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Interior Sensation and Exterior Forces: Cutting Away

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Interior Sensation and Exterior Forces: Cutting Away

by

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Report

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this report to my loved ones, without whom I would not have been able to achieve an advanced education and reach my creative goals. Primarily, I would like to mention my parents, Zorica Veljasevic Parker and Justin Heath Parker, my husband, Rolando Salazar, my mentor, Oscar Jay Gillespie, and my grandmother, Piroska Veljasevic, in special thanks. Each of the above mentioned individuals have enriched my growth as an artist and student through their advice, love, and unending support.

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ABSTRACT

Interior Sensation and Exterior Forces: Cutting Away

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

Supervisor: Leslie Mutchler

In my work, traditional printmaking techniques are pushed to their limits as a foundation for cut-paper installations and sculptures. The work reflects on notions of interiority and exteriority in relation to the body and nature, drawing from my experiences in meditation to create a two and three-dimensional visual play primarily using paper. Because of their illustrative looseness, the biomorphic structures convey a variety of sensations, shapes, and movements that are related to the interior of the body and exterior forces in nature. In this report, I plan to discuss topics of process, materiality, sensation, objecthood and phenomenology within the context of my work and as these topics relate to other artists such as: Lee Bontecou, Francis Bacon, Oskar Fischinger, Richard Serra, and Judy Pfaff. I also plan to indicate a contemporary and art historical context for the work, placing my pieces within a specific canon of visual culture.

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Lines cut from their paper matrices coagulate and break apart in space, forming a piece that is constantly raveling and unraveling itself before the viewer. The paper structures beg the question: is this a thing of potential and possibility, or an object of deflation? At times, the curvilinear forms become a solid mass of color and shape. In other instances, they materialize and then fall apart as they become thinner and less dense. Whether the cut paper components assume the role of installation, flat collage, or structural microcosm, they remain in a continuous push-pull between formation and deformation, slow and fast, compact and dispersed.

My work is comprised of elements of drawing, painting and printmaking—each to varying degrees depending on the project. When I begin a piece, the paper components come together in waves. For example, I will prepare and finish a plate, spend a few days running editions of prints and then several weeks paring them down with a scalpel for later use. The individual structures are carefully pulled out of the matrix; each incision is a record of a hand-to-tool meditative process reflecting on the movement and sensation. If there is no printing involved in the piece, then I will spend several weeks drawing or painting images on the back sides of the paper for them to be cut later on. I then dig into my flat files for old prints and drawings that could work well with the project. Toward the end of preparations, I work on digital images that get sent out for printing and cut up as well. I repeat this wave-like cycle of finding, making, slicing, and collecting until I have enough building blocks to begin a project. The forms are then spread across a space in an orgasmic explosion of movement after months of slow preparation. It is through this process of making and collecting that I act as both creator and curator of paper ephemera.

From the initial cut, down to the final compilation of a piece, the development is very fluid and intuitive. At the onset I have a general idea of color palette, scale, feeling, and movement sensibility, but the rest is a game of improvisation. The process is a constant conversation with the pieces as they reveal themselves to me. Projects usually fall within close range of what I had in mind at the beginning of their creation because I allow myself to room for changes along the way. Such was the case in *Fluidensity: System Breakdown (I.) (v.2)* (Plate 1). The first time this work was installed, I imagined using cut paper forms set against paint chips—a juxtaposition of material. The highly-pigmented paint chips are easily recognizable as synthetic objects sourced from a hardware store. In contrast, the paper is more organic and has less restriction in terms of scale and dimensionality. At the onset, I found it important to highlight these differences in material, using the chips in a more decorative, repetitive manner and the paper in a free-flowing explosion. The second time I installed the piece was a combination of remembering the movement it had the first time and a process of making adjustments and improvements. I added more paint chips the second time and was also more aware of their hue and value relationships within the composition (Plate 2).

In an interview with Judy Pfaff for *...all of the above* (Plate 11), when asked if she has a clear idea of what an installation will look like before she begins, Pfaff states: “I didn’t know what it was going to look like. I did know what it was going to feel like. Usually, there is some bell that goes off in my mind, and it’s like, this show will be about this, this show will be about that. What form it takes, what happens during making it, that’s probably 30-40%, but usually I have a pretty strong idea of what it’s going to be

about” (p.6). My approach to an installation is very similar to Pfaff’s. I gather all of the materials ahead of time, and go into the gallery with a few sketches and a general idea of movement, and then get to work in an improvisational and intuitive way.

