

THESIS

INTRINSIC MOTIONS

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

INTRINSIC MOTIONS

This graduate thesis describes in-depth research and artworks produced by Isaac Trujillo from 2018-2020. His MFA works created at Colorado State University expresses and captures the importance of traditional printmaking, digital photography and twenty-first-century interpretations of the land art movement. His work contends that the sport of rock climbing, printmaking, and interdisciplinary art practice are all in collaboration with the phenomena of nature. This expands our ideas of a static material world and expresses the constant flux of space through juxtaposition and metaphorical references to geologic time. The primary argument for contemplation is that material things and objects are inevitably in a constant state of change and renewal.

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INTRODUCTION

Printmaking and rock climbing have always been integral to my research-based art practice. They bring me balance, awareness and motivation to create. Throughout my work, I communicate the unique perspectives that each bring me, so that others can perceive the world through an expanded lens. Much of what I think about from day to day is relating, interacting, and balancing with nature. I often ponder how rock climbing allows me to become a collaborator with the natural world. The seasons of the year often steer my engagement and activity within the landscape, similarly to the rock that steers me up its face or to the lithographic limestone that dictates the next step I need to take for printing. These natural phenomena of the world are what inspire my art practice, as they have shown me ways of discovering the world's functions and how this connects us to the larger universe.

Searching is a philosophical journey. When moving throughout the landscape, I become aware of the environment, knowing exactly where cold, dry, sticky and Velcro-like rock awaits. I take the time to not only climb, but also to read into the geologic strata of the cliff side. I perceive cliff sides as artistic murals (Figure 1). I gain further understanding of my place in the universe by reading into the history imbedded into all of the earth's morphology. I have come to understand, that we are etching meaning into the rocks through the courageous act of rock climbing. As we give to the rock, the rock is giving back to us. There is a vibration created through this sport and art form we call rock climbing.



Figure 1: Photograph of a sport climb, Butterfly 11d, that is located on the Jungle Wall at Poudre Falls, Colorado. August 2019.

The direct connection and experience climbers have with nature is something that I search for while working in the art studio. Nature's presence can easily be lost as life passes. It is not until we begin to experiment with the materials of the environment that we begin to discover that everything is bound to the forces of nature. It wasn't until I began considering my practice of printmaking and rock climbing together as one, that I began to understand this connectiveness we all share with the materials around us. Similar to Jean Dubuffet's lithographic *Phenomena* series, my work becomes aware of the natural occurrences within our material interactions, not forcing the materials to become something, but allowing them to be. Throughout my artwork I am continuously expressing themes and concepts like these, as I reflect and learn from artists of the past and present. Examining their lineage is critical to my contemporary art practice within the twenty-first century.

An early mentor of mine, named Matthew Rangel, shared with me the important relationship we humans have with the landscape. He taught me how to set aside time to be with nature as an artist and how to incorporate my love of connecting with nature through climbing into my printmaking practice. Together we both relate the landscape as a sculptural form to the tactility of printmaking, communicating the process of its materiality to the landscape. Nature plays a critical role in how we identify with the landscape, it allows us to develop an understanding of where we come from and how we relate to the materials around us.

At a time of overwhelming expansion and urban construction, nature's presence cannot afford to be lost. It is our mission as nature's artist to share this lens of perception through our work. Rangel focuses his efforts toward illustration within modern and traditional lithography, a means to communicate how human constructs of the landscape are our embodiment of place. My work explores the use of metaphorical languages of process that allow me to relate the materials of my practice back into nature's presence and our existence.

THE SPORT AND ART OF ROCK CLIMBING

The sport of rock climbing is an artistic and multifaceted function of human expression. It allows me to make connections, a means of creating minimalistic sculpture that brings us closer to understanding the complexities of the universe. The boulders and cliff sides categorized and mapped by the climbing community become a collaboration with nature. Like a garden, we tend, care and listen to these places. They directly reflect the creative climbing culture of the twenty-first century. Each wall and boulder problem are given a name. We reminisce about them, sharing their existence and our relationship

to them. Climbing is a global and sharable experience. The moments of climbing are unique and should be seen as art happenings with nature (Figure 2). These perspectives become a rich definition of the sport. A moment of singularity is created through rock climbing. A moment within time and space that requires a conscious effort to reflect upon. A conceptual line of movement is brought into existence through rock climbing. It is a line of primal habit that wouldn't have existed in the space without the sport.



Figure 2: Ryan Nelson bouldering on Larping, a v8 located at the Tunnels campground in Northern Colorado. June 2019.

