

University of Arkansas, Fayetteville  
**ScholarWorks@UARK**

---

Graduate Theses and Dissertations

---

5-2018

## Subject to Change

Alexis Kurtzman  
*University of Arkansas, Fayetteville*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/etd>



Part of the [Illustration Commons](#), and the [Painting Commons](#)

---

### Citation

Kurtzman, A. (2018). Subject to Change. *Graduate Theses and Dissertations* Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/etd/2798>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@UARK. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UARK. For more information, please contact [uarepos@uark.edu](mailto:uarepos@uark.edu).

Subject to Change

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts in Art

by

Alexis Kurtzman  
Temple University Tyler School of Art  
Bachelor of Fine Arts in Printmaking, 2013

May 2018  
University of Arkansas

This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

---

Sean P. Morrissey, MFA  
Committee Chairman

---

David Charles Chioffi, MA  
Committee Member

---

Kasey Ramirez, MFA  
Committee Member

---

Janine Sytsma, Ph.D.  
Committee Member

## **Abstract**

*Subject to Change* is comprised of a series of self-devised, ritually practiced free-associative action-mark-making strategies. Each procedure explores various degrees of chance operations and seeks to question and explore the roles of intuition, intention, interpretation and human participation. A hybrid of fixed method with variables of the unknown explores and investigates performative mark-making methodologies, in-person and internet collaboration, control and working under pre-fixed intervals. Alongside chance, time-based procedures are concurrently determined to achieve work on paper whose marks are not initially foreseen. This practice of working addresses the disconnect between the maker engaged in active activity of doing versus the relative stagnancy of the resulting end product.

There is a relationship of tension between the realized end product and the formulas which created them in terms of which components possess relevance. Repetitively practiced actions of activity attempt to unite conventional modes of art production with routinely practiced everyday structured studio activity.

Heavily influenced by the scientific method, art-by-instruction and process art, the work aims to capture the conflicting elements of predetermined activity and variables and free-associative mark-making.

The chance operations in the work consist of: the rolling of dice, the blind spinning of dials, the selection from a deck of cards, and solicited participation of people from social media.

Through drawing, printmaking and mixed media, the works possess a strong reference to their materiality and the passage of time as seen through change, evolution or degradation.

©2018 by Alexis Kurtzman  
All Rights Reserved

## **Dedication**

For Louis, Beginning to End

## Table of Contents

Most Recent Analysis (Introduction).....	1
Formulating a Strategy.....	5
The Work of <i>Subject to Change</i> .....	8
From Surrealism to 2018 (Historical Content).....	12
Theory in the Methods (Art as Science, Emergence, time, the Everyday and the Art School Institution).....	17
Current to Future Thoughts.....	21
References.....	22
Appendix (Figures).....	24

## Most Recent Analysis (Introduction)

to satisfy  
a particular Need  
Though having no control  
ovEr  
what happENs  
accepTance  
sometImes  
written Out  
determiNate

- John Cage<sup>1</sup>

In 1951, architect and sculptor Tony Smith took three of his students from Cooper Union onto the unfinished and unopened New Jersey Turnpike. Smith and his students drove throughout the night from Meadows to New Brunswick on the unfinished turnpike. Aside from distant smoke flumes from the stacks of New Jersey's factories, the highway was devoid of lights, railings or anything at all to signal place or location. Smith describes this transformative experience as vital to the incoming development of his studio practice, "There's no way to frame, you just have to experience it...something that had to do with function, the artist as a vessel, creating worlds without tradition."<sup>2</sup> In American art, the mid twentieth century marks a significant transition towards the topic of unfinished or unresolved abstract art work. Artists were exploring process not in the "means to an end" sense, but to emphasize that actual experience of working rather than achieve completion of a polished end product. Since the 1950s, process art has changed and evolved with each decade but the core intention of this genre remains the same: a methodology where chance is inserted towards a product that cannot be entirely initially foreseen.

---

<sup>1</sup> John Cage, *Composition in Retrospect*, (Cambridge, Exchange Press, 1993), 10.

<sup>2</sup> Tony Smith, *Since '45: America and the Making of Contemporary Art*, Reaktion Books Ltd, 2011), 27.

In my graduate school career, my work has transitioned into focusing heavily on highlighting courses of action as my conceptual material. This is not to say that the material realization of all of my concepts was irrelevant. However, I have grown more concerned with a studio practice that revolves around a methodology that is to be carried out over specifically devised periods of time. There have been several problems and concerns raised along the way. How can I present a body of work to an audience that emphasizes both the product and the time-based processes under which I created them? Is the relevance in the work only in its methodology? Why is art practice which carried out through structured methodology important in the 21st century?

