

Sentient Process



Crit Streed

Crit Streed / UNI Gallery of Art

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Cover artwork:

Aggregate

Sumi Ink and gouache on paper, 2018

Photo credit: Gilded Pear Gallery



Capacious
Sumi ink on paper, 2021
Photo credit: Gilded Pear Gallery

Crit Streed

Sentient Process

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University of Northern Iowa
Gallery of Art
Cedar Falls, Iowa

This publication has been produced in conjunction with the UNI Gallery of Art Exhibition titled “Sentient Process” curated by UNI Adjunct Instructor and Foundations Coordinator Alex Dooley and UNI Gallery of Art Director Laura Gleissner, containing artworks by Crit Streed spanning 46 years.

Acknowledgments:

Essay by Alex Dooley

Text by Crit Streed

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The Architecture of Drawing
Sumi ink on various papers, 2007
Photo credit: Gilded Pear Gallery



Chris Ford '16

Artist Statement

I concentrate on the phenomenon of drawing as an action to reveal. Wrestled within the parameters of an approach, I intentionally proceed but I do not foresee the image. This drawing process generates structures that are oddly familiar yet enigmatic in reference. I perform to track time by hours, by days or by events, pursue perfection and therefore question it, cultivate an intuitive reflex and indulge my analytic nature. I am aware of the thin skin of mark making as an extension of myself and it offers perceptual substance as form outside my body. I am intrigued by the interconnections I find between drawing, nature, events and experiences. When I considered my nature as a part of nature the forms sourced are an action of that nature. The result is for the drawing to be, rather than to be about.

Artwork at left:

Homage

Sumi ink and gouache on paper, 2017

Photo credit: Lia Nall

Biography

I was born in Iowa, explored much of the world, and continue to reside in Iowa. Professionally as an artist I was awarded a long-standing national membership at A.I.R. Gallery, New York. My first showing there was one month after 9/11 2001 where I had prearranged to exhibit an installation entitled The Empty Void. In 2009 for one month I sat daily atop a 9' converted "hunting stand to drawing stand" interacting with A.I.R. Gallery visitors while drawing for the performance piece Survey of Drawing.

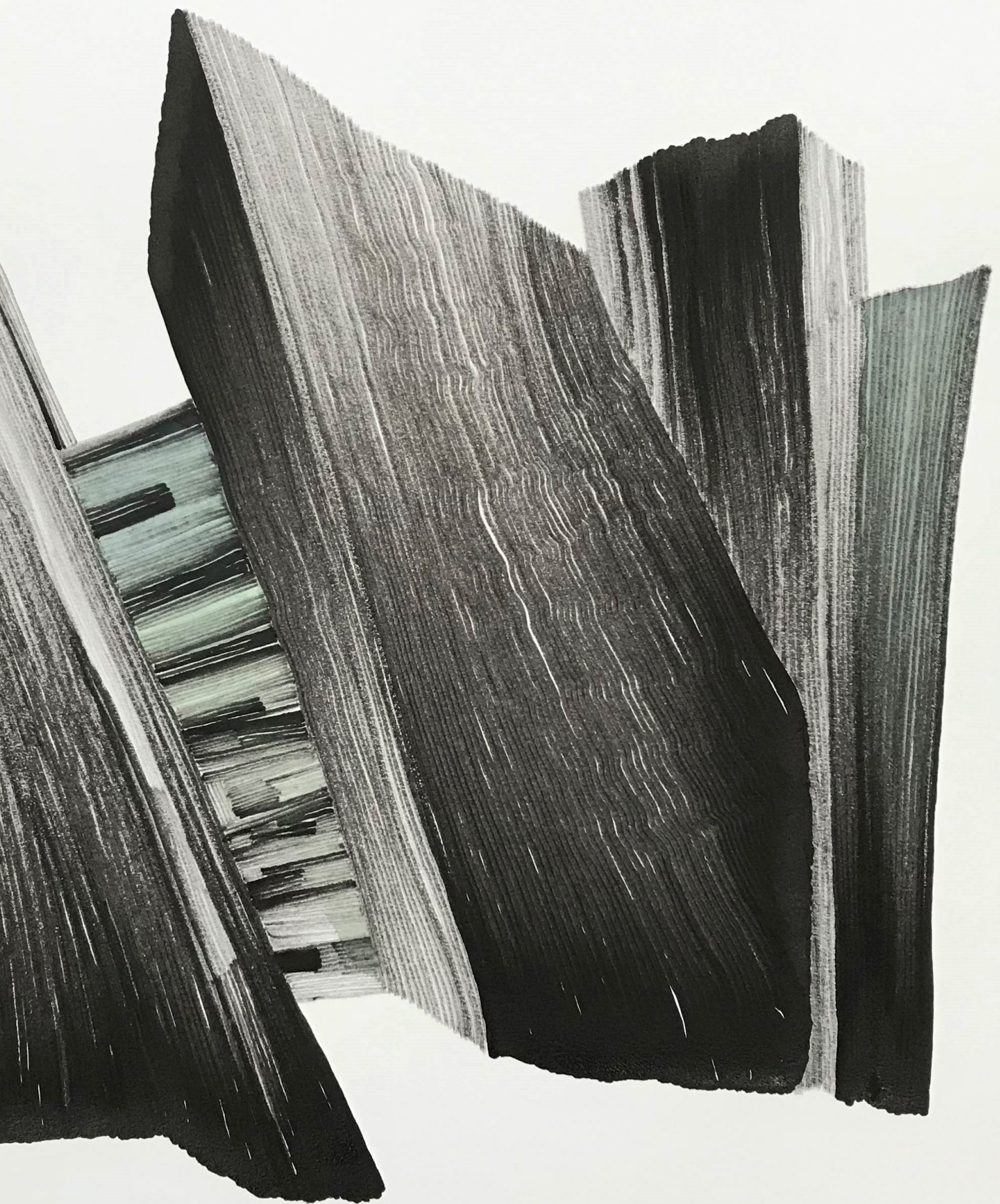
In 2010 I installed a solo exhibition of one of the first variations of Making Arrangements. The performance/installation was a mandala constructed with 1000 pieces of milk glass objects. In 2021 my drawing Compass was included in the exhibited folio Artist@Home for the global environmental arts project Extraction: Art On The Edge Of The Abyss.