There is so much that goes into mapping a rock climb: its location, duration, difficulty, style, exposure, rock type, ascent number and many other components add up to making its sculptural uniqueness within the landscape. Rock features and the holds on them become conceptual castings that reflect our humanity and awareness to nature, as they are expressed in *Cubist Doxology* (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Cubist Doxology, Digital Photograph, 30 x 22 in, 2020.

Holds like these serve a function by getting us to the top of the climb. They become chalked with magnesium carbonate and become a contact point within space. These contact points create tangible constellations for us. Deleuze relates the concept of idea formulation to that of a constellation; the more of these vantage points we obtain around the idea, the closer we get to knowing their true reality. These contact points allow us to better understand where we are in space and time. The fact that we can grasp these nooks and crannies of a micro-space, as they are momentarily fixed to the constellations in the sky, allowing us to find nesting and peace within the universe. They become metaphorical castings to our physical form of existence. These micro-perspectives allow us to gain macro understanding of the cosmos as we find flux within scale.

My artworks are like a trail and expressed in my two-layer lithograph titled *Figure-four* (Figure 4). They lead us to outlooks and new perspectives of nature's existence. I think how it relates to Andy Goldsworthy's rock stackings that source the materials provided by the landscape, presented as simple creations with nature. Like a rock climb, these works are outcomes of nature's existence. Nature needs our consciousness as

living beings to see it. Goldsworthy's earth works are similar to that of a climb in that each piece is composed of raw and earthy materials that have systematically been arranged by our consciousness.

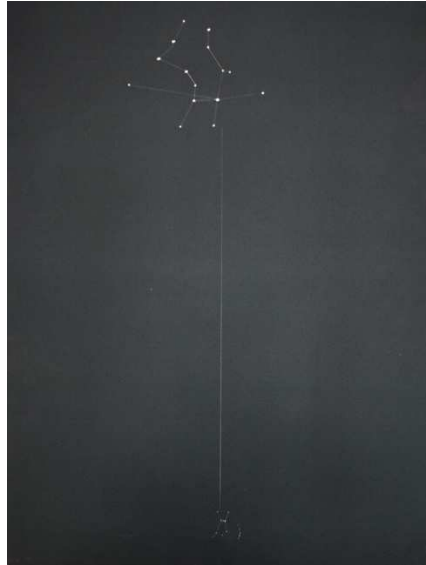


Figure 4: Figure-four, two-layer lithograph, 17 x 20 in, 2019.

LITHOGRAPHIC STONE WORKS

Parentage of Stone expresses an awareness toward the materiality of lithographic art-making with a focus on the origin of material (Figure 5). I am examining each stone's fragmented past, present and future flux. This work began with me finding a box full of lithographic fragments in the print studio. These stones for traditional lithography carry a complex lineage. They originated as marine organisms that later died and were compressed into sedimentary rock. That rock uplifted and metamorphosed, then was later quarried in Germany, shipped to the United States, and eventually here to Colorado State University. The stones were used for years to make prints, but over time became broken

and lay to rest in that cardboard box. The history of these stones and their materiality showed me that flux is inevitable, even for art objects.



Figure 5: Parentage of Stone, 16+ lithographic fragments and ink, 2018.

I began to question the state of all work. What is the work's material past, present and future state? How does this effect the context of its interpretation? Art is often seen in a state of permanence, but truthfully these materials that make up the art world are inevitably in a state of flux. This realization allows us to see the depth of agency in art. *Parentage of Stone* and the prints that come out of them leave us to reflect on our lineage as material beings (Figure 6). I strived to capture and find the beauty in their degradation. The work became a resurrection of material and a becoming of something new. Each individual stone is brought together by the process of lithography. The marks I made on them bring awareness to their different planes of fracture, relevant to time.

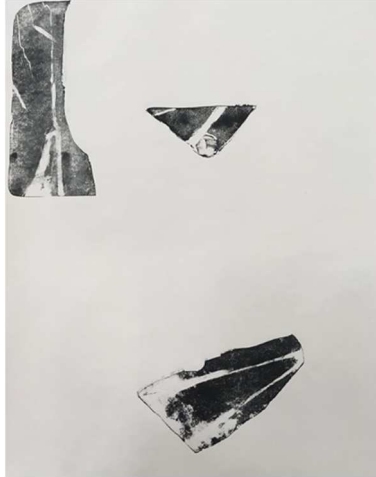


Figure 6: Parentage of Stone, hand-pulled lithograph, 22 x 30 in, 2018.

