

CHECK-IN REPORT

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VERMONT COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS

ABSTRACT

WHERE AM I NOW?

Residency week was an incredible, life-changing experience. In so many ways it manifested itself as the polar opposite of my years at the Academy of Art's online program. I am so thankful to have found VCFA, and to have made the leap of faith to transfer. I'm also endlessly thankful for the support I received and continue to receive to make it happen. From Montpelier I walked away refreshed and inspired. I also walked away with a new sense of clarity followed by confusion. Clarity came as a renewed sense of certainty that yes, I love design and there's definitely room for it to grow into something better, more meaningful, more powerful and much more rewarding. Confusion crashed in as a realization that, because so many doors of possibility were now open, I had no clue where to begin. Of course it's interesting now to reflect on the fact that these doors were always open. No one ever said "no, don't try watercolor", or "don't waste your time doodling with ink". These doors were always mine to open or shut. What is different however is a thing or maybe a way of thinking, which I cannot name today, that enabled me to give myself permission to explore. It could be something as simple as allocated time because for example, in my last program, we had so much busy work I simply did not have the luxury of time to sit and doodle. It could also be a little more complex, and so I look forward to exploring and discovering what that is.

Walking away from VCFA my study plan for the semester was pretty solid, or so I thought. It came as the fruit of an idea I'd had months before in my midpoint review class at AAU. See, I spent the previous six months working tirelessly on a single class aimed at finding a thesis-worthy topic, which I would have then developed for two years. The class culminated in the preparation of a three-minute video succinctly explaining a fact, a problem related to that fact, and my proposed solutions, which of course had to be Graphic Design related. For that particular class I came up with a topic, made my presentation and passed not only the class, but also the elusive and highly intimidating mid-point review. But honestly, after conquering that feat, I had nothing left to give. I considered leaving design altogether because every bit of inspiration and love for design had been sucked out through my hand via my computer's mouse, and into the cyberspace of an online graduate program entirely wrong for me. I guess deep inside I knew I wasn't truly ready to leave design, I just needed a new avenue on which to traverse it, a new perspective. So, my idea for this program and this semester's study plan was never something I could have pitched within the rigid constraints of my old program. It is so

exciting to be able to work on something that I am truly interested in without needing clarity on what it will become, or where it will take me yet.

So, for this semester I am looking for ways in which seemingly unrelated things are connected. This idea hinges at the core of all my beliefs as a human being. I truly believe everyone, everything, is interconnected and that if we all spend a little more time focusing on our similarities, rather than our differences, we could foster a much needed sense of empathy and tolerance, both personally & globally. But the ways in which we are similar are so vast, they don't always have to be serious, or heavy. I believe they can also be fun and light-hearted. So that is the direction I am going with first. Simple things, that make days happy. I know my curiosity towards this idea comes from my own life experience. All of my life I have been many 'this AND that's', none of which I have ever dissected to understand the extent to which they've shaped who I am. I hope that in finding how dualities are bridged in the outside world, some sense can be made of my world, inside.

DO



I've slowly begun to purchase new art supplies. It feels so good to be able to branch out and experiment with new media, knowing there's value in the effort whether successful or not.

SKILLSHARE COURSES

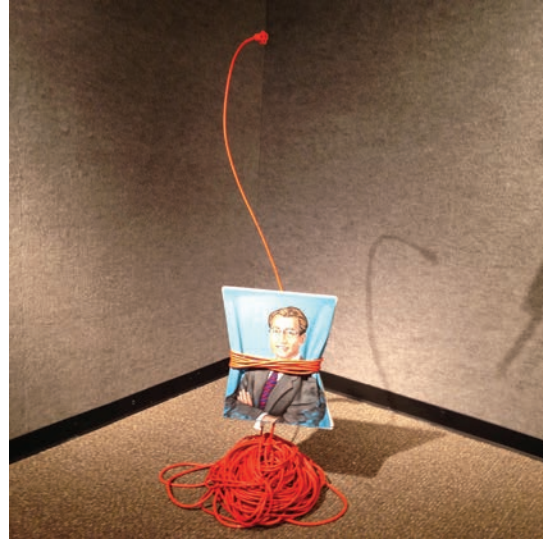
Prior to my first VCFA residency, I'd never heard of SkillShare. I absolutely love it. It's become a valuable resource for learning and exploring new media and techniques. It has also provided me with the inspiration and technical skills necessary to begin searching for my own voice as a designer.

