

THESIS

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## ABSTRACT

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This body of work is a combination of exploration within classic methods of printmaking, as well as, a new advance in the technical application of building a resist in Intaglio printmaking. This thesis is a representation of diligent hours of exploration, creativity and research. The work spans multiple approaches within printmaking, and delves into a wide variety of marks, textures and media. The apex of the work embraces fully a newly discovered and researched method of creating a resist on a printing matrix. This new form of mark-making is catalyzed through a reaction between water and liquefied rosin upon a copper plate. The water and rosin repel and react with one another resulting in a uniquely constructed resist to be etched and printed. The methodology is best suited for the intended concept and scale. The conceptual aspects of the work encompass a variety of notions such as: finding the *Self* within abstraction, Heideggerian philosophical concepts, comparison between self-awareness and oblivion, and presence.

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## INTRODUCTION

In various systems of belief throughout the world there is an understood notion of a cycle of life, death and rebirth throughout the universe. Within the cosmos there is an unceasing cycle of construction, demolition and reconstruction. Both earthly and heavenly bodies will die, while some are simultaneously being born. When a star explodes, all the material disperses into the universe, tiny particulates and pieces flying through the abyss passing from one body to the next, joining then detaching, moving then slowing; nothing retains its own form for more than a mere moment. The thought of this process humbles and almost forces one to contemplate why consciousness exists and where it originated. Humans have the intellectual capacity to try and find the answer, but we cannot and perhaps never will find.

In order to contemplate an unanswerable question, man must offer up his creative mind and spirit to reach towards unknowable answers. Consider the first human in existence: did they stand alone in solitude staring up at the expansive void of the universe wondering why they exist? The American Abstract Expressionist painter Barnett Newman believed, “The first man was an artist. Original man, shouting his consonants, did so in yells of awe and anger at his tragic state, at his own self-awareness and at his own helplessness before the void.”<sup>1</sup> Human consciousness has an inherent need to move through the world, to ponder the potentiality of things outside the senses and to question the origin of consciousness. Whether the first man’s inarticulate cry was directed towards the universe only to receive nothing in return, or was a declaration of independence for the fight of survival, the cry could be considered to be the first creative act of expression reaching at an unknowable truth.

For many, creative expression is the striving required to gravitate towards the unknowable truth through creative production. The Greeks made a clear distinction between producing (a sense of bringing into being) and doing (in the sense of acting). The latter, producing, was referred to by the Greeks as *poiesis*. The fundamental understanding of the word is the passing of something from non-being into being. The most essential characteristic of *poiesis* is not its aspect as a practical and voluntary process but it's being a mode of truth understood as *unveiling*.<sup>2</sup> Within the context of the studio, my own poetic reaching soars upwards towards the unobtainable truth, attempting to grasp at understanding, wisdom and knowledge as it slowly unveils, only to be thwarted back down and denied the ultimate answer to a lifelong curiosity and asking of why? My time as a graduate student has been spent on a steadfast voyage of independent research through a new method of making images within intaglio printmaking. It is my contention, through the exploration of diverse printmaking techniques and mixed media applications, that I am able to successfully examine and present the conceptual journey towards the unknowable origin of my consciousness through creation.

The creative process begins with *will* and for me, within that *will* lies an inherent need to not only investigate but to reconnect with my own origin. This reconnection does not have a specific definition or name, it simply is a poetic reconnection to an unknown source. There have been a variety of attempts throughout secular and religious sects of the world to describe this unknowable reconnection to a source, none of which I will specifically refer to, but only reference in the context of the explanation of the work in this document. There are two terms which I have associated with this idea of reconnecting; the *Self* and *Being*. The *Self* was defined by the Abstract Expressionist painter Barnett Newman as being "terrible and constant."<sup>3</sup> *Being* was a term adopted by the 20<sup>th</sup> century philosopher Martin Heidegger who defined it as,

“[Something which] denotes the state of conscious existence: what it means ‘to be.’”<sup>4</sup> The most important association to make is an acknowledgement of the pivotal impact both of these ideas of the *Self* and *Being* had within my own artistic practice. My practice is an autonomous action and reaction process which catalyzes the birth of a metaphorical lens utilized in examining the origin of my own consciousness. Observing each of the pieces created in the studio, viewed as a whole, form a semblance and record of questioning. Perhaps bearing witness to the primal man’s original impulse, an outcry of poetry or the *will* needed to investigate these questions.

It is my belief that modern man has forgotten his original essence. The key to understanding this forgetting is to investigate where the amnesia occurred and how it can be restored. For me, this reflection begins with and falls upon the wings of art. The creative impulse has the power to peer towards an origin only to find a cyclical pattern; at the end lies the beginning and at the beginning the end shall be known. The work of art, like nature, constitutes a certain physicality or form, but, something more, a visual metaphor. The embrace of the metaphors is contingent on understanding where my understanding and influences reside.

