

The Wayfaring Line
Lines of Thought, Gesture and Time

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Abstract

This thesis support paper explores the role of the line in my artistic practice, and its nature and meaning within the context of my graduate work. The line is the material, pictorial and theoretical foundation for my thesis exhibition, *Chain of Days*. This paper examines the line as a metaphor for my working process, the trace of the line as a material index which points to an action, and explores the links between my practice of drawing lines and the historical traditions of embroidery and lace-making.

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The Wayfaring Line

Lines of Thought, Gesture and History

“For people inhabit a world that consists, in the first place, not of things but of lines. After all, what is a thing, or indeed a person, if not a tying together of the lines – paths of growth and movement – of all the many constituents gathered there?”

-Tim Ingold, from Lines: A Brief History

In contemplating the path that my work has taken throughout the development of my artistic practice, I chart a meandering line, a sinuous trail that my work has worn through ideas, imagery, and materials in pursuit of my curiosity. In a world that “consists not of things, but of lines,” my graduate work has manifested itself as a sort of cartography of these lines, and I have spent the last two years mapping and analyzing the terrain of my life and work, and the connective territories within them. The path my work has taken has led me from a very early and purely visual interest in my mother’s anatomy textbooks and diagrams → to the body → to the biology of dreaming and dream imagery → to hair → to tensile threads → to knots → to braids → to woven textiles → to lace and lace-making → to veils → to shrouds → to netting → and recently, to lines themselves, which have been the material, pictorial and theoretical foundation for my thesis work. Here I have mapped a simple diagram or indexical chain of the visual and conceptual interests that my curiosity has threaded throughout the development of my practice. In reality, my line of thought is not so direct or consecutive: it forks and branches in its pursuits, existing in my cartographer’s eye more like a winding river, a woven tapestry, or branching veins.

The title of my thesis exhibition, *Chain of Days*, refers to my interest in this line in ways that are manifold – in the links between lines of thought and physical experience, in the linear nature of time as it unfolds, in the chain of events that leads to and influences each moment – but there are three distinct contemplations of the line that have been the central preoccupations of the drawings and prints that comprise my thesis work. First, there is this meandering line of my curiosity, which I have mapped through reflecting upon the nature of my creative process. This line is woven through the links between my intuition, my creative curiosity, and the artists whose work inspires and contextualizes my own interests and methods of making. Second, there is the line as a gesture. Here, the line exists as an indexical trace of a physical choice or action, as a moment or series of moments in time, and as a visual representation of a specific artistic process, as well as the state of mind that is conjured through the artistic gesture. And last, my work is concerned with patterned line as a visual element that references personally symbolic and socially charged textiles such as lace veils, mourning shrouds, and netting. This imagery and my methodical process of rendering it is closely related to the social history and implications of needlework that is traditionally done by women, such as weaving, lace-making and embroidery. In the threads of the patterned lines of my drawings, I am joined to a visual and social history of creative work done by previous generations of women like myself.

I. Lines of Inquiry

Curious Wayfaring

"It's a mystery, but if there is magic in the making, there is magic in the viewing."

-Louise Bourgeois, 2005

In developing and executing my thesis work, I have been thinking a lot about the idea of artistic research, or creative research. What exactly does *research* mean? What does it look like? How does it work in the context of an artistic or creative process? The dictionary definition of *research* is summarized as *the systematic investigation into and study of materials and sources in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions*. Following this definition, *research* is perhaps not the right word to use to describe the approach that many artists, including myself, take in the making of their work. I don't attempt to establish facts or reach definitive conclusions through the making of my work, and in fact my experience has been that the artistic process actually does the opposite in many ways, in that it frequently results in producing more questions, uncertainty, and open-ended explorations than it does answers or facts or conclusions. Beyond the context of academia, I seldom refer to my studio process as creative or artistic research. But in this context, I am compelled to analyze the specific individual approach that I take in developing my ideas and creating my work, and the fact that my methodology of making is certainly systematic, though in a less result-driven or rigidly organized way than most scientific or academic practices. But if it's not *research*, and the purpose of my artistic process is not to answer questions, but to pose new ones, then what characterizes my creative approach? How do I gather and compose the matrix of

imagery, associations, and ideas that are fused and shaped together in the course of my studio work to produce art images and objects?

To consider these questions I return to the *line* and the *path* as visual metaphors for my creative exploration. Tim Ingold offers in his book, Lines: A Brief History, an interesting paradigm for two different modalities of exploration that parallel my understanding of the differences between traditional research methods and my own generative creative processes. In his anthropological history of the line, Ingold draws a compelling comparison between two types of paths, which he describes as the “wayfaring line” and the “transport line” (Ingold 75). The *transport line*, I would argue, follows the same path as the line of inquiry characterized by typical research methods, in that it is inherently pre-occupied by the destination, or the end point of establishing facts and conclusions. The transport line “is tied to specific locations. Every move serves the purpose of relocating persons and their effects, and is oriented to a specific destination. The traveller who departs from one location and arrives at another is, in between, nowhere at all. Taken together, the lines of transport form a network of point-to-point connections.” (Ingold 84) The points, or facts, that are established through research are the ultimate goal or destination for the researcher, and what occurs in between those points is inherently result-driven and destination-oriented. In between those conclusions, the researcher is nowhere but in between results. This line of exploration “goes from point to point, in sequence, as quickly as possible... for every successive destination is already fixed prior to setting out, and each segment of the line is pre-determined by the points it connects.” (Ingold 73) Like the transport line, a line of research relies entirely on

one's pre-conception of where one is going and what they are looking for, and the path that is taken along this line of inquiry serves only to arrive at this fixed, pre-determined hypothesis or destination.

Though there are certainly artists whose respective practices are akin to this mode of exploration, my own approach to the development of my creative ideas is more open-ended. Rather than being results- or destination-oriented in how I develop my work, I am preeminently interested in the journey itself, and am much more attentive to a phenomenological pursuit of artistic expression, and to what I observe during the process of thinking, learning, living and making. My creative path takes the form of what Ingold refers to as the *wayfaring line*, which is an active, meandering line that takes a journey that has no preconceived beginning and no ultimate end goal. (Ingold 73) He writes, "the path of the wayfarer wends hither and thither, and may even pause here and there before moving on. But it has no beginning or end. While on the trail the wayfarer is always somewhere, yet every somewhere is on the way to somewhere else. The inhabited world is a reticulate meshwork of such trails, which is continually being woven as life goes on along them." (Ingold 84) This wayfaring line that Ingold describes is dynamic and constantly forming, and is defined by awareness and active engagement with its surroundings – it is constantly somewhere, even as it moves along towards somewhere else. This same type of journey characterizes my studio practice, and I see the methodology I use in creating my work as a sort of *curious wayfaring*. Rather than establishing a pre-determined research method or question, which I then solve by creating a drawing or a print, I believe that I am always, in all aspects and

environments of my life, exploring and posing questions that feed my creative development and inform my artistic practice. Wayfaring, for Ingold, defines existence. He writes, "Wayfaring, I believe, is the most fundamental mode by which living beings inhabit the earth. The inhabitant is one who participates from within in the very process of the world's coming into being, and who, in laying a trail of life, contributes to its weave and texture. These lines are typically winding and irregular, yet comprehensively entangled into a close-knit tissue." (Ingold 81) This notion reflects my belief that as a curious wayfarer, I am not so much researching for my work as I am just *living*, and being aware and engaged with my curiosity about the conceptual and material nature of my experiences and surroundings, and the ideas, feelings, and questions they elicit. In many ways, I feel as if I am "researching" for my work constantly, every day, in every activity and thought I experience, and my practice is very much based in my intuitive curiosity and a wayfaring, phenomenological engagement with the world around me.

Echoes of Attunement

"Artists have no choice but to express their lives. They have only a choice of process. This process does not change the essential content of their work in art, which can only be their life."

