WHAT IS ABSENT IS PRESENT

A lens-based enquiry into the spaces between representation and abstraction

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ABSTRACT

This project explores the extent to which a photograph can capture the fluid and dynamic process of making observational drawings and ceramics, where the emphasis is placed on the processes of making rather than on a predetermined outcome. I align this approach to making with the philosophical notion of *becoming*, which suggests that the world of objects is constantly changing and evolving rather than fixed or static. In this context, I employ methods of making that emphasise the processual, such as making and then erasing a drawing. This contrarian method of undoing what has been done dismantles an established hierarchy, where activity—the dynamic nature of making itself—is given priority over substance. Of particular interest is how photography can assist in shifting value from the conventions of making to the acts of making and how these shifts might generate a re-evaluation of the incomplete or redundant aspects of the objects I make.

CONTENTS

ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the Acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed

Heyes Johnson
09 May 2023

LIST OF FIGURES

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INTRODUCTION

For as long as I can remember, I have been drawn to the spaces between things. From a young age, I was aware of a particular kind of space I occupied as biracial—not Māori, not Pākehā, but in-between. As a child, drawing became a way for me to engage and process the world at large, a space between the outer world and my inner experience. By the time I reached art school, my attention had turned to photography, where my awareness of these liminal, in-between spaces had manifested as a preoccupation with subjects that appear incomplete or redundant. At the time, my attraction to these subjects was largely intuitively understood through feeling. Over the course of this master's project, I have come to better understand the connection between my fascination with incompleteness and redundancy and my awareness of the spaces in-between things. I find myself conditioned to, but not content with, a Western[1] perspective that defines something that is deemed incomplete as insufficient or *less-than.* As a result, I am left curious about what lies beyond that value system.

This project centres around directly engaging with ideas of incompleteness and redundancy. I employ a processual approach to drawing, ceramics, and photography to investigate how value is perceived and measured within the tropes and techniques of these established traditions. I then problematise the conventional methods of making drawings and ceramics in an attempt to locate alternative ways of assigning value, such as shifting emphasis from a finished object to the processes of making. I am particularly interested in discovering how meaning is attributed to something that has not arrived at or has lost its original function—its reason for being.

This research navigates the relationships between the action (making), the object (the thing being made) and the photograph (documentation of the making process) within the context of artmaking traditions of observational drawing and ceramics.[2] Two interrelated questions define the scope of my research: to what extent can a photograph capture the fluid and dynamic process of making drawings

[1] I use the term 'Western' to identify the dominant cultural context of my childhood and adolescence. While the negative connotations of incompleteness are not limited to mainstream Western thought, many philosophical traditions, such as Taoism and Buddhism, embrace incompleteness and redundancy. These traditions promote recognition and acceptance of these conditions as a natural part of existence. Furthermore, these traditions warn against attaching to negative perceptions of such phenomena as doing so may lead to unnecessary suffering.

[2] I have explored drawing and ceramic disciplines over the course of this project, however, observational drawing constitutes the bulk of the research output. Accordingly, this exegesis discusses both disciplines, focusing mainly on my drawing practice. The origami tradition is also discussed in the context of the genesis of the project.

and ceramic objects? And, how might photography influence (inform and direct) this process of *becoming*?[3] A prominent topic in Western philosophical traditions, the concept of becoming considers the world of objects to be constantly changing and evolving rather than fixed or static.[4] As a result, the objects I create are viewed through a temporal lens.

The objects I make—observational pencil drawings and unfired clay forms—are made to be photographed. In my project, photography is not simply a means to record an image. It is a multifaceted image-making system that informs every part of my creative process. Each new creative act begins and ends with photography. Even before I identify the subject of a drawing or the materials I use, the photograph is present conceptually, influencing how the making gets done. My research employs photography as a tool to cultivate my conscious attention. The goal of my picture-making is to leave traces of a "resonance of this conscious attention"[5] in the images I make and to relay a sense of *how* the subject was observed. Because the objects I make are viewed as temporal in nature, it is this perception that I am trying to elicit in my photographs. I am attempting to capture in a single image the objects in ways that convey a sense of continual transformation. I do this by exploring photography's potential to facilitate heightened states of awareness while mining the medium's unique abstractive qualities.

My project comprises two interrelated methodologies: hierarchy-disrupting approaches to creative practice and photographic abstraction. I use research methods such as making and unmaking objects that simultaneously adhere to and disrupt the conventions of drawing and ceramics traditions. For example, I wedge clay in a conventional fashion, however, it is kept in its raw state, air-dried, and then broken down and recycled—the object is never completed in a traditional sense[6]. Photographic abstraction informs my methods for documenting my object-making. For example, I use light as a tool to problematise image making, exploring the liminal or synergetic spaces between representational and abstract imagery. These disruptive methods of making, and photographic abstraction, combine to locate novel ways to assign value and construct meaning within the conventions of drawing and ceramic practice.

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[3] In the context of this project the process of making an object is aligned with an object's *becoming* as described by French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and others who take their cues from Deleuze such as Canadian Philosopher Brian Massumi.

[4] Brian Massumi, Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts (The MIT Press, 2011).

[5] *Stephen Shore | HOW TO SEE the Photographer with Stephen Shore*, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T029CTSO0IE&list=PLBHPlREG4FLiNSMvGMt-P4OnFPbtRbRKL&index=32.

[6] Wedging is the term given to the practice of hand-kneading raw clay in preparation for making ceramics. The purpose is to remove any air bubbles and inconsistencies in texture from the clay.

As stated, this project explores interactions between actions, objects, and photographs. This exegesis uses these key research components as chapter titles: 'Action', 'Object', and 'Photograph'. Each chapter addresses a specific part of the research and subsequent relationships between or 'spaces between' these constituent parts.

Chapter one, 'Action', discusses how aligning my making with the philosophical notion of becoming enables a temporal perception of the objects I make. I give examples of my process-driven methods where priority is given to the dynamic nature of making. I discuss how this activity-focused approach provides practical ways to examine and disrupt the conventions of making such as the established tropes, and techniques of observational drawing. I also outline how photographic documentation helps to enhance the perception of the objects I make as part of a continuous process rather than static or fixed in time.

