

THESIS

THE PROCESS OF PROLIFERATING CHANGE

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

THE PROCESS OF PROLIFERATING CHANGE

My research focuses on the relationship between self, community, and the environment. How through direct experience with the processes of nature and printmaking, a better understanding of existing harmoniously with the world can be accomplished. A phenomenological experience can be transmitted through this direct contact with process, in which the viewer might reflect on their being in the world. The process that is best suited for the work of art is used to have the least impact on the environment. This action creates prints that keep the community and environment in mind and perpetuates a harmonious existence that informs the content. Humans can create a harmonious trend of existence by living and creating consciously.

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THE PROCESS OF PROLIFERATING CHANGE

Existence is a transient state of being whether, composed of biological or material matter. Mass and energy are exchanged or converted but never lost. Everything in existence is in a constant state of becoming. A lot of the developed world has quit participating in this exchange with the rest of existence. Much of humanity objectifies non-human existence, and with this objectification, has found ways of valuating all things as how best to consume them.

My research at Colorado State University (CSU) has been focused on self, community, and environment. These things are not exclusive. While the self is composed of community and environment, the community consists of individuals in an environment, and the environment is the space all life must interact with. Derrida referred to this type of relationship as “aporia.” In his book *Derrida and the Inheritance of Democracy*, Samir Haddad defines “aporia” as, “a relationship between two elements that contradict each other at the same time that they depend on each other.”¹ I am expanding this definition here to incorporate three elements. It is easy to see how the individual is at odds with the idea of community: whereas the individual is about difference, the community is about shared ideals and experience. The community is at odds with the environment as the human race tries to create an environment free of the uncontrollable forces of nature. Environment and self, juxtapose each other on the idea of interiority and exteriority, but it is hard to separate the idea of how our exterior world informs our interior being. In ancient Greek aporia means “perplexity, difficulty; the state of being at a loss.”² This is the complexity of being in the world. Self, community, and environment are a complex relationship that depends on each element in varying degrees each piece informing the other as

¹ Samir Haddad, *Derrida and the Inheritance of Democracy*, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2013), 7.

² Maurice Balme and Gilbert Lawall, *Athenaze*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 325.

how to exist. My research focuses on how these ideas co-exist within our being to created how I view the world in which I live. Through process and direct experience, I entice the relationship between self, community, and environment into presence.

There is no end goal of my research; it is a way of being. The idea behind my work is that through existing consciously and with intent, the content of my work will reflect these ideals. Through direct experience with nature and the processes of nature, the work can reach a phenomenological level that transmits experience through a two-dimensional work of art. The type of experience is not specific, although I am sure my own ideals come out within the work. The work itself is intended to be a catalyst for derailing thought and creating new ways of thinking about how and where we exist.

All through school and university I had been given maps of life and knowledge on which there was hardly a trace of many things that I most cared about and that seemed to me to be the greatest possible importance to the conduct of my life. I remembered that for many years my perplexity had been complete; and no interpreter had come along to help me. It remained complete until I ceased to suspect the sanity of my perceptions and began, instead, to suspect the soundness of the maps.³

This quote by E.F. Schumacher reflects where my work and thought were during my first year of research at CSU. I was trying to express my relationship with the environment, but I was unable with my current knowledge and way of thinking, to make a significant impact on the content of my work. So, I just focused on the process for the pieces I was creating and absorbing as much philosophy and criticism as possible, attempting to get a handle on a positive direction in which to proceed.

Untitled (figure 1) was the first piece I created at CSU. I started the process with a spit-bite technique that consisted of soaking torn material and paper, natural elements (bugs and plants), and paper stencils in nitric acid and then placing them on a zinc plate to etch it. I then put

³ Neil Evernden, *The Natural Alien*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 1999), 26

hard ground on the plate and using a triangular scraper I remove the ground, letting my conscious mind react to the organic pattern on the plate. I printed the plate in a three-color viscosity technique on black paper. The work emphasizes an overall harmony within the picture plane, but dissonance between the specific elements. The hard ground is illuminated in white expressing the conscious thought through hard lines and alien shapes. The spit-bite has a soft organic becoming of form highlighted by the blue and yellow interacting.

The work ended up being a representation of the situation I was in and not the dialogue with nature I intended. The work lacked a strong reference to place and this caused the work to invoke the interiority of my nature and not nature as a whole. There is a saying from Heraclitus, an ancient Greek philosopher that has a continual effect on my work. Plato quotes him as saying “everything/permanence moves, and nothing stays.”⁴ There is always the superficial interpretation that Heraclitus is only speaking of the dynamism of the world we exist within, but I like this statement because although simple the depths are infinite. I see it as a kaon, Buddhist stories that are simple and answers seem readily available, but there are no answers they are just meant to be meditated on to help achieve enlightenment or in this case just a deeper understanding of my actual place in the world. I contemplate this idea as gluons transferring between quarks. Atoms transferring between material and organic masses. Electrons being exchanged, cells dying and proliferating, all this to the degree that I am no longer the same quantifiable person I was a minute ago. Rocks change chemical makeup, the universe is in constant birth and death, but the basic building blocks are never truly lost, they just move from one permanence to another. The process of becoming renders life and cognitive thought irrelevant, as the process continues whether life is able to contemplate it or not. *Untitled*, because of my

⁴ Maurice Balme and Gilbert Lawall, *Athenaze*, 11

focus on interiority, comes off as energy floating in a void; the work lacks the ability to transcend any being other than aesthetic.

