

EMERGING RHYTHMS

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ABSTRACT

Considering art as both a metaphor for place and a place in itself, this thesis project investigates the organic and fabricated rhythms in everyday life and art making. The project's concern is the effect of repeating seemingly simple gestures associated with the minutiae of everyday life. The rhythmic act of walking through place is a foundation and preliminary activity for the resulting paintings, drawings, and sound work. Echoing the action of walking, the rhythmic and temporal quality of music provides additional focus and inspiration. The works in the project present place from an aerial view, and considering the writings of philosopher Michel de Certeau, explore the complexities and tensions of representing absence, and creating intimacy in spite of an alienating view. The writings of sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre provide a context for analyzing rhythms and noticing difference. Repetition in sound is considered as a parallel to repetition in the visual. The music cognition researcher Elizabeth Hellmuth Margulis outlines the phenomenon of semantic satiation, which is used as analogy to analyze the rhythmic nature of the work in the project.

The work of artists Mark Bradford, Richard Long, and Roman Opalka are drawn on through their use of repetition, focus, and interactions with place. Artist Avis Newman's writings influence discussions of the nature of the unbound, unframed form of the work in the thesis project. The unbound form of the work connects it back to notions of the everyday and its incessant nature. An interest in the everyday informs the thrust of the work, indicating the aim of the practice: to create work that eschews spectacle, elevates simplicity, and recognizes the significance of the ordinary.

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INTRODUCTION

Rhythm as a subject sits at the heart of my practice. My interest in rhythm has to do with how it at once encompasses the natural and organic, as well as the mechanical and artificial. Rhythm is the beat of the heart, the action of walking, the dripping of water, the cycles of the tides and seasons; it is also the tick of a clock, the beat that propels music, our daily habits and rituals, the grid of the city. French philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991), who analyzed everyday life and its component biological, and social rhythms, asserts that rhythms are “simultaneously natural and rational, and neither one nor the other” (19). My practice deals with this complicated idea of simultaneity and how it conflicts and interacts with notions of temporality, rhythm, and place. A preliminary aspect of my practice involves mental and physical investigations of the way place is organized - examining the organic and fabricated rhythms on maps, and also walking the pathways and grids of my city. The resulting paintings, drawings and sound work aim to explore organic and mechanical rhythms and their relationships to the supposed fixed nature of place.

As a pattern of sound, rhythm develops over time, as do my artistic projects. Each work in this thesis project is a larger scale piece comprised of a number of smaller components. Together, the smaller components work to demonstrate an accumulation of repetitive acts, gestures, and marks, influenced by notions of place, time, and the everyday. Beginning with the seemingly static basis of location, walking - an embodied gesture - is an immersion into, and a way to connect to a place. The repetitive and rhythmic actions of walking and music are both influences and departure points for my repetitive and rhythmic art practice. Through repetitive actions in everyday life and art making, my work attempts to establish or reveal organic and fabricated rhythms as a way to see things that may go unnoticed, to transcribe the intangible, and to find significance in the everyday. My aim is to foster emotional engagement with the work through subtlety and simplicity as opposed to sentimentality or complexity. This thesis project works to create art that has the potential to be powerful in spite of its concern with minutiae or the mundane.

In this paper, I outline the influences that have informed the thoughts behind my artwork with sections reflecting on my personal history, rhythm, the everyday, walking, and place. I refer to a number of works from my thesis project that show the development of my research considering the accumulation of rhythm in my work. Within the project there is an intuitive shift from painting to drawing, and a gradual paring down toward increased simplicity. The evolution

of the project is about focusing on the pulse of my practice, allowing the work to be propelled by a consistency. Rhythm influences imagery and format, and becomes more salient as it begins to guide method and methodology. The emergence of a rhythmic way of working now determines how I formulate and develop new projects.

Personal history: music and time

My interest in rhythm has been developed and refined through my strong interest in music, as well as my experiences as a musician. I am a bass player, and the role of the bass in popular music can be likened to the way I make art. The bass, part of the “rhythm section” in a band, acts as a bridge between the steady beat of the drums and the melody and form of the guitar or vocals. The bass can sink back and keep time, or it can tentatively move to the foreground and contribute melody. It is a subtle voice, often only noticeable through its absence. When it drops out of a song for effect, a listener may then realize how it had been propelling the rhythm. My work as an artist is not a translation of my work as a musician, but these two practices are entangled. In music, I have a desire to downplay melody - the focus, foreground, or lead part of a song - and this is connected to the gradual downplay of representational imagery in my visual work. Additionally, I am drawn to driving, pulsing rhythms, which is connected to my interest in repetition and commitment in art.