Over the years, I exhibited significant groups of drawings or installations annually at A.I.R. along with other venues in New York City such as Kathryn Markel Gallery, Galapagos Art Space, Black & White Gallery and The Puck Building. My portfolio and biographic materials are included in the A.I.R. Gallery archives acquired by the Fales Library, housed at the Elmer Holmes Bobst Library at New York University. I now hold an Alum Artist status at A.I.R.

Also archived is The Iowa Women Artists Oral History Project launched by Jane Robinette at the University of Iowa Library Collection. In Iowa my work is permanently on view in the public collection of the University of Iowa Hospital, the United Medical Park Art Collection in Cedar Falls and the lobby of the CRST World Headquarter curated by Janelle McClain in downtown Cedar Rapids. There are six large format drawings for public viewing.

Artwork at right:
Cadaques Series
Sumi ink and gouache on paper, 2019
Photo credit: Lia Nall







Out of Mind

Taxidermy of Drawing
Sumi ink and archival pen on paper, 2012
Photo credit: Lia Nall

An exhibition record for solo and significant juried shows are regional and international to include the Art Institute of Chicago, the Des Moines Art Center, University of Wisconsin Madison, St Mary's College Notre Dame, The Minnesota Museum of Art St Paul, the University of Illinois Chicago, the University of Nebraska Lincoln and in the countries of Mexico, Guatemala, India, Nepal, Spain, Portugal and Russia with accompanying lectures and visual presentations. I have been a visiting artist, lecturer, juror, and panelist for both public and academic institutions.

A teaching career started early as adjunct faculty at UNI with only a B.A. degree and a great desire to make art and with the support of my mentors Ken Gogle and Shirley Haupt. Encouraged to attend graduate school I received my M.A. and M.F.A. in Painting from the University of Iowa. Applying then for a full time teaching contract at UNI, I taught for two years when an opportunity was presented to live abroad in Kathmandu, Nepal. After two and half years there gathering experience and making art, I returned to apply for a long awaited tenure track position. In 1986, I accepted the position to teach drawing, 2D Design and to coordinate the beginning of a creative and experiential foundation program. I continued to teach drawing as well as painting until retirement in 2009.

My teaching extended beyond the University of Northern Iowa to include setting up the first encaustic workshop at the historical Penland Center for Crafts in North Carolina, now offered annually. I also introduced encaustic painting for several teaching residencies at Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts in Tennessee. The Iowa Arts Council and the University of Northern Iowa have generously supported my creative and teaching research. Professionally, I have been awarded repeated and fully funded artist residencies at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, Atlantic Center for the Arts in Florida, Willapa Bay AiR in Washington, and Penland Center for Crafts Artist/Instructors retreat in North Carolina. In 2019, I held a six week residency in Cadaqués Spain at Bene Nota in the heart of Mediterranean nature and surrealist ideology.

