

RIGHT HERE / OVER THERE

by

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ABSTRACT

I am curious to find the places where all of humanity fundamentally overlaps, whether that is through feelings or objects or both. Through an elongated process of sensory observation, we can retain this knowledge for the long-term. Here there is more time and room to search for commonalities across cultural and social systems. Finding commonalities between myself and the people, places and objects I interact with is grounding. These experiences provide me with the emotionally loaded act of *feeling*. The objects within the exhibition are an abstract visualization of an inner presence experienced in my own search for commonalities between various cultural systems, human interaction, and material complexities.

INTRODUCTION

Finding commonalities between myself and the people, places and objects I interact with is grounding. These experiences provide me with the emotionally loaded act of *feeling*. Feeling through our senses is the most fundamental aspect to being human, and is something we are getting rapidly further from in contemporary society. The work in *Right Here / Over There* embodies sensations of unfamiliarity, connection, and experience through abstracted form, material comparisons, and an emotive color palette. The objects allude to something bigger than they are, referencing architectural space and our interactions with and within it. The materials point to something familiar, but are re-contextualized for a new relationship to evolve. A vernacular builds between the swatches on the wall and the objects themselves. They become a type of dissection of the process of reflecting, as well as the process of making. The exhibition is an abstract visualization of an inner presence experienced in my own search for commonalities between various cultural systems, human interaction, and material complexities. I am curious to find the places where all of humanity fundamentally overlaps, whether that is through feelings or objects or both. The ability to retain our emotional sensations comes with the practiced act of feeling through our senses. Through an elongated process of sensory observation, we can retain this knowledge for the long-term. Here there is more time and room to search for commonalities across cultural and social systems.

FORM / MATERIAL / COLOR

“Expectation is cruel to perception.”

-Siri Hustvedt

Formal considerations are first in a series of choices made throughout my process of making. These choices are based on an emotional sensation. Through slight variation of form, a narrative evolves between the objects. As large consistent objects, they create a type of visual texture within the space. Their geometric nature is an instinct I have as a maker. I find the modularity of formal geometry highly relatable to human complexities and experiences. Human emotions, desires and motives, though layered and complex, are incredibly similar when compared to each other. To me, these feelings have this same type of geometric modularity and formal quality as the objects and space we interact with. A large, dense, and darkly colored cube has a different emotive quality than a small, light, furry sphere would have; one being immovable and unapproachable, the other asking to be played with. Geometry surrounds us and exists within the same system as us. It can be dissected, moved around, matched up, and overlapped in various ways. Although the forms I make look highly calculated and precise, they come out of a haptic sense that allows the work to materialize through a subconscious state. Siri Hustvedt states *Living, Thinking, Looking* that “The truth about unconscious process is that the [work] can know more than the [maker] knows, a knowing that comes in part from the body, rising up from a preverbal, rhythmic, motor place in the self” (39).¹ This preverbal, rhythmic, motor place is the main factor in determining form within my work.

¹ Siri Hustvedt, *Living, Thinking, Looking*, (London, Sceptre, 2013), 39.

An objects formal considerations and decisions should not restrict where it is allowed to exist, artwork especially. The work in *Right Here / Over There* was not made specifically for a gallery, but this type of space provides a clean slate for the works to interact with each other in. The objects are intended to exist in a multitude of spaces, effecting each in a different way. Each setting will give the viewer a new opportunity to develop a narrative as well. The objects are equally effected by the space they are in, as is the viewer. Their relationship depends highly upon what and who else they are surrounded by. It is far more relevant to the life of the object if we can focus on the various emotive and narrative translations we can accomplish through it in a variety of settings. In the past I have made urinals and toilets intended for public restrooms. This specific type of space is very private and closed off, operating on a different system of do's and don'ts than a private bath in a home. It is interesting to me how specific types of space influence our interactions with objects and each other. To begin to break these obscure boundaries down I installed the public bathroom outdoors in a very open and communal setting with a fire pit beside it. People were really nervous to urinate in such close quarters to strangers and friends. Their nerves began to break and the objects got more use during the course of the night. By the end of the evening people were openly discussing their nerves and fears and how they felt as if they were over coming some kind of taboo. It just took some displacement and close proximity to push the limits of what is deemed an acceptable placement for an object. As Jean Baudrillard states "An objects functionality is the very thing that enables it to transcend its main 'function' in the

direction of a secondary one, to play a part, to become a combining element, an adjustable item within a universal system of signs” (67).²