Chapter two, 'Object', discusses perceptual shifts that occur when I am focused on my processes of making. Using the example of observational drawing, I discuss a change that took place in my research, from trying to understand a given subject to an enquiry of drawing operations—a move away from an emphasis on the thing being observed and towards the nuances of observation itself. I introduce a second philosophical idea, the *minor.* Most commonly associated with French Philosopher Gilles Deleuze, the minor refers to a process of emphasising the secondary, even incidental, aspects of a given process. I outline how the minor operates as a conceptual tool for disrupting hierarchies within drawing conventions and ultimately changes how my drawings are valued. I argue that these changes promote a more nuanced appreciation of the concepts of incompleteness and redundancy.

Chapter three, 'Photograph', discusses photography's role in the research, particularly how it is both an observational tool that enhances perception and an additive one that constructs the subjects it depicts. I examine the idea of seeing or understanding the world in terms of photographic language. I explain how photography subtly directs my enquiry throughout the entire process of making objects from conception, through documentation, to final presentation. I also investigate how photographic abstraction assists in capturing an object's becoming by setting up a visual conversation between what is seen and unseen.

This exegesis concludes by discussing the relative status and interactions between the action, the object and the photograph—the spaces in between. Finally, I contemplate the potential for the

photographs I present to invite a viewing experience that encourages a critical enquiry of sociocultural systems beyond the scope of my research.

This project is driven by a decision to engage photography's capacity to enhance, shift perceptions, and record the process of making drawings and ceramics. Photography, therefore, serves as both a method and conceptual framework for the research. I use the medium to document my process of making while exploring its capacity to inform how my objects are made. This research contemplates the philosophical notion of becoming as a way to investigate studio-based making. I employ methods such as making (and unmaking) observational drawings to facilitate a direct experience of incompleteness and redundancy. In doing so I attempt to enhance my perception of more-than states of being.[7] By photographically documenting this process, the project aims to explore the photographic medium at the borders between representation and abstraction.

[7] The phrase 'more-than' is used in this exegesis to describe an attempt to gain access to experiences beyond ordinary perception. In the context of this research project this ordinary perception refers to the conventional approaches to observational drawing and ceramic practice and the photographic documentation of these practices.

CHAPTER 1: ACTION

Making as Becoming

An important backdrop to my research enquiry into making and photographing drawings and ceramic objects involves two contrasting foundational philosophical notions, *being* versus *becoming.* The concept of *being* relies on viewing the world of objects in terms of their immediate appearance. Thinkers such as French philosopher Gilles Deleuze oppose this concept, describing it as a limited way to experience life. He argues that it restricts the depth of people's understanding of the world around them. For Deleuze, a better approach is to perceive the world temporally—as a process.[8] French philosopher Henri Bergson maintained that to describe the identity of something only in terms of its immediate appearance is to deny that it is part of a more fundamental and continuous process, what he called the *vital force* or *impulse* of life.[9] Where the concept of being views the world of objects as fixed and static, the notion of *becoming* understands the world as in a continual state of flux and the objects and people inhabiting it to be alive with histories and futures. Comparatively, Canadian Philosopher Brian Massumi's *activist philosophy* explores becoming in relation to how an object's identity is formed, stating that "the reality of the world exceeds that of objects for the simple reason that where objects are, there has also been their becoming. And where becoming has been, there is already more to come".[10] This definition of an object conceptually frames how I have come to perceive the objects I make. This chapter explores how aligning my object-making with the philosophical notion of becoming has given rise to a temporal perception of these artefacts. I discuss how temporal perception conceptually informs my research methods and a processual approach to making, providing a hands-on means of exploring ideas related to incompleteness and redundancy.

I began this project by making origami figures in a way that enabled a direct experience of incompleteness and redundancy (see Figure 1). Origami, at its most basic level, involves folding a piece of paper, then unfolding that fold, making another fold and so on until the desired intersecting combination of folds is reached—an origami figure. Curious about the forms being revealed and disappearing during the folding process, I began photographing the paper models at various stages of

[8] "Episode #126 - Transcript," Philosophize This!, accessed May 5, 2023, https://www.philosophizethis.org/transcript/episode-126-transcript.

[9] Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (Milton, UNITED KINGDOM: Taylor & Francis Group, 2022), 166.

[10] Brian Massumi, Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts (The MIT Press, 2011), 6.

completion. Over time, I became more absorbed in the processes of paper folding than concerned with its preconceived outcomes. Not completing the origami figure made the results of my experiments redundant in a conventional sense. Employing an open-ended method of constructing these objects, where outcomes take a back seat to process, allowed me to focus on the fluid and dynamic nature of making—what I now perceive as the object's becoming. I began to see beyond the limitations of origami conventions and explore the value in the seemingly marginal activities of making.

Figure 1: Heyes Johnson, Origami Bird, 6 iterations, *2022, Digital photographs*

Contemporary British artist Phoebe Cummings embraces the processual in her practice by producing works that visibly evolve across time (see Figure 2). Her site-specific installations vary significantly in scale but are almost exclusively made with raw clay. The clay is never fired and therefore remains unstable and subject to environmental conditions, to the effects of drying, sweating, cracking, and the stresses of gravity. The susceptibility of raw clay to environmental conditions results in works that exhibit a process of transformation across time. British Art curator Clare Lilley describes Cummings' works as "akin to a performance".[11] Each of her installations is unique and ever-changing and because the clay is recycled after each project, is ultimately part of an unending process. Cummings' artworks

[11] Louisa Elderton and Rebecca Morrill, eds., *Vitamin C: Clay + Ceramic in Contemporary Art* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2017), 64.

convey a sense of continual metamorphosis. It is this quality, where objects seem to exist in a constant state of flux, that informs my approaches to making. I employ a group of research methods where objects are made and unmade such as folding and then unfolding an origami figure. I am interested in how my making can function without a clear end in mind and in doing so elevate the fluidity and dynamism within the processes of making. I am particularly curious to discover how removing the expectations of a focus on outcomes might shift perceptions of the materials I use, the objects I make, and the processes of their making. And how this shift creates greater opportunities to capture an object's becoming.

Figure 2: Phoebe Cummings, *This Was Now*, 2020, Installation view & details, Clay rope, wire.

The continuing urge to experiment with and document a processual approach to making led me to other disciplines, such as the practice of observational drawing and ceramics. The conventions of these disciplines and their associated skill sets provides an ever-present context for my research. One such convention is using observational drawing as a method to better understand a subject—to study the thing being drawn. In one sense a drawing traces the artist's observational experience, the process of seeing (as well as thinking and feeling) across time. English art critic John Berger describes this process as a kind of autobiographical record that maps what has been discovered.[12] Berger makes the case that a finished drawing amounts to an attempt to reconstruct that event. As I began to place more emphasis on the processes of drawing, I started to question the extent to which a drawing, when deemed complete, could offer an adequate record of all the mental and physical actions that took place.

