

Reviving Craft in a Context of Design: *Physical Practice in a Digital Culture*

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ABSTRACT

In the pursuit of speed and efficiency, contemporary visual communication eradicates the essence of the individual in favour of certainty. Mass production and the rational thought processes that steer Western Culture have caused much of the human relationship with the physical world to deteriorate.¹ This graphic design research employs craft processes and theories of the discipline to explore the irregularities engendered by the human hand. It does so by merging production methods involving both analogue and digital operations. The unique vagaries of handcraft inform aesthetic experience by enriching communication culture with the haptic qualities of the individual. By combining strategies of risk and certainty, handcraft procedures complement the work of mechanical production and serves as a potential cultural instrument.² Together these production methods culminate in a richer means of communication that reveals an ontological relationship between form and representation, one which affirms and counters the alienation of a modern world.

¹ Sandra Corse, *Craft Objects, Aesthetic Contexts: Kant, Heidegger, and Adorno on Craft* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2009), 96.

² Glenn Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 5.

DEDICATION

I dedicate my thesis to my dad, Paul Grzeskowiak, for his unconditional love and support, and for being my eternal source of inspiration.

Growing up I spent a considerable amount of time at your furniture finishing workshop, where I wandered about and observed you as you worked. The scent of freshly cut wood and newly coated lacquers filled the air. I watched you sand and coat wooden surfaces with an utmost patience, care, and dedication. By example you have taught me to nurture and respect the relationship I have with my hands. I will always and forever cherish the knowledge you have instilled in me. You influenced my way of seeing and thinking about the world around me, and tirelessly encouraged my curiosity and work ethic. With every passing day I see more of you in myself. You have raised and shaped me into the person I am today, and the person I will continue to grow into. I am an extension of your love.

Thank you for working long hard hours so that I can have the things I have. It is impossible to thank you adequately for everything you have done for me.

I love you with all my heart,

Thank you.



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INTRODUCTION

Graphic design is shaped by an emphasis on quick and efficient production technique. The rationalizing forces of technology in turn, affect the ways visual communication is produced and consumed. Since the nineteenth century, the emphasis on functionalism and scientific knowledge greatly affected society's perception of reality. As a result, the instrumentality of delivering content came to outweigh the importance of studying form—the operation of creatively materializing form. The modernist cliché demands that form follows function, and while this statement may reflect some truth, its argument suggests that the value of design lies in its rationalizing tendencies. In other words, this position neglects to explore alternate methods and reasons for inquiry. By conforming to the demands of capitalism, the arts, and by extension, graphic design are, as Paul Virilio states, “instrumentalized beyond recognition”.³ Between the rapid speeds of mass production and the rational methods of thinking that steer Western culture, much of the human relationship to formed matter is deteriorating.⁴ For design practice and education, this deterioration creates an imbalance which hinders seeing, thinking, and making. In an article titled, “That Was Then, and This Is Now: But What Is Next?” (1996), Lorraine Wild writes:

but merely mastering the technology seemed to overshadow the ability to pause and notice where the work could go. Educators and practitioners were distracted by the whole new bag of necessary skills that greatly impacted “craft”: the ever-expanding number of software programs to master, added on top of all the older mandated skills and techniques.

...

The balance between generalization and specialization was thrown out of whack by the overwhelming problems of digital competence, and the (largely unstated) conviction that to master the new tools was the most critical thing a student could do. This was reinforced by a profession that immediately began to hire graduates based on their knowledge of programs, mostly to lift the burden of technical competency from the busy professionals running their offices. The short-term focus seemed to be entirely on production.⁵

In this statement, Wild discusses how design parallels and reflects the era in which it is produced. She expresses concern towards the shifting role and demands of the designer which the rise of mechanical and digital production has delivered. The discipline is in constant flux and continues to reinvent itself. It is crucial to reflect on the dominant notions and practices of a discipline in order to fully engage and participate within it. While Wild's argument does not entirely oppose this thesis, I believe her considerations of the terms *craft*, *production*

³ Paul Virilio, *The Accident of Art*, trans. Michael Taormina, (New York: Semiotext(e), 2005), 65.

⁴ Corse, 96.

⁵ Lorraine Wild, “That Was Then, and This Is Now: But What is Next?” *Emigre* #39 (1996), 28–29.

and *mastery* are ill-defined. Wild writes, “If you return to the issue of authorship in multimedia, it is clear that priorities in education have to shift away from the focus on perfection of craft. Beyond training the eye to see, technique is an unstable thing.”⁶ In this statement Wild generalizes technical competence of computer use with the ability to consider form. What is lacking from this perspective is the distinction between the technical or mechanical knowledge of using a tool, and the mastery of that tool as a craft—knowing how to use a pencil to make a mark is not the same as knowing how to draw. Furthermore, *technique* is not confined to the realization and use of a particular tool, but rather, is the embodiment of an ideological approach the individual designer employs. As such, technique is not an “unstable thing”—reliance on a tool over the hand is. Micheal Rock writes, “the misconception is that without deep content, design is reduced to pure style, a bag of dubious tricks.”⁷ This thesis argues that a deeper consideration and sensitivity towards form and craft is necessary and beneficial to the conceptualization and creation of meaningful design work. The opposition between form and function is often pitched as a black and white argument⁸, but this thesis argues that such an opposition is simply too narrow a perspective. I argue that what is really lost is a particular sensitivity and physical knowledge. Aesthetic style may be both representational and ephemeral, but form is the fundamental core of understanding in visual language. As Rock states, “treatment is, in fact, a kind of text itself, as complex and referential as any traditional understanding of content.”⁹

The lost sensitivity towards visual language is the same one which generates a struggle for the traditional craft arts. When compared to the rationalized standards of commercial and industrial production, handcraft falls short. Its use as a practice is neither considered legitimate nor respected. My research argues that there are unique and valuable aspects to be found in the handcraft process which inform visual communication. Hands bring consciousness to the material world¹⁰ by providing insight to form, physical reality, and the individual. Working analogously by hand forces a direct and physical responsibility on the maker. The artist, designer, or craftsperson becomes liable for the form’s output, which in-turn contributes into building a sensitivity and conscious awareness of what is occurring in the immediate context. While digital and mass production swiftly communicate information, certainty and universality eradicate the physical human presence, which I believe to

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Michael Rock, “Fuck Content,” In: *Multiple Signatures: On Designers, Authors, Readers and Users* (New York: Rizzoli International, 2013), 92.

⁸ Ibid., 92–93.

⁹ Ibid., 93.

¹⁰ Corse, 64.

be a vital component in the study of visual language. Directly working with hands involves the individual, Malcolm McCullough writes, “to craft implies working at a personal scale.”¹¹ This research sets out to implement craft ideology into the discipline of graphic design. Rather than arguing one form of knowledge over the other, I combine production methods involving both analogue and digital procedures. By combining qualities of risk and certainty, the accidental vagaries of handcraft create unique unexpected visuals which contrast and compliment digital visuals guaranteed by digital and mechanical methods. Bringing an awareness to physical knowledge raises a sensitivity towards the study of form and a closeness to human experience. Handcraft imbues individual authenticity into the work and reclaims both physical presence and authorship.

CONCEPTUAL & PHYSICAL THINKING

The study of perception allows for the examination of visual communication and the various ways in which information is internalized. Philosopher Theodor Adorno outlines two distinct modes of thought which construct perceived reality for the individual: *conceptual thinking* and *physical thinking*. The way Sandra Corse outlines it, “conceptual thinking puts an object under an abstract concept to understand and to exercise mental control over it” while “physical thinking remembers that the object always exceeds its concept, that there is more to physical reality than our categorizing allows.”¹² For the most part, traditional ways of physical thinking found in the arts, are pushed aside and abandoned by the cost and time demands of consumer society. Throughout the history of Western thought, conceptual thinking persists as the idolized and dominant power in experienced reality.¹³ This representational approach to perception continues to rule—if not especially—in the digital and contemporary era of communication. Adorno argues that, “our culture’s dependence on conceptual thinking has historically almost destroyed our ability to think non-conceptually and has obscured the usefulness and importance of alternative ways of thinking.”¹⁴

A good way to understand physical thinking and the study of form is to consider sound and music. A high pitched sound, for example, evokes a particular feeling that differs from a sound lower in frequency. The quality of the sound’s texture may also dictate the experience and its perceived meaning. This sound may be a crisp, continuous and sharp, or it may be distressed, screeching, and irregular. Furthermore, what would the two

¹¹ Malcolm McCullough, *Abstracting Craft: The Practiced Digital Hand* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 21.

¹² Corse, 81-82.

¹³ Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” In *Off the Beaten Track*, translated by Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 5.

¹⁴ Corse, 82.

sounds evoke when played together? Do the sounds harmonize in pitch? Do they clash? What does their relationship evoke? What do these qualities mean to the perceived experience? To consider these qualities means to pay acute attention to abstract sense related qualities. Physical thinking thus requires a particular sensitivity which looks beyond the ways verbal or written means of communication function. These same observations and questions can be applied to visual form.

Visual language is a byproduct of physical thinking in a context of visual perception. Haptic vision is the result of observing physical attributes and considering their implications for meaning. This manner of seeing requires physical empathy, which is precisely the quality of vision that the digital, industrial, rationalizing tenets of contemporary communication dilute. The result leaves the physical object unconsidered from a position of haptic awareness. Instead, the emphasis and reliance on rationalizing thought create a bias against form-based cognition. While theoretical knowledge certainly offers depth and cognitive engagement, the attributes of physical matter are frequently left overlooked and even misunderstood.

