The Reflection Of My Barrier

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Bachelor of Fine Arts, SUNY Purchase, 2025

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

SUNY Purchase School of Art and Design

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Bachelor of Fine Arts

SUNY Purchase

May 2025

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There are many forms of life transition, but one of the most significant is the shift from adolescence to adulthood. During this period, an individual's sense of self is shaped not only by internal experiences but also by interactions with the external world. This complex relationship between self-perception and external reflection creates a fluid identity, one that continually evolves as we navigate the challenges and expectations of growing up. In transitional moments such as graduation, starting a new job, or leaving home for the first time, we encounter raw emotions and unfiltered experiences that expose the tension between who we believe we are and how others see us. Adulthood is defined by this unpredictability, unfolding through real-time events and constant adaptation. My project, *The Reflection of My Barrier*, explores this very process of self-discovery as I transition into adulthood. Through observing others, using reflections to look back, and incorporating my car as both a literal and symbolic vehicle for forward movement, I examine how transition impacts identity. The car becomes a barrier, a space of separation that shields me from the outside world while framing how I see it. It serves not only as a mode of physical transition but also as a metaphor for the distance that often exists between the self and perception. This project seeks to express not only the complexity of self-discovery but also the quiet beauty in embracing the chaos, uncertainty, and messiness of becoming.

By photographing myself and fellow citizens in transit, caught in the blur of movement or the stillness between steps, I aim to give voice to the personal and collective experiences that shape who we are. These in between moments, often overlooked, reveal a raw and vulnerable state where identity isn’t fixed but constantly shifting. Whether it's the fatigue of a long day, the anticipation of what's ahead, or the quiet reflection that happens in a pause, these instances hold emotional and psychological weight. Like headlights illuminating a road at night, these images explore how adulthood is navigated in real time, yet often understood only in reflection sometimes through the foggy windshield of memory and distance. They reflect how we navigate our environments, physically and mentally, and how we are shaped by the pace, pressure, and unpredictability of everyday life. Inspired by artists like Friedlander and Winogrand, to capture the unscripted, transient nature of human experience, emphasizing how identity is formed not only by who we are but by where and how we move through the world.


By using black and white photography throughout the whole project, these two black and white photographs explore the tension between how we see ourselves and how others see us. The first image is a self-portrait of my side profile while driving quietly, composed, and in control. The second, taken through my front windshield, shows a blurred, unfocused view of the world ahead, dotted with specks of dirt. The outside scene is unclear, but the imperfections on the glass are sharp and unavoidable.

Together, these images reflect the disconnect between inner identity and external perception. The self-portrait captures how I present myself, what others might see at a glance. The second image suggests the noise and distortion between how I view the world and how the world might view me. Using black and white emphasizes this duality it strips away the distractions of color and invites a focus on contrast, detail, and emotional ambiguity.

Once a photo is shared, it's open to interpretation. Like identity, it becomes shaped by the eyes that view it.The photographer may intend one message, but the audience may read something else, reflecting how individuals are often perceived differently than they perceive themselves. Portraits and street photography, for example, can represent both deeply personal experiences and broader social themes. This reflects how identity is formed individually but also shaped by the external world. Drawing from the medium’s historical role as both mirror and witness, I engage with the emotional complexity of transitional life stages, moments where identity feels most fluid and uncertain. Black and white photography relies heavily on contrast light versus dark. These tonal tensions mirror the emotional and perceptual tensions in self-perception. The absence of color strips the image to its emotional core, reinforcing the psychological depth found in the work of documentary and fine art photographers before me. At a time when digital platforms promote curated, idealized personas, my images reclaim photography as a space for reflection, vulnerability, and truth. In capturing both myself and fellow citizens in motion or stillness. I seek the personal and collective narratives that shape who we are and who we are becoming.

Our sense of self isn't shaped solely by our thoughts or feelings, but also by the way we engage with the world around us. Whether through a literal mirror or our relationships with others, reflection can offer insights into our identity, but it can also reveal how others perceive us and how those perceptions influence our sense of self. Often, we understand who we are more clearly in relation to the environment and people around us. A barrier, like being in a car, blocks others from seeing who we truly are inside. The car creates a physical distance, a boundary, preventing people from understanding our emotions or the complexity of our experience. In the car we are seen as machines and the driver sees fellow citizens as obstacles.The images I created explore how identity is shaped by both internal and external forces, and how physical or metaphorical barriers can sometimes obscure our true selves. This tension between self-perception and outside perception, whether as simple as navigating city streets or as complex as moving away from home, is what drives my work.