It is emphatically not the case that Wadsworth hands over inorganic matter to the mercy of science, and concentrates on the faith that in the living organism there is some element that science cannot analyze. Of course he recognizes, what no one doubts, that in some sense living things are different from lifeless things. But that is not his main point. It is the brooding presence of the hills which haunts him. His main theme is nature in solido, that is to say, he dwells on that mysterious presence of surrounding things, which imposes itself on any separate element that we set up as individual for its own sake. He always grasps the whole of nature as involved in the tonality of the particular instance.⁵

This statement by Alfred North Whitehead talks about Wadsworth and his interaction with nature. Whitehead talks about the realization of how even inanimate objects have a presence.

Although material and organic matter are different, both make up space we exist within.

Wadsworth's evocative idea of place was what I was thinking of when I began my next stage of work.

Flowering Decomposition (figure 2) is one piece out of a series of works that encapsulates my first year of research at CSU. To create this piece, I used stencils soaked in nitric acid that were cut out of blotter paper. I wanted to reverse the focus from *untitled*, which was more about the hard ground etching and my cognitive reaction to the spit bite. Here I put my cognitive mind to creating idealized forms of nature I have experienced, directly into the blotter paper. The image on the plate was then created by the acid-soaked blotter, as an idealized corrosion on the zinc plate. I then took a second plate and sandwiched the corroding blotting paper between them. The second plate creates a sympathetic mirror of the first plate where the etch is weaker and the shapes mimic one another. The idea is a sense of place without reference. Also, an idea of time out of place, to where the image is about natural process, not my human construction. This is an image of the process of becoming (perpetual becoming). I printed this

⁵ Evernden, *The Natural Alien*, 33

work with a two-color viscosity technique, putting a warm base color on one plate and a cool base color on the other. I would wipe the plates down in the regular intaglio fashion, and then with a thicker ink, and a medium durometer roller, rolled black over the plates. I would then slowly paper wipe the excess ink off the plate; this would give a slight variation between hue and tint on each print. The printed images are a layering of these two plates, the similarities of shape and form creating harmony, and the warm and cool create a subtle dissonance that works with the conservancy of space to create somber movement. This slight tension and soft movement also highlights another idea, what I call the anthropomorphic gaze. Post-Colonial criticism and Neil Evernden's writing about the "Cartesian roadblock" influenced my definition of the anthropomorphic gaze as referencing the way in which those who exist within western civilization are socialized into viewing nature by categorizing, valuating as a resource and commodifying it.⁶ Scientific thought and western education are focused on teaching humans that they are subjects and all else are objects in which to act upon.

Krishna Reddy is one of the greatest influences on my artwork. Reddy sees man's cognitive mind as wanting to separate from oneness of existence. Out of fear of the chaos of nature humans created order in their image to make nature subservient to the artificial human needs.⁷ Reddy talks about how, through the confrontation of the dynamism of nature and the materials within nature, we can begin exploring the elemental truth of everything and ourselves.⁸ In his work *Whirlpool* (figure 3), an intaglio viscosity print created in 1963, dynamism of nature and material are made evident.

⁶ Evernden, *The Natural Alien*, 46-54

⁷ Krishna Reddy, *Art-Making as a Lived Experience and a Learning Process*, http://hilo.hawaii.edu/~art/three_masters-2007/reddy_essay.php.

⁸ Krishna Reddy, *Intaglio Simultaneous Color Printmaking*, (New York: State University of New York Press, Albany, 1988), 11-20

The next stage of my work began to develop when I wrote a paper on Krishna Reddy at the end of my second semester. The overriding thematic change was the realization of community as a part of my individual self, my place in the environment and how it shapes my view of the environment. Krishna Reddy was educated in Santiniketan, at Visva Bharti. Visva Bharti was a school founded by Rabindranath Tagore, a poet and Nobel laureate who was a major figure in India reclaiming its pre-colonized culture. There were no grades and the teachers were unpaid volunteers. The Upanishads is an ancient philosophy within India, and it was the basis for Tagore's education system. One of the definitions of Upanishad is sit close, near. At Santiniketan students would sit at the base of a tree with a master and receive instruction. They would then be able to internalize that instruction as the saw fit. Masters would be around to observe the student and instruct them on their individual need.⁹ Reddy, influenced by the Upanishad teaching believed that there is a dynamic creative energy created within the teacher-student relationship. That within an atelier type system where ideas are shared equally among individuals of different skill levels, new ideas, and paths to knowledge can be discovered. This indicates that if I focus on the environment in which I teach, and how I allow my students to interact with the knowledge, we can all grow as creative individuals within a creative community. The importance of growing a creative community to the world at large became evident to me through the ideas of Dan Eugene Ratui and Geoffrey West.