[12] John Berger, *Landscapes: John Berger on Art* (Verso Books, 2018).

I quickly became fascinated with the ancillary aspects of the drawing process, eager to discover other ways to more fully illuminate a drawing's becoming. Certain parts of the drawing process began to spark my curiosity, such as the stage when attention turns from the observation of the subject, for example a plaster bust, to the drawing itself, what Berger calls a "point of crisis".[13] This shift to looking inward felt like it was providing new information, like I was discovering a means with which to describe how a drawing comes into being. I was similarly intrigued by the incomplete and erased parts of the drawing (see Figure 3). What I might have previously considered redundancies in the drawing process began to hold more of my attention than the subjects I was sketching.
Focusing on incidental drawing activities, such as erasing mistakes, shifted how I perceived their importance. I explored purposely erasing parts of or all of a drawing, paying close attention to the points of crisis and collapse within its life-cycle. Actions such as erasure were no longer simply a means to an end but evidence of a rich, unfolding process of continual change.

Erasing a drawing or folding and unfolding an origami figure is for me a philosophical gesture, raising fundamental questions about the value of something when its function is lost or has changed (see Figure 3). These methods of deliberately undoing what has been done serve to dismantle an established hierarchy within drawing and paper folding traditions, where priority is given to the completion of a drawing or origami figure. By shifting emphasis to the dynamic, process-focused aspects of making, what Massumi calls the *event activities,* the completion of a predetermined object takes a backseat to the object's becoming.[14] This movement away from a prescribed outcome delivers a perceptual shift and brings an opportunity to re-evaluate a drawing beyond its conventions—to find meaning in incompleteness.

Shifts in perception are augmented by the insight-enabling qualities of photographic documentation. For example, a photograph highlighted for me the material aspects of folding paper, such as the prominence of the worn paper and how the sections between folds are faceted by light. In this way, photography moves my attention from simply noticing an object's appearance to tracking its transformation as part of an ongoing process of change. Additionally, photography's ability to record patterned behaviours in the studio adds opportunities for variability and reflexiveness in the ways I engage with the conventions of observational drawing. When I remove the rubbings from erased

[13] Berger, 31.

[14] The phrase 'event activities' is used by Brian Massumi in his book Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts. Massumi describes a way of perceiving an event as a set of actions or interventions that have the potential to open up new avenues of possibility within a given system or tradition. These strategies are therefore posited as having the potential to transform these systems.

parts of a drawing or avoid harsh studio lighting, photographs highlight these default habit patterns. The photographic documentation of my drawing process allowed me to see these default habits and disrupt them. Discarded rubbings that previously had little or no value became important signs of an object's becoming.

Figure 3:
Heyes Johnson, *Erased Hand 2*, 2022, Digital Photograph.

This chapter positions how methods such as making and erasing a drawing have opened up ways for me to understand the activities of drawing beyond its standard conventions. Emphasising process over outcomes subtly challenges the status quo of drawing practice in an attempt to shift perception and make visible the process and processes of an object's becoming. A sustained curiosity for modifying my perception has brought the entire process of making into view, revealing spaces between the actions of making and their intended outcome—the object. Like Cumming's raw clay sculptures, process is central to the experience of my artworks, but unlike her work, my making is not

performed for a viewing audience but rather for the camera. I choose to have a single photograph represent the objects I make in an attempt to activate the perceptual spaces between the actions, the objects and the photograph—a space that viewers are invited to fill. The next chapter, 'Object', examines and reflects upon how this shift away from an outcome-driven approach to making not only shifts the perception of the object—the thing(s) being made—but enables changes in value.

CHAPTER 2: OBJECT

Object as Event

> *This is how it should be done: lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times.*[15]

This chapter examines the philosophical notion of the *minor* as a means to activate perceptual shifts within my research. I discuss how the minor disrupts hierarchies and reallocates value from within the conventions of observational drawing. I give particular consideration to placing value on objects, materials and processes that might otherwise be considered incomplete or redundant.

One key aspect of the conceptual framing of this project is how the object—the thing being made—is positioned within my research. This project defines the object as the coalescence of a set of ever-evolving relations and interactions. Therefore, the objects I make are viewed by their very nature as dynamic. Some modes of object-making, such as conventional observational drawing, often remove signs of process from a finished work. For example, preliminary sketches or studies conducted before a final drawing is attempted might never be shown. In this approach, a work of art might be seen as complete only when tied to an object that is fixed and unchanging. Canadian philosopher Erin Manning describes this definition of an artwork as an "object out of time, relegated beyond

[15] Gilles Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Continuum, 2004), 161.

experience".[16] Manning prefers to conceive of art objects as not bound to linear perceptions of time or fixed to a predetermined set of values but understood as inhabiting a state of becoming.[17] Accordingly, my research employs a processual approach to making where the emphasis is placed on the fluidity of the process and processes of creation.[18] The objects I make, such as graphite drawings on paper, are viewed as events in progress—objects that are *of* time, not outside of it. By focusing on the activities of making, I intend to produce artifacts that might better hold traces of the dynamic nature of their creation.

In this project, a drawing, regardless of its degree of completion, is not perceived as simply the *result* of a process. The drawing is always *in* process, evidencing a continual state of flux, expressing an ongoing process of becoming something else.[19] Conceptually framing the objects I make as perpetual events provides a necessary shift in how a thing might be perceived while it is being made. For example, when the need to complete a pencil drawing is removed, so too is an established hierarchy. Therefore any part of the drawing process such as an erased portion or the resulting rubbings can hold as much significance as any other part. I find that these kinds of perceptual shifts are triggered more frequently when working within, and then problematising, conventional approaches to making such as those found in the long-established traditions of observational drawing. It is this strategy of repeatedly adopting and disrupting making conventions that both provides an existing system of value and promotes a re-evaluation of that system.

In *The Minor Gesture* (2016), Erin Manning expands on Deleuze's concept of the *minor*, describing it as a means of problematising normative standards by practising non-conformity in the context of creative practice.[20] In doing so, she proposes a mechanism for dismantling hierarchies within commonly held or 'major' systems of value, which can be used when assigning value to objects, places, and people. In my research, systems of value surface in the conventions of making traditions, such as the established standards, tropes, and techniques of observational drawing practice.[21] Rather

[16] Erin Manning, *The Minor Gesture*, 2016, 48.

[17] Manning, *The Minor Gesture*.

