Left to return to

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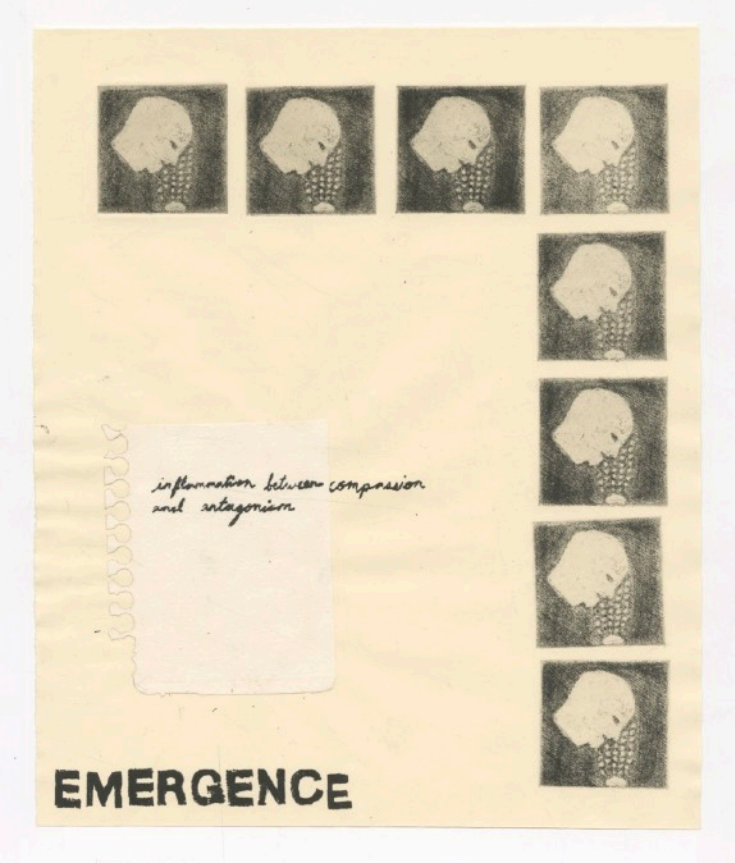
My practice has shifted in the three years since I began my senior project in 2019. In early 2020, the pandemic paused my studies. I am now at an academic residency at the Hochschule für bildende Künste Hamburg, having lived in 7 different places and reflecting on how the conditions of each place have left their mark on my project and worldview. Therefore, to treat, *Left to return to,* as an uninterrupted body of work would be incorrect. However there are thematic and stylistic trails –a fascination with symbols, the grid, materials and reproduction–that follow from one piece to the next.

Safety Signage: *Emergence*

In hospitality there is hostility. When you receive something there is a feeling of indebtedness to the gifter. I am inspired by novelist Philip Roth's memoir, Patrimony, recounting his fathers life, decline, and death from a brain tumor. The book speaks candidly of the abjection of caring for his dying father. The role of the caretaker is often one without gratitude. His father Herman is often obstinate and sulking. I am interested in the moment where compassion and hostility exist simultaneously. Likewise, in Emergence, I utilize converse visual languages–the hand drawn and handmade versus the homogeneous and and massed-produced–to explore these moments of cognitive dissonance.



Emergence, etching with chine collé and screenprint, 10 x12 “, 2022.

My ideas utilize the ubiquity of the printed image and the universality of signage as a way to consider the patterns within interpersonal relationships and what it means to care for another. While simultaneously considering the liability of the workplace and injury. *Emergence* plays with ideas of reproduction, repetition, and difference. Making it, I printed the same 1.5x1.5 inch etched copper plate with a hand-drawn rendering of the “eyewash” guy, in roughly the same

position, 8 times on each print for a final edition of 4. The process of printing was tedious and stressful and, in doing so,I knew I could not achieve exact same-ness in printing each plate or, from print to print, in the edition. It was the difference and uniqueness that each “pass” through the press marked upon the print that became important. The repetitive labor of printing mimicked that of industrial work. I noted that as I continued printing I also became more cavalier and hasty to finish, which is when most workplace accidents happen. The act of producing the print underscored the function of the signage which I had appropriated..

Like you’re alive here, block print with gouache, 16 x 20”, 2020.

Emergence links with my 2020 print, *Like you’re alive here*, as it similarly usurps safety signage, in this case the fluorescent green child shaped signs placed at the edge of driveways in neighborhoods. While this particular sign carries a grim undertone to child's play; how danger, even death lurks in the automobile culture that is an inseparable part of suburban life. *Emergence,* on the other hand, borrows symbolism from emergency eyewash signs you find in many shops, including printmaking studios and speaks to the conditions of adult labor and industry (and working in art spaces). De-contextualized it is less apparent what the figure is doing. Cleansing their eyes? Crying?