Extended travel through Europe, Asia, Mexico, South America has been a critical asset to my art making through the scope of exposure to environments, cultures, philosophies and artifacts. Many month-long trips to travel the whole of Guatemala were an immersion into the pattern and process of Mayan life and textiles. Never calculating how a drawing takes its shape, I continue to draw to be amused, amazed and even at times dismayed in what the drawings reveal ever cognizant of the absolute interrelationship of all things.



Artwork above:
Mysteries of Inventions
Ink, gouache, and graphite on various papers, 2008
Photo credit: Lia Nall

Artwork at right:
Sentient #1 and #2
Hand manipulated balsam fir tree, 2020 & 2021
Photo credit: Lia Nall





Making Arrangements Variation
Video and Milk Glass, 2009-ongoing
Photo credit: Crit Streed



Binding Time 1
Gouache on Paper, 1980
Photo credit: Lia Nall



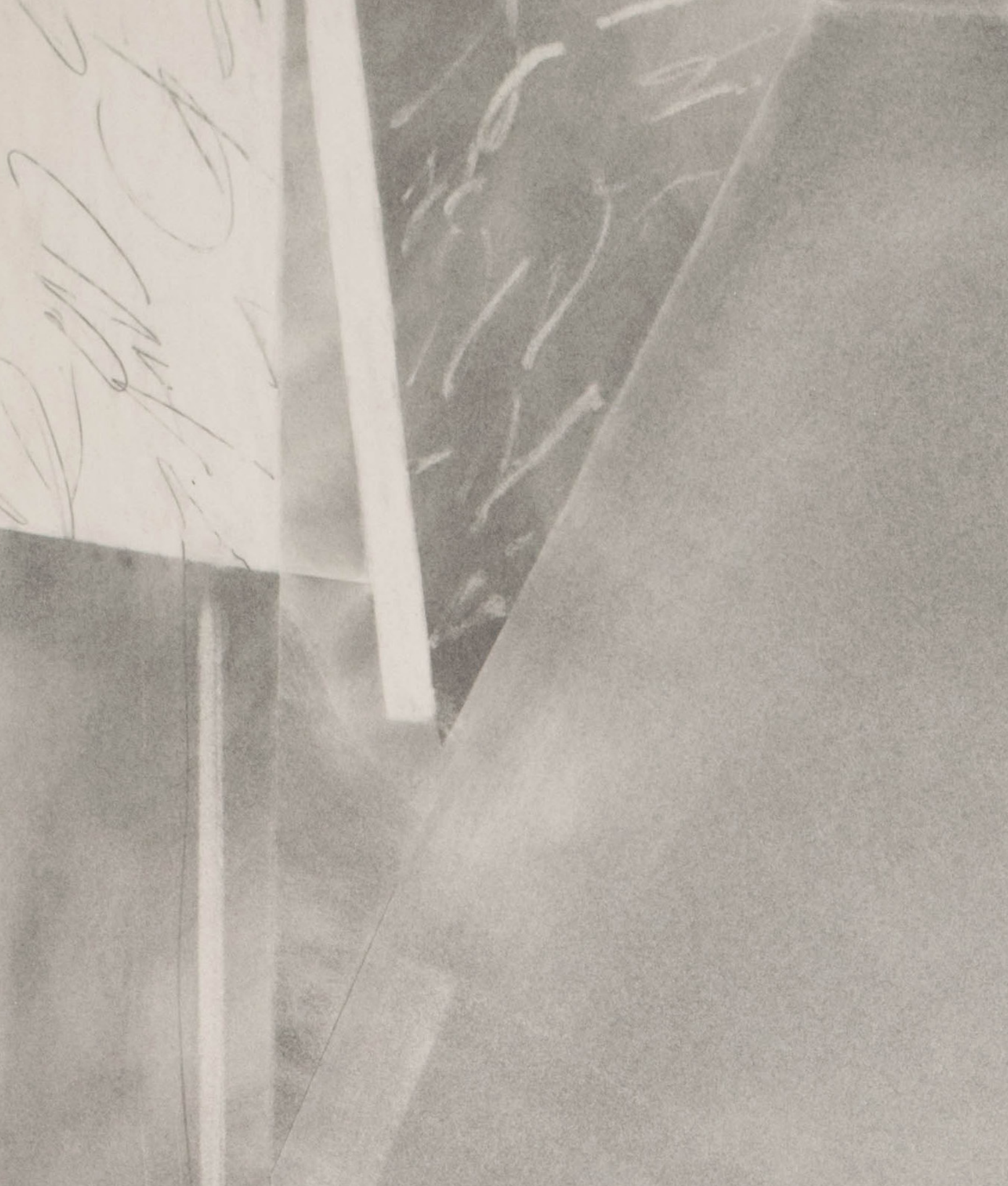
Binding Time 2
Gouache on Paper, 1980
Photo credit: Lia Nall



Under/Time Series 2
Acrylic ink and powdered graphite on vellum, 1979
Photo credit: Lia Nall



Under/Time Series 1
Acrylic ink and powdered graphite on vellum, 1979
Photo credit: Lia Nall



[T]Here

Standing at the edge

Looking out across...

