

OFFERINGS

by

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BFA, Georgia State University, 2010

A Report Submitted to the Lamar Dodd School of Art

of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment

of the

Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

OFFERINGS

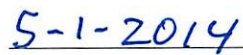
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Approved:

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Date

As an artist, I consider the creative process a quiet reclusive space, providing an alternative to the daily disorder of our rapid and fragmented culture. I believe that observing our surroundings at a slower pace and looking attentively provides a more gratifying experience. Actively seeing heightens our visual sensitivity and leads to discovery. It gives us a greater sense of awareness by satisfying the senses, stimulating our curiosity, and triggering the imagination.

The creative process also provides a platform to consider other possibilities, temporarily allowing us to escape into different moments in time and space. It is a place where observation and imagination unravel together to provide a greater experience of our surroundings. The ability to make believe and imagine through creative acts is one of our human strengths. To drift from the real into the imagined, beyond the material state into a nebulous space simply through our inner thoughts is incredible. I am interested in how we dwell and float between these fluctuating spaces through the creative experience.

This overarching idea directs my work to explore the overlap between tangible and intangible moments in the creative process. I am interested in the moments where intuition, observation, representation, and metaphor mingle in the same space providing a valuable lens into understanding ourselves. Works of art serve as a representation of fleeting moments, experiences, fallacies, and truths all wandering towards and coming from the same place in our minds. I consider this fluctuating area in our internal thoughts as the in-between space where we recognize and connect the material form to what it can embody or signify. I am interested in how art objects are sustained through their potential and rely on our imagination, curiosity, and desire.

Throughout my graduate work, I try to understand what this in-between space encompasses and how to represent it visually. The development of my work explores this central idea where the material, process, and image function as a metaphor for less tangible experiences such as transience and transformation. Through the making process I search for an embedded potential in the work and what it represents beyond its immediate physical state.



Figure 1



Figure 2

In earlier paintings, I was interested in depicting the possibilities of alternate worlds as a way to access the in-between space. By considering the picture plane as a physical window into another space, these works (fig. 1 and fig. 2) visualize fragments of an imaginary world. Imagery taken from the human body, aquatic life, landforms, and outer space becomes hybrid forms in the paintings. Intrigued by the mystery of the natural world, I explore how the accumulation of form, intertwined lines, and intricate patterns lead to a self contained

biomorphic cluster. Swarming with abstract forms, crystalline structures, and tangled marks, these works invite the viewer to look into the hidden places.

I respond to painting as a hybrid field for coexistence and interconnectedness, where intentional and improvised gestures carry equal significance in the construction of the pictorial space. I am drawn to the moments when the actions and consequences of fluid brushstrokes, translucent glazes, and washes of color accumulate into a rich surface. By scraping, incising, and sanding through the masses of texture, I find deep passages, crevices, and valleys to wander through, leaving traces to revisit at a later time. Painting is simply searching through a dense exterior until the space underneath slowly begins to unravel itself to the curious eye.

During this period, I followed the works of Darina Karpov. Her abstract paintings and drawings are a record of movement, bursting with intricacies, figures, and gestures. Her process speaks to the possibilities that thrive when visual hierarchies dissolve, allowing multiple facets of time and space to coexist. Fluid compositions evolve from layers of loose imagery that connect, cluster, and spill into a vague space. I naturally gravitated to her paintings which combine elements of the natural world with bodily masses through the materiality of paint (fig. 3).

In recent artist interviews, she discusses the transient moments that occur in her work. The paintings depict fleshy forms on the verge of transformation, generating, swelling, and



Figure 3

becoming something new.<sup>1</sup> During these instances, the depicted space is activated, becoming a malleable and vibrating substance. She discusses the painting's ability to breathe, which is a peculiar and intriguing observation that continues to influence my work.<sup>2</sup> Her enthusiasm for a sense of touch, where imagery emerges from the physicality of the medium against the surface also encouraged me to consider surface treatment more thoroughly in my work.

