

THE PRACTICE OF PERFECTION: Dance Gestures and Printed Traces

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ABSTRACT

The Practice of Perfection: Dance Gestures and Printed Traces explores the intimate parallels between printmaking and ballet, highlighting the shared dedication and physical demands of both practices. Beginning with an examination of the historical evolution of printmaking techniques, particularly drypoint, the narrative delves into the meticulous process of plate preparation, marking, and printing. Through meticulous attention to detail and repetitive physical practice, practitioners of both printmaking and ballet navigate the delicate balance between pressure and resistance. The paper further elucidates how touch and pressure are fundamental to the creation of prints, mirroring the physical demands and hidden labours inherent in ballet. Finally, it underscores the importance of embodied gestures and kinesthetic understanding in both disciplines, emphasizing how the pursuit of perfection leaves an indelible mark on both the artwork and the artist's body.

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INTRODUCTION

What does it mean to fail when we are chasing perfection? This is what I have come to accept as my thesis question. I approached my graduate studies with a lot of ideas and concepts that I wanted to explore and incorporate into my artwork. I had a very long list of complicated books and theories that I wanted to clearly articulate through my printmaking practice. I also envisioned my project as bridging the practices of visual arts and ballet through related themes of corrosion, pain, the body, class, etc. Yet, I found myself repeating the great pattern of my life: falling into complexity in the pursuit of perfection. Essentially, I was making everything too complicated because I wanted to avoid failure, not realizing at the time that failure was not the opposite of perfection, but instead is an integral part of the longer *practice* of perfection.

The primary works on display in my thesis exhibition, titled *The Practice of Perfection: Dance Gestures and Printed Traces*, are *Daily Practice* and *re-formation*.¹ *Daily Practice* a collection of several hundred drypoint prints pulled from Plexiglass plates, each inscribed with the date and trace of a day's worth of practiced pirouettes. It is installed on the walls as a grid, organized by date with gaps left for the days when no plate was made, or no print was pulled. The grid reaches high above the head of the viewer and extends down to the floor of the gallery where the distinct marks are continued in charcoal and black india ink on newsprint covering about half of the gallery floorspace. This ephemeral continuation of *Daily Practice* will trace the presence of any visitors to the gallery, picking up boot marks, yellowing and tearing over the course of a week. *re-formation* will be displayed as a video animation, back-projected onto a

¹ Special Projects Gallery, York University Campus, April 8th to 12th, 2024.

translucent plastic screen, set within a six-foot wooden box. On the wall to the left of this box is a selection of individual prints or frames from the animation.

Both my art and my research are informed by the process of intaglio printmaking and my admiration of ballet; two art forms that traditionally hold up ideals of rigorous practice and “perfect” results. While I do have experience printmaking, I have only ever approached ballet from a place of fervent admiration, and with no actual dance experience – an amateur. I explore the relationship between print and ballet through the lens of perfection, failure, bodily gesture, and material resistance. In this paper I begin by defining key terms within my research context, followed by an artist statement covering my past work and a detailed description of my two most recent projects. I then delve into the parallels between the physical demands and repetition in printmaking and ballet, followed by historical insights into printmaking techniques, particularly engraving and drypoint. I detail my approach to preparing, marking, and printing plates, emphasizing consistency and practice. I then examine classical ballet’s pursuit of perfection and its portrayal in visual arts. I explore the significance of touch and pressure in printmaking and ballet, highlighting drypoint’s reflection of the artist’s hand and plate resistance, akin to the physical demands in ballet. Lastly, I emphasize kinesthetic understanding and proper posture in printmaking, drawing parallels with the discipline required in ballet, reflecting on the interplay between pressure, resistance, perfection, and failure in shaping our understanding of the world.

ASPECTS OF A(MY) PRACTICE

Perfection

What is perfection? What does it mean for something to be perfect? According to several definitions, it is a nuanced and evolving concept that varies across different contexts and

domains. It encompasses notions of flawlessness, precision, and the relentless pursuit of excellence. However, one definition that stood out to me was the idea that “perfection is the quality of being as good as it is possible for something of a particular kind to be.”² How do we know the capacity for something to be the best of its particular kind? In the context of my work as an artist, where artmaking involves a process of risk taking, failure and honing, I see perfection as something that must be tested through repetition, pushed to the edge of its ability again and again until it is at the forefront of its kind. This feels like the best place to begin a dissection of such an abstract concept as it is more concrete and provable than the description of “flawless” which leads us down another road where it is necessary to prove and define a flaw. As such, I can say that within the scope of this paper, perfection is exemplified through an ongoing practice: the ability to execute a pirouette over and over again without falling, to pull a series of prints with uniform plate tone and registration and maintain consistency without leaving fingerprints. It is also defined by the high standards that are maintained by the institution of classical ballet, and the high standards that I maintain for myself and my work. Perfection is not a static endpoint, but an idealized standard that is larger than the capacity of any individual person, performance, or print; perfection lies in repeatability. Perfection, therefore, transcends mere technical proficiency; it is found in the pursuit of mastery, and resilience in the face of adversity. In her book, *On Beauty and Being Just*, Elaine Scarry writes about a young boy, sensing a moment of beauty, or perfection:

“A beautiful face drawn by Verrocchio suddenly glides into the perceptual field of a young boy named Leonardo. The boy copies the face, then copies the face again. Then again and again and again. He does the same thing when a beautiful living plant—a

² “Perfection Definition and Meaning | Collins English Dictionary,” Collins Online Dictionary, accessed February 25, 2024, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/perfection>.

violet, a wild rose—glides into his field of vision, or a living face: he makes a first copy, a second copy, a third, a fourth, a fifth. He draws it over and over,”³

Even when we are unable to firmly grasp perfection (a kind of beauty), we are compelled to reach for it over and over. Rather than striving to meet a singular “perfect” outcome, perfection is about showing up time and again to perform better than you did before.

Failure

Failure can be defined as an inherent component of perfection, which pushes the boundaries of ability to the forefront of its kind. Failure should not be viewed as the “flaw” to counter the “flawlessness” of perfection; instead, failure is the edge of our ability. Failure is the resistance to the pressure of striving for perfection. It is an integral part of the process, that which we must face repeatedly, particularly when engaging with structured art forms as an amateur.

Intaglio

Within printmaking, intaglio refers to a print that is made when the ink sits in grooves inscribed into a plate. Incisions are made by etching, engraving, drypoint, aquatint or mezzotint. Typically, plates are copper or zinc, but depending on what incision method you are using, there is room to experiment with different plate materials. I have, for example, used both copper and plexiglass plates to create drypoint intaglio prints. A stiff, printing ink is applied in a thin layer over the entire surface of the plate and is then strategically wiped off in two stages: first with a pad of Tarlatan, then with a thin sheet of tissue paper, or the bare heel of a printer’s hand.⁴ In this way, ink is left only in the marks made on the plate’s surface. Another key characteristic of

³ Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2001), 3.

⁴ **Tarlatan:** A heavily starched open weave cotton fabric that resembles a stiff cheesecloth. It is a big part of the intaglio printmaking process, but it is also used in costuming and used to be the fabric of choice for ballet tutus.

intaglio prints is that when printed, the paper is soaked first, to better fill the grooves and pick up all of the ink.

Drypoint

Drypoint is an intaglio technique that involves scratching the surface of the printing plate with a thin, pointed tool, called a scribe or a needle, to create a mark.⁵ What is unique about the drypoint method is that a burr of metal is pushed up on the sides of this scratch, staying attached to the print and becoming “an active part of the printing matrix.”⁶ This raised metal burr also holds ink, not just the hollow of the scratch, which creates velvety, soft and irregular lines. These delicate raised burrs also introduce a problem to the consistency of an edition made from any drypoint plate, as they are not an immovable part of the plate – they get crushed each time a plate is run through the press and begin to wear away and flatten after only the first print. The degradation of a print over time can be just as interesting, if not more so than a large set of evenly editioned prints. The malleability of drypoint goes beyond the effect of the press though - it is possible to achieve a kind of “erased” mark by burnishing drypoint lines. Burnishing involves the use of a long, thin, curved metal tool that can be used to smooth out drypoint marks, working the burrs of displaced material back into the hollow of the scratch.

Pirouette

As an amateur in the field of ballet, I have no personal definition of a pirouette, instead, I have relied entirely on the descriptions of others. One that I found to be quite thorough is that provided by Gail Grant in their *Technical Manual and Dictionary of Classical Ballet*:

⁵ Catherine Brooks, *Magical Secrets About Line Etching & Engraving: The Step-by-Step Art of Incised Lines* (San Francisco: Crown Point Press, 2006), 10.

⁶ Brooks, 10.

“Pirouette [*peer-WET*]. Whirl or spin. A complete turn of the body on one foot either on the pointe or demi-pointe the motive power being obtained from a combination of plié and arm movements. Pirouettes require perfect balance, and every pirouette is entirely dependent on the preparation which precedes it. The dancer should make use of all the toes of the supporting foot, pressing them strongly against the ground to increase the area of support and thereby assist the equilibrium of the body. During a pirouette the body is not absolutely vertical but leans very slightly forward. The force of momentum is furnished by the arms and never by the body or shoulder. The opening arm gives the lead, and the incoming arm gives additional impetus. The head is the last to move as the body turns away from the spectator and the first to arrive as the body comes around toward the spectator. This is known as spotting. During a series of turns the dancer must not lose the spot and should always feel the front to prevent dizziness. Pirouettes are done en dedans and en dehors and may be single, double, triple and so on before lowering the heel of the supporting foot to the ground. As a rule, all pirouettes en dedans finish [with the gesturing leg closing] in front of the supporting leg, while all pirouettes en dehors finish [closing] behind the supporting leg. There is a great variety of pirouettes, pirouette sur le cou-de-pied, pirouette en attitude, pirouette en arabesque, pirouette à la seconde, grande pirouette, pirouette renversée and so on. The exact height of the raised leg in a pirouette sur le cou-de-pied is a matter of opinion, the French School depicting the position of the foot as below the calf, while the Italian School gives the position as above the calf of the supporting leg. Technically, anywhere from the ankle to the knee is correct.”⁷

Practice versus Process

My methodology as an artist involves working directly with materials, immersing myself in the process, and documenting everything to create an archive of potential future material. The word “process” is key here. I used to consider the word “process” to be a suitable synonym for “practice,” thinking of both as long strings of repeated action that did not always have a clear beginning or end. It was only after reading Marcus Boon and Gabriel Levine’s introduction to *Practice*, that the “highly abstract and intellectualized” nature of the term “practice” began to sink in for me. “Practice” is comprised of two halves: *praxis*, “mean[ing] an action that is

⁷ Gail Grant, *Technical Manual and Dictionary of Classical Ballet* (New York: Dover Publications, 1967), 79.; Adjustments provided by Professor Mary Jane K. Warner from the York University School of the Arts, Media, Performance & Design.; It is worth noting that this definition is not all-inclusive, and that styles and rules change per country and dance company; for example, those trained in Cuba are generally renowned for their turning abilities and find that taking the gesturing leg above the knee helps them to turn more.

valuable in itself,” and *poiesis*, an action “whose goal is making or creation.”⁸ In this way, practice relates directly to gesture – it is much more than process, it is a way of thinking, of understanding our position in the world from two oppositional sides.⁹ As a result, I now use the word process to refer specifically to different art-making techniques, while “practice” I use to refer to a more holistic understanding of creative meaning making.¹⁰

If one thinks of art practice as a series of projects carried out according to whatever methodology the artist follows, it moves the focus away from results, reforming an artistic practice as a long string of repeated actions, or a process. The term practice is more specific than process, but maybe it fits inside of process, just as praxis and poiesis fit inside practice, and pressure drives poiesis.