INTRINSIC MOTIONS

The *Intrinsic Motions Series* brings together my experience of rock climbing in the majestic Poudre Canyon and the process of intaglio printmaking (Figure 7). Identifying the intaglio printmaking process as a metaphorical tool, each printed impression from etched zinc on paper expresses the physicality of geologic force through time and space. The *Intrinsic Motions Series* studies a body of zinc through the metaphorical use of geologic time. Similar to how Claude Monet's *Waterlilies* studies the same section of water lilies at different times of day in the same location. *Intrinsic Motions* captures the truly dynamic, yet seemingly static process of tectonics. This work also draws influence from Richard Serra's questioning of art process and material verbs. Now I am asking, how do verbs like cut, stack, stretch, round, loose, etch and separate relate metaphorically to geologic study? Combining both of these historical art concepts into the *Intrinsic Motions Series* allows the work build, and better express my ideas as they are based on art historical references.



Figure 7: Intrinsic Motions Series, Intaglio, 22 x 30 in, 2019.

These experiences expressed in the work reflect the metaphorical state of the plate. To highlight this important relationship I have with rock, I used the relief-roll technique over the cut and etched plates. Between these printed plates, embossments are made. Like Barnett Newman's *zips*, the human form is represented in these unique embossments. The *zips* are expressed in the gaps created by the laser-like fractures through the zinc. They become the space where the viewer can find a relatable grasp to climbing. The white spaces of embossments lead us into the simulation space of the art gallery and our consciousness. These embossed *zips* are unconstrained to vertical orientation as they stand out in various angles that represent the notches in the rock where nesting is found, a place for our eyes to rest as we look into the print. They also create additional contact points and new places of meaning.

In referring to the rock cycle (Figure 8), I saw the newly milled zinc plate as an igneous formation, one that was awaiting the transformative cycle explained below. Not long ago this zinc was magma, milled into a sheet and then cut into this rectangular plate. I was perceiving the zinc's materiality just I as did in *Parentage of Stone*, thinking about its past, present and future existence. After finding this conceptual frame work, I pondered the thought of where and when do I climb on igneous rock in the canyon? I created a diagram that helped me throughout this process of creation (Figure 9). It is a photographic chart showing the geologic strata of the Poudre Canyon, incorporating elevation, rock type, physical structure, and accessibility of season. Each component became relevant to one another as a metaphorical translator to the series.

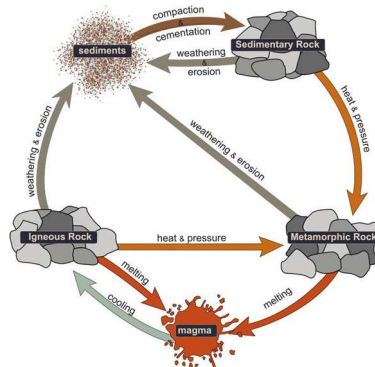


Figure 8: The rock cycle.

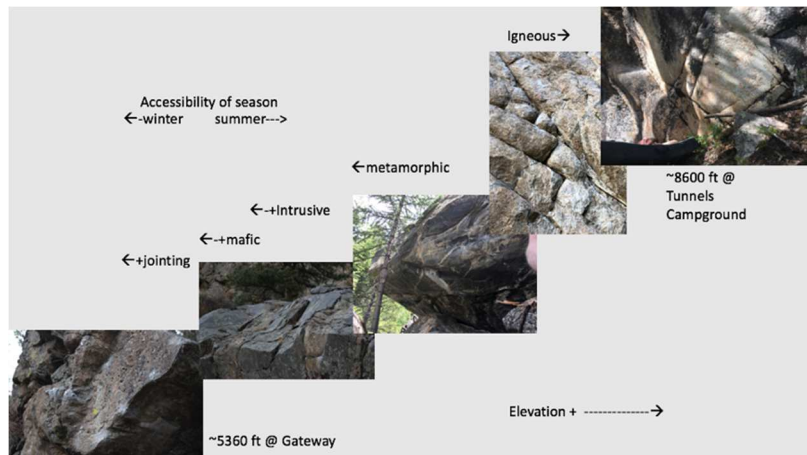


Figure 9: Intrinsic Motions chart, 2019.

Many other geologic references were used in creating the *Intrinsic Motions Series*. I looked at the *Goldich's Weathering Series/ Bowen's Reaction Series* diagram (Figure 10). This allowed me to correlate observations in the field of climbing to logical scientific reasoning.