-Anne Truitt

There are many other artists that take a similar approach to their respective artistic practices, and in making the body of work for *Chain of Days*, I have been especially drawn to art that is thematically and materially situated in the same kind of personal exploration of the artist's life. In her journal, Daybook, the sculptor and writer Anne Truitt describes a similar process of intuitive personal engagement with

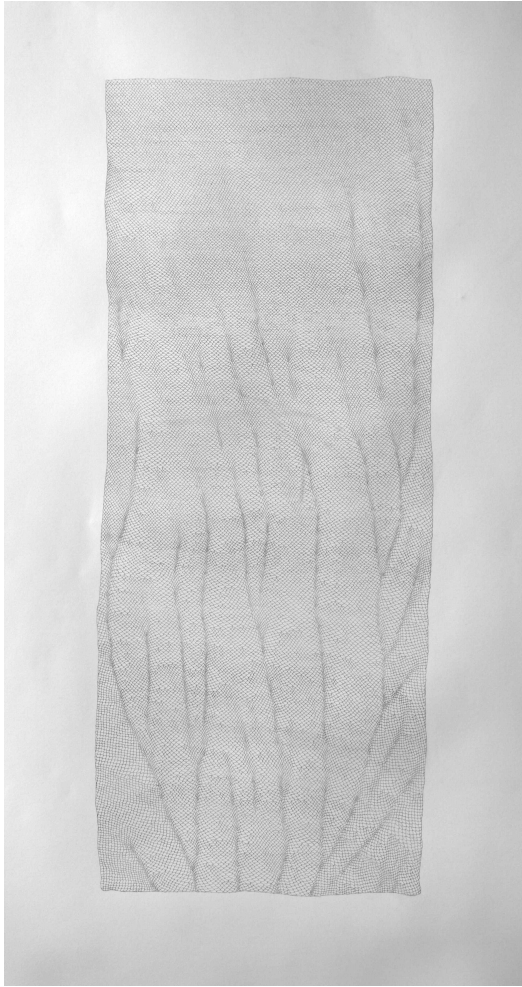
her world and her experiences, and a requisite state of phenomenological awareness that feeds her own artistic practice. In her published journals, she writes about an ever-watchful eye for order and meaning in her life that brings inspiration to her work through an intuitive and sensory awareness of her surroundings in a way that resounds deeply with my own feelings towards my work. She writes,

“I have found that this process of selection, over which I have virtually no control, isolates those aspects of my experience that are most essential to me in my work because they echo my own attunement to what life presents me. It is as if there are external equivalents for the truths which I already in some mysterious way know. In order to catch these equivalents, I have to stay ‘turned on’ all the time, to keep my receptivity to what is around me totally open. Preconception is fatal to this process. Vulnerability is implicit in it.” (Truitt 11)

This is a beautiful description of the working process of an artist that mirrors my own approach to my practice. Through my emotional and sensory attunement to the world around me, material and symbolic echoes of personal understanding and experience are revealed and are then rendered through imagery or process into artworks. Truitt’s deeply personal and poetic journal has been a constant companion throughout the creation of my thesis work, and her articulation of her working process and relationship to her practice is a resonant influence in how I have conceptualized my graduate work.

Truitt was, of course, not only a writer, but also a sculptor, and there are aspects of her artistic work that have influenced my own in addition to the parallels between our respective creative methodologies. To create her sculptural works, Truitt meticulously applied thin layers of paint, one after another, to large oblong-shaped vertical wooden sculptures (Ill. 2), to create iconic upright sculptures that

resonate physically and poetically through their simple, but precise, materiality and form. One of the drawings I completed early on in my thesis work, *Untitled (Shape Sketch 3)* (Ill. 1), is an interesting work to consider in relation to Truitt's sculptures. I began this drawing (which I consider a preparatory sketch for the large-scale work *Chain of Days* (Ill. 8)) prior to reading Truitt's journal and studying her work, but within the context of my research into her practice I believe that there are many similarities between my process and the imagery used in this drawing, and that of her sculptures. This work was the third sketch I created in early 2013 that employed a technique of repetitively drawing short interconnected lines that slowly accumulate in layers into a larger rectangular form. This process of drawing, though it uses different materials and results in a two-dimensional image, echoes Truitt's technique of slowly layering paint to cover the surface of her sculptures – both in the careful, meticulous approach of our respective applications, as well as the simplicity of the materials used. The structure of the imagery in *Untitled (Shape Sketch 3)* is also closely related to the forms of Truitt's sculptures in both its shape and compositional orientation, and how it relates to the body as an object that mimics a figure. Truitt's use of humble forms and materials is very inspiring to me, and I relate closely to a statement she made in a 1987 interview with the Washington Post, in which she stated "I've struggled all my life to get maximum meaning in the simplest possible form." The use of very simple materials, shapes, and imagery in our respective works emphasizes the significance inherent in the process and actions of making, and acknowledges the natural and meaningful presence of these simple



III. 1. *Untitled (Shape Sketch 3)*, Christie Kirchner, graphite on paper, 2013



III. 2. *First Spring*, Anne Truitt, Acrylic on wood, 72 x 8 x 8 in., 1981

forms and elemental materials in one's everyday experiences. It is useful to note these similarities in our respective work, which were present in *Untitled (Shape Sketch 3)* prior to my discovery of her journal or research into her work. I believe that the inherent commonalities between my work and hers is a result of our mutual interest in expressing the echoes of attunement to what life presents us, and the practice of curious wayfaring seen through an artist's creative process.

Notes on Collection

This curious wayfaring manifests itself tangibly in my studio practice through the activity of collecting. If a researcher engages in *the systematic investigation into and study of materials and sources* in their journey to pursue the answer to a question, I engage in the act of collecting things that resonate with me as I follow the wayfaring path that I trace through the world. I sift through the contents of my days and pick things out, setting them aside in little bundles of accumulations. Groupings of songs, artists, objects, colours, words, sayings, films, tv shows, places, textures, feelings, memories, body parts, images, sensations, dreams, animals, chemical elements – are gathered throughout my daily life and displayed in my studio while I work (Ill. 3-4). Typically these collections are thematically grouped by a specific concept or emotional affect – or visually grouped by a shape or particular physical quality. Most often my collections are comprised of imagery, and I devote endless hours to culling images from the Internet, from books and magazines, or from photos that I take in passing everyday. But I also have collections that exist only in writing, as lists of single words and sayings and quotes and lyrics, written out in long

single columns in my sketchbook, as well as collections of objects, which are often pinned to the wall next to my workspace or assembled on shelves in my studio. In contemplating the purpose and nature of these collections within the scope of my art practice, I return once again to Tim Ingold's vision of the world as "a reticulate meshwork of (wayfaring) trails, which is continually being woven as life goes on along them." (Ingold 84) My collections are like a "reticulate meshwork" that is created through the weaving together of the threads of different lines of thought, imagery, and materials that I intuitively gather throughout my days. Once collected, this meshwork of concepts, references, and imagery becomes like an affective screen through which my ideas pass from my mind and body onto the paper.