Part of the reason that I came to play music is the nature of my childhood. I grew up in a family that elevated popular music practically to the realm of the spiritual. My father worshiped the driving rhythms influenced by Merseybeat, while my mother revered the brooding, monotone poetry of folk singer-songwriters. Listening to (loud) music was a family affair, and something we did regularly together on car trips, or at home on weekends. Now, much of how I come to understand the world is through music, musical concepts, and the notion of music as both everyday practice and as ritual. Because of my history with music, much of the ideas and concepts in my thesis project use music and sound as inspiration for understanding the visual.

And related to music and rhythm is time. As a loner, I am energized through time spent by myself. Before starting my own family, I would spend hours at a time making art, thinking, and researching. Now, as a mother of two young children, part of my art practice is dedicated to carving out moments of aloneness or focus, however short. These moments have become routinized and ritualized. The restrictions of daily life dictate the times that I may spend alone, and as such, I have come to live a somewhat regimented life. The very early morning before my

family wakes, brief moments during the day, or the evenings when they go to sleep are the times when I walk, write, read and make art. These moments are not long, and because of this I have made a habit of taking and using every second that is available, and found ways to spend this time productively. My practice has evolved to include ways of working that consider the allotment of time, and which allow an immediate engagement with process, like turning a switch or pressing a button. On, then off.

PART 1: PATTERN IN SPACE AND TIME

Rhythm

My desire to explore rhythm in my art practice is connected to the qualities in music that I admire. The link between music and visual art has developed over several centuries; in the 18th century, writers on aesthetics began to link the two. Art historian Andrea Gottang (German, contemporary) describes how writers subjected painting and music to a “paradigmatic comparison and were allocated by means of the categories, respectively, of space, stasis, and understanding to the eye, and of time, movement, and feeling to the ear” (247). Music became a model for visual artists in the 19th century; it was “fascinating as an art form that was free of the obligation to imitate nature” (248). The work in my project tends toward abstraction, and I am interested in how this relates to music. In 1911, Wassily Kandinsky, in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, wrote about how music is “the art which has devoted itself not to the reproduction of natural phenomena, but rather to the expression of the artist’s soul, in musical sound.” Kandinsky suggests that visual artists who are not satisfied with mere representation to express themselves “cannot but envy the ease with which music, the most non-material of the arts to-day, achieves this end” (41). In 1943, Dutch painter Piet Mondrian (1872-1944) describes how to him, boogie-woogie music is “homogeneous” with the intention in his paintings: “destruction of melody, which is the equivalent of destruction of natural appearance, and construction through the continuous opposition of pure means - dynamic rhythm” (Daniels 257). His words speak to me on a few levels: there is the simple fact that music inspired the artist’s work, as well as the notion of rhythm - by way of music - as an influence. My own work is tied to music in its non-objectivity, and in the repetition of a measured form.

A particularly influential piece of music for my project is the work *Sagittarian Domain*¹ by contemporary Australian musician Oren Ambarchi. I first heard the 33 minute, one-song album after its release in the late summer of 2012. After returning from the Emily Carr MAA program’s first summer intensive and beginning to seriously work on my thesis project, I was struck by this repetitive yet transformative work. The instrumental composition, drawing influences from

¹ You can listen to *Sagittarian Domain* here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g_hVhqw9c48&feature=kp

minimal music, drone music, and Krautrock, begins with a driving, pulsing bass line that remains steady throughout. Guitar, drums, and eventually strings build upon and accent the pulse, creating a multi-layered and propulsive work that subtly builds tension. Ambarchi's record label describes how the song is "founded on hypnotic almost-repetition, the accents of the drum hits and interlocking bass and guitar lines shifting almost imperceptibly back and forwards over the beat as they undergo gradual transformations of timbre" ("eMego 144 / Oren Ambarchi: Sagittarian Domain"). The first time I heard the song, I was working in the studio, in a focused attentional state. At approximately 13 minutes in to the piece, there is a slight shift, which caused me to take note of the work. The way I was listening to the song transformed and I was unexpectedly enthralled with it. This sudden rapture seems directly related to the song's profound repetition and to the subtle shifts that would not seem as significant if they had been condensed into a 3-minute composition.