Alexandra Horowitz notes in *On Looking*, “Once you look at what seems ordinary long enough... it often turns odd and unfamiliar” (77).³ A large part of what the work in *Right Here / Over There* does is set up a scenario for the viewer to translate an unfamiliar experience or emotional sensation through familiar materials. The materials use or purpose in the objects is somewhat unfamiliar, needing re-evaluation within its new context. This analysis provides a common ground between our human complexities and material potential, turning it familiar once again.

Materials are developed or resourced for their practical or utilitarian functions for our convenience. There is so much pattern and structure within all materials, whether it’s the chemical make-up of weak, neon plastics, or the durability of a hard walnut board. I find a type of solace or recognition in these materials. All materials are mundane in the fact that they are of this world. They become relatable to ourselves if we take the time to assess their inherent complexities, which we impose upon them when we compromise their original existence for our own convenience. Jean Baudrillard states that “Objectively, substances are simply what they are: there is no such thing as a true or a false, a natural or an artificial substance... In the end, the inherited nobility of a given material can exist only for a cultural ideology analogous to that of the aristocratic myth itself in the social world” (39).⁴ Separating these materials from their utilitarian functions

² Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, (New York, Verso, 2005), 67.

³ Alexandra Horowitz, *On Looking*, (New York, Scribner, 2013), 77.

⁴ Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, 39.

and re-associating them in different forms or comparisons is where new narratives will develop. The question is no longer “why is this material being used?” but becomes more along the lines of “How do these materials relate?” or “what is the purpose of this material comparison?”. Our translations of these associations is largely dependent upon our cultural and social backgrounds.

Color is similar to material in that “...colours generally derive their significance from outside themselves: they are simply metaphors for fixed cultural meanings” (30).⁵ Although color is tied to complex cultural systems, it is still an extremely emotive and subjective aspect of the visual world. The fact that we all see color differently is what makes this so obvious. We all get to independently decide which blue is the best blue no matter what any type of broad system tells us. The psychological side of color is a cultural system in itself that ebbs and flows within a person as they grow. I can feel this within myself as I observe my interest in various color palettes shift over the past few years.

I find it important for a material to retain its authenticity through color as much as possible. Bozeman, Montana is a great example of a cultural system imposing an agenda on material and color. The palette that is deemed proper for the housing complexes is a fake representation of all the *actual* nature that the town exists within. This palette oozes a falsehood with its overuse of ‘earthy’ blues and greens with a touch of rusted orange to contrast. Baudrillard states that “...such straightforward and ‘natural’ colors turn out to

⁵ Ibid, 30.

be neither. They turn out to be nothing but an impossible echo of the state of nature, which explains why they are so aggressive, why they are so naïve” (32).⁶

The colors I employ within my objects have depth and character. Latex paints are used for their bright plastic nature. I often use colored slips as a decorative motif on my clay objects, avoiding colored glazes as I feel that they obstruct the physicality of the ceramic surface. The palette is evocative of the places I have been that retain this sense of character and celebrate it. When I walk into my studio filled with the objects intended for *Right Here / Over There* I am consistently reminded of my short visit to Havana, Cuba last summer. The thick layers of paint on every single car or wall chipping away to expose the layers beneath felt like the perfect metaphor for the livelihood of the people that exist within that community. Their perseverance throughout their own historical and cultural restrictions has made them incredibly resourceful. Even though they are restricted due to their trade and economic structure, I feel as though they retain a sense of celebration through a fresh coat of paint, the exposed layers portraying the peoples character and depth.