The collected items I have gathered that inform the body of work created for *Chain of Days* have been accumulated over several years, and the culling and curating of references for these works started long before I began formally organizing my ideas surrounding their creation. These reference images and objects that I've collected before and during the creation of *Chain of Days* can be understood within a taxonomy of three different pictorial and conceptual elements: the fold, the veil, and the knot. Though they were not initially accrued for the purpose of creating a cohesive body of work, the different collections that reside currently in my graduate studio (Ill. 3) bear many similar characteristics, and speak to my attunement to specific ideas and imagery that have calcified in my thesis work. Many of these reference images and objects were collected because of a particular graphic or compositional quality – the layering of multiple semi-transparent layers, for example, or the way in which a particular lace or veil pattern reminded me of

biological or anatomical imagery. I am also frequently drawn to imagery of folded materials that take on interesting geometric shapes and angular forms through their material layering, and I am intrigued by the linear, diagrammatic imagery of folding “instructions” for origami patterns or the folding of napkins and handkerchiefs. In this same vein I have a substantial collection of hand-drawn lace, embroidery and doily patterns and illustrations, which have a line-based, cartographic and diagrammatic quality that I find very compelling in relation to the decorative, organic frills of the needlework that is produced from these patterns. There is also a small collection of lace and rope objects that I have displayed in my graduate studio. Each of these objects was a gift from a friend or former partner, and include a decaying nautical rope found in the Atlantic ocean, and three lace hair-pieces that became my main visual reference in drawing the net-like pattern that is present in many of my thesis works. All of the reference objects and imagery that I’ve collected in my curious wayfaring through this body of work seem to speak to notions of concealment, layering, form and materiality; the index or diagram; and the coming together and pulling apart of shapes, threads and patterns. In the following pages I will elaborate on these ideas and images, and the role they have played in the development of my thesis work.

II. Line as Gesture

“A kinesthetic practice of traction – attraction, extraction, protraction – drawing is born from an outward gesture linking inner impulses and thoughts to the other through the touching of a surface with repeated graphic marks and lines.”

-Catherine de Zegher, from A Century Under the Sign of Line

Threads and Traces

Through his anthropology of the line, Tim Ingold differentiates not only between the wayfaring line and the transport line, but he also identifies two broader fundamental categories by which he classifies the line: the *thread*, and the *trace*.

(Ingold 41-43) A thread “is a filament of some kind, which may be entangled with other threads or suspended between points in three-dimensional space.... Threads have surfaces, however they are not drawn *on* surfaces.” (Ingold 41) I have already referenced the idea of the thread metaphorically in relation to my practice of collecting and curious wayfaring: I see the thread as equivalent to a line of thought or the filament of an idea, which can be collected and woven together with other ideas to form a conceptual and visual meshwork of references. The line as the *thread* is always tied to that which precedes and follows, and can be knotted and entangled with other threads of tangential ideas. The thread is also literally depicted in my collected reference materials and in the imagery of my drawings and prints, and I will discuss my work’s relationship to threads further in a later section. For this chapter, however, I would like to shift my attention away from both the symbolic and literal thread to Ingold’s other category of the line, the *trace*.

Ingold defines the trace as “any enduring mark left in or on a solid surface by a continuous movement.” (Ingold 43) A trace can be additive, a mark that is

transferred from the material of a drawing tool or other implement onto the surface of a substrate; or reductive, a trace that is scratched, scored, or etched in relief into a surface through the removal of the material from the surface itself. (Ingold 43) Both types of traces are present in my work, and their lines consistently relate in some way to the conceptual underpinnings of the drawings or prints that they form. I have always engaged in relatively complex and time-consuming processes of drawing traces to create my work, through methodical techniques of layering graphite and ink lines to make drawings, or by etching lines into copper and stone through intaglio and lithography printmaking methods to create prints. But until beginning my graduate work, I had previously understood my use of the trace in my drawings and prints only as a method of making – as a single approach to creation and a way to develop an image through drawing or printmaking. In creating my thesis work, however, my understanding of the role of line-making in my practice has shifted, and the traces I have laid down on paper, etched into copper plates, and folded in carbon to create this body of work are not understood only as a means to an end, but are an end in themselves. Throughout all of the work in *Chain of Days*, the trace has become more than a method to generate symbolic imagery – it has evolved into a meaningful phenomenon in itself, an indexical action that points to the conceptually potent and personally meaningful process of making.

The Indexical Line

In her essay, Notes on the Index, Rosalind Krauss explains this distinction I have drawn in my work between the symbolic and the indexical, and the index's

relationship to the trace. “As distinct from symbols,” she writes, “indexes establish their meaning along the axis of a physical relationship to their referents. They are the marks or traces of a particular cause, and that cause is the thing to which they refer, the object they signify.” (Krauss 198) The significance of the drawn or printed line in my thesis work is anchored in the gesture of its creation, as each trace of the line is an index that points to a specific action that results in physical change. This notion of the line as an index of a particular action which alters the physicality of an object is a prominent idea throughout this entire this body of work. But it is most prominent, and was at the forefront of my mind, in creating a series of five photo-polymer gravure prints entitled *Unfolding Series 1-5* (Ill. 5-7), which were completed in the spring and summer of 2013. The prints in this series of works depict sheets of carbon paper that I repeatedly folded and unfolded in a variety of patterns, so that the trace of the folded lines became visible as the carbon was removed from the surface of the material through repeated creasing. The sheets of carbon paper were then scanned to produce a digital image that could be used for the photographic intaglio process of producing a photo-polymer gravure intaglio plate.

This series of prints marks the first body of photo-based works I have created in the course of my practice. My use of the photograph – or more specifically the digital scan – and the photo-based printmaking technique of using light-sensitive polymer plates in this work is a direct result of my interest in the index and in the materiality of the trace. The photograph is in many ways the most literal and direct example of an index, in that “every photograph is the result of a physical imprint



III. 5. *Unfolding Series II*, Christie Kirchner, Photo-polymer gravure on paper, 2013



III. 6. *Unfolding Series IV*, Christie Kirchner, Photo-polymer gravure on paper, 2013

transferred by light reflections onto a sensitive surface. The photograph is thus a type of icon, or visual likeness, which bears an indexical relationship to its object. Its separation from true icons is felt through the absoluteness of this physical genesis, one that seems to short-circuit or disallow those processes of schematization or symbolic intervention that operate within the graphic representations of most (artworks).” (Krauss 203) Though I was very intuitively drawn to the graphic and material qualities of the carbon paper, my decision to use the photographic image in this body of work was a deliberate attempt to circumvent a symbolic reading of the works in favor of an indexical reading. Within this work there is a timeline of layers upon layers of indexical references: the graphic white lines in the image are traces of the gesture of folding and unfolding embedded within the carbon paper, which become an index to my physical action of creasing the paper; the scanned digital image, like Krauss’s photograph, is an index to the physical object itself; and the photo-gravure print, transferred onto paper multiple times from the intaglio matrix, is an index to the physical plate from which it was printed. The entire process of transformation, from the folding of the object to the final printed image, is retained in the work and expressed through the visible traces of the indexical lines that point to the gestures which altered it.

In this work, the trace can be seen as both an index to bodily action, as well as to how the carbon material itself indicates a primary material and corporeal physicality. After oxygen, carbon is the second most prominent element within the chemical composition of the body. In making this work, I was very interested in the carbon paper as a material that is specifically created to retain the trace of an action



III. 7. *Unfolding Series V*, Christie Kirchner, Photo-polymer gravure on paper, 2013

within itself while simultaneously externalizing the mark of the same action – the mark of the action on the carbon paper is white, while the carbon that is transferred to an external surface is black. Like the skin of the body, which externally retains and displays wrinkles, scars and callouses that form as indexes to physical actions and changes; and the internal thoughts and emotions that are imprinted and habitually expressed in the psyche as time and experiences pass while one moves through the world; the gesture of folding and its impact on the material of the carbon in the form of the trace enacts the body’s response to action and change. The act of folding can also be understood as altering the nature of the material object. Through the act of folding and unfolding, the interior of the folded carbon becomes the exterior, and vice-versa, and the interior and exterior also define and differentiate each other. As Gilles Deleuze writes in The Fold,

“The ideal fold is thus a *Zwiefalt*, a fold which differentiates and self-differentiates. When Heidegger refers to the *Zwiefalt* as the differential of difference, he means above all that the differentiation does not refer to undifferentiated origin, but to a Difference which ceaselessly unfolds and folds back from both sides and which only unfolds one by folding back the other in a coextensivity of the unveiling and veiling of Being, of the presence and withdrawal of being. The “duplicity” of the fold is necessarily reproduced on both of the sides which it distinguishes and which it sets into a mutual relation by distinguishing them: a scission in which each term sets off the other, a tension in which each fold is extended into the other.” (Deleuze 236)

This notion of the duplicity of the fold is symbolically resonant to me in that something is always hidden in between the folds of paper or fabric, while at the same time something new is also revealed in the alteration of the folded object: another surface, another shape, and the differentiation of the object’s inside in relation to its outside (and vice versa). The body can be seen in this way too, and through the

unfolding and enfolding of physical experiences such as being ill, having sex, eating and drinking, speaking and even drawing, the internal becomes the external and the external becomes the internal, and the parameters of the body and of the self – the experience of being in one’s body – is defined and differentiated through the enfolding and unfolding states of being.