It was a day when light made the line between sky and earth
shimmer and everything appeared as one.

And then as always

there is the parallax of every journey.

That is

It's not the change in the position of things

But rather a change in the position of the person looking.

- C.S.





Artwork above:
Luminiferous
Walnut ink and gouache on paper, 2019
Photo credit: Lia Nall

Artwork at left:
#3 Wild Series
Birch Bark, 2017
Photo credit: Gilded Pear Gallery





Weather Drawings #1-4
Sumi ink on paper, 2007
Photo credit: Lia Nall



Artwork from the Above and Below Series
Mixed Media on wax infused paper, 1999
Photo credit: Lia Nall



Tattoo

the mind glides through
invisible traces
tattooed fragments reveal
tender realms of mystery
we are marked by experience

- C.S.



From Everybody's Story Series
Encaustic, 1995
Photo credit: Lia Nall



From Tender Membrane Installation
Mixed media and student desk, 2003

Nature & Relationship
Oil on Canvas, 1990
Photo credit: Lia Nall



Everybody Knows Series
Pen on paper, 2002
Photo credit: Lia Nall







Often I am

wrapped in the comfort of the still
absorbed by the warmth of the light
drawn to the interior of others
caught on the side of the self

– C.S.

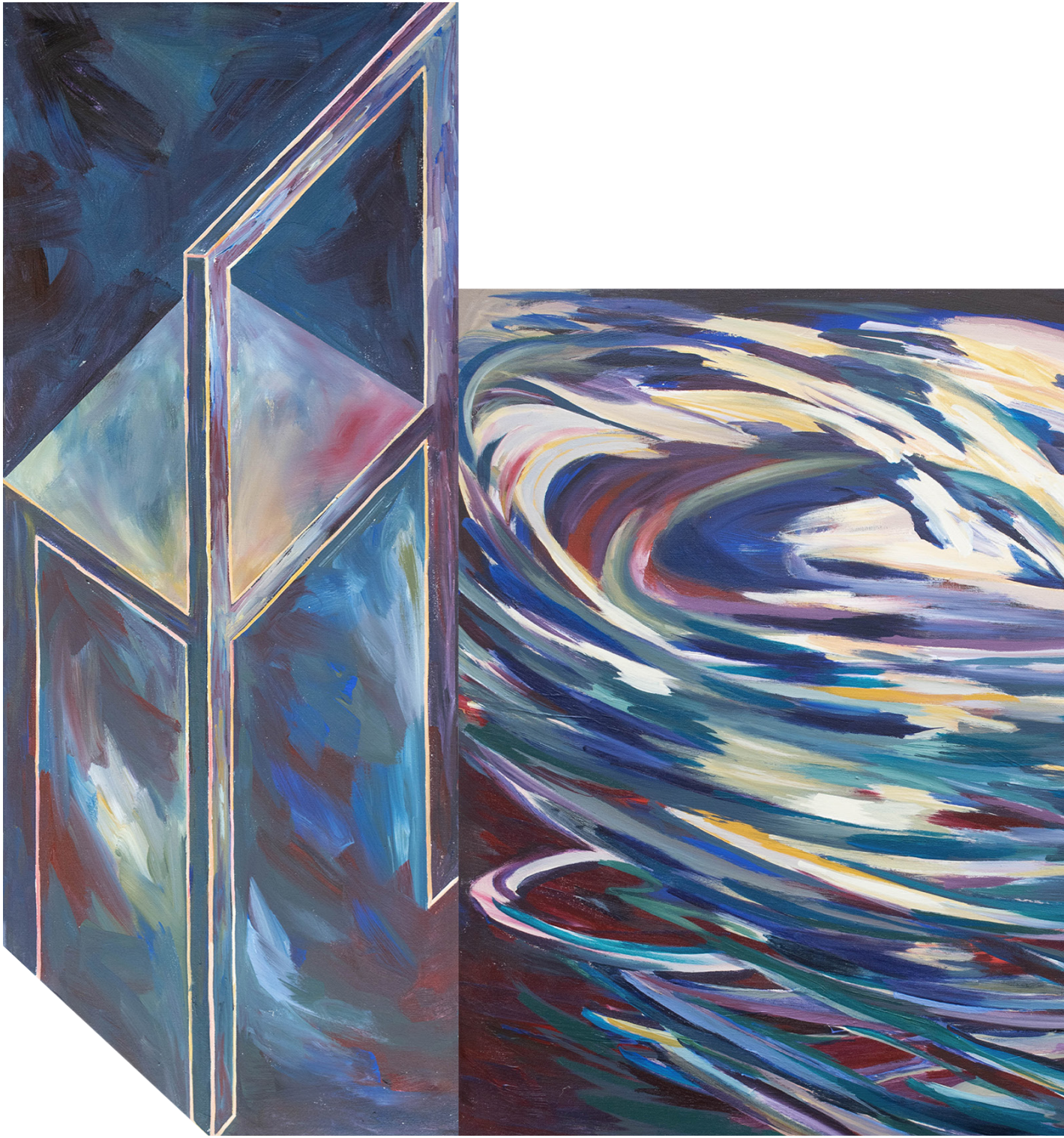
Artwork at left: #7 Wild Series
Birch Bark, 2017
Photo credit: Gilded Pear Gallery