DATE COMPLETED	COURSE NAME / DESCRIPTION	
10/26/15	Drawing Daily Monsters: Finding Inspiration in a Drop of Ink by Stefan G. Bucher	<p>My first SkillShare course, I chose it in an effort to find a fun and unique one-a-day activity. I noted from the introduction that it promised to be a wonderful platform for learning how to: 1) expand my ability to work within chance and unpredictability and 2) learn to see and create differently. I continue to strive for both of these in my work.</p> <p>What I Learned: Despite the fact that this course was very fun to watch, monster-making is not something I can feel passionate about on a daily basis. But it brought to my attention my curiosity about <i>working with ink</i>. (AHA!)</p>
10/28/15	Waterbrush Lettering Essentials by Teela Cunningham	<p>I've always found watercolor to be a beautiful medium for illustration. This is something I'd never tried before. Because one of my goals for the semester is to work with and explore letterforms, I decided this might be a fun course to watch and a great new technique to learn.</p> <p>What I Learned: I learned that I love <i>working with watercolor</i> inks and water brushes, and that I do not want to limit their use to hand lettering. (AHA!)</p>
10/29/15	Mastering Inking: Basic and Pro Techniques by Yuko Shimizu	<p>Inking is something I have always been intrigued about. I appreciate the stark contrast it provides and the crisp and clean way lines can be produced with both brushes and calligraphy pens.</p> <p>What I Learned: This course reiterated my interest in ink. It also brought to my attention my <i>lack of interest in realism</i>. (AHA!)</p>
10/30/15	Pattern Design I: Creating Inspiring Repeats by Elizabeth Olwen	<p>Soon after completing the Inking course, and in realizing that I like to work with minimal and abstract shapes, I decided to take a course on pattern design. Again, this is something I have always been intrigued about, but had never tried before.</p> <p>What I Learned: In considering how to bring some of my study plan ideas to life, surface pattern making seems to be a promising approach to consider. This course also brought to light my <i>love for mid-century modern design</i>. (AHA!)</p>

EXHIBITIONS

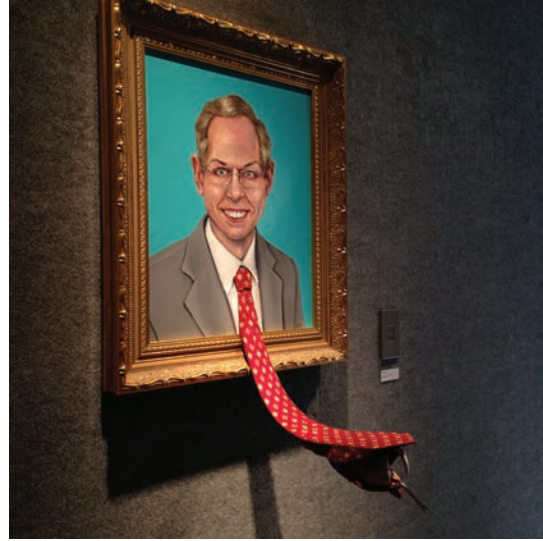
Ryan Roth // "I Quit, You're Fired"

SOUTH CAROLINA GOVERNOR'S SCHOOL FOR THE ARTS, LIPSCOMB GALLERY // SEPTEMBER 30 - OCTOBER 30



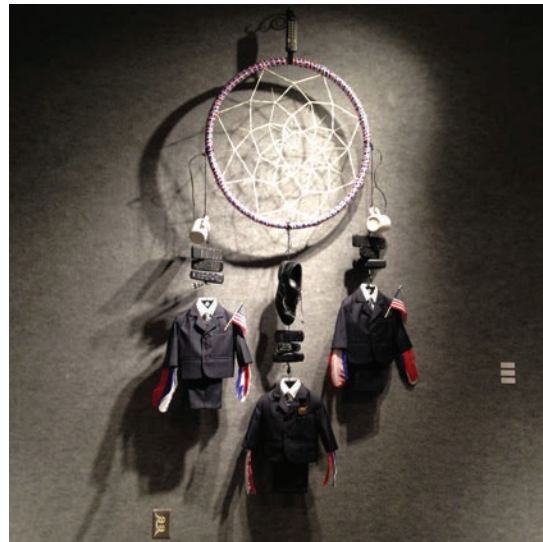
Power Cord

Acrylic on canvas, power cord, and hardware
64" x 28" x 24"



Shed Your Skin

Acrylic on canvas, ties, and mixed media
Dimensions variable



American Dreamcatcher

Hook, hoop, ribbon, power cords, cable ties, remote controls, mugs, hangers, shoe, trophy, plastic feathers, flags, and toddler suits.
95" x 36"



Ouroboros

Wooden popsicle sticks and hardware
36" diameter



Paper or Plastic

Acrylic on canvas, cut plastic bags, water cooler
63" x 24" x 52"



Wash Me

Acrylic on canvas, frame and nail
30" x 25"



Things Roll Down Hill

Acrylic on panel with frame
29" x 20"

I enjoyed walking through this exhibit for a number of reasons. First and foremost, in considering the direction that I'd like to take my practice, it's great to see the **depth** and **three-dimensionality** in this body of work. The artist uses a wide array of materials to embody his ideas, all of which work successfully together. Second, the overall tone, purpose and storytelling qualities of each piece, make the collection feel cohesive and relevant. The artist is making a comment on our society, recognizable through each individual piece, as well as together as a set. Lastly, it was great to see that **any theme or idea can be developed into an interesting and powerful exhibition**. I hope to some day be able to create a body of work, many times over, that can fill a room with powerful and important ideas that successfully captivate an audience.