As I had been writing and thinking about the effect of subtlety and repetition in my work, hearing *Sagittarian Domain* inspired me to ruminate further on what it is about these qualities that interests me, and how they could influence my own mostly visual practice. The *transformation* that the song had for me at 13 minutes intrigues me, as well as the ability of repeating something to cause the insignificant to seem significant. Or, to put it in another way, to *recognize* the significance in the seemingly insignificant. What happens when something, however simple it may seem, is restated again and again... and then *again*? (I consider some theories regarding the effects of extended repetition in Part 3.) However, the song also prompted me to think about the process of transference of an idea from one mode to another (like boogie-woogie and De Stijl). Once I thought about the commonalities between music and visual art, I extended the concept further to more general aspects of everyday life.

The *Handbook for Acoustic Ecology* defines rhythm in general as, simply, "pattern in space and time." It indicates the regularity of cyclic rhythm "found in such patterns as the inhalation and exhalation of breath, the systole and diastole of pulse, the ebb and flow of tides" (Truax). The period of repetition is referred to as the measure, and it is its sustainment that forms rhythm. Henri Lefebvre asserts that there is "no rhythm without repetition in time and space, without *reprises*, without returns, in short without measure" (16). Everyday life is a continual flow of overlapping rhythms, and I am interested in this incessancy, thinking of it on the same terms as the extended, repeated measure of *Sagittarian Domain*. Could turning our attention to repetition

allow for an awareness of the seemingly insignificant components that make up daily life? How can rhythm be a catalyst for meditative, self-reflexive, critical thought? Lefebvre suggested that repetition does lead to something more: “when it comes to the everyday,” he writes, “there is always something new and unforeseen that introduces itself into the repetitive: difference” (16). Contrasts, slight shifts, and even very small differences become notable in patterns. Turning our attention toward seemingly insignificant patterns can allow for the awareness of an unexpected “newness” within the accumulated rhythms.

The Everyday (beyond spectacle)

Contemporary English theorist Ben Highmore suggests that the notion of “the everyday makes the particularity of lived culture inescapable.” He argues that considering the everyday is a way of “registering the unregistered” (174). Artist Stephen Johnstone (English, contemporary), in the book *The Everyday*, describes how art that is informed by the everyday is “drawing on the vast reservoir of normally unnoticed, trivial and repetitive actions comprising the common ground of daily life, as well as finding impetus in the realms of the popular and the demotic” (12). The research methods in my practice include shifting attention toward, and training focus on seemingly mundane or insignificant aspects of life, everyday actions, and ways of making art. Turning to the ordinary is what Johnstone calls “a recognition of the dignity of ordinary behaviour,” but also “a distrust of the heroic and the spectacular” (12). This can be seen as akin to wresting our attention away from the spectacle of a swaggering guitar solo to the subtle elegance of the rhythmic, inconspicuous bass line. Specifically what interests me about the everyday are the rhythms generated through repetitive actions, and relationships with place. The artworks produced employ methods and processes that support the ideas of the everyday that inform them. Using strategies of repetition and serialization, repetitive mark-making, everyday sounds, and simple materials, the focus of my practice is to make simple works that subtly command attention (or *register*) through accumulation.

Walking

The rhythmic action of walking informs my practice. I walk alone, early in the morning through my neighbourhood, which lies in the heart of my city of Calgary, Alberta. My regular

walk takes me down quiet residential streets, over bridges crossing the river, into the outskirts of downtown, and through parkland. During the day this route is normally animated with activity, with business people rushing downtown, parents pushing strollers, dog walkers, tourists, joggers, cyclists and inline skaters. At the time of my walk, however, it is comparatively still and quiet. For this project I use a Global Positioning System (GPS) on my smartphone to record my movements, and a camera to record the imagery of the environment. The GPS, using satellite technology, provides a record of my presence in the form of a line traced onto a map. The generated GPS paths, as well as fragments of the photographs are compositional elements in the resulting drawings and paintings.