In the first image, I capture an elderly woman through a diner window, her back turned. Nearby, an older man sits quietly, caught in a moment of routine or rest. There's a sense of distance, both literal and emotional, as if I'm observing time itself slowing down. In contrast, the second image is a close-up of my own eyes, seen through the rearview mirror as I drive a moment of motion, framed by reflection.

Together, these images speak to the ever-shifting nature of identity. Like a car in motion, who we are is shaped by movement by the cities we move to, the routines we fall into, the people we gain or lose, and the way our bodies change over time. The diner feels rooted in the weight of lived experience, while the mirror reflects a self in transit, constantly adjusting to new directions.

These photos form a quiet dialogue between stillness and motion, presence and reflection, reminding me that identity isn't fixed. It's always being rewritten by the roads we choose, and the ones that surprise us.

By photographing myself and fellow citizens even in moments of stillness, waiting for change or recovering from it, our identities continue to shift, quietly and profoundly.

Each shift in our lives echoes past versions of ourselves, making memories and the act of reflecting on those memories are a key element in shaping who we are becoming.

Lee Friedlander, who frequently focused the lens on himself within chaotic and reflective urban environments, once stated,*"I suspect that the real world is richer than my pictures, and that's why I keep photographing. To see what something will look like photographed is a very different thing than seeing it."* That conflict between how we perceive things and what is real, between the experience at hand and the memory recorded, highlights the unique beauty of capturing life in transition. Friedlander's images emphasize the turmoil of the outside world frequently clashes with our inner feelings. Through his perspective, we're encouraged not merely to watch, but to interrogate the essence of reality itself, how we perceive the world and how it is ultimately shaped by the camera. This tension is strongly connected with my own work, where I aim to capture temporary moments that are both individual and universal. Similar to Friedlander's self-portraits, I strive to capture the space between the self and its environment, the moments when identity is formed and reformed by the world we explore. By doing this, I aim to uncover the depth of what appears to be ordinary, illustrating that life as it progresses, unforeseen, changing, and yet always significant.

(Lee F.)  

The images I engage with explore how identity is shaped by external forces, our surroundings, relationships, and the perceptions of others. Lee Friedlander's self-portraits challenge the idea of a singular, controlled self-image. Instead of presenting a polished version of the self, his work invites viewers to consider identity as something fragmented and influenced by context. *Self Portrait* becomes an intimate reflection on selfhood, time, and how we relate to the world around us.

In this self-portrait, light from a mirror casts distinct reflections across my face, partially obscuring and revealing me at the same time. The reflection becomes part of

the portrait itself, not just a tool to see, but a symbol of how identity is shaped by our surroundings.

This approach mirrors Lee Friedlander's work, where the self is often fragmented or reflected through everyday environments. Like Friedlander, I'm exploring the idea that who we are isn't just captured in a direct image, but in the way we're mirrored by the spaces and objects around us. The reflected light in this photo doesn't just illuminate, it distorts, shifts, and reshapes, just as external influences shape how we perceive ourselves.Understanding the self, then, becomes a matter of observing how we exist in relation to the spaces and people we interact with.

I view adulthood not as a clear, linear path but as a series of unpredictable moments, transitions, and spontaneous experiences. These instances often feel chaotic or uncertain, but they are integral to the process of becoming. Embracing this lack of control can be liberating, and it highlights how every individual's journey into adulthood is personal and unique.

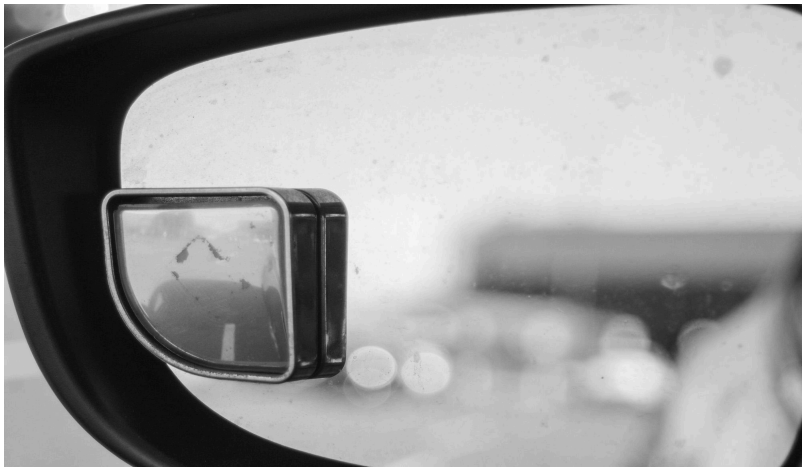
(Garry W.)  

