

THESIS

BETWEEN VIEWING AND EXPERIENCING

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ABSTRACT

BETWEEN VIEWING AND EXPERIENCING

Psychologist, American philosopher, and educational reformer John Dewey, once said, “Give the pupils something to do, not something to learn; and the doing is of such a nature as to demand thinking; learning naturally results.”¹ We learn through play and exploration. As an observer and participant in this world, my own personal experiences inadvertently impact me as a *maker*, and as a *teacher*. This is a continual revolving influence. My experiences, my artwork, and my teaching all have a direct impact on each other. There are intersecting connections and overlapping interests between design as visual communications and teaching. They are about shared experiences and both encompass communication, personal expression, collaboration, transmission of information, participation, and interpretation.

Design and teaching are about communication. Design can communicate a message in different ways such as through typography, visuals, materials, color, symbolism, etc. What we know as a viewer by experience, impacts our interpretation of the artwork. We look for ways to relate to the artwork based on what we know. The artwork can push us into feeling uncomfortable to promote a concept or a message. Even though an artist may have a specific message in mind, there is no check system to ensure the viewer received that message. In the classroom, I aim to create a comfortable environment for students to encourage a safe place for interactive learning. There are checks and balances in place, such as quizzes, tests, discussions,

¹ "John Dewey > Quotes," John Dewey Quotes (Author of Art as Experience), accessed January 7, 2018, https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/42738.John_Dewey.

projects, and critiques to ensure the message that was presented was clearly understood. If a student does not understand the message that was communicated, they can be affected since the message deepens the understanding of the industry they are preparing to enter as well as techniques that are needed to be a successful designer. Artwork is different, the message could be passive or ambiguous. It could be meant to engage and stir up a reaction.

Art is between object and viewer; the collaboration is personal and internal. Teaching is a collaboration between teacher and student, it is external. With teaching, collaborating with students relies on student experiences to grasp the concepts being communicating. With art, collaboration depends on the object or art to start the discussion, whereas with teaching the focus is on the teacher to start the discussion. Design and teaching can be static or interactive but collaboration is always present.

Design can encourage critical thinking, reaction, and even a change in the viewer's thinking. In my role as a teacher, I aim to encourage critical thinking. For example, I give a prompt and I expect students to come back with a concept for their project. They are acting and reacting to the direction they are given. I encourage change in their own thinking as we move through the semester and they learn new industry skills. As an artist, my artwork does the same. If I design a poster for a theater concert to promote sale tickets, my goal is to encourage viewer participation by convincing them to purchase tickets.

I never questioned whether graphic design was a form of art, but in graduate school, I came to the realization that teaching is an art form and there is an unquestionable connection between design and teaching. As an artist, I explore concepts through sketching and digital exploration. Through this process, the concept develops. As a direct result, I grow as an artist, learning and expanding my knowledge and experience. As I choose materials, size, typography,

and visuals for my artwork, I am framing a message. As a teacher, I play the same role. I choose the message I wish to convey to my students, and frame the presentation through a selection of materials, typography, and visuals. I have come to the realization that teaching a design class and creating artwork have many commonalities. In the classroom, I am creating an experience for the students—they are the viewers and what I am participating in is a creative act.

Many disciplines grade student knowledge and understanding by asking multiple choice questions. As a design teacher, I can ask multiple choice questions when it comes to industry terms and basic design knowledge, but design as a visual communication encompasses so much more. Technique, content, and concepts must also be evaluated and that cannot be done through multiple choice questions. I must handle students individually in a studio setting, grasping what individuals are getting and not getting from the instructions based on the work they are creating. I must be able to think on my feet and change gears quickly relying on my own intuition of the design field. Teaching is a creative act the same way making artwork is.

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INTRODUCTION

I worked as a graphic designer for over 15 years before feeling the confidence to pursue a Master of Fine Arts Degree. When I first came to Colorado State University, I became aware that it was up to me to make the artwork that I wanted to make. No client was there to give me a problem to solve, or a prompt to start with. I was my own client. This was the scariest realization I faced in graduate school, and it took me a full semester to come to terms with this idea of coming up with my own project ideas. In my studio, I hung many of the design pieces I had created prior to coming to CSU, and I began reflecting on my past work. It was during a studio open house when I was talking about my work with a visitor that I realized there was a common theme in my work. I was aiming to create an experience. Whether it be through texture or feel of an unusual material or a moving part that required participation, I was clearly looking for a reaction.

The idea of creating an experience for the viewer started way before I became a graphic designer. It began in my early 20s when I was a cake decorator at Albertsons. I didn't just create a ¼ sheet fire engine theme cake (Figure 1) for my son's third Birthday; I constructed a building that was on fire that stood behind the cake, and a fire engine ladder stretched out so the firefighter could put the fire out, with a path to the firehouse not far away. Let's not forget the helicopter hanging from the ceiling. The cake was there, somewhere, but it was amongst the scene I had constructed. I created an experience. This is where the idea of creating an experience began for me.

When I quit Albertsons to attend college full-time, my Dad asked me to work with him making commercials and logos for his off-road business. This was my first introduction to

graphic design, and it was all I needed to know what I wanted to do with my career. I thought about teaching but also new my love for creativity went beyond the typical kids' appreciation for art. I needed creativity in my life and I needed to mentor others. Teaching graphic design would give me both.

At first, as a graphic designer I saw design as a two-dimensional practice. As I continued in the profession I realized design was so much more than creating works on paper. So, as time went on, and budget allowed, I began exploring more costly elements and materials and I began to incorporate three-dimensional aspects within my work. I wanted to explore other disciplines in the round, and sculpture class gave me that opportunity.

I use graphic design as the vehicle to create an experience. Throughout my time at Colorado State University, and through research, and design practice, there have been many theories and ideas that have pertained to and influenced my work, as well as my approach to teaching.

DO I LOOK FAT IN THIS PARAGRAPH?

Amid researching typography in graduate school, I began thinking about the variety of typefaces we have available to us. Many students go one of two ways: they use all the same typeface or they use more than the suggested 2-3 typefaces in a composition. I started thinking about how society expects everyone to be a certain size. Yes, I am speaking about weight. This thought process came about because I was looking at the “weights” of the typefaces. Since weight is an area I have struggled with, I began thinking about a visual way to express this comparison and crossover between the weight of a typeface and society’s pressure of being thin. Out of this thought process came, *Do I Look Fat in this Paragraph?* (Figure 2) Formed in the shape of a thin waist dress, this piece reads:

Is bigger better?
the ANSWER is simply–NO
Just ask society
SMALLER is better
AND IDENTICAL,
everyone has to be the same size, thin.
No Variety. Hello. BORING
Pay NO attention to that stigma when choosing typefaces.
A little variety is desired, WANTED,
even EXPECTED! Let’s NOT forget NEEDED!
A little bold, a little thin and you have the perfect combo.
Know when to use regular, italic, medium, bold, condensed, expanded, thin, and every option in-between.
Just because there are A LOT of font options, does NOT MEAN you need to use them ALL.
Just like with painting, using a smaller palette has benefits.
A CHANGE in typeface means a change in MEANING–so MEAN it! Think Hierarchy.
Let’s review...Variety in weight is GOOD, but not tooooooooooo much variety.
Weight! Are we talking about typefaces or people?
Maybe BOTH, you decide.
Being unfriendly serves ZERO purpose, so BE FRIENDLY, use friendly type and ALL will be okay in the world.

I catch the viewer's attention with a common issue we have in society, not only with the title but with the cut-out dress shape of the piece and the three-dimensional aspect that represents a paper doll cut-out. I lead the story with what I am assuming the viewer has experience with either personally, by association, or in conversation: the expectation by society that women should be thin. Then I compare this to typography and get the viewer's attention by discussion how a variety is desired, needed, and wanted. I purposely cross the meanings of words such as wait w-a-i-t and w-e-i-g-h-t not only to add humor to a serious issue but also to help draw a connection with a familiar topic and a simple rule of typography the majority is more than likely not familiar with. I am aiming to create an experience that will be filed in memory and recalled to make a connection when needed. I end the commentary with, "Being unfriendly serves ZERO purpose, so BE FRIENDLY, use friendly type and ALL will be okay in the world." This is my call-to-action, reminding people to be friendly to those of us that do not fit into the expected "thin" mold because variety is a good thing. Of course, this statement also refers to wanting variety in our typefaces as well. This piece can be successful in an art context or in an education setting.