## CHAPTER ONE

During the early portion of graduate school, my mind was at a place it had never been before, independent and free. Leaving a life of distraction, dogma and rural life, I arrived disillusioned and unaware of my own direction. I was reminded by the author Joseph Campbell, who wrote about how we no longer listen to those, “who speak of the eternal values that have to do with the centering of our lives.” Taking these words into account, I realized that I was lacking my own deeper understanding of what spirituality and art meant to me. It was the words of Joseph Conrad who set me on a path of investigation;

Words, as is well known, are the great foes of reality...but when words fail, where can we turn? In order to understand spirituality, in order to live a spiritual life, we must first be able to imagine such a life, to form a mental image of what it might look and feel like. But to do that, to see and feel spirituality, we need a deeper level of language to help us fathom our experience. And so, as people have done throughout the ages, we turn to metaphors, images and stories.<sup>5</sup>

These words reaffirmed the need for artistic creation in order to find a path towards resolve mentally and spiritually. Realizing once again the importance of poetry, literature and the hero's journey, I began to delve into myth and mythic lore.

In seeking to understand my own conscious reality through time and place, stories provide a perspective that touch on the divine, and which allow me to see reality in full context, as a part of its larger whole.<sup>6</sup> The evolution of my creative process leading up to this point has been an alluring journey influenced by strict dogma, fascinating sirens and wise sages. My artistic endeavors began amongst a very dogmatic and orthodox community. Growing up fully immersed in the education and practice of the Roman Catholic Church, a majority of the work

produced during undergraduate studies revolved around the influences, confines and rituals of this religion.

The initial medium choice during undergraduate was photography. The camera changed the way in which I perceived the world; the lens became more of a shield than a tool. Photography occasionally is misunderstood as a medium having very little to do with artistic expression and viewed more as a utilitarian way of documenting the world. I spent a majority of undergraduate making photos both embracing and fighting this idea of the utilitarian photograph. I spent years photographing the human figure, learning from their behaviors, watching motion and observing light. I began to understand the world differently. Being an active part of an orthodox religious community shaped my receptivity of authentic experience, as well as to the observation of the human form through the camera lens. Clinging to the rules of the church, my conscious making was influenced by the strong overlooking eyes of dogma and the “thou shalts” of the world. At the time, my photography existed purely in the world of aesthetics and composition. There was a mastery of technical skill and process but not much conceptual depth within the photographs themselves. There was always an unsettling feeling of disconnection and dogmatic influence within my photography. Photographing with pure objectivism and technical rules, I longed to break away from the confines of rigidity within art and the influence of the church upon my life, ultimately leading to a schism from the religion altogether.

After my departure from the Catholic Church, I spent my remaining undergraduate years filled with an unquenchable thirst for knowledge. I was never satisfied with the limited answers to the questions of the spirit given through Roman Catholic doctrine. I was filled with many questions dealing with origins of consciousness and the question of what it is to be spiritual. It was through the continual embrace and study of myth and literature that I was able to find unity,

courage and guidance towards a new curiosity. Once again, the words of the mythological scholar Joseph Campbell rang true for my state at that point when he wrote, “One of our problems today is that we are not well acquainted with the literature of the spirit. We’re interested in the news of the day and the problems of the hour.”<sup>7</sup> It was the idea of getting acquainted with familiar stories that pertained to my life that lead me on the next stage of my artistic journey towards a graduate degree.

The true mental, spiritual and artistic schism from the Catholic Church began with my embrace of printmaking and the discovery of Irish author James Joyce. His novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* lead me on a path of self-discovery and liberation. Joyce’s prose rang through my ears and awakened in me a *need* to begin my move beyond religion. The words of the main character, Stephen Daedalus, brought a sense of certainty and calm to move forward with the split from the religion,

I will not serve that in which I no longer believe whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church...And I am not afraid to make a mistake, even as a great mistake, a lifelong mistake, and perhaps as long as eternity too.<sup>8</sup>

Joyce’s writings not only were the catalyst for breaking free, but also the driving force which steered me through the transitional phases of my artistic journey, moving from the medium of photography to printmaking. Joyce exemplified the importance of putting one’s mind to the problem of reawakening the eye and heart to wonder. Joyce presented Stephen Daedalus as a young man filled with an overwhelming call to regain harmony with life through the embodiment of the artist. With the profound sense of a call, a vocation, Daedalus turned his mind to the escape from bondage on “wings of art.”<sup>9</sup> Within this quest for the [re]discovery of the Self through the ‘wings of art,’ Stephen turned towards the instruction of Aristotle and to Aristotle’s medieval disciple, Aquinas. In the novel Stephen begins by quoting the great teachings of

Aquinas. “Aquinas says,” states Stephen Daedalus, “*ad pulcritudinem tria requiruntur, integritas, consonantia, claritas*. [*Three things are needed for beauty, wholeness, harmony, and radiance.*]”<sup>10</sup> These words repeated over in my mind, guiding my heart to wonder about the power within art as I headed towards the graduate program in Colorado.