Fraught Mesh

For half a year I worked as a screen preparation assistant in a professional print shop. My job was to maintain and prepare 6 - 12 foot screens for printing. It required fast turnover while keeping track of how each master printer liked their specific screens and being careful not to break the outsized and taught matrix. The hyper-masculine environment of the shop included bursts of rage as a normal means of communication. More than once the printers yelled at me

Mesh tapestry I, screenprint mesh, Japanese paper, thread, eyelets, ,mason line, 2022.

for accidentally puncturing their screens when I turned the tight corner from the exposure unit to the sink.

I use mesh from the busted screens, freeing the material of the tension of the frame and the tension of the workplace. Removed from its aluminum frame, screen mesh is airy and uncannily strong. By flipping the matrix into the medium, I toy with self-reflexivity. When describing the varied uses of the term “medium” Daniel Chandler writes, “every representation of experience is subject to the constraints and affordances of the medium involved“ While Chandler is talking about language and semiotics, I apply this, perhaps poetically onto my re-use of the screen printing matrix.

> “the more frequently and fluently a medium is used, the more 'transparent' or 'invisible' to its users it tends to become. For most routine purposes, awareness of a medium may hamper its effectiveness as a means to an end. Indeed, it is typically when the medium acquires transparency that its potential to fulfill its primary function is greatest.” (Chandler)

Mesh is the medium through which screen prints are made. In printmaking’s application as means for reproduction, one goal is to avoid characteristic traces of the process of being printed. To some, the more transparent the medium the better. When the goal of printmaking is

to be invisible, Chandler's notion of awareness hampering its effectiveness rings true. Printmaking is a process for reproduction and an artistic medium. My use of screen mesh in making tapestry is meant to remove it from its function as a reproducer and have it become a unique bit of collage material.


Mesh tapestry II, screenprint mesh, screen tape, thread, eyelets, ,mason line, 2022.

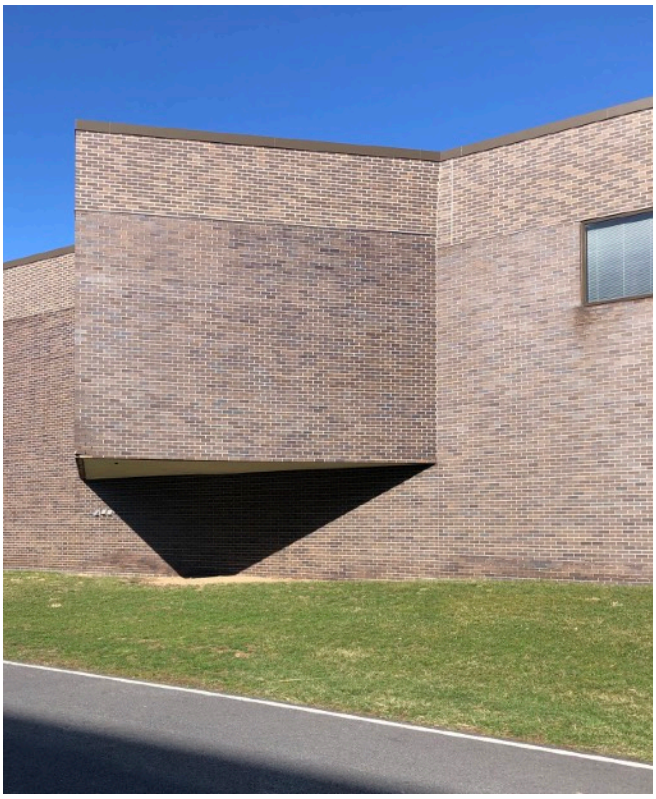
In the pieces *Mesh tapestry I* and *Lantern* I collage the mesh with paper using my sewing machine. To me, textiles are closely related to architecture. I draw lines with thread demarcating the grid thinking about notions of space and structure of the white cube. As described by Brian O'Doherty in, "Inside the White Cube", the surface of white cube gallery spaces are "untouched by time and its vicissitudes". By allowing the fabric to drape and wrinkle I intervene into these rigid structures, embracing the signs of wear. This tension between rigidity and looseness is an echo throughout my work. I like to create a structure and then interrupt it. I see this as related to gender dynamics as well. In work environments I have been made to feel that sensitivity and other traditionally feminine characteristics are a weakness.