Geoffrey West's research analyzes the growth and life cycles of cities and corporations and compares them to growth and life cycles of biological beings. West found that cities have exponential growth, where life forms have sigmoidal growth. The issue with exponential growth

⁹ Ratnottama Sengupta, Krishna's Cosmos: The Creativity of an Artist, Sculptor, and Teacher, (Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing Pvt Ltd, 2003) 14-19

is that with each doubling of size a doubling of energy is required to support the system. In sigmoidal growth, the organism eventually reaches adulthood and growth plateaus as well as the need for energy. For a city or country, the mitochondrial energy needed to support its growth is innovation supported by creative centers.¹⁰

Dan Ratui talked about the creative class regarding economics. Both Ratui and West recognize the creative class as engineers, scientist, artists, and other innovating professionals, but Ratui isolates the artistic profession for his study. Scientists and engineers are always playing the part of their profession and are confined to innovation within the strictures that define the profession. The artist has no such limitation and tends to push innovation beyond strictures and society. Artists have been found to revitalize entropic areas of a city and make it more desirable for other members of the creative class to move and stimulate the economy. Ratui used the Cluj School of Art in Romania as an example. A group of artists moved into an abandoned industrialized section of the city. They created areas for living and art creating. Once they were better established, they began community outreach events that brought awareness to different ways of viewing their city environment. After this awareness, artists and creative professionals from around the world competed to come to Cluj and participate in this invigoration of the city.¹¹ The part I want to focus on here is that it is not only the influence that my social environment has on me that is important, but also my influence on the social environment in which I exist.

This idea leads me to my research project in electro-etching. I began looking into electro-etching when I graduated with my BFA and continued making prints at home without dealing with the issue of etching with acids and hazardous waste disposal. I hadn't made too much

¹⁰ Geoffrey West, *Why Cities Grow, Corporations Die, and Life Gets Faster*, Big Ideas, October 11, 2011, <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/bigideas/browse/speaker.htm?index=idx-big-ideas-speaker-geoffrey-west>.

¹¹ Dr. Dan Eugeen Ratui, Lecture, Visiting Artist: Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado, May 6, 2017.

headway in this research until I committed to spending the summer researching the technique to see if it was an effective printmaking process.

The ideas that lead to electro-etching were first discovered in the 1780's when Luigi Galvani accidentally touched two different metals to the leg of a frog he was dissecting. The muscles in the legs twitched, and this led to further experimentation. Alessandro Volta created the first lead-acid galvanic battery in 1800, from building on what Galvani had discovered. In 1840 Thomas Spencer obtained a patent for engraving metals by voltaic electricity. The process never took off in printmaking until around 1989. Printmaker Marion Behr and organic chemist Omri Behr were concerned by the physical and environmental impact of the acidic printmaking process, and after patenting their system the "electro-etch system," they started doing workshops to create awareness in the printmaking community.¹²

The current artist and authority I looked to when starting my research was Alfonso Crujera, and his book *Electro-Etching Handbook: A Safe Non-toxic Approach*. Crujera's book is focused on showing how to successfully and safely set up and use an electro-etching system. *Punta del caleton V* (figure 4) is an electro-etching on zinc which Alfonso Crujera created in 2004. This work shows the galvanized electrotint technique that can be used to mimic an aquatint, exemplifying alternative and unique ways of creating with electro-etching. *Gpplh 9* (figure 5) is a three-color intaglio print that reflects my interest in the electrolysis system. Here, Crujera uses viscosity color application techniques to make the process and energy of the platemaking be the focal point of the finalized print.

My current system is a 20.5 in X 26 in X 6 in plexiglass tank, a 30-volt 20-amp DC power converter, 500g/1L zinc sulfate to water electrolyte solution, and copper rods that I

¹² Alfonso Crujera, *Electro-Etching Handbook: a Safe Non-toxic approach*, (Spain: Publicaciones digitales S.A., 2013) 21-23

suspend two plates I intend to etch with. I chose the zinc sulfate solution because it is okay to put into the water system so that I don't have to worry when rinsing off my equipment and printmaking plates (copper-sulfate must be neutralized before it is safe to rinse in the sink).

Printing Entropy (figure 6) and *Dynamic Stasis* (figure 7) are the two works that express my research into the electro-etching process. *Dynamic Stasis* was the positive pole (anode), and *Printing Entropy* was the negative pole (cathode). In an electrolysis system, negative sulfate ions are attracted to the anode, and the positive metal ions are attracted to the cathode. *Dynamic Stasis* etched much like it would in a nitric acid where the exposed sections of the plate are corroded to create a printable matrix. The major differences between nitric and electrolysis are that nitric etches large areas more aggressively and is less effective in delicate line work. Electrolysis is more aggressive in less exposed areas, and large open areas cause an electrical field that is inconsistent and most aggressive at the edges of the ground. This can be more controlled if a cathode is used that is not solid. It also makes foul bite more of a problem, since electrolysis etches those spaces deep and fast.

Printing Entropy was an experiment on the uniqueness of the electro-etch process. The exposed sections of the cathode plate receives metal, and I wanted to see the advantages of this in my own expression of work would be enhanced by taking this process to the extreme. Initially, the matrix is simple to control, and the metal is fairly stable on the plate. As the metal continues attaching to the plate, the hardground becomes less effective, and the metal that attaches is much more fragile. When I printed my test plates, inking them was the same as any etched plate, but I noticed that the plates that had additive metal absorbed ink. Since the test plates were so small, I didn't have an issue, but when I inked and pulled my first proof of *Printing Entropy*, the oversaturation of ink becomes a focal point and looks sloppy. I wanted to express both the

fragility and mass of the plate and process, so I started looking at alternatives to just straight inking the image. I ended up using a mixture of oil and powdered pigment, and spray fixing the final stage of the print. A way of making process the focal point was to establish the boldness of the electroformed plate, and through multiplicity, show the decay of such a solid image.