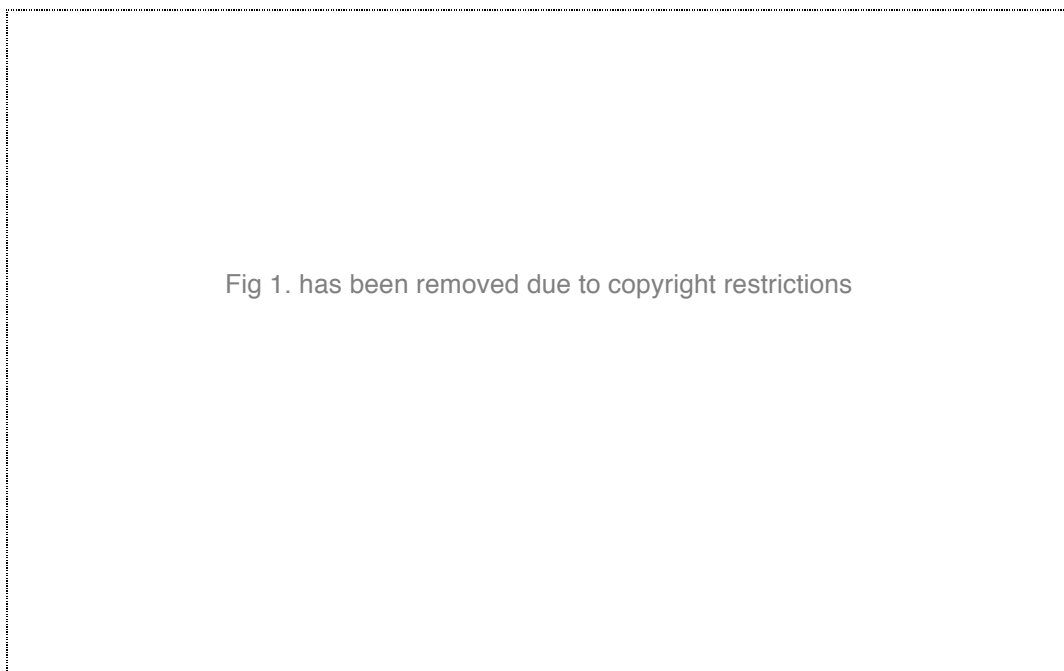


Fig. 1: Richard Long, *A Line Made by Walking*, 1967. Photograph and graphite on board, 15"x13".

I am drawn to walking as an everyday action. It is simple, mundane, and generally utilitarian. However, part of my research is to carry out purposeful, non-utilitarian walks on my own - walking for the sake of walking. Using walking as an element of my art practice is a way to simply interact with a place by moving through it, touching it. My practice explores how my tracked movements are a sort of “drawing” through a location. I am inspired by Richard Long’s 1967 work, *A Line Made by Walking*, a simple and repeated gesture that leaves a subtle imprint (fig. 1). The themes of walking and place are relevant to my practice, but it is the particularly the understated nature of Long’s use of walking in this work that has influenced this thesis project.

The photograph and the walked line are static, but Long's repeated movements are implicit. This dedicated, simple action has a subtle, yet powerful impact on the landscape, dividing it, claiming it, and proving an unquestionably human presence.

The more I walk, the more my thoughts about it are developed and refined. My research considers walking not only as an everyday action, but also as an organic rhythm that responds to the imposing and organizing forces of the city. French philosopher Michel de Certeau (1925-1986) describes how "walking manipulates spatial organizations, no matter how panoptic they may be" (101). While it is mundane and relatively slow, walking is also imbued with a power of its own. Unencumbered by a vehicle, walkers have choices in how they will respond to the space through which they move. De Certeau suggests that while the spatial order offers possibilities to walkers, the walkers actualize the possibilities, causing them to exist. They have the power to transform spatial elements through choice and improvisation, creating shortcuts or "condemning certain places to inertia or disappearance" (98-9). In spite of the organizing forces that define the city, walkers find their own way. I have chosen my particular route based on the amount of time that I have alone to walk, as well as on my own habits and idiosyncrasies. The walked path is the boundary of a place that I have defined with my body.

Through the rhythm of walking and by making *repeated* walks, the act has become something more than just an immersion into place. My research considers how walking is a way to interact with the controlling forces of the city, as well as a way to respond to the controlling regimen of daily life. In *Wanderlust: a History of Walking*, contemporary American writer Rebecca Solnit proposes that walking culture has developed as a resistance to the speed and alienation of industrialized society. "It may be countercultures and subcultures," she suggests, "that will continue to walk in resistance to the postindustrial, postmodern loss of space, time, and embodiment" (267). Walking is a kind of freedom: I am alone, unencumbered and intentional.