The play with typography, the play on words, the shape, and even the sarcasm is geared toward encouraging reflection on the typography we use and see in the world and how it is personal. How can it impact others? Are we set in our ways? According to the book I require in my Introduction to Graphic Design class, one of the 20 Rules of Typography is *type must be friendly or it serves no purpose*.² Of course, this speaks directly to design as a form of visual communication. Communication can be by means of written, visual, or color, just to name a few. There are specific messages that need to be communicated through typography and if the

² Timothy Samara, Design Elements, a Graphic Style Manual: Understanding the Rules and Knowing When to Break Them (Quayside Pub Group, 2014), 20

typography is not legible then the message could be lost. Phenomenology is prevalent in our work as artists as well as educators. We appeal to the experiences of the viewer and we build upon what is known. We provide new ideas and skills and create the opportunity for new experiences.

Phenomenology is an approach that focuses on direct experience. The star of the show is intentionality, often referred to as *aboutness*. Intentionality includes memory, perception, retention, and signification.³ It is the concept that consciousness is always conscious of something. We make connections in our environment based on what we have experienced previously. In short, phenomenology refers to the essence of, or idea, of something in our lived experience. In *Do I Look Fat in this Paragraph?* Phenomenology is at play because the topic of *weight* is a common issue in society and the viewer can relate based on their direct experience.

In his book, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes intentionality, not as a mental representation, but rather as a “skillful bodily responsiveness and spontaneity in direct engagement with the world.”⁴ According to Merleau-Ponty, to perceive has nothing to do with one’s mental state, but it does have everything to do with being familiar with, dealing with, and finding one’s way around in the environment. Merleau-Ponty would agree with Martin Heidegger that perceiving simply means having a body that exists in the world.⁵

As a viewer of artwork, we consciously search our memory for ways in which we can relate to the work. We add to our database of lived experiences every day and with every new experience. Understanding the intention of the artist is irrelevant (in many cases). We know what

³ Monika M. Langer, *Merleau-Pontys Phenomenology of perception a guide and commentary* (Brantford, Ont.: W. Ross MacDonald School Resource Services Library, 2012), 2

⁴ Monika M. Langer, *Merleau-Pontys Phenomenology of perception a guide and commentary* (Brantford, Ont.: W. Ross MacDonald School Resource Services Library, 2012), 4

⁵ Monika M. Langer, *Merleau-Pontys Phenomenology of perception a guide and commentary* (Brantford, Ont.: W. Ross MacDonald School Resource Services Library, 2012), 4

we personally know and that is what will drive how we perceive a piece of art. If an artist has a clear message they wish to deliver, they might rely on what is universally understood by others. For example, a heart is universally recognized as a symbol of love. Many countries view red as the color of love, but in China red is perceived as a symbol of good luck and the color is forbidden at funerals. If a designer was working on a piece for a funeral this is something they would need to know so they did not use red in the artwork. It is important to know your audience and what their interpretation might be of the visuals used.

Graphic designers provide a service to a client with a result in mind. Creating a visually appealing piece that attracts the attention of the viewer is great, but if the call-to-action is absent or unclear, then the piece fails. For example, if the call-to-action is to purchase tickets for an event, then the success of the art can be measured by the attendance at the event. Whether I am assuming the role as a graphic designer or an educator, the same approach to appeal to the viewer can be taken. My approach includes appealing to what is known universally through imagery and/or typography, telling a story with the information, and then ending with the call-to-action. What action do I want the viewer to take?

TYP-OJI

Humor is an important aspect of communication and it is often used in my artwork. While at a Poster exhibition in Finland, many posters on display used typography in obscure ways. This inspired me to explore typography in a way I had never done before. Since adding humor to my work whenever possible is a personal goal of mine, I decided to use typography in a playful manner in hopes of getting a laugh. After seeing an image of eyeglasses with a tie and identifying the similarity of the lowercase letter “i” and the tie, I started thinking about how letterforms can be seen in much of the world around me. For example, putting two “O’s” together could mimic the glasses. This led to an exploration typefaces in search of familiar shapes and forms, and a series of humorous people resulted. With a name reference to the well-known emoji, the intention of the *Typ-oji* series (Figure 3) is to encourage the viewer to not just see typography as letters, but also as form.

When we see letterforms, we have gotten in the habit of just reading the letters as words and sentences and we forget to see them as individual forms. This relates to the idea of making connections in what we know from experience to what is in front of us. By creating humorous people or gestures, I am questioning our habit of just reading the words instead of appreciating the form of the letters individually.

Humor creates a collaborative feeling in a classroom because it relaxes the students and the teacher. Think of it as leveling the playing ground and students will see the teacher as being more approachable for any help or guidance they might need in the classroom. I use humor in my class often. Much of it is not planned, but more of going with the flow of the interactions within

the classroom at any single moment. If I make a mistake, I add humor to make fun of myself and remind them I am no different than them and I make mistakes too, and then I get back on track.

I also like to add humor and fun to classroom activities. For example, for one quiz review, the class splits into teams of four and they each have a whiteboard. I will draw pictures, ask questions, or use a combination of these as we go through quiz review questions. As the teams deliberate, I play Jeopardy music and have a timer going as they determine the best answer. The teams must share their answer in the form of a question, just like in the game show Jeopardy. This is a fun way to study and students enjoy the experience.

The definition of communication is an exchange of information; therefore, communication is interactive by nature. Pedagogical communication is about two-way correspondence; interactions between teacher and students. Interactions with people is how we learn to relate to one another. Creating a friendly environment is a key component for encouraging pedagogical communication. If a teacher comes into a classroom and just reads off their notes and does not make eye contact with students or pay attention to the needs or reactions of the students, then the students cannot relate to the teacher or the message being delivered. Do you think these students will bother asking the teacher any questions? I say chances are slim because if the teacher is not putting in the effort to show the students they care about them, then it is much more difficult for students to care about what the teacher is teaching.

I have been a student in classes where actively participating in activities in class was standard practice. Graphic design and most art courses in my experience are structured in this manner. There is a combination of lecture, activity, work time, feedback, and critiques. Students play an active role in the classroom. To me, being an educator in the field of art is about helping students find their potential by providing a safe, honest, open environment for students to

explore. Providing prompts, terminology, and skill-building opportunities for students to learn, practice, explore, and ask questions results in a collaborative learning environment.

Pedagogical Communication is about creating a mutually respected environment where joint interactions between students and teachers lead the way for the conversation that will unfold. The attitudes and behaviors of the students and the teacher can influence the other in some way. I can remember back to many of my high school classes, and how I dreaded sitting through another *lecture*. My teacher's lesson plans were mapped out before they came to class and there was no room for interactions or letting things unfold as they might. Pedagogical communication is about teachers having the ability to connect with students emotionally, communicating verbally and non-verbally, adding humor in the classroom, using reflective communication strategies, and recognizing what motivated individual students to adjust strategies appropriately and create a collaborative learning environment.⁶

Pedagogical communication is also about verbal and non-verbal communication. Our verbal tones and delivery can make all the difference in creating that collaborative learning environment. A teacher making eye contact or having a casual posture, or even facial expressions such as smiling at a student can also establish a safe relationship between student and teacher and help produce a positive learning environment.

We have all heard the saying, "It is not what you say, but how you say it." Language deepens and transforms our experience. If we are in a safe, positive, collaborative environment, then we are open to exploration and failure. If all questions are welcome and there truly are no stupid questions, then we are more likely to ask every question that comes to mind. My cousin

⁶ Maryam Eskandarjouy, TOEFL Trainer at English Language Instructor Follow, "Pedagogical communication," LinkedIn SlideShare, December 24, 2013, accessed February 11, 2018, <https://www.slideshare.net/maryameskandarjouy/pedagogical-communication>.

told me recently that her eighth-grade daughter just transitioned from a homeschool situation to public school and she is struggling to adjust. Her daughter asked the teacher a question during the first week of school and the teacher's response was, "You should have learned that already." This taught her to shut down and not ask any questions because she fears she will be put down again. The teacher proved there is such a thing as a stupid question. It is not just what we say, but how we say it.

Another aspect of pedagogical communication is being able to reflect on situations. As a teacher, the delivery of a message may seem clear and easily understood in my mind, but being able to observe the behaviors and responses from students as the message is delivered is imperative. If students are not grasping a topic then the next step is to act fast and reflect on what has been discussed and how the method of teaching can be changed to ensure the message is relayed. Relating the topic to something students are familiar with is my go-to approach. For example, if I am talking about *margins* and students are not understanding the concept, we might walk out of the classroom to the posters hanging in the hallway and talk about margins on the posters in front of us. It is up to me to find a way to frame it so students clearly understand the concepts being presented and create an environment where students are not afraid to approach me and ask questions if they do not understand the material.