Once my master’s program began, I brought with me the tenacity of Stephen Daedalus and the poetics of Aquinas’, words to begin investigating a new set of images. Using the influence of Aquinas’ words on my work during this period, I began to aim for a new way to visually explore a genuine questioning of my consciousness in relation to the primordial origins of existence. The first series consisted of an elongated tryptic resembling the structure of stain glass windows from my former parish. The tryptic entitled, *Integritas, Consonantia, and Claritas*, was a first attempt at examining the beauty within cosmological formations. (Fig. 1) The tryptic, which resembles ethereal structures, as well as stained glass windows found in a traditional Catholic Church, was an attempt to harbor the power of color within the multi-plate intaglio process. The way in which the images were created happened by means of an accident in my studio: a small error caused a unique reaction that yielded strange results. This reaction was the mixing of a liquid varnish (a traditional printmaking chemical) with water, causing a chemical reaction to occur on the surface of the copper plate. It was this discovery that soon became an obsession and I began to dedicate my time to controlling the chaos of this and developing a new methodological approach to creating a resist on a copper plate prior to etching.

At this point the resist method was very primitive and chaotic, yielding unpredictable yet interesting results. (Prior to providing a brief summation of this process, the new method shall be referred to as, NM.) NM became body of research which offers a new and unique method of creating a resist on an intaglio plate, which not only echoes the linear quality of a lithographic

tusche wash, but also produces an individually unique organic linear quality and density. This new method also produces a denser detailed etch in comparison to an aquatint, through the combination of two elements: water and liquefied rosin. NM is a method which uses traditional chemicals and materials found throughout intaglio printmaking but utilized in a different way. Combining the chemical ethanol with various amounts of rosin, a simple varnish is created by dissolving rosin into ethanol. Once the rosin has dissolved into a liquid state, this is the primary solution used to create a resist on a copper plate. It is important to note that NM is a method in which all the materials used during the image making are in a stasis; being wet and never dry from start to finish. Once the simple varnish has been created, the subsequent component will be the utilization of water in various applications.

Using copper plates and coating them with liquid rosin, I set water into motion, which then naturally reacts with the rosin-coated plate. Immediately after water encounters the plate, a chemical reaction begins to occur. Through this chemical reaction, rosin particles are stripped from the ethanol and an organic resist is formed, which is adhered to the surface of the plate by the kinetic force of the water in motion. Working with two liquids to create marks upon a matrix, I was essentially inviting ‘natural’ chance. With a brief explanation of the mechanics of how these Intaglio prints are created, the topic can be shifted back towards the conceptual drive of the work.

The importance viewing place as a sacred space is heavily embedded within my artistic creation. Perhaps due to my former life as a pious individual, I refer to spiritual or dogmatic sources. One aspect of Barnett Newman’s creative environment that I find monumental is his reference to his studio as a *Makom*. He compared his studio and artwork to the synagogue, which, when empty was an architectural structure and nothing more. Once occupied and used for

the rituals, the physical space is transformed into a *place*. “A synagogue,” he contends, “is more than a house of prayer. It is a place, a *Makom*, where each man may be called up to stand before the Torah to read his portion.”<sup>11</sup> Embedded within my own studio, my presence and the intention of creation turn cold concrete floors and fluorescent lights into a place filled with essence. When I am standing at my table, about to begin to create, there are quiet moments of acknowledgement. I know where I stand, and I accept responsibilities as an artist to fill the space with essence to transform the space into a *Makom*.

This initial action, from its inception, speaks to the idea of a spiritual practice within my work. There is an acknowledgement of something beyond the senses working throughout the environment of the studio and in me. Paradoxically, there is a mysterious inclination that something beyond the senses is present within the creative place, but also equally distant or absent. Though there is no validated proof that this transformation occurs, it can be testified as an innate feeling, a true mystery which introduces a transformative process into the studio through the ritual of creation. Newman hinted at rituals transforming a synagogue into something more than just a physical location. The same could be said for dwelling inside a home makes it more than a physical site. The solitary environment of the studio, standing alone at the table and peering into the black liner of the water table, metaphorically harkens back to the first man, standing alone, peering into oblivion and becoming self-aware.

Once the water begins to flow through the table and the varnish has been poured, what is required is absolute clarity of mind and body in order for my response to chance and creativity to take hold. The chemical reaction is instantaneous and requires a keen sense of intuition and reflex. Newman goes on to further explain the action within the *Makom*, “Reading one’s portion before a congregation also requires clarity of purpose, a sense of conviction comparable to the

one with which individuals atone for their sins.”<sup>12</sup> The mental image of a human being standing and reciting the Torah, endowed with harmony and wholeness, implies the concentration of a solitary person standing before the *mysterium tremendum*, engaging in a symbolic ritual, reaching for the *Self* to make amends with the *forgetfulness of Being*.<sup>13</sup> When the waters begin moving across the rosin-coated plates, it is a mesmerizing and contemplative reaction. It’s difficult for one to not get lost in the pale white discharge of the reaction and the black liner of the table itself.