In both *Dynamic Stasis* and *Printing Entropy*, I tried to put the process of electromagnetism as the focal point; the images were created in a way that exemplified the structure and fragility of positive and negative elements coming together. I am emphasizing the way in which these works confront the process of becoming a printing matrix that pushes the viewer to confront inorganic matter as part of being in the world.

The next phase of my research is a meditation on the idea of inheritance. Much like *untitled*, my focus was an internalization of my research up to this point. Inheritance is a word signifying the confrontation of philosophies, geo-specific socializations, and family specific socializations, and how I interpret these influences and project them into the world. I spent the summer cultivating garden plants and early fall, I dug the plants up trying to preserve as much of the root system as possible. I then placed the plants on (24" X 36") zinc plates and spray-painted the plates using the plants as stencils. The piece *Specter* (figure 8) represents this body of work and encapsulates the ideas I was working through. This piece is a two-color relief roll that has been selectively wiped. The silhouette of the tomato plant represents the specter, the thought of how ideas and people that are significant haunt us. This isn't necessarily a negative haunting, more of a statement of how meaningful ideas stick in your mind and continually reveal new ways of perceiving and acting in the world. My meditation on Heraclitus's statement would be an example of the idea of inheritance, where I continually reflect on the significance of the statement on me and my being in the world.

For me, the tomato specter represents three ghosts: my grandfather, my mother, and the tomato plant. My grandfather owned a farm with three tomato greenhouses on it that I would work at in the summer. I would get paid a set wage that was based on my worth to the farm. What I learned from him during that time, I still wrestle with today as to how it informs my being in the world. The specter of my mother is evoked by the reference to her father, but more importantly the idea of cultivation. I link cultivation of a plant with the raising of a child. I was socialized and nurtured into maturity, all the things I am now are directly influenced by how my parents chose to nurture my mind and body. Neil Evernden quotes Marjorie Grene as saying:

the whole biological development of a typical mammal has been rewritten in our case in a new key: the whole structure of the embryo, the whole rhythm of growth, is directed from the first to last, to the emergence of a culture-dwelling animal—an animal not bound within a predetermined ecological niche like the tern or stag or the dragonfly or even the chimpanzee, but, in its very tissue and organs and aptitudes, born to be open to its world, to be able to accept responsibility, to make its own traditions of a historical past and to remake them into an unforeseeable future.¹³

This quote talks about how humans have a prolonged gestation out of the womb in which we develop to participate in the human constructed social environment. For me, my mother was the most important influence during this gestation period.

The last aspect of the specter is the tomato plant. The plant exists as a silhouette in form signifying that the domestic garden plant represents a shadow of the former wild plant, and now exist only through the care and attention of a human progenitor. I am using the specter of the tomato plant as a representation of the human need to tame the aspects of nature that can be controlled. Humans would rather subjugate nature to the existence of our choosing than live harmoniously with the world as it is. The selectively wiped areas are the main conveyors of this idea. The tomato plant exists suspended in a landscape that is devoid of the landscape. The white

¹³ Evernden, *The Natural Alien*, 112

relief roll over the cool black creates a harmonious background where the bluish film left on the plate from the wiping down the black, blends. The voids created from the selective wiping of the relief roll creates a tension that disrupts the harmony and destroys the possibility of any background. The warm rawness of the paper reminds the viewer this image is an artificial presentation of the idea of a tomato plant. The voids convey as much meaning as the inked sections of the plate, reminding the viewer that something is missing. This is not the ideal form of art, but a step into the necropastoral. Joyelle McSweeney states:

the term necropastoral re-marks the pastoral as a zone of exchange, shading this green theme park with the suspicion that the Anthropocene epoch is in fact synonymous with the ecological endtimes.

Never inert, the necropastoral is defined by its activity, its networking, its paradoxical proliferation, its self-digesting, its eructations, its necroticness, its hunger, and its hole making, which configures a burgeoning textual tissue defined by holes, a tissue thus absent as it is present, and therefore not absent, not present—protoplasmic, spectral.¹⁴

These lines sum up what I have said up to this point. All existence is in motion, the human race is exponentially enveloping all aspects of nature to create a comfortable world. Civilizations growth is at the expense of all other existence, and the spaces between things in the urban landscape are haunted by specters that will never be again.

The variable editioning of *Necrotic Proliferation* (figure 9) represents my current body of research. All the zinc plates are created with either electro-etching or mechanical manipulation. The process of the creation of the work informs the content, so here I am forcing a confrontation with the processes of nature, and my ability to manipulate it for my means. I use processes that affect the environment as little as possible. This is an example of a different aporia, the human race depends on science for our existence, but it is this mindset that objectified nature, made it a

¹⁴ Joyelle McSweeney, *The Necropastoral: Poetry, Media, Occults*, (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2015), 3.

commodity that leads us to destroy the world we exist within. The image of *Necrotic Proliferation* is intended to signify circulatory processes such as a watershed or lungs. The organic abstraction gives the image the ability to signify on multiple levels of interior and exterior, organic and material, making the process the focus. I enhanced this with the addition of dirt to illicit the idea of erosion and geologic time. The embossment of the print exemplifies the extreme pressure used to force the materials on the plate into the paper. Two fundamental processes of physics, gravity and electromagnetism are made evident through the physicality of the paper. The black ink and powder pigment is made of the ash of animals and plants signifying the consuming nature of being human.