PART 2: RHYTHM AND PLACE

Place

Human geographer Tim Cresswell (English-American, contemporary) describes place as “a meaningful location” (7). He refers to phenomenological geographer David Seamon (American, contemporary) whose theories suggest, “places are performed on a daily basis through people living their everyday life” (34). This thesis project began as an exploration of the meaning of place, specifically urban parks. My research considered the meaning of urban parks within a city that celebrates development and growth as much as my home city of Calgary does. Calgary is a city that is constantly expanding upwards and outwards, organizing and “civilizing” decomposing urban areas and surrounding farmland and wilderness. While parks are intensely planned and controlled, in the sense that they do not generate revenue (as condominiums, office buildings or shopping centres do), they can be considered outside of traditional urban development. Parks can be viewed as symbols of antimodernism, as an indication of a society’s values regarding conservation, and as cultured representations of nature. Parks can also be considered as traditional places to create idealized images of landscape, as scenes of fetishized nature, or as an “escape” from urban life. The work I created in the first year of the MAA program, which was exhibited in a solo show at a small, artist-run centre in Calgary, uses “islands” as a conceptual and connecting framework in the sense that parks are both isolated and focalized within a city. In this collection of paintings and drawings, islands are, in a representational sense, urban parks and green spaces, the traced GPS pathways of my movements, and also actual islands. In addition, these works consider the poetic associations of solitariness and seclusion that are commonly attributed to islands.

The painting *The Islands* (fig. 2), is a kind of title page for the project. The ground is a roadmap of Calgary onto which I have painted a layer of pale yellow, but the parks and green spaces I have painted a dark grey. Visually, my intent here is to show the urban parks as positive space and to cancel out the other elements of the city. Islands within water: parks within a city. Parks are places in which individuals pause, and it is because we pause here that these *spaces* become *places*. Human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (Chinese-American, b. 1930) describes how a space can become a place in terms of movement: “if we think of space as that which allows movement,” he writes, “then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for

location to be transformed into place” (6). I see the pale yellow areas as non-places, as areas of movement, as means to get to the next place, even as erosive or shaping forces. Likening parks to islands imposes a stillness to them within a sea of activity.



Fig. 2: Sarah Nordean, *The Islands*, 2012. Acrylic on paper map, 80"x37".
Photo: Marc Rimmer. Used by permission of the artist.

While *The Islands* is the most literal example, it illustrates my thinking in the thesis project and my practice in general. The works are akin to a place that is viewed from high above, and *The Islands* is a kind of filter that highlights a particular view of a particular place. A cartographic view of the earth reduces the complexities of place to a flat network of data, and my practice considers the effect that this distant vantage has. I discuss this in more depth in the section below: “The view from above”. When I am making two-dimensional work, I imagine my vantage to be

vastly removed, beyond a human scale. I think of the surface I am working on as a place, and my tools as a presence in this place.

Exhibited alongside *The Islands*, the painting *Bluff* is a gridded grouping of 55 small canvases (fig. 3). In this work there is a juxtaposition of cartographic representations of actual places, with abstract paint formations - made by pouring paint onto canvas - that take on the appearance of an aerial view of the earth. Pouring the paint is a way to relinquish control, allowing the media to respond to gravity, spread out across a surface, drip, or mix with another colour or material. Representational imagery and drawn grids are “controlled” decisions that respond to the organic forms. Both the representation and the grid are the elements of fabrication, civilization or the human in *Bluff*. What I want out of a work is a balanced image that exhibits a tension and synchronicity involving the rhythms, tendencies and organization of the organic and the fabricated.



Fig. 3: Sarah Nordean, *Bluff*, 2012. Oil, acrylic and graphite on canvas, 42" x 98".

Photo: Marc Rimmer. Used by permission of the artist.

The tension within the convergence of organic and fabricated rhythms can be seen as a complex layered relationship of temporalities. Invoking the organic and fabricated is not an attempt to establish a conflicting duality, but an interest in how things exist at the same time. An element of my research is to examine how different layers within place and within art respond to

each other, disregard each other, and interact with each other. For instance, on my morning walk, I am walking through a place where once the Blackfoot Nation moved freely, and where settlers later established a lumber mill - both now absent. Michel de Certeau discusses the “moving layers” that make up the history of a place: “it is the very definition of a place, in fact, that it is composed by these series of displacements and effects among the fragmented strata that form it...” (108). A place is a buildup of memories, histories, temporalities, and I am interested in how this translates to art. English contemporary artists Tacita Dean and Jeremy Millar in *Art Works: Place* convey that “art, like place, is a process of accumulation” (21).