What is occurring during the reactionary process between water and rosin can point towards the moment of reconnection between the *essence of Being* and an understanding of *logos* through the washing with water and chemical reaction of the rosin. Throughout much of philosophy, the term *logos* has morphed and changed meanings. It currently is known as, “the rational principle that governs and develops the universe.”<sup>14</sup> However, in theology, *logos* is defined as the divine word uttered by the creator deity to spark the dawning of creation. What I am motivated to work towards in my current artistic state is contemplation of the difference between the theological, philosophical and ontological definitions of *logos*. In Heideggerian terms, *logos* understood as a “premise,” Heidegger’s analysis of *logos* refers to the origin that did not refer to speech. It was his assumption that *logos* was “the intrinsic togetherness of essence...*logos* characterizes *Being* in a new and yet old respect: that which *is*...and maintains itself is such togetherness.”<sup>15</sup> Instead of allowing things to fall into haphazard dispersion, *logos* sustain bonds, and does not let what it holds in its power dissolve into empty freedom of opposition, but by uniting the opposites maintains the full sharpens of their tension.<sup>16</sup> Heidegger is referring to the original *oneness* when speaking of *logos*. To apprehend truly, the philosopher continues, means “to let something (namely that which shows itself, which appears) come to

one...unity is the belonging-together of antagonisms.”<sup>17</sup> This is the original *oneness*, the birth of the artistic image. Capturing a moment of movement, destruction and rebirth, these plates relate directly to the understanding of *logos*.

Much like the *Beauty Series*, existence is a unified experience—though frightening and fragile—in which man resides eternally in search of the *Self*, terrible and constant (the unity of antagonisms), and the essence of *Being*. (Fig. 1) The three prints stand together as a representation of my understanding of Aquinas’ idea of beauty, but also reflect on *oneness* achieved through the creative process. The mental state of creating points as a reminder to strive towards reconciliation to the mystery of consciousness. Barnett Newman proclaimed, “Man is sublime insofar as he is aware,” and it is through this awareness that one can begin to contemplate the true *essence* of *Being*.<sup>18</sup> It is through the artistic creative act—man’s personal birthright—that we can begin to abide in a nearness to *Being* and a searching of the original *Self*.

## CHAPTER TWO

The very asking of the question of Being means nothing less than recapturing and repeating “the beginning of our historical spiritual experience, in order to transform it into a new beginning,” according to Heidegger.<sup>19</sup> But we don’t repeat a beginning by reducing it to something past and now known, which merely need be imitated. Rather, the beginning must initiate again, more radically, with all the strangeness, darkness, insecurity that attend a true beginning. Lithography was a new beginning for me, striving into my second year I spent countless hours immersing myself a new medium. I felt a certain sense of humility and ambition once beginning this new medium. The only way to preserve this power (of beginning) “is to repeat it, to retrieve it once again...in its original character, in a more originaive way,” states Heidegger.<sup>20</sup> Authentically moving forward into the unknown of lithography, I embraced the very real possibility of failing in numerous ways.

Taking time away from my curiosity with water, my table and intaglio printmaking altogether, was the departure and beginning required for the next stages of artistic development. During this time, I relied heavily on the unity between mind and spirit within context of my studio practice. “The unity of two,” Heidegger states, “...is where beginning is. By returning to Beginnings we are made self-aware and come closer to *Being*.”<sup>21</sup> Lithography was a foreign printmaking process, difficult to learn, and full of technical steps required for proper execution. The journey into the medium of Lithography seemed like taking steps through Joseph Campbell’s *Hero’s Journey*.<sup>22</sup> There was a call to adventure with encouragement to begin a new process and to pass beyond the threshold into the journey where transformation truly begins. The head-first dive into lithography initially prompted frustration. This frustration lead to growth and

confidence in the technical applications of the medium. It came as a surprise to me how three subjective aspects of lithography became critical to its success. The first was embracing the notion of risk. Without risk, no chances would be taken towards advancement. The second was the idea of playful mark-making. Being too contrive or controlled with the compositions prompt frustration within the construction of images. Lastly, the material itself was a catalyst for advancement. The Bavarian limestone used to make the lithographs had harmonious and grounding aspects to them. When I run my hands across the limestone, the cold smooth surface, unblemished and full of potential energy, invites me to acknowledge the millions of years required to form the stone itself. Something new was being born within my work from utilizing the old Bavarian limestone. Former aspects of my creative process were carried into this stage of the journey only to be deconstructed and reassembled through the new medium.

Creating marks upon the surface of the stone, processing and proofing the image, switching colors, and rotating the matrix are steps similar to a detective investigating all possibilities within a mystery. Every component provides a clue, which may lead to a drastic stopping point or to a brilliant realization. All the elements of the process, from the stone, tools, the press, and even the shop itself, are keys in creating an environment for creativity and exploration. Being embedded within the printmaking studio, making it my own place, I finally began to understand the poetical nature of *Da-sein*. *Da-sein* is a connection with place, a place which is created by occupying that space. Heidegger said, “*Sein ist Da-sein* – one creates place.” A key point to understanding the meaning of *Da-sein* is remembering that the question of Being “embraces the foundations of *being-there* [Da-Sein].”<sup>23</sup> *Being-there*, standing next to the forty-year-old Griffin lithography press, surrounded by an atelier of artists, I understood what it means to begin asking the question of Being, my own origin and purpose.