I chose to use an ampersand on its side rather than the traditional signifier for an edition variation. One of the reasons I chose to do this is because the number of prints in an edition creates the value of the print. Much like how nature is valued based off use and need, prints even in a variable edition, are valued by the amount made and not on the individual elements that make it a unique work of art. The other reason I use this signification is it emphasizes the idea of translation and proliferation. Joyelle McSweeney states that, “art itself, is the occult ampersand, that which is in itself and, and per se and, pure medium a place where binaries meet and reverse places, mingle statuses, incompletely saturates and split, more Mobius strip than equal sign, enfiguring a constant draining and accruing of material across its libidinous band, its slippery starved and gorged interior throat/exterior flank.”¹⁵ The ampersand signifies the complexities of existence, the continual becoming, the proliferation but not of the same thing, something similar and different that can change the world significantly.

¹⁵ McSweeney, *The Necropastoral*, 85

The idea of translation refers to the process of printmaking. The idea is that I spend all my time developing a plate that is the conveyor of information, but not the work itself. As a simple comparison it would be like writing a book in German, but only publishing it in an English translation. The translation would always refer to the German text, but it would never be available to the average reader to read. This is the power of the print because only the product of the plate can be seen, the actual creation can only be speculated. Here the viewer is forced to confront the process of the becoming of the work of art, propelling it from other plastic arts into a phenomenological experience.

My research has been focused on perpetuating the creative community and creating art that exemplifies the principles of existence that I feel are important. My research is continuous; every day is about knowing more about the environment I inhabit and finding positive ways to co-exist and make art. All living things must consume to exist, and humans are fragile beings that have to manipulate our environment to live comfortably. Living consciously and creating prints consciously does not mean not damaging the world; it means that I think about what I want and need and try to accomplish this harmoniously. I look at myself, my social environment, and physical environment and try to perpetuate an existence that supports all three. One purpose of art is to express ideas in a way that changes the current way of thinking. Art revitalizes communities and is the energy source for our living social organism. Art can be used to stop the exponential necrotic proliferation of human progress, and create a sigmoidal trend that benefits all being.