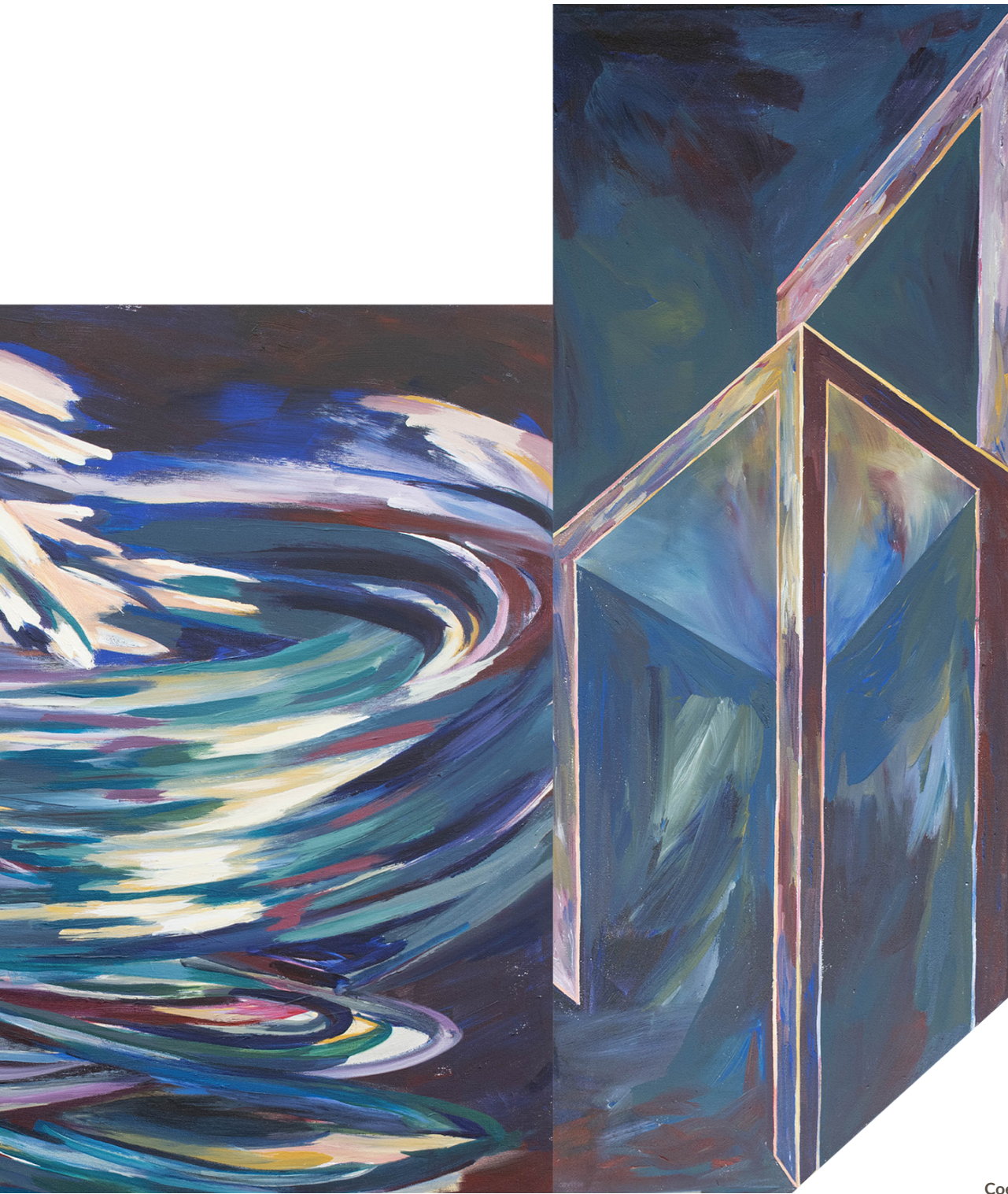


Coextensive Series: Field Study Case 1
Acrylic on canvas, 1988
Photo credit: Lia Nall



dis-played #2
Sumi ink and gouache on collage paper, 2018
Photo credit: Lia Nail





Coextensive Series: Retablé 1
Acrylic on canvas, 1988
Photo credit: Lia Nall

Sugar is the pure manifestation of light

In western thought the square and the circle represent the exquisite perfection of form. In Eastern symbology a circle represents the heavens and the square earth.

- C.S.



Tropism and Persistence of light series installation

Mixed media, 1998

Photo credit: Crit Streed





Detail from Making Arrangements
Milk glass, 2009-ongoing
Photo credit: Crit Streed

Art at left:
Control Burn
Ebonized wood, rubber cord, 2021
Photo credit: Crit Streed





Tender Membrane

There is a tender membrane of time through which we continually pass. The future slips by and we step into potential.

Under Time
Acrylic on Canvas, 1977
Photo credit: Lia Nall

Mind/Being

Curation

The origins of this exhibition were born during a move. Specifically, Crit Streed's move from a home and studio which had been lived and worked in for more than 30 years. As cupboards were emptied and boxes were packed up in the domestic arena, so too was the creative life ousted from the studio. Out came paintings from decades past; portfolios of early drawings were opened and re-explored. As a friend and fellow artist, to see a lifetime of work revealed in this way was exhilarating. There was so much to look at! It illuminated a network of thoughts and ideas that crisscross the work Crit has made and exhibited over the many years of her career. Serendipitously, the University of Northern Iowa Department of Art had just hired a new gallery director, Laura Gleissner, who also happens to be a former student of Crit's. A studio visit confirmed that she felt as strongly as I did that a show of Crit's work had to happen.

The selection of pieces for the exhibition came easily. Together, Laura and I, after many hours of rich conversation with Crit, formed a vision for an expansive showing of her work. Our attraction to specific works spanned decades of Crit's production which we probed to identify what we saw as the common threads. We found in her studio a wealth of creative output that only deep investments of time and thoughtful investigations can yield. The one truly difficult thing was choosing what had to be left out.