In an effort to understand surface texture, their aesthetic properties, and symbolic implications, I fully immersed myself into a period of material investigations in paper and plastic surfaces. Relying less on imagery, my studio practice transitioned into a phase of playful experimentation, observation, and thorough documentation of the process. I began experimenting with acrylic sheets to mimic the mysterious interiors of geodes depicted in earlier paintings. Translucent coats of pouring medium were cured into vibrant sheets. The malleable plastic radiated light and began to cast colorful shadows on the wall blurring the distinction between object and shadow (fig. 4). Hand held forms made with abaca paper and vibrant acrylic films began growing on my studio wall. These studies were a culmination of material investigations and self indulgence. Rooted in biomorphic forms, glowing jewel tones, and wrapped in gold thread, these clusters evolved into ritualized objects and artifacts (fig. 5).

The three dimensional interpretation of the organic forms provided a more gratifying visual experience compared to their illusion in earlier paintings. Texture, material, and color were no longer subverted layers within a constructed space but instead carried a strong physical presence as materialized objects. Recognizing paint as a substance profoundly changed the trajectory of my work by allowing me to see the image, material, and object as one. The

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Frank. Darina Karpov. Bomb Magazine, Jan. 6, 2014, <http://bombmagazine.org/article/4763/darina-karpov>

<sup>2</sup>Zachary Keeting. "Darina Karpov at Pierogi, March 2013" Gorky's Granddaughter video, 4:57. March 14, 2013. <http://www.gorkysgranddaughter.com/2013/03/darina-karpov-at-pierogi-march-2013.html>

transition from two dimensional to three dimensional works evolved out of a necessity for a more immediate interaction with the material. I enjoyed the satisfaction of working on a smaller scale and using my hand to understand the material on a sensorial level. Creating these glossy, iridescent, and intricate forms led me to reconsider the role of my hand and the implications behind the ritual of making (fig. 6).



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6

During this transitional phase, I took an art history course in modern art and spirituality which helped direct my work in its current direction. The class provided a platform to consider the artist as a visionary, who through the act of making can navigate between the parallel realms of the real and the imaginary in an attempt to understand the unknown. I believe this culminating experience is why making art is magical, mysterious, and essential to the human spirit. The following quote by Auguste Mache resonates with my personal beliefs about how we collectively try to understand our surroundings through personified forms,

“Incomprehensible ideas express themselves in comprehensible forms. Comprehensible through our senses as star, thunder, flower, as form. Form is a mystery to us for it is the expression of mysterious powers. Only through it do we sense the secret powers, the “invisible God”. The senses are our bridge between the incomprehensible and comprehensible. To behold

plants and animals is: to perceive its secrets. To hear the thunder: to perceive its secrets. To understand the language of the forms means: to be closer to the secret, to live. To create forms means: to live”.<sup>3</sup>

I am drawn to the moments where the ritualized nature of making art can trigger our collective curiosity for the unknown. As visual thinkers, we rely on physical forms to comprehend the less tangible aspects of our being. The objects that surround us provide a deeper understanding of our universal human desires for the infinite. My interest in this idea stems from how both art objects and spiritual artifacts symbolize our search for unattainable aspirations.



Figure 7

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<sup>3</sup> Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc, eds., *The Blaue Reiter Almanac*. (Boston: MFA Publications, 2005), 85.

Currently, I am referencing memories of Indian shrines, rituals, and ornamentation in my work. I rely on formal qualities such as bilateral symmetry, gold, and light to suggest the spiritual potential of the art object (fig. 7). The shrine is a visually dazzling and mysterious entity. Miniature idols and reproduced photos of deities are displayed inside, each symbolizing aspirations that one seeks. Surrounding the figurines are trinkets, bells, and candles embedded with equal significance. As a physical object, the shrine represents an entry into a different space and becomes a symbol for greater ideas. Additional images that accompany the shrine are powerful depictions of goddesses with daggers, lions, tigers, and snakes. Placed above the doorway, these images are a sign of protection and blessing for those who enter and leave the space.