SEMIOTICS

The mental reliance on conceptual thinking is best examined through semiotics: a study of signs.¹⁵ In the 1960's, structural linguistics emerged concerning the study of language and how meaning constructs reality.¹⁶ One of the prominent theorists of the time was Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss linguist who developed semiology.¹⁷ The foundation of Saussure's theory rests upon the relationship between the signifier (a sign), and the signified (a concept which the sign makes reference to).¹⁸ A sign can take the form of words, images, sounds, gestures and objects.¹⁹ Succinctly put, semiotics engages with anything that can be taken as a sign.²⁰ To borrow an example from Imre Szeman and Susie O'Brien, a cup of coffee, in its denotative form, refers to its most literal and physical state of being—the coffee substance and the space and structure of the container it occupies. The signified, on the other hand, is an instantaneous connotative layer of meaning which a spectator concurrently makes reference to when encountering a sign. The signified can be in the form of a particular idea, concept, belief, or feeling about the sign. In a way, the signified acts as, “an aura, an invisible layer of meaning” which

¹⁵ Daniel Chandler, *The Basics: Semiotics*, Second Edition, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 2.

¹⁶ Susie O'Brien and Imre Szeman, Excerpt from: *Popular Culture: A User's Guide*, Second Edition, (Scarborough, ON: Nelson Education Ltd, 2010), 71.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ O'Brien and Szeman, 73.

¹⁹ Chandler, 2.

²⁰ Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 7.

surrounds the sign with an interpretative reading of the object.²¹ A cup of coffee may signify associations of waking up, morning routine, a social gathering, or beliefs framed around breakfast. In simpler terms, a red light signifies to stop. This type of vision travels immediately from the eye to mind, creating a reality constructed of previously associated notions. Virilio writes, “since every object is for us merely the sum of the qualities we attribute to it, the sum of information we derive from it at any given moment, the objective world could only exist as what we represent it to be and as a more or less enduring mental construct.”²² This representational aura is a semiotic structure which allows the mind to navigate, organize, and make sense of perceived information. The way in which an individual defines and understands signs ultimately shapes their ideas of reality. For the most part, representational thinking is an automatic and even essential process to navigating human existence. After all, it is in our best interest to stop at a red light. However, the admission of mentally constructed information has a tendency to divert perceptive attention away from physical reality in a way that may affect physical experience.

Martin Heidegger’s description of the “thing” and “thingliness” parallels the signifier–signified system. In “The Origin of the Work of Art,” Heidegger argues that thingliness (the signified) “attacks” the thing (the signifier) by diverting the spectator’s awareness away from the objects physical aspects and in-turn assaults its truth and reality.²³ Returning to Szeman & O’Brien’s example, if a cup of coffee additionally presents itself with a logo, the coffee further ties itself down to representational notions associated with a company brand signified by the mark. A consumer is then no longer simply drinking a beverage, but consuming an entire lifestyle and culture associated with the logo.²⁴ In the instance of consuming coffee, the representational ideas surrounding the logo rob the individual’s attention away from the physical and sense related characteristics that make up or define the coffee substance itself. As semiotics explains, a sign develops its associated “thingliness” over the course of time through repetition. In this process of fixing meaning, representational notions encode within the domain of memory, and thereby become a central source for associated recall. Representational thinking allows for a cognitive extension of experience outside the physical world which mediates cultural power. However, the notion of thingliness raises a question of honesty. Are representational notions a reflection of experiential truth

²¹ Marty Neumeier, Excerpt from: *The Brand Gap* (San Francisco: Peachpit Press, 2005), 2.

²² Paul Virilio, *The Vision Machine*, translated by Julie Rose (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 22.

²³ Heidegger, 7.

²⁴ O’Brien, and Szeman, 31.

in visual communication? How do they interfere with the study of form and physical knowledge? And what are the repercussions for a society governed by an emphasis of representational thinking?

REPRESENTATION

Representation fails to capture the full physical characteristics of experience. In the case of coffee, characteristics such as taste, temperature, weight, colour, density, and strength, communicate through the physical pathway of perception. Holding a strong belief towards the representational may cognitively influence the experience of the coffee. A Starbucks consumer, for instance, may be preoccupied with the surrounding culture of the brand to a degree which overrides and dismisses the individual's sense related satisfaction. A culture founded on rational modes of thinking yields a physical disconnect with the self.

This mass neglect emerged in part with the rise of capitalism and popular culture.²⁵ The rapid processing speed at which representation operates at, reinforces its prominence. The speed and fluency of conceptual thinking serves as a natural catalyst for the fast-paced, consumerist society in need of the quick delivery and presentation of information. Held together by rational and scientific modes of thinking, the reliance upon representation results in a habitual way of creating and processing visual information. Subsequently, this bias leaves physical thinking with the arduous task of maintaining legitimacy as it fails to ground itself in written or spoken language, or abide by scientific formulas. Depreciating physical thinking leaves the illusion that conceptual thinking is truer and more real. There is considerable potential being ignored in communication when physical thinking and making are devalued as legitimate forms of knowledge. It is as though the desperate search for logic and meaning forces, for example, a fixation on the lyrics of a song, overlooking the beauty and influence of the instrumental melody beneath. In this way, the technologically advanced society paradoxically falls deaf to the very fundamental essence of instrumentality and melodic composition.

Rock states, "We seem to accept the fact that developing content is more essential than shaping it."²⁶ Such an approach diverts the essence and purpose of communication and the inherent knowledge shaping form offers. Phenomenologist Günter Figal writes, "observation is not concerned with an aim but with matter. The sole aim of observation is that the observed matter come forward as clearly and distinctly as possible."²⁷ To observe,

²⁵ O'Brien and Szeman, 85.

²⁶ Rock, 93.

²⁷ Günter Figal, *Aesthetics as Phenomenology: The Appearance of Things*, translated by Jerome Veith, (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015), 7.

then, is the act of understanding matter for its physical presence. Goal-oriented thinking only exists when an experience is conceptualized, or planned ahead of time. The shaping of form, on the other hand, remains open-ended and subject to change and experimentation, since the final output is not defined.²⁸ American ethnobotanist Terence McKenna claims that we are too dependent on notions of order, he writes, “Chaos is what we’ve lost touch with. This is why it is given a bad name. It is feared by the dominant archetype of our world, which is Ego, which clenches because its existence is defined in terms of control.”²⁹ An open-ended approach to making creates space for generating unique approaches, inquiry, and visual outcomes. Representational frameworks do not dictate the manipulation of form and thus allows physical thinking to roam freely outside the parameters of defined purpose. The freedom to explore the realm of the undefined and unplanned leads to new findings that would otherwise go undiscovered. Physical thinking nurtures curiosity and experimentation. This dimension of thinking is significant for both the practice of graphic design and the culture of visual communication as it reveals their capacities for research and investigation.

Mechanical and digital production paired with scientific knowledge, play a role in the cultural dependence on goal-oriented thinking. In design, the drive for efficiency results in a vision focused on rationality. The pursuit of defined answers and logical methods leads contemporary visual communication to dismiss physical inquiry. This surge of mechanical and digital production reconstructs perception according to the machine rather than the sense related experienced.³⁰ Art was once the interpreter of the senses, a catalyst between the eye and the object.³¹ However, the arts are now fixated upon, “a continuous progress comparable to what science and technology can offer.”³² Namely, the arts are treated and forced to fit quantitative formulas which assume a defined measure of progress with every subsequent iteration. This approach suggests an appearance of efficiency but defeats the very purpose of the arts. In the attempt to fit a frame of conceptual knowledge, physical knowledge ceases to exist. The overvaluing of certainty in communication culture presents a bias which Virilio poetically summarizes in his comparison between a photograph and painting. In *The Vision Machine* (1994), Virilio notes that, “people in photographs suddenly seem frozen in mid-air, despite being caught in full swing: this is because every part of the body is reproduced at exactly the same twentieth or fortieth of a

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ayub Ofulla, *The Secrets of Hidden Knowledge: How Understanding Things in the Physical Realm Nurtures Life* (Bloomington, IN: Abbott Press, 2013), 249.

³⁰ Virilio, *The Accident of Art*, 66.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 59.

second, so there is no gradual unfolding of a gesture, as there is in art.”³³ Virilio argues that the objective seemingly evidence provided by the photograph does not sufficiently capture truth or reality. Instead, the image flattens reality into the representational realm. While arguably the camera scientifically captures visible light and nuances undetected by the human eye, the camera only manages to see in sections; failing to capture duration. A painting or the stroke of the brush initiated by the hand is a recording of a gesture from start to finish. In capturing the essence of time Virilio adds that, “it is our duration that thinks, feels, [and] sees.”³⁴ Photography serves as a tool for capturing evidence and a means for evaluating occurrences.³⁵ As a result, the lens aids and excels representational perception. In society's search for the certainty of defined limits, the relevance of tacit knowledge is lost and disappears from the creative toolkit.

German philosopher Walter Benjamin writes, “the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity’s entire mode of existence. The manner in which human sense perception is organized, the medium in which it is accomplished, is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well.”³⁶ Graphic design history is rooted in analogue production. Between woodcut, lithography and screen printing, the final outputs of analogue processes retain a presence of human engagement. The shift to industrial (and later, digital) production placed an emphasis on mechanical reproduction. Works are now typically photographed or scanned, and mechanically reproduced. In response to the development of photography, Walter Benjamin writes, “for the first time in the process of pictorial reproduction, photography freed the hand of the most important artistic functions.”³⁷ Rather than physically engaging the world through the hand, the designer shifted their role to attend the instantaneity of industrial production. Now, graphic design requires to serve an outreach much greater and quicker than ever before, which respectively prioritizes mechanical and digital reproduction. The rapid pace of the representational perception and industrial production holds up to the demands of a consumerist society. Benjamin adds, “since the eye perceives more swiftly than the hand can draw, the process of pictorial reproduction was accelerated so enormously that it could keep pace with speech.”³⁸ In visual communication, the demands of rapid speed results in the loss of a tacit quality. The specificity of a gesture is

³³ Virilio, *The Vision Machine*, 1.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” In *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn, (New York: Schocken Books, 1935), 8.