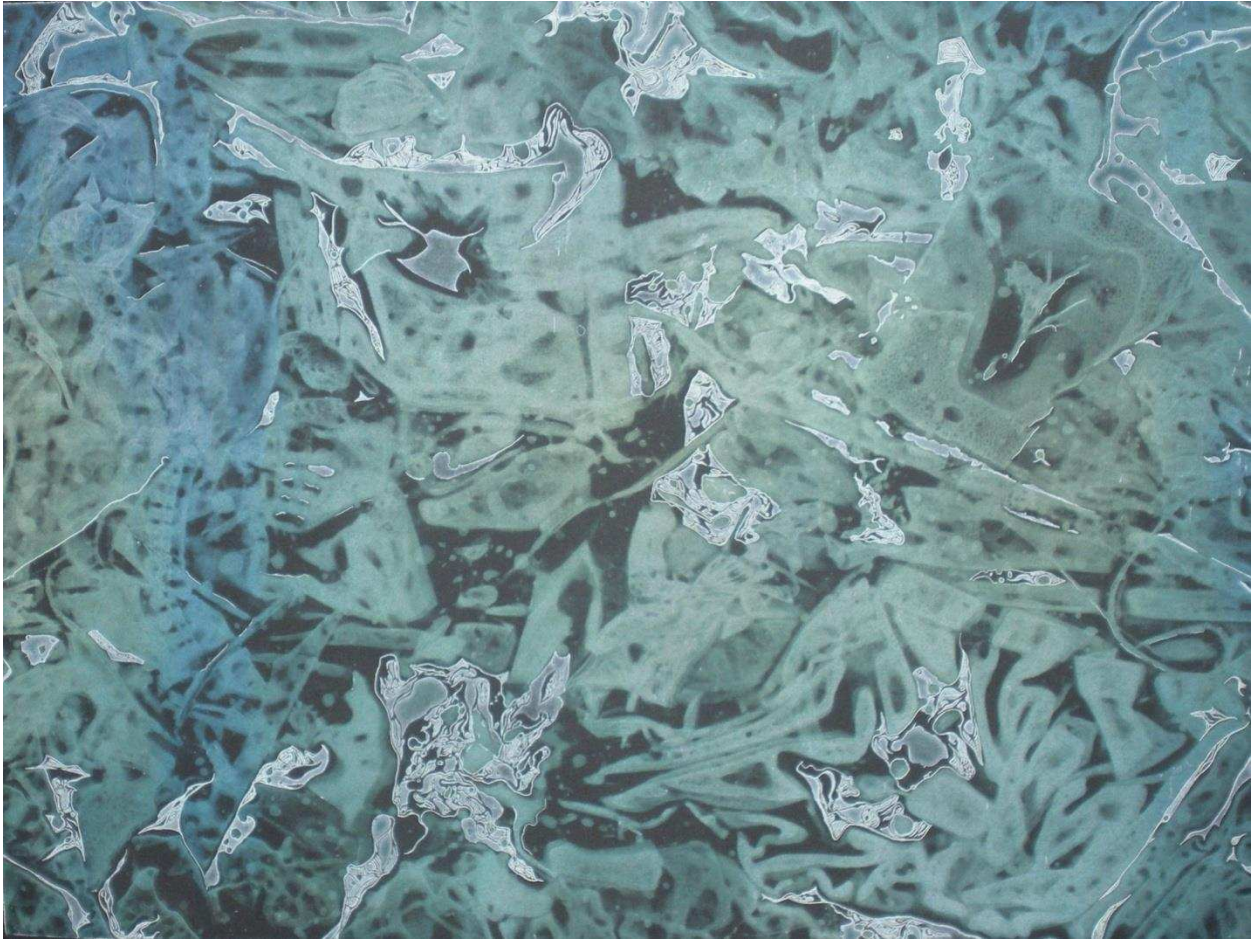


Figure 1: Taylor Lee Bisbee, untitled, 2015, Intaglio three color viscosity print, 18"x24"



Figure 2: Taylor Lee Bisbee, Flowering Decomposition, 2016, Intaglio two plate four color print, 5.75"x5.75"



Figure 3: Krishna Reddy, Whirlpool, 1963, Intaglio multicolor viscosity print, 15"x20"



Figure 4: Alfonso Crujera, Punta del Caletón V (Serie: LPGC), 2004, Electro-etching on zinc galvanized electrotint in blue ink, 10x40 cm

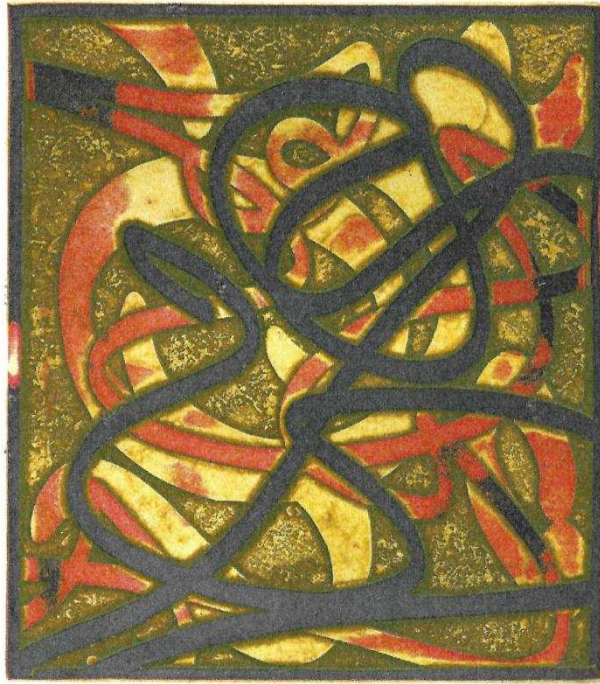


Figure 5:Alfonso Crujera, Gpplh 9, 2009, Passive electro-etching on zinc three color viscosity print, 28x24.5 cm

