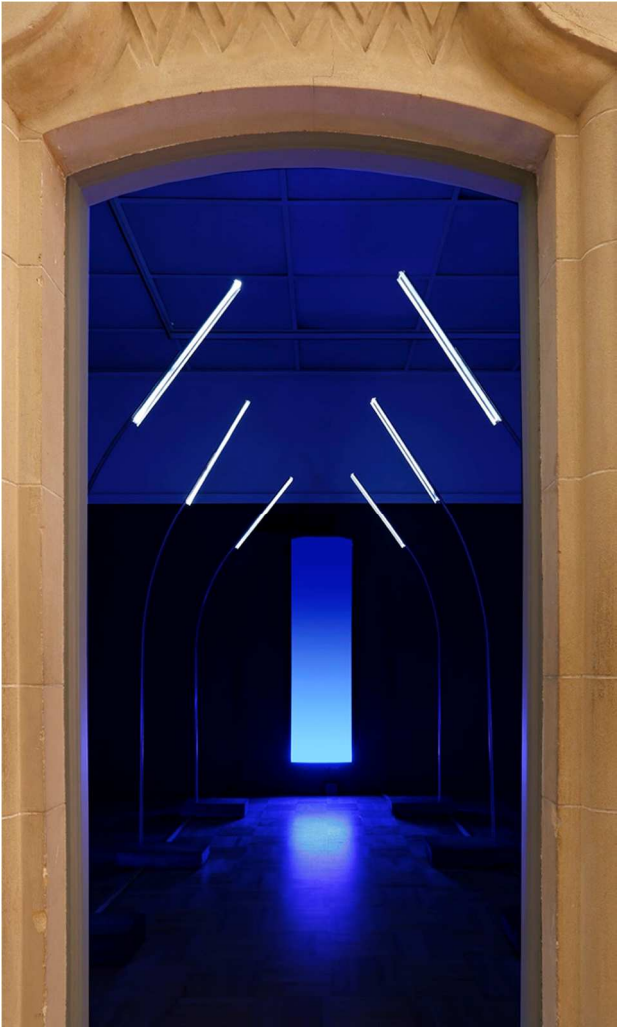


Fig. 9 MFA Group (Mark Woods image)



Fig. 10 Group Thesis (Mark Woods image)

The thesis work that includes objects as installation embodies natural elements inserted through architectural vernacular. The suggestion is that one cannot exist without the other and the symbiotic relationship the two have not only pair them but also empower each space. My experiences of both evoke reverence, which I hope the viewer instills upon the installation from the environment created with the blue ambiance of the created space. This blue, twilight, fraction of time, so peripheral and encompassing that it is easy to miss, overlook, and no embrace (Fig. 9) In winter months, closer to the equator this moment can be so photographic in timespan that without concerted effort it certainly expires before embrace. That is the power of place. Photography captures moments, frequently so fleeting and unreproducible that conveying that to a non-participant is impossible. This is where my work comes into play. This is the

power of creating non-durational work, that prolongs a moment hard to capture in life. Think of that installation as a frame of time slowed down, just enough to understand it, to digest it, given the capacity to feel the effect of the blue and the distillation of form through the arched lighting. This is power. It is not a scream, or a yell or an exclamation point because again this is inherent beauty, invaluable because its existence to exist not for pleasure but because it is understood as beauty (Fig. 10). Reverence. Respect. This is what I give the spaces I reference and are forever connected to because they offer themselves up with no cost of entry and ask for nothing in return.

THE FLICKER

In early 2018 after hearing of a visiting Architect/Artist whose work embodied place through installation and lighting I was very compelled to hear this individual speak. Yumi Kori, Japanese-born architect spoke of her work, very traditional as far as essential components in her design which always includes a tea room. She referenced this book, “The Tea Room,” several times as a foundation to her design approach and that utility of the actual tea room itself. Aside from this there was a chapter on appropriation and an awakening.

“at the magic touch of the beautiful the secret chords of our beings are awakened, we vibrate and thrill in response to its call. Mind speaks to mind. We listen to the unspoken, we gaze upon the unseen. The master calls forth notes we know not of. Memories long forgotten all come back to us with new significance. Hopes stifled with fear, yearnings that we dare not recognize, stand forth in new glory.” – Kakuzo Okakura

When focusing inward on my thesis and this place of home, and while referencing my own experiences, she says “we vibrate and thrill in response to its call” (Okakura 106). The sensorial response of goosebumps comes to mind. For me, the memory of place, the power of memory to create goosebumps for instance is this response and in the moment a flicker. If a memory is photographic then then remembrance of that fragment is The Flicker. That moment that takes you to the elements and components essential to that place, “home.” Gibson speaks about environment in a manner that abstracts itself into a form of home also, “No animal could exist without an environment surrounding it. Equally an environment implies an animal to be surrounded” (154). Here again this thought of you as a constituent in a large schema that requires you to activate it, acknowledge it as much as you depend on it.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

To cap off this concept, and place I am calling “A New Home,” much like every individual's history is different and occasionally non-translatable, as are life experiences. The ability and moment of allowing one's self to realize the place, moments, people, locations, smells, lighting and surroundings that move from observer to participant is a moment to make note of; but the beauty of it is that you should be so enveloped in that moment that you might not recognize it until it manifests itself in a new way where you are drawn to understand the attributes that invite this voluptuous surrender.

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