Drawing and the Passage of Time

“I felt that a line was one of the more sparse, singular expressions of oneness, although it is certainly not the final expression. Somebody might choose a point. However, the line was interesting because it was continuous – it existed in time. A line is a potential of existing in time. In graphs and scores one designates time as one dimension. Nonetheless, the actual drawing of the line did involve time and it did involve a singular event.”

-La Monte Young, from Draw a Straight Line and Follow It

“There is only one type of duration: the act.”

-Lygia Clark, from Walking

In the *Unfolding Series* works, the line is an indexical reference to a gesture of the body in a very direct, physical way that refers to the altered materiality of the carbon paper through the action of folding. Where my interest in the indexical aspects of the lines in that work was driven by ideas of physicality and materiality, the lines in the large-scale piece *Chain of Days* (Ill. 8-10) are also indexical, but point more prominently to my interest in sequential gestures and temporality. To create this piece, I established a pre-determined process of repeatedly drawing short, interconnected v-shaped lines in a method and visual pattern that is similar to the systematic processes of knotting and weaving, used traditionally in the creation of lace and netting. I began in the top left corner of the paper, and worked left to right, top to bottom, to draw rows of short, connected lines that create a series of attached,

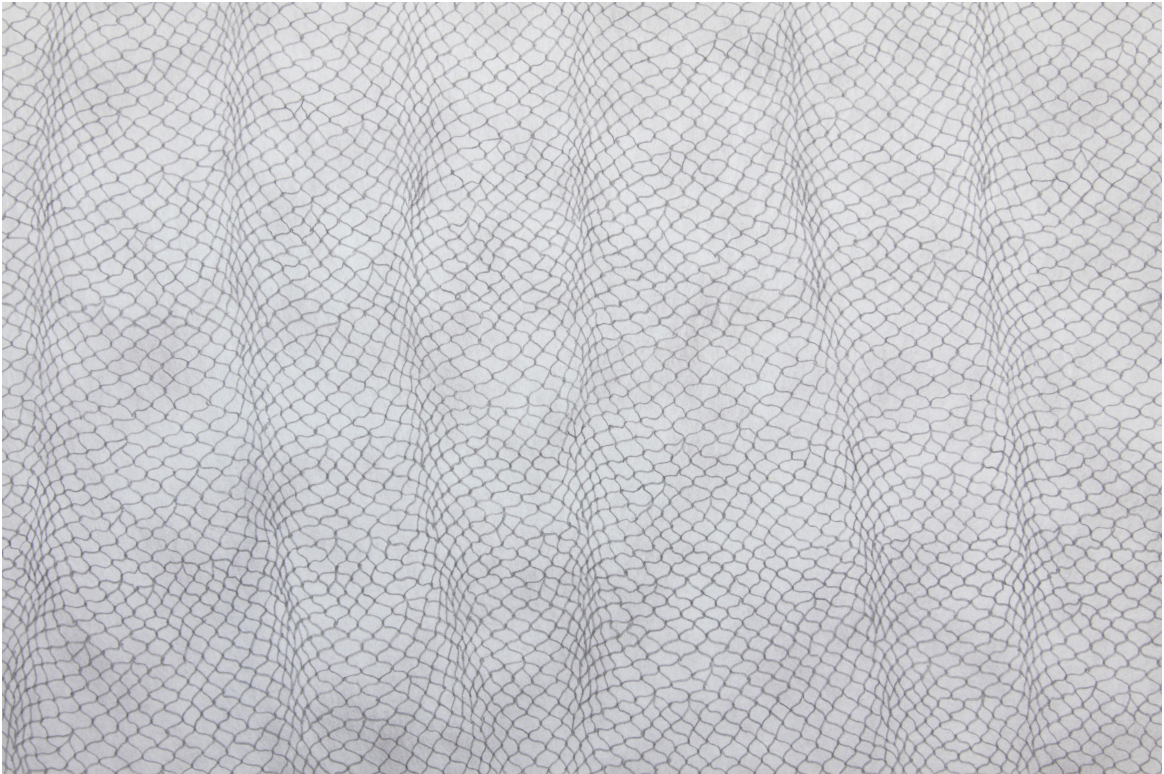
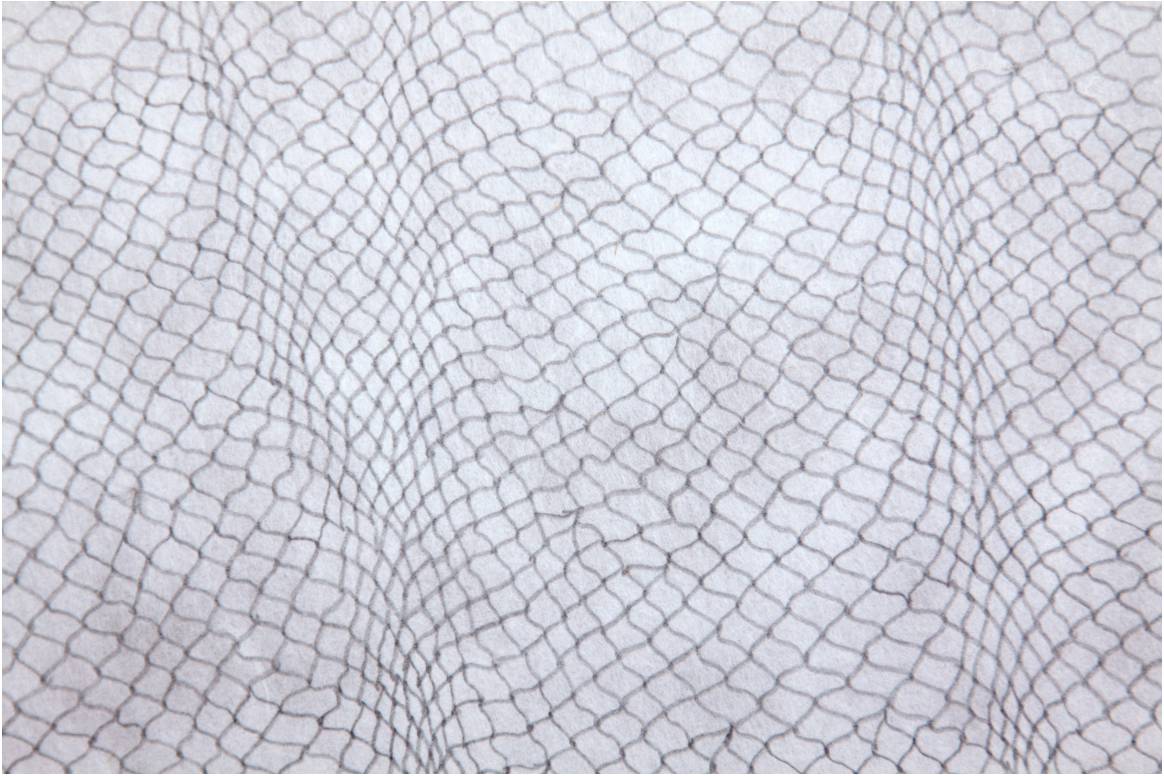


III. 8. *Chain of Days* (installation view), Christie Kirchner, graphite on paper, 2013-2014

open loops which read as a matrix or net of woven lines. Through this time-consuming, organized method of slowly building the image through repetitive marks, each line becomes an index of a gesture, but also of a moment, and the slow accumulation of the progressive lines becomes a measurement of the time that passed in its creation.