ARTIST STATEMENT

My artistic practice delves into the material intricacies of printmaking, drawing parallels between this medium and the practice (or art?) of ballet, tracing the bodily gestures of dance and inscribed movement. While I am a printmaker by training and practice, my relation to dance is that of an amateur, something I have endeavoured to learn on my own without professional training. My work acknowledges the complexity and failure involved in repetitive, daily practice - the push and pull of pressure and resistance that lies at the heart of both printmaking and ballet.

⁸ Marcus Boon and Gabriel Levine, “Introduction//The Promise of Practice,” in *Practice*, ed. by Marcus Boon and Gabriel Levine (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2018), 13.

⁹ Vilém Flusser, *Gestures*, trans. Nancy Ann Roth (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 33.

¹⁰ It is worth noting that many artists of the 1970’s used the term “process art” as a deliberate revealing of the hidden processes by which art was made.

This research journey commenced in 2019, with a simple interest in scrutinizing the movement of ballet, evident in my work titled *Study of Movement* (2019). Here, I deconstructed a video of a dancer into 42 frames, rendering each moment on a small piece of newsprint using gestural charcoal marks before transferring the reverse of each image to a larger sheet of paper in a rudimentary approximation of a mono-print [Fig. 1 & Fig. 2]. This piece served as a catalyst, igniting a deeper curiosity about ballet, and prompting a deeper exploration of possible printmaking techniques. The ephemeral nature of the charcoal mark intrigued me, leading me to delve into drypoint as a fascinating “next step.” Only a few months after finishing *Study of Movement*, I began experimenting with layering drypoint figures through a series of prints. Printing the



Fig. 3. *Repetition*, 2019

plate between the addition of figures, I could watch past figures fade into the background with each iteration [Fig. 3].

Eventually, I was working with erased drypoint marks in *Pentimento* (2022) [Fig. 4]. *re-formation* was the next step in this line of research.



Fig. 2. *Study of Movement*, 2019



Fig. 1. Newsprint matrix from *Study of Movement*

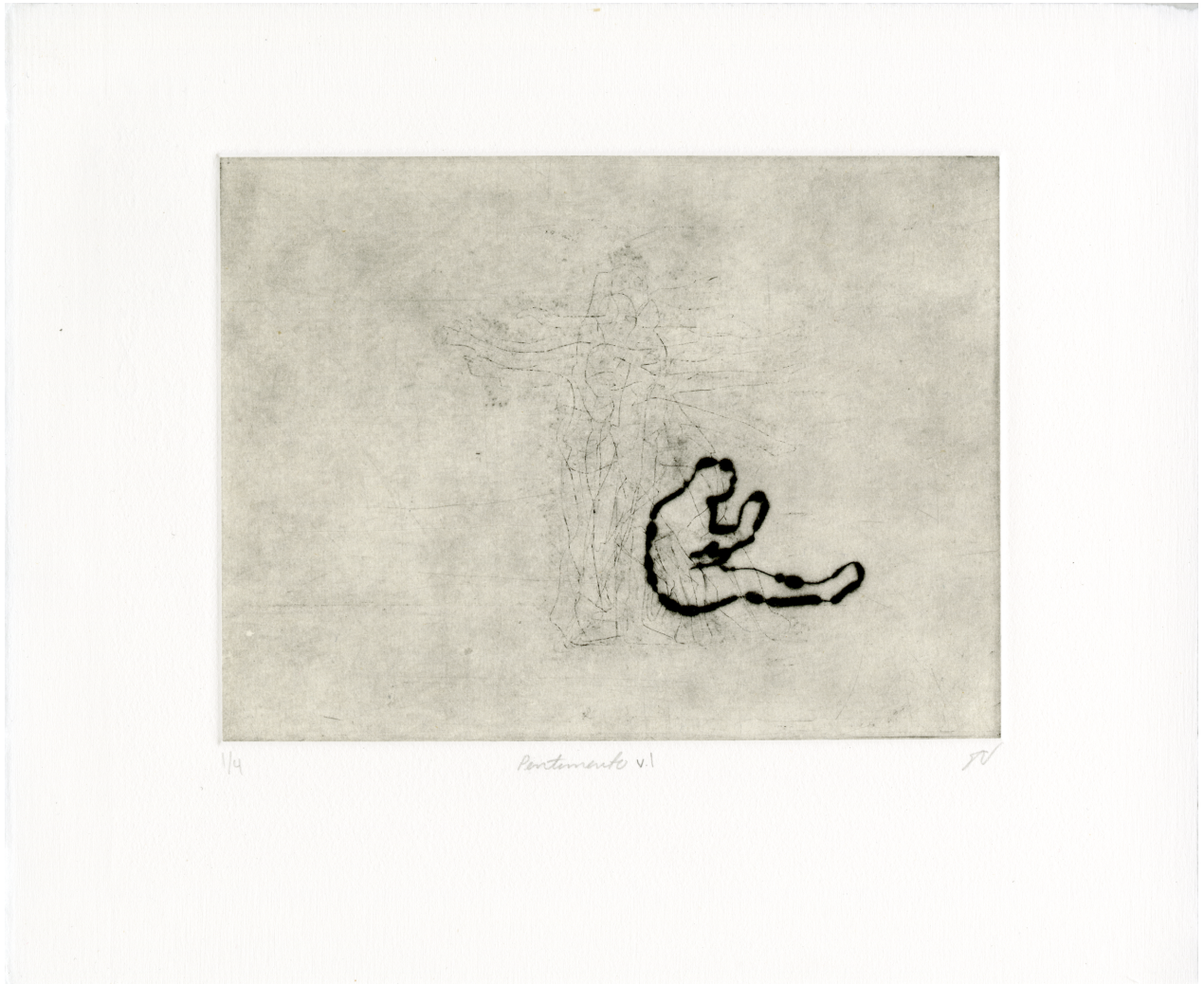


Fig. 4. *Pentimento*, 2022

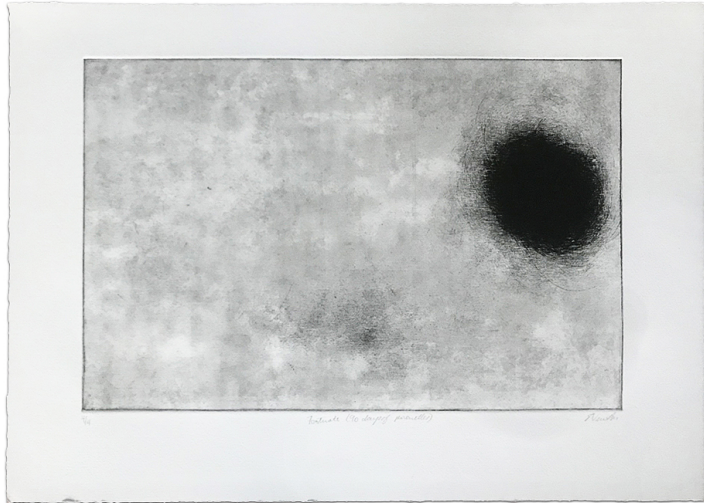


Fig. 5. *Footnote (90 Days of Pirouettes)*, 2022

It dawned on me that truly comprehending a gesture necessitates embodying it, inspiring my *Zoetrope Dress* project (2021). I embarked on a daily pirouette practice for the first time, aiming to animate images screen printed along the hem of a dress while executing a pirouette. Embodying the gesture drew my attention to the interaction between a dancer's feet and the floor – a moment of contact often minimized in classical ballet, where ballerinas exude an ethereal, gravity-defying presence. Thus, for my next project, *Footnote (90 Days of Pirouettes)* (2022), I used a plate covered in soft ground to trace the gestures of my feet doing many pirouettes, layered over each other, before etching the resulting marks into the plate with acid [Fig. 5]. This resulted in a dark, solid circle where my one foot turned against the plate and a soft layering of smaller, almost incidental marks.¹¹ While it was an interesting first attempt at marking the trace of a pirouette, *Footnote* was a directionless trace – there were no real indications of the gesture in this print



Fig. 6. A view of my studio floor, plexiglass plates, sandpaper dance slippers and registration marks

¹¹ **Softground:** In printmaking, a ground is anything that resists acid, but is traditionally composed of different proportions of varnish and wax. Soft Ground uses a more sensitive wax ground, applied to the plate using a hotplate and roller. Gentle pressure is usually used to lift the ground from one surface to another revealing an image on the plate to be etched. In most cases, an artist will use a technique similar to that used by early engravers to trace an image onto a plate. Instead of scratching into the revealed lines when using soft ground, this is when the artist would submerge the plate in an etching bath. See: Brooks, 76-142.

beyond the title. Having worked with drypoint in so many of my other pieces, I wondered if there was a way I could use the linear, scratching marks of drypoint to better trace the gesture of a pirouette, and, after some experimentation, found that I could make a trace using sandpaper shoes to dance on a thicker plexiglass plate [Fig. 6] which has culminated in my current piece, *Daily Practice*. It is on these two most recent projects, *re-formation*, and *Daily Practice*, that I have focused over the course of my graduate studies, both of which are anchored in the drypoint technique and continue to explore the theme of ballet.

re-formation: The Mark of the Body & Its Erasure

I began *re-formation* (2023-24) as an experiment in erasure by removing and redrawing incised drypoint lines from a copper plate. I had applied this technique before in *Pentimento* [Fig. 4], but I wanted to push it further, testing the capacity of the plate to be scratched and healed. *re-formation* is a printmaking/video project, in which my goal is to create an animation, frame-by-frame, by changing and printing a single plate, scratching an image in using drypoint, printing, and burnishing the image “away” and starting on the next frame [Fig. 7 & 8].