Art historian David Getsy, in his essay, "Pedagogy, Art, and the Rules of the Game," writes about "how he creatively engages young artists in the classroom by taking seriously the claim that being an artist is a kind of game." There are ever moving parts: the rules, the limits when to encourage creativity. Getsy believes the "non-seriousness of games is exactly what enables their serious potential and practical outcomes"—and the same thing can be said about art.⁷

⁷ Mary Jane. Jacob and Jacquelynn Baas, *Learning mind: Experience Into Art* (Chicago, IL: School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2009), 6-7

In my own classroom, I enjoy incorporating games, such as Jeopardy, because it is when students seem to relax and absorb, understand, and grasp new concepts and ideas versus memorizing class content. Learning just happens when we are entertained and the environment is fun and less serious. “Games are representational...games are important cultural and developmental activities because they provide a surrogate arena for interactivity and absorption.”⁸ I think John Dewey would agree with me when I say, observing is just not enough, we must experience things, and those experiences that are fun are those we learn from most, and remember the most.

Methods of pedagogy can relate to both design and teaching. As an artist, I explore ideas and skills I already know, as well as build new skills looking for an original idea. The premise of my work includes inquiring as needed by way of mentors or online resources, actively learning individually, and seeking and participating in feedback. Without even realizing I was following a pedagogical method in the classroom, I realize I am doing just that. I have realized not everyone learns in the same manner, and some even need exposure to ideas in more than one way. As I am teaching, I have come to realize being creative to address learning styles (visual, auditory, verbal, and kinesthetic) is key to being successful as an educator. Lecturing about design and showing examples of styles of design, or demonstrating a skill, is a vital but a small part of a student learning the information. The most important part is the idea of individual active learning, or practice. I believe in providing instructions, demonstration, and an experience to provide a jumping off point for students, then they are free to explore and inquire as needed. Using me as a resource for mentoring, I can assist students individually depending on what direction they are taking with their individual project. No two will be the same.

⁸ Mary Jane. Jacob and Jacquelyn Baas, *Learning mind: Experience Into Art* (Chicago, IL: School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2009), 129

Pedagogy is about an educator connecting with students, encouraging inquiry, and creating a caring environment that maintains structure. This structure becomes a balancing act between the transfer of knowledge and a performance. I truly believe this process leads to learners discovering their true potential. John Dewey once said, “Education is a development within, by, and for experience.”⁹ Students who are given the opportunity to “experience” a subject by being an active part of the class, are going to go further because they are not limited by restrictions but instead given the freedom to explore. Dewey said it best, “Observation alone is not enough. We have to understand the significance of what we see, hear, and touch.”¹⁰

From an educator’s standpoint, we can look at this from a testing point of view. Knowing students learn, process, and execute ideas differently, how can we best test to see students absorbed the material? Observing students work, through the individual process of a project, tells me if they have grasped the concept or skill being explored. Objectives are clear; analysis and synthesis are observed throughout the process. A powerful Dewey concept to keep in mind: “We do not learn from experience... we learn from reflecting on experience.”¹¹ As an educator, I am constantly reflecting on the experience in the classroom. As an artist, I am also reflecting on the experience viewers have with my artwork.

⁹ John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Free Press, 2015), 28

¹⁰ John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Free Press, 2015), 68

¹¹ "Thought-Provoking John Dewey Quotes You Must Know," Inspirational Quotes to Fire You Up With Motivation Even When Taking A Single Step Seems Difficult., accessed January 01, 2018, <https://quotes.thefamouspeople.com/john-dewey-144.php>.

HYPHENATIONS SUCK

During my second year of graduate school, I started looking for gaps in my own knowledge about design and I began reading books about typography. I felt this was an area where my knowledge was lacking but it also related to the class I was teaching so I needed to know more. I began making these fun learning tools related to design principles and terms. Again, I added some humor to these pieces; *Hyphenations Suck* (Figure 4), *Undo* (Figure 5) and *How's My Leading?* (Figure 6)

We all have our pet peeves, and hyphenations are mine. I joke with students about this in the classroom so I thought it was appropriate to make a visual for the idea that if they want to look like an experienced designer, then they will be sure not to have hyphenations in their work and as a result, *Hyphenations Suck* was created.

Undo come from my own personal experience. As a designer, I use *Command Z* often to “undo” the last move (or ten). In life, I often found myself wishing for a *Command Z* button so I could *undo* whatever it was that I wish I had not done. Using only the words “Undo Mistake” I created *Undo*.

Students often get *kerning*, the vertical space between letters and *leading*, the horizontal space between lines of type confused. So, I wanted to create a visual to help them remember the difference. I always remember leading by thinking about stacking pencils, which have lead, between the lines of type. More pencils equal more leading. *How's My Leading?* is made using only the title and adjusting the leading tighter to make the darker areas and looser to make the lighter areas into the form of a pencil. I took this idea one step further by laser cutting the files into wood pencils. (Figure 7)

After creating several of these learning visuals, I thought about all the terms I was teaching in my Introduction to Graphic Design class and how they were the foundation of graphic design. That led me to the idea of when we are kids, we learned the ABCs before we could start putting letters together to form words and then putting words together to form ideas. This was the same idea for graphic design. You must know the foundations of graphic design before you can be successful at designing a piece. The message must talk to the visual and the colors must enrich the idea by evoking the same emotions as the message. This led me to make *ABCs of Typography Book*. (Figure 8) Each page in the book describes a word related to that letter. For example, “R” is for readability. (Figure 9) I show the word, but I also visually represent the word by showing part of the word readable and part of it not. The entire page is in a typeface that starts with that letter. So, the entire “R” page is in the typeface *Rockwell*. Each page also has a learning message. For the readability page, the message reads:

The quality of being legible or decipherable; the quality of being easy or enjoyable to read. Readability refers to the way in which words and blocks of type are arranged on a page. Visual communication is about delivering a message. If the viewer cannot understand it then the message can be lost. Legibility refers to how a typeface is designed and how well one individual character can be distinguished from another. Type is only type when it is friendly.

Since I always think about the end experience I am creating, I did not just make this a normal book size, but rather a very large 36-inch-wide x 22-inch-high book. Turning each page becomes an experience because the motion itself is so much larger than what we are accustomed to when turning the page of a book. When we turn a page in a book, we take for granted that small motion. I brought the awareness of the simple gesture of turning a page to the forefront. I wanted turning each page to be an experience.

Pragmatism is a significant American philosophical movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This movement is about *how* we think—not *what* we think. Three main

contributors include logician Charles S. Peirce; psychologist William James; and philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer John Dewey. Peirce, James, and Dewey were impressed by the experiential premise of Buddhism, as seen in the basic tenets of Pragmatism:

1. Meaning and belief are fallible, liable to error and thus subject to change
2. Inquiry is essentially experimental
3. Meaning and belief depend on the context of the community in which they are formed
4. Experience is the interaction of an organism with its environment
5. All thinking is resolving doubts (Peirce) or solving problems (Dewey)
6. All judgments of “truth” are fundamentally judgment of value¹²

Number two and four above relate to Phenomenology and Pedagogy. The idea of individual exploration and inquiry relates to how we live in and experience our environment. American art historian, art critic and museum curator Marcia Tucker said that art can change the way viewers see things: therefore, art can also change how they think and possibly the way they act as a result.¹³ As an artist, this is my goal. This also relates back to the idea of presenting information and a call-to-action hoping to encourage an action. Even if the viewer started out not being interested in the event presented in a poster, I hope to change his/her view. If a viewer is reading my piece *Do I Look Fat in This Paragraph*. I hope by the time they finish reading it, they will have a little different outlook on those that do not fit the society standard of being thin.

Artists ask us to “question ourselves instead of settling into complacency, to opening ourselves instead of closing down around what we already know, and to embrace ourselves instead of worrying what other people think.”¹⁴ It is suggested in the book *Learning Mind: Experience into Art* that having this freedom of open oneself up is the core of artistic freedom.¹⁵

¹² Mary Jane. Jacob and Jacquelynn Baas, *Learning mind: experience into art* (Chicago, IL: School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2009), 1-2

¹³ Mary Jane. Jacob and Jacquelynn Baas, *Learning mind: experience into art* (Chicago, IL: School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2009), 3

¹⁴ Mary Jane. Jacob and Jacquelynn Baas, *Learning mind: experience into art* (Chicago, IL: School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2009), 4

¹⁵ Mary Jane. Jacob and Jacquelynn Baas, *Learning mind: experience into art* (Chicago, IL: School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2009), 4

Should we not do the same thing as educators? Why settle into complacency? Artists must continue learning in their own practice, as do educators. We attend education conferences and learn new software to keep abreast of the field. Why would we not continue to change our curriculum or learning strategies to reflect the changes in our environment? Marcia Tucker insists art can be a catalyst for change. She says, "...confusion, disorder, mistakes, and failure—all the things that we can encounter when we try something new—are essential to the creative process."¹⁶ It is through trial and error that we learn. That is just part of the process.