The title of this piece and of the exhibition, *Chain of Days*, refers to the chain-like imagery generated through my process of drawing, but also to the time spent in making it, and to the link between the nature of drawing and its relationship to temporality. In her essay *A Century Under the Sign of the Line*, Catherine de Zegher posits drawing as being defined by its inherent temporality, and by the relationship between the sequential, recurring mark-making of drawing and the passage of time. de Zegher writes, “Seen as an open-ended activity, drawing is characterized by a line that is always unfolding, always becoming. And in the drawing’s stages of becoming – mark becoming line, line becoming contour, contour becoming image – the first mark not only structures the blank page as an open field, but also defines it temporally, as the drawing’s marks follow one another in time.” (de Zegher 23) The lines in *Chain of Days* structure the page in an almost grid-like composition, with each row of lines defining the row that comes after it, both visually in how the lines connect to one another, and temporally in how the lines are a trace of each sequential moment in time. The drawing is a map of time itself, sequentially passing, as time commonly appears to do, throughout the four months of its creation.

There is an index of a more personal nature that is also intrinsic to this work, that being the indexing or a mapping of the self, in that it was my body and my hand



III. 9-10. *Chain of Days* (details), Christie Kirchner, graphite on paper, 2013-2014

that left the trace of each moment. My body, intention, state of mind, and position in space while tracing the lines of each moment all contribute to the personal specificity that is inherent in this work. The formation of the lines has an indexical relationship not just to the idea of time or of a moment, but also to the occurrence of a particular instant in my own life. Because of the time-consuming, physically demanding, and meticulous process required to make a work of this magnitude and intricacy, I have an intimate relationship to each line, and the gesture of each one often relates to an individual period or experience I had in its making, which I can recall upon identifying the lines in a later viewing of the image. In this way, *Chain of Days* becomes a diary or record of the four months of my life in which it was created. This speaks in a very literal way to the *wayfaring line* that my work weaves through my life, and the personal nature of my work and the subjective approach I take to my practice.

Daily Gestures

The notion of repetition and the repetitive process I employed in this method of drawing is integral to its indexical reference to time, and repetition as a concept and an action is a primary concern in *Chain of Days*. In establishing the pre-determined process of drawing used to create this piece, the repetitive gesture of the mark-making as well as the recurring daily process of executing the marks in the studio frequently conjured contemplation of the other repetitive daily tasks that comprise my life. In her article [Monstrous Domesticity](#), Faith Wilding references this relationship between the repetition of labor, of art-making and of life:

“The subject of work (labor) itself is central in much "domestic" artwork. This is often expressed in the charged, obsessional quality given to objects or installations which have been personally worked by the artist. This obsessional quality speaks about the body in time (a life-time), and ceaseless effort. The repetition of bodily gestures and motions produces sameness with slight variations (a mimicry of the conditions of every day life), and a hypnoid state (altered consciousness) in the maker. An epistemology of making develops, which brings into play knowledge lodged deeply in the interaction of hand and material: making fabric, making substance, transforming, linking stitch to stitch, loop to loop, fragment to fragment, forming a web, connecting strand to strand, node to node, repeating, patterning, alternating, repeating -- the magic of form coming into being through the "thinking hands" acting with material. The above could be a description of the processes of drawing, painting, crocheting, embroidering, weaving, and the like -- and even perhaps of (longhand) writing.” (Wilding 4)

Daily, weekly, or monthly acts such as washing the dishes, riding the subway, getting a haircut or cleaning the house are domestic moments in my life that hold a similar indexical reference to the passage of time. Because it is inherently the same action that is performed in regular intervals, like the lines in *Chain of Days* or the daily studio work that created them, regular domestic chores often elicit thoughts in my mind about what has come to pass in my life since I last performed that particular chore. In this way, *Chain of Days* references the repetitive nature of life itself – it is a “mimicry of the conditions of every day life,” as Wilding puts it – and corresponds to the daily actions that comprise our lives and indicate the passage of time. (Wilding 4)

In this work there is also a relationship to Wilding’s notion of “sameness with slight variation” that characterizes the repetitive nature of life, and which occurs through the body’s embedded epistemology of making that is incurred through repeated physical actions. Though the system of making these works is very controlled in how it is measured, executed and consistently drawn, I am not a machine, and the angle of my body, shape and sharpness of the graphite, and the

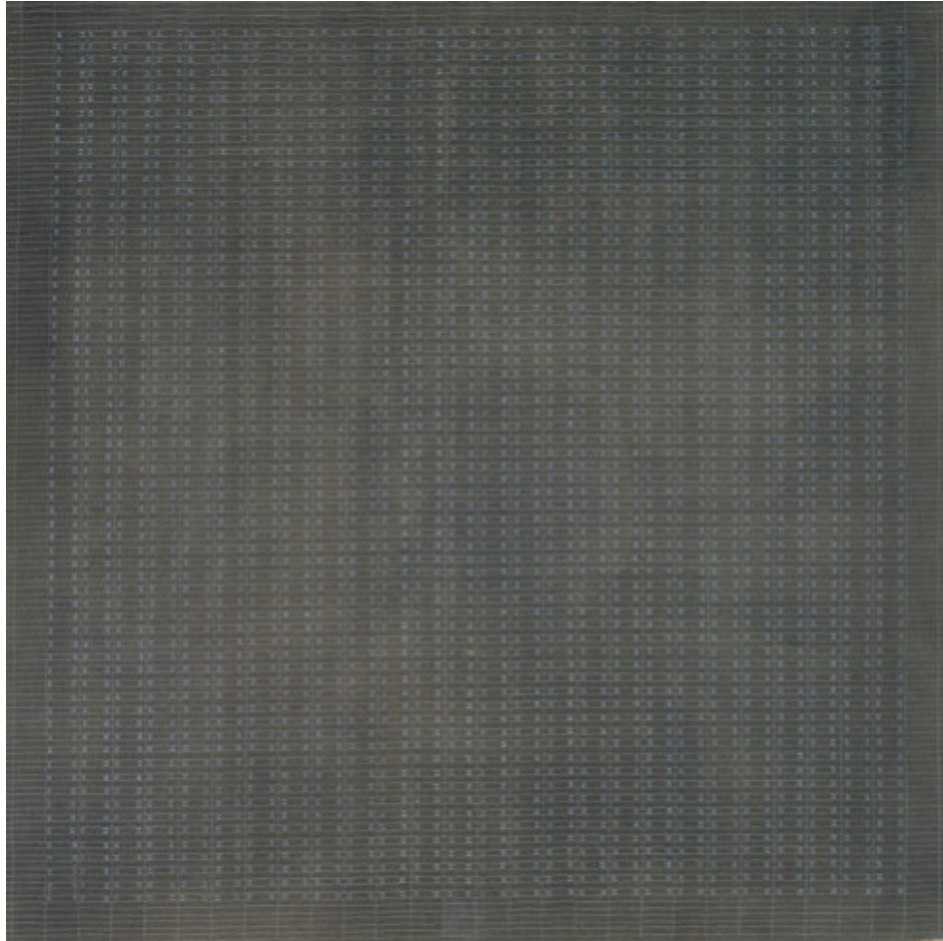
pressure I use in drawing the lines results in differences of the length and spacing of each line. This subtle variation in each line generates the vertical “folds” that form in the pattern as each line and each row of lines affect those which come after them. These folds are not planned in advance and are self-generating through the repetition of the process, and the organic shifts of shapes and angles in the pattern. I see this phenomenon as a result of the body’s “thinking hands” (Wilding 4) which have intuitively controlled the process of making, but also as a metaphor for the intersection between the choices I make in my life (which are repeated, controlled and measured by me and my prerogatives) and the external influences and factors of my life over which I have no control. As the piece progresses and my life unfolds in parallel, the organic vertical folds that form through the deviation of the angles and pressure of each mark are reflective not only of the repetitive nature of life, but also of the variation and unpredictability inherent in daily life, and the convergence between what I can and can’t control. In the repetitive ebb and flow of my practice of drawing, the image becomes a hybrid of controlled process and organic, self-generating patterns that are propelled by the body’s haptic memory.