In his book *The Logic of Sensation*, Gilles Deleuze uses the work of Francis Bacon (Plate 12) as a springboard to write on the relationship between painting and sensation. He states that “... the task of painting is defined as the attempt to render visible forces that are not themselves visible” (p.48). In *Skyview 837 (v.1)* (Plates 3 and 4), I had in mind a certain centrifugal movement and sensation for the piece. The desire for a centralized, swirling movement led me to construct a churning vortex within a skylight, colored with pink tube lights. I knew before I had even started physically making the piece that I wanted to reference James Turrell’s recent installation in Austin, *The Color Within*, through use of light, hue, and value. The nod to Turrell and the idea of a centrifuge was only a jumping off point for the construction of the piece. The color of daylight reflecting off the dark blue painted walls, in combination with hidden pink fluorescent bulbs combined to form a deep violet. Just as Turrell’s piece reflects on our view of the outside from within, the skylight piece seeks to do the same. The Plexiglas rods and paper components combine to create a mass of light and shadow across the walls of the skylight. During the day, the piece is like a serene flow, a stream of water. At night, the work is more like a synthetic cosmic tunnel or a raging weather pattern. In Deleuze’s discussion of invisible movement, he writes that “... elementary forces such as pressure, inertia, weight, attraction, gravitation, germination—how can they be rendered? (...) The transformation of form can be abstract or dynamic, it happens at one place, it

subordinates movement to force” (p.50). In preparing an installation, I write down lists of words that I would like to associate with the piece and once the installation is complete, I jot down another list to see if they match. In *Skyview 837(v.1)*, some words were: solar systems, gravity, dissipation, cosmic, back-lit, front-lit, centrifuge, tunnel, vortex, swirling, swimming, and twilight. The list of words is a concretization of the feeling or sensation I envision for the piece. In the second instance I installed the work, *Skyview 837 (v.2)* (Plates 5 and 6), I used the same paper components but rearranged them to fit the new space. The adjustments were made because the second version was to be in a corner set against a window. In this case, rather than focusing on a centrifuge, I sought a diagonal thrust up into the window, drawing attention from the piece into the trees and sky outside.

Deleuze writes that the sensations experienced by the body are often reflected upon in Bacon’s work. “Bacon’s deformations are (...) the most natural postures of a body that has been reorganized by the simple force being exerted upon it: the desire to sleep, to vomit, to turn over, to remain seated as long as possible” (p.50). Figures convey physical urges in Bacon’s paintings. The abstract forms in my work also scream, vomit, and expel fluids, though in a less illustrative way. In *Leukos-Haima (v.1)* and *(v.2)* (Plates 7-10), I am reflecting on inside-outside ideas of the body. Specifically, I am thinking about my own body during pregnancy in contrast to my grandfather suffering with leukemia. Bodily flow, as Bacon expresses it, is just another type of movement in our ever-changing environment. The play on interior-exterior spaces in *Leukos-Haima (v.1)* and *(v.2)* becomes apparent through the arrangement of cut paper. From certain vantage

points, the piece looks grey with a red glow in the back. In this case, I am equating paper with skin. From other vantage points, the piece is a conflagration sanguine linear flow. The inside calls forth images of blood or body. The paper components are suspended overhead, jutting out from the wall on six-foot Plexiglas rods, or in the case of the second version, suspended from cables in the ceiling. The paper-objects enter the viewer's space as a waterfall or bulge from the front. The audience is able to walk behind the suspended piece and experience its belly. From the inside, the red ink drawings are revealed in high saturation and drama. The light above casts shadows over, around, and on top of the viewer. The piece is integrated into the space and into itself. It is site-specific in both instances, and uses light and shadow as a guide for painting. Digitally-manipulated images of objects within my grandparents' home, along with images of cells and medical machinery are cut apart and encompass a large part of the piece, signifying what is seen from the outside, what is utterly transparent. The cells and machinery are juxtapositions of the natural and man-made. Other opposing elements are flagging tape (plastic) and paper (derived from nature), Plexiglas rod and acetate (both synthetic), and branches encased in latex paint. The materiality in *Leukos-Haima (v.1)* and *(v.2)* is just as important as the movement.

Ideas of body and inside-outside are further exemplified in the title of the work: *leukos* being the root word in Greek for white or light and *haima* being the root word for blood or bloodstreams, both coming together to form the clinical term *leukemia*. In this case, I decided to conjoin the words as a nod to the inherent dualities in the piece, translating to White-Blood.