The word *educate* comes from the Latin root *educare*, meaning "a sense derived from that of 'assist at birth.'"¹⁷ This implies we already have what we need at birth, we just need assistance recognizing and nurturing what we already have. Socrates described his personal approach to education as the *maieutic method*; "a process of assisting a person in bringing into consciousness his or her own latent conceptions."¹⁸ Providing the opportunity for learners to explore and experience concepts individually is to educate. In *The Art Experience*, Vicci Sperry said it best:

A teacher does not make an artist. A teacher does not put anything into you but helps to bring forth that which is your natural endowment. Your latent talent needs guidance and nourishment. Learning does not make the artist. It is practice and effort that comes from the heart and from the intuition that makes for one's development. The teacher can help your growth through inspirational approaches that deepen your understanding and stimulate your interest.¹⁹

Teachers play an important role for students to find their natural talents, but it is truly up to the student to take advantage of the opportunity. We are familiar with the saying *you only get out what you put in*. This also relates back to phenomenology and pedagogy.

¹⁶ Mary Jane. Jacob and Jacquelynn Baas, *Learning mind: experience into art* (Chicago, IL: School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2009), 3

¹⁷ Ibid, 5

¹⁸ Ibid, 5

¹⁹ Vicci Sperry, *The art experience* (Boston: Boston Book and Art Shop, 1969), 22

WOOD EXPLORATION

In my first sculpture class, I worked on a wood exploration project. As a prompt, we were to create three pieces from wood. They could relate or be completely individual. I chose to create three pieces that were in some way an exploration of the material. I used all *found wood* and explored different aspects of the wood in each piece. I scavenged the Woodshop at school, the scraps bin at Home Depot, and my own stash in my garage to come up with a large variety of material.

In the *Wood Tower* piece, (Figure 10) I glued a variety of wood material together at the base, clamped the piece down and used a grinder to create a smoother surface to give the impression it was one piece. I was interested in making a variety of wood look like one piece transitioned into the next. I was exploring texture, shadows, and depth.

In *Cube of Cubes*, (Figure 11) using the same variety of wood as in the Tower piece, I cut one inch cubes and glued three of them together creating a strip. I kept to a theme of three since the prompt was three separate pieces. One inch times three across equaled three inches across in each direction. I then glued three of the strips together, creating a 3x3 block. I made three of these blocks. I then stacked the three blocks and drilled a hole through the center. I inserted a post and bolted the end so the three blocks can rotate independently. This piece was inspired by my son's love for Rubik's cubes. He was ordering new Rubik's cubes every time I turned around and he was memorizing algorithms to solve them quickly. I was focusing on the inside grain of the different wood materials and how the focus shifts when viewed next to different textures.

In the *Wood Exploration Block*, (Figure 12) I was focusing on the flat plane area of the different pieces of wood. This piece was inspired by the game, Tetris as well as, by a teddy bear

piece I saw that was made from stacking and sanding wood. I wanted to make a ball made of wood so I included a shelf that stuck out beyond the edge of the piece that would hold the focal point, the ball. This piece can stand or hang on a wall.

The *Wood Tower* piece has been in a few exhibitions shows, but the other two I would not consider to be a complete success. Are they a failure? I have a hard time calling anything a failure, because there are always learning outcomes from every project and experience. I challenged myself with these pieces and I learned to use new tools such as the grinder and drill.

Existentialism was a prominent undertone of Post-World War II art that intended to analyze the role of sensory perception in the thought processes. The focus was primarily on vision. Existentialism stressed individual freedom and autonomy based on subjective and personal experiences. Existentialism is closely related to phenomenology and pedagogy in terms of individual experience to express autonomous ideas. Existentialism relates to my practice as an artist and an educator in a few ways. Personal responsibility and discipline are crucial. Being responsible for my actions and teaching students to be responsible for their own actions is pivotal. This also brings forward the question of the nature of our own existence. What is our purpose? What is my purpose as an artist? As a teacher?

It is okay to break the rules if there is a reason for breaking them and you are willing to pay the consequences. Another way in which the idea of existentialism relates to my practice in the idea of individual struggle. As a graduate student, I have struggled internally with ideas and influences for my own art. Trying to step outside of my own comfort zone of always being handed a problem or topic for a project by a client has been a personal challenge for me. As an educator, I strive to show students that pushing through the struggle is how we find our best self and how we become a stronger artist and person.

USED MY MAC TO MAKE A MAC

I considered how I could incorporate my skills on the computer and my interest in three-dimensional work. With a class prompt of replicating an important material item in my life in a substance that is out of place, I thought about the one tool I use for all my design work, my Mac computer. For this piece, *Used My Mac to Make a Mac*, (Figure 13a and 13b) I measured all aspects of my personal Mac laptop computer (including counting the speaker holes!) and drew the files, to scale, in Adobe Illustrator. I then printed the pieces on the laser cutter, sanded, glued, assembled, and sanded some more.

The concept was about using my Mac to make a Mac. As a graphic designer, my Mac computer is the tool I use to create every design. I rely on my computer to work the way it is supposed to, access the Internet and my design programs, to save my work, to connect to a printer for output. My Mac is also a learning device. I learn techniques and skills using my Mac and I also teach using my Mac. I purchased my Mac computer brand new and I am aware I paid extra for the Apple brand because using Apple products is the preference of the design industry. Why did I choose wood for the material? Not only was this decision made to grab the viewer's attention by creating a sense of awe and wonderment, but also to capture a moment in time. Technology is changing so fast that in a few years my Mac will be ancient, maybe even obsolete and this throw-back piece references that change in our marketplace. During my research for my Thesis I learned the first apple computer ever made was crafted by Steve Jobs in 1976 and it was made of wood. My Mac computer truly was an unintentional throwback.

The tool I use daily, in this monochromatic, nonfunctioning format is silenced. Since this is a 1:1 replica of my Mac computer, at first sight, the viewer might think it is an actual

functional Mac computer. Had I chosen to make this in a different scale the impact would be completely different because the question of *is it real*, would not exist. I made this piece intuitively, without understanding why I was doing what I was doing or the importance this piece plays in my own design practice.

Making this sculpture is another example of my goal of creating work that provides an experience. Watching people experience and respond to this piece is rewarding to me as an artist. For example, when this piece was shown in the Student Exhibition in the Lory Student Center in January 2018, I stood back on opening night and watched people experience my artwork. Many of them looked around it or ducked down to look at the keys from a side view. A few of them said that they wanted to touch it and even stuck their finger out as if they were going to touch it. Not one of them went through with it, but it was evident they thought about it enough to start the action. One student turned to me and said, "I just want to touch it." This encouraged me to reflect on my own intentions for the piece and it solidified that I hit the mark with my artwork. My sculpture professor said sometimes we see a piece and must process it for a while; we must consider how it came to be here and just ponder on that for a while. I took this as a compliment. I surprised myself with this piece. It was not until I sat down to write my Thesis and reflect on the piece that I really understood the magnitude of what was at play including semiotics, perception, and pedagogy just to name a few.

The Mac computer was by far the most 'out of my comfort zone' piece I have created to date. Not only was this the first time I used the laser cutter, but I was mixing skills in design, math, and woodworking. I could not wrap my head around the complexity of the assembly process for this project. I was telling my students in the classroom that if they could come up with an idea, they could make it happen, so I followed my own advice. I was not sure how I

would make it happen but I went for it. Sometimes we do not grasp a concept fully until we explore it. We may think we have a great idea and it end up being a horrible idea. Other times, our idea ends up being better than what we could have imagined. Exploration of concepts is imperative for artists and in my opinion one of the hardest things to teach students.

MAKING SENSE OF OUR SENSES

I began thinking about installation because this process is all about creating an environment and, therefore, an experience. The installation titled, *Making Sense of Our Senses*, (Figure 14) was about activating your senses. Each participant's experience in this space will be unique because each person will reflect on their own personal experiences and relate to the space in their own way. My goal was to encourage internal reflection. It is for the participant to decide how they relate to a single item. Without written instructions and just the use of imagery, you can navigate the experience using your senses. The only words in this space are those written by the participant on post-it notes. We reflect on our knowledge, experiences, and our senses to navigate through the world around us. Installation art makes us feel alive and activates us. As a graphic designer, my focus is to appeal to the single sense of sight. I strive to push that boundary by appealing to other senses through out-of-the-box ideas and material.