(A.H.A.I.)



Should We Rename Graphic Design?

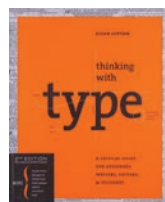
by Michael Worthington

Published by AIGA on August 25, 2015, I found this article really fun and interesting for a few reasons. First, the narrative is relatable at a personal level. It covers important differences between professional & amateur designers and connects these to the history of the term. In the end, his exploration leads to the conclusion that as vague and appropriated as it may be, 'Graphic Design' works well as an umbrella under which many can exist.¹

(AHA!)

ARTICLES & BOOKS

Despite the fact that I absolutely love reading, it is the single-most difficult activity for me to incorporate into my every-day life. The circumstances in which I enjoy it—with good lighting, quiet, comfortable—seldom present themselves, especially all at once. This is something I will work on for our next check-in. Regardless, I did get a little reading done this month. Here is what I am currently working on.

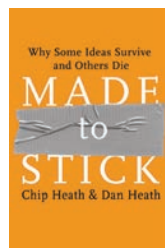


Thinking with Type

by Ellen Lupton

I did not intend to read this book. This is why I find it of utmost importance and meaning this month. I stumbled upon it at the school where I teach and the elusive 3 circumstances under which I read best presented themselves effortlessly. Before I knew it, I had read almost half of it in one sitting. And what's more, I enjoyed every single page in such an unexpected way. I have never picked up a typography book that I enjoyed reading this much. One of the reasons for this may be because I *wanted* to read this book. I was not being forced to or tested on it. I wasn't looking for specific and dire answers to anything. I was literally reading every word, curious about what would come next and how I could connect to the content. I have since purchased it as a 'must have' in my own personal collection.²

(AHA!)



Made To Stick

by Chip & Dan Heath

Originally assigned for my previous program, this book is fascinating. It has shed light on a manner of thinking and conceiving ideas that has eluded me for a very long time. The ability to come up with compelling, interesting and memorable stories is crucial to a designer's role. I find this is especially true for those aiming to create work that calls for social change. I'm excited to finish the book and begin incorporating these techniques into my way of thinking and making.

(AHA!)

“A good process for making your ideas stickier: 1) identify the central message you need to communicate (find the core). 2) Find what is counterintuitive about the message, i.e. What are the unexpected implications of your core message? Why isn't it already happening naturally? 3) Communicate the message in a way that breaks your audience's guessing machines along the critical and counterintuitive dimension. Then, once their guessing machines have failed, help them refine their machines. *Surprise* is followed by *insight*.³”

MOOD BOARDS & INSPIRATION

Within the past month I have added to and created new inspiration boards within *Pinterest*. It's become an important tool for finding new techniques and understanding where my visual and conceptual interests lie. It is through my selections in *Pinterest* that I realized how much I love watercolor. It is also through *Pinterest* that I have found points of departure for trying new things. Please click on the links below to see my current working boards:

1. [Typography & Lettering](#)

2. [Illustration Inspiration](#)

3. [Ampersands](#)

4. [Patterns](#)

5. [Conceptual Design](#)

6. [Fine Art](#)

7. [Books & Publications](#)

On November 7th I attempted to run my first marathon. I trained for almost five months and ran more than I ever have in my life. I do not consider myself an athlete, much less a real runner, and so this was a pretty big deal for me. It was a check off the bucket list and a mid-life crisis goal. The day of the marathon a heat wave came through. It was unseasonably hot in Savannah, Georgia. A few hours into the race, and after many runners began to seek medical help, the race was re-routed. I ran a total of 21 miles to the finish line, short just five. It's unthinkable that I could ever feel disappointed about doing this, but I do. I worked so hard, I wish I'd had the chance to complete the race. I think I could have actually done it! So I sit now with this dreary feeling of incompleteness and sadness. I don't know when this became so important to me, but it did. What's more, in doing so, I injured my knee. I have not run since the race and it still hurts.

The irony in this story is the fact that this semester I've set out to explore ways in which things or people are 'this AND that'. This interest is likely rooted in my life's experience of being many 'this AND that's' without clarity of how they've shaped who I am. For example, I am an only child AND the youngest of three. I am Mexican AND American. I am a marathon runner AND I'm not.

So, I will try again. Not this year. Not before I turn 40, but I will try again. Why not, I got a free registration pass.

DISAPPOINTMENT

MAKE

This month I decided to focus my efforts on two things. First & foremost, on trying new things. I decided to peruse SkillShare.com to find courses on topics I've always wanted to know more about. Every course I took was on a completely new technique for me, so I wasn't able to dive directly into my topic. I believe it's been a really important step in redefining myself and my design, however. Second, I focused on rethinking the way I work, specifically on making with my hands rather than relying on the computer. Because we are in the midst of moving across the country, there are many aspects of my environment that have been less than ideal. Starting with the fact that I do not have a studio, hardly a desk in a corner actually, to the fact that some of my supplies have been packed away among endless stacks of boxes. Yet, in the madness there's always a new perspective and it turned out alright.