The stop-motion animations of Oskar Fischinger (Plate 13) illustrate movement through a combination of image and music. The synesthetic compositions reveal forms that mutate, break apart, and come back together to form a new image. The movement in Fischinger's films ranges from extremely slow to overwhelmingly fast and dizzying. While working on my installations, I would often watch his films, writing down long lists of words that I might use for a piece. One list I made for the *Wax Experiments* sequence of films was this: slow, fast, slow, out, across, in, over, light, dark, growing, separating, flashing mountains, dispersing, marble, cutting, crashing, splitting, osmosis, into, covered, sucking inward, cascading, bursting, aerial, (etc.). Similarly, I would keep a sketchbook for drawings I made while listening to music. These exercises help me loosen up before beginning a project, much like a jogger stretching before a run. At David Zwirner Gallery in 2013 I saw *Verb List Compilation: Actions to Relate to Oneself* (Plate 14) that Richard Serra made in 1967-68. A portion of his list was as follows: to roll, to crease, to fold, to store, to bend, to shorten, to twist, to dapple, to crumple, to shave, to tear, to chip, to split, to cut, to sever, to drop, to remove, to simplify, to differ, to disarrange, to open, to mix, to splash, to knot, to spill, to droop, to flow, (etc.). The complete list was a compilation of 107 verbs relating to the human body. Serra's early work is a clear reflection of the verbs he was thinking of when he made the list. Some pieces of leather droop off the wall. Some pieces of metal are severed, split, and cut. Some neon lights are knotted. And most certainly, everything is simplified.

Some early drawings and sculptures (Plate 15) by Lee Bontecou depict spindly, weightless shapes with a sensibility for organic line. In an essay by Donald Judd, he

writes that “Bontecou’s reliefs are an assertion of herself, of what she feels and knows (...) The scale is pragmatic, immediate, and exclusive. Rather than inducing idealization and generalization and being allusive, it excludes. The work asserts its own existence, form, and power. It becomes an object in its own right” (p.196-99). For me, the removal of an image from paper negates its illustrative qualities. The image is no longer a depiction; the lines form a structure that is an object. Judd also writes that “The black hole does not allude to a black hole; it is one. The image does suggest other things, but by analogy; the image is one thing among similar things (...) the triple existence of the image makes it an object” (p.196-99). When an image is confined within the frames of a canvas or the border of a page, it is a mere illustration of reality, not a thing in its own right. As I separate line from paper, the image steps into the realm of objecthood. In *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Martin Heidegger examines the thingness of a thing as a way of determining the nature of art as object. He writes that, “If we consider the works in their unsullied actuality and do not impose ourselves upon them the result is that the works are as naturally present as things (...) even the much vaunted aesthetic experience does not disregard the thingly aspect of the art-work” (p.651). Heidegger goes on to say that “The art-work is, to be sure, a thing that is made, but it says something other than the mere thing itself. The work makes public something other than itself; it reveals something other; it is an allegory” (p.652). The object as art may suggest similar things, but it is not an allusion, it is a thing in itself. I am interested in this potential for an image to become something beyond itself.

I believe my work fits within a repertoire of artists concerned with similar

aesthetic approaches. Examples of contemporary artists whose work also deals with systems, nature, abstraction, linearity and biomorphic forms are: Matthew Ritchie (Plate 16), Shinique Smith (Plate 17), and Mia Pearlman (Plate 18), to name a few. Within the context of art history, I am interested in the maximalist approaches of the Baroque and Rococo periods in Europe. Ornamentation, decoration, and drama are a large part of the aesthetic sensibilities of my work.

Many artists before me have explored the idea of art as object, each with their own respective way of revealing objecthood and immateriality. In his essay *Specific Objects*, Donald Judd discusses the work of his contemporaries, stating: “The new work obviously resembles sculpture more than it does painting, but it is nearer to painting. Most sculpture is like the painting which preceded Pollock, Rothko, Still, and Newman (...) Stella’s shaped paintings involve several important characteristics of three-dimensional work. The periphery of a piece and the lines inside correspond. The stripes are nowhere near being discrete parts. The surface is farther from the wall than usual, though it remains parallel to it (...) A painting isn’t an image. The shapes, the unity, projection, order and color are specific, aggressive, and powerful” (p.826-27). Likewise, Ives Klein wrote in the *Evolution of Art towards the Immaterial* that, “...it is through color that I have little by little become acquainted with the Immaterial” (p.819). Many of the artists of Klein and Judd’s time were treating the canvas as an object in order to release the image from being an image. Rather than painting windows into a pictorial world, they were exposing paint as a material, lying on the surface, as part of the canvas-object. In contrast, instead of emphasizing the paper plane as an object, my goal is to