I was glad I started graduate school with this exploration because it led me to the conclusion that it was not installation art I was interested in, but again creating that experience. I was drawn to the individual parts within the installation that created the experience and not the installation process. I was not interested in pursuing installation art but to continue down the path of creating an experience through my work.

Perception is an expression of learning. We unconsciously run through our memories as we view things around us to draw connections and make sense of what we see. We draw connections to perceive the message in front of us. Our interpretation could match the intention of the artist, but it could also be completely different because our education and memories are unique, and therefore, our connection to the art would also be unique. Postmodernists believe

that truth is connected to something else we know and the individual must determine for himself/herself what truth is. A postmodernist views themselves as truth, and the world outside of themselves as being in error.²⁰ They believe no one has the right to decide truth or influence others of their opinion of morality.

Since perception and sensation happen at the same time, it is difficult to separate the two. Scottish Philosopher Thomas Reid defines perception as “the formation of immediate belief.”²¹ We are conditioned to frame and analyze events and object based on past experiences. For example, we perceive a couch in the category of a couch because we have experience with objects in the category of “couch.” We perceive what we know based on experience.

Postmodernism encompasses many characteristics, but the specific traits I am focusing on are the playful and ironic treatment of fragmented subjects, undermining the concepts of originality and authenticity, an emphasis on image and spectacle, and the idea there can be more than one meaning to a work and the viewer becomes a crucial part in determining the meaning of the art. These ideas relate to my work in many ways, including the idea that the viewer is participating in my work through the experience I am working to create. The viewer’s perception of the work is something I can guide by appealing to experiences and knowledge I anticipate the viewer to have. This is a great example.

Experience is feeling; it is a sensation. Psychologist and philosopher Nicholas Humphrey claims that sensation tracks our personal interactions with the outside world “creating the sense each person has of being present and engaged, lending a *hereness*, a *nowness*, a *me-ness* to the

²⁰ "Postmodernism," AllAboutPhilosophy.org, accessed February 11, 2018, <https://www.allaboutphilosophy.org/postmodernism.htm>.

²¹ Mary Jane. Jacob and Jacquelynn Baas, *Learning mind: Experience Into Art* (Chicago, IL: School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2009), 218

experience of the present moment. Sensation generates consciousness.”²² Each experience we have creates a physical change in our brain. It adds to our bank of what we can relate to in the world. John Dewey explains that art is something we do intentionally “...in order to generate mind-altering experience in themselves and others.”²³ As the artist and the viewer, we are present with the art, we are engaged, we are experiencing, and that is what makes art so satisfying.

²² Mary Jane. Jacob and Jacquelynn Baas, *Learning mind: experience into art* (Chicago, IL: School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2009), 218

²³ Ibid, 218

LIGATURE

The word *Ligature* is derived from the Latin word *ligatus*, meaning to tie or bind. When two or more characters squeeze together to become one character it is referred to as a ligature. This happens in some typefaces more than others and it is associated with the space between the characters, also called kerning. A common ligature we see is *fi*. This can be rectified by putting your cursor between the characters and opening the kerning, or the spacing between letters. My first *Ligature* piece (Figure 15) was designed in Illustrator as a visual to represent the word. Wanting to explore the idea further by creating the interactive piece, I began thinking about the framework or structure of letters. I used plastic canvas sheets to cut out an “f” and “i” and I created an *Interactive Ligature*. This was a visual learning tool that allowed the viewer to see what a ligature looks like but also to be a part of the solution of fixing the ligature. This instructional and informative piece is a great example of didacticism.

It is hard to avoid thinking of design as fitting well within a description of art practice that is didactic. Didacticism emphasizes instructional and informative qualities in art.²⁴ This supports the idea of education and teaching in a fascinating and intriguing way. In other words, didactic art is meant both to engage and to instruct. This is supported by Dewey’s view of experiential learning. Dewey said, “There is an intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and education.”²⁵ Each piece of work, I create has a goal and a purpose, whether it be my own personal piece or the clients’. The goal of the visual is to grab

²⁴ "Meaning of "didacticism" in the English dictionary," DIDACTICISM - Definition and synonyms of didacticism in the English dictionary, accessed February 10, 2018, <https://educalingo.com/en/dic-en/didacticism>.

²⁵ John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Free Press, 2015), 20

attention and be engaging. However, the underlying agenda is to enlighten the viewer on the information provided.

Didactic teaching is an experiential strategy. This environment allows students to learn by themselves with the instructor as a guide and resource for students. This method of teaching proposes lessons that focus on practical, sensory, and formal skills. The hands-on learning tools I have made to teach students terminology of design is a perfect example. The *Ligature* piece (Figure 16) is a prime example of students having the opportunity to use sensory skills to move the character together and apart, exploring the concept of the ligature.

STABILITY VS. RISK

With my Plaster piece titled, *Stability vs. Risk*, (Figure 17) I started with a square block of solid plaster. I chiseled, sanded, and sanded some more. Starting with the project prompt of opposing forces, I chose to work with the idea of *thick* and *thin*. My plan was to have one side be thick and the other side thin. At the time I began this project, I was feeling the pressure of working full-time to provide for my family and the one thing I needed to attain my dream job teaching, my MFA. I was at a crossroads. This piece became therapeutic for me. The opposing forces changed from *thick vs. thin* to *stability vs. risk*. The exterior of the piece, specifically the base, is thick and strong, whereas the interior is so thin it looks fragile. This relates to my personal experience at the time because on the outside I felt I had to be stable for my family and on the inside, I wanted to take the risk to reach my goal. It was during the long hours of sanding this pieces that I decided I must find a way to provide the stability for my family but also take the risk of quitting my full-time job.

Experience is undoubtedly affected by the viewer's knowledge of the subject at hand. If you stand before a piece of artwork and the subject of the piece is not something you have experience with or knowledge of, then your interpretation or take-away will be much different than someone that has the knowledge the artwork speaks of. With the piece *Stability vs. Risk*, I hope to draw the viewer's attention to the inside of the piece, specifically to the thin section that is barely connected: signifying *risk*. I am hoping the viewer will recall their own memories of a risk they have taken to relate and connect with the artwork.

The split between artist and viewer leaves much for interpretation. The viewer is limited to see what their experience and knowledge allows them to see. When you look at a piece of

artwork in a museum, you are observing an expression from the artist. As a designer, I am the vehicle the client uses to get the message out, but it must be clear and leave little room for interpretation. I must not only create work from the artist's point of view, but also from the perspective of the viewer. As an educator, I take out that split between myself and the viewer. I am present to clearly deliver the message, answer questions, and ensure the interpretation is correct. My goal is to ensure students understand the message clearly so they can apply the skills correctly in their work.

If I do not consider the viewer or audience of my piece as part of the medium, and I do not deliver the message and call-to-action, it can be devastating to the outcome of the overall goal. Although I have a creative skill, and self-expression is experienced through my design, there is a purpose of the art, and that is the priority. I create the visual interest to grab the audience's attention, specifically to deliver the message and to encourage a specific action. If art is created for a purpose, do we think of it as being less than art? I say no. Giorgio Agamben would say that yes, it would be less. Agamben believes the split between the artist and viewer causes the art, and the artist along with it, to become a self-annihilating nothing²⁶. I would argue that no matter what the media, every piece of art always has some message to be seen by the viewer. Even if a work of art is created with a purpose in mind, the viewer may not receive that message because their experience and knowledge did not lead them to the specific message, but their personal experiences could lead them to another message that is personal for them. Does the artist need to be there to explain the art for it to be art? Then, how do we call art in art galleries, art?

²⁶ Giorgio Agamben, *The man without content* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2008), 52.

In *Infancy and History, On the Destruction of Experience*, Giorgio Agamben talks about the split between the subject of experience and the knowledge of experience.²⁷ In the early years of infancy, we can experience things without theory, without concepts, and without knowledge. We do not just give small children toys to entertain them, but we give them toys that double as learning tools. As they are entertained, they are learning shapes, colors, counting, or whatever the underlying learning element(s) may be. Again, this is that didactic way of thinking; it is about engaging and instruction. Once we have experiences and learn ways of communicating, we are tainted because we are no longer without the knowledge nor can we ever return to this state of not knowing.

²⁷ Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and history on the destruction of experience* (London: Verso, 2007).