[18] While this exegesis does not directly position the project in relation to the historical tradition of process art, artists such as American sculptor Eva Hess has informed my processual approach to making. Of particular interest is the recent re-evaluation of Hess's studio experiments (non-art objects) in the context of her larger process driven practice.

[19] Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (Columbia University Press, 1994).

[20] Manning, The Minor Gesture.

[21] The tendency towards notions of perfection as reflected in Renaissance depictions of human form is one historical context that exemplifies these conventions.

than avoiding the meaning derived from subjects I draw, I experiment with utilising drawing tropes such as life drawing, landscape and still life as starting points for discovering new meaning within the processes of drawing. Within my object-making, the minor is revealed in often discrete actions, such as preparing a material (for example, clay or paper) for use, unintentional mark-making, or erasing mistakes. Elevating these small moments within the practice is a gesture that promotes process ahead of outcomes (see Figure 4). Rather than denying the conventions of drawing and ceramics, my research relies on working within and responding to them. In this way, my methods function to highlight the minor within the major, shedding light on the fluid and dynamic process of making.

In relating the concept of the minor to creative practice, Manning positions the object not as the goal of artistic endeavour but as a means of activating new understanding within familiar or routine procedures. Similarly, my research methods foster modes of perception that enable the exploration of observational drawing's rich history and technical knowledge in search of new avenues of meaning. Predicated on the idea that an object might hold within itself the process of becoming, I employ practices such as 'making and unmaking' to emphasise subtle aspects of observational drawing and expand possibilities for discovery. Secondary or incidental gestures, unique occurrences, the effects of environmental variability, chance discoveries, and so-called accidents are amassed across the making. These seemingly insignificant threads, when stitched together, create a more nuanced picture of the rhythms of making across time.

Using methods that upset the order of conventional drawing practice, such as erasing an entire drawing or leaving a drawing unfinished, disrupts hierarchical norms and raises questions of value. A different system of value is established by repeatedly focusing on a standard set of activities such as observation, mark making, shading, rubbing, and erasing, then staying alert to ways to interrupt typical habit patterns. Qualities that might otherwise be described as mistakes or mishaps, things that seem incidental or lacking, are elevated. Shifting emphasis to the secondary or *minor* aspects of making opens up all parts of the practice. The entire drawing process is explored, from paper preparation to the complete erasure of a 'finished' work, from a passing curiosity for the graphite marks left on a kneadable eraser to the purposeful generation of drawing 'accidents' (see Figures. 5-6). Emphasising these actions serves to relocate the dominant or *major* definitions of drawing language within the context of my research. Repeatedly recognising and documenting small in-

process gestures has the cumulative effect of orienting my practice towards a re-evaluation of ideas of incompleteness and redundancy.

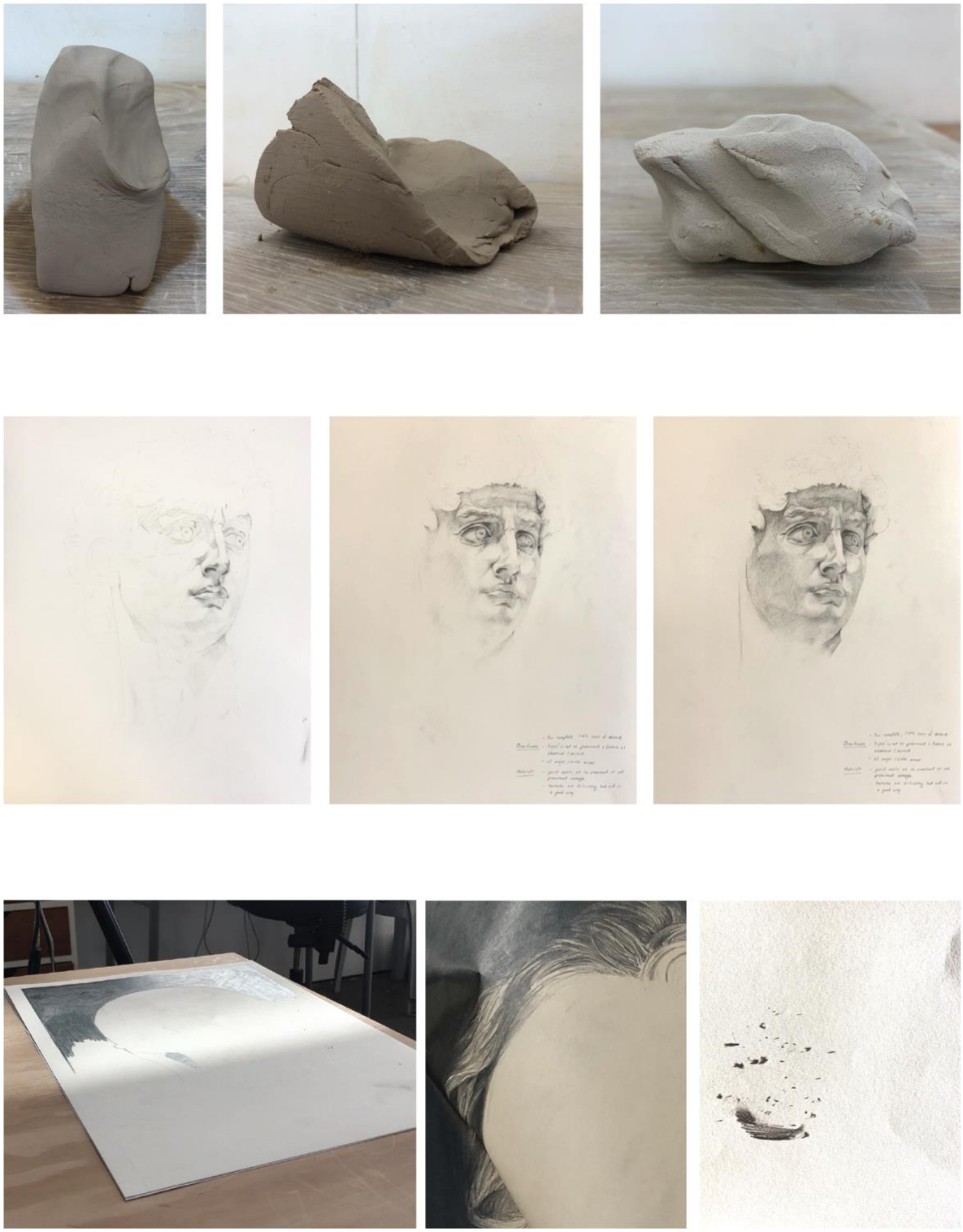

Figure 4: Heyes Johnson, *Studio Experiments*, 2022-2023, Digital Photographs.