obliterate the edges completely. I am not satisfied by the flatness of a drawing or print, nor am I interested in discussing the paper on which it is printed as an object in its own right. Through cutting out the lines, I wish to free them from all physical constraints. In turn, the structures themselves become more important than the flatworks that comprise them. This strategy starts to become more apparent in pieces like *Skyview 837 (v.1)* and *(v.2)* and *Leukos-Haima (v.1)* and *(v.2)*, where architectural structures more seriously dictate the size and shape of the piece, and the work itself is built off of an object such as Plexiglas rod or wire.

In discussing the relationship between my meditative practice and studio practice, it is important to understand phenomenology. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy describes phenomenology as “...the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view. The central structure of an experience is its intentionality, its being directed toward something, as it is an experience of or about some object. An experience is directed toward an object by virtue of its content or meaning (which represents the object) together with appropriate enabling conditions”.

In creating an installation, I am most interested in the sensation, feeling, or phenomena that the piece imposes on the viewer. This viewer-object relationship is best defined by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his *Phenomenology of Perception*. Merleau-Ponty describes the human body as being in a permanent state of experience. Perception becomes an active and primary dimension in its own right, and is said to be a combination of bodily awareness and language. In his essay *Eye and Mind*, Merleau-

Ponty states that “The painter’s vision is not a view upon the outside, a merely ‘physical-optical’ relation with the world. The world no longer stands before him through representation; rather, it is the painter to whom the things of the world give birth by a sort of concentration or coming-to-itself of the visible (...) This internal animation, this radiation of the visible is what the painter seeks under the name of depth, of space, of colour” (p.770). Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze have many of the same ideas, including that they both believe form and representation must be broken up for the benefit of color, for the presence of color. Color becomes the most expressive element in a work of art, and is seen as being more meaningful than representation of objects. Objects are illusions that get in the way of the vibrations entering the soul like musical instruments being played, as Kandinsky was known to say. Merleau-Ponty and Kandinsky both believe that nature has a life of its own; this is expressed in the discussion of the internal animation of a pool of water in the Eye and Mind excerpt. In meditation, there is no such thing as perceiving with the eyes. The theta state of cognition is what we experience just before falling asleep. It is the state in which memories exist, intuition is used, dreams are recalled, and meditation happens. In this rhythm of thoughtfulness, the mind expands beyond the boundaries of the body. As an artist, it can sometimes be difficult to bridge the gap between an experience in deep consciousness and the act of translating it into an art object. For this reason, I come back to making the verb lists such as Serra’s compilation or Pfaff’s thoughts for an installation. Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty both state that it is through internal animation, such as in meditation, that the artist can turn a thought or sensation into a physical object.

My internal experiences in meditation lead me to create large and small-scale paper structures as expressions of movement. The flow of each piece can be best described by a basic set of verbs so as not to pin the work down to a certain illustrative quality. As lines are removed from their paper matrices, they are granted the freedom of weightlessness and ability to float and disperse in space. It is important that the image is broken apart so that the installations and sculptural pieces may become objects in their own right. The image printed or drawn on paper is a depiction of reality, and so it is removed from reality. By cutting apart the image, scanning or photographing it, and cutting it apart again, the image is twice or three times removed from its origins. In this way, the structures take on an otherworldly quality that is akin to the environments I traverse in meditation. My web-like paper structures are ciphers of deep thought and reflection, made to make visible what is generally invisible. Through my work, a sensation within the body can be perceived optically.