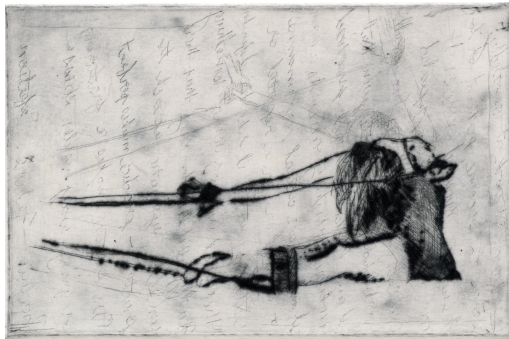


Fig. 7. *re-formation* (Frame 2), 2023

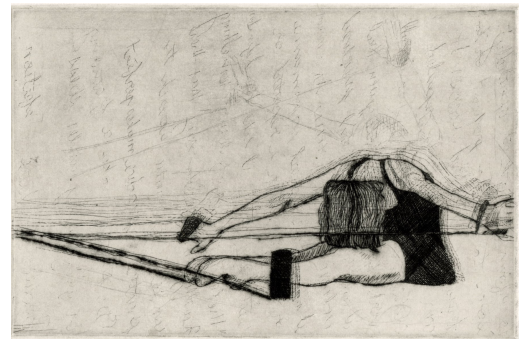


Fig. 8. *re-formation* (Frame 34), 2024

The collection of prints are then strung together at 0.2 seconds per frame into a video format.

With this piece, I hope to draw a connection between the worked plate and a worked body – both undergoing practice/change with the goal of betterment, but are failing (degrading) together. For

my imagery, I adapted a video of a dancer recovering from an injury through repeated mechanically controlled exercises. I like the parallel between the work of healing my plate and a dancer healing her body. The dancer is using a Reformer, a piece of equipment that is often used in Pilates and physical therapy to do recovery work after an injury. A reformer uses a series of pulleys, ropes, and springs to provide tension and resistance. I chose to isolate these visual points of tension from the whole machine and include them in my image. The gestural strangeness that comes to this bodily form affixed to these floating ropes is part of the appeal as I enjoy the play that occurs between the weight of the body and the tension of the ropes. Because I wanted to track the fading of a burnished mark, I chose to begin by filling the fresh copper plate with a piece of writing and then burnishing it away before ever printing the plate. This gives every print a baseline burnished mark that you can track through the animation, while also alluding to some sort of unreadable past as the text prints in reverse and is illegible.

While the subject matter is quite different from my own, I took a great deal of inspiration from the charcoal drawings of William Kentridge, who incorporates trace into all his animated drawings, valuing the act of erasing just as much as the act of drawing. Using charcoal, paper, and a camera, Kentridge creates animations on a single sheet of paper, drawing, erasing, and photographing along the way. You can see in a still pulled from his film, *Other Faces*, in which the path of the figure's head has moved across the same sheet of paper [Fig. 9].¹²

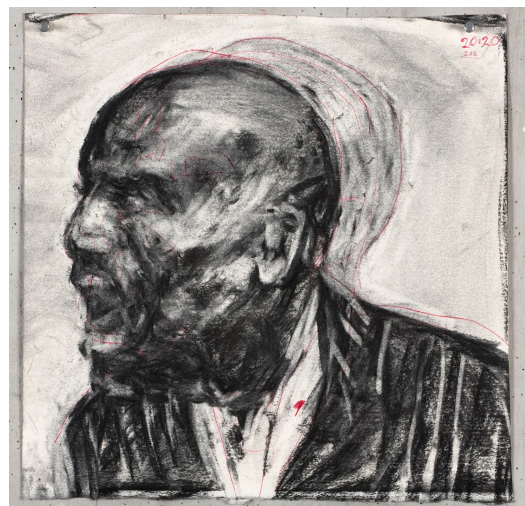


Fig. 9. Still from Kentridge's film *Other Faces*, 2011

¹² "The Animated Films of William Kentridge," Harvard Film Archive, accessed February 13, 2024, <https://harvardfilmarchive.org/programs/the-animated-films-of-william-kentridge>.

Not only does the inclusion of erased marks trace the movement of images and ideas across the page, but it also says something about mistakes, repetition, and pursuing perfection.

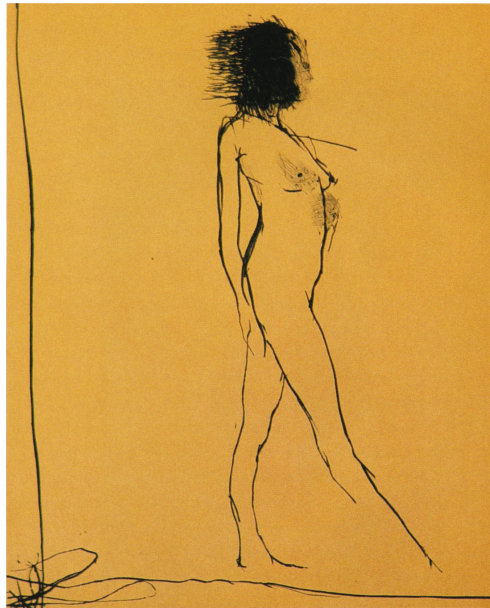


Fig. 10. Nathan Oliveira, *Dancer*, 2004



Fig. 11. Nathan Oliveira, *Baboon*, 1994

Nathan Oliveira is another artist who, like Kentridge, intentionally used erased marks in his prints *Dancer*, and *Baboon (Celadon)* [Fig. 10 & 11].¹³ This inclusion effectively marks the journey of his print “leav[ing] evidence of where he traveled” as he developed an image.¹⁴ Oliveira’s prints are not an endpoint, instead each one is as good as it is possible for it to be. *Baboon*, in particular, has a lot of scraped marks behind the baboon’s snout. If you look closely, you can see two other attempts at the snout – the resulting print is not one baboon with one snout, but the representation of an entire process with three snouts, shifting legs and one human foot tucked into the bottom right-hand corner.¹⁵ You can see the same kind of evolution captured in his other print, *Dancer*, where he has reworked smaller areas of the image. What is particularly interesting about Oliveira’s drypoint images created at the Crown Point Press (like *Baboon* and *Dancer*) was that he had the

¹³ Kathan Brown, *Magical Secrets About Thinking Creatively: The Art of Etching and the Truth of Life*, (San Francisco: Crown Point Press, 2006), 29.

¹⁴ Brooks, 37.

¹⁵ Brooks, 37.

opportunity to work from a live model directly onto a copper plate. I believe this is what gives *Dancer* a particularly lovely sense of time and motion. Images made from live subjects have a different quality about them, perhaps owing to the greater sense of speed that is required than when working from reference images.¹⁶ The images rendered directly in front of the subject carry a greater spontaneity of trace as they are searchingly made in a particular moment. While *re-formation* was made from reference images so that I could slow down the movement enough to draw it frame-by-frame, it does draw inspiration directly from Olivera and his erased marks.

Daily Practice: The Perfection of Cycles-Circles-Spins

Daily Practice (2022-2024) is a collection of 256 intaglio trace prints installed in a grid, inspired by the idea of trying to illustrate daily practice, to fill a room with notations marking down and displaying the magnitude of rigorous, daily practice [Fig. 12]. Each of these prints began as a 6x8" plexiglass sheet that I practiced a pirouette on using a pair of split-sole canvas ballet slippers modified to have sandpaper soles. The resulting images are amorphous clouds of whorls and spirals that vary in size, shape, quantity, and opacity, with the date inscribed in the corner [Fig 13]. Each day is printed in black ink on a cream or white piece of paper.



Fig. 12. Installation view of *Daily Practice*, 2024

¹⁶ Brown, 30.

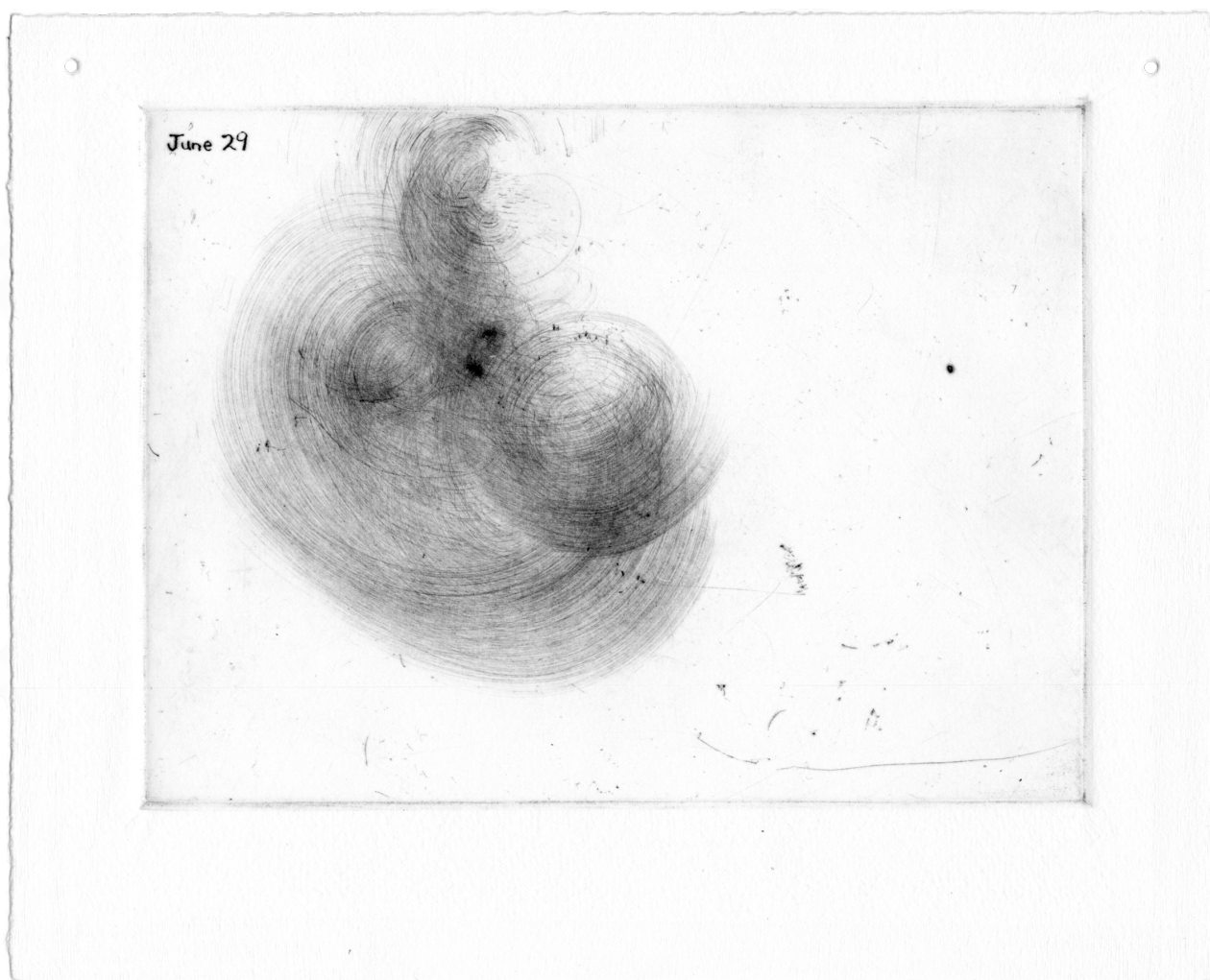


Fig. 13. *Daily Practice (June 29)*, 2023

Initially, I had the intention of strictly following a set of rules to create *Daily Practice*: I would practice a pirouette on each foot every day on a fresh plexiglass surface, working on each side of the plate to try to maximize my materials. Of course, this quickly turned from a “cool experiment” to a daily problem that needed to be solved, an item on my to-do list that needed to be checked off. Thankfully, I came to recognize that I could still have a “daily” practice even if it did not necessarily result in a plate or a print *every* day.