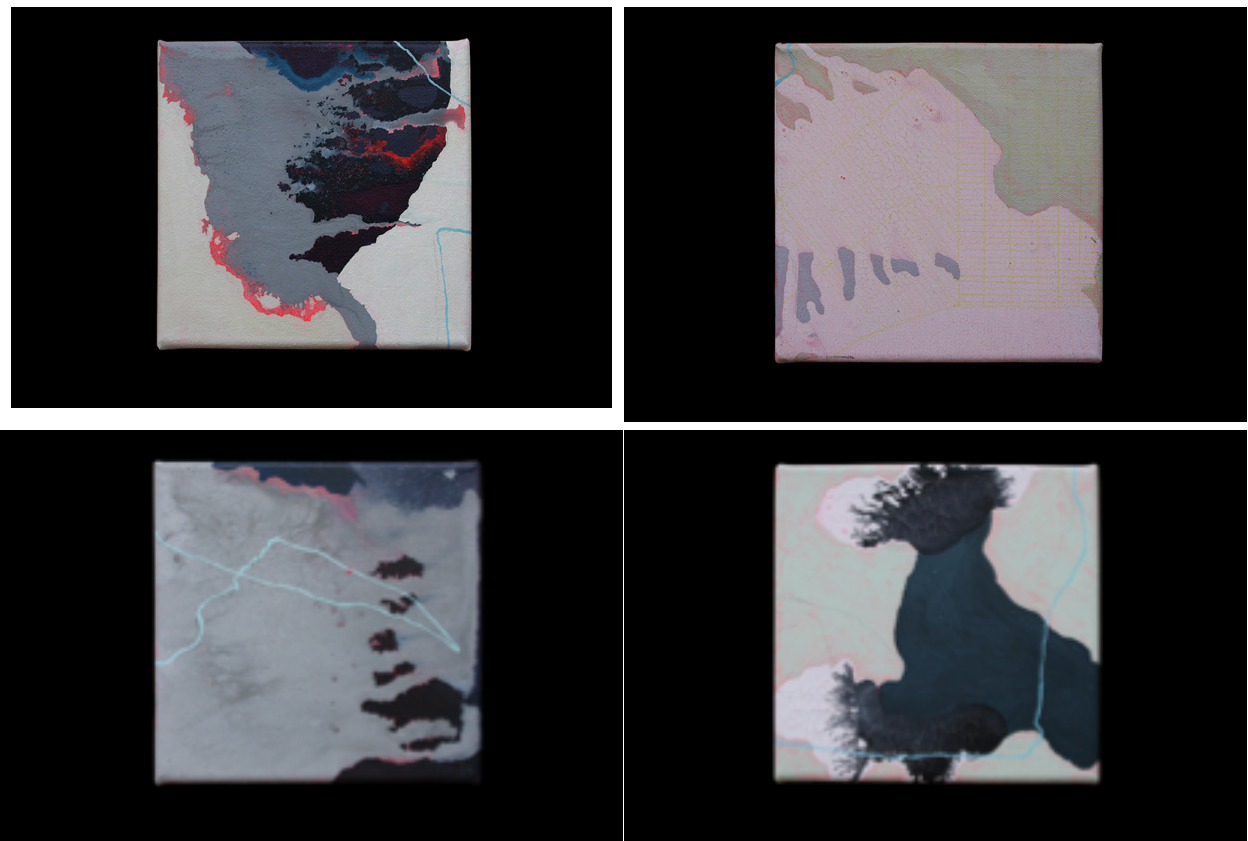


Fig 4: Sarah Nordean, individual canvases from *Bluff*, 2012. Oil, acrylic, and graphite on canvas, each 7"x7".
Photos: Sarah Nordean. Used by permission of the artist.

An awareness of the method of making in *Bluff* reveals it to be a convergence of layers of media, colours, marks and imagery that were built up over time. By responding to the previous layers, I am, in a sense, trying to make a place. Each canvas begins with a single, brightly coloured under-layer that asserts its presence even as subsequent media are layered over it. On top of this, variably, are layers of acrylic, drawn pencil lines, collaged paper, and oil that may

conceal or reveal the layers beneath them. Layered over the abstract and representational imagery are the meandering, painted representations of my GPS routes connecting one canvas to the next. Using techniques of wiping and scratching, or using semi-transparent media, the buildup of the work - the time spent making - becomes evident to the viewers. Demonstrating a layered temporality, this way of working is highly detailed as I interact very closely with the canvas to make the work. In this sense, the art itself can become a meaningful location - a place.

The view from above

The cartographic view in my work removes viewers from a place and allows them to contemplate it as a whole. Walking is a rhythm that is generated over time and through space, and the view of a walked path from above presents an expanse of time at once, in a space that is flattened. While the act of walking immerses me into a place, the resulting artwork often presents a detached and distant vantage. My practice looks at the tension that a cold and removed perspective presents to its viewers, preventing them from knowing a place as an inhabitant. De Certeau discusses how the view from above can be intoxicating, how “the fiction of knowledge is related to this lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more” (92). Being able to perceive an expanse of place at once, as on a map, indeed constructs a fiction of knowledge that conceals the meaningful social rhythms of a place. It is a panoptic view, the view from the ghostly data cloud that records the paths of my walks.