³⁶ Ibid., 5.

³⁷ Ibid., 2.

³⁸ Ibid., 3.

erased in the reproduction of it. “Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be.”³⁹ In the contemporary context, Benjamin’s claim can be experienced confronting a reproduction of an artwork. At times, these works may be blown up to a scale much larger than their original creations. They may be printed on a canvas material and stretched on a wooden frame which gives an illusion of the real canvas. However, something is still missing. The moment one picks up a piece and realizes there is another one just like it resting stalked behind. And behind that one, ten more. There is something illusive about the flattened texture of a paintbrush’s stroke. In this instance, the function of art is reversed.⁴⁰ Benjamin notes that, “the presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity.”⁴¹ In the case of reproduced artworks, it becomes apparent that this authority is missing. The reproduction of a work hides a key experience of the individual by flattening out physical impressions.

This disappearing quality is as Benjamin writes, the “decay of aura.”⁴² Virilio argues that this blindness has created “a sightless vision”⁴³ which is making us all “a bit more inhuman.”⁴⁴ This applies both to the maker and spectator who are equally impaired by the deterioration of physical empathy. Designers lose ownership over individual expression, and spectators lose the ability to see and relate in a physical manner. An original work preserves its authority, Benjamin states, “the authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced.”⁴⁵ Craft writer Peter Dormer argues, “the success of our modern day technological culture is putting a strain on personal, individually owned tacit knowledge.”⁴⁶ This success runs the risk and tendency of watering-down specificity, complexity, and uniqueness—all of which are qualities pertaining to human presence and experience. Although physical thinking is not entirely lost or hopeless, it lacks credibility in the context of graphic design. In “The Macramé of Resistance” (1998), an article written a few years later, Lorraine Wild states that:

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 6.

⁴¹ Ibid., 3.

⁴² Ibid., 5.

⁴³ Virilio, *The Vision Machine*, 73.

⁴⁴ Virilio, *The Accident of Art*, 67.

⁴⁵ Benjamin, 4.

⁴⁶ Peter Dormer, *The Art of the Maker* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 100.

*The marketing and anthropology models propose that designers must become more conceptual because the computer has devalued their traditional skills ... the invention of form —something that designers have traditionally done as a way of communicating concepts, is neglected in the desire to elevate design as a conceptual activity.*⁴⁷

Graphic design largely operates in manipulating representational matter and organizing it via the rationalizing forces of certainty. An example demonstrating this method is editorial design. The content of a magazine is both text and image based. Its matter is organized in a way that fulfills legible needs in the span of the space available and budget allocated to the project. The magazine requires rational choices for the sake of utility, such as the consideration of dimension, hierarchy of information, placement of advertisements, and layout. A designer seeks to organize content serving the needs of utility through digital and mechanical production procedures. Driven by its instrumentality, graphic design constantly seeks efficiency. My research does not intend to argue against its instrumental value, but simply points to a bias which frequently dismisses a facet of visual communication. Society's desensitization to the language of form affects seeing, thinking, and making. It is appropriate to consider the societal significance since graphic design has a direct affect on communication culture. Putting formal and sensual knowledge on the back burner limits the articulation of human experience.⁴⁸

HANDCRAFT

To revive physical knowledge, Heidegger suggests suspending representational thinking in order to experience the undistorted presence of the thing itself.⁴⁹ Bringing attention to the physical object counters the inclination to see in representational terms. To do this, the designer's perception requires a re-tuning of cognition to appreciate the physical world. This research looks to handcraft and craft theory to examine the methods, approaches and ideologies that probe physical inquiry. Handcraft engages with physical thinking and offers specificity owing to the individual nature of uncertainty. Through the involvement of the body, handcraft brings consciousness to the material world⁵⁰ and serves as a potential cultural instrument.⁵¹ The term *craft* is defined as an action-based mode of thinking. It involves the process of manipulating and handling material or

⁴⁷ Lorraine Wild, "The Macramé of Resistance," *Emigre* 47, (Summer 1998): 17.

⁴⁸ Corse, 71.

⁴⁹ Heidegger, 7.

⁵⁰ Corse, 64.

⁵¹ Adamson, 5.

medium in time (and when dealing with physical craft, space) to perform a desired function.⁵² Historically, craft processes were rooted in pre-industrial and ancient traditions originating in handmade objects which served practical purposes.⁵³ Though craft serves in bringing forms to life, it should not to be mistaken as a simple fabrication technique. Craft is a skill and knowledge in of itself. Its knowledge however, is derived from an intelligence acquired through a sense-related experience demonstrated through physical practice.⁵⁴ Traditionally, this learning process involves repetitive labour and the commitment of time to acquire a level of mastery. Gradually and over the course of time, material dexterity arises from the temporal dialogue between the medium and its maker. During this back and forth dialect, knowledge is gained through judgement and discrimination, which becomes the embedded intuitive physical knowledge of the maker. A craftsperson works with the on-going goal to seek and reduce risk and uncertainty to the degree which allows them to achieve perfection with every execution. However, writer and curator Glenn Adamson, approaches craft as an idea in theoretical terms, defining it less as a field, and more as a way of working. He analyzes it as an “approach, an attitude, or a habit of action”⁵⁵ which through its application, is considered as a “supplemental language of form.”⁵⁶ He writes, “craft is not a defined practice but a way of thinking through practices of all kinds.”⁵⁷ Here he suggests that craft is not necessarily tied down to specific materials or means of production, but rather is an ideology for seeing, thinking, and making.

Fundamentally, craft knowledge is reliant on a physical effort⁵⁸ that confronts the resistance of physical matter. This physicality gives handcraft its defining characteristics: the palpable involvement of the human hand. In the unraveling of a gesture, the risk of encountering an error is expected. In theatre or in dance, this gesture is live and ephemeral, captured only in the presence of time. With visual work, this gesture is recorded, retaining the embodiment of the physical act and all of its aberrations. French philosopher Alain Badiou regards truth as the very process and act of creation, he writes, “a truth is an artistic procedure initiated by an event.”⁵⁹ Event is

⁵² Dormer, 24.

⁵³ Corse, 93.

⁵⁴ Dormer, 7.

⁵⁵ Adamson, 4.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 32.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 7.

⁵⁸ Dormer, 11.

⁵⁹ Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, translated by Albeto Toscano (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 12.

generated in the mutual dance between the artist's physical involvement and their mark.⁶⁰ The hand physically responds to the physical life of matter. During the act, the agility and quickness of the hand responds to the unexpected which defines its presence and event. Reality then resides in the errors encountered and recorded during the making process (however grand or minuscule they may be). In these moments, the hand (or human body) captures what it means to be physically present. This presence is documented through the gesture's immediate recording in time. Representational thinking exists at the opposite end of this spectrum, where it retrieves truth from the memory's storage of preconceived notions. The form of representational thinking is thus reliant on a reference to the past. A sense related form of perception is "a focus on the object of our immediate perception,"⁶¹ remaining as a continuous source in perceiving the present. This is not to say that there is something wrong or false about memory. Physical knowledge is deeply connected to memory as well. The speed, accuracy, and ability to anticipate and react to unknown variables is rooted in the individual's personal physical knowledge and stored in memory. However, physical knowledge reveals the traces of the instances where physical reaction occurs. Captured in time, the self physically manifests in the act and remains present in the object. This is the beauty of the hand. The act of being present and connected is related to the physical involvement of the human body. As Heidegger notes, "things move us bodily, in a quite literal sense."⁶²

RISK & CERTAINTY

This research explores the communicative values found in the risk of handcraft production. David Pye created a useful framework for comparing hand and machine work by their varying degrees of involved risk. He argues that "handicraft," "hand-made," and other craft-like terms are historical or social, and not technical ones.⁶³ These terms have been "deeply coloured by the Art and Crafts movement; which has become a movement of protest against the workmanship and aesthetics of the Industrial Revolution..."⁶⁴ Rather than dividing production procedures between the hand and machine, Pye uses the terms "workmanship of risk and certainty" to distinguish visual quality. The workmanship of risk refers to:

[A] workmanship using any kind of technique or apparatus, in which the quality of the result is not predetermined, but dependent on the judgement, dexterity and care which the maker

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Virilio, *The Vision Machine*, 62.

⁶² Heidegger, 7.

⁶³ David Pye, *The Nature and Art of Workmanship* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 10.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 11.

*exercises as he works ... the essential idea is that the quality of the result is continually at risk during the process of making.*⁶⁵

Conversely, the workmanship of certainty is, “always to be found in quantity production, and found in its pure state in full automation ... the result is exactly predetermined before a single saleable thing is made.”⁶⁶ In this way, Pye avoids dismissing the craft equally present in the industrial or digitally produced, while maintaining a scheme that permits the discussion of handcraft characteristics. Pye notes that the workmanship of certainty continues to grow and dominate visual culture. As a result, the reliance on certainty in production operations diminishes visual diversity. Highly regulated work is incapable of what Pye describes as “free” or “rough work.”⁶⁷ There is spontaneity and continuous response between the hands of the maker and the material when working with physical production. Handcraft requires response and improvisation towards the unexpected and unknown factors that arise during production. The way in which an artist deals with unforeseen variables or challenges engender’s the maker’s unique visual responses. Industrial or digital methods cannot simulate this struggle, rather, they are known for seamlessly hiding them. The workmanship of certainty comes with a guarantee of predictability and control. The digital techniques of a computer, for example, permit functions such as undoing, deleting, editing, copying, etc. Pye writes, “the workmanship of certainty can do nearly everything well except produce diversity.”⁶⁸ The combination of planned operations and regulated control makes goal oriented tasks easy. However, the uncertainty of risk is shunned in the digital and mass produced environment.