The resulting inconsistency of my practice makes for more interesting images, after stepping away for a weekend or a trip home I find that I have new ideas for how to approach the plate. There is also a warm-up period, where I fall a little more and make more interesting, stretching spirals. I think that this is a better description of what we call daily practice, the “daily” in daily practice is more aspirational than actually performed, it brings in an element of realism that truly contrasts with and highlights the surrealism of the expectations we hold for ourselves. Another reminder of how life and inaction interrupt a conceptual process is On Kawara’s *Today* series; a staggering collection of monochromatic canvases created according to a strict set of rules, each inscribed with the date it was made [Fig. 14]. The paintings began on *Jan. 4, 1966*, and finished on *Jan. 12, 2013*, with each date represented in the language and format that was common to Kawara’s location on the day. Notably, if a painting was not finished before midnight, it was destroyed, which creates a record that ebbs and flows, tangibly



Fig. 14. On Kawara's *Today* series in his studio, 1966

marking what Kawara was able, or not able, to finish within the confines of a day.¹⁷ I think we all hold ourselves to ideals like rigorous daily practice, or perfection, but end up falling short.

As his collection of date paintings grew, Kawara devised a storage system that incorporated another trace of his existence in a day. He would build a cardboard box to house each painting, and line it with newspaper clippings from the daily press [Fig. 15]. This, along with the brushstrokes and craftsmanship of each painting, presents a range of signs that indicate the presence of his body even in its absence – they offer a trace of his movements and gestures.¹⁸ Another artist whose work presents only the trace of past action is Tom Marioni, particularly in *Drumming*, and *Flying with Friends* [Fig 16 & 17]. Both of these works capture the trace of a gesture through the medium of print; *Drumming* is the result of a practiced, two-handed gesture performed by the artist on a plate prepared with soft ground, and *Flying with Friends* involved three plates that were marked



Fig. 15. On Kawara, *18 ENE. 69*, 1969

by his friends.¹⁹ The plates were mounted high on a wall and Marioni's friends were instructed to run and jump, holding a sharp tool to scratch the plate.²⁰ Though both prints capture the trace of a gesture there are several differences, the most important being the difference in printmaking

¹⁷ Lei Yamabe, "On Kawara's Quantum Gravitational Body, or the Confinement of Space-Time and the Liberation of Consciousness," in *On Kawara: Date Painting(s) in New York and 136 Other Cities*, eds. Tommy Simoons and Angela Choon (Antwerp: Ludion, 2012), 141-148.

¹⁸ Yamabe, 141-148.

¹⁹ Brown, 41 & 38.

²⁰ Brown, 38.

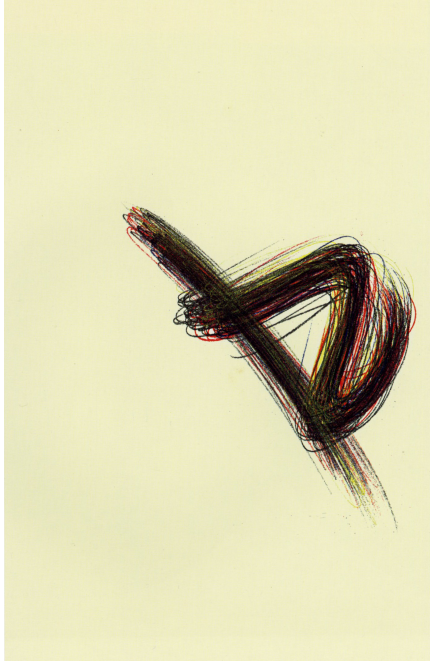


Fig. 16. Tom Marioni, *Drumming*, 2002

techniques used. Both the softground and drypoint techniques reflect the changing pressure applied to a plate's surface in the quality of the resulting lines. In *Drumming*, for example, you can see a thick, heavy, line somewhat isolated in the centre of the entire gesture, indicative of the artist applying more pressure through the paper onto his plate [Fig. 16]. Compare this with the lighter, trailing quality of the lines at the ends of each gesture (that of the right hand and the left). You can see a similar correlation between pressure and line weight in

Flying with Friends, however, where softground lines get wider under pressure, you get a deeper line in drypoint because the tool physically cuts a deeper mark into the plate [Fig. 17]. With any kind of pressure comes an opposing force of resistance, and the resistance of removing a layer of wax is significantly less than the resistance of metal scratching into metal. As a result, you can see a different kind of line in *Flying with Friends*, one that dips and snags, slightly less controlled than the smooth, consistent lines on *Drumming*. In *Daily Practice* I prefer to use drypoint for its deep, resistant marks, which echoes the pursuit of perfection in its active resistance of failure.



Fig. 17. Tom Marioni, *Flying with Friends*, 1999

BALLET & PRINTMAKING: Rigorous Bodily Practices

I find pleasure in working in a physical medium like printmaking, which requires the repetition of physical activity. I enjoy the meditative act of repetition, but at the end of the day, I can tangibly measure my labour by the effect it has on my body. Ballet is notorious for its insistence on a certain kind of body, and the image of a relentlessly practicing dancer is familiar to most people. The printmaking process, too, demands long periods of physically demanding practice. Just as a dancer practices their moves, so do I, and just as a dancer needs to work through blisters, muscle pain, and minor injuries, taping toes and stretching, so do I. Sitting, working the surface of the plate, my fingers start to callous where the tool rests, my hand starts to cramp and eventually, my wrist seizes. At this point I have to take a break and stretch my fingers out, pulling my hand back until there is a pop, then I can continue. The more pressure I apply, the more my elbow starts to ache until it becomes unbearable, and I am forced to straighten my arm for a break. The spot between my shoulders starts to burn, and that means it is time to stand. I tape my fingers and wrap up my wrist, the same way a dancer tapes their toes, wrapping up their feet to prepare them. Both printmaking and ballet have an intense physicality, and repetitive nature. This comparison underscores the shared dedication and physical demands of both printmaking and ballet, drawing parallels between the two practices.

Printmaking

Phil Sanders, in *Prints and their Makers*, outlines a history of printmaking processes and its key artist practitioners. He posits that “the first true intaglio prints were engravings produced in German silver- and goldsmiths’ workshops in the early 1430s.”²¹ Engraving profoundly

²¹ Phil Sanders, *Prints and Their Makers* (Hudson, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2021), 77.

influenced artists' mark-making techniques. In engraved images, every element is rendered through linear forms, precluding the use of shading for creating tonal variation as one might in drawing. Instead, artists relied on cross-hatching, varying line weight, and spacing to achieve tonal depth, a technique masterfully exemplified in the works of Albrecht Durer.²² Drypoint, intriguingly, can be traced back to a preparatory stage of the engraving process. Traditionally, when preparing to transfer an image from paper to plate for engraving, artists would coat the surface of the plate with softened, tinted beeswax. Placing the source image face down on the plate, they would trace the desired lines, causing the wax to adhere to the paper while leaving the plate exposed where pressure was applied. A scribe would then be used to scratch a shallow mark over the exposed lines which acted as a guide for the engraving burin to follow.²³ At some point, a plate was printed in this early stage, before being properly engraved, and this led to the drypoint technique being developed as a printing method separate from engraving.²⁴ This historical context underscores drypoint's origin as an intermediary process—transient and immediate. It occupies a unique space between sketch and finalized print, capturing the imagination of artists and viewers alike with its behind-the-scenes allure and raw immediacy.

While there are pretty clear guidelines when it comes to printing techniques, everyone manages to take their own unique approach to these guidelines. As a result, no two printers seem to pull a print in the exact same way, however, once they have found a technique that works for them a printmaker's next goal is consistency – practicing the exact feel of their technique until

²² Sanders, 77.

²³ **Scribe:** A long, thin tool with a sharp-pointed end used to mark metal. **Burin:** "A tool made of a square or rectangular steel shaft cut off at a 30- to 45-degree angle and stuck into a stubby mushroom-shaped wooden handle."; Brooks, 54.

²⁴ Sanders, 78.

they can successfully repeat the performance of printmaking with similar results. I have outlined my printmaking practice below:

Prepare the plate. *There is a lot of work to do before ever making a mark on the surface of a plate, and the process is a little different for copper and plexiglass. The plexiglass plates that I have been using require slightly less surface preparation as they come with a protective coating that you peel off before starting. Additionally, the deburring tool in step b. does not work well on plexiglass, so I skip steps a. & b. when preparing plexiglass.*

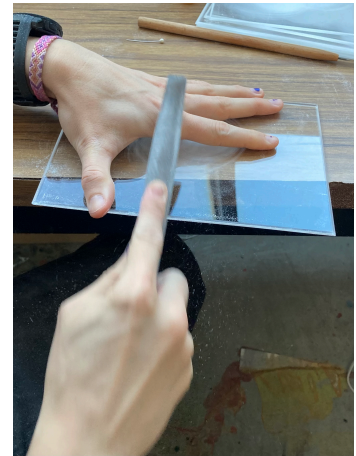


Fig. 18. Filing the edge of a plexiglass plate

1. Any scratches or scuffs that already exist on the surface of the plate need to be scraped and burnished away if they are particularly deep. I typically use a polishing compound as the final step in this process.
2. I begin using a swivel-head deburring tool to smoothly remove the bulk of the material, shaving each of the edges down close to a forty-five-degree angle. This is a slow, fluid gesture on each side or else the cut will be jagged, making a second pass more difficult. Pressure is applied downwards at an angle as I pull the blade towards myself.
3. Next, I apply a coarse file, held carefully at the correct angle to remove another layer of material.
4. To finish the edges, I switch to a very fine, smooth-cut file, evening out any of the tooth marks left by the rougher file. Touch becomes extremely important at this point, as I repeatedly run my fingers over each edge to detect any imperfections my eyes cannot catch.