I don't get to decide what is beautiful and effective across the board in contemporary society. This is the subjective nature of the rapid evolution of styles and cultures. I do not get to say that any approach to a color palette or material use is wrong, but I can disagree with it and feel emotionally repulsed by it. Beauty is often a subject that we avoid due to its intense subjectivity, but it's existence is so entirely necessary because of this. Our preferences in terms of beauty defines us all as individuals, and

⁶ Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, 32.

within that there is a system where we overlap. We can find commonalities within our sensibilities and preferences no matter where we are. Morandi boils all of my sentiments on color, material and form down to one simple statement: “The only interest the visible world awakens in me concerns space, light, color and forms” (237).⁷ This is a highly reductive statement, but I cannot help but cling to it. These may seem like minimal and restrictive qualities to our observation but they are broad and enveloping of everything we encounter. Hustvedt summarizes by stating, “Quality, light, color, depth, which are there before us, are there only because they awaken an echo in our body and the body welcomes them.” (p 234 LTL) This is evidence of our senses at work.

⁷ Siri Hustvedt, *Living, Thinking, Looking*, 237.

OBJECT

Architectural space is a complex and layered object. It dictates our movement and influences our visceral reactions within it. It's also a vessel that holds us, our things, and our memories. The relationship between human interaction, objects, and architectural space do not exist as separate experiences, but create a whole one. They become markers in our memory of an experience as well, dictating or triggering reflective thought. Space and our human interactions, with and within, are relative to and influence each other.

The placement of our objects within architectural space develops narrative and evokes emotive qualities. The space between them is where we fill in the blanks. This can create various triggers within the body. When my hallway at home is full of other things that I would rather not have placed there, it evokes a sense of claustrophobia and stress. Certain types of space function in very specific ways. Something as simple as a wall can provide us with varying levels of visceral experience. A wall with indentations and nooks to set a stack of books can feel comfortable and intimate. They can make us feel small or large depending on the scale. They also function to separate or block a view. The fur and ceramic wall in *Right Here / Over There* triggers many of these qualities. The wall being six feet tall by two and a half feet wide relates to our human scale, making it feel relatable and huggable. It is also made in two parts, the top piece made of faux fur and the bottom piece of ceramics, fitting together like a puzzle. This connection point is simple but very specific, fitting only one way, expressing the way in which our different emotions or personalities overlap and fit together. When the parts are separated, they become independent objects. Their proximity to each other operates as a metaphorical

comparison for hard and soft, distance and difference, or solidity in relation to our own personal complexities.

The two blue waves facing each other within the exhibition also set up a conversation through form and proximity. Their closeness in this show provides and angled pathway through to the rest of the space, as well as striking a dialogue between them with their similar sides facing each other. Their flat planar sides, painted with either a faded circle or faded squares, act as an echo to their wavy front sides, relating to either the pattern of circles or stripes. The wavy fronts that face each other start to ripple back and forth between the space they exist in. These forms are very abstract, referencing distance through the use of various blues. The supports they stand on are concrete, industrial, and utilitarian; one being held up by cinder blocks, the other being held up by concrete pillars. These supports tie the objects back to the physical world. The use of candle wax to coat the cinderblocks and other concrete aspects gives them depth and still questions their actual utilitarian nature. These two objects are like a brother and sister relationship to me. Their similarity through form, material and color will keep them in conversation no matter the proximity within the space. I can see many scenarios of these objects relating to each other, this exhibition being the first iteration.

We become a part of the narrative between the objects due to our intentions by placing them in proximity to one another, as well as our physical interactions with and between them. Modularity within these objects allows the narrative to change and evolve over time. Modular items within a domestic space, mostly concerning utilitarian furniture, can be seen as being liberated from their true function, their initial intention

being straightforward and utilitarian, their second intention being connection and movability.