Despite my attention to process in the construction of the work, a majority of my studio products (which are predominantly prints, drawings or mixed media works on paper) unsuccessfully attempted to capture the time-based processes I was implementing because the material realizations did not accurately represent the formulaic approach I used to construct them. Each body of work was also frequently being mislabeled as pertaining to other fields of content. More than often, I felt relatively indifferent towards the material realizations I was left with at the end. Nothing in the work was left to chance, which I found problematic because chance and degrees of “unknowns” is an inherent component of process based work. As the maker, I continued to play either too much or too little of an authoritative role in the process and studio product. There was little to no dynamism in the works on paper or physical evidence of a process-based body of work coinciding with the material realizations. What the work needed was the creation of a functional hybrid of chance, action mark-making and method. It needed a method which would result in an end product could not be entirely initially foreseen. It needed a



procedure that emphasized the dynamism of working a specific way, but still remained committed to the realization of a tangible end product.

In addition to process, my recent studio practice has also been heavily influenced by the relationship between contemporary art and science. I have been interested in how both artist and scientist can approach working with a similar methodology; revolving around a procedural method or following a certain set of steps; one or several variables being tested; questions being pursued and an outcome that could not be entirely predicted beforehand. The questions I am asking myself are why and how is this approach of working successful for certain artists whose disciplines frequently crossed paths with adopting a scientific methodology? What were the benefits but also the drawbacks of working with a regimented and rule-based method? Pursuing a body of work that revolves around emphasizing the importance of studio process with the scientific method as the theoretical framework presented a fundamental concern: whether the importance of this work lived only in its ideation or in its material realization.

In 2017, I began investigating action mark-making within my studio practice on my own and also in tandem with the mechanical engineering department at the University of Arkansas. I did this by devising of a series of controlled experiments which would result in unique but non-representational works on paper. These experiments tested a selection of historically traditional printmaking matrices (meaning, the plate, block, stone or screen from which the image is printed<sup>3</sup>) under pre-devised intervals of time: a metal corrosion test, a fractal wood burning test and an interdisciplinary test with the mechanical engineering department's research facility HiDEC, the High Density Electronics Center. Elements of natural and synthetic chance such as weather, temperature, time and electric current would play a critical role in how the marks on the

---

<sup>3</sup> Susan Tallman, *The Contemporary Print: From Pre-Pop to Postmodern*, (Thames and Hudson, 1996), 10-11.

materials would formulate. These experiments embraced the print matrices susceptibility to change. By subjecting these materials to different tests in which certain elements were left out of my control, such as leaving metal plates outside and exposed to the open air, or electrocuting different blocks of wood with 12,000 volts of electricity where I cannot control the direction of the current, the resulting works on paper contained marks which I could not entirely foresee.

The material realizations of this round of experiments felt rather mundane. The usage of manicured (meaning polished and synthetically cut to uniform size and shapes) print matrices lead to a sterile realization. Due to a lack of my authority, a majority of the physically realized work on paper lacked presence of the hand, which made the work feel too detached from its maker. The methodology was successful in that it followed a self-devised deviation of the scientific method of conducting experiments. But, I mislabeled the work as directly addressing the influence of modern science on contemporary art. To emphasize the unpredictable internal landscape of the print matrix, I would need to work with the unmanicured or unprotected form of them. What I had realized by the end of the spring was that my work was not about creating controlled science experiments but creating action-marks with degrees of chance operations at work in the methodology, and formatting those procedures into regimented everyday practice.

## Formulating an Approach

*Subject to Change* would become a large body of work exploring restraints and instructional measurements. It would delve into where the balance lies between activity and passivity, “the difference between things in time and time in things...the former we do right away...as for the latter; later...there’s hardly time to classify and file away, for future abuse, one’s so busy being there and knowing it.”<sup>4</sup> This body of work concentrates around formatting a series of ritually practiced methodologies that would result in a range of varyingly scaled, free-associative works on paper. Jack Richardson and Sydney Walker, professors in Art Education at Ohio State University provide evidence that the art-making process is an event of movement through relationships between all things into a “process-event”. Walker and Richardson proclaim, “The process-event represents a dynamic synthesis of forces that are immanent to the various elements that compose an artwork, and that are activated as a consequence of artist’s and the work’s presence.”<sup>5</sup> *Subject to Change* pays attention to “process-events” that take place within the artmaking practice itself.

