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**GENERATING INSIGHT INTO THE NATURE OF EXISTENCE; THE PROCESS OF
UNRAVELING LOGIC.**

By

Keith Reed Hayden II

BFA University of Massachusetts, 2000

A THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Fine Arts
(in Intermedia)

The Graduate School

The University of Maine

August 2020

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Chair: Dr. Susan L. Smith

An Abstract of the Thesis Presented
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This paper discusses the author's creative practice as it relates to the evolutionary origins of the unique aspects of human consciousness and their implication throughout time. A methodological approach that models cognitive systems that have developed based on these implications is described. The art works that these models generate are described in the context of contemporary art practice as well as their relevance to the author's personal spiritual journey, especially in light of his involvement with Zen Buddhism and eastern philosophy.

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CHAPTER 1

THE SELF REFERENTIAL VIEWPOINT

1.1 Introduction

As an artist and Craftsman I've spent many years engaged in the activity of making things. I have made boats, houses, signs and furniture. Of all the activities I have been engaged with over the course of my life, my art practice has been the most rewarding. The making of art for me has been the activity that continually raises questions about the nature of the world and my place in it. As these sorts of questions arise I have searched for ways to explore them through my process. These explorations have led to the implementation of other practices. Practices that engage the physical body and the mind, such as Brazilian jiu-jitsu, fasting and meditation, to name a few. For years I engaged in these other disciplines in parallel to my art. Zen Buddhism has been my primary spiritual practice. Before engaging in and even at the beginning of my graduate studies I believed if I employed Zen as a primary tool for making art I would somehow lose my original artistic expression. I believed that I would just become another westerner hijacking Zen for my own purposes. To understand how Zen may be utilized in any activity in the world we must understand some things about Zen. One of the most basic teachings of Zen is that there is no separate self. Detong Choyin who is a Buddhist nun, ordained by the Dalai Lama, said that, "the self exists only as a foil for "objects/others" that the mind grasps at as separate. It is through the giving up of attachment to the "objects/others", by gaining insight into the true nature of their existence, that the individual gradually gives up attachment to the conceptual support of "self". Having done so, the individual "goes beyond" this level of existence based in ignorance and awakens from the dream". (Choyin xvi). Any practice that begins with a dualistic view of the world is not Zen. Zen is one thing and everything simultaneously but it is never a

dichotomy. If a person believes themselves to be a Westerner engaged in an eastern practice they are not utilizing Zen. When a person begins with the concept of us and them they have established a logic based on dichotomy. The concept of us and them is what, as Choyin says, they grasp at as other. This other is what supports the “self”. Zen must be engaged without reservation. If one is to utilize it they must understand that the self is only a function of the view they take. It is in this spirit that I have chosen to engage my work.

For many years my work consisted of abstract wooden sculptures. I viewed these pieces as formalist works and made it a point to avoid discussing the inspirations behind them. It has become obvious to me now that Zen has played a primary role in the development of these pieces as well as everything that has followed. Being introduced to someone like John Cage, and seeing how Zen is engaged in his work, was eye-opening for me. It was after seeing his work that I began to utilize techniques involving algorithms and chance operations. I also began to engage in monastic retreats. Through these retreats and practices I have come to understand more clearly how to engage my art practice as a Zen practice and vice versa. Ultimately trying to work without reservation in a spirit of unity with all things and beings.

What is described here is a specific philosophy that I, as an individual and artist, use to investigate and understand my place in the world. It is based heavily on certain Buddhist ideas. I would like to point out right from the start is that what is described is not a complete representation of Buddhist philosophy. The work strives to uncover the origins of human consciousness through Zen, cognitive science and art. It is done in order to reveal the root of suffering, but does not however discuss suffering or how to handle it. This question of how to cope with our own suffering as well as the suffering of others is a primary concern in Buddhism. As we gain more and more understanding into the nature of existence and understand the

interconnected nature of all things and beings we are able to generate compassion and empathy. My contribution to this effort is to investigate the origins of consciousness. It is important to use the understanding gleaned from this work to bring compassion and empathy into the world, both for ourselves and others. According to Buddhist teaching the path that leads us to liberation from suffering begins with the right view or understanding. This first step is where I focus my research and my work is an expression of that investigation. Although I believe a work of art that expresses the right view can be a powerful tool, I acknowledge that there are many other factors that must be considered in order to achieve true liberation from suffering. My work is not intended to describe or address all these factors, rather it is meant to manifest compassion and empathy directly in the world through abstract expressions of the ideas I am working with. It is my belief that the presence of such work provides an opportunity that is available less and less in contemporary culture.

1.2 Original Mode of Operation

I would like to explain the nature of my practice by speaking about my aspiration to gain insight into the nature of existence and how I model cognitive systems to achieve this. However, as a spiritual and art based practice it is implemented in ways that need some clarification. As I stated in the introduction I engage my practice without reservation and do not concern myself with the notion of justifications based in contrast. Part of this approach means that I do not find any difficulty in referring to myself as the gateway to understanding. To be clear I mean understanding for myself in my own practice. It may seem ironic or illogical for someone practicing and utilizing Zen to say that they see themselves as the gateway to understanding. In fact this idea that someone may access understanding through the individual manifestation of the whole is a very old eastern view of understanding. In the Chandogya Upanishad, one of the

oldest Hindu texts, it says; “There is an eternal all pervading intelligence in which all individual souls are rooted. That supreme awareness is the final truth. That is your innermost being . You are that.” (Johnsen 115). In order for me to implement my practice in a way that is in keeping with these principles I cannot begin with the dualist notion that the insight I seek is to be found outside of myself. The self I refer to here is the self spoken of in the Chandogya Upanishad. This self is not easily found and that is the point of the practice. I am not saying “I have all the answers and bam, here they are in my work”. I am saying the answers lie somewhere within, beyond common perception, and I am on a quest to find them.

Existence has a true nature, a nature that exists independent of the perceiver. When I say that it is my aspiration to generate insight into the nature of existence this is what I am referring to. However, the way in which this existence is understood is dependent upon who is perceiving it and how. Each person perceives this existence in a unique way dependent upon their particular beliefs. Beliefs are a direct result of a human's operational view of the world and although we have developed a multitude of nuanced ways of operating, I would like to discuss two specific modes of operation. The first mode we will call the “Original Mode”. In order to discuss the first mode we must look at our evolutionary past. It may be difficult to see how things that happened so long ago can be pertinent to a discussion about a person's art practice today, but in this case it is necessary. The original mode has been part of our DNA since the beginning of time. We, like all biological entities, have evolved from one source.(Than Web). One of the propositions I explore with my work is that we maintain this evolutionary link to all things and beings and that this link can act as an unfiltered connection through which we may experience existence in a direct non-conceptual way. Non-conceptual in the sense that there is minimal mental representation between the experience and the experiencer. In other words we can experience an

activity without building a narrative within our mind about who we are in relation to this thing we are doing. We do not think dualistically about the action, we simply engage it.

Most all people attest to having experienced the world in this way at one time or another. People describe this as "being in the zone" or "in flow". We can think of an athlete at peak performance or an artist who becomes so engrossed in their work that they lose track of time. In the original mode the sense of self gives way to something else, something within which they feel connected in the broadest sense of the word.

1.3 The New Mode

The second mode is quite different. We will call this mode the "New Mode". This new mode refers to a shift in human consciousness from a strictly biological process to a biological process plus the addition of "the immense diversity of imagined realities that sapiens invented"(Harari 37). Harari is referring here to implications of what he terms the cognitive revolution of about 70,000 years ago. If we examine the cognitive shift that he describes as being the indicator of the cognitive revolution, and compare this with the Buddhist notion of the separate self, we can start to see some interesting parallels. Detong Choyin describes the self as "a merely conceptual self separate from similarly illusory objects/ others; it believes both to be inherently existent, or "real" and therefore attainable, or graspable"(Choyin 14). Here we see that Choyin is indicating that when we interact with our world from the perspective of the separate self (self referential viewpoint) the experience becomes "illusory". Just as Harari speaks of a reality invented (at least in part) by our cognitive perspective, so does Choyin. In Buddhism the emphasis is on the moment at hand, so a Buddhist may not be as interested in investigating the origins of our cognitive perspective as much as dealing with its implications. A biologist, or as in the case of Harari, a historian, is more likely to provide us with some context within which