Figure 5: Heyes Johnson, *Kneadable Eraser*, 2022, Digital photograph.

Figure 6: Heyes Johnson, *Test Paper* 2022, Digital photograph.

An example of how a shift in emphasis to the secondary or incidental aspects of making can generate shifts in value is exemplified in *Hair Study 2* (2022) (see Figures 7-8), a printed photograph of an incomplete graphite drawing on newsprint. This work was the second iteration of an observational drawing study of an image of a hair model. When working on the first version of the drawing, the newsprint paper I used began showing signs of wear and tear. The paper, even when taped to the supporting board, was suspectable to pencil pressure. The material was unintentionally pushed beyond what it was designed for. Historically linked to newspaper production, newsprint carries a socio-cultural identity related to single or short-term use. It is a popular choice for life drawing as it is inexpensive and lends itself to multiple quick drawings; however, it was never intended for sustained use. Yet for me, this material becomes most useful at its limits. Newsprint's unsuitability for long-form drawings revealed its capacity to retain traces of the activities of my making. I became increasingly curious to explore various ways that an object could hold visual information that recalls the process of its creation and the extent to which that could be visually documented.

Figure 7: Heyes Johnson, *Hair Study 2*, 2022, Digital Photograph.

Figure 8: Heyes Johnson, *Hair Study 2 (detail)*, 2022, Digital Photograph.

In the artwork, *Yielding Stone* (1993) (see Figure 9). Mexican artist Gabriel Orozco rolled a ball made from his body weight in plasticine through city streets from his studio to the gallery. Gathering debris and imprints from its journey, the oversized mass of putty-like substance records its own making in ways that trace the passage of time. In an interview, Orozco detailed the events that led to the work being made. He described the frustration of using plasticine on a previous project: "When you rolled it the plasticine got really dirty and I had to accept the vulnerability of the material".[22] First identifying and then expanding on the limitations of his chosen material, Orozco created *Yielding Stone* by re-evaluating apparent weakness. Discovering utility in the vulnerability of materials in works such as *Hair Study 2* led me to place greater value on my drawings' accidental, in-process, and material qualities. This shift in value was framed by a desire to find ways in which objects might recall their past. Experimenting with materials unfit for purpose, such as newsprint paper, or leaving a drawing unfinished, are gestures that create small ruptures in the hierarchies within drawing traditions. These ruptures problematise the standard conventions of drawing practice where the material function or outcomes would otherwise take priority, repositioning the aims for the objects that I make. The aim

[22] Gabriel Orozco, *Gabriel Orozco* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2006), 199.

becomes to create objects that reveal evidence of their making and to investigate how these traces can be captured in a photographic image.

Figure 9: Gabriel Orozco, *Yeilding Stone*, 1993, Chromogenic Colour print, 406x508mm.

Unlike Orozco's *Yielding Stone*—where photographs of the work being made were exhibited alongside the object whose making they describe—the artifacts I produce rely on the absence of the original object. In most cases, the only sign of the thing being made (and the actions of its making) is a single photograph. In this way, the project relies on the camera's capacity to make visible something that has been seen across time. Orozco, well known for photographically documenting his artmaking process, describes a dilemma with photographic documentation, stating, "I always say that the work doesn't end in the museum but keeps going. The problem with the document (photograph) as a kind of evidence is that it is an end".[23] The attempt to capture in a photograph the process of an object being made—it's becoming—relies on understanding that there is 'more-than' the object that is visible at any one time. In this context, the phrase 'more-than' sets up an interesting contradiction in my research. Namely, the attempt to make visible an experience (an object's becoming), and an understanding that this experience exceeds the limits of ordinary perception.

It is this problematic space, between the objects that I make and the photographs that represent their making, that lies at the conceptual heart of this project. As discussed in this chapter, focusing on the

[23] Orozco, 57.

minor activities of making—for example, erasure—dismantles hierarchies within *major* making traditions, such as observational drawing practice. It is the subsequent shifts in how seemingly insignificant processes are perceived and valued that serve as the aims of this project. These shifts assist in revealing the more-than that is present—more than incomplete, more than redundant, more than the static object as it is presented. The next chapter discusses these ideas in relation to methods of photographic documentation, digital translation, and printing. Of particular focus is how these photographic processes augment shifts in perception while capturing and influencing the creation of qualities that might best represent an object's becoming.

CHAPTER 3: PHOTOGRAPH

Thinking Photography, Photographic Thinking

This chapter explores the relationships between my photographic methods and the objects I make. I discuss photography's potential as a perceptual tool and as an awareness practice comparable to meditation. I address the challenge and opportunities involved in making images that attempt to capture an object's becoming. I also outline a definition of photographic abstraction that parallels my conceptual interests, namely identifying and depicting the spaces between things.

The photographs in this project are characterised by imagery that relays a process of change. Key to this depiction is evidencing the secondary, latent, or otherwise less visible aspects of making such as the material properties of the paper used to make drawings—its registration, surface, susceptibility to touch, and object-ness. Of particular significance to my research is the extent to which photography can be perceived as an abstract art form. The book *The Edge of Vision* (2009), by American curator and critic Lyle Rexer surveys a diverse grouping of photographs that feature various kinds of abstraction, from William Henry Fox Talbots's early photographic experiments, to Wolfgang Tillmans camera-less images (see figures 10-11). Rexer makes the case that photography is inherently tethered to abstraction, stating that "by its nature photography is an abstracting art, involving a gap between what is seen and what is shown".[24] He alludes to the idea that a photograph is always subject to the representational limits of the camera (or photo-sensitive materials in the case of camera-less photography), and that by continually being faced with the choice of what to leave in and what to

[24] Lyle Rexer, The Edge of Vision: The Rise of Abstraction in Photography (Aperture, 2009), 257.

leave out of an image, the photographer is involved in a process of abstraction. He describes photographs that resist revealing completely the subjects they contain as "undisclosed images".[25] In attempting to make apparent the less visible aspects of making objects across time, photography's abstractive characteristics are revealed.