John Cage’s visual art making process from the last 1970s-1990s has been the overarching influence on how I have gone about formulating my own procedures of working. He would frequently write about his own work in prose as a mesostic, or a poem within a poem, that indirectly indicated his intentions and thoughts. His continued and honest usage of the *I Ching* algorithm system allowed for degrees of unpredictability in all of his visual art. The *I Ching* is a collective of ancient Chinese divination texts. The divination in the texts produces random sequences of numbers, which were utilized towards cosmological, philosophical, scientific and

---

<sup>4</sup> La Monte Young and Jackson Mac Low, *An Anthology of Chance Operations*, (Heiner Friedrich, 1963), 15.

<sup>5</sup> Jack Richardson and Sydney Walker, “Processing Process: The Event of Making Art”, *Studies in Art Education*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (fall 2011), pp 12.

artistic intentions For my own studio practice, I've devised my own individual divination system. I am focusing on the influence of Cage's approach to constructing visual art that revolved around chance determined methods and "process instead of object":

...divide the work to be done into partS  
and the Time  
Available  
iNto an equal number  
then you Can  
procEed giving equal attention  
to each of the partS<sup>6</sup>

The usage of free-association mark making comes as a response to my dismissal of representation and typical figure/ground relationships on a picture plane because of the growing concern that this approach would define too much of my studio practice (as it has done in the past). The usage of chance could be defined as something of a defense mechanism from my own aesthetic habits, where I would not be prone to draw in any conventional way nor would I place marks in any particular fashion simply because aesthetically I "felt this looked good".<sup>7</sup> For this body of work, success would not be demarcated solely on the formal beauty of the image but by how I would approach finding "freedom in the rules" of each procedure, level of image resolution and visualized implications of passage of time.

A 30-day experiment was crafted in collaboration with a close personal friend. This test, which we agreed to title *Thirty Variations on a Print*, would determine how I/we would operate using our own chance operations and respond to the mechanics of free-association mark making. This friend played the role of critical role of chance, in which I would relinquish a certain authority to her to make decisions for me in order for me. We pre-devised certain requirements

---

<sup>6</sup> Cage, *Composition*, Exact Change, 32.

<sup>7</sup> Kathan Brown, *VISUAL ART: To Sober and Quiet the Mind* (San Francisco: Crown Point Press, 2000), 65.

of our collaboration: for each of the 30 days, I would construct a 19 x 25'' print upon three specifications that she would provide. She would have to delineate the type of print media (woodcut, monoprint, etching, etc.), the materials used to construct the image and the amount of time I could have to construct the image.

Upon completion, I was left with 30 unique works on paper, but only six of them could I establish as resolved. The six prints possessed three qualifications which I used to calculate their success: strong reference to their specific materiality, the same time intervals spent doing image construction (20 minutes up to two hours) and usage of formal space. What remained unsuccessful was collaborating with someone who understands me too personally. We fell into trends of complacency with her daily print prompts in that she assigned me tasks she knew I would be comfortable with doing. The chance operation became predictable.

The successful components of *Thirty Variations* lead to the structuring of various formats for my forthcoming studio projects: the same six materials (or a selection of such) and six time intervals for each of the future series I would produce. Each piece or series follows a system I intuitively devised: there are one or several devices of chance, there is a resulting work on paper which communicate ambiguous configurations and there is active usage of drawing and printmaking materials. The existing titles of each series are as follows: *Changes and Disappearances*, *Variations In Between*, *Beginning to End*, *A Do-It Revised I and II* and *Untitled*.

## The Work of *Subject to Change*

*Subject to Change* attempts to unite a few key strategies: projects involving producing end products and corresponding records of the evolution of these products through photographic process documentation, verbal log sheets, chance devices and logbooks. Daily practiced studio activity under certain time intervals is a critical feature of the work; in that this space of doing and thinking under a stopwatch highlights everyday activity and passage of time. I have placed my actions and myself in a certain role in relation to these end products. This methodology is an entirely invented practice. My procedures are the creation of everydayness. Information about my methodologies would presented to an audience at the time of the exhibition in the form of a small zine.

*Changes and Disappearances* is named after John Cage's series of etchings, drypoints and engravings from Crown Point Press in 1980<sup>8</sup>. After deciding upon a consistent size of paper, he would work with the Iching as his guiding principle, "lines were drawn and colors specified, when the plates were set on the press bed, a line would fall outside the paper borders. Cage called this a disappearance. Nevertheless, there were many additional appearances, or changes to the composition..."<sup>9</sup>. The piece centers around change, in that will never remain the same for more than a single day. The working revolves around, "...a sequence of thoughts or actions that generally consist in putting oneself (or someone else) into a particular concrete situation...once underway, the project highlights the conditions of the experiment, the rules of the game, the practical steps to be taken."<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Brown, *VISUAL ART: To Sober and Quiet the Mind*, (need to find right page).