When a fixed structure is invaded by a-structural elements, when the object itself is overwhelmed by a formal detail, the true function is no longer anything but a pretext, and the form does no more than signify the idea of the function. In other words, the form has become allegorical...It is through allegory, moreover, that the discourse of the unconscious makes itself heard (63).⁸

The faux fur and ceramic wall in *Right Here / Over There* is this statement made three dimensional. The allegorical nature of this object takes precedent over its functionality as a wall. The wall covered in corrugated cardboard does this as well. It takes one of the most mundane and utilitarian materials, removes it from its intended use, and celebrates its formal qualities. On one side of the corrugated wall, opposite the fur/ceramic wall, is the cast cardboard and concrete connecting point from the fur/ceramic wall. This object is meant to blend into the corrugated wall and eventually find its allegorical tie to its original fur/ceramic wall through time and observation. Through this distance, proximity, concealing and revealing of the objects throughout the space, narrative develops.

Isamu Noguchi's work has had an incredible influence on me in terms of how large scale objects and space relate and influence each other. I relate to the formal geometry, scale, and use of various materials that he employed. His work blends furniture and art, turning the gray area between the two into emotion and narrative. There is a type of solace in the independent objects, not needing a modularity with the objects around it.

⁸ Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, 80.

They reflect such simple notions of mundanity, turning them beautiful and making them feel important. “

...but the visible world, in human terms, is more than scientific truths. It enters our consciousness as emotion as well as knowledge; trees grow in vigor, flowers hang evanescent, and mountains lie somnolent - with meaning. The promise of sculpture is to project these inner presences into forms that can be recognized as important and meaningful in themselves (518-519).⁹

Form and material carry so much of his inner emotional weight into the objects themselves, making the viewer feel something familiar and similar as he did.

The objects in the exhibition *Right Here / Over There* relate to some of Noguchi's notions in that they are inner emotional presences made three dimensional. They are the physical construction of a condensed memory of my guttural reactions to architectural space and human interactions. The objects relate on a very formal level, developing a type of vernacular. This creates repetition and pattern within the room, suggesting movement through the objects, and providing multiple perspectives. A conversation between the objects unfolds from the large blue waves, to the tight wavy pattern of the corrugated cardboard wall, to the repetitious pattern in the pinched clay. This repeating pattern through various materials represents my interest and slight neurosis in repetitious process as well. The material swatches covering the wall in *Right Here* are the structure to the vernacular built by the formal objects in *Over There*. Although they represent every material, color, and surface treatment in the objects, they also represent my intention to fully understand each material and to see it as a single piece within a larger

⁹ Noguchi, Isamu. *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*. 518-519.

system. The mundanity of the materials from yarn to cardboard to candlewax are meant to trigger memory and reflection in the viewer. The materials are taken out of their regular context, becoming unfamiliar at first, but through close inspection and time, can become recognizable again. All these collected objects communicate on a visceral level through their architectonic form and mundane material, alluding to something bigger than they are. The abstractness of the forms takes them out of any context that is too specific to my own observations, keeping them open for various interpretations.

EXPERIENCE / MEMORY

When we have a new experience we gain knowledge, a type of practical wisdom that can be applied to the current moment as well as to past experiences as a way to compare and contrast. This knowledge comes first in feeling, sometimes shock, awe, or uncertainty. These guttural feelings come inherently as a human instinct, a type of reaction from exposure to new information. Some feel these senses more intensely than others. I make work to make use of these senses through memory, to make the viewer feel a similar emotional sense of awe through my lens. The main functionality of the material swatches in *Right Here* is to work with the viewer's memory. With time and an acute sense of visual perception, the viewer will find the links between the materials used in the objects in comparison to the swatches on the wall. The lightly painted swatches on the opposing wall at the opposite side of the gallery are an echo, representing how memory can fade between "right here" and "over there".