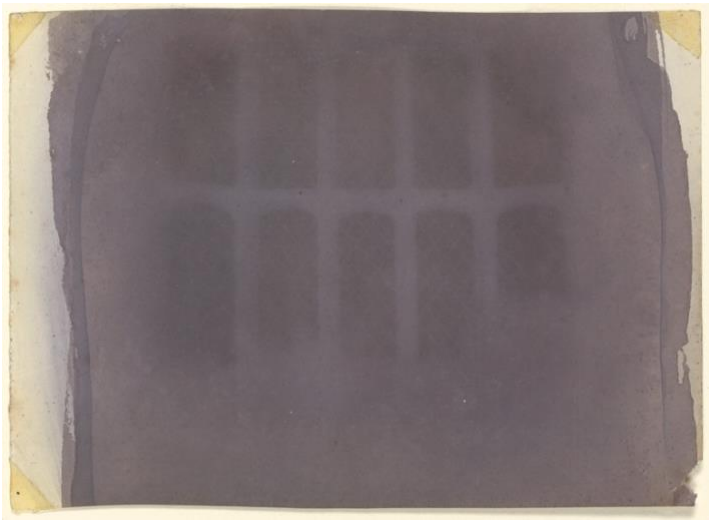

Figure 10: William Henry Fox Talbot, *The Oriel Window, South Gallery,* Lacock Abbey, c. 1835, Paper negative, 85x116mm.

Figure 11: Wolfgang Tillmans, *Star Struck #3*, 2000, Chromogenic print, 610x508mm

Because I make objects for the purpose of being photographed, photography is present across every aspect of my research. The choice of subject to draw, the colour of clay, or the right texture of the paper to fold are all decisions informed, albeit subtly, by an awareness of photography's aesthetic and technological qualities—a kind of "photographic thinking".[26] The question underpinning all decisions in the studio is what, when made visible, might these qualities offer a photographic image? Once I start making objects, photography enacts my curiosity about the in-process aspects of drawing or shaping clay. Intensifying and informing the observational process, photography enhances the way I view my materials and activities of making across time. In discussing the urge to preserve time, American curator Kerry Brougher describes photography as less an invention than an innate perceptual tool within the human mind.[27] Whether the camera is in my hand or not, the impulse to capture what I see is present in every act of making. In this way, photography is an ever-present tool for cultivating conscious attention.

[25] Rexer, 9.

[26] Sean Ross Meehan, 'Emerson's Photographic Thinking', *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 62, no. 2 (2006): 27–58, https://doi.org/10.1353/arq.2006.0010.

[27] Hiroshi Sugimoto, Hiroshi Sugimoto / Texts by Kerry Brougher, David Elliot, Hiroshi Sugimoto ; Catalogue Designed by Takaaki Matsumoto., 23.

One example of how photography influences perception in my practice centres around the variable conditions of my work studio (see Figure 12). The quality of light in the studio—its angle, brightness, colour temperature, and its potential to influence how objects are made—differs each day. The camera assists in noticing these variations. It measures the changes in light and form and records them, augmenting perception and influencing which material qualities are given more attention. The photographs that result document the presence of light in ways that imbue the images with a sense of temporality. The photographs, whether singular or in series (see Figure 13), act as a kind of time stamp. The qualities of light captured provide a sense of time and place, hinting that the objects in view are in the process of becoming something else.

Figure 12: Heyes Johnson, *Studio View*, 2023, Digital photograph

Figure 13: Heyes Johnson, *Wedging Process,* 2023, Digital photographs.

As the camera increasingly influences my drawing practice, I find myself comparing the act of photographing my studio activities with the practice of meditation.[28] I have become cognisant that, like meditation, photography can enhance my capacity for embodied awareness. Meditation practices are primarily driven by an inward enquiry, focusing on the senses, whereas photography is informed mainly by the camera's outward-looking view of the world. However, I contend that both can enhance sensory perception and augment the observation of subtle experiences. Accordingly, my research explores how photography can assist in discovering minor gestures and subtle 'more-than' qualities when making objects in the studio. In the case of crafting an observational drawing, the secondary or incidental acts of making are studied so that the nuanced rhythms of a drawing's becoming might be revealed.

Perceiving an object, such as a pencil drawing, as possessing a past, present, and future enacts an intensified perception of time. In this way, my research considers how photography might relay this temporal intensification in visual terms. The relationship between photography's unique visual language and temporality is a fundamental aspect of Japanese photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto's project *Theatres* (see Figure 14-15). Over a forty-year period, Sugimoto has photographed in excess of 160 movie theatres. Each image is created by positioning the camera directly in front of a cinema screen and exposing an 8x10-inch photographic plate for the duration of a feature-length film. The individual histories of these buildings are animated by a single light source reflected from the film's projection screens.

Figure 14: Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Cinema Dome, Hollywood*, 1993, Silver gelatin print, 508x610mm.

Figure 15: Hiroshi Sugimoto, *U.A. Play House, New York*, 1978, Silver gelatin print, 508x610mm.

[28] These observations are based on my experiences over the last 15 years practising, studying and teaching various meditation practices.

Sugimoto does not use still photography to mirror the temporal experience of a feature-length film. He could have contrived a linear series of still images to relay the narrative of each feature-length movie, resulting in a simple exchange of one visual idiom for another. Instead, he explores the limits of the camera's image-making capacity, particularly its distinctive representation of light and time. In doing so, viewers are presented with an altogether unique image representing the experience of an event—of a coming into being. By utilising photography's innate connection to abstraction, he creates a temporal record that gives an account of what is seen, while highlighting what is unknowable. Similarly, I photograph drawings across the duration of their making. However, I take multiple exposures, documenting an array of moments in the drawing process (significant and not). Although taken in series, a single image is selected, one that best captures the event.

Theatres provides a historical record of cinemas while inviting contemplation on time itself. Sugimoto utilises photographic ambiguities to enable his philosophical enquiry, stating, "The starting point for my work is the horizon where the certainty of perception begins to waiver".[29] The photographic apparatus leaves its indelible footprint in the images he makes. A white square provides clear evidence of photography's additive nature by highlighting its technical limitations. The photographs activate the space between pictorial representation and abstraction, between what is immediately recognisable and not. It is in these marginal spaces where my research finds its home—where photographic language begins to stutter and stammer.[30]

While my project relies heavily on the descriptive capacity of the camera—its ability to faithfully record what is seen, it also explores its additive characteristics—how it constructs the subjects being depicted. I am interested in how taking a photograph can influence so much of what happens before, and after, an image is captured. I am fascinated by how the camera changes what it sees and how these changes when visible carry their own unique meaning. In this way, my project investigates photography's potential to influence the objects I make and the signs of this influence. In *Each Wild Idea* (2002), Australian art historian Geoffrey Batchen explores a view of the medium as one that "both reflects and constitutes its object".[31] In ways that mirror this

[29] Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Hiroshi Sugimoto: Theaters* (Bologna, Italy: Damiani Editore; Matsumoto Editions, 2016), 2.