This research identifies and exercises the inherent qualities found in analogue work in a context of otherwise regulated procedures found in graphic design production. The use of the hand reveals the presence of human effort and error. Badiou writes, “an event is precisely what remains undecided between the taking place and the non-place—in the guise of an emergence.”⁶⁹ In submitting to the uncertainty of risk-driven operations, imperfections record the unique vagaries of the hand. The struggles encountered by the hand are recorded in the artefact itself, which preserves the presence of both accidents and deliberate decisions. My visual research studies the tension between the workmanship of risk and certainty, not by emphasizing one over the other, but

⁶⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 17.

⁶⁸ Pye, 73.

⁶⁹ Badiou, 61.

by infusing a more deliberate physical intervention into design production. By purposely weaving craft and design processes, this research creates a ground for exploration and conversation surrounding the hand's role and influence in graphic design. The visual work produced juxtaposes the methods of trial and error found in the exploration of material contingencies against the organized and clear sequencing of operations found in design practice.⁷⁰ In turn, I build a hybrid form of production which becomes both my methodology and overarching creative outlook.

⁷⁰ Claude Lichtenstein, "Caterpillar and Butterfly: Remarks about the Relationship between Craft and Design," In *The Intrinsic Logic of Design* (Zurich: Niggli, 2016), 83.

STUDIO RESEARCH

My studio research has, over the last two years, been focused on two main modes of production: *the workmanship of certainty* and *the workmanship of risk*. Firstly, the workmanship of certainty, incorporates printed matter that is either found, or digitally and mechanically created (such as a poster or book). Secondly, *the workmanship of risk*, applies a physical intervention by means of handcraft and foreign materials (such as thread, sequins, or spray-paint). Certainty procedures speak to an ease of control and the rapid ability to edit, organize, and predict. Meanwhile, risk procedures have a limit on control, are more accepting when it comes to mistakes, and the unforeseeable. By combining these two procedures together, I create a hybrid production method which yields surprising and unique results. Since the discipline of graphic design primarily operates in the workmanship of certain, the integration of handcraft disrupts the control and predictability found in digital and mechanical production. The conversation between the workmanship of risk and certainty offers new insight into aesthetic perception and communication.

The subject matter in my visual research is not an integral component to proving my argument, as my focus is on the study of form, and the integration of physical qualities pertaining to handcraft. However, I chose to situate my content in the theme of nature and natural imagery, (specifically flowers and their growth), which compliments my position without drawing attention away from my haptic studies. Similarly to form, nature speaks a physical language that is neither written or spoken. It operates in a constant mode of risk, that exhibits the aptitude for chaos, unpredictability, and surprise. Imperfections are found in the formation of growth, a quality shared with handcraft. However, rather than depicting narrative or representational content, I focus on capturing the qualities found in the appearance of flowers and how time is inherently reflected in their life. I push my subject matter towards material and formal abstraction, which supports the focus on physical and material presence. In order to emphasize the qualities of uncertainty, conceptual thinking requires interruption. In *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, Deleuze argues for a suspension or escape from figurative, illustrative, and narrative means of reading (which are all facets belonging to representation).⁷¹ This thesis avoids fulfilling instrumentality by eliminating the visual cues of language, narrative content or symbolic representation. By doing so, the research focuses on the physical non-codified truth that is closely linked to the nervous system.⁷²

⁷¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, translated by Daniel Smith (London: Continuum, 2005), 2.

⁷² Deleuze, 35.

The move towards formal abstraction counteracts the structures of rational thought and invites the spectator to engage with haptic exploration. Much like a handmade artifact, a flower is borne out of a dedication to time and a trusted bond between physical matter and applied environmental forces. This research invites an affective response in the viewer—to not only imagine, but to feel with a sentient physical empathy that is intrinsic to human nature, experience and communication. In this chapter I elaborate on the background, application, and development of these key elements to my research through a dossier of my studio-based work.

BACKGROUND: STUDYING FORM

In my first year, I took a studio course which revolved around the understanding of form.⁷³ I was given a single object, which I was instructed to investigate in every possible way that was outside of literal representation. This course fundamentally informed the underlying motive and position behind my work. The term long investigation pushed my sensitivity towards form and physical thinking and remained as my base approach. In this process I learned about tweaking and investigating form characteristics, and what they offer and mean at varying amplitudes. The object I was working with was a stainless steel scour. For most of the course, I worked in black and white abstracted forms to strictly limit discussion to form, shape, and material. Every week, the course conducted an in-depth discussion surrounding the perceived affect the visual research achieved. This process was conducted without the preconceived notions of end-product, which allowed for a rich visual development, lead by material and form, rather than conceptual content.

I first began by working with physical impressions accomplished by using the scour as a tool to paint with. I experimented with various mediums and gestures (*figures 1.1–1.2*). Different speeds, direction, and force applied to the scour, created different lines and shapes that evoked distinct qualities. *Figure 1.1* exemplifies one stream of research that investigates a pressing and twisting motion at varying levels of ink present on the scour. More ink on the tool required less force, while less ink required more force. The first mark with the most ink and least pressure appears to be bold, longer and thicker in stroke, and graphic. The last pressing is softer, shorter and thinner in stroke, more seemingly scattered, textured, rapid, and indecisive in direction. From the first pressing, to the last, the resulting impressions reveal the embodied gestures of the individual as they respond to the medium, and unfolding marks created by the particular tool. Being aware of these attributes and understanding

⁷³ GS/MDES 5108 Design Studio 1 course, taken with professor Maggie Fost.

how to manipulate them, builds a hands-on knowledge that informs visual communication. Studying form in a serious manner has permanently influenced the way I see and approach shaping matter. The rigorous process between the hand and material builds a perceptive sensitivity to form, which culminates in a physical knowledge that I find integral to understanding and manipulating visual language—be it in digital, printed, or real space.



Figure 1.1



Figure 1.2

Figures 1.1–1.2. *Stainless Steel Scour*, 2016. Mixed Media.

Shortly after my ink experiments, I moved onto examining the scour as an object. I scanned and photographed the scours forms, in a multitude of angles and ways (*figures 1.3–1.5*). I set up different jigs, lighting environments, and varying camera zooms with ranging depths of field, which I explored with equal intensity. Similarly, I transferred all of my physical markings to digital space by scanning and digitally manipulating them (*figures 1.6–1.8*). At this point, I had captured and augmented the reality of the scour and its abilities as a tool. Bringing everything into a software program gave me the freedom to close-crop segments, invert the black and white tones, alter contrast and texture, and change lighting. Furthermore, this allowed me to print the images at varying scales ranging between tabloid to poster sizes six feet tall. Digital and mechanical production allowed me to explore a kind of visual loudness and surreality in the forms that seemed more real than life, yet, I was left

dissatisfied by the flatness of the surface. I found that there was a disconnect between the physical marks on the paper, and the final printed output.



Figure 1.3

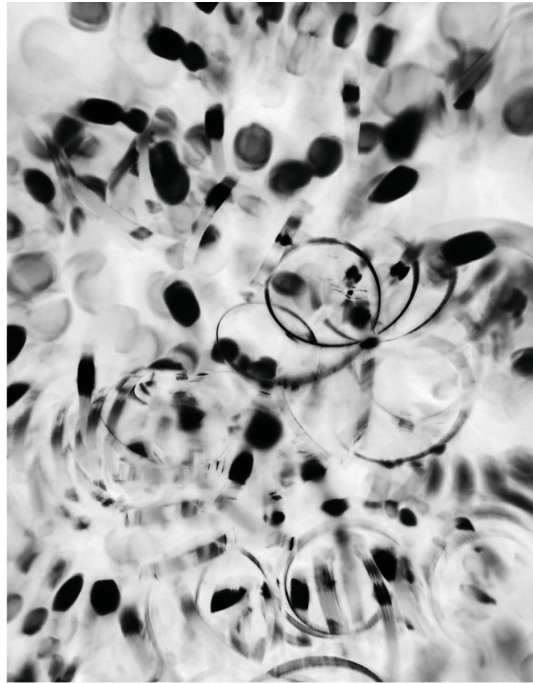


Figure 1.4

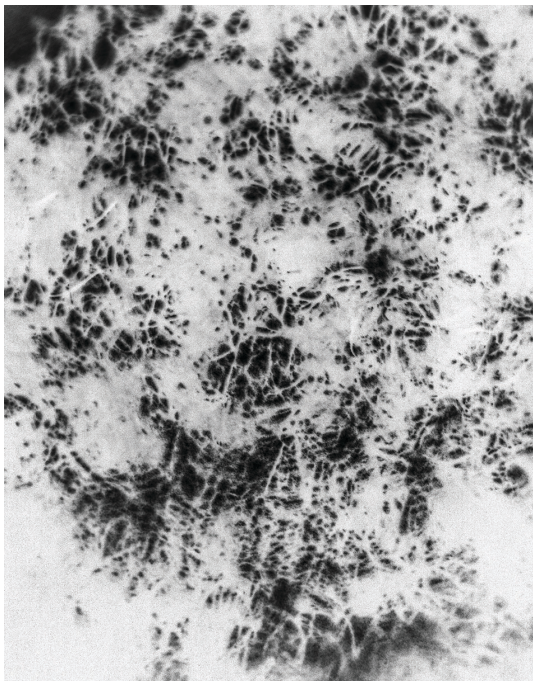


Figure 1.5



Figure 1.6

Figures 1.3–1.6. *Stainless Steel Scour*, 2016. Mixed Media.