to consider this. Harari states that from the time of the cognitive revolution on, “It is not enough to comprehend the interactions of genes, hormones and organisms. It is necessary to take into account the interaction of ideas, images and fantasies as well”(Harari 38). The cognitive revolution was an evolutionary step. It was at this point that human cognition, likely due to some genetic mutation, shifted. This shift changes humans, “Enabling them to think in unprecedented ways and to communicate using an altogether new type of language”(Harari 21). As we can infer from the quote, this unprecedented way of thinking gave rise to ideas, images and fantasies. These things changed the way humans experienced the world. From an evolutionary perspective this shift in our way thinking was a huge advantage. We as a species have built an entire existence around these ideas, images and fantasies. These things enabled us to dream up and execute plans never before thought of by humans. These things allowed us to build structural wonders and invent concepts like money and credit and most importantly co-operate across vast numbers of our species. All of these things helped humans to thrive and expand to every corner of the globe. This is the new mode of thinking. This new mode sounds wonderful. However, I have indicated that there is a parallel between Harari’s statement and Choyin’s and when we read her statement she seems to be implying that this way of thinking is inherently flawed. It is at this point that we must be clear about what our motivations are. If we are interested in generating insight into the nature of existence, we must investigate the origins of our cognitive perspective and the implications of this perspective. The implications are complicated and colored by the person who describes them. A biologist or historian may describe it as a fortunate mutation that provided our species with unprecedented creative and deductive powers. When I examine how this cognitive shift is described I cannot help but see how this shift seems to have produced the very attributes that Buddhists describe as being the root of delusion. I will acknowledge that

biologists and historians are mostly concerned with questions that relate to the physical world while Buddhists and philosophers do not have this limitation. Scientists and academics rely heavily on reason and logic. Buddhism calls into question the application of logic and reason. In what we have termed the original mode, logic and reason seem to take a back seat to direct experience unencumbered by conceptual thoughts. In the new mode, through an evolutionary mutation which augmented the way humans perceive and interpret the world, logic and reason take the helm. An investigation into how logic is generated and applied will help us to understand how the two modes are working within us.

1.4 The Backward Step and the unraveling of Logic

What we think of as logic is really just elaborate systems of thinking based on, as Harari says; ideas, images and fantasies. Let me stop here and explain this statement. Human logic is unique. We consider logic to be the definition of veracity. When I say that logic is an elaborate system built essentially out of fantasy, you may be reluctant to accept this. As I consider how to describe this concept I am reminded of a quote by Krishnamurti who said “Truth is a pathless land, and you cannot approach it by any path whatsoever”.(Blau 86) This statement refers to the futile nature of calling on the sort of categorical, self referential logic systems that we commonly utilize to examine the nature (or truth) of reality. However, we as humans have evolved to favor this self referential mode of thinking and we must look deeply into this in order to understand the implications of it. In the previous chapter I stated that logic is a product of the new mode and that the new mode is self referential. To be clear what I am working with here is a theory of logic in which it is intrinsically tied to humans' cognitive shift, the shift to a self referential perspective. In other words we are not becoming mired down in human cultural history. What we are considering is the origins of the new mode of thinking and how it gave rise to our way of

understanding as a species. We must consider that all the cultural, historical and scientific information available to us from the point of the cognitive revolution on, is affected by the cognitive shift that resulted in our self referential dualistic perspective. In my practice the modeling of logic systems is not meant to confirm their veracity, but rather is meant to investigate their limitations. Ironically their limitations often reveal the original mode of understanding with which they are entwined within the human mind. The ability to gain insight lies in looking deeply into logic and then abandoning it. Dogen who was the founder of the Soto school of Zen in 13 century Japan said; “You should therefore cease from practice based on intellectual understanding, pursuing words and following after speech, and learn the backwards step that turns your light inwardly to illuminate yourself. Body and mind of themselves will drop away and your original face will be manifest. If you want to attain suchness you should practice suchness without delay” (Loori 21). Dogen traveled to China seeking a more authentic form of Buddhism and upon his return he promoted the practice of zazen (seated meditation), this quote is from *Fufanzazengi*, one the works he composed for this purpose. We may guess that when Dogen speaks of the backward step he is referring to meditation or general mindfulness. This would be a good guess in my opinion, but I think his statement indicates much more. We can view the backward step as the process of unraveling the logic which arose from the self referential mind and shapes the way in which we interpret our world. If we think of this from an evolutionary perspective, we can think of looking backward to the origins of our way of thinking and how this is tied to the notion of the self. In Daniel Dennett's book *Consciousness Explained* he looks very far back in deed, and describes our origins like this; “But after Millennia there happened to emerge simple replicators. While they had no inkling of their interests and perhaps properly speaking had no interests, we, peering back from our godlike vantage point at their

early days can non arbitrarily assign them certain interests - generated by their defining “interest” in self-replication.”(Dennett 173) This self-replication may seem a primitive drive and difficult to relate to our modern concerns but Dennett goes on to describe how this interest in self preservation is applied in the world; “As soon as something gets into the business of self-preservation, boundaries become important, for if you are setting out to preserve yourself, you don't want to squander effort trying to preserve the whole world: you draw the line. You become, in a word, selfish, (Dennett 174). When Dennett says “you draw the line” we can think to Harari’s statement about ideas, images and fantasies. We are drawing the line by creating a logic of dichotomy based on ideas, images and fantasies. This logic had a practical application, it is the very thing that our species used to survive. It is a system for navigating and influencing the physical world and in this sense does tell us about the nature of existence, at least in part. If we are interested in having the complete picture of the nature of existence however, we must unravel our current logic system and consider what we are left with.

This is what I am doing. The work is logical and organized, and although it varies from person to person, most people relate to it until they begin to sense the unraveling. When the system begins to produce images that they cannot categorize or utilizes steps that seem arbitrary they crave a logical explanation. A Justification. The work takes on a paradoxical nature where randomness seems to grow out of logic. This paradox is designed to create a point at which the viewer must either accept that the image before them exists independent of a logical justification or reject the overall premise. The rejection of the overall premise is a perfectly acceptable response. The search for insight is an introspective process and my practice is an investigation not a lesson. What I leave for the viewer is the artifact of my journey and perhaps the opportunity to begin their own.

CHAPTER 2

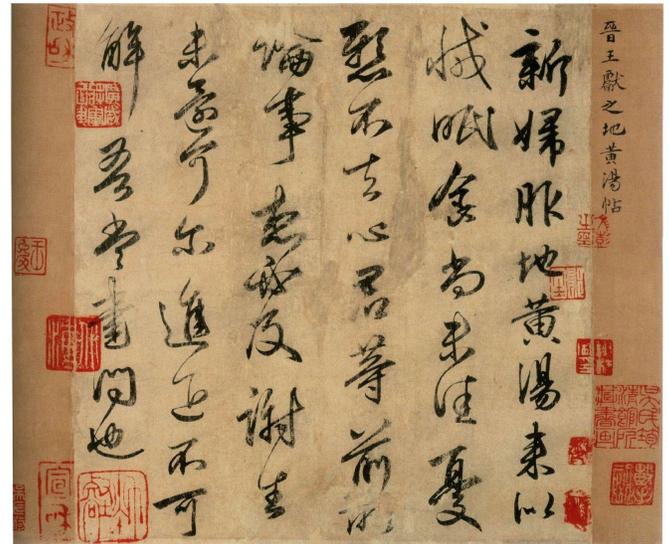
CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

In this section I will discuss how the motivations that drive my practice can be found in other disciplines. Generally speaking most human activity flows from the new mode to the original mode and back again, if it reaches the original mode at all. In the introduction I spoke about how the new mode has become the predominant way in which we act in the world. As we find ourselves operating from this self referential perspective, we must look for ways to use it to move into a way of thinking that reveals a more complete picture of reality. What follows are some examples of how this is possible.

2.1 Zen Practitioners and Japanese Calligraphy

My art practice is largely informed by but not limited to Concepts found in Zen Buddhism. I have practiced Zen Buddhism both on my own and within different groups. The overall tone of my work and the objective of my practice is similar in many ways to the practice of Zen. In the same way that Zen engages a philosophy in action (or non action) my work is an attempt to engage a philosophy and manifest the concepts in the world. Japanese Calligraphy is an interesting example of this sort of approach. When we look at it we see that there is an intention by the artist to engage a system in order to communicate something. The system in this case is the characters and their arrangement. Like all human language, the decisions about what the characters should look like and how they should be arranged are all decisions that were developed by utilizing the new mode of thinking. In other words humans used their self referential perspective to divide and categorize the world and then assign symbols to represent

these divisions. This system is the framework within which the expression starts. What happens next is when the artist picks up the brush and begins to engage the system the unknown enters the process. The characteristics of the paper and the brush and the ink all begin to influence the work. All of the unanticipated splatters, undulations and variations are accepted into the process. Many things are coming together to produce an expression. Some things flow from the artist some things flow from the system he/she engages and still some things flow from the unknown.

