

JUSTIFICATION OF AN EXPERIENCE

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Approved:

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Date

*The self is not something ready-made, but something in continuous formation through choice of action.*

- John Dewey

Prior to 2009, I had left behind a personal passion for drawing and painting for the public service of educating teens with social and economic disadvantages. After four years of teaching high school in the Bronx, NY and receiving tenure, I experienced a quarter-life crisis. Though I stood daily as a leader and example to young adults, convincing them to believe in themselves and to achieve goals of their own choosing, I realized why I was teaching: I had doubted my own abilities as an artist. I made the decision to leave New York and return to school for myself, already over-educated and now unemployed. I decided, in effect, to believe in my own abilities and to achieve the goal of reaching my artistic potential. In the fall of 2009, I began pursuit of the MFA in Painting and Drawing at the University of Georgia.

I partly based the decision to apply to UGA on my experience in its Cortona, Italy Summer Abroad Program, which I attended in 2003 as a college junior at Wellesley College. That summer was the first time in my life I completely devoted my time to making art. I took 4 classes in Cortona. I worked tirelessly everyday, and well into the nights. In the end, I produced the most amount of work of anyone in the program and earned the respect of all of the professors.

Another important factor in my decision was my visit to the campus and Lamar Dodd School of Art. I encountered pleasant, friendly faces and meet many students

who answered questions and expressed willingness to help in my transition to the school. I also liked the new art facilities, large studio spaces, and generous assistantship opportunities. After visiting the school, I felt that I could continue the artwork I had put on hold for over four year: larger than life charcoal drawings.

During my first year in the program, I thought the task was simple: draw. Unfortunately, the transition from selfless-teaching to selfish-art-making was very challenging. I felt guilty about spending my days obsessing about composition, paper size, and medium, when just prior to this I obsessed over how best to help numerous students graduate from high school and pursue their own meaningful college degrees. Other feelings started to fill my mind: that my art was both priceless and worthless until someone directly placed value on my efforts. This drove me to compare new experiences to old ones: the work I did with my former students was similarly priceless and some days, worthless, as well. I soon realized that I had to accept the possibility that I could end up with a storage room full of invaluable pieces of my own art.

At the same time, I had a more difficult time reminding myself that my art could potentially set into motion a positive, lasting impact on its viewers. This was largely due to the fact that many factors had to be decided on prior to the act of actually drawing. Pre-production requires planning and consideration of the parts that would eventually create the whole. And I knew I wanted to go in a different direction that I have done before, that I wanted the scale to be larger and the work to be more forceful. But how? What dimensions exactly? What shape should the drawn space be? How do I build a frame for it all? What should the content be? How should the content and space relate to each other? I spend many hours making decisions for these kinds of questions,

decisions that were solely mine to make, and therefore created anxiety over my work. After years of teaching others how to plan and make decisions, making decisions for my own art process, seemingly for my own benefit, showed me how difficult it is to decide on something so personal. It took a kind of courage that I had to rediscover within myself. I decided that I would have to throw myself into my work, and to take a chance, so that what I end might create visually lasting and positive impressions in the end.

These first efforts at creating graduate level art were presented months later at the Annual Painting and Drawing Open Studios. Perfectly poised, yet obviously unfinished, I presented *Enclosure*, a large-scale charcoal drawing that spanned 3 8x8 foot panels arranged in an open box. It became better known and “The Barn Drawing”. The viewer could walk into the space, and stand surrounded by a charcoal drawing of superimposed architectural elements that, physically and thematically relate to ideas of enclosure. The images merge in correct perspectives at the corners, in order to place the viewer in a certain location within the space. Just as my long-time artistic idol, William Kentridge, embraced the effects of erasure and mistakes that could have gone unseen, I resolve the drawing of *Enclosure* with a more dynamic sense of tangible and transitional than any of my previous work. My hope is that, if outside of the space, a view is drawn into it, and that, if within the space, the viewer gains a sense of stillness and movement. Perhaps Kentridge best explains it: “the imperfect erasures...thicken time as they become a record of thinking in slow motion.” All the time spent collecting images, setting the stage for the drawing, and finally, producing the drawing itself, culminated in an experience that aimed to stop the viewer, then transport and enclose them to a different setting and sense of time and space.