<sup>9</sup> Kathan Brown, ed. David Nicholls, *The Cambridge Companion to John Cage* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 110.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Sheringham, extract from "Configuring the Everyday", *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present* (Oxford University Press: 2007), 386-391.

*Changes and Disappearances* closely mirrors the mindset of the American abstract expressionist mindset of questioning the finishing of an artwork. Their rejection of the, “French manner of refined picture-making, with a delicacy of touch and surface detail, ” lead to the new way of thinking that making any art should focus on the actual experience of on-going activity.<sup>11</sup> In my circumstance, resolution of the piece would come with the end of the time frame given to work, not its level of formal completion. To pursue an end product without marks that couldn’t be entirely initially foreseen, two handmade dials will be spun in the beginning of each work session. One dial is for media, the other is for time interval. Whichever option they land upon is the time and material to be used in the session. Some marks will disappear and others will be more permanent depending on the material used. At the end of each work session.

*Variations In Between* is an ongoing collaborative project, which would focus on working with time and outside human participation from strangers on Craigslist as the chance operation. I construct one mixed media work on paper for seven days every consecutive week. Three separate content dice determine a selection of my choices and actions: dice one is time interval, dice two is material, and dice three is surface cell of the paper I work within. In nearly thirty major cities across the world, I posted ads asking for additional prompts and suggestions to be included in each weekly mixed media piece. The Craigslist suggestions have me activating modalities of making that are beyond my habitual sphere of conventional creation. The formatting of Craigslist’s network allows for separation between each participant, where they cannot influence or obstruct one another’s participation; thus providing a broader depth of acts of chance to be included in the work. This piece, similar to *Changes and Disappearances*,

---

<sup>11</sup> Seigel, *Since ‘45*, 25.

concentrates on triggering awareness and perception within given periods of time, practiced daily:

One of the defining features of the everyday project is that it neutralizes purpose by displacement from the long-term macro-level, to the short term micro-level, through a proliferation of rules, constraints, provisos and methodological niceties. In most projects the specifications (usually self imposed ordinances) bear on both space (location, itinerary) and time (duration, frequency), as well as on mental and physical ‘acts’ to be performed.<sup>12</sup>

I think of this project in correlation to (of?) On Kawara’s date paintings, which in concept were about preserving the “uniqueness of the moment” of working on something in a specific time and place, a time and place which is otherwise deemed insignificant in calendrical terms.<sup>13</sup> I name each individual drawing anecdotally as if to preserve or secure their positioning in time. I document each work session in the studio (with me in the frame and often out of frame) to clearly implicate the passage of time as seen through the marks made on paper.

*Beginning to End* and *Untitled* share similar formatting in that they both show passage of time through repetitive/disappearing marks on paper. The products are sequential timelines of decay or degradation as seen through a work on paper through the lense of slowly degrading printmaking materials. With *Untitled*, I print from a screen (with no image) over and over across a scroll of paper until the screen is fully clogged with ink. The chance operation in the methodology is a handmade deck of cards. The cards determine the length of time I’m to push ink through the screen. *Beginning to End* follows the slow decaying of an amorphous form of copper wire which I place in a vat of acid before each work session. The amount of time the copper sits in the acid bath mirrors the intervals of time under which patients undergo traditional chemotherapy treatment for small cell carcinoma: three to four hours a session, for one to three

---

<sup>12</sup> Michael Sheringham, extract from “Configuring the Everyday”, *Everyday Life...* (Oxford University Press: 2007), 386-391

<sup>13</sup> Kathryn Chiong, “Kawara on Kawara”, *October*, Vol. 90 (Autumn, 1999), 2.



days at a time. The chance operation is the initially unknown amount of time this would take until the copper form would deteriorate entirely.