I am continuously influenced by the ideas surrounding the shrine, as a place where repetition and ritual transform the ordinary into signified objects and moments. I see a close parallel between this relationship and what takes place in the creative act. There is embedded potential inherent in art objects that can emerge in the making process taking it beyond its immediate material state. My belief that art objects are animate and carry an otherworldly presence relates back to the role of the shrine. I am also interested in exploring how works of art, similar to shrines and idols function as unattainable embodiments of human desire. These ideas inform the imagery, processes, and materials that I am interested in and to a great extent influenced the evolution of the thesis project.

My current work investigates the art object as a threshold into the otherworldly. Using cut paper, I explore the ethereal and transient moments that occur when the material and image are on the verge of disappearing, dissolving, and reappearing. I respond to paper as a support-less



Figure 8

substrate which easily shifts between two dimensional and three dimensional representations, simultaneously becoming an image and an object. The inherent qualities of paper, reminiscent of fabric, sensitivity to air and light are points of departure for the next body of work.

In *Paper Study 1*, meticulous cuts through the surface transform it from a rectangle sheet into an undulating sculptural form (fig. 8). The repetitive act leads to the absence of form and the fluidity of color. This piece seeks a balance between the presence and absence of the paper and how gravity affects the

illusion of volume and weight. These transitions, dualities, and relationships develop into themes in later works.

During this time, I also took a papermaking course and attended a workshop at Penland School of Arts and Crafts to further investigate the possibilities of paper in my work. I was introduced to Kozo-shi, a strong translucent paper that absorbs fiber reactive dye. Hand dyeing paper helped me move away from digital imagery and allowed color to take on a more significant role in the work. I was able to incorporate sheen and luminosity into the paper's surface by coating it with polyacrylic and gloss medium. These surface treatments transformed

the paper into a bioluminescent plastic film similar to the polymer sheets from earlier experiments. This extensive period of material explorations with paper and plastic surfaces was an opportunity to isolate visual elements that I was increasingly interested in such as translucency, air, luminosity, vibration, and spatial ambiguity (fig. 9).



Figure 9

Recent images rely on two methods of working with paper which combine rhythm, repetition, and ritual into the making process. I begin by hand dyeing and bleaching large sheets of kozo- shi with a limited color palette. Using analogous colors, I consider how the placement of specific hues can disappear, advance, recede, and reappear on the surface. Washes of bleach interrupt the subtle gradient to create spontaneous fleeting effects that finalize the color composition. This interruption multiplies as the sheets are repetitively cut through the center to dissolve into vibrations of color. The forms evolve from the balance between the gestural rhythm of dyeing paper and the controlled repetition of cutting paper (fig. 10).