[30] Mieke Bleyen and Simon O'Sullivan, eds., *Minor Photography: Connecting Deleuze and Guattari to Photography Theory*, Lieven Gevaert Series 13 (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2012). The phrase 'stutter and stammer' is used by Gilles Deleuze in his book Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature to describe the minor's destabilising effects on language. I use the term here to parallel my interests in visual language, in particular concerning images that explore photography's representational borders.

[31] Geoffrey Batchen, *Each Wild Idea: Writing, Photography, History* (Massachusetts MIT Press: 2001), 22.

conception of photography, I employ studio-based methods of making, photographic documentation, digital translation and printing. These methods form a continuous and reciprocal workflow—make an object, observe and document its making, digitally translate and print the resulting images, and remake the object. This fluid interaction between object making and photography forms the basis of my response to the research questions: how might photography best capture, and in what ways might it influence an objects becoming?

The term *translation* describes the manner in which digital technology (i.e., digital cameras, or processing and editing software) is used within my practice. Each stage of the capture and subsequent digital development has an effect on the image. I use translation as a method to reveal qualities in the objects I make that might otherwise be negligible. Additionally, print processes utilise paper texture, tonality, and scale to exaggerate or diminish both representational and abstract forms. Intensifying a shadow cast by drawing paper or digitally combining multiple exposures to maximise details are visual tools used to emphasise the paper's object-ness (see Figure. 16). These methods of photographic manipulation are subtle, even undetectable in the images that result. Nevertheless, they serve the purpose of making the objects and the actions that produced them more visibly present.

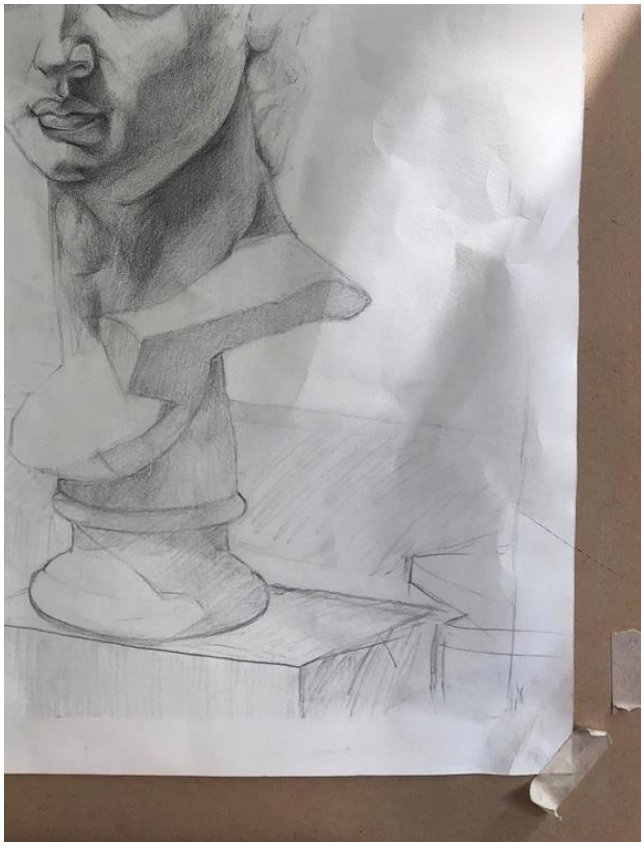

Figure 16:
Heyes Johnson,
David 3, (detail),
2023, Digital
photograph

Photography's complicated relationship to representation is evidenced in my life-drawing study titled *Max Black Skull,* 2022 (see Figure 17) where negative space around an outlined subject (a bare human skull) is filled with the darkest tone achievable using a 6B graphite pencil. Like other drawing studies made over the same period (see Figure 18-19), the drawing accentuates that which is absent—in this case, the space around the subject. Informed by a kind of photographic perception, involving sensitivity to brightness and shade, I became aware of light reflecting off the dense layers of graphite. I subsequently photographed the drawing in ways that capture both the drawn image and the reflective surface. The resulting photograph depicts a process of mark-making that is difficult to see with the naked eye while revealing the camera's characteristic struggle to manage reflections. In this way the camera leaves subtle signs of its unique manner of representing light and time. British philosopher Diarmuid Costello describes this type of photograph as exhibiting "Faux Abstraction".[32] where the recognition of the subject (or parts of the subject) is delayed. By repeatedly photographing drawings I make, two interrelated 'in-between spaces' have become apparent in the resulting images: the space between photographic representation and abstraction, and a space formed by the intersection of photographic and drawing languages.

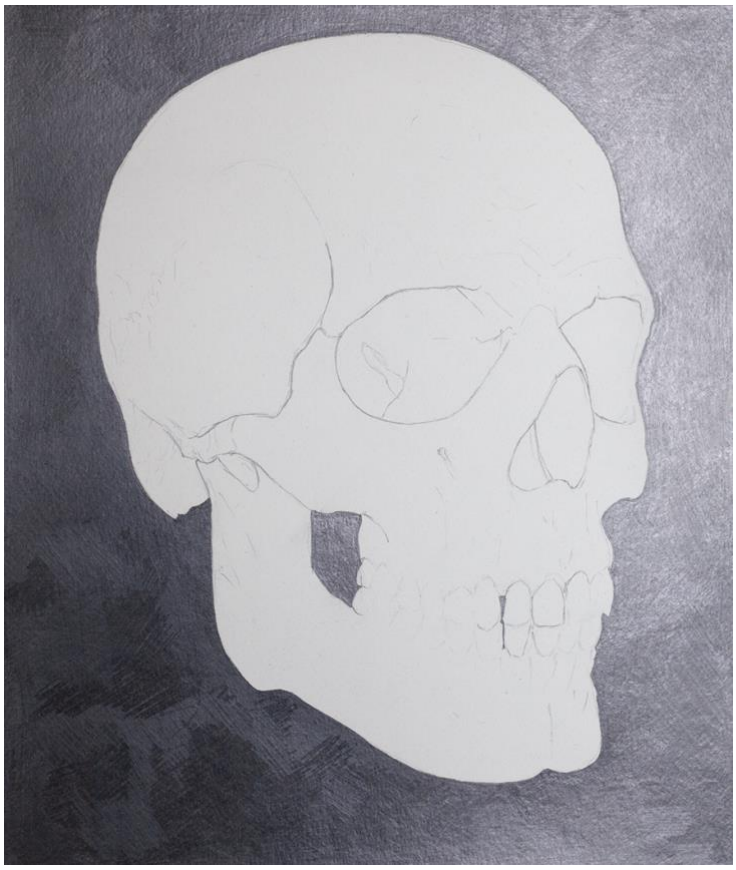

Figure 17: Heyes Johnson, *Max Black Skull*, 2022, Digital photograph.