I did not have enough time this month to do everything I wanted to. There are so many more SkillShare classes I'd like to watch and there are so many new techniques I'd like to try. I'm excited to keep making.

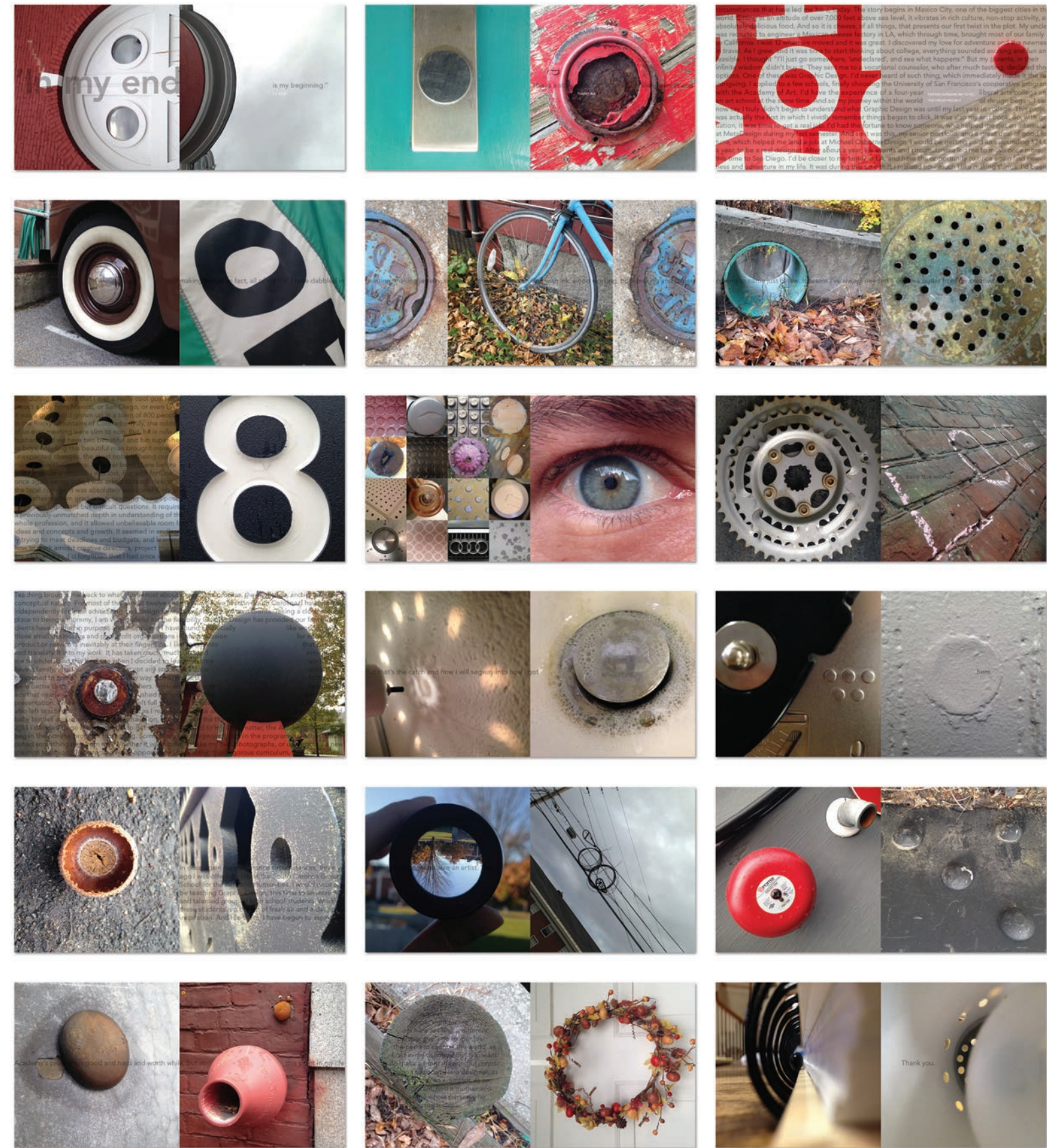
DOCUMENTATION PROJECT

During our week-long residency in Vermont we were asked to create a project that would document our experience. Aimed as a medium to explore our voice as artists, the format was open to interpretation. I decided to take this as an opportunity to work on a project that had been sternly shut down at my previous program; a study of circles. They abound in our lives and in their varied manifestations literally enable our very existence. *Catharsis*, a 4" x 4" booklet, embodies some of the beautiful circles I discovered in Montpelier.



What I Learned: This image is a Photoshop mock-up. (I know!) In trying to produce this piece I had a very hard time printing and binding the book how I envisioned it. For the presentation it ended up being a very long horizontal banner. So what did I learn? A bit of humility and acceptance. All good.

(AHA!)