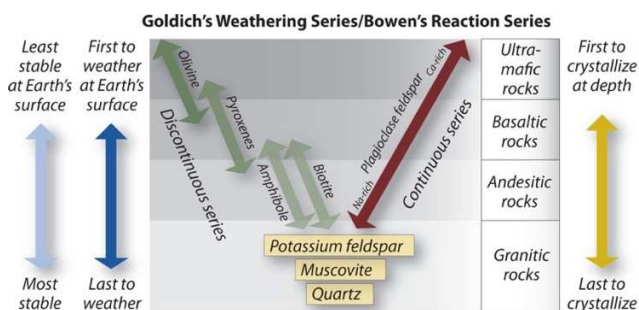


Figure 10: Goldich's Weathering Series/ Bowen's Reaction Series.

These observations and correlations lead me through a cycle. I began considering the warmer months when the northern hemisphere becomes more perpendicular to the incoming rays of sunlight. The environment allows us to gain access to different rock types and see first-hand how geologic time is working. Through mineralogy, one can begin to distinguish potassium feldspar from muscovite, quartz and so on. Using the *Moh's hardness scale*, one can conceptualize weathering more clearly. I enjoy thinking about these distinctions of morphology and how they influence my choices in the print studio. Rock poetically becomes the fingerprints of earth.

My art practice is a product of this geologic knowledge. A combination of science, observation, experience and reflection. This concept reverberates throughout the *Intrinsic Motions Series* and later works. It is the merging and disguising of these cut plates, etched lines, offsetting, and ink tones that reflect the atmosphere of my memory. Simultaneously, I view my actions as translating geologic interpretation through artistic choices of process. from interpretation. These tectonic movements aren't actually happening to the plate but

are visually taking place in the studio and my mind. This questioning steers my process and engagement. I like to think nature is watching me, viewing the works that I make as I am making it.

As the *Intrinsic Motions* series follows the metaphorical journey down the Poudre back to Fort Collins, the presence of faulting and jointing increase and the crisp edges of the plate began to round out. Smaller pieces are lost and eventually the red sands of the Front Range make their way into the work as sedimentary rock. The geologic puzzle of this place reflects the work and its meaning. Geology is like a drawn line that you can try and trace chronologically. The forms of *Intrinsic Motions* communicate a history of its making. The print does not only reside in the plane of the sheet, but by adding other dimensions into it they become objects.

The thought of elevation influenced the amount of pigment I used during printing. The prints with less pigment are metaphorical to that of higher elevations, where the air thins the rock become more igneous. While in contrast the prints receiving a dose of bold tonality represent the lower rock of the canyon. The viewer can follow and solve these geologic deformations and references to place.

Intrinsic Motions, Seismic Activity stands out from the other prints in the series (Figure 11). This triple dropped print captures the vibration and uncontrollable energy of an earthquake. Unlike the other prints, where geologic time is expressed throughout many prints, this sense of seismic activity is expressed in one print. This work holds a sense of tension, with potential energy awaiting release, but unable to escape. Capturing this metaphorical action of seismic motion allowed the work to achieve a period of play and chance.



Figure 11: Intrinsic Motions, Seismic Activity, Intaglio, 22 x 30 in, 2019.

Intrinsic Motions Weathered Granite I and II also stand out from the rest of the series (Figure 12 and 13). This diptych expresses characteristics of spheroidal weathering explained in figure 14 as they are caused by the freeze thaw effect. The existing joints and fractures, like an etched line, progress into larger cavities and began to round out. I like to think of the landscape as an intaglio plate. Canyons are lines and edges formed by rivers that have etched the landscape by way of the passing water. These different weathering patterns that influence the landscape are metaphorically and literally present in the intaglio print medium that quickly expedites the erosional process.



Figure 12: Intrinsic Motions, Weathered Granite I, Intaglio, 22 x 30 in, 2019.



Figure 13: Intrinsic Motions, Weathered Granite II, Intaglio, 22 x 30 in, 2019.