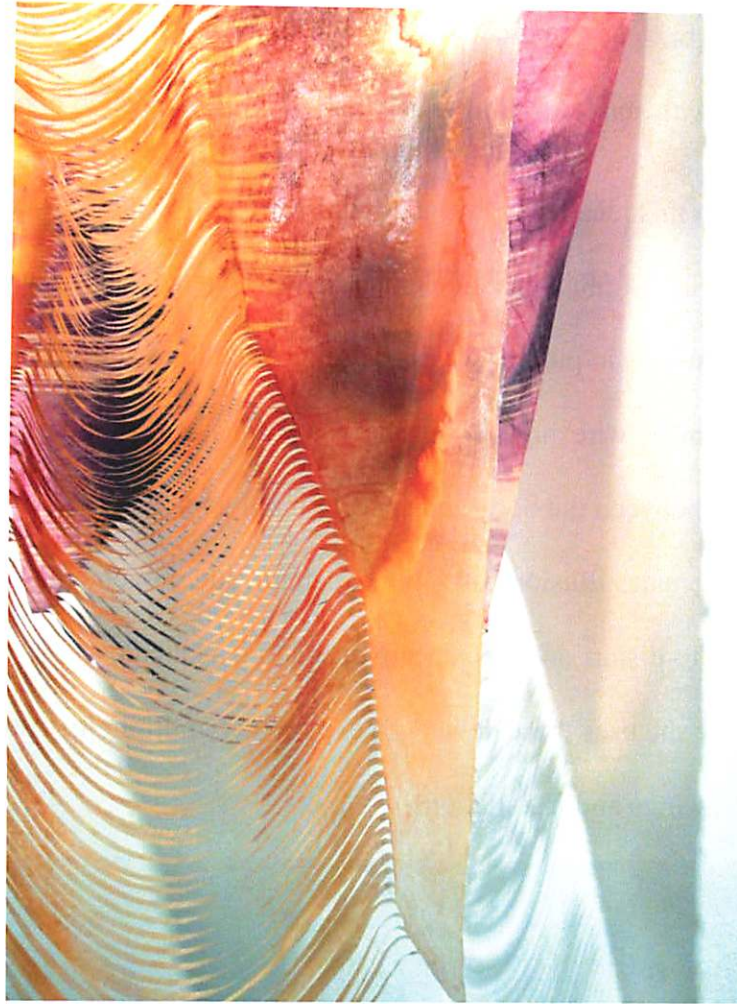


Figure 10

I am interested in the process of cutting because it brings out several dualities that inform the themes surrounding the work. The act of cutting, though simple, repetitive, and ritualistic is the foundation of the paper pieces, bringing attention to the exchange between opposites. Cutting is a direct act that permanently alters the body of the paper, yet it leads to a delicate subtle form. The sliced paper shows how each individual strand holds the sculptural form together referencing the need for symmetry and balance in the work. Using this permanent process, I find the temporary moments that occur when one sheet is placed in front of another. Aligned with moiré patterns, the superimposed strands of color create a sequence of vibrations that play with our perception of spatial ambiguity. Through cutting, the paper is transformed into a place for

exchange between light, space, and color. There is a union of stillness with movement, absence with presence, light with shadow, all of which play into the embedded potential of the piece.

My interest in this idea led to researching the works of contemporary sculptor, Alyson Shotz. Her investigation of fundamental elements such as light, gravity, and space informs the installations she constructs in public spaces. Through repetition and scale, accumulated materials such as mirrors, wire, and acrylic sheets are transformed into optical structures that push the boundaries between the body and space. Employing geometry, light, and reflection as linear elements, she creates illusions of volume, pattern, and movement (fig.11). Her work uses fragmented surfaces to distort one's perspective, creating a kaleidoscopic view of real space. I am interested in how she uses these devices to explore the multiplicity of the viewing experience in her sculptural drawings and installations.