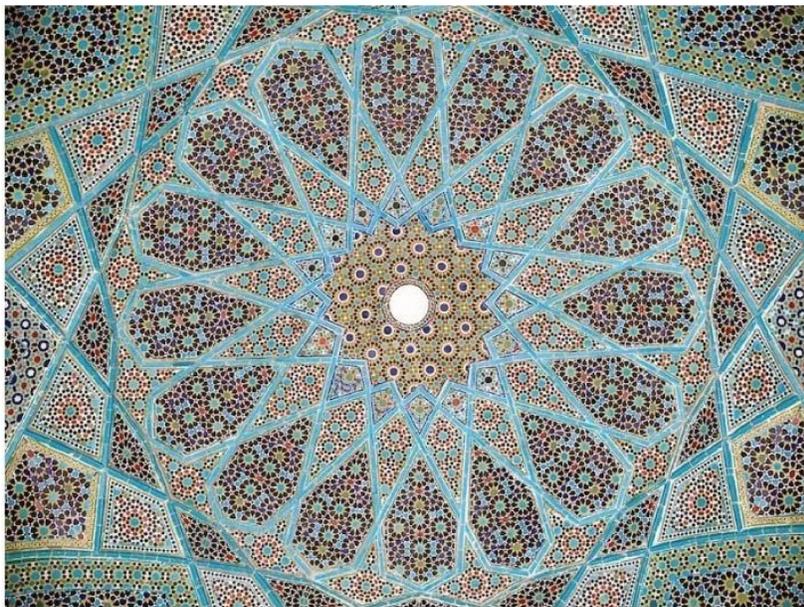


2.1 Tang Dynasty Chinese Calligraphy / *Enso* by Kanjuuro Shibata XX

2.2 Arabic tessellation

Most literature available on Arabic Tessellation tends to focus on the Historical and technical development of the practice. There are many references that state that the practice was developed in response to the fact that representation, especially of God, is forbidden in the

Muslim religion. In order to express their devotion Muslims looked for other connections to their God. “The Repeating Geometric Patterns are a glimpse into the Spiritual World and Perfection – Geometry has been associated with metaphysical properties long before Islam. For example, the Greeks had contemplated the perfection of Geometry and came to associate it with divine properties. The Muslims, who studied the Greeks' mathematical works, amongst other, agreed and integrated Geometric art as a spiritual gate to the divine plane”. (Azim24) I agree strongly with the last part of this statement. I believe the work to be a spiritual gate to the divine plane, I however would say that this divine plain is simply the acknowledgement of the interconnected world we inhabit. The point here is that again we see people utilizing an established logic system in a way that exposes and evokes a more complete understanding.



2.2 Iranian glazed ceramic tile work, from the tomb of hafel in shiraz, Iran.

2.3 Boat builders / Craftsmen

Many people build a life around craftsmanship. The journey from novice to expert can be viewed as a spiritual one. Most people, even people who are highly accomplished craftsmen, would likely shun this description. I can say, from first hand experience, that when one becomes completely competent in a particular area it becomes like a meditation. When I say a meditation I am not referring to an idea that most people have in their head, such a Zen monk sitting in zazen, but rather to a person engaging a system with such complete confidence that they are able to allow the unknown to influence the process. I take inspiration for my art practice from the act of building. When a person builds they start with an interest and an intention. The desire to express or explore this intention drives them to either utilize an existing system or create their own. It is possible for anyone to do this and if they are able to engage the system they have chosen without reservation then they will be able to invite the unknown into their practice. You will often hear this described as effortless. When a person completely trusts themselves and the unknown to flow together in action the work seems to happen rapidly and effortlessly.



2.3 Boat under construction at Brooklin Boat Yard Brooklin, Maine

2.4 Joseph Kosuth

Joseph Kosuth is a conceptual artist who questions the nature of art. When Joseph Kosuth makes a work like *Four colors Four Words* he is using a tautology to show that the work is complete within itself and needs no further explanation. The identification of the work as art comes from the artist and once identified in this way there is no further criteria that it must meet. Ironically this is a non-conceptual way to present something. What Kosuth is saying is that this is not a metaphor, it is art. He says that the work can only be art and nothing more. If we begin to imagine connections beyond the work we are fantasizing. He is not only using tautology to make the piece, he is saying that all artwork is tautological. It is only what it is. This is similar to what I am saying when I say that my finished work is meant to be experienced in a direct non-conceptual way.



2.4 *Four colors four words* Joseph Kosuth 1966

2.5 John Cage

“ We are not, in these dancing and music, saying something. We are simple-minded enough to think that if we were saying something we would use words. We are rather doing something. The meaning of what we do is determined by each one who sees and hears it.” (Cage 1961: 94)

In this writing John Cage is expressing his desire to manifest something in the world that is non conceptual. He is making the point that what we manifest in the world does not need to be saying anything. In fact the act of saying something makes the work inconsequential as it becomes just another self referential statement about this or that fragmented piece of reality. No further justification is needed beyond the act of doing it. The mind of the viewer either expands to encompass it or it does not. The pieces I make are not intended to inform you of anything. They are artifacts of a journey along a path. In some ways the work can be thought of as a tautology. They need not point to anything beyond themselves.



2.5 *New river watercolor, series IV, No.6* John Cage 1988

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Threefold approach

The methodology I employ is threefold. I start with research that ranges from something as simple as reading, to active forms of research such as monastic practice and intentional living. From this research I gather theories and ideas relating to my area of interest. Which is the origin, evolution and implications of human consciousness. Once I gather these theories and ideas I form a supposition, made on the basis of the evidence at hand as a starting point for further investigation. The next step in my methodology is to design a system that I can use to investigate this supposition. At this point things become somewhat complicated to explain because the system I design is not just some random system that I stick an idea into. As the artist I feel that it is my responsibility to create the framework within which the work will manifest the ideas. I do this in a way that acknowledges the presence of both the original mode and the new mode of thinking. I also make no effort to draw a line between the artist and the unknown. Some aspects of the system and the work will flow from me and some will flow from the unknown or indeterminate. I want to be clear here and say I am not trying to not use the self referential mind. As we possess both the original mode and the new mode we must engage them both without reservation. What I mean by without reservation is without fear of contradiction. For ideas to be in conflict they must exist as inherently separate. It is not possible to act without the self referential mind. To try and do so is not Zen. The systems I am creating begin with the logical self referential way of understanding and shift into the unknown. The work acknowledges both modes of understanding and is not intended to convey my views as much as to bring a concept into the world in an unprecedented way. The systems are designed and implemented in such a

way that they become the idea. What I mean by this is that every aspect of the system relates to and personifies the idea. The reason this is so is because when the results of the system are created they are not intended to provide a concrete answer, but rather they are meant to be the manifestation of the idea and the questions which arise from the idea. This in fact is the final step in my three fold methodology; to present the artwork generated by the system to the audience in a direct way, a way that does not rely on concepts and explanations.