That art has something to do with a way of being is one of the insights I've gleaned from being Crit's student, colleague, and friend of more than 20 years. This is something I've heard her speak about many times over the years. It is a perspective that infuses her teaching and studio processes alike and which Laura and I feel is at large in the works we selected. Evidence of this intersection between life and art is everywhere in this show.





dis-played #1
Sumi ink and gouache on collage paper, 2018
Photo credit: Lia Nall

Laura and I are both teachers ourselves. We have thought quite a lot about what it means for young artists to encounter this work in the context of a university gallery, which is, above all, a learning space. Some things are taught explicitly, through lectures and demonstrations. But there is another kind of learning where understandings are passed from teacher to student in the slow haze of presence. The work itself is also a teacher when true attention is given to it. Processes unfold, with time being the conduit through which insight and awakening truly occur.

Erasure

One of the first lessons I remember Crit teaching was about absence. I was auditing her painting class as a postgraduate student, new to town and not very far along in my own artistic journey. She showed a video on “erasure” which featured different artists using absence as a way to communicate presence, an idea that I found in her work when seeing it for the first time. In a work called “Adequate Light,” everyday objects, lamps, and flashlights wrapped in heavy black felt rested on shelves. They seemed to float on the white gallery walls. These objects, givers of light, were reduced to crude outlines of their true forms. Muffled and suffocated, their swaddled silhouettes were gradually recognizable, and following this realization, came the comprehension of their purpose, thwarted and literally dark.

That lesson, of erasure, stayed with me and gave me a new understanding, not simply of a way to communicate artistically but of the visceral power of disrupting expectation. An image or an object is more than what it does, it is also what happens when it ceases to do.