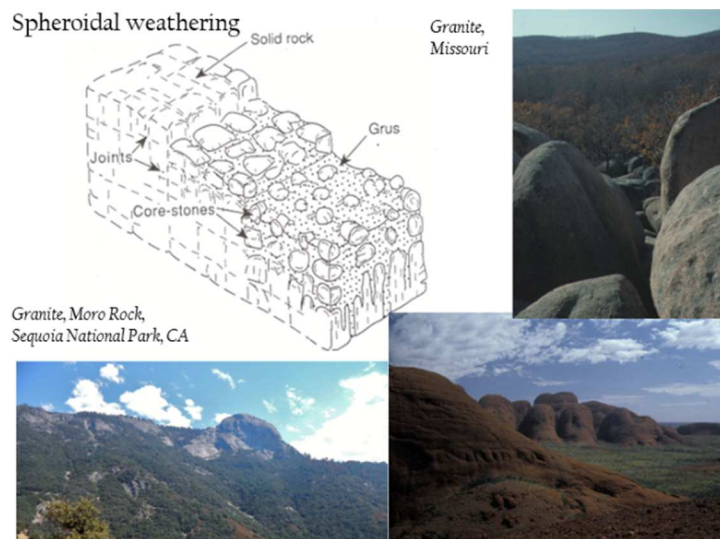


Figure 14: Examples of Spheroidal weathering.

Throughout these observations between the studio and time spent up the canyon, I began to make further associations. Specifically, I began observing how suspended sediments during peak runoff are relatable to that of graining a lithographic stone. You realize that suspended sands like carborundum for lithography are required, thus creating abrasions and not just the water alone. The outcome creates unique shapes and smooth features on our rocky matrix. The fixed rocks that face upstream become more rounded out, while the rockfaces downstream hold their sharper edges and texture.

Chemical weathering, an additional process of printmaking, shapes my prints and the geologic phenomena we climb. Acidic water, after much time, will dissolve the softer limestone away. Printmaking has a way of speeding up this time frame. The concentrated etching solutions etch the plates in just minutes, allowing us to see long-term geologic process in condensed real-time action. Printmaking becomes a way for us to perceive the world and its geologic functions at an accelerated rate.

URBANIZED AND SIMULATED SPACES OF CLIMBING

The act of climbing alone has different facets of expression. Alongside the dance-like movement of outdoor climbing, indoor climbing gyms provide a safer place for more people to experience these movements, originating in outdoor climbing (Figure 15). For me, climbing gyms have become a simulated place of hybridity, existing not only as a place for exercise and training, but an interactive work of art. The climbing walls, volumes, and holds are all composed of different materials and become a component of this art simulation.



Figure 15: Wooden Mountain Bouldering Gym & Simulator mural, 2019.

This work is constantly on exhibition and goes through weekly resetting. A place of constant flux is created here as route setters, like me, are constantly recycling and cleaning the holds that create new movement and fun problems for their audience to solve. This creates a social atmosphere for people to interact and make plans to climb as a community. With a sense of community behind it, climbers at any level can experience this uplifting movement.

In the spring of 2019, I had the opportunity to paint my first mural titled *Simulator* located at Wooden Mountain, the local climbing gym of Loveland Colorado (Figure 15). I aimed to capture the essence of climbing in the simulated space of the gym. Located on the corner of the wall near the stair case, the arete-like feature functions as a way of breaking the two-dimensional plane. The limited color pallet of white, blue and brown allows the viewer to visually search for their own path throughout its form. The inspired crystalline shapes of the Colorado Rocky Mountains become a visual language that expands the meaning and title of this work *Simulator*.

This mural was a major component of a solo show I exhibited at Wooden Mountain Bouldering Gym in 2019. This exhibition primarily showcased the multifaceted expression of climbing that is shown throughout my art practice. Not only was the *Intrinsic Motions* series and newly painted mural *Simulator* on exhibit, the community of local climbers, route setters, hold shapers and wall makers were all in collaboration with one another. This dialog brought climbing into the scope of contemporary art through this exhibition. I could not have completed this project without the help and support of fellow M.F.A. graduate, printmaker, and co-owner of Wooden Mountain, Evan Mann, who invited me to exhibit work in this capacity.

EMBODIMENT

Printmaking has always been a process of reflection for me. I can't help but go back into my memory and think about the beautiful summer days of rock climbing at the Poudre Falls Crags. In the summer of 2019, I spent more time focused on sport climbing

than bouldering without a rope. Sport climbing is the act of free climbing with a rope and harness. This method of climbing allows access to taller and longer sequences of movement, while on the other hand, bouldering trends toward shorter and harder movements on singular panels of rock (Figure 16). This expansion to sport climbing allowed me to find grander perspectives of artistic expression. These more grandiose climbs allow access to more obscure locations and finishes. Like an eagle's nest, they become experiences that lead us to a more majestic and sublime realities.



Figure 16: Josh Cook sport-climbing Gorilla 12c at the Jungle Wall at Poudre Falls, Colorado. August 2019.