In-process critiques of *Enclosure* centered on questions about when the drawing should be considered complete. Discussions involved topics of photo-realism versus expressionistic mark making, and the use of precision drawing versus obvious erasure marks. Tastes were split between those who wanted to see the drawing more finished, and those who thought the drawing might be too finished, wanting more looseness in line and erasure. For myself, I had never considered the possibility of “not finishing” it. I had always polished my work to the point of near photographic completeness. These critiques allowed me to appreciate and consider using gestural marks as final, finished work for the first time. As a result, I embraced the traces left behind from constant revisions of the Bodega doorframe and floor, among other selected areas that offered varying amounts of structure and form. Yet, there were still sections I knew I needed to push to full realization: the distant barn, the poised violin, the hanging extension cord and shiny colander in the sink. I listened and I edited until finally *Enclosure* felt “complete”.

Interestingly, rarely did anyone question the drawing’s content and intention? The reference images I used were of various enclosures located in different cities, both interior and exterior spaces. Many people, however, thought all of the imagery originated from the interior views of various barns. At first I was disappointed by this discovery. People didn’t know exactly what they were looking. They didn’t understand what I was drawing. However, I quickly applied my own analysis to the situation and realized that, having successfully unified recognizable spaces into a new space, a space that was expected, I had essentially provided viewers with a newly composed barn. The domestic view from a kitchen sink, the interior of the Central Park bridge, the

overhang of a bodega entryway, the interior of the Wellesley College green house and finally the view out from the inside of a lama farm barn, all merged to create one Enclosure that felt natural.

During the summer of my first year, I took an Aesthetics course with Dr. Richard Siegesmund. The course helped me better understand my own process and the artwork that resulted from it. I spent considerable time comparing my efforts to that of William Kentridge, whose charcoal animations have long provided me with inspiration and justification. Kentridge's drawings reflect a constant state of stream of consciousness, constantly stay in the present moment of the development process, and I felt similarly about my own process.

My process of art making begins with a prescribed surface area and a select few images. The way in which the images eventually meld together to form a composition occurs only in the final processes of drawing. As architectural elements align, reflect themselves or mimic each other, the end perspective is discovered. The images may shift again, and again, until there are views that are independent of a viewer's standing height and position before the drawing. Viewers are therefore forced to create their own experience of the work, as they may feel overwhelmed by the material quality of the charcoal or the unsettling unfinished state of the drawing. In the process of drawing and presenting a unique experience, I hope to enact ideas of self-formation and transformation in keeping with Foucault's care of self, which is also reflective of William Kentridge's influence in my work.

Once complete, *Enclosure* was difficult to document as an installation, a spatial experience, and as a drawing. At open studios, *Enclosure* was presented with a

spotlight that shined into the interior space of the 3 panels, set up as 3 sides of a box. The spotlight's effect didn't transfer very well to photo documentation; however, viewers spoke highly of its hypnotic pull into the space. Months later I sought to show *Enclosure* at Chase Street Studios and tried to map out the space for the 24-foot drawing to lay flat against a wall. The studio didn't have the wall space, however, and I again placed the piece in the corner in an open cubic formation. In the end, the cubic formation felt unstable and ill considered as a structure. After the show closed I took a risk and physically removed the drawings off of their wooden panel supports. I abandoned the idea of displaying *Enclosure* as a structure, and in the next hanging, I placed the drawings flat against the wall about a foot off the floor. Viewers now could appreciate the entire drawing without the overwhelming feeling of being trapped in a cube. *Enclosure's* imagery now became more important as people began to question the original's use of space. The work still maintained an element of the experience, though, since the drawing was too large to be seen in its entirety from one standpoint. However, the work now appeared as more of a presentation than an installation. What viewers once described as overwhelming and disorientating now appeared beautiful. I decided to take that juxtaposition of beauty and disorientation into the planning of my next work, a series of paintings.

Prior to starting these paintings, I took a month during the summer break to complete a performance piece. I drew on site in the large storefront window of the Frontier, a local shop in downtown Athens. I wanted to explore ideas of drawing, enclosure, and physical action. I hoped to answer some of the questions often asked about my drawings: How I manage to draw so large and with obvious references to

physicality in the mark making. I drew in the glass-front space for hours during the day while downtown shoppers and workers viewed for varying lengths of time, often with daily, repeat viewers.