In her paper, *Drawing Threads from Sight to Site,* theorist Victoria Mitchell considers relationships between textile and architecture. She touches upon gender politics in differentiating the value of labor in this statement, "the potential of thread as a means of mapping and ordering space relates to that which is also framed through gender, mechanization and mass production, with the meter measure marking an economic relationship between piece-work and paid work." My work pushes against masculinity in art

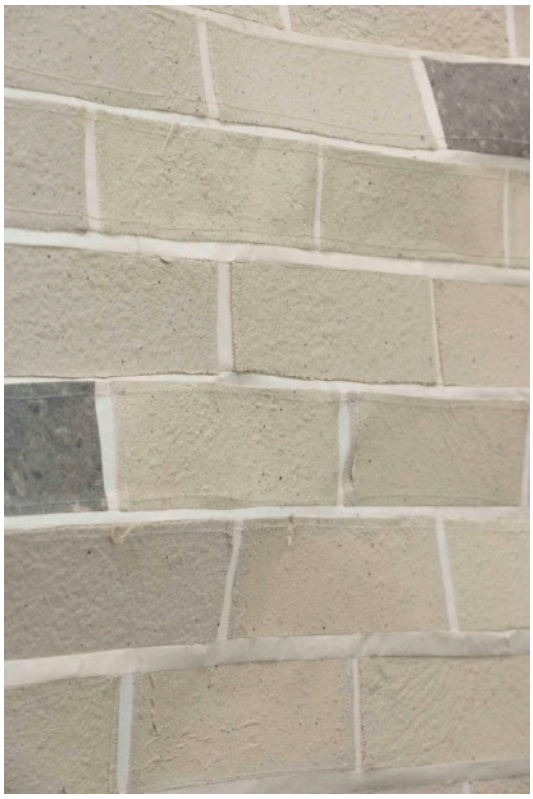
and labor. I look to post minimalist artist Agnes Martin for her sensitivity to composition in space and to Eva Hesse for her transformation of industrial materials.

The Grid: *Bricks*

Shortly before my senior year was interrupted by COVID-19, I made the paper for this piece– *Bricks*. It is created from recycled prints accumulated through years of editioning. Most of the materials I use are recycled and repurposed as I am interested in the history and wear of objects. In this case, I am reincarnating old prints into blank paper for molding, in relief, found bricks.



SUNY Purchase campus.



Bricks (detail), handmade paper, thread, eyelets, 2022.

After two years away, I arrived at Purchase to finish my degree. The campus felt reset, new. Rather than oppressive, as it had once felt, the modernist architecture was an intriguing blank slate. The brick landscape called for artistic inquiry from me. I connected the texture of the paper I had made to that of a brick, juxtaposing the fragility of the paper with the indestructibility

Bricks, handmade paper, eyelets, thread, 2022.

of the brick. When making, I like to push against the limits of the material, here using a sewing machine, a tool for fabric work, to construct the paper object.

Bricks is an ode to a pervasive landscape and a structural product produced first at least 6,000 years ago. Furthermore, it is an exploration of the grid, the copy, and a questioning of the stability of institutions and infrastructure that shape the world we live in. The art critic, Rosalind Krauss says in *Grids*, "By virtue of the grid, the given work of art is presented as a mere fragment, a tiny piece arbitrarily cropped from an infinitely larger fabric." The uneven edges of the pieces allude to this definition of the centrifugal grid given by Rosalind Krauss.

The brick is a symbol of industrialism throughout culture. Think about how we now use the term brick and mortar shop to describe the "old" way of commerce versus Amazon, a brand and a giant of Capitalism, as the "new" way. I also think of it as authenticity and foundation; it is an entirely blank object from which to build structures and impose meaning. Or it can be a creative exercise:*50 uses of a brick*.

Sketchbook

A motif in my work is the sketchbook. I have faithfully kept sketchbooks for the past decade and it is a vital and daily part of my practice. My sketchbook is a site of memory, an archive of pen and paper. It is an object I carry to collect paper scraps, stories, information, collaboration and ideas of varying importance. Sometimes I will spend days on a particular page, other times, pages are for notes or aimless scribbles while I sit in class. By using sketchbook pages as jumping off points for my prints I bring importance to things that seem superfluous in my