INK EXPLORATIONS

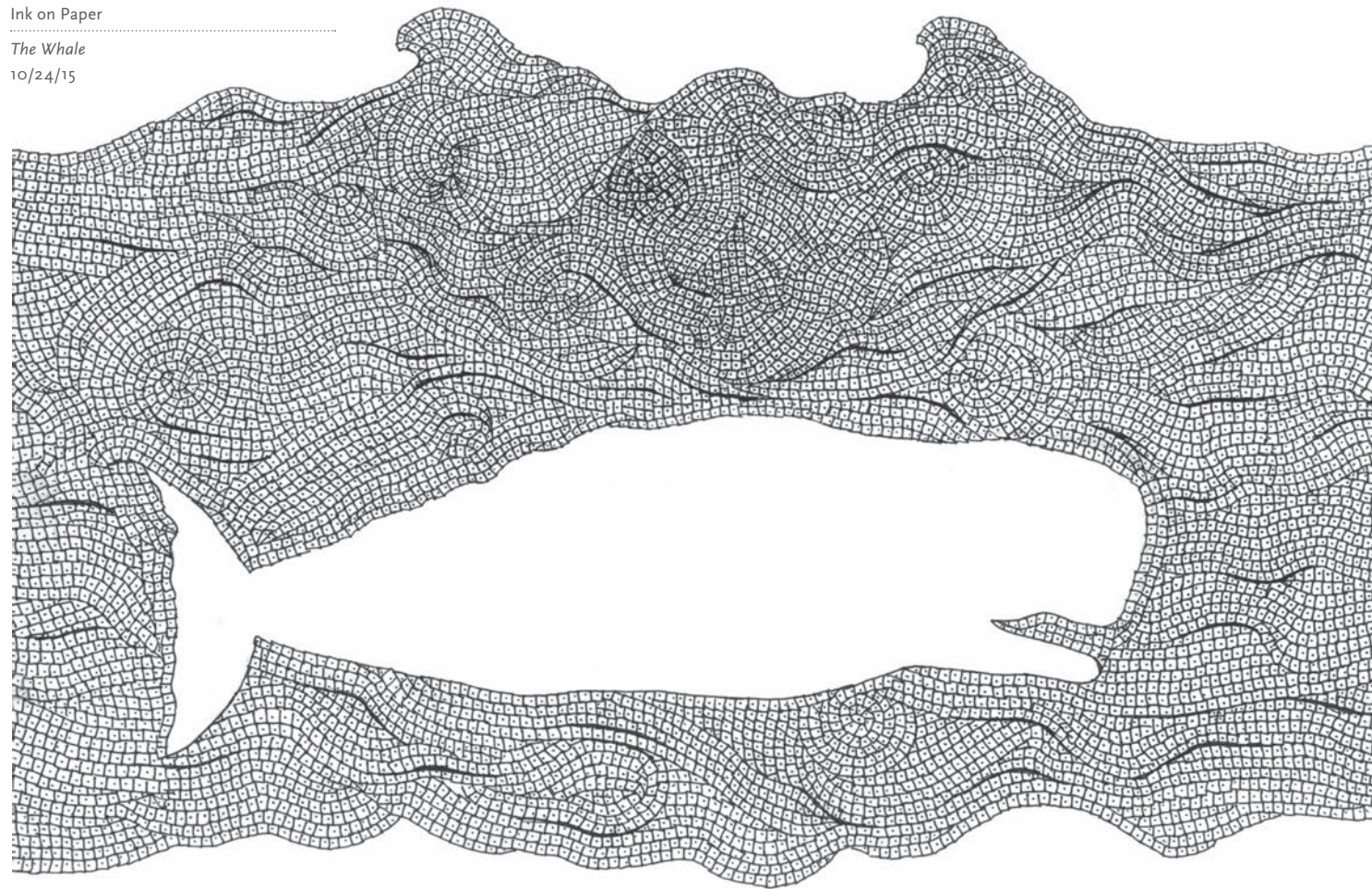
(AHA!) Since I was in college (undergrad) I've been a big fan of doodling. I have a box with over ten journals full of doodles and random entries. I love working on doodles that allow for repetitive, Zen and unconscious movement of the hand.

It is usually not until hours later that I find form within the lines. Since I am changing the way I work in every other way, I decided to change the way I doodle as well. For these two pieces, I started with basic shapes, squares & circles, to see where they'd take me. It's actually interesting to see they both took me to the ocean. I love the ocean.