Marking the plate. *This step of the process can vary widely depending on the image you are trying to make, so I am only including the techniques that I have been using in my recent work, which involves drypoint using a scribe and sandpaper. Regardless of what method you are using, drypoint requires a great deal of pressure.*

1. Copper: I use a scribe when working on copper, so my work is made up of lines -



Fig. 19. Drypoint on copper

shading and texture are achieved with crosshatching. Scratching metal against metal is a

strange feeling and the plate's resistance is immediately apparent. Each piece of copper, though smooth and perfect in appearance, has a unique grain that attempts to dictate my movement across and into its surface. Though right-handed, in drypoint my hands work in unison, pushing and pulling with the scribe in between, dancing the world's slowest, tightest, most tension-laden pas-de-deux [Fig. 19].²⁵

2. Plexiglass: I have been working on plexiglass to capture a lighter mark using sandpaper. The only time I use a scribe on a plexiglass plate is to scratch the date into the corner of my plate. To maintain consistency, I have marked out a rectangle on the floor of my studio where I place my plexiglass plate for every pirouette. The main tool I use to mark a plexiglass plate is a pair of canvas dance slippers with sandpaper sewn onto the toe and the heel. Wearing the shoes, I execute a pirouette over the plexiglass plate [Fig. 20].

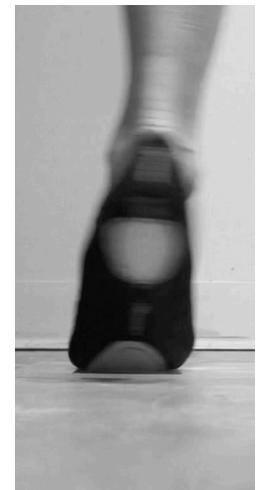


Fig. 20. Pirouette on a plexiglass plate

²⁵ **Pas-de-deux:** Characteristic of classical ballet, a pas-de-deux is a dance duet that usually involves a male and female dancer performing ballet steps together.

Printing. *The plate must be wiped every time a print is pulled, which involves fine-tuning carefully practiced movements to apply different amounts of pressure, putting ink on and wiping it off. This is the movement that needs to be practiced the most. Each time you wipe a plate is like a performance; it is all about remembering the movement to get each plate as close to the same as possible [Fig. 21].*



Fig. 21. Pulling a print

1. I set my limit for the day, ripping a sheet of paper for each print I intend to make, placing them in the sink and leaving them to soak.
2. Using a putty knife, I remove the ink I will be using for the day from my pot and scrape it onto the glass to the right of my plate.
3. I then apply the ink in a thin, relatively even layer to my plate. For this, I use a piece of flexible plastic spreader. I am careful not to press too hard, leaving empty streaks on the plate, but also not to press too lightly applying too much ink only to have to remove it later.
4. When wiping my plate, I begin by using a pad of Tarlatan in small twists, moving right to left, and then left to right. I transfer the extra ink from the Tarlatan to a phonebook page between every few twists. I repeat this treatment of the entire plate three more times, starting with a dirtier section of Tarlatan and switching to a cleaner piece for the last two passes.
5. Next, I use squares of white tissue paper. I lightly draw small counter-clockwise circles using the pads of my index, middle and fourth fingers, down to the second knuckle on my right hand. Once a fresh square of tissue comes away with minimal ink, I clean the

beveled edges of the plate. I use a scrap of felt and my index finger to swipe each side three times [Fig. 22].

6. I carefully lay the plate on the press bed within my plate registration marks. Removing my gloves, I scrub any remaining ink from my hands before pulling a piece of rag paper from its bath. I blot excess water from the surface using sheets of newsprint before rolling it gently across the plate, lining it up with the paper registration marks. Covering the soon-to-be print with a sheet of newsprint and the press blankets, it is time to print.
7. Turning the handle of the press, the paper is pressed into every line of the plate and the ink transfers from plate to paper.
8. Once I peel back the layers of blanket and newsprint to reveal my print, I set it aside to dry.
9. Repeat steps c through h once.



Fig. 22. Wiping a plate with tissue paper

10. Now that it has dried slightly, I tape that previous print along all four sides, face-down on a drying board with strips of filament tape. To make a *flat* print the tape needs to be burnished to the paper and the drying board [Fig. 23].
11. Continue to repeat steps i and j until there is no paper left in the sink.

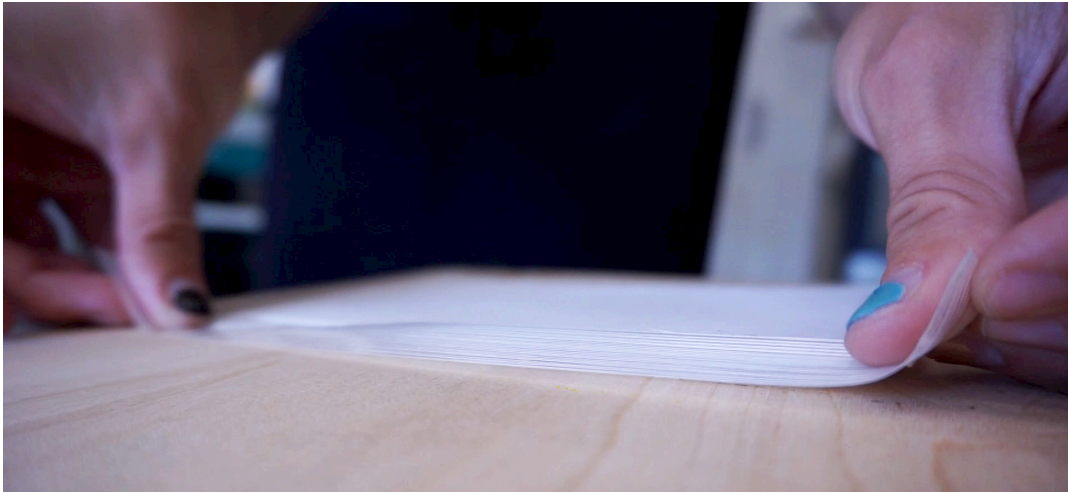


Fig. 23. Taping a print to the drying board

Ballet

I am inspired by the practice of classical ballet, and its endeavour for wholeness, perfection, and mastery through the repetition of gesture.²⁶ Additionally, ballet proves to be an effective way to examine movements built on a foundation of individual building-block gestures.²⁷ By this, I mean to say that ballet is a strictly regimented kind of movement. Each dance is put together using a set of individually defined gestures, arranged in different patterns.

²⁶ Flusser, 1-9.

²⁷ Stephanie Weissberg, "Between Drawing and Dance: Works on Paper by Simone Forti," *Master Drawings* 54, no. 2 (2016): 247-258.

Beyond that, I believe employing ballet movements offers the potential to draw attention to hidden and underappreciated labours of practice. Deirdre Kelly, in her book *Ballerina: Sex, Scandal, and Suffering Behind the Symbol of Perfection*, provides valuable insight into the lives and histories of ballerinas off-stage and is a source I continue to return to in my examination of ballet.²⁸

Ballet has a long, and fascinating history, which is not without its share of darkness. While there have been recent strides to make it more accessible, ballet is “an art form with a history of female oppression committed in the name of art.”²⁹ While its origins can be traced back to the Italian renaissance, ballet truly began to take shape in the French court of King Louis XIV.³⁰ It was largely linked to etiquette and posture, and every dance was choreographed in relation to the King, usually carried out by nobles of the court. At this time “dances of the serious, noble style,” were performed by men, with the role of “star dancer” usually occupied by kings themselves.³¹ Women were amateurs in this iteration of ballet and were expected to be modest even in their dancing, their feet barely left the ground – a stark contrast to the ballerina we know today.³² Only in the early eighteenth century do we see “the rise of professional ballerinas,” well after the dance had migrated from the court of kings to be practiced by trained dancers instead of nobles.³³

²⁸ Deirdre Kelly, *Ballerina: Sex, Scandal, and Suffering Behind the Symbol of Perfection* (Vancouver: D&M Publishers Inc., 2012).

²⁹ Kelly, 165.

³⁰ Jennifer Homans, *Apollo's Angels: A History of Ballet* (New York: Random House, 2010), 4-48.

³¹ Homans, 26.; Kelly, 5.

³² Kelly, 7.

³³ Kelly, 10.

It was at this point that we start to see a rise in the athleticism of ballet and in ballerinas, incorporating more leaps and pushing the body further in its abilities. However, the image of a ballerina is not one of pain and suffering, but one of gentle grace, which leads me to the heart of my interest in ballet: hidden labours. In her book *Ballerina*, Deirdre Kelly said it best:

“Pain in ballet is often denied, hidden behind a façade of skillful composure. This stifling of discomfort has produced a culture where deprivation and degradation co-exist alongside the pursuit of an ideal, often rendering the ballerina a victim of her own beauty and artistry.”³⁴

This is a problem that only seems to have worsened with time as ballet has continued to push for stunning physical feats of grace and power, while apparently resisting updated equipment and only recently investing in injury prevention.³⁵ One of the big problems for a ballerina’s body is the point shoe. Jefferey Russell, an assistant professor of dance medicine at the University of California, “developed an MRI method for evaluating the ankles of female ballet dancers standing on their toes.”³⁶ Dancing en pointe is not good for the ankle, and leads to lots of tendon damage and sprains, but it has become too essential to the image of ballet to be easily dismissed. With people like Russell studying ballet injuries and working on preventative methods, ballerinas are much healthier than before. There is, however, a limit on how much can change when facing the resistance of an institution set in their ways. Many dancers, throughout the history of ballet, have had to end their career because of injuries sustained through the practice of ballet. Some have been in terrible accidents, like Emma Livry, who came too close to an open flame backstage in 1862 and caught fire.³⁷ Others, like Bridgett Zehr, a dancer who “is prone to

³⁴ Kelly, 4.

³⁵ Kelly, 181.

³⁶ Kelly, 180.