[32] Costello, 'What Is Abstraction in Photography?' 395.

Figure 18:
Heyes John*son, Hand Erased*, 2023, Digital Photograph

Figure 19:
Heyes Johnson, *Skull Erased,* 2023, Digital Photograph

New Zealand artist Andrew Beck makes work that explores photography's ambiguities—in particular, what he views as the medium's problematic relationship with representation.[33] Through a conflation of visual art languages, namely camera-less photography, painting, and sculpture, his images trigger real-world associations while remaining visually complex and difficult to define (see Figure 20).[34] Similarly, my photographs reflect the subtle complexities of marrying two distinct visual languages—photography and drawing. In this project, photography's ability to capture and influence an object's becoming resides in the places where drawing and photographic languages intersect.

Figure 20: Andrew Beck, *Fragmented Light*, 2017, Acrylic, enamel, silver gelatin print.

This chapter has discussed my attempts to discover the role photography might play in describing the process of becoming. In doing so, I am making images that explore the extent to which a photograph might "palpate the unknowable".[35] Representing in a single photograph, all of what a drawing was, is, and will be is, on the surface, futile.[36] However, the ambition of my project centres around what might be revealed about the photographic medium in the spaces between the photograph and the

[33] 'Soft Filter: Andrew Beck Artist Interview', 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tlRkIFfsTWI.

[34] 'Andrew Beck: Photography Backwards', accessed April 30, 2023, https://robertleonard.org/andrew-beck-photography-backwards/.

[35] Todd May, *Gilles Deleuze: An Introduction* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 20.

[36] I acknowledge that many theorists have explored this line of thinking. For example, in his book Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography, Roland Barthes discusses the photograph's unique capacity to conflate past and present and, more generally, act as a symbol of time passing. This project's enquiry centres more specifically around photography's capacity to relay temporality via its abstractive characteristics.

reality of the objects it depicts. When considering Sugimoto's *Theatre* series, I am struck by the gap between what I see and what I perceive. A white rectangle, devoid of form, is depicted in the centre of the frame. What I perceive is equally undefined yet conceptually spacious—filled with possibility. Through photographing drawings and ceramics, fertile gaps have appeared between the objects I make and the photographs that document their making, between drawing language and photographic language, and between representation and abstraction.

CONCLUSION

The Spaces In-Between

The central aim of this project has been to investigate how the process and processes of making observational drawings and ceramics might be best represented in a photograph and how photographing the making might impact the manner of their creation—their *becoming*. This enquiry is driven by embracing two interrelated interests: my affection for the ambiguities of photographic visual language, such as is present at the borders between pictorial representation and abstraction; and a lifelong curiosity for the spaces between things, specifically the shifts in perception that appear when looking beyond normative standards of value.

My processual approach to the research is informed by aligning the process of making (pencil drawings, clay forms, and photographs), with the philosophical notion of becoming. The idea that a pencil drawing can be viewed as an object in a constant state of flux aids my perception when making drawings. In this light, a drawing can be *completed* in a different sense. These objects are much 'more-than' any one isolated phase or iteration of their life cycle. Making drawings, working with raw clay, and folding origami figures for the purpose of being photographed allows for direct engagement with these philosophical concerns. For example, by documenting what is conceptually framed as a drawing's becoming, photography is used to expand both how the drawing might be represented, and how it is made. The resulting photograph serves both as a representation of the drawing and presents evidence of its passing.

Key to this enquiry was finding ways to directly engage with ideas related to incompleteness and redundancy, so that a re-evaluation of these ideas might take place. Employing research methods

that interrupt the linear and outcome-focused aspects of making drawings and ceramics, I developed ways to sustain shifts in perception throughout the entire process of making. Undoing what has been done or not completing a given task is not simply a philosophical gesture; it supports the central aims of my project by providing a practicable means of engaging the idea of an object's *becoming*. These modest gestures reflect the perception of the objects I make as events within a continuum of change. I contemplate the philosophical idea of the *minor* as a conceptual tool for provoking hierarchical shifts within the conventions of making. Holding philosophical notions such as *becoming* and the *minor* moves the dominant language forms of observational drawing beyond approaches that are predetermined or reliant on a linear concept of time. Focusing on revealing and embellishing discrete processual acts makes space for shifts in the perception of the objects I make and how they are valued.

Ultimately this project is concerned with the nature of photography: its ability to augment visual perception and its tendency to leave its footprints in the process. A photograph that may capture an object's past, present and future—it's becoming—can enable further discovery about the photography. As a result of this project, I remain curious about what might be discovered about the medium itself. For example, I am interested in how the process of becoming might coalesce in a single photograph and create a visual dialogue between what is seen and unseen. I am curious to discover what might arise in making images that attempt to touch softly that which is not yet fully formed or has already passed from view.

The artworks that result from this research are not in themselves intended to act as allegories for larger moral or socio-cultural concerns. They attempt to invite a viewing experience that will inspire curiosity towards the spaces between abstraction and representation, between drawing and photographic languages, between what is absent and what is present, and a contemplation of the value structures on which the definition of these spaces depends. On the back of these experiences, I hope that viewers might be inspired to look to the world outside and into the spaces between other relational structures in which value attribution takes place—to look carefully at these spaces and the *more-than,* that is inevitably there.

EXHIBITION

Masters of Visual Arts Exhibition

St Paul Street Gallery One

June 15 – 17, 2023

Figure 21: Installation View, St Paul Street Gallery One, 15 - 17 June 2023

Figure 22: Installation View #2, St Paul Street Gallery One, 15 - 17 June 2023

Figure 23: Installation View #3, St Paul Street Gallery One, 15 - 17 June 2023

Figure 24: Installation View #4, St Paul Street Gallery One, 15 - 17 June 2023

Figure 25: Installation View #5, (*Refraction*, Inkjet print, 816 x 776mm, 2023), St Paul Street Gallery One, 15 - 17 June 2023

Figure 26: Installation View #6, St Paul Street Gallery One, 15 - 17 June 2023

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