The imagery created during this year of endeavors began to morph and change with this new sense of place. Moving from the organic, fluid lines of my intaglio prints, I stepped into a more direct free way of making marks with intent and chance fully embraced. I began a new way of making as a printmaker by treating my creative flow like a puzzle. The prints would begin with one stone matrix, a set of stream-of-consciousness marks placed upon that stone, processed and printed eight or more times. Following that series of eight, two more stones were prepared with autonomous mark-making and then processed and printed on top of the unrelated original eight prints. Once these images were collaged and merged together, there was an antagonism in many of the images, as well as harmonious unity within a few. This way of working began to feel more fluid and natural as each image was created.

The prints in this extensive series, each concealed and revealed certain individual characteristics. Because each layer was created in an autonomous fashion, there would often be an opposition within the image that would evoke curiosity and frustration. This would force adaptation on my part to find new ideas to progress forward. I made more than one hundred twenty individual lithographs, all rotated through these various stones. An intentional and curious element that I used within the lithographs was the direct application of the circle and the strong bold vertical. Reflecting all I had learned from studying the paintings and writings of Barnett Newman, I implemented vertices into my prints out of curiosity. Reading Newman's own words and critical writing that analyze his paintings, I now began to understand Newman's intention and purpose. Harold Rosenberg once wrote on these paintings that, "... [The] isolated vertical stands for the self and for the first, for the conferring of many and the origin."<sup>24</sup> These words harkened back to my own curiosities. I longed to know more of what Barnett Newman's thinking was when he made such simple yet complex paintings. I wanted to visually understand

how these ideas might play within the context of my own artwork. I believe that Newman was after something that a majority of artists are, to reconcile ourselves to the mystery of our own existence; the “why” and “how” questions of consciousness. An artist’s answer might only offer up what they know as the most genuine form of truth, to create in return.

I offered an explosion of creation as well to examine the “why” and “how” of my own existence. This was exemplified through the drastic use of varying colors. I had never given color a chance within my work until this period of working with lithography. I was able to explore the potential and power of honest abstraction through a large scale varied edition of prints. Printing more than one hundred twenty unique prints during my pilgrimage allowed for the work to better reveal something poetic. I was able to find visual metaphor in them and open myself up to the idea of the vast possibilities exploring abstract imagery. The fact that my prints now dealt with chance and the experience of randomness was new to me. Soon came the realization that probability and not knowing of how and when and where things are going to work, is crucial to the success of many of my images.

Through the construction and deconstruction of these lithographs I began to evaluate the visual harmony and conflict within the work. The print, *Readiness-to-Hand IV*, is a lithograph that I felt harkened to my investigation of Heidegger’s *Between*. (Fig.2) Heidegger was influenced by the poetics of Holderlin. Through the reading of Holderlin, Heidegger understood the underscored humanity’s rivalry with the divine.<sup>25</sup> In interpreting Holderlin, Heidegger described, “Those who stand between the men and gods endure this ‘*Between*’... [as] the demigods... These pointers are the poets [artist].”<sup>26</sup> As I progressed through the development of these lithographs, it became apparent that the act of printmaking was the *Between* for me. The series continued with the prints, *Semblance* and *Readiness-to-hand VII*, which referred to visual

representations of the idea of the poet presenting a creative work as the enactment of the arbiter of the *Between*. (Fig. 3, 4) Implementing a vertical line (reference to Newman), visual presence was commanded by the symmetry and visual emphasis implied by the vertical mark. Through extensive deconstruction and reassembly of the lithographs, more pieces began to reference curiosities I had regarding my own idea of the *Between*. The use of the circular form within the printed mesh over the lithograph visually referenced an interpretation of the poetical veil inferred by Heidegger's *Between*. The print entitled, *Ex Nihilo* was a progressive step towards a unification between the vertical presence of something within the notion of the *Between*. (Fig. 6) This print was the catalyst understanding how to emphasize the *Between* through the presence of dense black vertices accompanied by the ethereal cosmic colors. This interpretation of the piece points the artist or viewer to ponder, embrace and peer through the *Between*.

Struggling to find unity and a crescendo for the series, I referred back to my original understanding of the *Between* and the veil that exists between the realm of men and the gods. This veil is a part of Heidegger's *Between* and is explained as the boundary which separates the gods and mortals, as well as the locus of their mediation. Lithography had become the locus of mediation for me. There are many aspects of the universe which are veiled from us (to remain a mystery) and presented only as an expansive void. Contemplation of the vastness of the universe was the catalyst for completion of the series. I gravitated back towards the circle being an emphasis and faded the vertices out of the images all together. *Message I* and *Message II*, are prints which project the idea of a concealed form or an ethereal significance peering through the tears of a printed veil (black cheesecloth), whispering a message from another plane. (Fig. 5) Making their existence felt, the prints evoke a true sense of the *Between*, a work which can be viewed as a statement or interpretation of something other-worldly, yet oddly connected to my

conscious existence. It was not the asking of the question; rather, the belief that human beings may partially compensate for the involuntariness and anguish of existence by questioning the meaning of *Being*, where these newest images hold the same expressive abstract forms and marks to create a whole.