³⁷ Kelly, 80.

injuries, having several times broken bones in her ankles and her metatarsals” know the fragility of a ballet career owing simply to the repetitive strain of ballet on the body.³⁸

There is also a long, shared history between dance and visual arts. The stage has even been compared to a kind of moving painting with the set design and dancers framed by the proscenium.³⁹ Additionally, ballet’s popularity in the mid-nineteenth century made it a common subject for prints and caricatures like this print of Marie Taglioni in the titular role of *La Sylphide* (1836) [Fig. 24].⁴⁰ Images like this were designed to sell the stage-presence of the dance, presenting Taglioni as The Sylph, in her costume with no reference to the floor of a stage, or a practicing studio. Instead, she is portrayed as an ethereal figure dancing in a mist glade. This stands in stark contrast to the work of Edgar Degas, who was working only a few decades after the print of Taglioni was produced, but painted ballerinas in a different light.

Degas was primarily known as the “painter of dancers,” he attended many performances at the Paris Opera and had the privilege of observing classes and



Fig. 24. Alfred Edward Chalon, *Marie Taglioni (fac. sig.) La sylphide*, 1836

³⁸ Kelly, 154.

³⁹ Jean Sorabella, “The Ballet,” In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art), 2000, http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/balt/hd_balt.htm.; **Proscenium:** The archway or opening that sits in front of the curtains, separating the stage from the rest of an auditorium.

⁴⁰ Sorabella.; **La Sylphide:** A romantic-era ballet developed for Marie Taglioni by her father.



Fig. 25. Edgar Degas, *The Dance Lesson*, 1879

attending rehearsals [Fig. 25].⁴¹ All this is to say that he studied his chosen subject deeply, and his representations of dancers reflect that. They go beyond the standard representations that were being done at the time, prints of dancers were very popular in the nineteenth century but they were usually done like this: of the dancer in costume and in character, portrayed with a little of the set and the illusion of the stage.

Degas shows the behind-the-scenes that he was privy to, he paints practicing, stretching, tired, earthly ballerinas [Fig. 26]. He did not show the ethereal creatures that were “Apollo’s Angels,” instead working to de-romanticize the ballet. His choice of subjects within the



Fig. 26. Edgar Degas, *A Coryphée Resting*, 1880-82

⁴¹ Jill DeVonyar and Richard Kendall, *Degas and the Dance* (New York: Harry N. Abrams in association with the American Federation of Arts, 2002), 9.; Jill DeVonyar, “Degas, Classicism, Dance,” in *Degas: A Passion for Perfection*, ed. Jane Munro (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 160.

ballet is particularly interesting – most of Degas’ work was focused on the Corps de

Ballet as opposed to the primary dancers and soloists. One of his most well-

known works, *Little Dancer Aged Fourteen* (1879-81), was modelled after

Marie van Goethem who, at the time the statue was made, had been a member of the

dance conservatory. She was a student, not yet a “proper” ballerina [Fig. 27].⁴²

Norman McLaren is another artist who took a unique approach in

portraying ballet through his art practice. Seminal to the history and

development of animation, McLaren made most of his work by painting

directly onto film, drawing one frame at a time.⁴³ Instead of showing

ballet behind-the-scenes, McLaren’s 1968 film, *Pas de Deux*,

emphasizes ballet’s abstract gestures [Fig 28]. The video features a pair

of dancers in white, set against a solid black background. As they move

through their choreography, the dancers appear to have many limbs that are

left behind, tracking every gesture of their dance across the screen. This was

achieved “by making

multiple exposures of

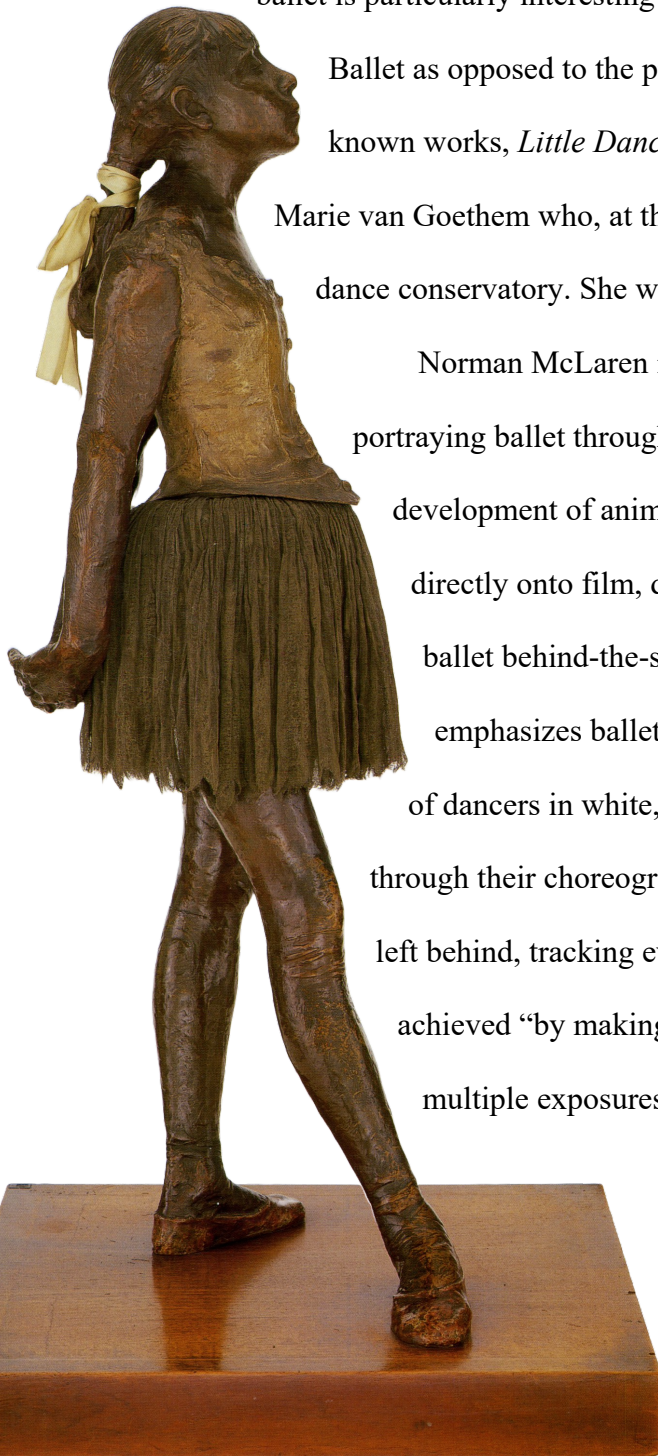


Fig. 28. Edgar Degas, *Little Dancer, Aged Fourteen*, 1878-81

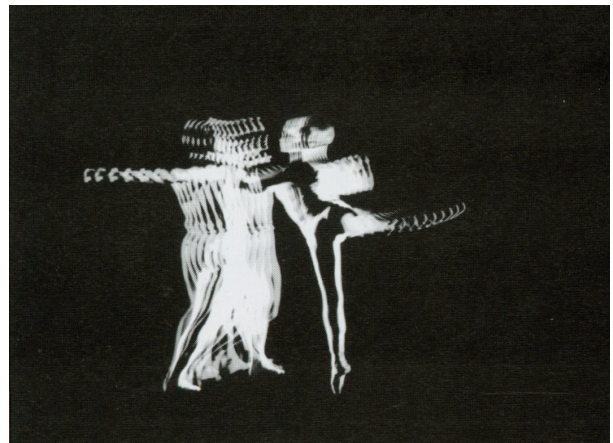


Fig. 27. Norman McLaren, *Pas de deux*, 1968

⁴² Kelly, 61.

⁴³ Giannalberto Bendazzi, *Cartoons: One Hundred Years of Cinema Animation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 114-120.

freeze frame scenes, [which] were later combined to make the effect of the multiplication of movement.”⁴⁴ The staggered arms and legs abstract the gestures of dance, slowing them down and drawing the viewer’s attention to small details of movement that are not usually the focus of a classical ballet piece. While this style of animation deviates in technique from the rest of his films, it is still in line with McLaren’s sustained interest in movement. “Each film for me is a kind of dance, because the most important thing in film is motion, movement. No matter what it is you’re moving, whether it’s people or objects or drawings; and in what way it’s done, it’s a form of dance.”⁴⁵ Movement was not only the essential connecting thread between McLaren’s many films, but it was also the essence of his medium.

Another, more contemporary artist who looks at de-romanticizing ballet and exposing its hidden labours is Brendan Fernandes. He is looking critically at the labour that goes into the practice of ballet, beyond what is seen on stage. Fernandes, however, is more interested in movement than in painting still images, like McLaren. Primarily a performance artist, he abstracts movements of ballet and pushes boundaries of what is considered dance. *The Working Move* was both a live performance and a photographic installation which “considers the



Fig. 29. Brendan Fernandes, *The Working Move*, 2012, Live performance

⁴⁴ Nichola Dobson, *Norman McLaren: Between the Frames* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 128.

⁴⁵ Bendazzi, 117.

intersection of dance and the visual arts,” as well as highlighting the degree of labour required of the dancers [Fig. 29 & 30].⁴⁶ In both the photographs and the live performance, dancers interact with a series of white, rectangular plinths. The performance is set within the context of a rehearsal where performers are taking instruction from a dance master. It starts and stops at their command and consists of movement vocabularies that reference labour and endurance.⁴⁷ Use of plinths draws a direct connection to the world of visual arts, and, in the photographs, positions the dancer’s bodies as artifacts, objects on display, but they are also a burden that has to be carried, moved and held by the dancers during the performance. *The Working Move* highlights the dual nature of a ballet dancer as both an athlete that faces physical exhaustion, and as a kind of art object that appears on stage to perform effortlessly.



Fig. 30. Brendan Fernandes, *The Working Move*, 2012, Photograph

⁴⁶ Brendan Fernandes, *Still Move* (London: Black Dog Publishing Ltd., 2016), 30.

⁴⁷ Brendan Fernandes, “The Working Move,” *Brendan Fernandes*, accessed May 28, 2023, <https://www.brendanfernandes.ca/the-working-move>.

Fernandes also approaches his artistic examination of ballet as a former dancer whose career ended because of injury.⁴⁸ His piece, *Standing Leg*, is a performance that relates directly to his own experience, trying to fit his body to the ideals and physical demands of ballet [Fig. 31]. The performance consists of Fernandes attempting to stand while wearing a ballet foot stretcher, a device designed to force a dancer's feet into the "ideal" shape. *Standing Leg* directly challenges ballet's proffered "fantasy that through consistent and repetitive training, conditioning, mental and physical pain one can attain the heights of bodily perfection."⁴⁹ It presents the very real struggle of pushing up against bodily resistance as Fernandes lies on the ground, repeatedly failing to stand.