Thinking Through Repeating

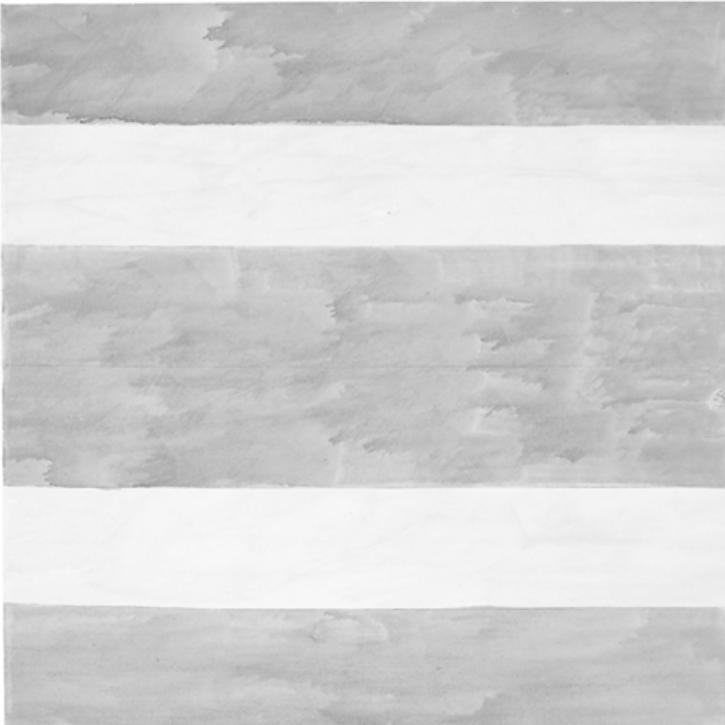
The “hypnoid state of mind” or “altered consciousness” that Wilding describes in her essay as being produced through the repetition of bodily gestures is also a powerful and personally meaningful facet of this body of work. (Wilding 4) In her work and writings, Agnes Martin alludes to a similar process and related state of mind while working, and Martin’s work and personal approach to her practice has

been very influential in the creation of this body of work. *Chain of Days*, in its line-based, grid like form, is visually related to Martin's work in how she paints meticulous, horizontal lines, row after row (Ill. 11), and in how the gesture of her hand is present and visible in the final paintings. In her work as in my own, the lines are drawn by hand without a ruler, and the wavering quivers of the graphite as her hand moves across the canvas to draw lines are an index to the body and to time, through the act of making a mark in a specific moment. The thin washes of paint which she applies to the canvas between drawn lines also points to her hand, and the slow, layered process of her painting (Ill. 12) was inspiring to the approach I take in my own method of drawing. Her attentiveness to the process of making in relation to the experience of viewing also interests me. Her work is abstract, and she does not generate representational imagery through her paintings, but rather an *experience of viewing* that is transmitted to the viewer upon seeing her work. The meaning and experience of the artwork, for Martin, is present in the viewing of it, but also in the making of it through a particular state of mind, which she describes as an "awareness of perfection." She writes, "The paintings (are) not really about nature. They are not about what is seen. They are about what is forever in the mind." (Martin 13)

In her writings, Martin refers to this contemplative state of mind that she enters when painting in solitude, which is closely related to my own experience of drawing in the peaceful, quiet space of the studio, where my mind is free to reflect



III. 11. *White Flower*, Agnes Martin, oil and graphite on canvas, 1960



III. 12. (left) *Untitled* (detail), Agnes Martin, oil on canvas, 2004

deeply while the repetitive action of my drawing unfolds. Of her own state of mind in working, she writes:

“The holiday state of mind is the most efficacious for artists: ‘Free and easy wandering’ it is called by the Chinese sage Chuang Tzu. In free and easy wandering there is only freshness and adventure. It is really awareness of perfection in the mind. Everyone has memories of adventures within the mind, strange and pleasant memories, but not everyone is aware of adventures in the mind when they happen. I want to recommend the exploration of the mind and the adventures within the mind. It takes so much time, that is the difficulty. It is hard to slow down to the pace where it is possible to explore one’s mind.” (Martin 71)

Like Martin, in creating my thesis work, I have allowed myself to become completely absorbed in methods of making that are motivated entirely by process, actions, and materials. By relying on repetitive method rather than concept, my mind is free to think openly, to enter a mode of perception akin to Martin’s “holiday state of mind” or Wilding’s “hypnoid state of mind” of repetition, offering me a quiet and calm space in my life to reflect on the ideas and experiences that have passed during the making of the work. (Wilding 4) (Martin 71) In this way, my process opens my mind for “free and easy wandering”, a pause for personal exploration and respite within an often-overwhelming pace of life.

III. Patterned Lines

Lace and Pattern

Though the evocation of meaning in my thesis work is largely realized through my engagement with repetition and process in making, the imagery itself is specific and the method of drawing in pieces such as *Chain of Days* (Ill. 8), *For Penelope* (Ill. 15-16), and *Untitled (Shape Sketch 3)* (Ill. 1) was designed to parallel the techniques traditionally used to create handmade lace or netting. Lace, which is a historically ever-present fabric dating back to Ancient Greece and Egypt (Bury Palliser 2) is of visual and conceptual interest to me for many reasons. The veil or the net is an important graphic and thematic concern in all of my thesis work. Within the drawings and prints that encompass *Chain of Days*, there are recurring images that reference lace, netting and other woven textiles that appear as a veiling, semi-permeable barrier, which simultaneously conceal and reveal the surface of the paper. In collecting reference images for this work, I was especially drawn to samples of knotted lace with tears or holes (which reveal more through their damage) as well as the hand- or machine-drawn patterns for lace-making that appear almost like a skeleton or geometric sub-structure for the decorative patterning that will eventually be stitched upon them. The physicality, patterning and shapes of lace and veil imagery had a strong formal influence on the composition and mark making I used in creating the drawn and etched works for my thesis exhibition.

My initial interest in lace as an object or substance emerged through an investigation of knots, which are symbolic to me of tension, of the joining together of

two separate threads, and of the desire to hold onto something. A knot is, by its very nature, a manifestation of physical tension – of two ends pulling against each other while also coming together. Knotting is the technical and structural foundation for the creation of many types of lace, netting, and other textiles used for veiling and shrouding the body, and I see these materials as substances that are essentially created out of wrought tension. As such, lace is a dichotomous symbol for me of simultaneous beauty and tension, threat and desire. My work is also deeply inspired by the metaphor of life as a thread, which is knotted and patterned by one's choices and experiences into a complex matrix of patterned actions, decisions, relationships, successes and regrets.