The photo I took of a man jaywalking right in front of my car represents one of those small but jarring moments that disrupt the flow of everyday life. At first, I felt annoyed—he was in my way, throwing off the rhythm of my drive. But looking back, that unexpected interruption feels symbolic. It reminds me that adulthood isn't a smooth, planned-out road; it's filled with spontaneous encounters, unforeseen decisions, and moments that force us to pause, adjust, or even rethink our direction. This image captures the unpredictability that shapes the process of becoming.

Garry Winogrand's *Figments from the Real World* is another key influence on my project. His street photography captures fleeting, unscripted moments that often go unnoticed, yet they reveal deep human complexity. Like Winogrand, I'm interested in the everyday interactions and disruptions that, while seemingly mundane, reflect larger truths about identity, control, and how we navigate a chaotic world.

Winogrand focused on fleeting expressions, social interactions, and real-time events, offering a raw and honest perspective on the world. His work mirrors the unpredictable, unfiltered nature of adulthood. It reminds me that there's beauty and truth in the unplanned, and that documenting these moments can offer comfort and connection for others also navigating the uncertainties of growing up. Often, I find myself witnessing these moments from inside a car, an in between space that becomes both a barrier and a frame. The car shields me from the chaos of the outside world while letting me observe it on my own terms. Through the windows, the world becomes a curated sequence of images. It’s a place where I can reflect without being exposed, where I can feel the way of life without being fully immersed in it.

Learning to accept these interruptions—rather than resist them—has helped me see that there’s unexpected value in the chaos. Sometimes, it's those unplanned moments that offer the most insight into who we are becoming.



Here in the first image, I’m sitting at a red light, watching a man sprint across the street without hesitation ignoring the signal, moving with urgency. Maybe he was late, maybe he just needed to run but whatever the reason, he didn't wait. It felt like a sudden break in the usual flow, and for a moment, I was pulled out of my routine. The second photo shows my car's side-view mirror. The mirror itself is sharp and in focus, but the reflection is blurry, almost unreadable.

Together, these images reflect how I see adulthood not as a neat progression, but a collection of chaotic, unplanned experiences. The running man reminds me that life doesn’t always follow the rules or timelines we expect. The blurry reflection speaks to how the Future is uncertain, most times our own identity can feel the same. But there’s something freeing about that uncertainty. These moments, even when chaotic or

unclear, are what shape us. They remind me that everyone moves at their own pace, and that embracing the unpredictability is part of what makes growing up real.

In my installation, I presented 25 black and white images in a linear format, each in a black frame to establish a consistent visual. The arrangement included a mix of vertical and horizontal compositions, with all vertical images sized at 11x17 inches and horizontals at 22x17 inches. By aligning the long side of the verticals with the short side of the horizontals, I created a sense of visual continuity and structural unity across the series. This sizing choice allowed for a seamless rhythm along the installation line, guiding the viewer's eye from one image to the next despite differences in orientation. The use of the same black frames throughout the installation served not only to unify the images but also to evoke the idea of a barrier. The car functions like a frame structuring our view while also acting as a buffer between us and the world outside. These frames create a boundary around each image, protecting it from the surrounding space while simultaneously focusing the viewer's attention. The consistent monochrome palette further reinforced this project, allowing the content and emotional tone of the images to take lead over variation in format. This careful attention to scale, alignment, and repetition was essential in supporting the conceptual theme of my work particularly the themes of transition, reflection, that run throughout the project.

In Conclusion *The Reflection of My Barrier*, the car becomes more than just a space I occupy, it is a lens through which I observe, reflect, and redefine myself. By using it as both shield and frame, I uncover how identity is shaped in motion, formed as much by what we keep at a distance as by what we let in. This project ultimately reveals that growing up isn't about reaching a fixed version of the self, but about learning to live with flexibility. Embracing the tension between visibility and isolation, control and vulnerability. Through images that capture this quiet in between, I hope to create space for others to reflect on their own transitions and the invisible boundaries they carry. It's in these moments that we begin to understand not just who we are, but who we are becoming.