Figure 1.7



Figure1.8

Figures 1.7–1.8. *Stainless Steel Scour*, 2016. Mixed Media.

This dissatisfaction lead me to explore more sculptural approaches. In my following explorations, I looked at dimension in real space and experimented with plaster and spray paint (*figures 1.9–1.10*). This was perhaps one of my first conscious moves towards escaping flatness. During the plaster experiments, one of the plaster panels had accidentally fallen and broken up into little pieces. The mobility of these small fragments sparked the idea in me to juxtapose and glue them onto flat paper surfaces. This lead into exploring abstract collage compositions that displayed physical materials such as tape, paper, acetate, thread, and the plaster bits (*figures 2.1–2.2*). In these experiments, I achieved an intriguing depth and layering of materials that freed me from the usual confinement of digital and mechanical production I normally operate at as a designer. Unknowingly, at the time, this search to escape flatness underpinned the motives which guided my craft direction and my search for physical presence.



Figure 1.9

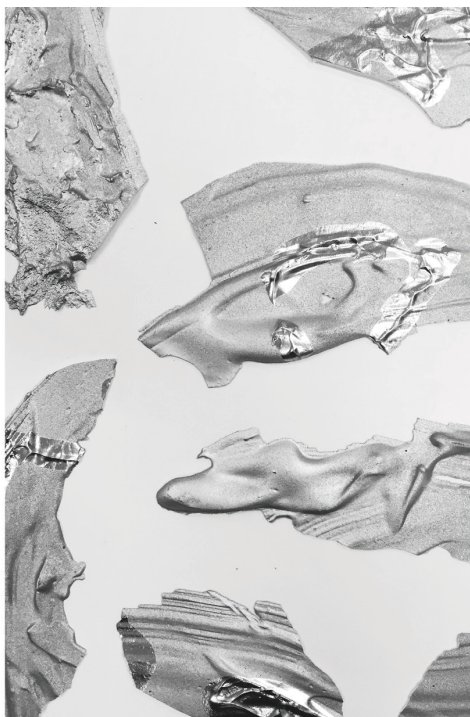


Figure 1.10



Figure 2.1



Figure 2.2

Figures 1.9–1.10. *Stainless Steel Scour*, 2016. Mixed Media.

Figures 2.1–2.2. *Material Collage*, 2016. 11" x 17". Mixed Media.

One of my initial works that positioned my handcraft argument was a course project titled *Stop and Smell the Roses* (figures 3.1–3.2). In this project I use an image from a book I found at an antique store, titled *Roses: How to Know and Grow Them*. The book was published in Italy, in the early 1970s and emphasizes the use of large, vibrant film photography. The layouts are artful in composition, and structured in a grid system. The book is organized and utilitarian. The large images dominate the content of the book, but never disrupt the legibility of the accompanying text. When I purchased the book, I had no particular plan for its role in my work; I was mostly drawn to the large images of roses and the potential implications surrounding the notions of growth. At the time, I began to cultivate a fascination for embroidery and sewing. This project was one of the first explorations of thread, in which I imposed embroidery onto mechanically produced imagery. For my base layer, I scanned a page from the book and then heat-transferred it onto raw canvas. Removed from its original context, the page's number and textual content lost its utility and meaning. I overlapped the images with custom type embroidery. I made use of the phrase “Stop and Smell the Roses,” a cliché which conceptually alludes to the slow process required in handcraft embroidery. In illustrating the typography, I utilized curves



Figure 3.1



Figure 3.2

Figures 3.1–3.2. *Stop and Smell the Roses*, 2016. 10.5" x 14". Embroidery on canvas.

and decorative flourishes which deliberately accentuate excessive visual qualities that counter rational structures and utility found in the book. The curves and sprouting decorative lines, likewise, mimic plant growth and structures. I unify the two planes by assigning a red monotone colour palette to the project—signifying the commonly associated colour of a rose.

Though successfully communicating the message of value found in the dedication of time and handcraft. I ultimately found the use of literal text in the work both creates a communicative redundancy, and diverts attention away from the phenomenology present in the act of handcraft. For me, the textual message gives away too quickly the ideas and notions behind the quality of a hand process, which reduces the need for further inquiry and observation. What is lost in the immediacy of a written message, is the slow observation and curiosity required for reading communicative qualities in form and physical manipulations of material. The embroidery exposes physical imperfections that are not immediate, but discovered in closer observation. In this work particularly, the stitching gradually becomes refined over time. There is a progressive tightening and directional consistency in my stitch-work that improves with each letter. This observation provides insight to where I (the maker) began, and ended the embroidery work. The stitching captures the embodiment of time and physical human effort, that is easily glazed over by the immediacy of representation and conceptual thinking.

REVIVING FORM THROUGH HANDCRAFT

Here I will return to “Roses: How to Know and Grow Them” and discuss a more substantial project that grew out of it, with a deeper understanding of physical thinking. This time around, I bring focus to the organic and abstract structures of the flowers present in the images of the book. In a new project titled, *It Takes a Loyal Gardener to Tend Roses* (seen in *Figures 4.1–4.4*), I trace the flower forms with thread-work, directly onto the paper pages of the book. On one side of the page, the sewn path directly traces the printed forms. On the obverse side of the page, the thread reveals a path that is unpredictably placed on the page, and results in visual and compositional surprise (*Figure 4.3*). On this side of the page, the backing mechanics of the stitch are revealed—displaying a tangled disorder. Also apparent are instances where the needle missed its stitch and left behind punctured holes and disordered repairs. The imperfections and material contingencies of the thread-work disrupt the utility of the book, as it permeates the print layer. The hand stitching interferes with legibility, and the rational order of the book. In this way, I transform the book’s original form and function by introducing

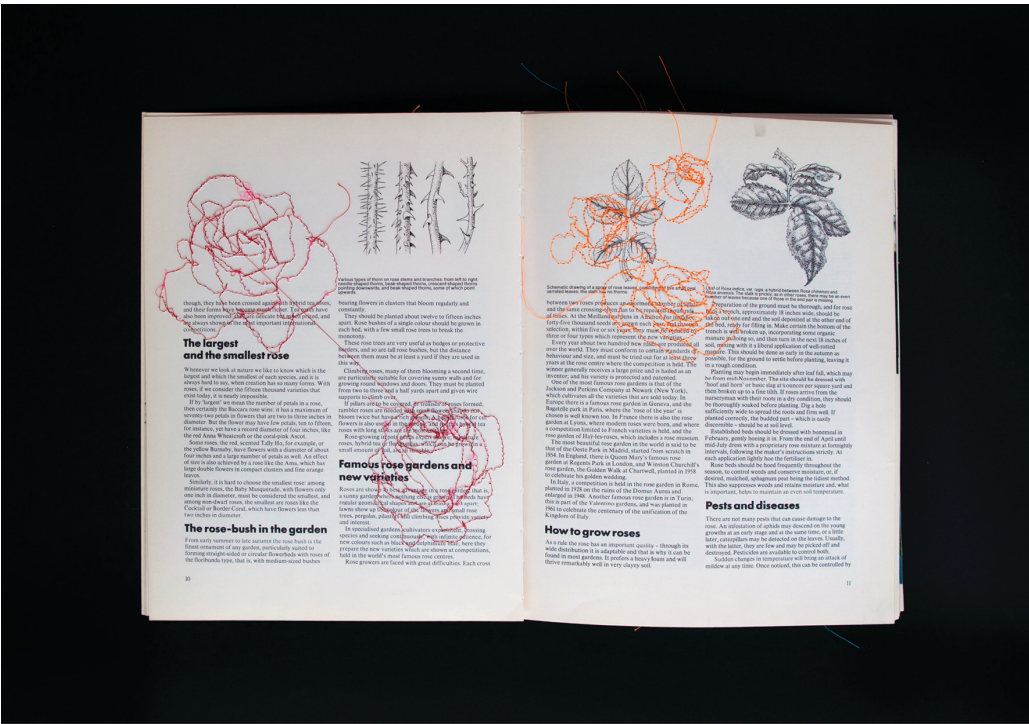


Figure 4.1



Figure 4.2

Figures 4.1–1.2. *It Takes a Loyal Gardener to Tend Roses*, 2017. 9" x 12". Thread on paper.



Figure 4.3



Figure 4.4

Figures 4.3–4.4. *It Takes a Loyal Gardener to Tend Roses*, 2017. 9" x 12". Thread on paper.

analogue handwork into the mechanically produced object. The act of overlaying hand stitching reclaims a physical presence and brings attention to the language of form and material, rather than written content. By engaging with printed matter in a haptic way, the flat surface is supplemented by a sculptural dimension. The two-dimensional printed surface is reconfigured and brought into a three-dimensional space. The thread-work awakens the physical attributes of nature found in the content of the book, which affects the way in which the work is experienced and read. Handcraft celebrates diversity and delays the immediate gratification which is typically present in the rational conventions of industrialized production. Unlike digital or mechanical production, the presence of a physical gesture communicates tacitly with the viewer. Handcraft showcases diversity through the risk driven process of the individual's handwork and results in unique visual outcomes. Bruce Metcalf writes that handcraft stands for "the rich potential of the human body at work and against disembodiment in all its forms."⁷⁴ When the hand (or body) is involved in production, no replica can compete with its presence. In this way, handcraft gains its voice and authenticity through the involvement of the physical body.