FINLAND

Haihaitus Art Residency, Finland

In the summer of 2017, I spent 34 days at Haihatus Art Residency in Finland, an amazing time to experience, reflect, and research. I met Finnish artists and we discussed their art as well as my own. I visited museums, a Poster Exhibition, an Illustration Exhibition, an artist talk by Paula Troxler, and observed as artists' setup their work at the Residency House where I stayed. I also spent three days with two well-known artists, Pekka Loiri and Kari Piipo. Pekka and his wife Eila came to visit me two weeks after we met at Haihatus Art Residency, and I plan to see them again when I return to Finland in May 2018.

When I returned to CSU, I reflected on my experience in Finland and as I looked through my thousands of pictures of my trip, I pondered how I could create a work of art to encapsulate my experience. I started by choosing twelve pictures that encapsulated my trip. I altered them in Adobe Illustrator, creating line art which I then used to make twelve woodblocks using the laser cutter. Then, I printed them using printmaking techniques on BFK Rives paper, linen, and a variety of other materials. I then adjusted the original images in Adobe Photoshop, and added color from the original picture and printed them on gloss Luster paper so that I had a graphic design final product. Using the same image, I have two different results, one a printmaking solution and the other a digital solution. *Sunnantai*, (Figure 18 and Figure 19) is one in the series of twelve. Sunnantai means Sunday and is named after the Finnish textile for 2017, which boasts birds frolicking on a Sunday. Printmaking was a technique I enjoyed in undergrad and I wanted to explore printmaking again. I was thinking about the choices I have as an artist as far as mediums, techniques, materials, etc. The way I present my artwork to the world is my choice. I

wanted to treat the same piece in two different ways, and that was the idea behind the print series.

Haihauts Art Residency reached out to me a couple of months after my departure and offered me the opportunity to show my work in their upcoming *Haihatus International 6 Exhibition*. I sent them three of my Finland-related pieces: Sunnantai, Symboli (Figure 20) a picture of the Helsinki Cathedral which is a symbol of Finland, and Uudestisyntyminen (Figure 21), meaning rebirth—a picture of a controversial statue which symbolizes the rebirth of Finland. The images I chose not only symbolized something to me and the experience I had there but also symbolized something important to Finland.

Finland opened my eyes to what is possible for my own design practice. That challenge I had when I first arrived in graduate school of finding my own inspiration for my work came alive. I realized how easy it is to be inspired by what is around me if I just stop long enough to look and soak in what I am experiencing at any single moment. I get so wrapped up in what is going on in my life, that I forget to experience life. I don't need a client to give me a prompt for a project, my own life is full of prompts. My experience and the networking that opportunity allowed me, also resulted in the realization that participating in art exhibitions across the globe is attainable.

Education in Finland

During my residency last summer, I did research on the education in Finland in hopes of discovering why their education system is rated in the top 5 in the world. I had heard of the amazing education system and that was a contributing factor in my decision to apply for the residency at Haihatus. I found many factors that play a role in why their education is top notch compared to that of the education we provide in the United States. These factors include more

breaks, less standardized testing, encouraging kids to be kids in the classroom, and the high regard of the teaching profession. These factors relate to the pedagogical communication and create an environment of collaboration and do not cultivate a competitive culture.

The United States continues to decrease lunchtime and recess minutes allowed to students because schools are under significant pressure to perform and meet standardized testing expectations.²⁸ The question is, “Does this give the results the schools are looking for?” Jill Violet, the founder of a nonprofit organization, called Playworks, is dedicated to improving the climate of play in schools. Violet insists this decrease in play time is producing kids who do not have a *culture of play*. Violet says, “Play is really a developmentally significant experience...it helps kids become high-functioning citizens and grown-up.”²⁹ Finland has a much different outlook than the United States in terms of play time during the school day, as they have a mandatory 15-minute outdoor free-play break every hour. Finns consider enjoying fresh air, nature, and physical activity to be an engine of learning. The weather has no bearing on this view. In fact, one Finnish maxim says, “There is no bad weather. Only inadequate clothing.”³⁰ So while US students are deprived of their outdoor activity in inclement weather, their schools focus on dressing properly for the weather. Gym class for a student might consist of being handed a compass and a map and having to find their way out of the forest. Talk about a practical skill.

The United States spends billions of dollars on low-quality standardized testing, while students are assessed daily by means of direct observation, quizzes, one-on-one check-ins and by

²⁸ Stephanie Pappas, "As Schools Cut Recess, Kids Learning Will Suffer, Experts Say," LiveScience, August 14, 2011, accessed February 11, 2018, <https://www.livescience.com/15555-schools-cut-recess-learning-suffers.html>.

²⁹ Stephanie Pappas, "As Schools Cut Recess, Kids Learning Will Suffer, Experts Say," LiveScience, August 14, 2011, accessed February 11, 2018, <https://www.livescience.com/15555-schools-cut-recess-learning-suffers.html>.

³⁰ "Why Finland has the best schools—LA Times," Los Angeles Times, accessed December 31, 2017, <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-0318-doyle-finnish-schools-20160318-story.html>.

high quality “personalized learning devices.”³¹ Finland is clearly using Pedagogical strategies in their schools. The amount of time students spend testing in the United States could be used for active learning. This idea is in-line with the pedagogical model.

My own children have been scolded in United States schools for daydreaming, giggling, or just having fun in class. In Finland, this behavior is encouraged. Kids are encouraged to be kids. It is said a child’s work is to play and “Children learn best through play.”³² It is through active learning and exploration in which learning will happen. Students need the time to be themselves and find their own way. The United States puts more restrictions on learning and classroom behavior. In 2015, the United States ranked fourteenth and Finland ranked fifth out of forty countries in the category of “cognitive skills and educational attainment.”³³ We might need to rethink our education strategy in the United States.

In Finland, next to doctors, teachers are the most admired and trusted profession. Teachers are required to hold a Master’s degree and specialize in classroom practice.³⁴ As a result, the pay scale for teachers is also significantly greater than in the United States. The United States requires a bachelor’s degree and teaching credential and in desperation due to regional teacher shortages, schools have been known to hire those without the credential and pay for the individual’s credentialing program so they could begin teaching simultaneously. Schools and teachers do not compete in Finland; the idea is cooperation. The word “accountability” does not exist in their dictionary because as director of the Finnish Ministry of Education's Center for

³¹ "Why Finland has the best schools—LA Times," Los Angeles Times, accessed December 31, 2017, <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-0318-doyle-finnish-schools-20160318-story.html>.

³² "Why Finland has the best schools—LA Times," Los Angeles Times, accessed December 31, 2017, <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-0318-doyle-finnish-schools-20160318-story.html>.

³³ "Posts about Ranking of 11 to 20 on Ranking America," Ranking America, accessed December 31, 2017, <https://rankingamerica.wordpress.com/category/rankings/ranking-of-11-to-20-rankings/>.

³⁴ "Posts about Ranking of 11 to 20 on Ranking America," Ranking America, accessed December 31, 2017, <https://rankingamerica.wordpress.com/category/rankings/ranking-of-11-to-20-rankings/>.

International Mobility and author, Pasi Sahlberg explains, "Accountability is something that is left when responsibility has been subtracted."³⁵ This is a completely different mindset than in the United States.

Finland has not always been in top rankings for education. They made the conscious decision to make a change in their education in the 1970s. Giving less homework and engaging students in more creative play has earned them the top or near the top rank in the three competencies—reading, math, and science—in every survey since 2000.³⁶ Even if a school is privately funded, all schools are tuition-free in Finland. No schools are tuition-based from Pre-K through Ph.D. The economic and philosophical inequality in the U.S. are significant road blocks in reaching the same level of educational success as Finland. The United States does have over 4,000 Montessori schools, which is a similar model that fosters children's natural desire to learn. However, once again the majority are privately owned and tuition based.³⁷ Just as Finland recognized they needed to make a change, perhaps one day the United States will also come to that conclusion. This decision is not in the hands of the teachers but needs to start with the educational policymakers.

Exposing children to the ability to explore their own natural curiosity feeds ideas and creativity. Teaching an Introduction to Graphic Design course at the university level in the United States has shown me that students have been sheltered and hand-fed ideas. Giving a prompt for a project is not always enough; we must teach them how to come up with concepts

³⁵ Anu Partanen, "What Americans Keep Ignoring About Finland's School Success," *The Atlantic*, December 29, 2011, accessed December 31, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2011/12/what-americans-keep-ignoring-about-finlands-school-success/250564/>.

³⁶ Anu Partanen, "What Americans Keep Ignoring About Finland's School Success," *The Atlantic*, December 29, 2011, accessed December 31, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2011/12/what-americans-keep-ignoring-about-finlands-school-success/250564/>.