3.2 Research and Supposition

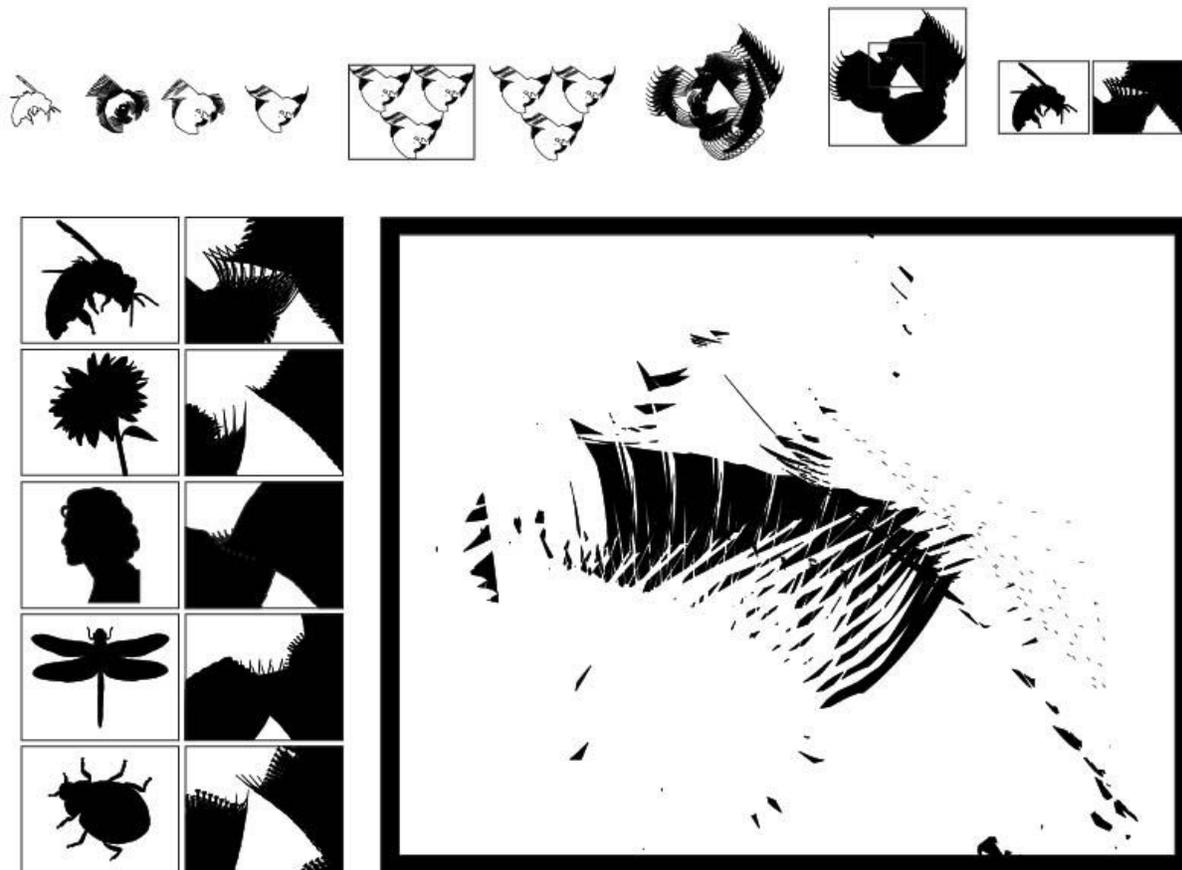
In practicing Zen I have found that it is important to learn and understand the philosophical concepts in order to put them into practice. As I learn the lessons I am able to form questions and through the practice I'm able to investigate the questions first hand. If you engage in the practice without first understanding the philosophy you are very liable to flounder around in confusion. This is how I look at the research in my art practice. Through the research I am able to establish my personal perspective. Once I have my perspective in place I am able to generate the theories and ideas that lead me to a supposition. Suppositions are, by definition, beliefs based on limited data that need further investigation. The supposition contains the questions that need to be investigated. I should mention that at times the research itself includes the whole process of investigating, questioning and practicing. As in the practice of Zen, where the entire practice is part of my research and becomes an example upon which (at least in part) my art practice is modeled. The research and the suppositions that it leads to are tools. It is important to acknowledge that the discussion of these things will not define the work I am doing. D.T. Suzuki a Japanese author, lecturer and scholar of Zen buddhism, who was instrumental for spreading Zen in the west, said this in his 1964 book *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*; "Zen constructs all the verbal and conceptual scaffold which is found in its literature known as

“sayings”. Though the scaffold affords a most useful means to reach the inmost reality, it is still an elaboration and artificiality.” (Suzuki 3) Suzuki is saying that the thought and effort we put into our practice is important but we must understand that it is not the goal, it is the process, an elaboration. What I have been describing is the elaboration, the scaffolding that I use to construct the work. Although this elaboration need not be evident in the final piece it is an important way to move myself, and in the case of teaching, others through the process of shifting perspectives. For my work the elaborations take the form of models that represent cognitive systems.

3.3 Systems and Investigation

The models I design utilize visual systems. These systems function as an investigative tool, they help me to investigate not only concepts, but myself and the world around me. These systems function in a unique way. They represent multiple layers of investigation simultaneously. On one level they're simple algorithms . while helping to provide structure to the model also introduce an element of indeterminacy. On another level the systems become a vehicle through which the idea in question can be manifested in the world directly. By directly I mean as the idea is worked through the system it is transformed in such a way That it may be experienced as it is without the need to be understood conceptually. An example of this may be a distorted shadow playing over the landscape. You know that their Shadow has a source, and is a result of the elements that combine to create it, but when we experience it it becomes its own thing. It is a phenomena that we experienced directly. We do not need to understand it on any other level other than it exists and we are experiencing it. If we really want to push the issue we can say that the ability to accept that it exists, and not search for a reason for its existence, is to understand that there is no explanation, based in Logic, needed for it or anything else. The idea

that we may define things and understand them comes from the new mode of thinking that separates us from our surroundings in order to define them referentially. This phenomena stands in defiance of the new mode and it's self-referential logic. When we experience this we are able to have a more complete understanding of existence. This is how the abstractions I make are intended to work. They are the manifestation of an idea that must be experienced and cannot be explained. when there viewer encounters the work the investigation is complete. The scaffolding, or the elaboration, is gone. What is left is the idea it need not say anything. I'm aware that this may seem theoretical and abstract. Let me give some concrete examples of my process. In the image below we can see that there are 5 representational images on the left. Across the top of the page is a simple algorithm that transforms each input into an abstraction. This process is meant to represent the preconditioned mind's response to what it encounters in the world. In other words the way in which our personal history and experience colors how we see and relate to things in the world. The resulting abstraction is meant to represent an individual's unique view of reality. Each input has a corresponding abstraction all generated from the same algorithmic process. At this point I have produced a very simple visual model that results in a series of abstractions that may be displayed and considered together. I felt that although these pieces spoke to my idea I wanted to go a step further and illustrate that even in the confusion of the self referential perspective the interconnected reality of life may be found. In the large frame to the right I have composed all the negative vectors from each abstraction into one image. This one image is meant to represent the underlying connections in all things. This image also has the quality of being non representational. What I mean is that it does not convey the ideas I am describing through representation but rather depends on the viewers intuition and ability to be open to the experience it provides.



3.1 *A day in the park* Reed Hayden, 2018

What I have described is an example of a system I have created to investigate and consider ideas about cognition. As stated earlier this is the scaffolding and as Suzuki points out it is a means to an end. I never intend the work to convey the ideas literally. Instead I intend them to convey them directly, and as I have said, by this I mean experientially not conceptually. This can be thought of also as intuitively. I display the final result of the work with this in mind.



3.2 *Untitled* Reed Hayden, 2018

3.4 **Direct access**

Above is the finished piece. This work is intended to provide the viewer with direct access to the ideas that generated it. This may seem silly but the state of being connected, in ways that are so obscure that they seem non-existent, is the point. This is meant to bypass the logical mind and tap into our intuitive awareness. The idea is that at this point the work does not need to literally describe the idea because it now embodies it. This approach leaves the interpretation in the hands of the viewer. Because the work is so open it will reflect the mind of the viewer and as the artist I am happy with that. The work provides an opportunity and the

viewer does with it what they will. My intention has been realized before the work is ever seen by anyone else.

3.5 Social Engagement

There is another step beyond the three I have just described. This is a direction I have just started to head in recently. Until now all of my work has been mainly introspective. There are some reasons why this is appropriate, as I pointed out in chapter one, but now I am interested in observing how others interact with the systems I create. Below is a piece called Arcs. In this piece I have created a system and then invited viewers to engage the system. This work is realized in much the same way as the last image. The difference between this work and the last piece we just saw is that the “direct access” starts much sooner in this approach. It is my hope that this approach will provide an opportunity for the viewer to experience the work first hand in a direct and intuitive way.



3.3 *Arcs* Installation at the Top Of the Nine. Bangor, Maine 2019

CHAPTER 4
PORTFOLIO OF WORKS



Figure 4.1A *Three Views*. Wood, Steel, 53" x 52" x 10" 2015

4.1 Three Views (2015)

Three views is a kinetic piece that investigates how we perceive and translate our experiences. The sculpted form we see in the photo above is interpreted in two additional views which were visible to the viewer as the triangular box rotated. The first additional view was a drawing of the form with Cartesian offsets Embedded within it. The second additional view was a chart that organized the offsets, typically referred to as a table of offsets. The two additional views demonstrated how we use discriminatory logic systems to understand our surroundings and also that this understanding is usually an abstracted awareness emanating from a personal self - referential perspective.

4.2 Untitled (2017)



Figure 4.2 *Untitled* Wood, 24" x 24" x 3" 2017

This piece is constructed from sixteen individual pieces of wood. The four faces that emanate from the ring and the individual pieces themselves are meant to represent the interconnected nature of reality.