Our senses are constantly communicating to each other through the vehicle of our body. Sight, sounds, and smell inform us about our surroundings. Together they describe the culture and livelihood of a place. The many sensory layers of chaotic traffic in Hangzhou, China is enough to make me feel insane. As I sit, watch, and listen I eventually find a sense of calm. The traffic navigates its own chaos with such ease, as drivers swerve in and out of lines, continuously honking in place of using a blinker, and paying little attention to traffic signals. From a western perspective it is discombobulated and unapproachable, but slowly, so slowly, I begin to engage with the movement. The feeling of confusion was so intense that it was hard to process. A place needs time and

endless observation to begin to understand it in relation to yourself and the larger system it creates. This whole exhibition is like a puzzle that takes time, as puzzles do, to put all the pieces together.

We should start to wonder about the culture and history that loads a location we are experiencing. It is important to feel this sense of intrigue before attempting to name it. “But if you have ever looked long enough at a thing, you will notice that one of the first aspects to vanish is the word for the thing” (237).¹⁰ This is where the magic happens, when you are at a loss for words but entirely full of emotion. To me that is one of the most human experiences possible. The abstract and metaphorical use of material throughout this exhibition sets up many scenarios for this type of intrigue, keeping the viewer engaged with the narrative as it unfolds.

Sensory memory is the highly active engagement of all senses at once. Visual, aural, haptic and olfactory triggers consistently happen in the exact same moment. It is a very brief type of perception, but it is an incredibly accurate one. This type of memory retention does not require our conscious attention as our brains quickly decipher what is potentially helpful information for later on. This information is all stored in our short term memory. It is a fundamentally human process as “Living creatures all have motor-sensory memories that are implicit, and these mostly unconscious learned abilities underscore much of our habitual movement in the world” (108).¹¹

¹⁰ Siri Hustvedt, *Living, Thinking, Looking*, 237.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 108.

These perceptions provide us with memory. How strange or unfamiliar an experience is, in terms of where we come from and our own personal history, can be evaluated through our memory of it once the moment has passed. Memory can tend to be exaggerated or underestimated, in other words, it can't really be trusted as truth. Wilhelm Wundt stated that "Memory changes under the influence of our feelings and volition to images of imagination and we generally deceive ourselves with their resemblance to real experience" (106).¹² It is important to keep in mind that the memory of an experience, interaction, or of a space is layered with meaning and emotion. Those same meanings and emotions become triggers for that specific memory, and influence the way your imagination plays out the scenario. "Hence memory is the same as imagination... Memory has three aspects: memory when it remembers things, memory when it alters or imitates them, and invention when it gives them a new turn and puts them in a proper arrangement and relationship." (106)¹³

I think through all of this intense exposure to various cultures I have gotten increasingly overwhelmed, unsure of how to process my place within it all. I tend to push these thoughts to the back of my head in an attempt to deal with them later through time and my subconscious. It is becoming more evident that the works in *Right Here / Over There* are an evaluation of my confusion, desire, and memory of some of the strange places I have been, as I am constantly trying to tie them all together and pull out so much meaning. Sometimes I feel as though I have no place within these different cultures. My

¹² Siri Hustvedt, *Living, Thinking, Looking*, 106.

¹³ *Ibid*, 106.

presence is arbitrary, but the experience is crucial to my personal development and understanding of my own culture and place within the world. I have learned to abandon expectation when traveling, arriving with an open mind to allow the place to seep into me, to allow my interactions with the people of that place to inform me of the social norms. The more openly I exist in these times the more information there is to process. David Tremlett is a great example of this type of attempt to process so much cultural exposure. As a world traveler, he is constantly exposed to new people, places, and the systems they create, which are inherently different than the one he grew up in. He takes physical, architectural space, utilizing its functional nature to express the character and nature of place through large scale wall paintings. His poetic use of text and words reflects his constant wonder of place, searching for similarities through his endless observations. The color palette is rich and tactile, carrying a feeling of depth and history. My work uses the physical, architectural space in a similar way, employing the scale of a wall to make the viewer wonder, and encourage an endless observation.