The view from above can expose the rhythms of place. Henri Lefebvre insists that in order to “grasp and understand rhythms, it is necessary to get outside them” (37). He describes how the optimal vantage for analyzing the rhythms of a city is to look down onto a street from a window or balcony, “where one dominates the road and passers-by” (38). It is a view that reveals the choices that people make in how we organize and classify our environment - that is, how we deal with nature. I am particularly interested in the associations conveyed through the pattern, measure and rhythm of the grid, and as explored by artists such as Sol LeWitt (American, 1928-2007), Sean Scully (Irish, American, b. 1945), Hanne Darboven (German, 1941-2009), James Hugonin (English, b. 1950), and Agnes Martin (Canadian, American, 1912-2004), among many others. In her 1979 essay “Grids”, American art theorist Rosalind Krauss (b. 1941) points out how the grid is “an emblem of modernity”, as it did not appear in art before the 20th century (10). Krauss characterizes the grid as “flattened, geometricized, ordered, it is antinatural, antimimetic,

antireal. It is what art looks like when it turns its back to nature” (9). However, the steady rhythm of the grid can also be viewed as soothing and reliable. The paintings and drawings of Agnes Martin exhibit a less rigid approach to the grid. American art historian Barbara Haskell describes how Martin’s grids of rectangles create “an all-over pattern which eradicated the hierarchical balancing of parts” (104). My practice considers how the grid can be cold and aloof, yet also meditative and rhythmic. In my own city this “emblem of modernity” is tight and ordered, only occasionally yielding to the will of the river. Sharp corners in the loop of my repeated walk indicate where I follow the lines of the grid, while sweeping curves reveal the influence of the river.

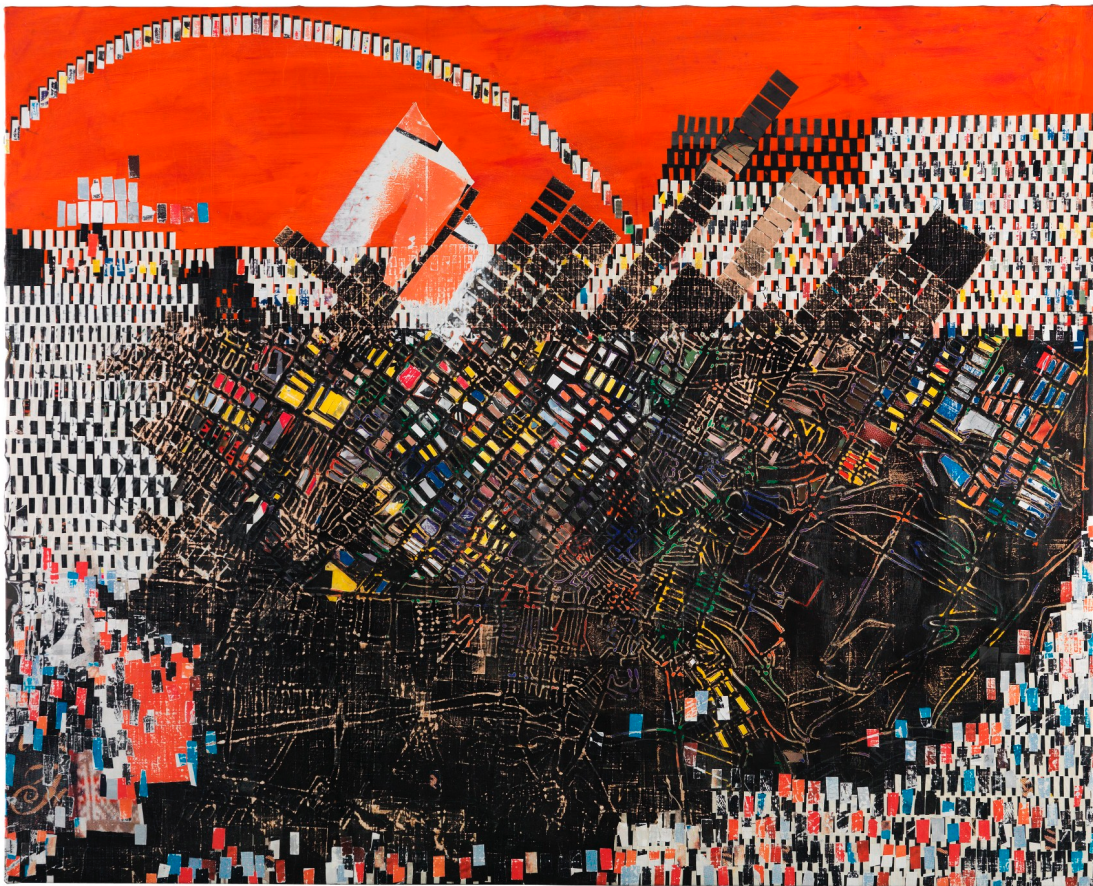


Fig. 5: Mark Bradford, *Scorched Earth*, 2006. Billboard paper, photomechanical reproductions, acrylic gel medium, carbon paper, acrylic paint, bleach, and additional mixed media on canvas
95 ¼ x 118 ¼ x 2 ¼ in. Used by permission of The Broad Art Foundation.