Lace is a substance that is also closely connected to socially and emotionally charged experiences that I contemplate frequently in the course of my life and in my practice. In sex and marriage, lace is a permeable membrane of lingerie or veiling that separates people even as they are joined together, and in death, a woven burial shroud or widow's morning veil is also a porous barrier between the living and the dead, and between the body and the afterlife. Toronto artist Catherine Heard is interested in the intermediate nature of lace, or more specifically veils, and how they relate to these liminal states of being. Of her series of sculptures entitled *Veil* (Ill. 13-14), she writes: "Historical sculptures and paintings incorporating veils frequently depict liminal states -- the virgin bride, the mourning widow, and the ghost. The veil can also take the form of a shroud, as in Giuseppe Sammartino's *Veiled Christ* (1753), wherein the sensual draping of the form emphasizes the marginal threshold between life and death." (Heard) The idea of a beautifully patterned covering that



III. 13-14. *Veil 4 & 5*, Catherine Heard, earthenware (wax finish), 2011

simultaneously reveals and hides its wearer – that allows some people or some things through its screen, and others not – is a very symbolic and emotionally potent notion in this body of work. Indeed the etymology of the word lace can be traced back to the Latin word, *lacere*, which means "to entice" and can also mean "net, noose, or snare". Lace is beautiful and decorative, but like a net or a noose, also holds the ominous power of concealment, seduction, and containment.

These ideas are all present in *Chain of Days* (Ill. 8), and the patterned graphite line and mottled surface of the kozo paper visually echo the duality of the reveal-conceal experience of looking through a lace veil or shroud. In this imagery, however, the decorative element of the lace is dropped, and it is the interstitial net-like space between the embellished patterns that served as my reference imagery for this drawing. Without the ornamental element, the imagery in *Chain of Days* – like lace itself – depicts the *space between*: the space between moments, between people, between past and present, between life and death, between threat and promise. The net-like imagery of the patterned lines of the interstitial space also emphasizes what I see as the more dangerous aspects of lace's concealment, in its visual relationship to netting, which is far less ambiguous about its intention to trap, to contain, or to prevent passage to the other side.

Threads of History

"To know the history of embroidery is to know the history of women."
-Roszika Parker, from *The Subversive Stitch*

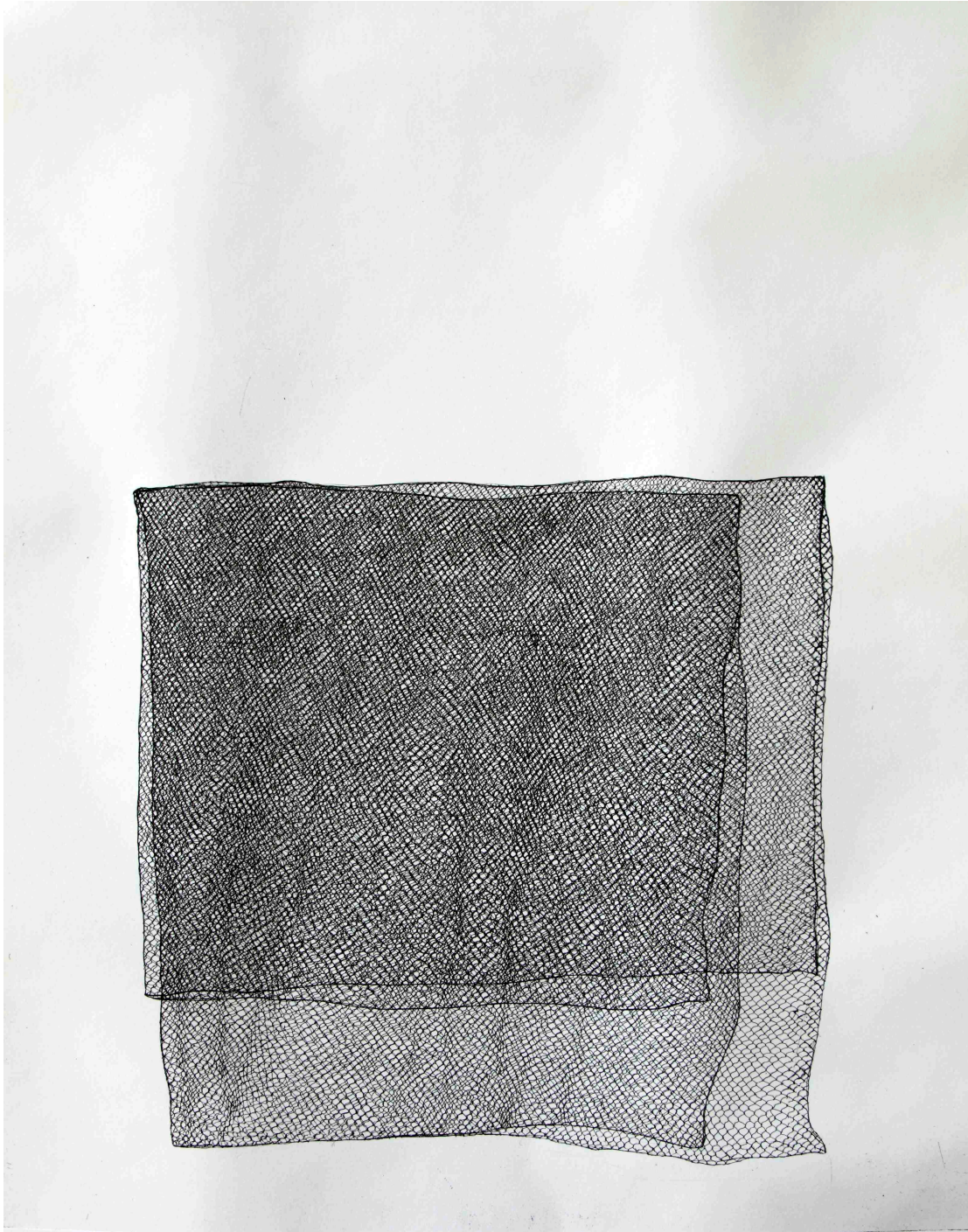
The notion of visual pattern is closely linked in concept to ideas of generational or historical patterns in my thesis work, and I am interested in the

relationship between myself and my work, and that of antecedent generations of women historically who have participated in the making of actual lace and other thread-based textile arts. In executing the left-to-right, top-to-bottom, row-by-row process of drawing lines in the netted lace imagery of *Chain of Days* (Ill. 8) and the etching *For Penelope* (Ill. 15), I am very aware of the phenomenon whereby each row that comes before the next affects the shape, pattern, and folds of its subsequent rows. This occurrence speaks directly to the idea of generational patterns of femininity and art-making. Each generation is shaped by that which comes before, and by drawing with techniques and imagery that parallel that of traditional needle-arts, I am joined to the past and to the collective history of women by the line of my practice. Louise Bourgeois, in a 1988 interview discussing her quilt-based drawings, said “My feminism expresses itself in an intense interest in what women do” (Hanson and Wood 4) and this feeling is prominent in my own work. As I weave the drawn line into lace-like patterns, I often contemplate the millions of women before me who have done the same, and reflect on what may have passed through their minds in a “hypnoid state” (Wilding 4) as they worked in this same rhythm of repetitive process. Indeed, the comforting, contemplative state I spoke of earlier that I experience through the act of drawing repetitively has been cited by other women throughout history when speaking of their engagement in needlework such as embroidery. Dinah M. Craik wrote in her 1891 book *A Woman’s Thoughts About Woman*: “The needle is a wonderful brightener and consoler; a weapon of defense against slothfulness, weariness and sad thoughts.” (Craik qtd. in Parker 150-151) Much later, in the late 1970s, Carmen Silva also wrote in her introduction to a book

about tatting, that embroidery is her true friend, a safe companion and a comfort, as it “occupies the hands when we feel restless.” (Silva qtd. in Parker 150-151)

Enmeshed within the historical practice of needlework is a shared experience of tradition, community and creativity that is principally unique to the female gender. (Parker 1-3) I engage this legacy through my work in a way that is not overtly political, but that seeks a connection to history and an acknowledgement of the body and my own biology, which has long been a preoccupation of my practice.