The drawing consisted of two women of different ethnicity working in a cafeteria. Some people read a commentary on working class and race into the drawing's intention. Other's simply appreciated the drawing without any consideration of content. These two distinctly different reactions helped me to narrow down my interests as an artist. Although I had previously explored making work that examined race and the working class, I now realized I was more interested in the act of drawing itself, and the experience it created for the viewer in a more universally appealing way. I stepped off my quintessential soapbox and embraced the simplicity of appreciating art for beauty of its process.

My series of flower paintings began shortly after this. My first set of 3 paintings were entitled *Flowers for Me*. They drew on my earlier ideas of larger-than-life, combined spaces, multiple perspectives, and physicality as seen in my charcoal drawings. I had to relearn how to paint, however, and how to paint at this scale. The scale was important to help force the physicality involved in painting at this scale. Making the frames 6 ft x 8 ft for the canvases was a challenge itself. The physical challenge of preparing the canvases for art making felt like it was an essential part of my process as well. I wanted my physical body to take part in the gesture and consequently, aid the viewer in experiencing the painting with their entire body. I allowed my brush strokes to follow the natural arc of my reach. Overall, emphasizing a relationship between body movement, gesture and painting.

In addition, color played a large role in the painting process. I examined clarity of color and the language of mark making with paint. It was a struggle and felt very uncomfortable when compared to the ease and simplicity of drawing with charcoal on paper. Mixing paint to the correct value and hue took a considerable amount of time. In addition I had to adjust the quantity of color I prepared. My color combinations grew increasingly simplified as I learned to maximize my vast collection of paint.

Critiques of the paintings once again brought forth ideas of finish and completeness. People also questioned if the flower paintings were any thing more than just big, pretty paintings. I wanted the third painting in the series, which features a leaf resembling a tongue, to appear more aggressive and the colors less vibrant. The painting became more abstracted as I sought to resolve issues of color, depth of field and perspective. Viewers responded to the painting with a greater emphasis on the experience it generated more so than picturesque pair that preceded it. In general, when viewing *Flower's for Me*, people mainly remarked on the beauty of the colors and the effectiveness of the gestural swoop of leaves and flowers. They looked, unfortunately, in parts and I needed them to see a whole.

As a result, I moved on to even looser and more abstracted paintings. I changed my reference material to blurry photos of flowers in shallow spaces in order to challenge my idea of clarity, form and representational rendering. *Flowers for Som* captured the surface of an ocean shore dominated by seaweed. People loved the marks, color and gesture. But it failed to commit to either abstraction or representation. The same-sized brush strokes revealed my dependency on a single brush. However the manner in which I adapted overlapping color proved a value tool for my next painting.

*Flowers for Som* was followed by *Flowers for Sara*, which depicted orchids hanging over a pool of water from the local Botanical Gardens. People responded to it with a greater emphasis on abstraction and critiques were quick to center on my use of color and form. The flower itself had almost entirely disappeared from the conversation and the painting was no longer pretty or beautiful. I missed the beauty and vibrancy of the earlier paintings, so I set aside all options and again refocused. I wanted shape, color and beauty together.

My final flower painting comes from a photograph taken on a vacation to Hawaii. I also visited my first nephew on this trip. He was born premature at 18 ounces. Yet despite his obvious physical challenges, he remained happy and vibrant. I tried to rely these ideas in painting *Flowers for Ian*. I didn't give myself the luxury of time to refine and revise. Rather, I kept my marks of paint fresh and immediate. I combined line, mark making, and shape with clearer, more vibrant colors.

During this time of focusing primarily on painting, I completed *Stored*, a 10x0 foot charcoal drawing of the inside of a closet from the perspective of someone sitting on the floor, in this case a child. The scale of the drawing intended to force viewers to feel small and overwhelmed. For some, the drawing felt incomplete, while others liked its gestural and energetic qualities. The drawing remained fairly high contrast with nothing really rendered to a polished level. Perhaps I could have possibly pushed the drawing further, but I suddenly grew bored with such a content specific subject: my childhood. It felt too personal and less universally appealing when compared to my current paintings. The closet drawing, which was displayed flat on the wall, somehow appears meek and

ill considered when compared to the more complex imagery of *Enclosure*. I had perhaps over-simplified my content, imagery and mark.