This project both exhibits a contrast between the workmanship of certain and risk, as well as a harmony that is achievable between the two modes of production. While the two planes convey very different voices contrasted by their respective workmanship, they find harmony in their shared form similarities. The delicacy of the thread speaks to the fragility of the rose petals, and the imperfections found in the thread work. The irregularities of hand production parallel a flower's growth, in that both handcraft and nature create imperfect forms and characteristics which reflect their authenticity. In the sewing process, I alternate between fluorescent thread colours, which contrast with the different coloured roses and backgrounds found in the photographs. The sewn tracing process continues throughout the entirety of the reconfigured and rebound book. Page after page, the newly realized book format allows for a temporal experience that gradually unfolds to reveal a breadth and depth of the thread-work. It is an intimate experience which absorbs the spectator in unexpected physical gestures; generating inquiry about how the forms came about. Handcraft serves as a method in reviving the essence of physical reality that is lost in industrial production and in the practice of graphic design.

⁷⁴ Bruce Metcalf, "Contemporary Craft: A Brief Overview," In *Exploring Contemporary Craft: History, Theory and Critical Writing*, edited by Jean Johnson, (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2002), 16.

RISK AS DESIGN PROCEDURE

In a further investigation of the transformative quality handcraft offers, I will now turn to a project that explores a further incorporates risk procedures into my process. In *Risk Study* (Figures 5.1–5.7), I reproduce a composition I created through digital and mechanical printing. Following that, I treated each individual print with a layer of risk procedures. This project illustrates the unique and unrepeated compositions that result with the integration of the workmanship of risk. The printed work originated as a collage created by hand. Scanning and digital printing provided me with the ability to create multiple copies. However, the digital reproductions of the work lacked a physical presence and authority. This is because the printed image was in constant reference to the collage. The tracings of memory of the hand are no longer present but flattened into the reproduced set of six prints. To revive a physical presence, I stencilled spray paint layers which I masked off using leftover paper cut-outs remaining from my initial collage work. The overlapping texture of the spray paint imbues the flat surface with individual character and revives its memory.



Figure 5.1



Figure 5.2

Figures 5.1–5.2. *Risk Study*, 2017. 14" x 19". Print and spray-paint on paper.



Figure 5.3



Figure 5.4



Figure 5.5



Figure 5.6

Figures 5.3–5.6. *Risk Study*, 2017. 14" x 19". Print and spray-paint on paper.



Figure 5.7

Figures 5.7. *Risk Study*, 2017. 14" x 19". Print and spray-paint on paper.

The masking of each spray-painted layer involved working in a “blind” manner. I could estimate the approximate areas where the spray paint would land, however the various layers and distracting images present on the collage pieces, made it impossible to visualize or control my final composition or output. Each added layer and colour of spray paint overlaps with the previous layer, as well as the base digital print. This resulted in the crossing of colours, forms, and textures. For example, a yellow layer overlapping a pink one generated an orange hue. While every print layer is repeated, the involvement of the hand and its spontaneous collaboration with materials manifests in varying and surprising outcomes. The results of this study is a collection of works which appear to be similar but possess a very particular individuality that is not possible to recreate. Each work is a unique recording of my personal gesture culminated by my choices, responses, and the dexterity of my hand. By working and “making do” with what I had present at hand,⁷⁵ my process closely exemplifies *bricolage*, a French term which loosely translates to “tinkering.” Anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss elaborates on the

⁷⁵ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), 17.

ideology of bricolage and the unknown variables which he defines as an intrinsic part of the *bricoleur's* process.

He writes:

*but the contingent can also play an intrinsic part in the course of execution itself, in the size or shape of the piece of wood the sculptor lays hands on, in the direction and quality of its grain, in the imperfections of his tools, in the resistance which his materials or project offer to the work in the course of its accomplishment, in the unforeseeable incidents arising during work.*⁷⁶

Learning to accept unknown variables and allowing them to lead my process, not only produces unique results but also influences my personal creative approach. There is a give and take relationship between what I intentionally plan out, and the risks involved in the physical engagement with material. What this gives me is a more direct relationship to form. The involvement of handcraft requires a closer consideration towards shaping matter that is not bound to the demands of conceptual planning. I respond to my materials and make decisions that inject my voice through my work, which bear the traces of my physical conversation with unknown variables.

ORGANIC AND STRUCTURED ORDERS

In *Digital Flowers & Craft Vectors* (Figures 6.1–6.4), I explore the juxtaposition of digital elements and collage work. In this series, I first worked by hand to create collage compositions using organic shapes and layouts. Once I had these works established, I scanned and scaled them to large compositions printed at 23" x 33.5". Secondly, I created vector elements which were inspired by floral ornamentation found in folk traditions such as embroidery, weaving, and decorative painting. These elements were digitally designed as graphic and symmetrical shapes, set into patterned grid structures. This layer of shapes was then laser cut to match the scale of the prints, and used as big stencils to spray-paint overtop of the digital prints. The creation process and production output switched roles. While the collage work underwent digital manipulation and printing, the ornate vector shapes were stencilled by hand. The repetition and structure of the vector shapes contrast the organic shapes and layout of the collage work. Likewise, the single coloured, flat, sharp edges of the vector shapes contrast the colourful, tone-ranging, photographic fragments. The physical spray paint material overlays the digital print, in a crossing of the workmanship of certainty and the workmanship of risk.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 27.



Figure 6.1



Figure 6.2



Figure 6.3



Figure 6.4

Figures 6.1–6.4. *Digital Flowers & Craft Vectors*, 2017. 23" x 33.5". Print and spray-paint on paper.

Though this project accomplishes the methodological structure of my argument, it does not achieve the intimacy handcraft requires. The big scale and bold graphics allow the work to be seen from a distance. While this is normally a positive attribute in graphic design, in the context of my research, the work fails to invite the spectator closer. Only upon closer inspection, do material contingencies and handcraft errors become apparent. The spray-paint reveals risk characteristics such as fuzzing along the edges of vector shapes caused by shifts or lifting of the stencil. These details aren't however detectable from a distance. While spray-paint is a material that allowed me to cover larger surfaces, it lacks the slow paced quality and intimacy that thread, for example, achieves.

BETWEEN RISK AND CERTAINTY

In the series titled *Between Flowers* (see in *Figures 7.1–7.7*) I use collage, digital printing, and thread-work. This project bounces between the workmanship of risk and certainty in a back-and-forth fashion similar to a tennis match. I began the project with collage work, which makes use of existing print material such as magazines and calendars. However, it is important to note that before cutting the images of flowers out for my own use, that these images were captured in their original context. The collage flowers that I use in my work were first present in the physical world, then photographed, and then applied in the design work of the various print materials that I select and cut from. The flowers were thus flattened by photography, digital composition, and mechanical production—all of which are part of the workmanship of certainty. Returning to my collage, the images bounce back to the workmanship of risk, where I cut and compose the elements in an analogue process. The use of the hand reasserts a physical presence which was lost in the flattening of the photograph. Following that, I scanned the collage work, colour corrected, intervened with vector elements such as type, scaling it to a desired size, and printed them, which brings it back, yet again, to a process driven by certainty. To complete the work, I hand-sewed thread to the surface of the printed output which overlaps the digital and mechanical composition. In this final step, the work comes a full circle by returning to the workmanship of risk; reflecting the flowers' physicality. The handcraft layer revives the essence of nature which has been flatted two-fold by the digital. This back and forth process reveals my underlying methodology which bounces between artificial and natural structures. In this way I play two roles which alternate between risk and certainty procedures. Digital process and print reproduction offer certainty but flatten the reality of my image, while handcraft offers physical presence of reality only through the process of involved risk. Playing this back and forth game, I explore the potential for unconventional mixtures of process, disciplines, and perceptions.



Figure 7.1



Figure 7.2



Figure 7.3

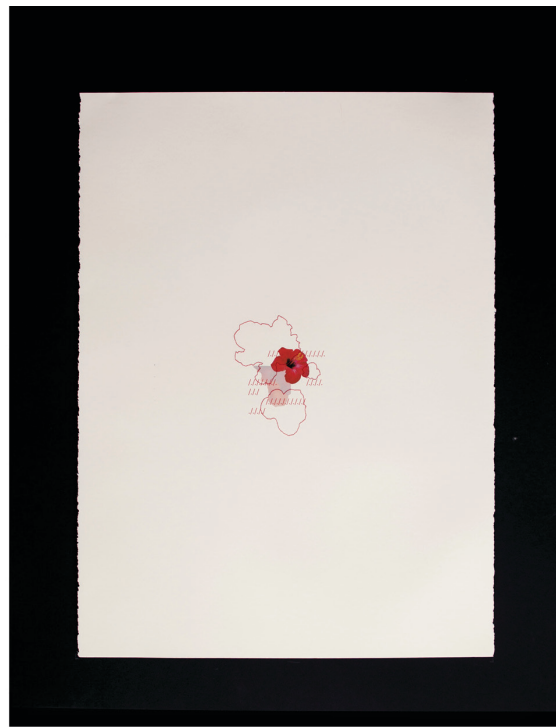


Figure 7.4

Figures 7.1–7.4. *Between Flowers*, 2017. 22" x 30". Print and thread on paper.