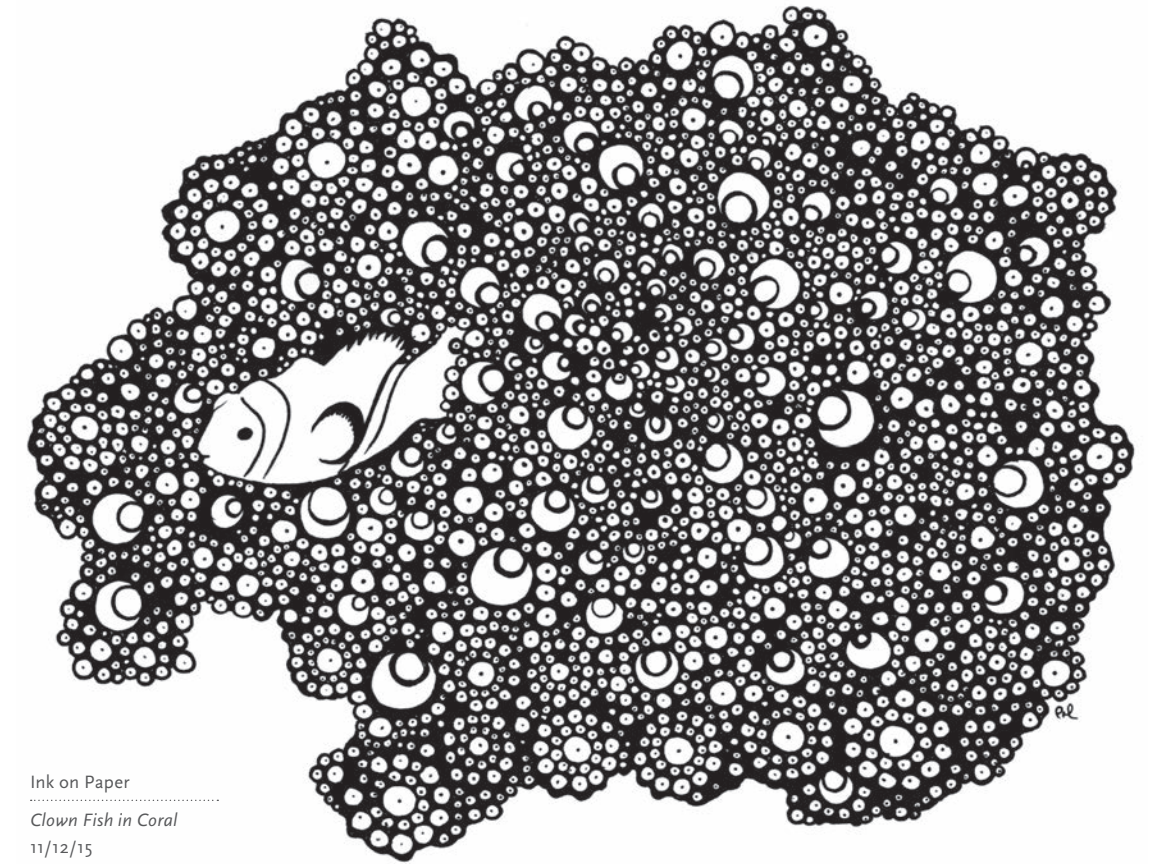
Ink on Paper

The Whale

10/24/15



I began this piece on my way up to Vermont. I was trying a technique I had seen in an exhibit months prior. Slowly, it evolved into a flowing ocean in which I found a whale.



Ink on Paper

Clown Fish in Coral

11/12/15

Much like *The Whale*, this piece started as just a doodle of circular shapes. Eventually, they took the form of coral in which I found a little clown fish. These meditation doodles are a great way of 'making' without much thinking. I can do it sitting next to my husband on the couch, while he watches movies. They will probably also serve to create good muscle memory of the most basic drawing shapes.



I created a few ink marks as a result of taking the *Drawing Daily Monsters* SkillShare course. It was really fun to watch the ink move and shift with the air pressure. I didn't enjoy 'finding the monster' as much as I had hoped, but eventually I realized this same technique could be used to find, or elude to, letterforms.