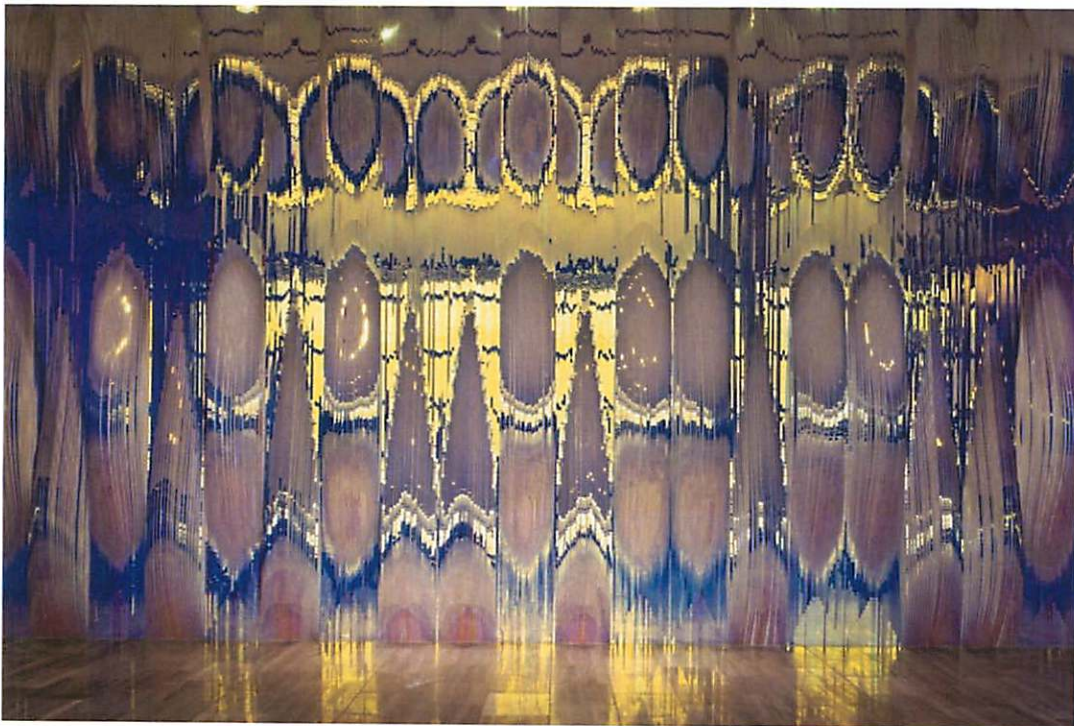


Figure 11

Continuing into my final semester, I worked with the paper in various sizes to observe how the shift in scale influences the nuances in color, movement, and form. Consequently, the paper's relationship to the space and the viewer's body is of greater concern in current works. Suspended in the corner of the room, the human scaled form suggests portals, barriers, and openings into another space. The lightness, fragility, and translucency of the paper take on new meaning in relation to the viewer's body. The paper's form uses the body as a vehicle to elaborate on the imbedded potential of the art object. It questions if intangible ideas such as thresholds, transience, impermanence, and embodiment can be actualized through the formal qualities inherent to the paper sculpture. Through simplified form, color, and material, the paper sculpture offers a quiet moment for observation, awaiting an exchange with the viewer.

The thesis installation consists of two large scale paper sculptures that rest in the corners of the gallery space. Subtle halos of ruby red and deep turquoise radiate from the center of the forms inviting the viewer to come closer to the ambiguous surface (fig. 12 and fig. 13). An artificial hybrid between paper, fabric, and plastic, the translucent film is reminiscent of cloth, skin, reptile shedding, and fish scales. The uneven transparency of the material blurs the visibility of what is behind it. The sheen responds to and is activated by external elements such as light. Together, the translucency plays with both sides of the paper reemphasizing the surface as a mediator, filter, and veil within a spatial context.



Figure 12



Figure 13

I am inspired by Mark Rothko's rectangular compositions where expansive vistas of floating color become thresholds into an ambient space. The chromatic fields hold a mysterious presence over the viewer. The subtlest shift in color vibrates through the canvas, awakening the stillness of the painting. There is a simple pleasure in seeing bands of boundless color come together slowly to suggest the infinite. His work brings together pairs of color to meditate on deeper notions of symmetry, silence, fullness, and emptiness.

I chose to rely heavily on color to transform the paper into a mystical state of being. While dyeing the individual sheets of paper, I thought of the inexplicable depths of color, as a

potent and active substance that can potentially evoke an experience in the viewer. On a large scale, the translucent surface and rich colors carry a sensation that suggests an otherworldly dreamlike state surrounding the pieces. In *Offerings I*, rich hues of fuchsia and deep orange pulsate through the form, suggesting the bodily nature of the sculpture. In the companion piece, the quiet blending of turquoise and transparent mint green offers a calm stillness to the expansive body of the paper (fig. 14). In both works, the simultaneous planes of color disperse into space as light casts colorful shadows on the wall. It exists in a state of flux as a means to visualize spatial depth and reference the infiniteness associated with color as a singular element (fig. 15).



Figure 14



Figure 15

Both pieces use color as a primary stimulus for the viewer to investigate the sculptural form of the cut paper. Two sheets of paper are layered together to create an undulating hollow form, where vibrations of color reveal and conceal the surrounding space. The empty space between the convex and concave sheet where strands of colors cross paths at various degrees is the most active area within the form. The distinction between the individual sheets begins to diminish as colors collide, reappear, and

dissolve into thin air. The space between each strand continues the vibrating sensation past the physical boundaries of the paper, bringing the viewer's attention to the cast shadow on the wall.