Figure 7.5

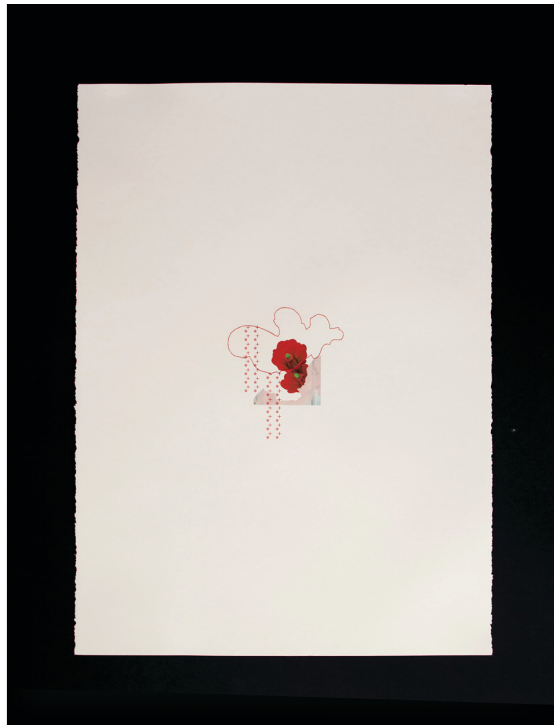


Figure 7.6



Figure 7.7

Figures 7.5–7.7. *Between Flowers*, 2017. 22" x 30". Print and thread on paper.

The thread-work in this project borrows forms from elements present in the collage work which parallel the forms found in the both the flower images as well as my hand cut collage fragments. The organic qualities found in nature and in handcraft manifest through the imperfect line-work varying in stitch consistency and direction. The thinness of the thread outlining the shapes I sewed, sharply contrast the full images and elements present in the scanned collage elements. It is as though the thread is mimicking digital forms, and the print's mimicking physical reality, creating an unconventional visual language. Furthermore, the rag paper colour resembles warm earth tones. The deckle-edges of the paper form irregular shapes which add to the handcraft quality, as oppose to straight machine-cut edges. Upon presentation, the nature of thread-work requires an intimate setting to be seen. The thread-work is only experienced upon a closer inspection. By approaching the work closer, the details of the sewing process become physically apparent, and the illusions of the collage elements can be detected as printed layers. To accentuate this intimate viewing experience, I chose to work small scale and provided a deliberate large amount of paper space surrounding the compositions. The exaggerated amount of space invites the spectator to approach the work closer, in order to examine the quiet and delicate work of the thread. It is here in the observational closeness that the thread mends a relationship to digital and mechanical production. Between risk and certainty, tacit and conceptual knowledge come together. This visual research discovers a space for the unconventional intersection of handcraft and mechanical production, and concludes with works that explore physical thinking and the voice of the maker.

REFLECTIONS

The hand manifests a beauty that is not captured by either the digital, reproduced, or representational methods of communication. Rather, the hand is crude, and despite all practice and intentions, it performs under the continuous mode of risk. This susceptibility to error—however big or small—is the embodiment of human life and nature. Life breathes through the hands; transmitting its character essence into every gesture and action. And above all, the hands make evident the honesty of the individual, in all their uncertainties and mistakes. In *The Life of Forms in Art*, French art historian Henri Focillon explains,

I undertake this essay in praise of hands as if in fulfillment of a duty to a friend. Even as I begin to write, I see my own hands calling out to my mind and inciting it. Here, facing me, are these tireless companions who for so many years have served me well, one holding the paper steady, the other peopling the white page with hurried, dark, active little marks. Through his hands man establishes contact with the austerity of thought. They quarry its rough mass. Upon it they impose form, outline and, in the very act of writing, style.

Hands are almost living beings. Only servants? Possibly. Servants, then, endowed with a vigorous free spirit, with a physiognomy. Eyeless and voiceless faces which nonetheless see and speak. Some blind persons eventually acquire a touch so sensitive that they can identify playing cards by the infinitesimal thickness of the shapes printed on them. But those who can see also need their hands to see with, to complete the perception of appearances by touching and holding. The aptitudes of hands are written in their curves and structure. There are tapered slender hands, expert in analysis, with the long and mobile fingers of the logician; prophetic fluid hands; spiritual hands whose very inactivity has grace and character; and tender hands. Physiognomy, once diligently practiced by those who were expert in it, would have benefited by a knowledge of hands. The human face is above all a composite of the receptive organs. The hand means action: it grasps, it creates, at times it would seem even to think. In repose, the hand is not a soulless tool lying on the table...⁷⁷

Since the very moment I took on craft as my research direction, I experienced the frustration of attempting to define it. In the conventional sense, craft aims to master a tool and way of working. A traditional craftsman works until the risks encountered in their process are least evident and in their mastered control. I began my research with an aim towards an impossible ideal of perfection which ultimately defeated the quality I was searching for. Over the course of my research, and many mistakes later, it became apparent that nothing I was creating by hand was—or really should be—perfect. If I were searching for perfection, I could easily achieve it by returning to my computer and opening up a software program. It was this moment of discovery that allowed

⁷⁷ Henri Focillon, *The Life of Forms in Art* (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1948), 65.

me to consider and research the terms *risk* and *certainty*. By releasing the absolute need for control—which is both idolized in the traditional craft sense and glorified in the discipline of design—I created a methodology that steps outside of craft and design convention.

My visual work would not have been created, researched, or discovered, if I had not set aside my need to control the end product or resulting outcomes. Though it created a lot of fear to accept not knowing, and running the risk of destroying my work, the visual research I produced was nothing I would have ever created with an expectation in mind. It is perhaps the human condition to search for meaning and control, though surprisingly wonderful things occur when we simply let that go. Lévi-Strauss writes:

*the 'bricoleur' also, and indeed principally derives his poetry from the fact that he does not confine himself to accomplishment and execution: he 'speaks' not only with things, ... but also through the medium of things: giving an account of his personality and life by the choices he makes between the limited possibilities. The 'bricoleur' may not ever complete his purpose but he always puts something of himself into it.*⁷⁸

Through the involvement of the workmanship of risk offered by handcraft, my research concludes that uncertainties and mistakes have the ability to elevate graphic design practice and education. The involvement of the hand stresses the individual maker's physical knowledge and sensitivity towards form, which shapes their understanding of visual language and their independent approaches surrounding it. Implementing and studying the unique voice of the maker in the context of graphic design practice, results in curious and meaningful work. It is thus integral for the designer or maker, to study physical thinking and consider their individual approaches to shaping form and content. As Rock states, "We are intimately, physically connected to the work we produce, and it is inevitable that our work bears our stamp."⁷⁹ This research intersects certainty procedures related to graphic design production with risk procedures inherent to handcraft. In this crossing, conceptual and physical knowledge come together to explore the missing relationship between form and representation found in the design discipline. The risk and certainty hybrid method results in a developed sensitivity towards form, and culminates to a richer way of seeing, thinking, and making.

⁷⁸ Lévi-Strauss, 21.

⁷⁹ Rock, 95.

IMPLICATIONS

Contemporary visual communication suffers from the cultural blind spot when it comes to tacit knowledge. My visual research seeks to find a balance between digital or industrial production and the physical nature of human reality. I explores the formal qualities of finesse and complexity that are otherwise difficult to achieve in the manufacturing world. My findings conclude that there are visual territories to explore outside of the controlled, mass produced environment, and even someplace in-between. An emphasis on rationalized production separates the designer from their work and results in a lost sensitivity to physical knowledge. My thesis argues that the involvement of the individual is not a detriment to a work of design, but is instead vital to a work's and designer's self-awareness. The artist, designer, and craftsperson all carry the responsibility in understanding their involvement and the language which they work with. Lorraine Wild writes that,

*the best way to salvage graphic design in the face of the juggernaut of technology and the demands of the market is to nurture authentic individual voices in graphic design, and to recognize that individuality manifests itself in form made independently of conceptual analysis or the market.*⁸⁰

Rather than reducing graphic design to a theoretical argument,⁸¹ I explore the undefined visual possibilities found in design production at its intersection with handcraft. There is a beauty to be found in the unexpected. Risk procedures promote physical inquiry which generate unique visual surprises. In addition, the exploration of unknowns serves as a valid contribution to the design research process and to honing a sensitivity towards form. This means that analogue craft processes generate a knowledge that is outside of planned and calculated methodologies. It is only through the journey and exploration of the unknowns that new questions arise. For the discipline of design this is significant, as new questions promote new invention and ways of communicating. Though by no means does this research suggest a single formula to which all graphic design should aspire to be, but rather offers an ideology that investigates the missing gap between form and representation found in contemporary visual communication. Furthermore, the study of physical thinking offers a knowledge which constructs the very core of design practice and education—visual language. Encouraging the sensitivity towards physical thinking supports the knowledge of form and self. Graphic design can benefit by bonding with the slow, risk-driven, empirical process that handcraft offers. Bridging handcraft

⁸⁰ Wild, "The Macramé of Resistance." 47.

⁸¹ Ibid.

with mechanical production exemplifies the embrace of risk and uncertainty. As a result, curious and unique outputs occur in the release of control.