TOPIC DEVELOPMENT

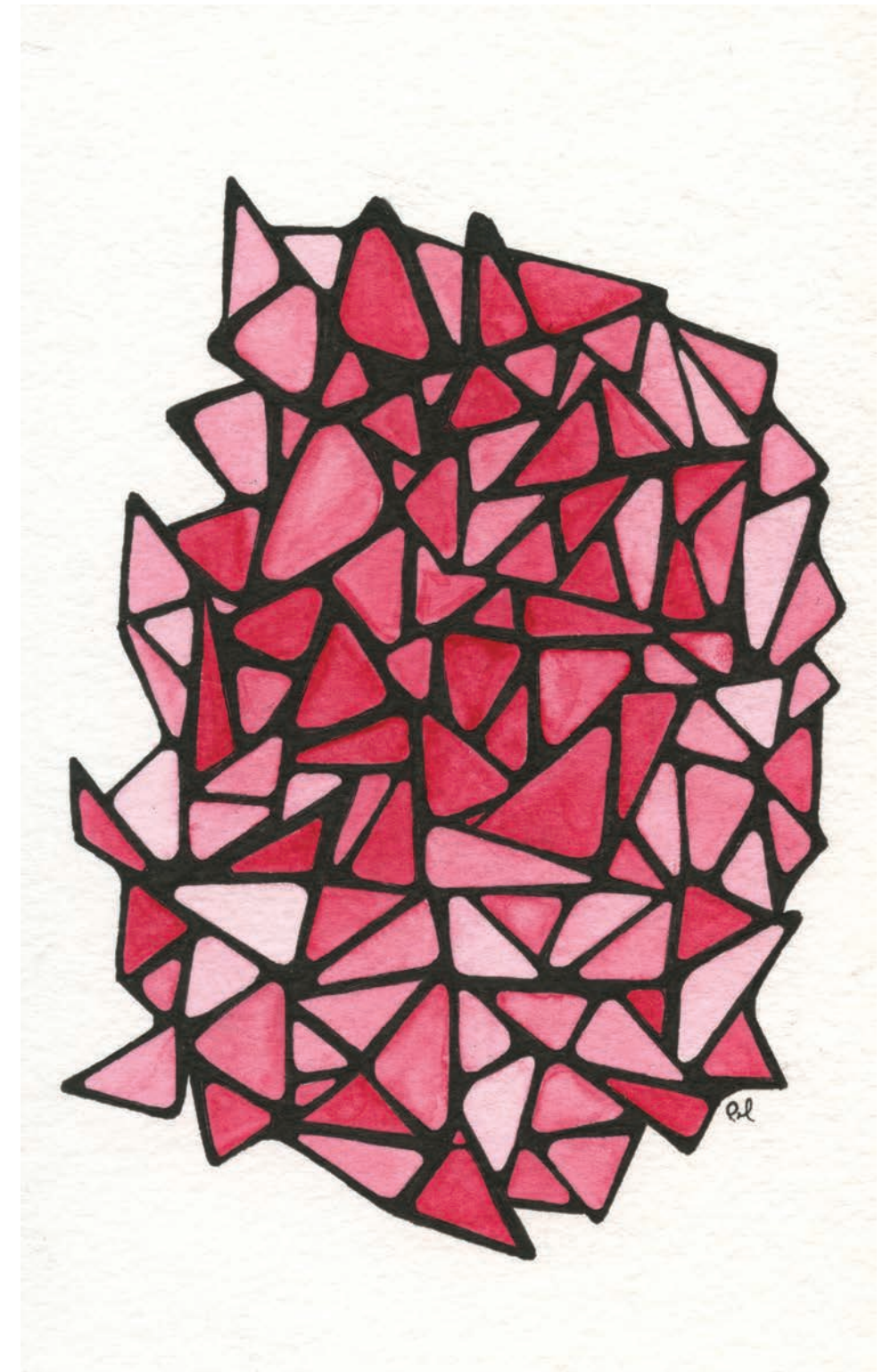
This semester I set out to explore the idea that all of us, in our common human experience, do not live as isolated beings, disconnected from each other or the rest of the universe. To do this, I aim to create a body of work that is relatable and intriguing, while also insightful and revelatory. I hope the stories found within the work will expose connections between unexpected and seemingly unrelated people, events, objects, etc. to foster empathy and tolerance at both a personal and eventually a global scale.



I started my exploration of seemingly unrelated objects with food. Because I want my work to be approachable and relatable, I decided a simple peanut butter & jelly sandwich could be a good point of departure. Why? It brings two things together into a universally and mostly-loved denominator. So, I set out to make a pb&j into the shape of an ampersand. This was NOT a successful experiment. First and foremost, cutting bread with an x-acto knife is not easy. Second, cutting two pieces of bread with an x-acto knife is not possible. Most importantly however, after doing this exercise I realized that peanut butter & jelly is not an unexpected connection, but perhaps strawberries & peanuts alone are. With this in mind, I plan on creating patterns for each element which, when intersected, reveals a more recognizable connection.

WATERCOLOR & INK

22 I've admired watercolor illustrations for a long time. I especially love the use of watercolor with ink. A couple of weeks ago, I finally I bought myself some watercolor tubes, waterbrushes and a watercolor journal. These are a few of my initial explorations.



My First Watercolor

WATERCOLOR & PEN ON WATERCOLOR PAPER.