4.3 Double Bind (2018)



4.3 *Double Bind*, Wood, Steel, Paracord 24" x 24" x 10"

Double bind is a piece in which there are three components that converge to represent a common human experience. The first component is an angular wooden body that is meant to represent the physical biological entity that our consciousness inhabits. The second component is a sculpted head and a pair of hands, both of which have been painted black. These elements together represent consciousness. The third component is a yolk like apparatus that binds the figure to its base in a restrictive way. This third component represents the construct of the separate self. The human experience represented here is that of a person who is unable to freely experience the nature of existence because they are entangled in the false perception that they exist as a separate self. This false perception leads one to continually defend and reaffirm the very identity that ensnares them. As we can see in the piece, if we were to simply release our grasp, this construct would easily fall away, allowing us to carry on unencumbered.

4.4 Untitled (2018)



4.4 *Untitled*, Wood, Marlin 12" x 7" x 35" 2018

This *Untitled* piece is the result of a meditative approach to Art Making. The work was conceived and executed without a preconceived design, rather the form and composition was allowed to emanate from the artist's personal experience and proclivities. The work is in essence the opposite of conceptual art. The work is driven by and reacts to the process of its own creation.

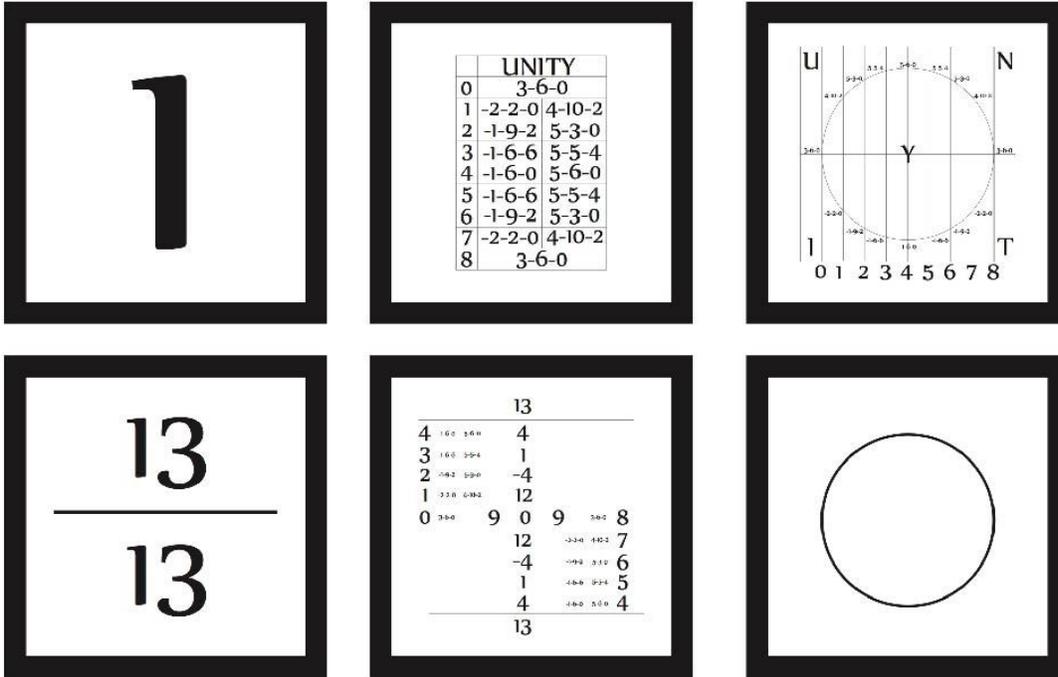
4.5 Five Aggregates (2019)



4.5 *Five Aggregates*, Wood 84" x 84" x 38" 2019

This piece is an effort to explore the elements that, according to the Buddhist philosophy, work in conjunction to produce a mental being. These aggregates are believed to be ever changing and in the Heart Sutra, which was presented with the work, we see the emptiness of the five aggregates. The aggregates are form, sensation, perception, mental formations and consciousness.

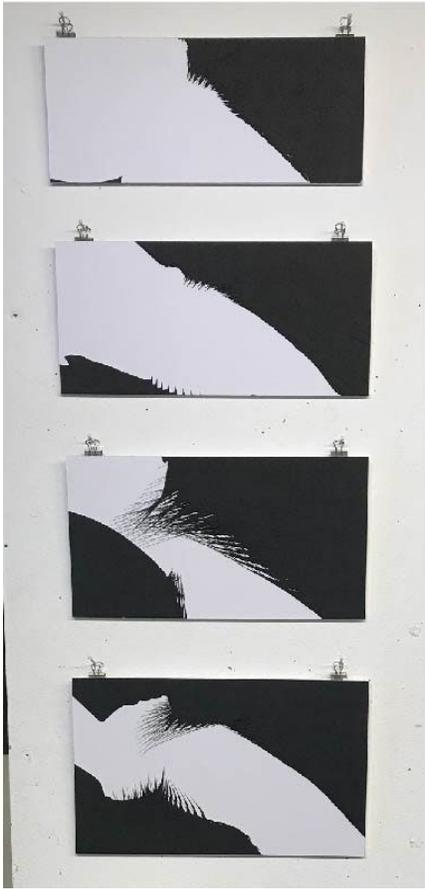
4.6 Unity (2017)



4.6 *Unity*, Digital 2017

This work is about logic and how it can be applied in relation to one's personal experience. It is intended to allude to the idea that all logic is conceived and applied in relation to the false perception of a separate self. Logic is an immediate step away from direct experience and into discriminatory thinking.

4.7 Four Portraits (2017)



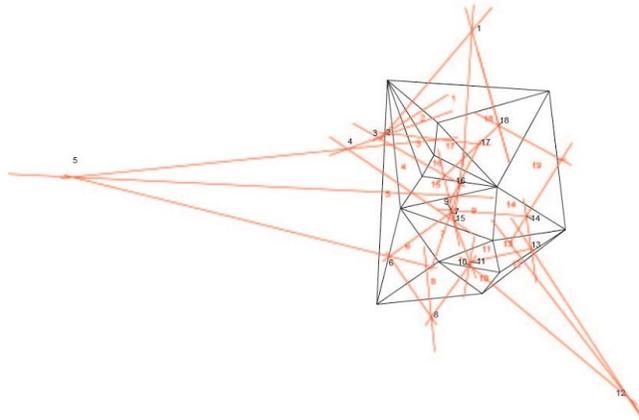
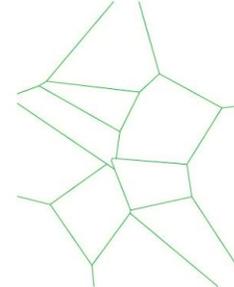
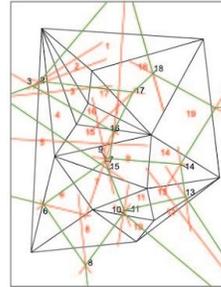
4.7 *Four Portraits*, Prints 10" x 38" 2017

This work was produced by taking four pictures of people and running them through an algorithm. The idea being that the algorithm acts as a stand-in for the biochemical algorithmic process that the human body uses to produce an impression. The resulting impression, which may manifest as emotions such as affection or disdain, is a unique abstract notion which is dependent upon the bias of the viewer and is therefore not a complete picture. The images above are meant to demonstrate the abstract nature of self-referential perception as it works in unison with the biochemical processes of the human mind.

4.8 Zen (2018)

Is Zen a religion? It is not a religion in the sense that the term is popularly understood; for Zen has no God to worship, no ceremonial rites to observe, no future abode to which the dead are destined, and, last of all, Zen has no soul whose welfare is to be looked after by somebody else and whose immortality is a matter of intense concern with some people. Zen is free from all these dogmatic and religious" encumbrances. When I say there is no God in Zen, the pious reader may be shocked, but this does not mean that Zen denies the existence of God; neither denial nor affirmation concerns Zen. When a thing is denied, the very denial involves something not denied. The same can be said of affirmation. This is inevitable in logic. Zen wants to rise above logic; Zen wants to find a higher affirmation where there is no antithesis. Therefore, in Zen, God is neither denied nor insisted upon; only that in Zen no such God as has been conceived by Jewish and Christian minds. For the same reason that Zen is not a philosophy, Zen is not a religion.