## From Surrealism to 2018

Conventionally inscribed methods of drawing, printmaking and mixed media have a long history of being closely tied to the genre of performance-based media. Connie Butler, Chief Curator of Drawings for the Robert Lehman Foundation at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, comments on the relationship between performance and conventional art-making from a survey exhibition at MoMA in 2007, “Live/Work: Performance into Drawing” :

Drawing, with its long history rooted in material permanence and its status as a private and often preparatory activity, may seem at odds with performance art. Yet drawing has been used by artists engaged with performance just as it has by painters and sculptors, to record their actions and for the mapping and preparation of those actions. The deployment of unorthodox materials and approaches to the two-dimensional surface, often involving an intensely physical interaction, has in many cases rendered drawing an action in itself<sup>14</sup>

In the 1950s, Jackson Pollock’s bodily engagement with paint and canvas becomes a performance in itself. A decade later, William Anastasi produced *Untitled (Pocket Drawings)* by placing folded paper into his pants pockets with a small pencil pressed up against it. While unable to observe the marks being made, the pencil would create marks with every step. He would repeat this process over and over. The scope of action mark-making in the 21st century has broadened dramatically, with a range of artists using materials far beyond paper to convey form and meaning.

The beginning of this historical, overlapping and somewhat bizarre trajectory of the birth of free-associative action work and process art begins in the 1930s with the cunning and ever-deceptive Marcel Duchamp and the development of Surrealism, the Avant-Garde and conceptual art. Surrealism and conceptual art, “picks up from the antiart, antiskill, antiobject aspect of the

---

<sup>14</sup> Department of Communications, The Museum of Modern Art. *MoMA Exhibition Explores Performance and Drawing Through Works in the Collection*, 2007. [https://www.moma.org/documents/moma\\_press-release\\_387120.pdf](https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_press-release_387120.pdf)

Dadaist nonphilosophy. As implied by their name, conceptual artists emphasize their thoughts over their skill in manipulating materials. Decision making is stressed as the central activity to their art...”<sup>15</sup> Surrealists (Dadaists as well) generated the term and active usage of Automatism. Automatism is defined in several ways, but a definition of the practice is best defined as, “a means to stimulate the imagination and a starting point from which to reach images that are consciously reworked in a subsequently moment.”<sup>16</sup>

Duchamp’s usage of chance is drawn back as far as 1913 with his *Three Standard Stoppages*, where he would drop meter-long strands of string onto a canvas to generate new units of length and creation, a tactic to be implicitly employed nearly 80 years later by highly influential action and visual artist John Cage. In 1917 Duchamp arranged an exhibition of the some of the earliest work that was a result of chance procedures in New York for the Society of Independent Artists. He directed all of the pieces in the show to be arranged alphabetically by artist last name.<sup>17</sup> The critical interpretation of *Stoppages* was seen as a pseudo-experiment; in that they were, “an artistic experiment that is the result of speculations on projective geometry.”<sup>18</sup>

Towards the end of the first World War, a plethora of interconnected artists, exhibitions and movements continued to influence this genre style of art making. Duchamp and fellow Dadaists were enigmatic played crucial roles in the manifestation of the two main principles of

---

<sup>15</sup> Steven Leuthold, “Conceptual Art, Conceptualism, and Aesthetic Education”, *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 33 No. 1 (Spring, 1999), pp 41.

<sup>16</sup> Francesco Poli, “Wandering In The Land of Intuition,” in *Intuition* ed. Alex Vervoordt (Venice, 2017), 38.

<sup>17</sup> Altshuler, “Art by Instruction”, e002.

<sup>18</sup> Herbert Molderings, *Duchamp and the Aesthetics of Chance: Art as Experiment*, (Columbia University Press, 2010), page number unavailable.

the Western European and American avant-garde movements: “the generation of work followed by written instructions, and the insertion of chance in the realization of an artwork.”<sup>19</sup>

By the mid-twentieth century, Abstract Expressionism had exploded onto the art world, phasing out the stranglehold of the School of Paris aesthetic for a new and controversial New York School emphasis upon process-oriented art. Many of the American and European expressionists are adopting the psychic automatism of Surrealism and also beginning to utilize the avant-garde Art-Informel movement that is most strongly propagated by mid-century French art critic Michel Tapié. Although difficult to pin down the formal style of Art-Informel, it existed as an, “existentialist vision of an uncertain moment in which the artist’s action with and against the artistic material expressed a dialectical tension between the subject and the world.”<sup>20</sup>

Musical and visual composer John Cage is a critical participant in the act of employing chance operations in both his musical and visual work. Cage was ahead of his time on his thoughts of being able to present his viewers of his exhibitions with an awareness of what already exists and what might have possibly existed. His attention to the ways in which art could imitate life or nature is what captured my attention the most. One of his major reasons for adopting a method of working that revolved around chance operations was in response to his rejection of certain qualities of the American and European Abstract Expressionists.<sup>21</sup> For him it was about putting the body into a series of situations where it could not do what it intended or wanted to do.