³⁷ "Montessori Schools," American Montessori Society: education that transforms lives, accessed December 31, 2017, <https://amshq.org/Montessori-Education/Introduction-to-Montessori/Montessori-Schools>.

and ideas. Bringing the active learning to my introduction class exposes students to independent exploration. Exposing students in college to this method is a little late in the game when compared to Finland which is using this structure in elementary school. This was that very idea I struggled with when I came to graduate school, having to come up with a concept without any guidance. Just exposing students to the idea of looking around them for ideas could make an impact. In a world with “Google” we have unlimited inspiration at our fingertips.

PERCEPTION

This leads me to my current work for the Thesis Show. The concept came from writing my Thesis and the ideas that have come to fruition during my time at CSU. Thinking about our perception and how we see things differently depending on our past experiences and taking that a step further to even how tall or not so tall we might be could also impact our perspective on what we are viewing.

As you walk into the room and look to the far-right wall and you see a large 8.5' strip of aluminum. Stretching from the corner toward the viewer. There is a Styrofoam ball suspended from the ceiling that blends in with the shape. Looking to the left back wall we can see something protruding from the wall. As we move around the room we try to make out what those shapes might be. We search our memory for anything familiar as we continue walking to make sense of what we see.

It becomes clear, we are looking at the word PERCEPTION. That hanging ball that belonged to the aluminum artwork now becomes the "o" in the word PERCEPTION. The ball is playing double duty, depending on your position in the room it can be part of the composition on either wall. Your perception of what you see changes based on your decision of where to stand. What if you decided to kneel, would it be different? What if I, standing at a mere 5'5" stood next to a very tall person, would our perspectives be different? Yes, of course they would. It is what we bring to the table that impacts our view of what we see.

On the left wall, the freestanding artwork *Do I look fat in this paragraph?* Demands attention. Next to that is *Used My Mac to Make a Mac*. The final piece will be *Sunnantai* in three formats; the woodblock, print, and digital pieces.

CONCLUSION

During my research and exploration over the last three years at Colorado State University, I have realized the overlap between design and teaching, starting with the nature of visual communication. As an artist, I communicate visually and through language. When I create artwork for myself, I can be specific about delivering a message or I can be ambiguous. When I design for a client, I create a piece of artwork for an audience with a message I need to deliver. As a teacher, I am communicating with students in much the same way. If my message is interpreted incorrectly, what is the impact on the students? My goal as an educator is to prepare students for the working world of a graphic designer. I must find strategies for teaching that constantly provide Finland's strategy of *one-on-one check-ins* with the students to ensure they are interpreting the communication as I intend them to be interpreted.

From materials, to process, to concepts, artwork can be whatever an individual decides. When we look at teaching styles and structures, we should be able to conclude teaching is also about personal expression. While some teachers lecture, or direct students to online resources for demonstrations and instructions, others dress up in medieval costume or play a game show host while delivering their own interpretation of the message of the day. There is no right or wrong way to teach, but like many things in society, we should be evaluating what is working and what is not. What is yielding the best return? Students are paying a large sum of money for their college education, and it is up to us as educators, to ensure students are graduating with what they need to be successful in their field. Personal expression, flexibility, and constant assessment is key to making sure this is happening.

This applies to graphic design as well. Artists must be well versed in universal meanings, of symbols, imagery, color theory, and language to ensure the correct message is communicated and no one is offended by an element used in the design. There is such a thing as a design failure. In November 2017, *Ink! Coffee* in Denver faced raging demonstrators when they put a sign up in front of their coffee shop that read, "Happily gentrifying the neighborhood since 2014." The back read, "Nothing says gentrification like being able to order a cortado."³⁸ Demonstrators were offended and said the coffee shop's sign overstepped the bounds, displayed poor taste, and was disrespectful to the minority roots of the neighborhood. Doing your homework and knowing your terminology and audience is vital to any design project. The same can be said for teaching. Flexibility and being aware of what ideas students may not be grasping and being able to switch things up a bit will make a huge difference.

Is our goal to just create beautiful art? If it is, then why is there a message within art? Is our goal to give an experience to the viewer? Can art itself be an experience? Perhaps the answers to these questions depend on the artist. For me, the answers are clear: no matter what the goal or theme of artwork is, it creates an experience. Based on the experiences and knowledge the viewer brings to the table, different emotions can be sparked and their interpretation is their own takeaway.

As visual artists, we bring forth the appearance of a thing, we take them from non-existence into existence. We open a world of connections and imagination. In the book *Roots of Romanticism*, Berlin quotes Schopenhauer, "The composer reveals to us the intimate essence of the world; he is the interpreter of the profoundest wisdom, speaking a language which reason

³⁸ "Ink! Coffee shop reopens to more demonstrations after gentrification sign controversy," FOX31 Denver, November 28, 2017, accessed December 31, 2017, <http://kdvr.com/2017/11/28/ink-coffee-shop-reopens-after-sign-controversy/>.

cannot understand.”³⁹ The composer Schopenhauer speaks of the artist. We reveal or bring into existence our interpretation of the world through our art. Schopenhauer talks about the internal energy that moves the world, this inexpressible inner drive. What he speaks of is the Will. As Agamben sees it, the Will is understood as the basic unit of craving and desire. This is also the basis behind Agamben’s argument that art cannot be just for self-expression. We have the will to choose as we please, within our means and the constraints of the society we live in. This includes choosing how to live our lives and creating the artwork that we desire.

Often, it is hard to tell if we are in the presence of art or an everyday object. Just look at Marcel Duchamp’s Fountain piece. The question is, “Does it matter?” There is overlap between many things we encounter in life. As an artist and an educator, I will not only strive to create an experience for the audience, but I will continue to reflect, reassess, and revise the experience I am providing. Growth through experience will make all the difference and it is up to us to determine how we will frame the message we will then deliver to the world whether through artwork or teaching.

³⁹ Isaiah Berlin and Henry Hardy, *The roots of romanticism* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Pr., 2014), 129

FIGURES



Figure 1: Fire Engine Theme Cake

Cake, icing, rock candy, cardboard, paper, fire truck toys, plastic trees and fence



Figure 2: Do I Look Fat in This Paragraph?
Luster gloss paper, ink

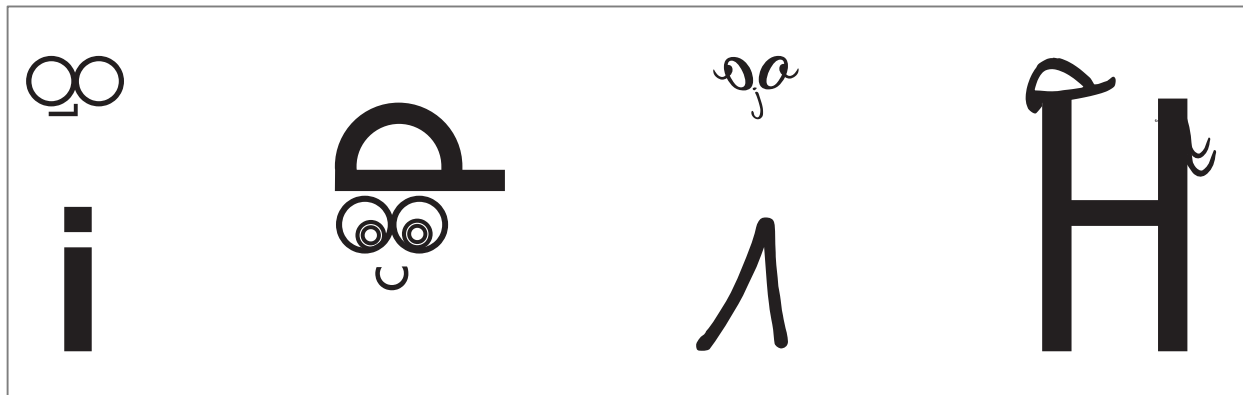


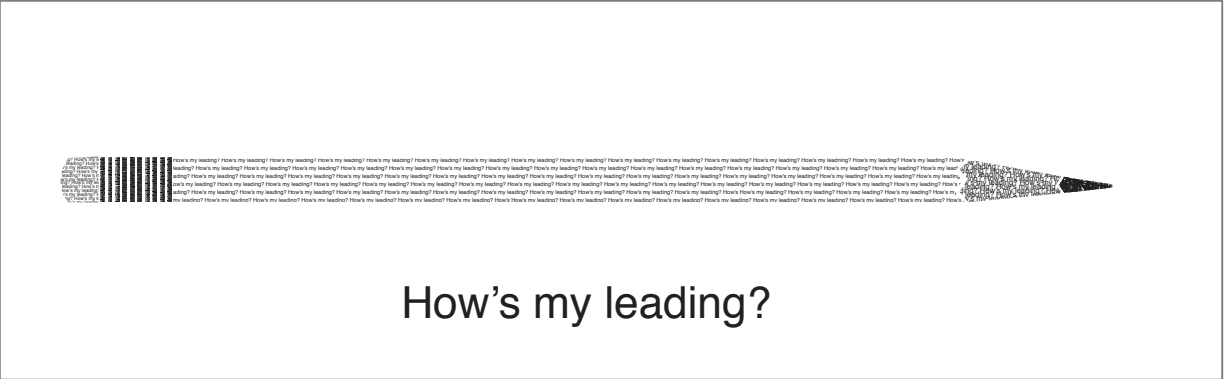
Figure 3: Typ-oji
Luster gloss paper and ink



Figure 4: Hyphenations Suck
Luster gloss paper and ink



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How's my leading?