After two years of completing large-scale paintings and drawing, I felt lost. I didn't know if I could continue to justify the scale of my work and the time required to complete each one. I delved into experimenting with photography, smaller drawings and video work, all which were unified in theme. I was obsessed with collections, multiplicity and point of view. I had a few exciting moments during this brief foray, but in the end, I was ashamed to even show the drawings and videos. They didn't feel serious enough and worthy of any more time or effort. Drawing and painting at a small scale felt forced and actually made me feel as though I had regressed in my skill level. They took on the appearance of something I had completed at the high school level. They also did not reflect my natural processes as an artist at this stage in my life. I came to miss the physical act of making art to the point of exhaustion. In short, I quickly abandoned the idea of working small, but I salvaged a select group of photos from the experience. The photos would eventually serve as the starting place for my next (and currently in progress) series, which examines collected items and man-made landscapes.

Of the photos, I liked the repetitiveness of the pallets and tires. I liked the muted colors and natural forms which worked well with the idea of viewing these piles of discarded materials as human-made landscapes. I wanted to continue the success of creating a believable space with two-dimensional images and allowing the viewer to experience the work as previously accomplished by *Enclosure* and the dedicated flower series. I sought to meld beauty and masculinity, as my previous work had been overtly

feminine. I simply yearned for the intense skill involved in rendering various tire treads and capturing the natural, muted tones of the wood pallets.

In my final series I sought to present the argument justifying the difference between a photo and a painting or drawing. In regards to my photos, some have questioned why I cannot accept the idea that a photo is a photo and move on. Others have challenged my need to translate a photo into a painting or drawing. Though I have always believed in the need for my physical hand in the process, I decided to take my photos to a “finished” state and present them as works of art. Printed and framed, the photos appeared sterile to me. They are something to admire, but they do not necessarily invoke an exceptional experience.

Creating the photos, however, help me to form a greater appreciation for the physical act of translating what I see and feel on the surface of a painting or drawing. While editing the photographs was essential, embellishing them with emphasis in flow, movement and drawn gesture, discovering shapes and colors in subtly and boldness, was the importance of the process for me. Tangible and believable, they can create a transformative experience. The resulting paintings, when complete, will offer a deeper engagement for the viewer, in contrast to the quick appreciation of the photos.

In the beginning, William Kentridge greatly impacted my perception of the process of drawing and the use of charcoal as a primary medium. Along the way artist such as Janet Fish and Susan Hauptman heightened my sensitivity to color, value, texture and depth of field. In the end, I have come to a handful of general conclusions about my work. First, I have gathered many useful opinions from others, and now I must listen to artistic instincts, merging the two threads together when appropriate.

Second, I must learn to put more trust into my body, especially for these large-scale works, so that as my eyes may grab hold of what was important, they are more confidently translated into marks of paint, charcoal and erasure. And finally, as an artist, I feel obligated to make objects that yield an experience of time and movement, that engage the view in the process that went into the work's creation.

It is my hope that my work can stand on its own as a reflection of an idea by John Dewey, which have tried to use as a guide amongst many others: "An object is peculiarly and dominantly esthetic, yielding the enjoyment characteristic of esthetic perception, when the factors that determine anything which can be called *an* experience are lifted high above the threshold of perception and are made manifest for their own sake."