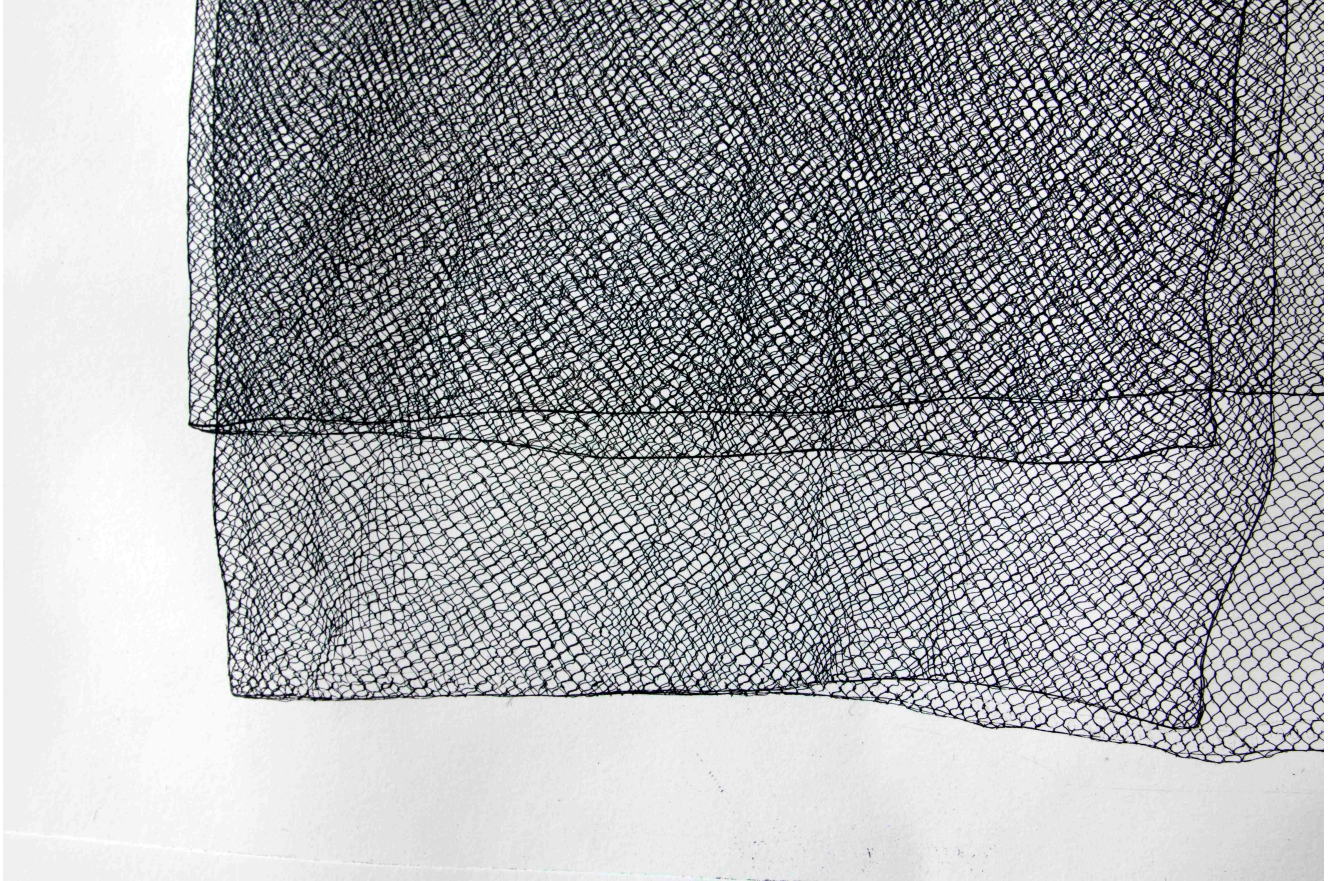
Like the more ominous netting that spans between the ornament of lace, however, there is also a threatening and subjugating aspect of “women’s work” that must be acknowledged in how it has been used throughout history to suppress women into submission and obedience. The “dual face of embroidery... has provided both a weapon of resistance for women and functioned as a source of constraint. It has promoted submission to the norms of feminine obedience and offered both psychological and practical means to independence.” (Parker xix) This inherent dichotomy that exists within the practice and material of lace-making was my main focus in creating the etching *For Penelope* (Ill. 15-16). The title of this work refers to the mythological character of Penelope in Homer’s *The Odyssey*, and the point in the story in which she is weaving a burial shroud for her dead father-in-law. Penelope, who has then been single for years while her husband Odysseus is at sea, faces increasing pressure by a group of men attempting to force her into marriage in order to become King through their union. Not wanting to re-marry and give up hope in



III. 15. *For Penelope*, Christie Kirchner, etching on paper, 2013

Odysseus's eventual return, Penelope declares to the suitors that she will choose a husband upon her completion of the woven shroud. She then cunningly works each day to weave the shroud, but returns to it in the night to undo the threads of her progress, delaying the completion of the shroud to maintain her autonomy. This portion of the story of the *Odyssey* has always fascinated me, and offers an interesting mythological analogy for the dual facets of liberation and entrapment that are present within the history of needlework. Weaving is Penelope's "weapon of resistance" (Parker xix) within the trappings of her position and the coercive attempts of the suitors to force her into marriage. In making the etching, I mimicked the action of Penelope's nocturnal undoing of the burial shroud by etching the image in four separate layers, which requires the plate to be coated, drawn into, etched, and then uncoated, re-coated, re-drawn and re-etched four different times through each subsequent layer.

My use of lace as imagery is not only a linked thread to the collective history of women, but also a reflection of the duality and complexity that is intrinsic to this history – much like the tradition of embroidery, lace-making, and other needle arts practiced predominantly by women either by choice or by necessity, the meshwork of lace simultaneously exposes and obscures, liberates and contains, unites and separates. Lace-making's associations with sweetness, passivity purity and domesticity contribute to the problematic social and psychosocial production of the ideal feminine woman as an obedient, faithful wife and mother. (Parker 3) But within those confines, embroidery and lace-making was also an outlet for creativity, expression and self awareness. As Roszika Parker describes in *The Subversive*



III. 16. *For Penelope* (detail), Christie Kirchner, etching on paper, 2013

Stitch, her anthropology of embroidery and its political relationship to femininity, “Because of its history and associations, embroidery evokes and inculcates femininity into the embroiderer. But it can also lead women to an awareness of the extraordinary constraints of femininity, providing at times a means of negotiating them, and at other times provoking the desire to escape the constraints.” (Parker 11) Her book goes on to explore the subversive ways in which women have used embroidery as means to elevate their social and economic status, and to question and reveal the disparity between gender dynamics of power and personal agency through embroidered imagery and messages. I am interested in tracing a reference to the practice of embroidery and lace-making through the lines of my work as a means to acknowledge the subversive power of this practice and its contribution to social change in attitudes towards acceptable female identities and labors.

Chain of Days

Through drawing and mapping the “paths of growth and movement” (Ingold 5) in my life, the chain of links between my creative process, physical gestures and actions, and personal and collective history have resulted in a body of work that offers an indexical reflection of time and corporeal experience. In charting these lines, I see that there is over-lap and cross-hatching, doubling-back, looping, and cycling of lines of thought, imagery and methods. As my ideas have been raveled and unraveled through the making of this work, each creative gesture and thought is tied by the thread of the line to what precedes and what follows. This line can be seen as a graphic, a visual, as the index of an action, and as a metaphor for my life and

personal history. The threads and traces within *Chain of Days* are a pictorial representation of the complex interconnectivity my choices, movements, and experiences. The result is a materially resonant and personally meaningful exhibition of works that traces the lines of contemplation, of the chronology of time, and the unfolding of personal experiences that have unraveled in my life throughout an intensive and sustained engagement with the *wayfaring line* of my practice.

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