---

<sup>19</sup> Bruce Altshuler, “Art by Instruction and the Pre-History of *do it*,” in *Do It: The Compendium*, ed. Hans Ulrich Obirst (Independent Curators International, 2013), e002.

<sup>20</sup> Jaimey Hamilton, “Making Art Matter: Alberto Burri’s Sacchi,” *October*, Vol. 124, Postwar Italian Art (Spring, 2008), pp 35.

<sup>21</sup> Brown, *VISUAL ART: To Sober and Quiet the Mind*, 48.

More than Cage, even, Yoko Ono is an artist during this period of the last 50s to 60s whose practice most significantly focused on the creation of objects from instructions. Her most prolific exhibition that focused on this method was a 1961 show at George Maciunas' AG Gallery: she displayed a group of works in the process of realization which were made from instructions carried out by visitors.<sup>22</sup> An additional direction of Ono's practice that played a critical role in the crafting of my own methods is her 1964 instruction book *Grapefruit*. *Grapefruit* presented a conceptual and material tension between ideation and object or image realization: the pieces are meant to be imagined by readers and the written instructions for actions "further stake their claim in the world".<sup>23</sup>

By 1969 the international art world is paying much closer attention to the art-by-instruction genre. The intention of this new wave of art-by-instruction is driven by several factors: "The nature of much new art allowed for its being made on the basis of artists' directions, and the great demand by curators of large shows for pieces from artists unable to travel to distant venues."<sup>24</sup> Robert Morris continued to take process art to its extremes in the 1970s by taking literal blind perspectives to his works on paper. Starting in 1973, he produced hundreds of drawings that, "divided into several series, compose the cycle, *Blind Time Drawings*. These are drawn with eyes closed (with some preventative measures in place) in order to underline the gap between idea and realization, between the artist's intention and the limits and characteristics specific to the body's physical action."<sup>25</sup> An important distinction that Cage, Ono and Morris contribute to the art-by-instruction genre is the tension that exists between the

---

<sup>22</sup> Altshuler, "Art by Instruction", e002.

<sup>23</sup> Altshuler, "Art by Instruction", e002.

<sup>24</sup> Altshuler, "Art by Instruction", e003.

<sup>25</sup> Francesco Poli, "Wandering In The Land of Intuition," in *Intuition* ed. Alex Vervoordt (Venice, 2017), 39.

works ideation and its material realization. While all of their pieces seemed to be created simply by being imagined, their instructions for physical action and a resulting product further stake their claim in the world.

## **Theories in My Method (Art as Science, Emergence, Time, Intuition, the Everyday and the Art School Institution)**

The seven-step scientific method, tried and tested in its absoluteness as the most effective form of rational and logical exploration, is a widely accepted tool of experimentation of the science community and beyond. Closely intertwined with the history of science itself, its origins stem from Ancient Greece and India. Although there have been centuries worth of debate over the most accurate and effective models of scientific experimentation, the foundational principles of the method revolve around the same components: systemic observation, measurement, following a certain protocol of testing and inherent components of chance in the method. I found an attraction to how this method of working overlaps with contemporary art in that both parties perform a series of cause and effect encounters which leads to a result that is not always initially foreseen, especially if the executor of the method is unfamiliar with the variable(s). Although the scientific method is based upon discovery of objective, non-arguable truth, the artist has more freedom to expand or break away from certain rigid rules of the method to allow for a broader range of objective and subjective results (objective in that a final product will be achieved, subjective in that this final product can be interpreted in a variety of ways as opposed to just one truth)

For the context of my own work, ontologically speaking, I view the procedure of working as a series of devised circumstances to allow for the possibility of a series of events. Theories of Emergence apply to the devised formulas of my artistic studio practice. I am applying the emergent philosophy in this context where I have set up a certain amount of self-organized environments, where the outcomes depend upon time interval, material and sets of instructions. The instructions depend upon specific agents or tools that I utilize to carry out a series of events.