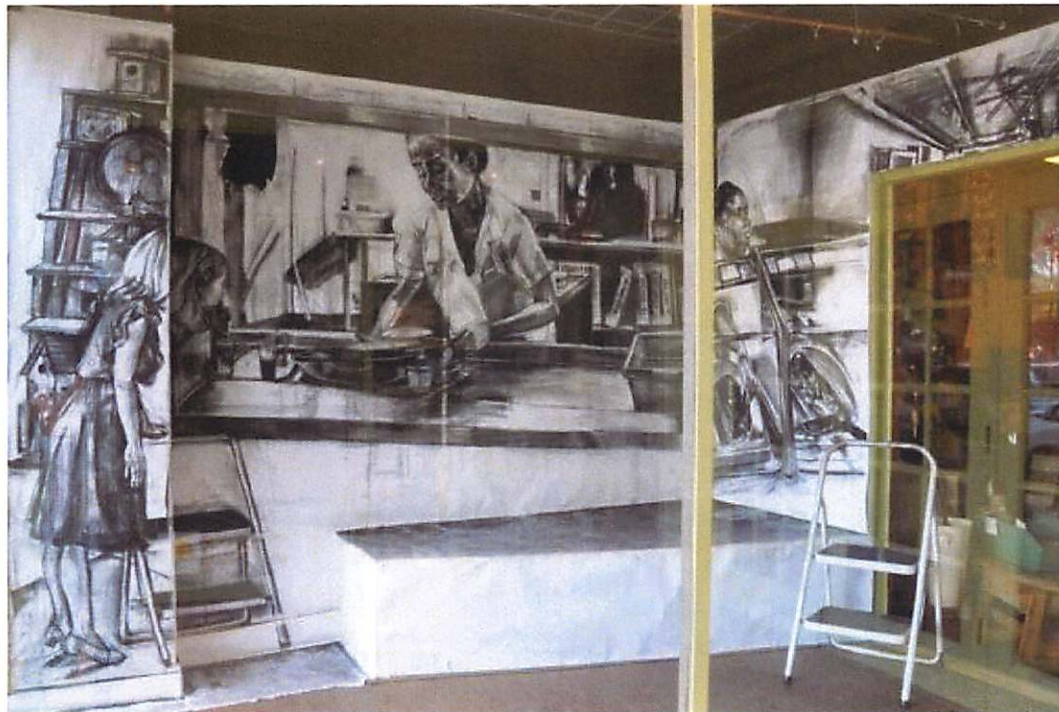
Terence Tirpak. *Enclosure*, front view. 2010. Charcoal on paper mounted on wood. 8' x 24' feet.



Terence Tirpak. *Enclosure*, flat view. 2010. Charcoal on paper mounted on wood. 8' x 24' feet.



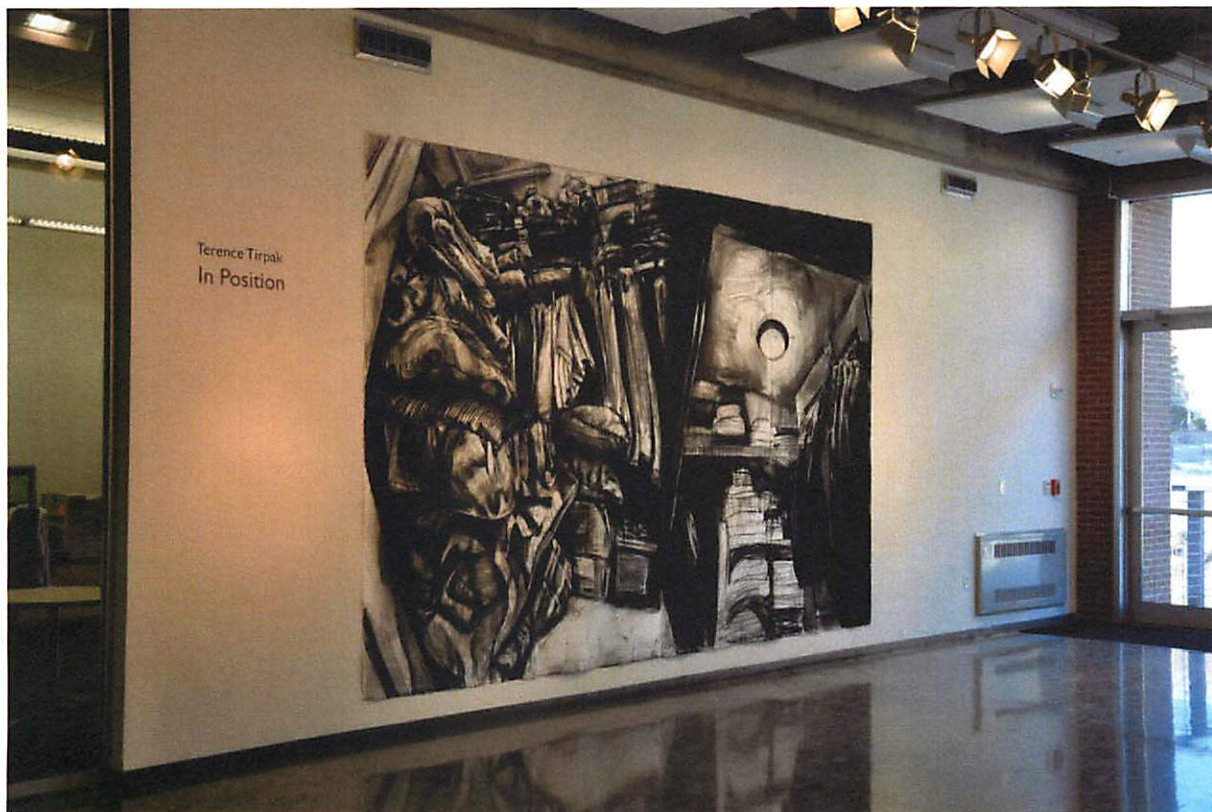
Terence Tirpak. *Enclosure*, flat view. 2010. Charcoal on paper mounted on wood. 8' x 24' feet. Displayed at Lamar Dodd School of Art for 30-hour Review.