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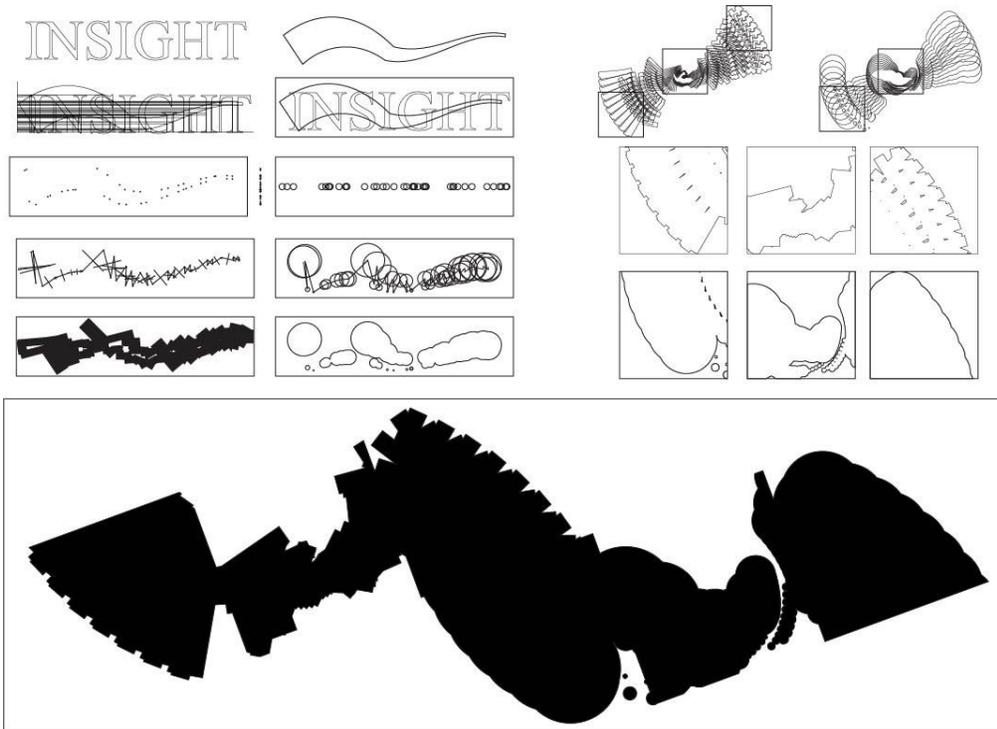
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4.8 Zen, Digital 2017

The text in the piece above is from DT Suzuki's introduction to Zen Buddhism. Hear the text has been restructured using an existing algorithm. The restructuring results in a series of poems. My interest in doing this piece was to re-examine a text in a way that would break conventional logic and provide me with a fresh perspective. This process of restructuring the text and considering the resulting poems helps me to consider my own self-referential logic habits.

4.9 Insight (2018)



4.9 *Insight*, Digital 2018

In this piece I'm starting with text and gesture. I am then combining these two elements through an algorithmic process. The resulting abstraction is meant to be an interpretation of two different styles of understanding. This piece, like many of my other pieces, is about examining how logic is constructed and how the results of that process are ultimately only interpretations of reality. Some would argue that if you apply an odd logic to any circumstance you will end up with an odd result. Oddity however is determined in reference to a system of logic that we as a species have constructed around the mistaken identity that we are a separate self. This work is meant to speak metaphorically of that situation and point out that the idea that we are separate

selves is odd and that our resulting perception of reality, although we are not aware of it, is odd as well.

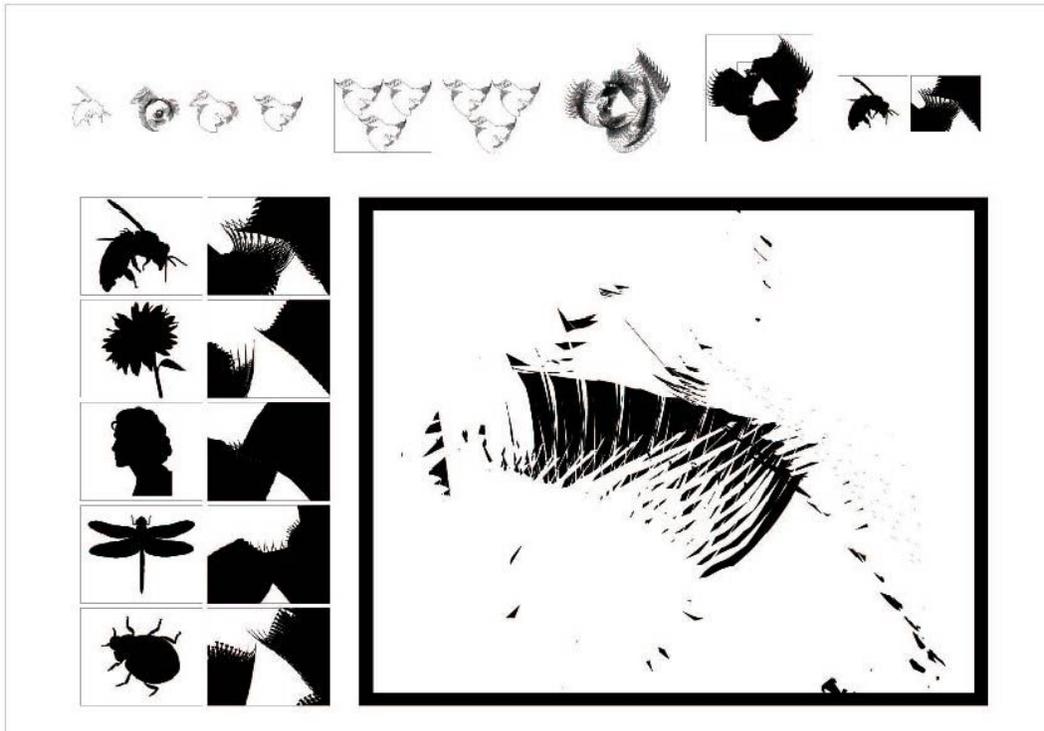
4.10 Unity 2 (2018)



4.10 *Unity 2*, Wood, Paper 22" x 22" x 2" 2018

In this piece I'm exploring the relationship between the individual and the universal. I produced a simple equation that symbolically moves from one concept to the other. This equation is meant to represent a logic system that is progressive and self-referential. The elements on either side of the equation I meant to represent the nature of the individual and the universal. The individual on the left as an example of a component of a theoretical logical system in the universal on the right as a biological entity you experienced directly.

4.11 Day in the Park, (2018)



4.11 *Day in the Park*, Digital 2018

Categorical thinking is relative and arbitrarily applied in relation to the self, it produces an abstract experience of reality. This abstraction becomes a medium within which we exist. We encounter the world as it is but then swiftly process it through a system of logic that we have developed in relation to the self we believe ourselves to be. This creates an experience that, in itself, will never reveal the selfless interconnected nature of existence. The above piece explores the way in which logic works in relation to the self-referential perspective. The choices that the artist makes in the development of the piece are not significant other than they are representative of his role as a self referential being. The intention of the work is to demonstrate that the self is a construct which produces logic relative to its perceived interest and that results in an abstract

experience of reality. This does not reveal the nature of reality but rather creates a perpetual illusion within which the self is continually supported and re-established.