### CHAPTER THREE

After a yearlong pilgrimage through lithography, I recognized it was time to take a step back and begin to revisit the original curiosity I had upon arrival as a graduate student. Returning back to the water table with a newly developed understanding of color, shape and space to begin utilizing the NM again. This series was intended to be the next step in an earlier direction which needed to be explored further. After one year of independent research dedicated to creating a more concrete methodology for the NM, I treated each of the new plates differently. Embracing the lessons learned during my year with lithography, I treated these plates as one continuous action of creating and etched in permanence after completion. The current plates are larger in scale and physically demanding. I chose larger scale plates to become more physically equal in size to the matrixes I was working with. This jump in scale was an attempt to diminish the need to control within the method and allow the process to dictate the imagery. Acknowledging the need to let go of control was a fundamental element within the pedagogy of Heidegger and Newman. I realized the success of the series crucially relied on me letting go of control. Loosening my grasp on control began to open new doors of creative opportunity for me.

Before working with large-scale plates full time, I revisited mythic influences with two smaller more manageable plates to generate concept and aesthetic ideas. These two preliminary pieces, entitled *Vision* and *Lamentation* were again the result of again reading mythic. (Fig. 6, 7) The inspiration for the two prints derived from a small excerpt from an ancient text entitled *Corpus Hermeticum*. It is a story of a pupil who longs to learn the creative power of the universe and how consciousness developed in the universe. This excerpt stood out as most pertinent to me:

And thereafter I saw the darkness changing into a watery substance, which was unspeakably tossed about, and gave forth smoke as from fire; and I heard it making an indescribable sound of lamentation; for there was sent forth from it an inarticulate cry.<sup>27</sup>

These pieces resonate with not only a void or absence, but a moment of stillness encompassed by an inarticulate cry. The title, *Lamentation* refers to the poetic cry of the first man which Barnett Newman had described in his writings “The Artists Thinker.” These two smaller pieces, which are presented in a landscape fashion, were interpreted as smaller windows into something more vast. These two prints validated the need to seize an opportunity to begin to create larger works.

The large-scale print which derived from these two smaller works, is entitled *Doubting Thomas*. (Fig. 10) Originally derived from the method used to create *Lamentation*, it is the primary print in the *Void* series. It visually commands attention due to scale and subtlety within the organic lines that fill the large rectangle. When standing in front of this work, there are moments of limbo felt, perhaps pointing to a time prior to the creation of consciousness when dark primordial waters washed across the barren planet. The print has a presence that is contingent on solidarity, apprehension, and a sense of place, but also reliant on its inseparability from, as well as its incommensurability with, the void or Heidegger’s *Nothing*. The *Nothing* is frightening, not only because it stands as utterly distinct from humanity, but also because it represents the state from which humanity emerged and to which it may return, especially if man rescinds his responsibility to contemplate the meaning of *Being*. In this sense, the *Nothing* is not a physical being, yet the Nothing has a certain tenuous reality.<sup>28</sup> The print does not depict empty space, rather a space when viewed, the viewer can sense anxiousness or the absence of meaning. When standing in front of *Doubting Thomas*, the viewer is faced with a challenge between self-awareness and oblivion. (Fig. 10) Our self-awareness is a double-edged sword: once we grasp the meaning of our own existence, we find ourselves alone. There is no relief to the isolation

humanity feels once it discovers its own uniqueness and finds no satisfactory means of explaining it. This work offers up an opportunity to be present in a moment, *being-there*, to see *Nothing* or the *Self*, some-thing will be present. I compare it to being a child witnessing the Catholic mass for the first time. The awe and bewilderment overcame me and I could not help but be astounded by the great mystery presented during the ritual.

When I look at my large-scale void print, I see the accomplishment of something I have been striving towards for nearly seven years. I feel as though I have offered up something that I wanted the world to see and to perhaps validate my own beliefs on the *spirit*. The print provides a place of silence needed to make a distinction between absolute self-awareness and oblivion. I find myself engulfed in the field peering back towards something, an origin perhaps, or confrontation of my own doubts. The expanse of the print provides a place to see the *Self* and to perhaps even contemplate what it means *being-there*. Regardless of my projection onto the art work, it is that certain there is something recognizable both simultaneously present and absent. There is a form, a presence, which cannot be described. It as if something is so near to you yet far away, you cannot understand why or how it is there. There is an unsettling antagonism, an unresolved curiosity and a sense of mystery. Perhaps even a quiet teaching moment or a peering back towards the origin of *Being*. Heidegger once said, "The origin of something is the source of its essence."<sup>29</sup> *Doubting Thomas* offers the viewer a moment to acknowledge where their own awareness is and realize what their own essence is or can become. Giving a vast window into a void or a reflection field to peer into the *Self*, each person experiencing *Doubting Thomas*, so long as an open heart and mind are present, have an opportunity to realize how close their own *Being* may or may not be.

## CONCLUSION

It has never been society that can save mankind, rather, the creative hero—the artist—with a willingness to dive into the primordial depths of the original *Self*, the artist who can strive to mend our *forgetfulness of Being*, inspire awareness of our true sublime nature and atone our consciousness to the original *oneness* of *logos*. Man, the artist, is rarely offered opportunities to take hold of the desire to know all things that “are” in terms of their existence and understanding the essence of their nature. Joseph Campbell said, “... I think we might say that when a situation of phenomenon evokes in us a sense of existence (instead of some reference to the possibility of an assurance of meaning) we have had a metaphysical experience.”<sup>30</sup> This feeling of existence evoked by, viewing a work of art may be trivial or profound. The experience is contingent on the readiness of the one who experiences art. It is through the birthright of the creative act, the same birthright as the first man in existence, I enact *Gelassenheit*, a kind of release, a state of mind wherein I wait, without specifying or anticipating what we are waiting for. During those moments of waiting I am open to the approach of the next step in creating. I shall aim my creativity towards the original essence of *Being* and can continue to reconcile myself to the mystery of my own existence.