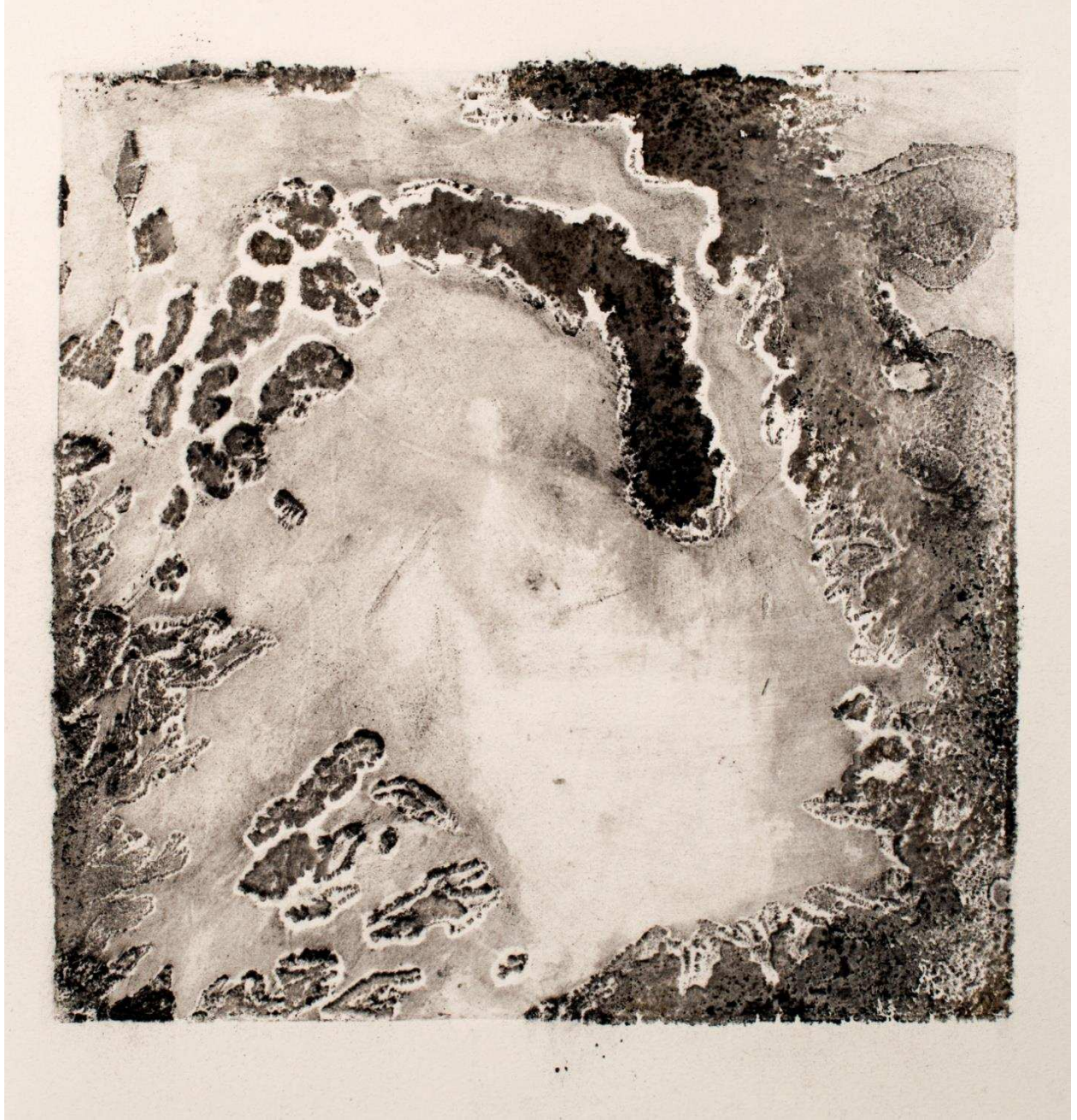


Figure 6: Taylor Lee Bisbee, *Printing Entropy*, 2016, Galvanized electro-etch oil and powder pigment print, 12"x12"