Figure 6: How's My Leading (Illustrator)
Luster gloss paper and ink



Figure 7: How's My Leading? (pencils)
Plywood



Figure 8: ABCs of Typography Book
Luster gloss paper, ink, Birch, post and screws



Figure 9: Readability
Luster gloss paper and ink

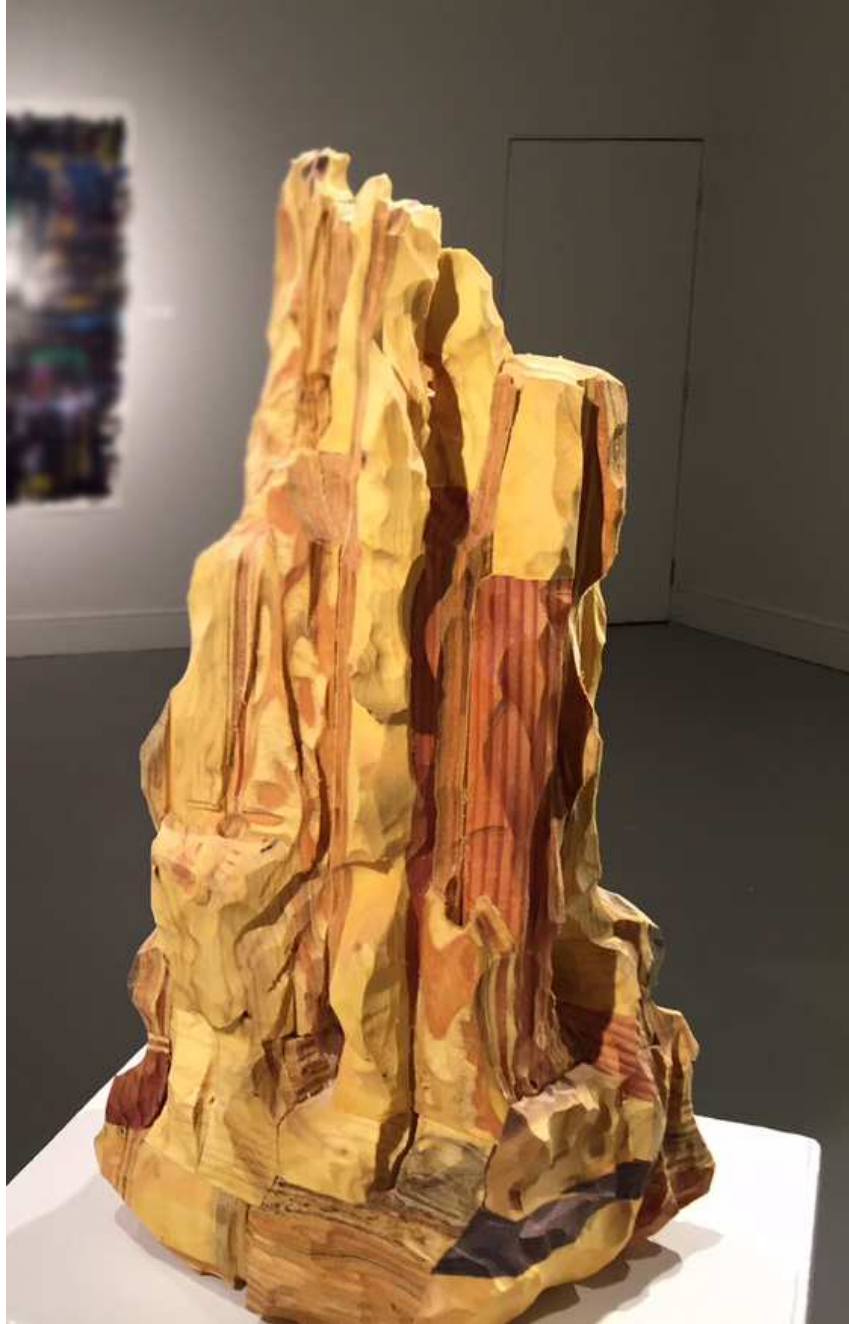


Figure 10: Wood Tower
26"h x 12"w x 12"d. Plywood, pine, beetle kill pine, walnut, oak



Figure 11: Cube of Cubes
Plywood, pine, beetle kill pine, walnut, oak



Figure 12: Wood Exploration Block
23"w x 18.5"h x 4.5"d (ball: 3.5"). Plywood, pine, beetle kill pine, walnut, oak



Figure 13a: Used My Mac to Make a Mac
Open: 9.75"h x 14"w x 9.5"d. Scrap plywood, springs



Figure 13b: Used My Mac to Make a Mac
Open: 9.75"h x 14"w x 9.5"d. Scrap plywood, springs



Figure 14: Making Sense of My Senses

Paper, ink, oranges, post-it notes, pens, sanitizer, ear plugs, flash lights, wood, paint, twine, lamination, clocks, plates, paper towels, crates, trash can, trash bag, orange bags, burlap, plastic tray, tongs, disinfectant wipes, chairs, sharpie, clipboard, pencils, table cloth

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Figure 15: Ligature (Illustrator)
Luster gloss paper and ink

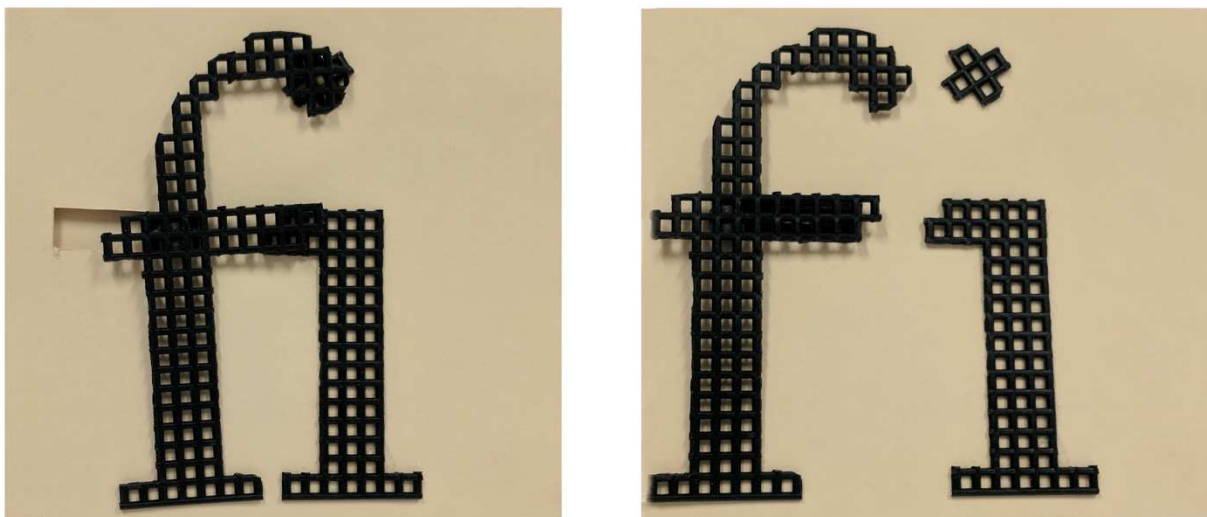


Figure 16: Ligature (Interactive)
Card stock paper, plastic canvas, scissors, glue



Figure 17: Stability vs. Risk
8"h x 10"w x 5"d. Plaster



Figure 18: Sunnantai (Printmaking)
11"w x 7.5"h, woodblock print, BFK paper



Figure 19: Sunnantai (Digital)
8.5''w x 5.5''h, Luster gloss paper, ink



Figure 20: Symboli (Digital)
8.5''w x 5.5''h, Luster gloss paper, ink



Figure 21: Uudestisyntyminen
8.5''w x 5.5''h, Luster gloss paper, ink

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