The materials I have been using to construct the images and the devices of chance (such as the dice, dials and deck of cards) can be defined as “capacities”. A capacity, as defined by philosopher Manuel Delanda, is like a physical property. A capacity can become actual, or real, when it is exercised.<sup>26</sup> Even more specifically, a capacity presents the possibility for an event to take place.<sup>27</sup> For instance, the black gunpowder possesses certain properties; it will ignite and burn when set on fire. The property of being able to burn becomes a capacity when I set the powder ablaze on top of the paper. The matrix in which they are being applied (in this series of cases is the paper) can be defined as “properties.” The black gunpowder’s ability to affect something is contingent on the existence of the paper and my landing on that material by spinning the dial. The paper has the capacity to be affected by the gunpowder. In theories of Emergence both scientifically and artistically, Delanda once again explains this system of cause and effect:

Thus, while properties can be specified without reference to anything else capacities to affect must always be thought in relation to capacities to be affected. Finally, the ontological relation between properties and capacities displays a complex symmetry. On the one hand, capacities depend upon properties...On the other, the properties of a whole emerge from interactions between its component parts, interactions in which the parts must exercise their own capacities...<sup>28</sup>

This brings me to another important component of the work, which is its emphasis on working under intervals of time on a ritualized routine throughout the weeks and months of this year. The artist can transform the method into a regiment, something of a simulation that can be carried out within the routine of everyday life. Each piece centers me upon the foreseeable present with essential shifts in focus and attention in each work session. Michael Sheringham

---

<sup>26</sup> Manuel Delanda, *Philosophy and Simulation: The Emergence of Synthetic Reason* (New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2011), 4

<sup>27</sup> Manuel Delanda, *Philosophy and Simulation: ...*, 4.

<sup>28</sup> Manuel Delanda, *Philosophy and Simulation: ...*, 5



explains this mode of thinking more thoroughly, “By diverting attention from a goal to the carrying out of a repeated, preordained programme, the project creates its own intermediate spatio-temporal zone. In doing so, it generates attention to the present, to the unresolved matter of what is in the process (the process may be the spectators current flow of awareness).”<sup>29</sup> In *Subject to Change*, doing is a way of thinking. I wanted this work to represent both active process of producing quantifiable art forms and also take account for the ill-defined moments in between. The degrees of methodology in these intervals of time of each on-going series are also what is, paradoxically, their strength. The emphasis on time-based procedures elevates their continuity and rhythm, time intervals are seen as events rather than measures.<sup>30</sup>

There are some implications in my work of the enormous scope of influence that the 21<sup>st</sup> century academic art school model has provided for me. Prior to the 1960s, studio work that focused on both the object and the conceptual was frowned upon. The mid-century art school model, “...claims that programs that are organized according to highly specialized professional tracks tend to reinforce the divide between art and life...to the degree that educators socialized students to become members of an institutional art world and profession...”<sup>31</sup> The 21<sup>st</sup> century model has seen some fairly radical new approaches to the way they encourage art-making in that they have become a prolific space for the reintegration of art and life. Practicing professors and instructors are encouraging students to not only pursue object-oriented goals, but to pursue studio work that is noncommercial or nonobject oriented in its intention. One could argue that *Subject to Change* is a testament to the effectiveness of the broadened, conceptually-inclusive art school

---

<sup>29</sup> Michael Sheringham, extract from “Configuring the Everyday”, *Everyday Life...* (Oxford University Press: 2007), 386-391

<sup>30</sup> Jack Richardson and Sydney Walker, “Processing Process: The Event of Making Art”, *Studies in Art Education*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (fall 2011), pp 12.

<sup>31</sup> Steven Leuthold, “Conceptual Art, Conceptualism, and Aesthetic Education”, *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, pp 42

model in that it attempts to focus on both traditional object/image oriented goals and also specific acts of procedure to attain those goals. Although this body of work has moved away from conforming to or emphasizing a certain aesthetic code that has dominated a majority of my studio practice for the last several years, it still conforms to broader codes of producing product and process that have been underscored by the art school model in the last fifty years.

## Current to Future Thoughts

Similar to Duchamp's *Three Standard Stoppages*, *Subject to Change* has been an overarching act of liberation for me inside my studio practice. The chance operations at work in my studio practice have become methods of removing me from the kind of work which had previously defined my formal content for several years. My initiative was simple: to make a body of work consisting of action-mark-making with conventional and unconventional approaches. Over time, it became about living through working and an exploratory study on intuition. Midway through working, I knew what I was doing was acts of liberation . Performance, drawing and printmaking are historically time-based mediums. Despite my methodology which in my initial understanding was purely clinical, the methods morphed into a form of expression. *Subject to Change* preserves and pays closer attention to the passing time of everyday, ordinary life.