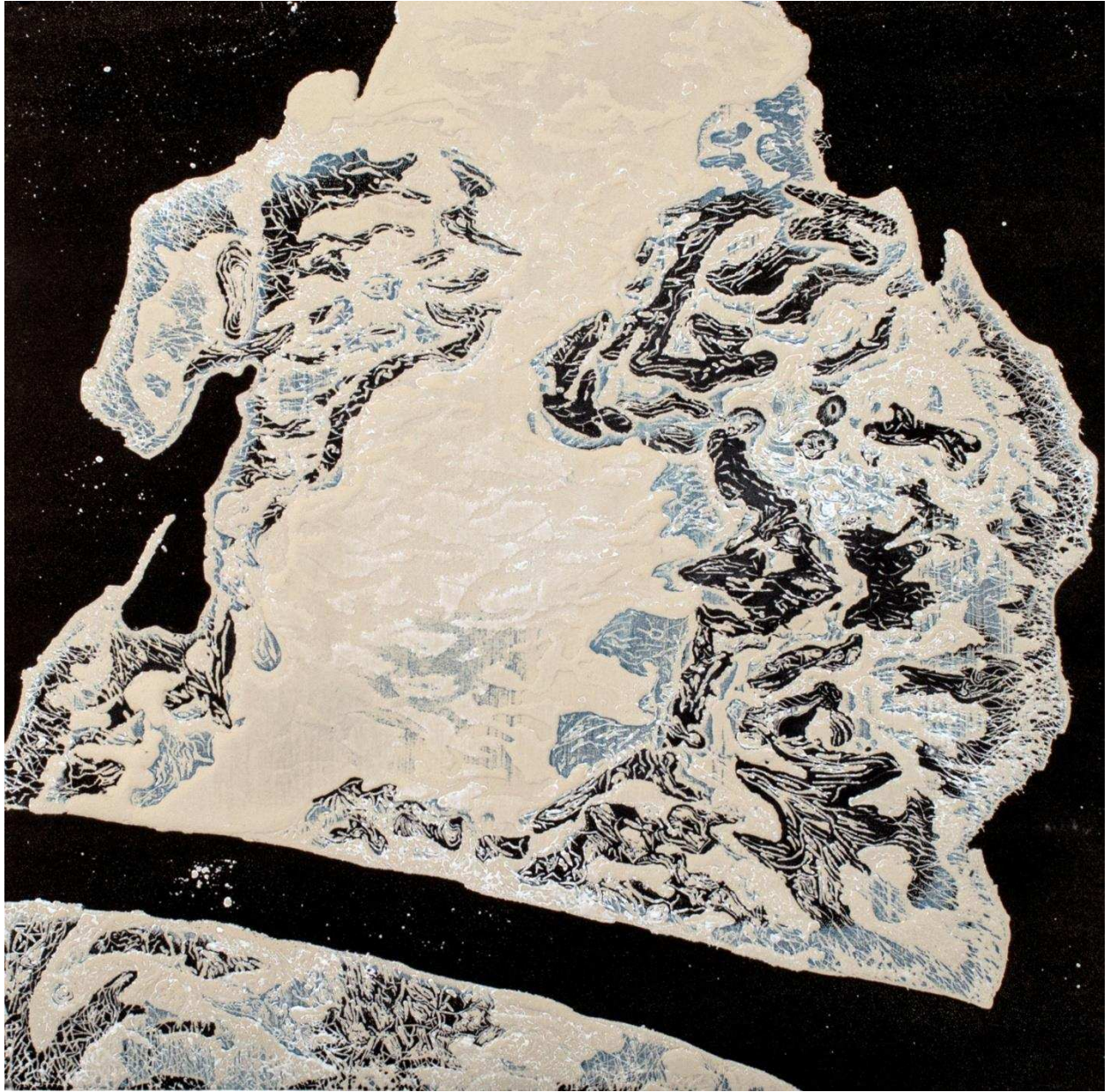


Figure 7: Taylor Lee Bisbee, Dynamic Stasis, 2016, Electro-etch three color viscosity print on grey paper, 12"x12"



Figure 8: Taylor Lee Bisbee, *The Specter*, 2017, Intaglio two color relief roll selectively wiped on Arches Cover, 36"x24"

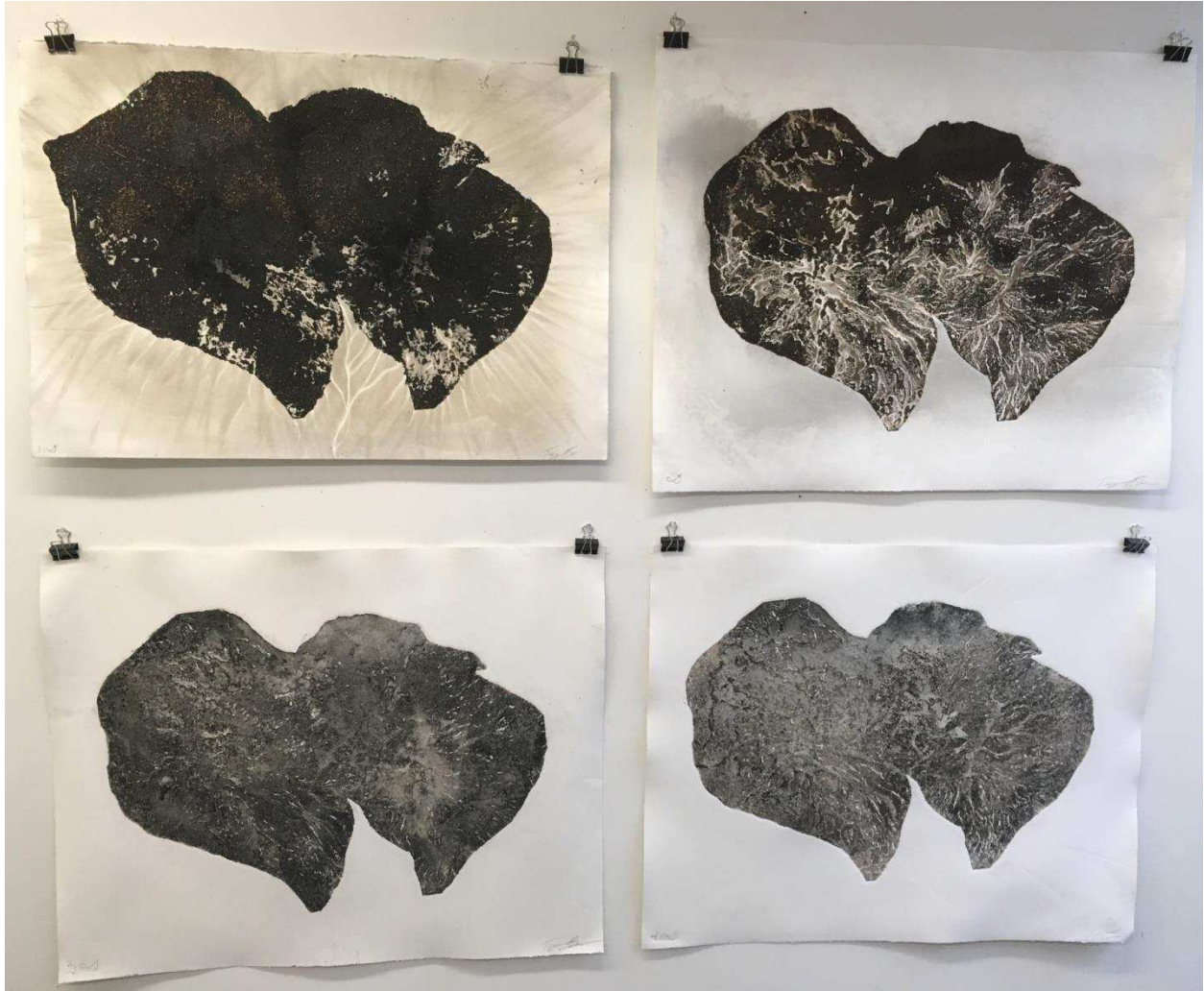


Figure 9: Taylor Lee Bisbee, Necrotic Proliferation, 2017, Galvanized electro-etch oil, dry pigment, and sand print. 18"x24"

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