These sport climbing experiences led me to a new direction in the print studio. Specifically, I made a conscious decision to print on longer scrolls of mulberry paper, which has allowed my process of *Intrinsic Motions* to expand. The work is not only

representing the geologic forms of the landscape, but also the human form and consciousness in relation to the movement of dancing up the rock face. The work contains the choreographed nature of climbing, capturing the sequences of sport climbing into the print and its process. The forms, originating from the *Intrinsic Motions Series* expands the constraints of the standard (22" x 30") sheet of Rives BFK cotton rag paper. These Mulberry scrolls begin to push the scale directly towards a relatable size to the human body and rock face. The choice of working on Mulberry scrolls allows the work to gain full presence as an installation and architectural feature within gallery spaces. The plates for these prints are partially inked because this creates a push and pull between the overlapping forms as they move up the scroll like a climber. These superimposed forms fade from opaque and monochromatic tones, that eventually lead into fully transparent layers and blind embossments from un-inked plates. This pushes the atmospheric depth and distance from the ground. Serendipitous folds and wrinkles also occur with this paper choice, adding additional cracks and fissures. Push, the term for sliding ink, occurs and is encouraged as the press bed is sent through during printing. These inconstancies of traditional printmaking are a way for nature to become present in my work and create harmony with me as I find reckoning with it. A cubist perspective is found in the *Intrinsic Motions Series II* (Figure 17 and 18).



Figure 17: Intrinsic Motions, Embodiment I, Intaglio on mulberry paper, 33 in x 6 ft, 2020.



Figure 18: Intrinsic Motions, Embodiment II, Intaglio on mulberry paper, 45 x 33 in, 2020.

This work is in conjunction with the movement of the human form that dances up the rock face. These works become reminiscent to Picasso's *Accordionist* or Duchamp's *Nude Descending A Staircase*. This cubistic perspective allows the work to communicate the feeling of movement, a condensing of time and space and the essence of climbing. The mulberry scrolls become a place for these interwoven ideas of landscape and human form to combine dynamically and exist as one.

As we think about verbs like tear, stretch, break, wrinkle, expansion and contraction, it is important to see that not only we, but the landscape too is subject to this cycle of life and flux. We as one, are constantly on a journey of becoming something different. It is inevitably nature that allows us to see ourselves through seemingly inanimate objects. These objects have agency with us. We are the material extension of nature and we should apply both our own emotional and physical state towards working collaboratively with the materials of the world.

CONCLUSION

I ask, can the verbs stated above, the ones that can evoke thoughts of violence, trauma and inflictions of force instead become meanings of growth and linkage, rather than that of degradation or destruction? I find beauty in this questioning, as it becomes a way of grappling with both our own material self and the inanimate objects around us. A way in which nature's agency holds an importance to my art. All of the materials of the universe are in fact in a constant cycle of flux. They find chapters of expansion or

contraction, in states of liquidity and solidarity. They intermix and chemically bond into new things.

These states of change are found in my art and are communicated non-verbally. Art is reflective of our ideas as they expel outward and into the materials we choose to make art with. This leads not to an end, but new states of existence. We are part of the earth's consciousness and I aim my artwork to explore a greater understanding of this. Materials have history and process of flux we will never completely grasp, but what we can do is take advantage of the precious moments we have with them. Like a river stone we are left to ask, where and what has this thing been, what is it becoming and what does it want to be?

Like John Baldessari and his willingness to burn his artwork into ashes, the work's importance is now and in the present. My prints become a way of capturing the seemingly static, yet clearly dynamic instances of our time. The work becomes a conceptual casting of this time, a specific reckoning toward our consciousness. Knowing that one day my works, like all the materials of the world, will find a new state or form, creates a circulation of meaning that I interpret as uplifting and freeing.

My art practice is continually growing and expanding, like all the changing materials and new discoveries of the universe. My perspectives of the world are always changing. It is expressed throughout the materiality of my work and its process. Tying together both the landscape and the human condition as an inseparable entity through printmaking and rock climbing has been a major dedicated pursuit over the past three years. As we reflect, each are the same. It is our consciousness that allows us to realize these principles and philosophize our connection with nature. Don't forget to spend time

in nature and periodically let go of the everyday comforts built by society. Spend time in the natural environment, away from the internet and controlled spaces. Go out and freeze a little bit in the winter air so that you can come back to society on Monday with a renewed and clear vision of how the art of our lives is still deeply connected to all of nature's beauty.