4.12 **Untitled (2019)**

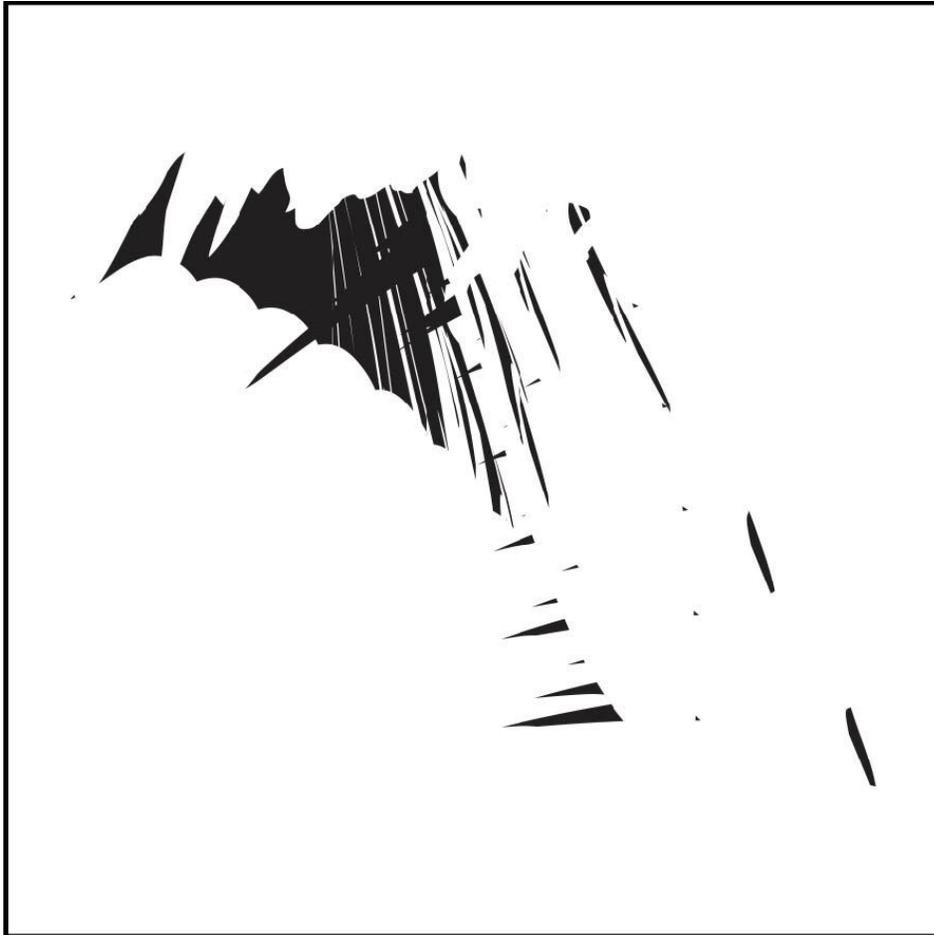


4.12 *Untitled*, Silkscreen 35" x 27" 2019

In the previous image of this piece we looked at the process and discussed the ideas that inspired it. The final piece is different in a couple of key ways. First of all, as a gallery piece it is not meant to convey or evoke the ideas previously discussed. It is meant to be experienced by the viewer directly without any sort of conceptual framework. Secondly to return to the previous discussion for a moment, ultimately this piece has been constructed from the negative elements found within the abstracted frames of the process piece. The reason for this is that this piece represents the underlying ground that ties all the other elements together. In this way it is a representation of the interconnected nature of all things which is present even within the self referential perspective. The reason the work is presented directly without this information is

because ultimately this sort of understanding cannot be arrived at through conceptual thinking but must be experienced directly.

4.13 Predation (2019)



4.13 *Predation*, Digital 2019

This piece was generated in the same way as the previous piece. Like the previous piece it is complete as an image without any further explanation. However, for the sake of sharing my process, I will tell you that it was created with two source images; a hawk and a sparrow.

4.14 Five Fold Pattern (2019)



4.14 Five Fold Pattern, Wood, Pencil 9" x 18" x 1" 2019

This is the first piece in a series I produced in response to an investigation of Arabic tessellation. I became interested in Arabic tessellation because it seemed to me that the artists and Craftsmen who engage in this work were attempting to investigate and express the interconnected nature of existence. In some ways this is similar to what I am doing however it is likely that they viewed the logic systems that they employed as an understanding bestowed on us by God and their work was an attempt to represent this beauty of this gift. In the piece we can see the underlying geometry used to produce the carved design, by showing the underlying

geometry with the carving I'm encouraging the viewer to consider the relationship of these different elements and possibly to consider the implications of this beyond the it's practical application.

4.15 Six Fold Pattern (2019)



4.15 *Six Fold Pattern*, Wood, Paint 9" x 16" x 1" 2019

This is the second piece for my series of Arabic tessellations. This is a standard Arabic design. I have employed sign making techniques to produce this piece.

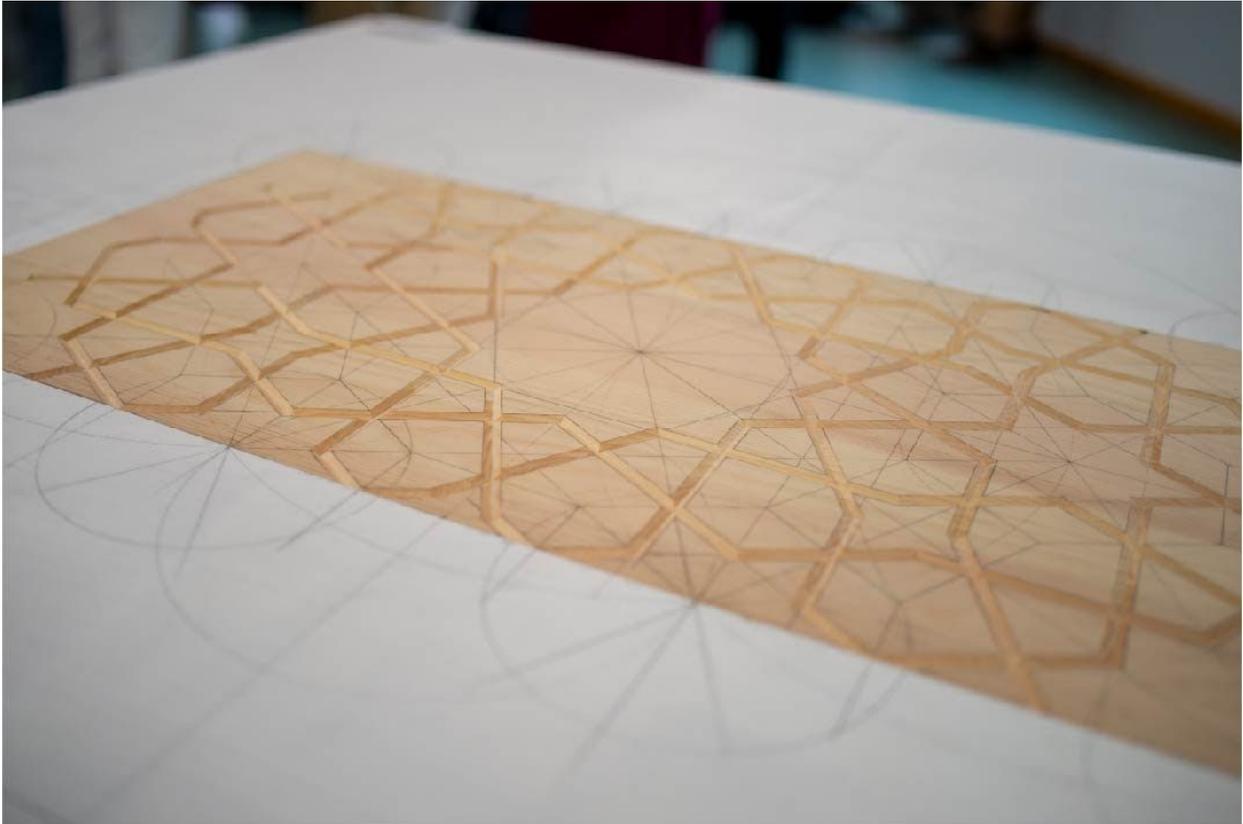
4.16 Four Fold Pattern (2019)



4.16 *Four Fold Pattern*, Wood, Paint, Gold Leaf 16" x 16" x 1" 2019

Like the previous piece, this is a standard Arabic design and I have employed sign making techniques to produce it.

4.17 Lofting (2019)



4.17 *Lofting*, Wood, Pencil, Paint 60" x 60" x 35" 2019

Similarly to the first piece in the series this piece presents the under drawing with the finished carving.

4.18 *Signal* (2019)



4.18 *Signal*, Wood 61" x 21" x 3" 2019

Signal is the final piece in my series of Arabic tessellations. In this piece I am combining Arabic design, sign making techniques and sculptural elements. It is titled *signal* because with the confluence of these different elements I am encouraging the viewer to contemplate the cumulative symbology.

CHAPTER 5

THESIS PROJECT

There are a few different aspects of my thesis project that may be described. I have described extensively the concepts that drive the work, that being the case, I will focus Less on that and more on the Practical aspects. First and foremost I must speak about the global pandemic and the impact that it has had on my and my peers ability to realize our intentions and regards to executing and showing our thesis work. I will then briefly show the system I used to generate the pieces. until now I have not written much about the actual production of the work. This is not because I don't think it is important. I sometimes forget that this type of work isn't as familiar to most people as it is to me. In this section I will describe in detail how I produce the work. This description will include techniques and materials. The concept and production I utilize work together to form the aesthetic. I will speak about how and why the Aesthetics came about. Lastly, I will speak about the work as a meditation and will describe how the entire process moves through varying states of awareness and culminates in the contemplative piece.