11/02/15



Point of Inspiration:
Patchwork Fields
by Emily Garfield

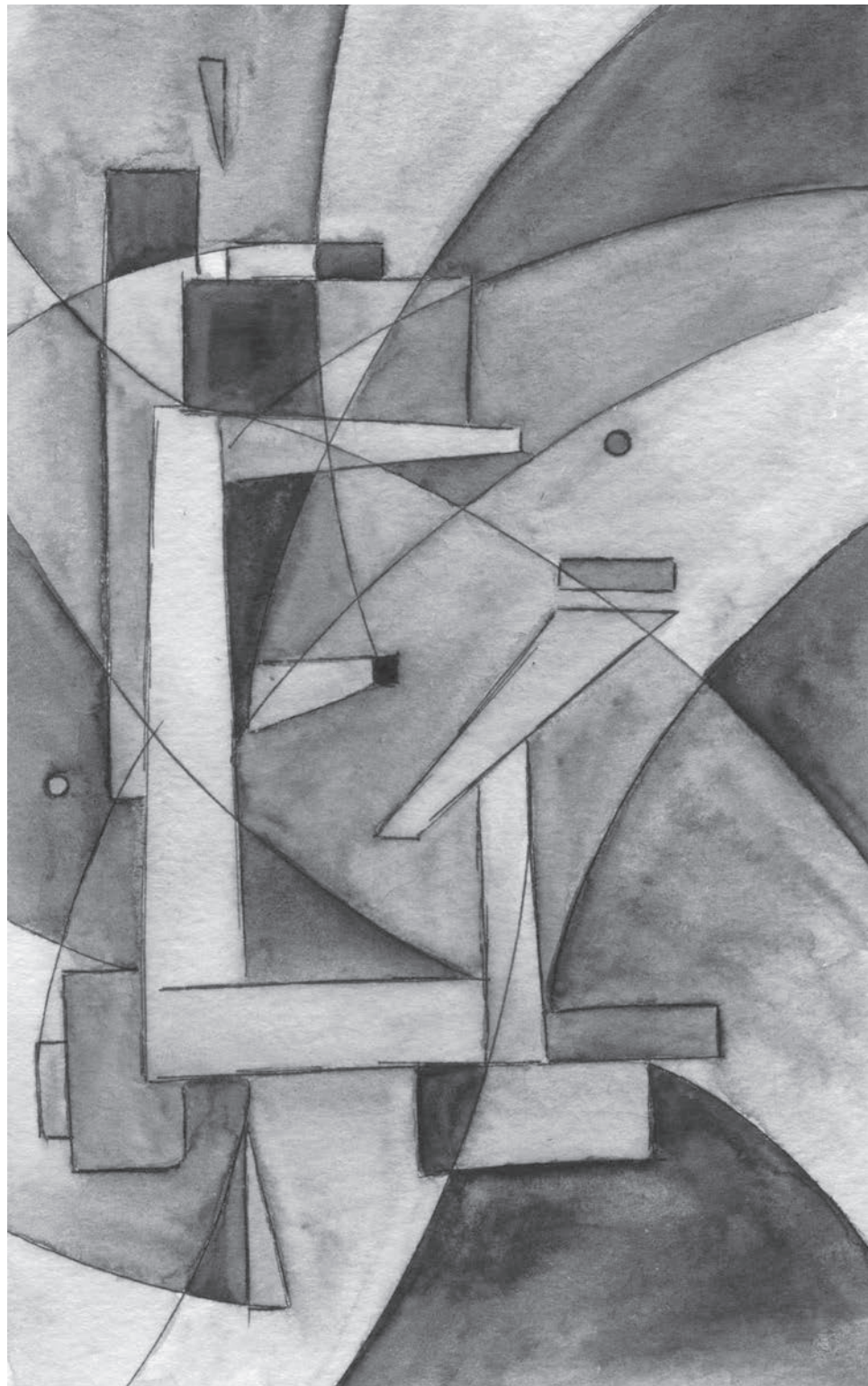
Nature & Man, 1
PENCIL, WATERCOLOR & PEN ON WATERCOLOR PAPER.
11/02/15



Point of Inspiration:
Los Angeles Aerial
by Michael Kelley



Nature & Man, 2
PENCIL, WATERCOLOR, BLACK INK AND METALLIC PEN ON WATERCOLOR PAPER.
11/11/15



Geometric Abstract

PENCIL, WATERCOLOR & PEN ON WATERCOLOR PAPER.

11/05/15



Point of Inspiration:

Unknown

During our stay in Savannah this piece was hanging on the walls of the apartment where we stayed. I loved the texture and geometric forms. My piece attempts to insert an ampersand within the constraints of the rectilinear forms.

PUBLICATION DESIGN

One thing I do want to keep from my previous practice is book & publication design. I love designing multi-page documents and typesetting books. So, I am making these packets part of my 'making'. At the end of the semester I will compile them together and get them printed and bound through blurb.com.



I really need to design a better cover for this. I think with more work in hand, and with a clearer idea of where my work is headed, I'll come up with something better.

THINK

It's difficult to include everything that has gone through my head throughout the past month. I can honestly say I have not been this invested in my work in a very long time. It's exciting, fun, but of course also a little scary. These are all tid-bits of wisdom or straight up 'aha' moments worth noting. I've set the type sideways because that's how a lot of these moments felt. Each and every one of those moments felt off-kilter, in a great way. All of these are highlighted throughout the text on the previous pages in blue. They are not in chronological order. I look forward to making a longer list throughout the semester.

“Aha” moments of the month: *To my surprise, I am not interested in realism, I love mid-century modern art, black ink is beautiful, especially when used with*

watercolor, I'm so OCD, I'm totally Ok with that, I am very intimidated by 3-dimensionality, I want to try and conquer it, my environment affects my work, once in a while I need a lot of alone time, 'Graphic Designer' is only a title, it does not enable, limit or define me, reading is really important to me, I need to work on making it a more important part of my daily practice, I seek perfection in fear of judgment and failure, I need to work on acceptance and humility, repetition is my friend, it helps me zone out, which is good.