CONCLUSION

It is incredibly difficult and seemingly impossible to condense the past three years of thought, research, and physical work into a four-day exhibition in the Helen E. Copeland Gallery. My interests in form/material/color, objects and proximity, architectural space, experience, and memory have always been there. The past few years have given me the opportunity to begin to find out how they all relate to each other and how they truly affect me as an individual, as well as their influence on others. Every day it becomes increasingly more obvious and prevalent to me that we are losing touch as a society with our sensory awareness. Our senses are one of the most fundamental aspects we have to being human. Touch, taste, sight, smell, and sounds are there for our endless observation and consideration, and we are constantly taking them for granted. I believe we all need to feel like we belong here. The fact that we are similar, even if it is on such a rudimentary level like our senses, if it is just the fact that we can touch a wall and feel that it is soft, or find some kind of solace or peace in that moment of softness, or to reflect on a memory because of the material experience, then that is enough for me. Maybe then we will stop taking our spaces, our objects, our relationships, and something so mundane as corrugated cardboard for granted.

A friend of mine was helping to clean the corrugated cardboard for the wall installation. Sometimes when you are sanding the paper a little too roughly it gets ragged and bruised. He pointed to his hand where he had an old scar that was indented and said “Hey, I have one of those, too.” This statement gave me an incredible sense of joy, that

he could find a similarity between himself and corrugated cardboard. We both will never look at it the same again.

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IMAGES



Right Here I – XXXI



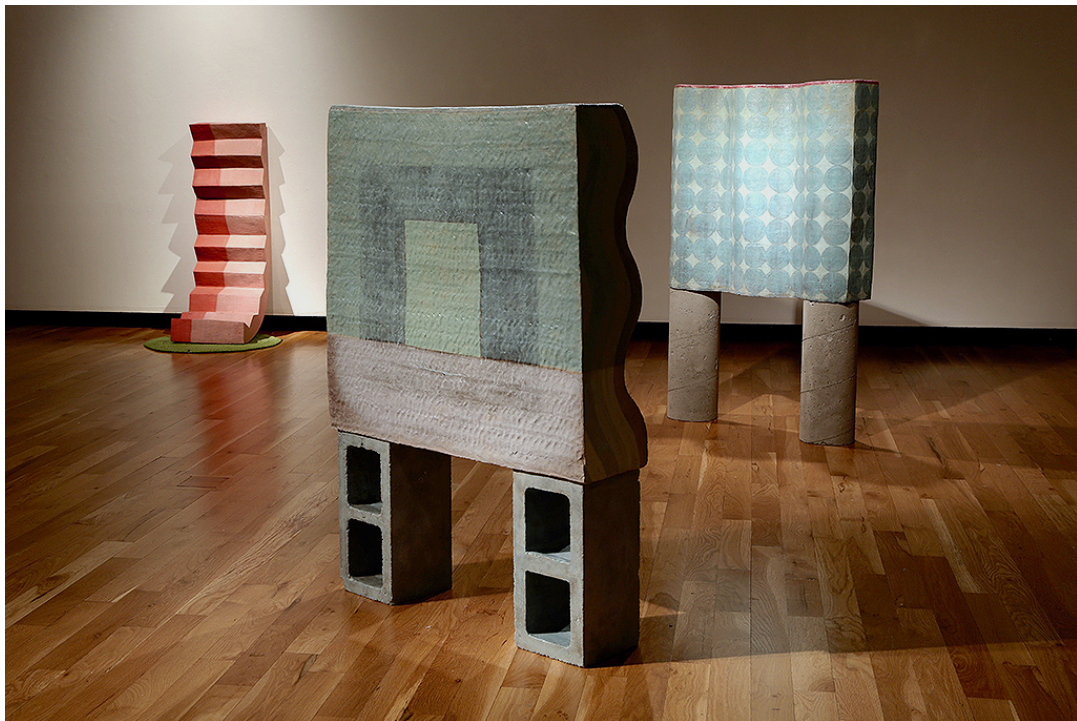
Over There I



Over There IV



Over There IV – Iteration



Over There I - III



Over There II



Over There III



Right Here XXXII



Corrugated Wall



Right Here



Over There



Sink