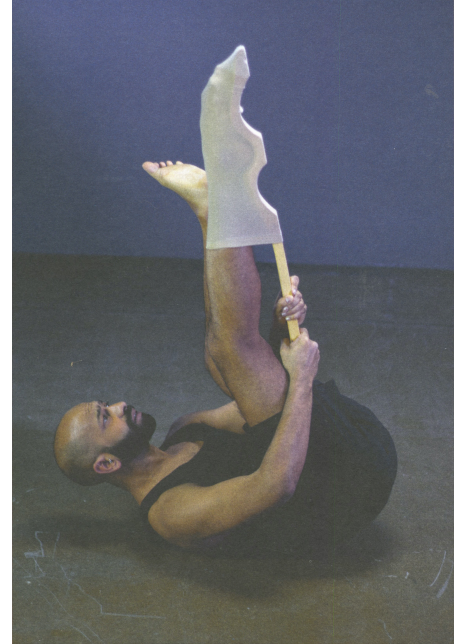


Fig. 31. Brendan Fernandes, *Standing Leg*, 2014, Endurance solo performance

In my own work, I hope to parallel the hidden labours of ballet with those of intaglio printmaking, bringing attention to technique and process in art. While there have been advancements made in printing technology, on the surface choosing to work with intaglio as an artistic medium feels like a kind of senseless resistance, like that of ballet. It is like acknowledging that there are better, more efficient options out there to produce an image, but choosing to do it the hard way because it is about the process rather than the results. The process has meaning as well. Maybe the process that wears you down and wrecks you is fine because it is meaningful, but it is our current production expectations where the problem lies.

⁴⁸ Brendan Fernandes, "Standing Leg," *Brendan Fernandes*, accessed May 28, 2023, <http://www.brendanfernandes.ca/standing-leg>.

⁴⁹ Fernandes, *Still Move*, 106.

PRESSURE & RESISTANCE

To understand something one may first look, but our understanding is always deepened by touch. Touch is also how we exert physical pressure, which is not only important to the gesture of making but is essential to the gesture of making prints. Printmaking is all about touch, contact and release, about *pressure*. Hands press tools and ink to plate, and the pressure of the printing press transfers ink to paper. The printing press takes the importance of touch and pressure a step further – the moment of making, when the image is transferred from plate to paper in the press, is entirely sensual. No part of that making is visual, the image is created entirely out of sight, by touch and pressure alone.⁵⁰

In this context, intaglio printmaking, particularly drypoint, stands out as the perfect medium to reflect this profound transformation. Kathan Brown describes how the character of a drypoint line is linked to the changing pressure of an artist's hand: "Instead of etching [a] line with acid, the artist scratches it directly into the plate, plowing up a burr made of displaced metal that sticks at the sides of the mark."⁵¹ Pressure determines the quality of a drypoint line, and the pressure applied is a mutable, human kind of pressure - not the even, mechanical pressure of a press. Drypoint marks possess a velvety quality, evoking a sense that they were drawn against the metal's resistance, a dance between the printer's hand and the copper plate—an intricate interplay of pressure and resistance. Richard Diebenkorn said it best when describing how he

⁵⁰ Jennifer L. Roberts, "Contact: Art and the Pull of Print: 1: Pressure," video lecture presented as the 70th A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, <https://www.nga.gov/research/casva/meetings/mellon-lectures-in-the-fine-arts/roberts-2021.html>, 2021.

⁵¹ Brown, 29.

found himself drawing in spite of the metal. “I think I’m going to make a straight line, and the metal says, ‘Oh no you don’t!’”⁵²

Pressure is also a key part of ballet; a lot of injury comes from pressure exerted on joints when they are pushed too far. It is also about touching the ground as little as possible, going as far as to have women dancing en pointe (all their body weight on two, sometimes just one small point of contact with the ground), meaning that the pressure of their entire body comes down just over the point of their toes. This is why the floor is so important to consider when dancing, you have to think about the pressure coming up to meet you. For something so focused on creating ethereal women without weight, dance has so much to do with the pressure of gravity. This is a big difference that I notice between classical ballet and more contemporary choreography, one that I have never seen so starkly as I did in the piece *Passion*, by James Kudelka, performed by the National Ballet of Canada.

Passion is a love story that features the Corp de Ballet and two couples – one classically represented and the other more contemporary. I was struck by the contrast in gravity and humanness between the two styles of dance. The classical couple presented nothing short of what I have come to expect from a classical ballet: bodies that effortlessly leap across a stage, barely touching the ground and seemingly unaffected by their physical efforts. The contemporary couple, on the other hand, seemed constantly to be affected by the pull of gravity and by the pull of each other. They dragged instead of floated and somehow made their breathing more visible. The contemporary couple was also costumed differently, in regular clothing that betrayed the

⁵² Brooks, 13.

physical effort of the dance, darkening with sweat as the show progressed.⁵³ Such a striking visual contrast revealed the resistance that classical ballet typically works to disguise. It reminded me of what it feels like to create a print, versus what the final image looks like. Printing is something that you feel throughout the body, not just your hands.

EMBODIED GESTURES/EMBODIED KNOWLEDGE

When learning to print you have to practice the movements until you can remember how the gesture of printing feels throughout your body - it requires you to achieve a kind of kinesthetic understanding, like dancing.⁵⁴ There is particular attention paid to posture in engraving (the technique that drypoint was born of) because the pressure and resistance between your body and the plate is greatly increased compared to etching techniques. In her book, *Magical Secrets About Line Etching & Engraving: The Step-by-Step Art of Incised Lines*, Catherine Brooks included a step-by-step instructional guide at the end of each technical section, and I was struck by the sheer detail that went into describing how one should *sit* to engrave:

“The foundation of making a beautiful engraved mark is in your posture. you will be pushing the tool through the metal, and the thrust should come from the body. Amy Worthen sits sideways to the table, her legs parallel to its edge rather than under it. To use her approach, line up your torso against the edge of the table without leaning or shifting your weight to the side. Plant your feet firmly under your knees. Sit erect on a chair that is firm, or on a wooden stool; don’t lean back. make sure that the chair elevates you to a height that will allow your forearm to rest flat on the table without collapsing your shoulder.”⁵⁵

⁵³ *Passion*, choreographed by James Kudelka, Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts, Toronto, November 15, 2023.; “Emma Bovary | Passion,” The National Ballet of Canada, accessed February 17, 2024, <https://national.ballet.ca/Productions/Emma-Bovary-Passion>.

⁵⁴ Noël Carroll and William P. Seely, “Kinesthetic Understanding and Appreciation in Dance,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 71, no. 2 (2013): 177-186.

⁵⁵ Brooks, 58.

Much like the classical ballet definition of a pirouette I previously outlined, Brooks is sure to describe what each part of the body should be doing in a single moment, to execute a single gesture of print. The idea of posturing yourself correctly is particularly important when there are specific points of intense pressure that are at a higher risk of injury, especially when working repetitively.

As mentioned above, a ballerina's feet and ankles are one of those pressure points that seem to attract injury, particularly when working in pointe shoes. As for the world of printmaking, I find my hands and wrists to be my greatest concern. Not only do they hold a lot of the pressure printing - gripping tiny tools and working against the resistance of metal - they are also an essential part of my practice, carrying the physical memory of every print I have ever pulled. Vilém Flusser, in his book *Gestures*, focuses heavily on the hands as the two opposing forces that dictate how we comprehend everything, and suggests that our hands, and consequently our own understanding, can only come together, fully and completely, through the gesture of making.⁵⁶ However, I think that this is only half the truth; it is as if Flusser is only considering pressure and not its counterpart, resistance. Without hands, and with our bodies, we can exert that pressure, pursuing perfection and understanding, but we cannot disregard resistance and failure. It is through pressure that we leave our mark, our trace, on the world, but the world resists and this is how we are marked ourselves.

In her book, *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry suggests that "as the body breaks down, it becomes increasingly the object of attention."⁵⁷ Scarry has written this within the context of pain,

⁵⁶ "This gesture [of making] presses from two sides on an object so that the two hands can meet. Under this pressure, the object changes form, and the new form, this 'information' impressed on the objective world, is one of the ways of getting beyond our basic human constitution. For it is a method of bringing the two hands together in an object." Flusser, 32.

⁵⁷ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, (Oxford:

suggesting that your body in pain is increasingly the object of your own attention, shrinking your world as your awareness focusses keenly on the pain in your body. However, I read this quote as meaning that your body increases in attention and value as it breaks down. As we inscribe ourselves with more embodied knowledge and kinesthetic understanding, scarring, and injuring ourselves along the way, we learn to pay greater attention to our bodies, learning from them our experience. When a body, tool or machine loses its instrumental use value they shift our sense of meaningfulness away from mere functionality. If one looks close enough, there are stories inscribed in the places a tool has worn thin and snapped, where scars mark the surface and, in the places where our joints swell and protest.

Materials are vulnerable and malleable – this is true of both the surface of an intaglio printmaking plate as well as our bodies. Initially, I found myself drawn to how material bodies are slowly worn away and sacrificed in an iterative attempt to become better. Instead, I have come to realize that our pursuit of perfection does not “wear us away,” it shapes us. It inscribes a kind of notation into the body, adding history and knowledge instead of sacrificing and corroding. In drypoint the displaced material from a scratch sits on the surface of the plate and remains a part of the print. This also allows for a greater degree of changeability, the “displaced” burrs can be “replaced” by burnishing, pressing them back into the groove of the line. The mark is not fully erased, it may fade but it will always remain, having forever altered the grain of the plate.



Fig. 32. Studio organizational system for Daily Practice plates. From left to right: "To be Sanded," "To be Filed," "To be Printed," "Printed," "Blank" & "In-progress."