Perception and meaning; an internal discourse

In Crit’s drawings we find that between object and perception, there is an internal discourse taking place. The thing which is seen, and perhaps known through use, is continually translated through the self; the eye, then the brain, through memory and sensation. Interpretation of that form relies always on the experiences one has and it happens so instantaneously as to be missed, often, by the unaware mind. Separating those processes of eye, brain, and recognition is what is taking place when Crit uses the outline of a chair juxtaposed against a wave. The chair, a repeating image in her early work, is a neutral but familiar form; meaningful but static. A wave is more charged, a force of nature it conjures sensation; suggesting that larger processes are at play. Catching the difference between these two kinds of perceiving is what Crit asks us to do. To be awake to vision, thinking, and feeling, is to awaken to the nature of the mind.

Living with objects

A chair can be universally understood as an object. It has a function. That function relates to the human body. Its purpose can be reduced to an essence even, a simplicity of understood lines and shapes that have a shared purpose, extending bi-directionally into the physical world and the symbolic. Living with chairs is different. Such objects in our homes are not reductions but expansions of possibility. This is another lesson of Crit's. The objects of obsession that occur and reoccur in our work are also present in our lives. As an artist, how fully can one embrace the manifestation of our ideas in our everyday spaces? Does the work require a continuum between studio and living room? In her video work "Making Arrangements" we see an empty room with two armchairs. The chairs are sleek, plush, and inviting. There is the soft, cool light of late afternoon gleaming on hardwood floors. A woman begins moving the chairs. She makes an arrangement of them, and then another, and another. For the length of the video she rearranges. The chairs are always moving because the possibilities are endless. Arriving at any one configuration would miss the point.

There is a pleasure to dissatisfaction. Seeking what is possible is a little different from seeking what is best. I think of the chairs in Crit's home. They are diverse and exquisite, as is every object in use and in view. But the utility of her furniture is equal parts function and form. Consideration is paid to the aesthetics, in other words, she cares, as many of us do, about the way things look. More to the point though, is that any object, be it a chair or a lamp or a milk glass vase contains within it a host of associations, which can be read like a book if you are paying attention. The placement of that object then, within a room or within a drawing is a way of authoring, of rearranging themes to arrive at new understandings.



Fare Thee Well
Sumi ink and watercolor on paper, 2011-12
Photo credit: Lia Nall

Many of Crit's paintings and drawings function in this way. Her installations are playful proposals for us to see the relationships that form between objects and images. Ideas exist as internalized perspectives, literally, where the image of a vase relative to a window has something to do with an open book on a desk. By simplifying the pictorial, the mind is free to activate, to invent, or find the relationships hiding in plain sight. To experience the inner process of making meaning.

In curating the show, Laura and I had stacks of exhibition photos to work from but it was always clear that paintings and objects would come together in a new way from previous configurations. Crit was comfortable giving us room to choose how to bring elements together. She was curious even, to see how our involvement would reframe the works as we selected what would be included and where things would go. Her installations have always shifted and changed, with each exhibition leading to a reinvention. How else could the artist reach for the numinous other than through reincarnation?

Arrangements

Crit taught drawing and painting in the Department of Art at UNI for 32 years and has traveled extensively. Her time living in Nepal, visits to Turkey, and travels to Central and South America led to a collection of fascinating and beautiful ephemera brought home from her journeys. The artworks and textiles which grace her home, exist alongside a curated assortment of domestic and creative treasures.



From Tender Membrane Installation
Mixed media and student desk, 2003
Photo credit: Lia Nall

Less visible is the knowledge which accompanies each item and so it is hard to explain how deeply connected her ideas are to the cultures and philosophies she has explored in her life. She chooses to live among these objects thoughtfully, selecting forms for their enigmatic capacity to hold more than one meaning and represent more than one thing.

The disparate realms of home and gallery are not unlike. Both are spaces that allow the invisible interior of the self to manifest through exploratory interactions of things. In the gallery Crit sets the terms of these encounters for us, offering up poetic configurations for considering. Repeating throughout her work over the years, for example, is the use of the circle and square. In both Eastern and Western traditions these shapes are symbolic of heaven and earth and she uses them with this specific reference in mind. But in encountering the work in person, the circle and square might be experienced more intuitively, where the scale and placement of the shapes are relative to you, the viewer. In the installation, "Persistence of Light", the circle and square are lying side by side on the gallery floor, each filled to the edge with sparkling white sugar. Sugar is used by Crit as a catalyst. The end product of photosynthesis – pure sugar – is the distillation of sunlight converted into matter by plants; an actual manifestation of light. You may be aware of this symbolism or you may not. Regardless, the white sugar glows, ethereal in the black frames of circle and square, which are in the space of you, the viewer, and must be physically navigated as such. That there is also a greater meaning to the circle and the square is sensed but not explained. She gives you the pieces of the whole in elemental form. What cannot be shown explicitly has been implied and it is up to you to synthesize your sensations.