## FIGURES



Fig.1 *Integritas, Consonantia, Claritas*, 2015, Multi-Color Intaglio Prints, 36 x 36 inches.

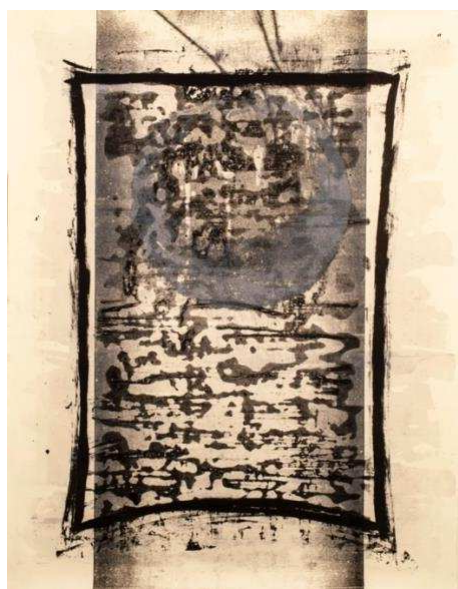


Figure 2: *Readiness-to-Hand IV*, 2016, Color Lithograph. 19 ½ x 25 ½ inches.



Figure 3: *Readiness-to-Hand VII*, 2016, Color Lithograph, 20 x 26 inches.

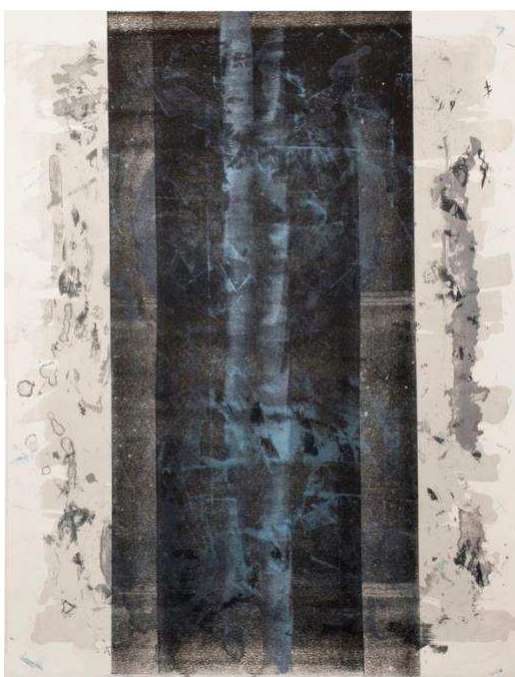


Figure 4: *Semblance*, 2016, Color Lithograph, 20 x 26 inches.



Figure 5: *Ex Nihilo*, 2016, Color Lithograph, 20 x 26 inches.



Figure 6: *Message I*, 2016, Color Lithograph, 20 x 26 inches.



Figure 7: *Message II*, 2016, Color Lithograph, 20 x 26 inches.

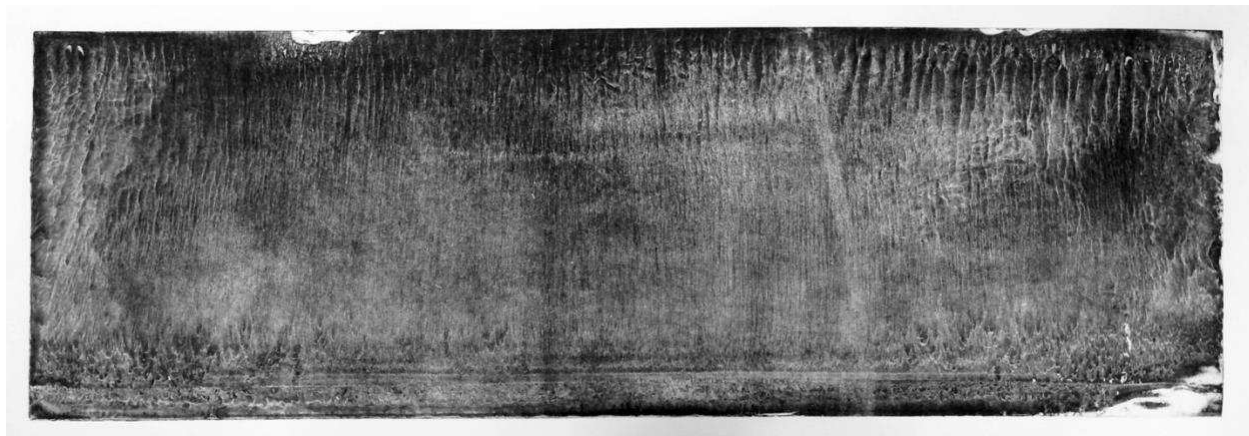


Figure 8: *Lamentation*, 2017, Intaglio Print, 12 x 36 inches.