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APPENDIX A: Exhibition Documentation Images

The Practice of Perfection: Dance Gestures and Printed Traces

Special Projects Gallery, Joan & Martin Goldfarb Centre for Fine Arts
86 Fine Arts Rd, Toronto, Ontario

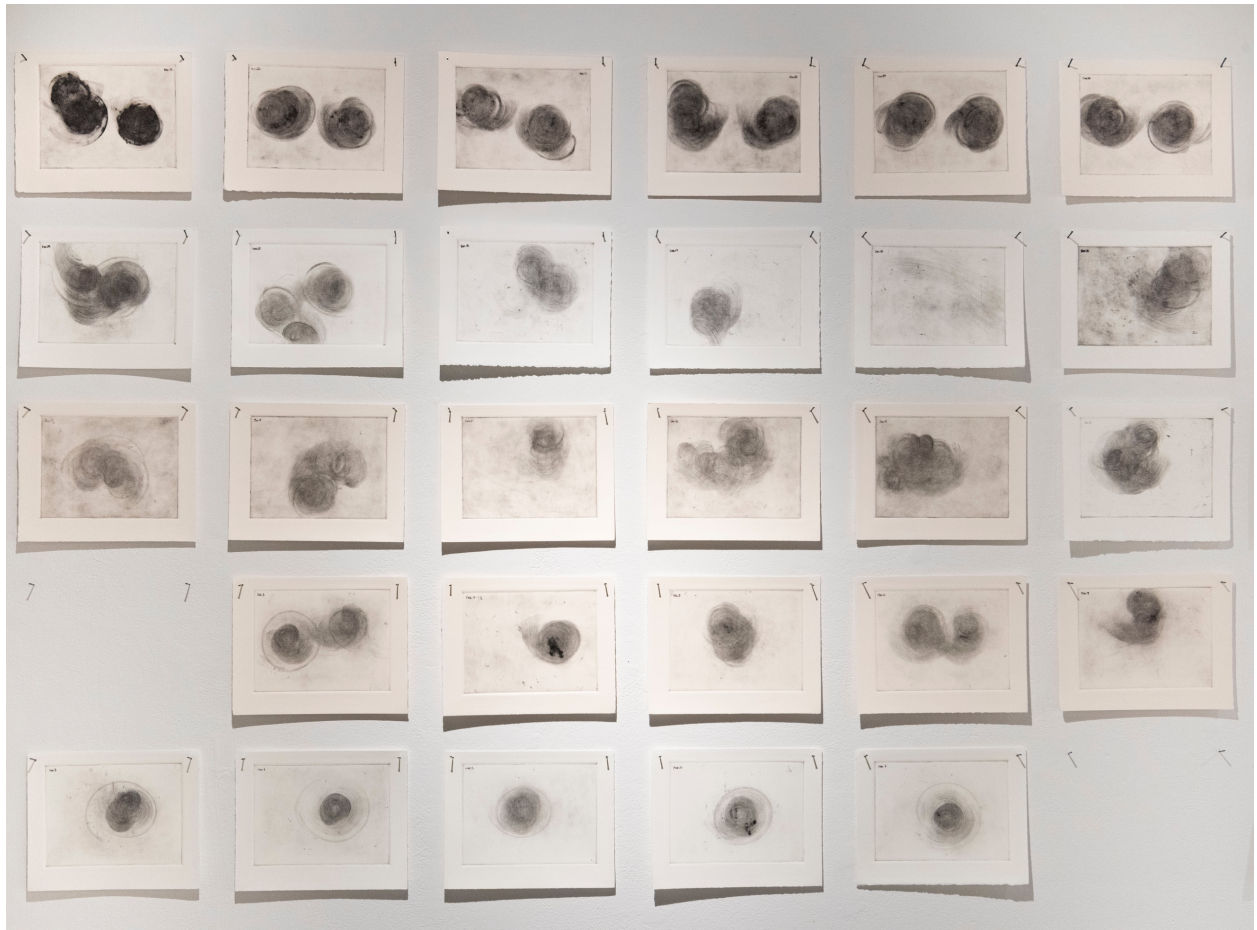
Photos by Heather Rattray, 2024

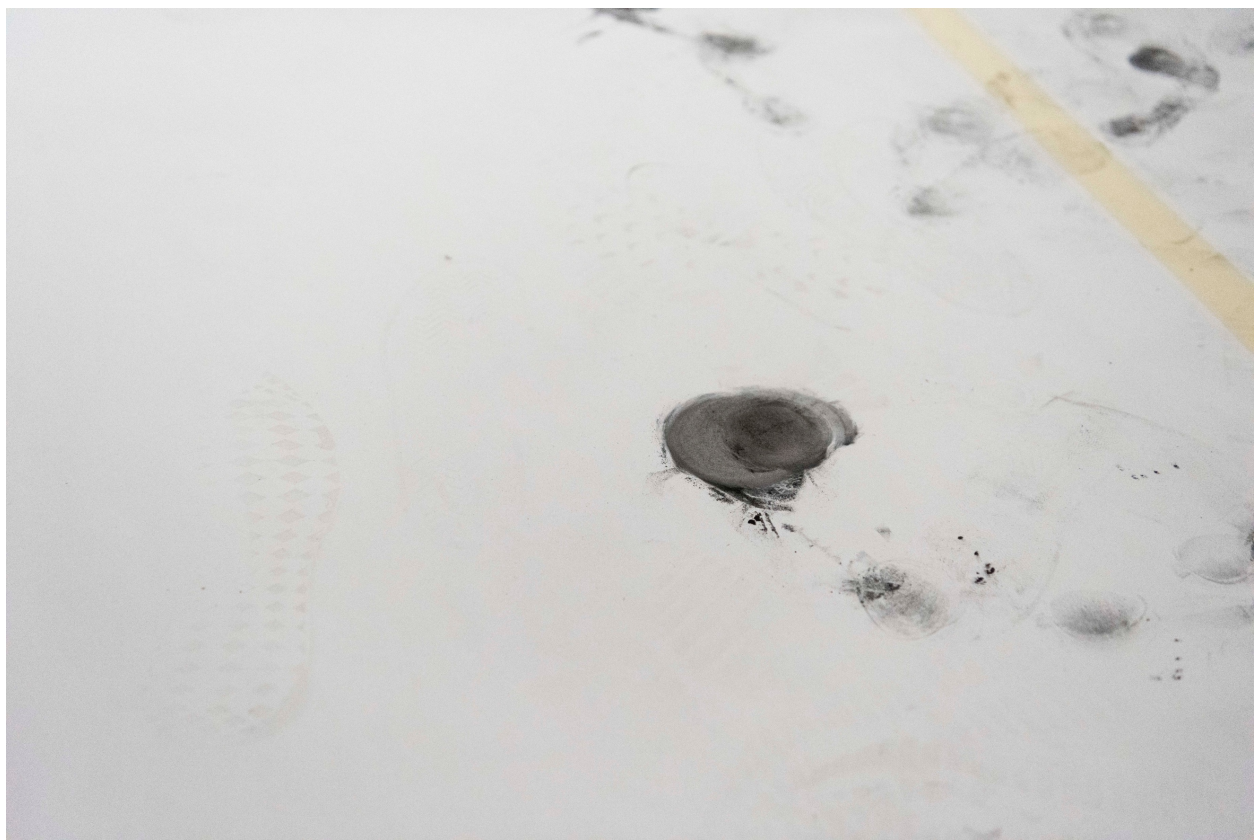




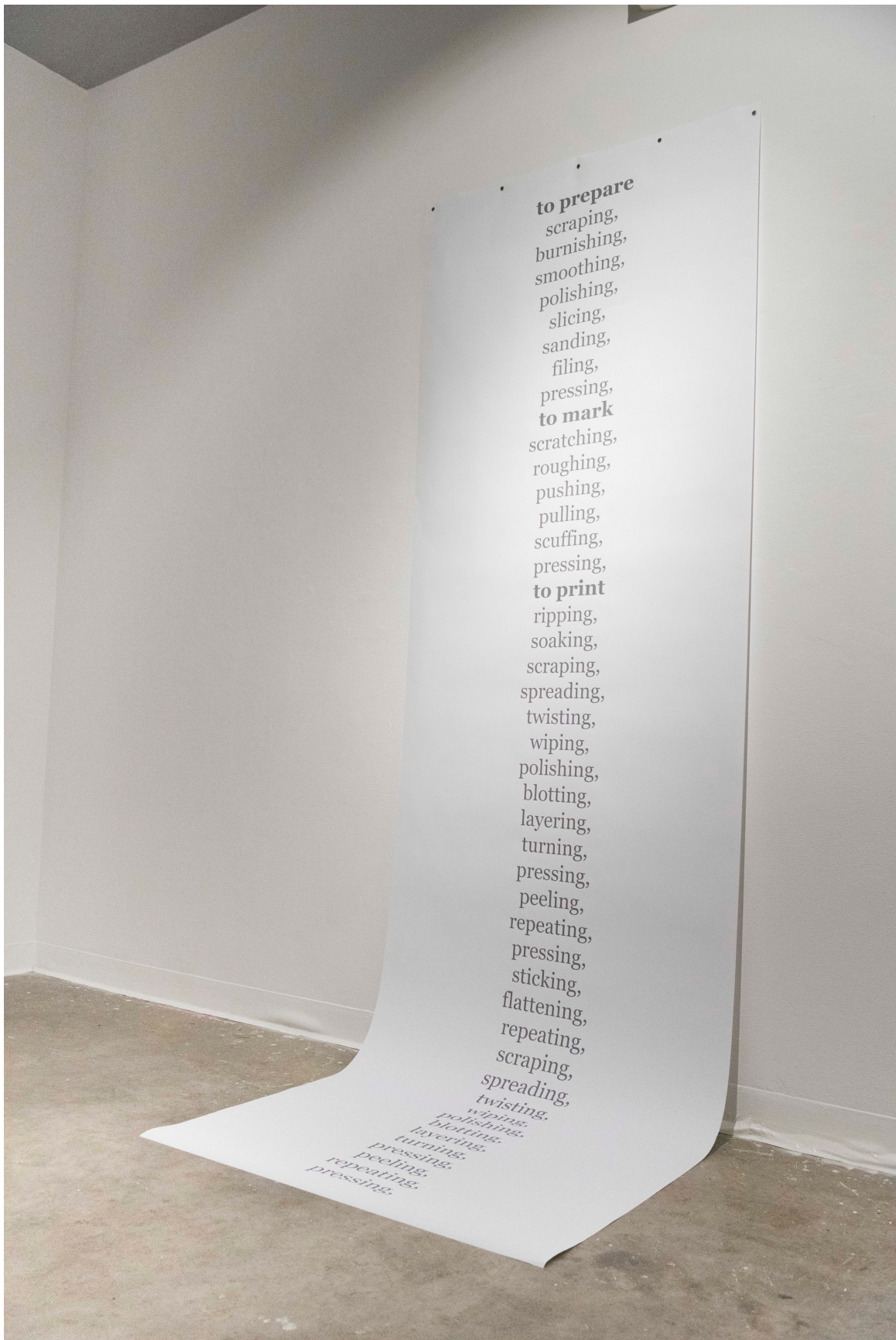












to prepare

scraping,
burnishing,
smoothing,
polishing,
slicing,
sanding,
filing,
pressing,

to mark

scratching,
roughing,
pushing,
pulling,
scuffing,
pressing,

to print

ripping,
soaking,
scraping,
spreading,
twisting,
wiping,
polishing,
blotting,
layering,
turning,
pressing,
peeling,
repeating,
pressing,
sticking,
flattening,
repeating,
scraping,
spreading,
twisting,
wiping,
polishing,
blotting,
layering,
turning,
pressing,
peeling,
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