What this body of work is most successfully accomplishing is its, “attempt to capture experience prior to any analytical preconceptions. Above all, arts involving indexical procedures have been shown to play a crucial role for they are capable registering what ...called, ‘the tiny spark of contingency.’”<sup>32</sup> What I have strived to find is a hybrid of work production that focuses upon both a visually arresting realization and also a cataloging or capturing of the experience of doing along the way. I see this work as a part of living, where it is, “concentrated in its detail and more refined in its discipline than everyday life, but nonetheless it was integral to it, as the spirit is integral to the body.”<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Margaret Iversen, “Profane Illumination,” in *Intuition*, ed. Alex Vervoordt (Venice, 2017), 63.

<sup>33</sup> Brown, *VISUAL ART: To Sober and Quiet the Mind*, 118.

## References

- Altshuler, Bruce. "Art by Instruction and the Pre-History of *Do It*," in *Do It: The Compendium*, edited by Hans Ulrich Obirst, e002. Independent Curators International, 2013.
- Bashkoff, Fontanella and Joan Marter. *Art of Another Kind: International Abstraction and the Guggenheim 1949-1960*. London: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2012.
- Braun, Fontanella and Carol Stringari. *Alberto Burri: The Trauma of Painting*. New York: Guggenheim Museum Productions, 2015.
- Brown, Kathan. *John Cage Visual Art: To Sober and Quiet the Mind*. San Francisco: Crown Point Press, 2000.
- Byrd, Seph. "Planned Panichood." In *An Anthology of Chance of Chance Operations*, edited by Jackson Mac Low and La Monte Young. Heiner Friedrich: 1963.
- Cage, John. *Composition in Retrospect*. Cambridge: Exact Change, 1993.
- Cage, John. "Composition as Process Part II: Indeterminacy (1958)." In *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artist's Writings*, edited by Peter Selz and Kristine Stiles, 707-709. University of California Press, 1996.
- Delanda, Manuel. *Philosophy and Simulation: The Emergence of Synthetic Reason*. New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2011.
- Elman, Jeffrey. "Finding Structure in Time", *Cognitive Science* **14**, 179-211 (1990).
- Hobbs, Robert. *Lee Krasner*. Independent Curators International, 1999.
- Iversen, Margaret. "Profane Illumination," in *Intuition*, ed. Alex Vervoordt (Venice, 2017).
- Jacobson, Bernard. *Robert Motherwell: The Making of an American Giant*. London: 21 Publishing Ltd, 2015.
- Leuthold, Steven. "Conceptual Art, Conceptualism, and Aesthetic Education", *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Spring, 1999), pp. 37-47.
- Molderings, Herbert. *Duchamp and the Aesthetics of Chance: Art as Experiment*. (Columbia University Press, 2010).
- Robert Motherwell: Works on Paper*. London: Bernard Jacobson Gallery, 2011.
- Poli, Francesco. "Wandering in the Land of Intuition," in *Intuition*, ed. Alex Vervoordt (Venice, 2017).

Richardson, Jack and Sydney Walker. "Processing Process: The Event of Making Art", *Studies in Art Education*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (fall 2011).

Rose, Barbara. *Lee Krasner: A Retrospective*. The Museum of Modern Art, 1983.

Schwartz, J. (2013). "Interview with James Siena," *Figure/Ground*. December 1st.  
<<http://figureground.org/a-conversation-with-james-siena/>>

Sheringham, Michael. Extract from 'Configuring the Everyday', *Everyday life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 386-391.

Tallman, Susan. *The Contemporary Print: from Pre-Pop to Postmodern*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1996.

Tony Smith, *Since '45: America and the Making of Contemporary Art*. Reaktion Books Ltd, 2011.

## Appendix



Figure 1: Alexis Kurtzman, *Subject to Change* (Gallery View), 2018. (Image by Ashley Gordon)



Figure 2: Alexis Kurtzman, *Variations In Between I / Non-Dominant Hand*, 42 x 44", mixed media on paper, 2017 (Image by Ashley Gordon)





Figure 3: Alexis Kurtzman, *Variations In Between II / Weights*, 42 x 44", mixed media on paper, 2018 (Image by Ashley Gordon)





Figure 4 : Alexis Kurtzman, *Variations In Between III / Holes*, 42 x 44", mixed media on paper, 2018 (Image by Ashley Gordon)





Figure 5 : Alexis Kurtzman, *Variations In Between IV / Child's Drawing*, 42 x 44", mixed media on paper, 2018 (Image by Ashley Gordon)



Figure 6 : Alexis Kurtzman, *Changes and Disappearances*, 42 x 156'', mixed media on paper, 2017 (Image by Ashley Gordon)



Figure 7 : Alexis Kurtzman, *Beginning to End* (Gallery View), 36 x 360", embossing , 2017  
(Image by Ashley Gordon)