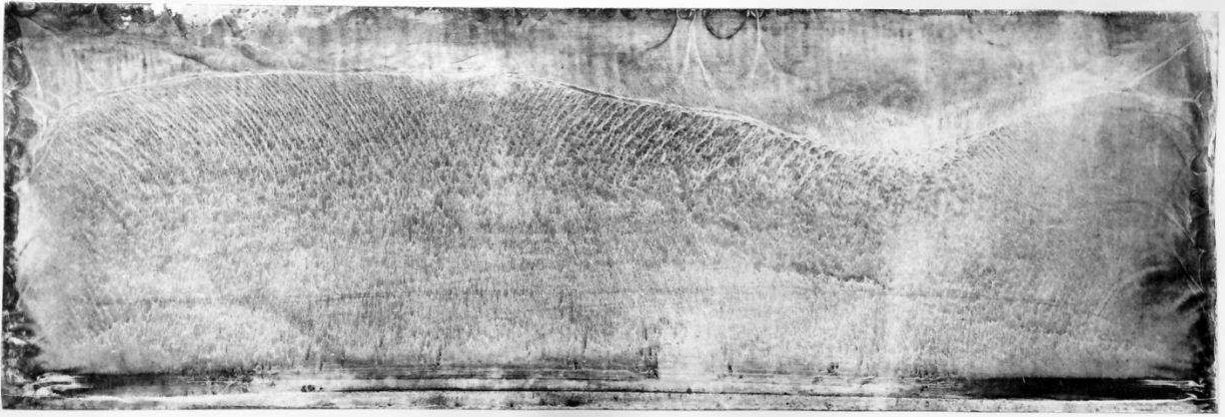


Figure 9: *Vision*, 2017, Intaglio Print, 12 x 36 inches.



Figure 10: *Doubting Thomas*, 2018, Intaglio Print, 36 x 60 inches.

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## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> Claude Cernuschi, Barnett Newman and Heideggerian Philosophy (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press & The Rowman and Little Field Publishing Group, 2012), 87.
- <sup>2</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Man Without Content* (Stanford University Press, 1999), 69.
- <sup>3</sup> Cernuschi, Newman and Heideggerian Philosophy, 11.
- <sup>4</sup> Cernuschi, Newman and Heideggerian Philosophy, 11.
- <sup>5</sup> Ernest Kurtz, *The Spirituality of Imperfection* (New York: Bantam Publishing, 2002), 16.
- <sup>6</sup> Kurtz, *The Spirituality of Imperfection*, 12.
- <sup>7</sup> Kurtz, *The Spirituality of Imperfection*, 12.
- <sup>8</sup> James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Viking Press, 1916), 84.
- <sup>9</sup> James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Viking Press, 1916), 90.
- <sup>10</sup> Joseph Campbell, *The Mythic Dimension: Selected Essays 1959—1987* (HarperCollins, 1997), 134.
- <sup>11</sup> Neill, Barnett Newman: *Selected Writings and Interviews*, 181.
- <sup>12</sup> Neill, Barnett Newman: *Selected Writings and Interviews*, 306.
- <sup>13</sup> Cernuschi, Newman and Heideggerian Philosophy, 29-30.
- <sup>14</sup> Cernuschi, Newman and Heideggerian Philosophy, 223.
- <sup>15</sup> Cernuschi, Newman and Heideggerian Philosophy, 29.
- <sup>16</sup> Cernuschi, Newman and Heideggerian Philosophy, 30.
- <sup>17</sup> Cernuschi, Newman and Heideggerian Philosophy, 31.
- <sup>18</sup> Neill, Barnett Newman: *Selected Writings and Interviews*, 258.
- <sup>19</sup> Cernuschi, Newman and Heideggerian Philosophy, 35-36.
- <sup>20</sup> Cernuschi, Newman and Heideggerian Philosophy, 32.
- <sup>21</sup> Cernuschi, Newman and Heideggerian Philosophy, 42.
- <sup>22</sup> Joseph Campbell, *A Hero With a Thousand Faces* (Pantheon Books, 1949), 13.
- <sup>23</sup> Cernuschi, Newman and Heideggerian Philosophy, 3.
- <sup>24</sup> Cernuschi, Newman and Heideggerian Philosophy, 34.
- <sup>25</sup> Cernuschi, Newman and Heideggerian Philosophy, 244.
- <sup>26</sup> Cernuschi, Newman and Heideggerian Philosophy, 241.
- <sup>27</sup> Sir Walter Scott, *Hermetica: The Ancient Greek and Latin Writings Which Contain Religious or Philosophic Teachings Ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus* (Shambhala Publishing, 1982), 115-117.
- <sup>28</sup> Cernuschi, Newman and Heideggerian Philosophy, 95.
- <sup>29</sup> Cernuschi, Newman and Heideggerian Philosophy, 31.
- <sup>30</sup> Diane K Osbon, *Reflections on the Art of Living: A Joseph Campbell Companion* (HarperCollins, 1991), 246.