Plate 1: *Fluidensity: System Breakdown (I.) (v.2)*, 2014



Plate 2: *Fluidensity: System Breakdown (I.) (v.2)* detail, 2014



Plate 3: *Skyview 837 (v.1)*, 2014

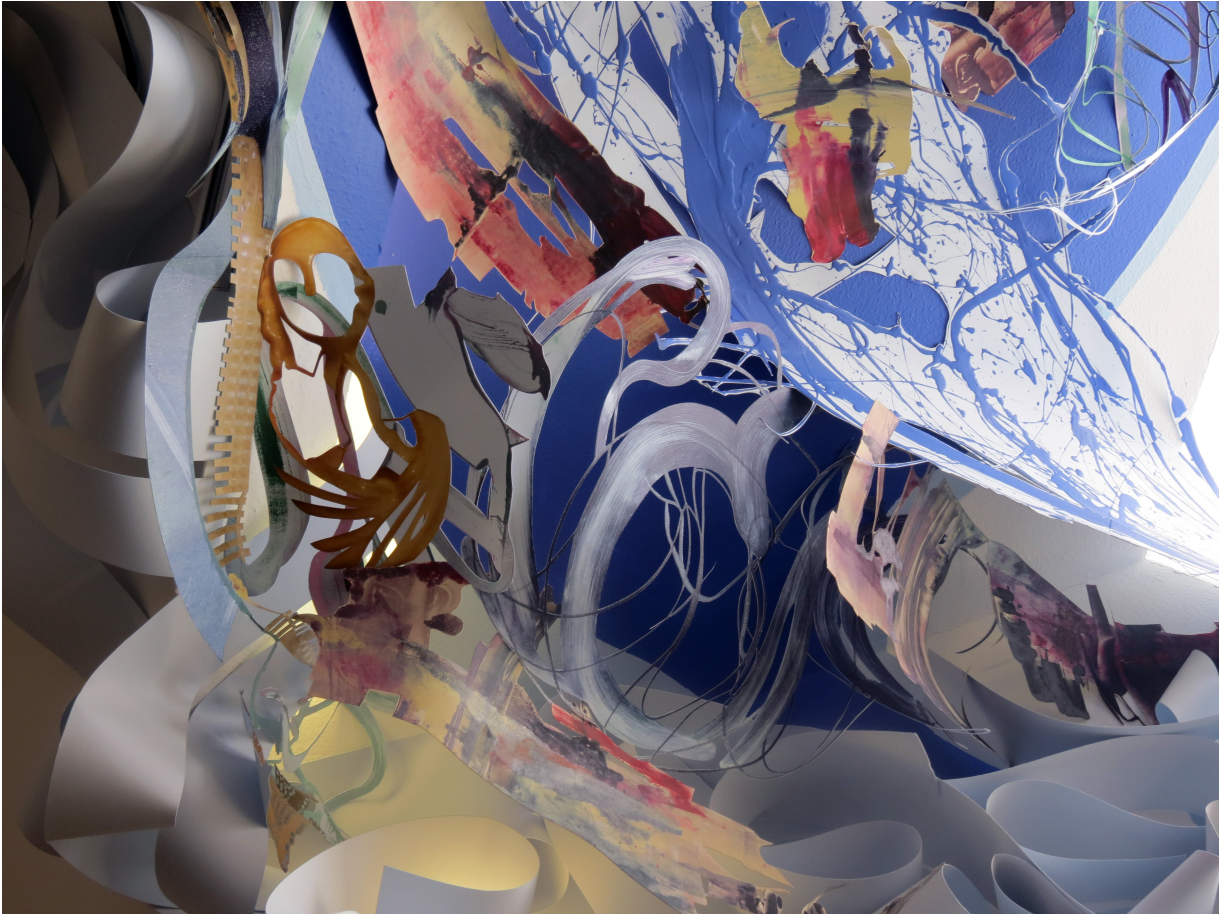


Plate 4: *Skyview 837 (v.1) detail*, 2014



Plate 5: *Skyview 837 (v.2)*, 2014



Plate 6: *Skyview 837 (v.2) detail*, 2014



Plate 7: *Leukos-Haima (v.1)*, 2014



Plate 8: *Leukos-Haima (v.1)* detail, 2014



Plate 9: *Leukos-Haima (v.2)*, 2014



Plate 10: *Leukos-Haima* (v.2) detail, 2014



Plate 11: *...all of the above*, Judy Pfaff, 2007



Plate 12: *Study of George Dyer*, Francis Bacon, 1969

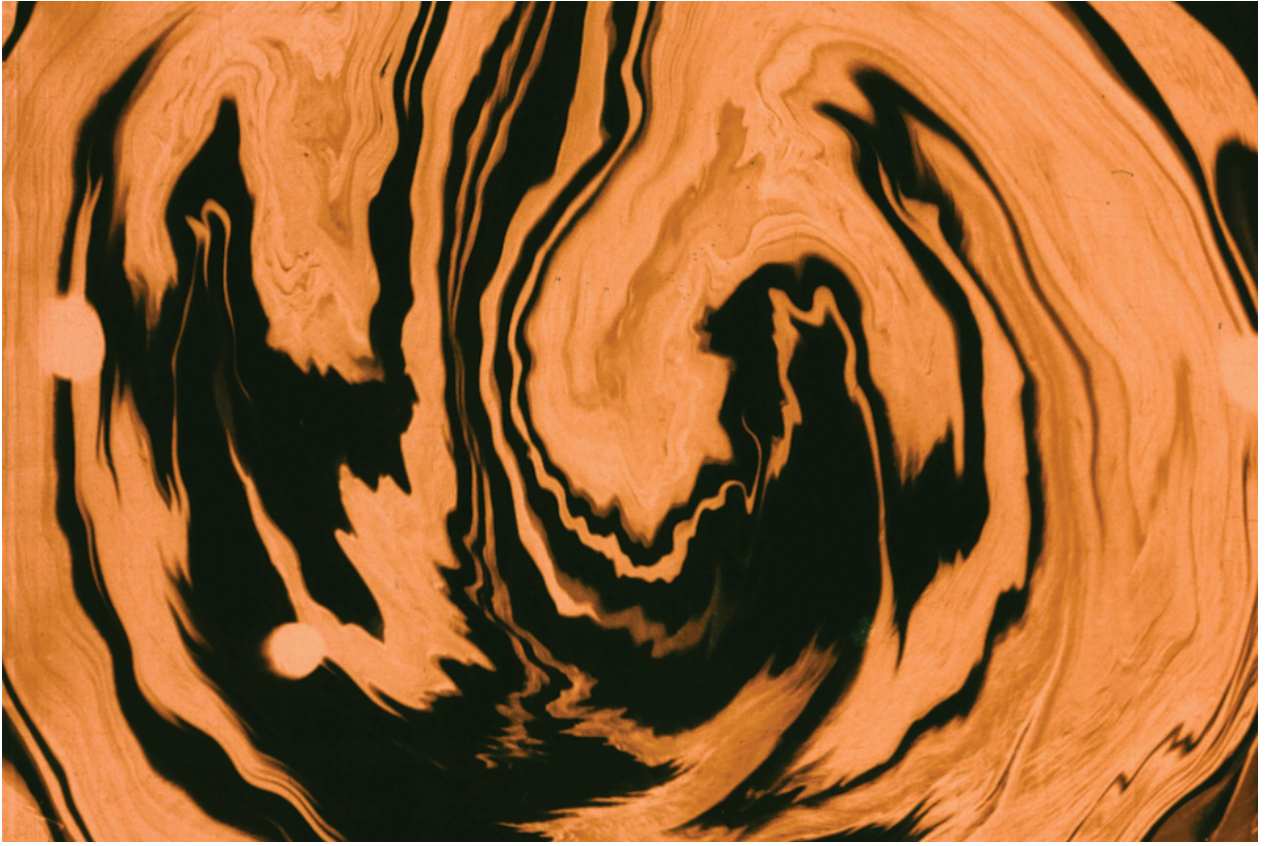


Plate 13: *Wax Experiments*, Oskar Fischinger, 1926

to roll	to curve	to scatter	to modulate
to crease	to lift	to arrange	to distill
to fold	to inlay	to repair	of waves
to store	to impress	to discard	of electromagnetic
to bend	to fire	to pair	of inertia
to shorten	to flood	to distribute	of ionization
to twist	to smear	to surfeit	of polarization
to dapple	to rotate	to complement	of refraction
to crumple	to swirl	to enclose	of simultaneity
to shave	to support	to surround	of tides
to tear	to hook	to encircle	of reflection
to chip	to suspend	to hide	of equilibrium
to split	to spread	to cover	of symmetry
to cut	to hang	to wrap	of fluctuation
to sever	to collect	to dig	to stretch
to drop	of tension	to tilt	to bounce
to remove	off gravity	to bind	to erase
to simplify	of entropy	to weave	to sprain
to differ	of nature	to join	to systematize
to disarrange	of grouping	to match	to refer
to open	of layering	to laminate	to force
to mix	of jelling	to bond	of mapping
to splash	to grasp	to hinge	of location
to knot	to tighten	to mark	of context
to spill	to bundle	to expand	of time
to droop	to heap	to dilute	of carbonization
to flow	to gather	to light	to continue

Plate 14: *Verb List*, Richard Serra, 1968



Plate 15: *Untitled*, Lee Bontecou, 1980



Plate 16: *Parents and Children*, Matthew Ritchie, 2000



Plate 17: *Tongues Became Flowers*, Shinique Smith, 2013



Plate 18: *Inrush*, Mia Pearlman, 2010

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