The corner wall allows the paper to occupy its own separate space and plays an integral part in the entirety of the piece. The point where the two planes of the wall meet becomes a place of spatial ambiguity. On one hand, the blank wall helps the viewer clearly see the subtle cascade of lines. As the cast shadows drape from the center of the wall, they falsely give the impression of an expansive and elongated form. The repetition of cast shadows overlapping with paper strands blurs the distinction between the presence and absence of paper creating a spatially ambiguous occurrence. When they accumulate in the center, the simple draped lines develop into an elaborate pattern. Multiple layers of visual nuances take place between the sheets and the flat planes of the white wall to create a dimensional after image of the cut paper (fig. 15).

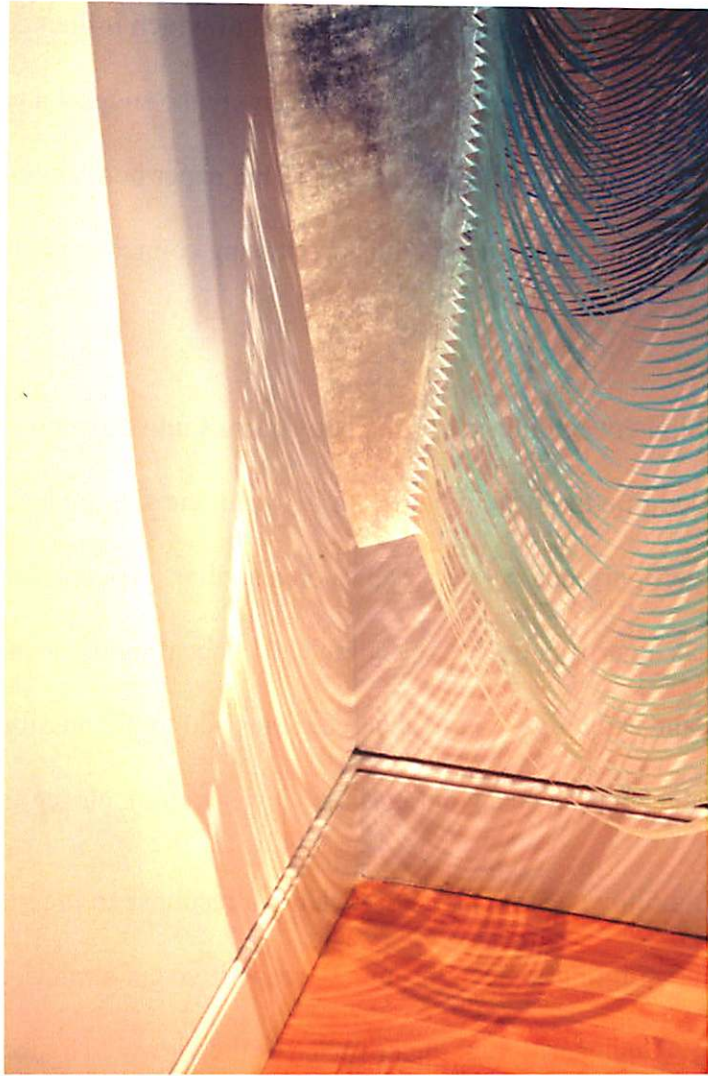


Figure 16

Slow observation of these temporary occurrences between light, color, and space depends on the viewer's body in relation to the body of the paper. Placed in the corner of the room, the viewer is encouraged to look closer to discover these moments. The potential of the work begins to surface as the subtle sway of the paper invites one to look further into the hollow space. Oscillating between the decorative, sacred, object, space, presence and absence, these forms become illusive embodiments of desire.

The installation uses the body as a metaphor to encourage an exchange between the viewer and the art object. From the beginning, the lightness, transparency, and warm tone of the

paper alludes to air, fragility, body, skin, and veiling, all of which influence the formation of the sculptures. The hanging of the paper and the draped center also suggest a recognizable figurative form. Both pieces convey a universal presence, where the paper body, symmetrical form, and viewer's body share a common thread, and thus preexisting connections begin to unravel through closer observation.