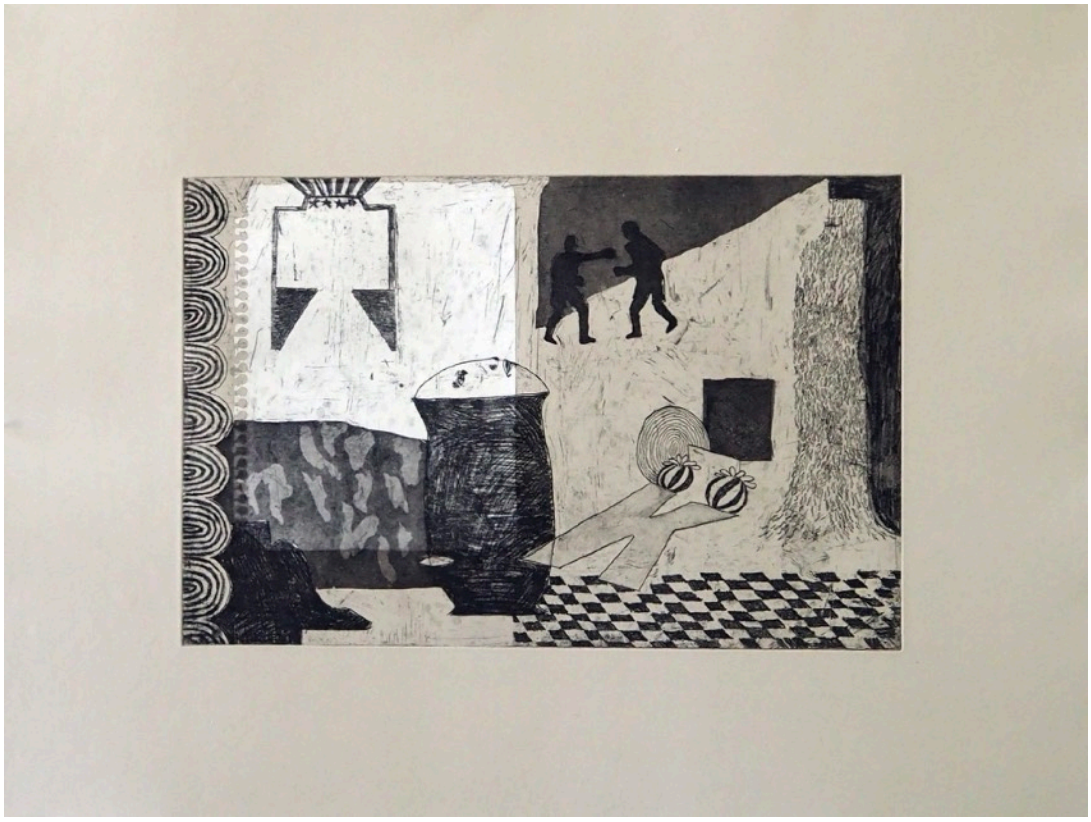
personal catalog. Joan Didion describes the keepers of private notebooks as "…resistant rearrangers of things, anxious malcontents, children afflicted apparently at birth with some presentiment of loss". Later writing, "the point of my keeping a notebook has never been, nor is it now, to have an accurate factual record of what I have been doing or thinking." The moments recorded by the notebook are coincidental, not of greater importance than any other passing thought or image. I have a library of past sketchbooks containing banal bricolage, embarrassing notes, and obsolete feelings. They house the mundane and my vulnerabilities.

Untitled triptych, etching with chine collé, 11 x 15", 2019.

Untitled triptych is a translation of pages from my sketchbook onto the reproducible copper matrix, utilizing chine collé to mimic a price sticker, a loose doodle sandwiched between pages, these etching make the capriciousness of the sketchbook medium intentionally slow and weighty.

Spiral bound, another etching with chine collé*,* is a composition defined by its negative space and the way symbols teeter on the edge of abstraction. Like a daydream, it depicts a place that is not fully described yet contains recognizable forms–an icon of aggression, an empty spectacle, a letter. The tension is between intelligibility and connotation. Embracing etching's particular beauty, the plate tone and surface scuffing is an expressive testament to the process of translating a reverie. The visual objects exist as a fragmentary composition, leaving narrative

to be implied. Notions of memory are inscribed into the copper. Its physicality and purpose contradicts the spontaneity of the drawing.



Spiral bound, etching with chine collé, 22 x 30", 2021

Themes of labor, gender, and power dynamics are prescient to me as I move away from being a student. As a printmaker, these ideas come symbolically and conceptually through the process of making layers, working iteratively, and accomplishing reproduction. But writing now from Hamburg, a monolingual American in Germany, it is hard now to feel grounded. Without the facility of language I rely heavily on symbols to communicate, which has shifted my thinking of signage from a detached artistic fascination to a very practical necessity. And I wonder, how do symbols work beyond language? How far can I abstract them and still convey meaning?

Image List

1. *Emergence*, etching with chine collé and screenprint, 10 x12 “, 2022.
2 *Like you’re alive here,* block print with gouache, 16 x 20”, 2020.
3. *Mesh tapestry I,* screenprint mesh, Japanese paper, thread, eyelets, ,mason line, 2022.
4. *Mesh tapestry II,* screenprint mesh, screen tape, thread, eyelets, mason line.
5. SUNY Purchase campus, photo by Elizabeth Kaiser 2022
6. Bricks (detail), handmade paper, thread, eyelets, mason line, 2022.
7. Bricks,handmade paper, thread, eyelets, mason line, 2022.
8. Untitled Triptych etching with chine collé, 11 x15”, 2019.
9. Spiral Bound etching with collé, 22 x 30” 2021.

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