Awareness of the potency of the object within relation to the whole is, for Crit, the beginning of the exercise. In this approach, setting dishes around a table can be a way of drawing, a walk in the woods can be entering the studio. When burnt sticks are gathered from a forest fire and later leaned against a gallery wall she has set a conversation in motion between the circle and square on the floor, the mounds of sugar, and the remnants of a forest. Light, growth, death, and rebirth are implicated in these relationships.

Symbolically or otherwise, the arranging of objects is a way to engage the psyche with the tangible world in order to instigate a deeper perception.

Natural selection

In the act of drawing an outcome is inherent. This is not unlike the fact of a tree or the non-negotiable weight of a stone. The accretion of material happens through a process and to grow or to accumulate is to be bound very specifically to the circumstances of creation. Where things are manufactured, as in plastics poured into a mold, for example, the realization of that making is lost. That a drawing can be a revelation of nature and natural processes is the surprising proposal Crit makes in her recent drawings. To depict a natural subject, say the papery bark of a birch tree, should one render it faithfully in color and shape? Or is the truth of it more closely expressed through movements of the hand and seeping tones of walnut ink? Maybe the thing that is being depicted is arrived at rather than determined beforehand?

This is how Crit came to her recent bodies of work, by way of movement and watching the patient accumulation of lines on paper. Skies, earth, weather – these can be sensed in the images. But the drawings are not these things, nor are they specific depictions of them either. They are an echo of what a human being knows about living in the physical world. A place where water, wind, pressure, time, sunlight, and darkness are all at work on the material substance of existence. There is time and timelessness within the stacked lines that make up these drawings. Looking back through earlier pieces you can see it there too. Ink drawings soaked in beeswax become tangible in the form of a book, a canvas devoid of image and scrubbed with gray paint can be re-seen as an atmospheric plane.

Two of the most inscrutable works in the show are large black drawings with a viscous, thickened surface. In one an amorphous hollow forms, in the other the surface seems to part and reform. These two drawings, shown here for the first time, are an example of how presence emerges from and through the material, physically and spiritually. What cannot be said through picture or word, is what the artist delivers. Crit's understanding of artmaking is that the nature of what is happening in the drawings is of the same origin as of all things in the natural world.



Richard 42



Taxidermy of Drawing
Sumi ink and archival pen on paper, 2012
Photo credit: Lia Nall

Throughout this exhibition are works which reference nature and natural processes. Crit's hand in the drawings and paintings can be recognized as either a conduit of self or an instrument of record. Or both. Her recent series of drawings are made with continuous lines which fold back and forth upon one another, stacking like layers of silt compressed by time into stone. The forms that emerge are organic. The sense of unanticipated emergence is authentic. In reflecting the forces which act upon the world, the drawings are recognizable experiences of it. Lines build into skeins of atmosphere reminiscent of towering skies and shifting clouds. Passages of color push deeply, delicately through strata reminding us of dimensions unseen.

Paramount in all of Crit's work is the presence of the mind, itself a work of nature. Her process of drawing which involves the application of ink with a single continuous line is arduous and slow. It requires sustained attention of the sort that makes most of us shiver with impatience. The meditation and calm focus of the steady hand is an expression of intent, which might be seen as both to do and to not do. Where the hand wavers a variation occurs, which leads to an echo in the line which follows, which leads to a formation and to an emergent shape. That the waver is allowed to exist in equal part to the careful repetition is another lesson; it demonstrates the conditions that are necessary for growth.

Relationships

A thing can only be perceived in the context of another. Absence and presence, erasure and accumulation, thinking and sensing, sky and earth, mind and being – she provides these dichotomies as ways to echolocate, to comprehend the self within the boundless mind and finite world. Crit speaks about her approach to art making "as a sentient process, slow and methodical while spontaneous and responsive." It is an invitation to come awake, to be aware of that which is continually unfolding. She points to the human gesture, sensitive thought, and action, as a way to navigate the physical world and build our intelligence in proportion to it.

Alex Dooley



Geography of Drawing
Archival pen on paper, 2009
Photo credit: Lia Nall



ZZZzzz
Sumi ink on paper, 2016
Photo credit: Gilded Pear Gallery