The relationship between fabric and the body carries into the viewing experience extensively. Acknowledging the way Indian cloth is worn; one single piece draping, undulating, and swaying across the figure, the cut paper takes on a similar form and falls like a garment. The way fabric functions as an artificial skin, revealing and concealing the form underneath is alluring, mysterious, and seductive. These characteristics add to the possibilities surrounding the pieces while the translucent surface encourages the viewer to look closer and touch.

The paper as a hollow vessel begins to breathe in response to the viewer's movement, suggesting fullness and emptiness. Seen through the repetitive cut strands, the material body of the paper dissolves into an apparition in the presence of the viewer. The form of the paper instantaneously comes into being and disappears during the subtlest shift in viewer's position. In these fleeting instances, the sculptures offer a quiet moment for observation, bringing forth the body's connection to states of transience and impermanence (fig. 16).



Figure 17

Thus far in the discussion, there have been various instances where shadows and vibrations function as illusive formal qualities in the pieces. These parts makeup the totality of the forms and engage with the viewer's curiosity towards it. Moments of fluctuating uncertainty and a desire to look into the empty space reference the overarching theme of the

void and the unattainable. The pieces rely on the materiality of the paper to suggest the immaterial moments that present themselves in the experience of looking. Ideas surrounding transience, thresholds, embodiment and impermanence are part of a greater parallel relationship between the physical body and the spiritual body which quietly surfaces during the exchange between the art object and the viewer.

I am interested in the moments where by the act of looking inwards, the viewer's body is in dialog with the body of the paper in terms of movement and visibility. In these instances, subtle gradients of color become fleeting moments that breathe, change, and drifting away. Bound by our material bodies, we share a collective yearning for experiences of the infinite and the impermanent. My work is suggestive of these desires and the sheer satisfaction of looking for these possibilities, however real or imaginary they may appear to be in our daily encounters. By presenting these ephemeral moments through the artificial plasticity of the material, the forms align with the broader idea that art objects provide a surrogate connection for the viewer.

Working solely with kozo-shi paper, the simplicity of the installation communicates these ideas while showing the intricate relationship between the material, form, and space. As a visual artist, I work within the boundaries of the material to understand and value the simplest discoveries that can lead to greater possibilities in the creative process. By limiting myself to specific materials and processes, I extract formal qualities that evolve into perceptual phenomenon relying on light, color, and shadow.

The culmination of my work dissects the individual parts to understand the indefinite nature of the whole. Responding to the inherent materiality of the kozo-shi paper leads to finding deeper potentials and connections that preexist in the form. Investigating these qualities leads to hybrid forms that draw from the aesthetics of the body, fabric, painting, and

sculpture. The endless search for mystery and desire in my work ultimately originates from the transformative nature of the material and the processes that I engage with. Through the act of making, visual elements are isolated, reconsidered, and put back together to address the continuous dialogue between form and content.

## Image List

Figure 1

*Dwellings IV*, oil on panel, 24x48, 2011

Figure 2

*Red Blister*, oil on panel, 24x24, 2012

Figure 3

Darina Karpov

*Cradle*, oil on canvas, 18x14, 2008

Figure 4

*Swarm*, pouring medium and abaca paper, 2013

Figure 5

Material Study: pouring medium, abaca paper, and thread

Figure 6

Material Study: pouring medium and abaca paper

Figure 7

Material Study: Kozo-shi, thread and oil on panel

Figure 8

Paper Study: Ink-jet print on mulberry paper

Figure 9

Paper Study: Hand-dyed kozo-shi

Figure 10

*Offerings. Vermillion*, hand dyed kozo-shi, 2014

Figure 11

Alyson Shotz

*Standing Wave*, acrylic with dichroic film and velcro  
96" x 354" x 12", 2010

Figure 12-17

Thesis installation

*Offerings I*, hand dyed kozo-shi, 47x72, 2014

*Offerings II*, hand dyed kozo-shi, 47x72, 2014

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