Through the application of handcraft, the area of print design acquires an additional layer of substance. Digital or industrial methods are transformed by the use of the hand in the exploration of material dynamics such as surface, depth, and dimension. Handcraft, in the context of graphic design, becomes a catalyst between the eye and the object, which engages physical thinking and material reality. As William Morris argues, handcraft is the most fundamental and common element found between civilizations.⁸² Morris means that, tacit knowledge is a credible and unifying source for communication shared between all people. By emphasizing the hands as a method for inquiry, this research critiques the faith contemporary culture holds towards theoretical knowledge and argues the relevance of physical thinking in the discipline of design. There is information to be gained from visual stimuli, be it representational or form-based. This means that visual communication does not require an attachment to rational or language-based knowledge in order to communicate. Handcraft informs aesthetic experience by physically relating to the senses. The application of tacit knowledge and craft theory in the context of graphic design reveals the individual knowledge and character of the maker. Course writes, "Craft objects embody basic human activities of forming the physical world and manipulating it; we respond haptically not to the concepts as artwork suggests, but rather to the relationship of the maker to the forms, materials, and techniques of the art work."⁸³ The unique vagaries of handcraft inform aesthetic experience by enriching communication culture with the haptic qualities of the individual. By intersecting tacit and conceptual knowledge, this research explores the missing congruity between form and representation.⁸⁴ The aim is not to value one knowledge over the other, but to create an environment which welcomes both forms to exist in a shared exploration. Through the crossing of risk and certainty procedures, handcraft complements the work of digital production and culminates in a richer means of communication.

⁸² William Morris, "The Lesser Arts," In *Hopes and Fears for Art*, (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1929), 8–9.

⁸³ Course, 96.

⁸⁴ Dormer, 35.

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APPENDIX

(Full works may be viewed at www.julia.com)

1. *How to Grow Orchids*, a duotone book contrasting production methods that disrupt originating utility.



Figure 8.1



Figure 8.2

Figures 8.1–8.2. *How to Grow Orchids*, 2017. 8" x 10.75". Print and thread on paper.



Figure 8.5

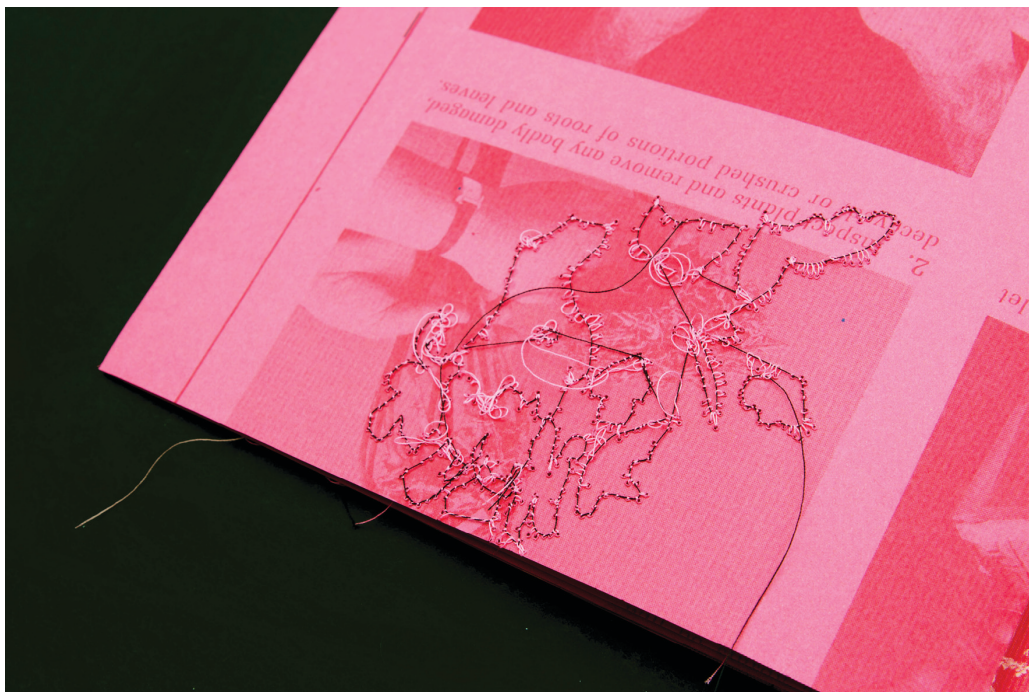


Figure 8.6

Figures 8.5–8.6. *How to Grow Orchids*, 2017. 8" x 10.75". Print and thread on paper.

2. *A Quote by Henri Matisse*, a poster triptych playing on the perceptive illusions of print versus object. The quote alludes to an escape of learned representational notions.



Figure 9.1



Figure 9.2



Figure 9.3

Figures 9.1–9.3. *A Quote by Henri Matisse*, 2017. 22" x 30". Print, collage, and thread on paper.



Figure 9.4



Figure 9.5

Figures 9.4–9.5. *A Quote by Henri Matisse*, 2017. 22" x 30". Print, collage, and thread on paper.

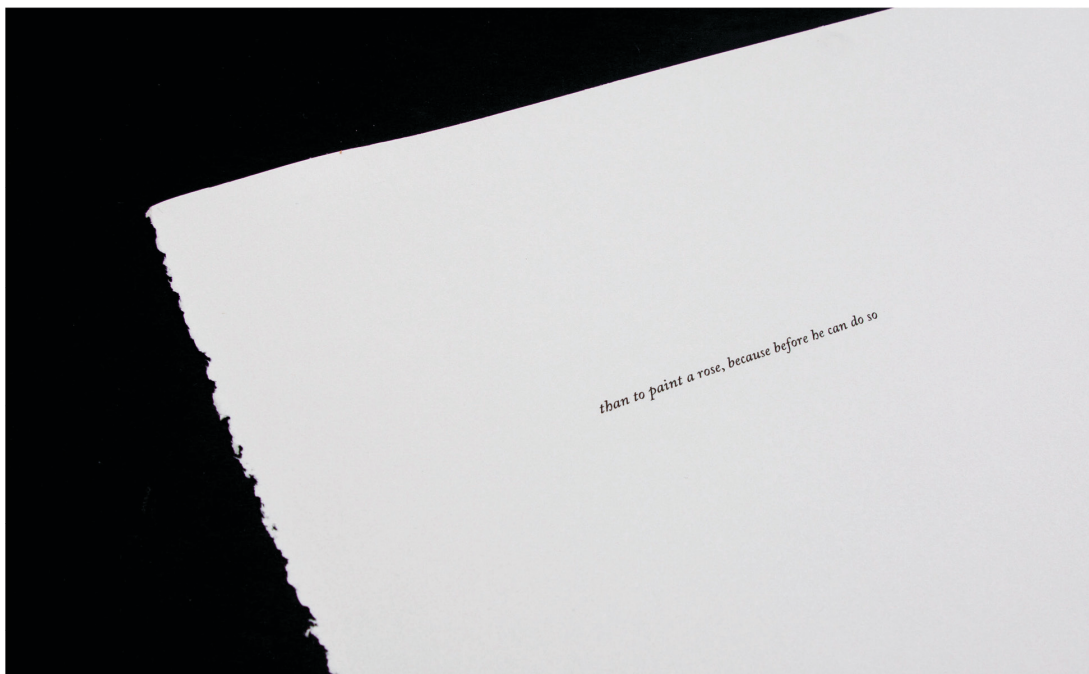


Figure 9.6

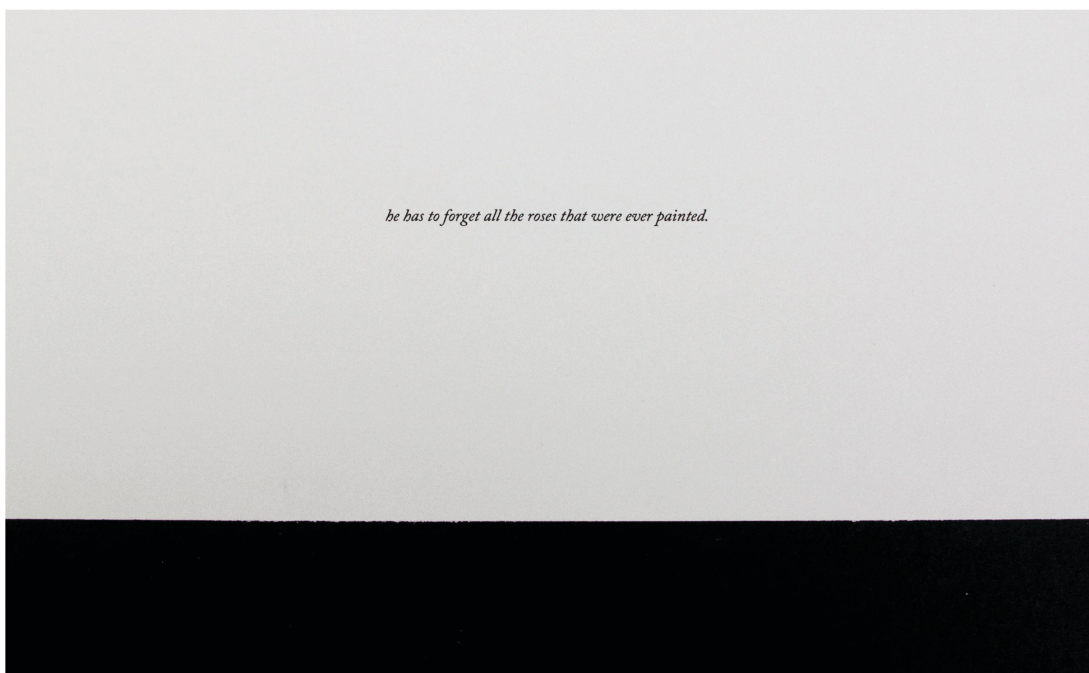


Figure 9.7

Figures 9.6–9.7. *A Quote by Henri Matisse*, 2017. 22" x 30". Print, collage, and thread on paper.