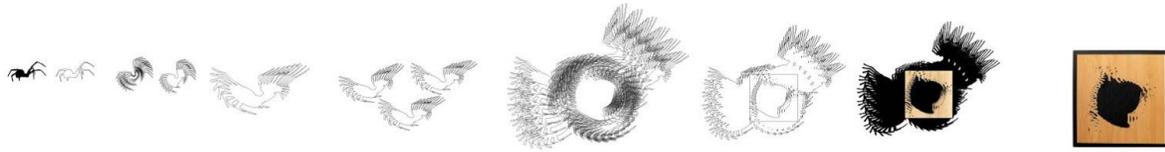
5.1 Covid 19

As I began production on my thesis project we were hit with a global pandemic and a general stay-at-home order. Having a home studio was helpful and I was able to continue production on the pieces. We were however cut off from our instructors and our peers. This inability to connect directly and receive feedback from my creative community had a bigger impact on my ability to create my art than I had anticipated. In addition to not having access to my creative Community I was faced with the question of how my work would be shown. I came to realize that this was a major issue. As I stated earlier my intentions are realized before the

viewer ever sees the work, and this is true, however, as works of art, these pieces were intended to be experienced directly. As I have spoken of often in this paper the direct experience is what the finish work is all about. When I proposed the thesis pieces I had envisioned them in the gallery. In the gallery I would need to create a contemplative space in what is often a crowded chatty atmosphere. The way I hope to do this was by making the work large enough to hold someone's attention. The idea of this being that work of a large scale would be harder to glanced over than a typical sized wall piece. I had additionally intended to position the work so that it would occupy a corner, creating its own space within the gallery. I felt that with these two considerations, and the addition of a bench to encourage people to sit, I could create the right conditions for contemplation. All of these plans were completely out the window as the lockdown was obviously going to continue for the foreseeable future. Ultimately our cohort of graduates decided to have a web-based display of artwork. The website does a fine job and in some ways provides more information than a show could. Ultimately however my work is intended to be viewed in person.

5.2 System

I have described in-depth how and why I design the systems I use for my work. I will say briefly that the system below is a simple algorithm I used to produce the three thesis pieces. It is meant to represent the preconditioned mind's response to what it encounters in the world which results in a unique abstract notion of reality.



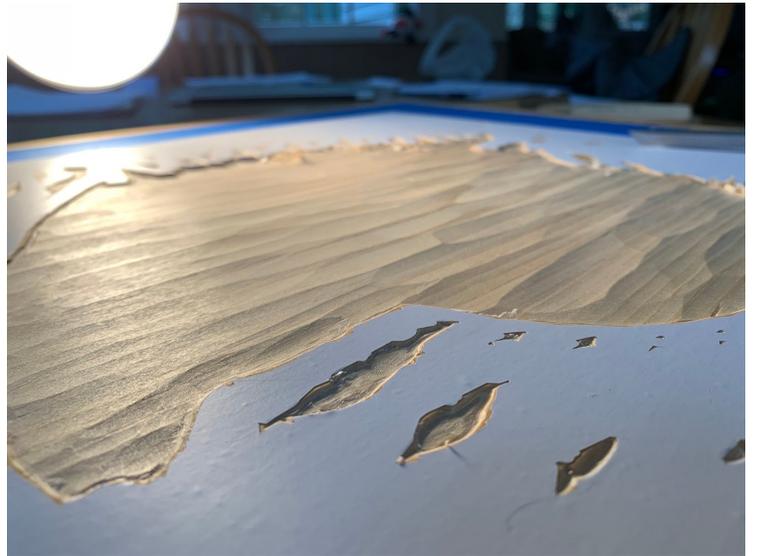
5.1 Algorithm

5.3 Production / Materials

The novelty of my work lies in its concepts. In the production of my work I utilize my experience and my abilities. I have always worked with wood. Wood has qualities that support the work aesthetically, which I will discuss in the next chapter. For now I will talk about the how to's of the work. The way in which this particular series is made is very much like how a carved sign would be made. I begin with a white pine board of an inch and a half thick. I cut the board into the appropriate lengths and then edge glued the pieces together, alternating the direction of the growth rings in each piece to minimize warpage, forming a blank. The blank is then faired and smoothed. Once the blank is sealed it is ready for the mask. The mask is made by creating a vector file in illustrator. This is the same software used to create the visual system that generated the design. The vector file is then used to cut the design into the mask on a vinyl plotter. The mask is then applied to the blank. The area inside the mask is carved by hand in relief. This process leaves a varied texture. Once the carving is complete the piece is then painted with an opaque stain. Finally the mask is removed and the work is finished.



5.2 Blank glue up and fair



5.3 Mask application, carving and paint



5.4 Two piece mask application

5.4 Aesthetics

I would like to say a little about how the materials and the process form the aesthetics of the work and how the aesthetic supports the concept. I have made this type of work before in other materials. These materials have included vinyl on composite boards and silkscreen on paper. These works were similar to what we see here in the sense that they were very deliberate, neat and clean lined. These other pieces however seem to lack warmth. They were all black and white and had a sterile feel. People often expressed that they had difficulty engaging with the work conceptually and emotionally. In the thesis work I have used wood as the substrate. The use of the wood has produced a much warmer and more approachable result. The grain of the

wood also introduces a more natural feel into an approach that can sometimes feel a bit clinical. The stain that I am using has a matte finish which also contributes to the more natural feel while still accentuating the hand carved surfaces. The evidence of hand work within the piece also adds an element of relatability. All of the elements combine to form a more engaging piece of art. This engagement is important because the work is meant to create a question in the viewer's mind. This question can sometimes be disconcerting to people. If the work does not appeal to the viewer on some level they may disregard the work completely and never begin the contemplation the process requires.



5.5 Author at work

5.5 Work as meditation

There are specific parts of my process that are meditative. What is interesting to me is that the entire process moves through varying states of awareness. This is reflective of life. As we perceive and navigate our world we are constantly shifting between analytical and intuitive understanding. Understanding this shifting awareness is the key to gaining a complete picture of reality. When I am working on the carved elements of a piece it is easy to treat it as a meditation. The point I would like to make is that the entire process is a meditation. Being aware of and accepting the shifting states of awareness that it takes to produce the work is the ultimate meditation.

5.6 Conclusions, final placement and further engagement



5.6 Final Placement

As mentioned earlier in this chapter my work is intended to be viewed in person. This being the case, I decided to display the work outside on my property with a bench for contemplation. I generally, as I have here, describe my work from a philosophical standpoint. This philosophical description is often about how I interpret the ideas and what I intend to do with them. What I would like to talk about in this conclusion is the way in which the work was actually realised and what can be learned, by me, from this. So, as I said, I displayed the work outside. In order to do this I had to decide how the piece would be hung. As I considered how best to hang the piece I thought of the han that hangs in the Zen Mountain Monastery. The han is a wooden percussion instrument that is struck with a wooden mallet. The han is struck repeatedly in rapid succession and it lets the monks know that it is time to take their seats in order to practice zazen. Over time the han becomes disfigured by the repeated mallet strikes. Although the han is primarily a sound instrument it becomes an interesting visual representation of faith, practice, time and circumstance. I decided to hang the piece the way a han is hung in the meditation hall. Seeing the piece hung in this way I began to realize that beyond being connected to my Zen practice it was actually connected to many other aspects of my life. Obviously the way in which the work is made and displayed reflects my craft background but beyond that it was obvious that it was bringing together my craft with my research. I have been a sign maker for many years and as you look at the piece you can see it is essentially a sign. According to google a sign is defined as an object whose presence indicates the probable presence or occurrence of something else. It is the presence of the work that is important. This comes back to the idea that I am not trying to describe my beliefs or ideas verbatim. The piece is a sign of the research, the practice and the philosophy. I like the idea of the work existing in the world as a sign. I do however find that this is a limited way to interact with the audience. In chapter three I

mentioned a project called Arcs. This project enabled me to involve the audience in the production of the work. The work still originated from the research but rather than being a sign of my journey alone it became a sign of the practice as an occurrence. This occurrence did not express the Journey of the individual but rather reflected the collective response. This collective response speaks more to the interconnected quality of all life. If the objective is to move away from the self-referential and into the more intuitive original mode of understanding then it seems that the collective response is necessary. The arcs project was the first foray into this form of practice and would likely be the model for further engagement.



5.7 *Untitled*, Wood and paint 24" x 24" x 1.5"



5.8 *Untitled*, Wood and paint 24" x 24" x 1.5"



5.9 *Untitled*, Wood and paint 42" x 46" x 1.5"

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BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Keith Reed Hayden II was born in Taunton, Massachusetts and attended Barnstable High School in Hyannis, Massachusetts graduating in 1991. Hayden holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts in 3D studies from the University of Massachusetts, graduating in 2000. Hayden worked for 20 years as a professional boat builder and has owned and operated his own sign company since 2007. Hayden draws primary inspiration for his work from the practice of Zen and the study of cognitive science. His medium of choice is wood and his pieces range from constructed abstract forms to incised graphic compositions. Hayden is a candidate for the Master of Fine Arts degree in Intermedia from the University of Maine in August 2020.