Terence Tirpak. *Untitled*. 2010. Charcoal on paper in installed window space. Public drawing.



Terence Tirpak. *Within Reach*. 2010. Oil on canvas. 54" x 48."



Terence Tirpak. *Stored*. 2011. Charcoal on paper. 10' x 10.'



Terence Tirpak. *Flowers for Me*. Oil on canvas. 2 x 8' x 6.'



Terence Tirpak. *Flowers for Me, Three*. Oil on canvas. Installation view.



Terence Tirpak. *Flowers for Me*. Oil on canvas. 8' x 6.'



Terence Tirpak. *Flowers for Som*. Oil on canvas. 6' x 8.'



Terence Tirpak. *Flowers for Sara*. Oil on canvas. 8' x 6.'



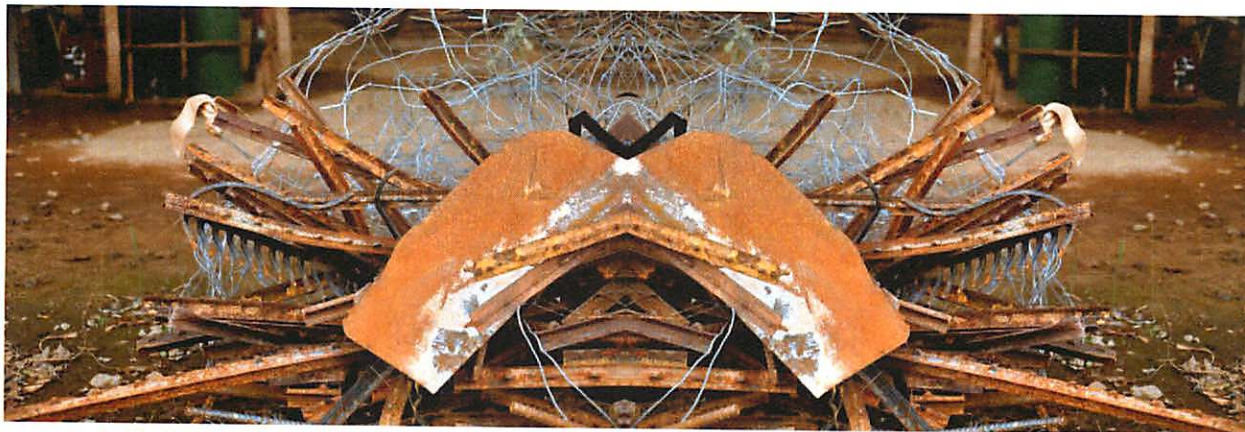
Terence Tirpak. *Flowers for Ian*. Oil on canvas. 6' x 8.'



Terence Tirpak. *Tires*, detail shot. 2012. 4.25' x 19.5.'



Terence Tirpak. *Tires*, detail shot. 2012. 4.25' x 19.5.'



Terence Tirpak, photo reference. 2012.