Contemporary Los Angeles artist, Mark Bradford's large-scale paintings/collages, built up in layers, read as urban aerial views. His 2006 work *Scorched Earth* (fig. 5) positions viewers as a viewpoint, where it is possible to assess the rhythms of place, but impossible to recognize the characteristics that would invest a place with meaning. Viewers are instead presented with work that arrests attention through its massive and immersive scale, and textured layers of media. Using de Certeau's language, the work reads as "an immense texturology" (92). American writer and curator Katy Seigel describes how Bradford's topographic paintings, "taking the view from above, imply a power dynamic in which position distinguishes somebody from nobody" (116). The viewer then, like the artist, is this "somebody", unaware of the seemingly non-existent people who occupy a place. Similarly invisible, are the individual features including architecture and nature. If place is "a meaningful location", the invisibility of its individual features can separate a location from its status as "place". Through the presentation of the view from above in my work, the gulf between viewpoint and the surface of the work is alienating, and the meaning of the place becomes abstracted. Instead of seeing individual characteristics, viewers become aware of the patterns and rhythms of natural forms, and urban or agricultural development. The loss of, or change in meaning - from a place with particularities to a collection of shapes or lines on a map - is akin to the kind of transformation that took place when I became aware of the patterns and rhythms in *Sagittarian Domain*.

Similar to this transformation of meaning, the action of the walk itself is not present in the cartographic line of a GPS route. De Certeau describes how the traced path on a map refers only to, "the absence of what has passed by" (97). Once a walk is completed, all that is left is the GPS data - evidence that the action occurred. The action itself, however, is an invisible absence. "The trace left behind is substituted for the practice," de Certeau continues. "It exhibits the (voracious) property that the geographical system has of being able to transform action into legibility, but in doing so it causes a way of being in the world to be forgotten" (97). This transformation from performed action to readable trace speaks of an anxiety related to the irreversibility of time. A GPS path is like a drawing (or a photograph, or a sound recording), an attempt to hang on to the present, to capture an action. I repeat the walk and the drawn route again and again, not as a way to translate the experience but as a way to perpetuate the action—a perhaps futile attempt to keep it from being forgotten.

My research considers this problematic nature of the view from above, and how its aloof presentation is nothing near the truth of actual experience. The GPS route is the result of an experience of a place, but its presentation from a remote vantage distorts and perhaps completely conceals this experience. Attempting to translate an experience in or through an artwork is likewise problematic. A 2001 work by contemporary English walking artist Hamish Fulton seems to capture this: superimposed over a spectacular landscape photograph from one of his walks is the dominating text, “AN OBJECT CANNOT COMPETE WITH AN EXPERIENCE”. This phrase certainly clarifies how I feel about my own practice. I walk, and while walking is essential to my practice, it is not the work. The alienation of the removed vantage point severs the significance of my own individual experience. My intent is not to attempt to represent the experience. Part of my objective is to draw relationships between walking, art making, and looking, and how each of these actions on their own can generate intimacy.

Intimacy

Although my work presents a removed, aloof view of place, I am very interested in generating a kind of intimacy. As mentioned above, close interaction with the work can frame it as a place in itself, and there are further parallels in how we interact with a place, and with an artwork. In the essay “Ways of mind-walking: reading, writing, painting”, anthropologist Tim Ingold (English, Scottish, contemporary) draws connections between physical and imaginative practices: “...the mental and the material, or the terrains of the imagination and the physical environment” he writes, “run into one another to the extent of being barely distinguishable” (17). He claims that there is little difference between walking on the ground and “walking” in the imagination. Rebecca Solnit draws a similar connection: “walking the streets is what links up reading the map with living one’s life, the personal microcosm with the public macrocosm. It makes sense of the maze all around” (176). In my practice, proximity and connection are a way to establish intimacy; my walking practice is an intimate engagement with a place, and my art practice is an intimate engagement that links my tools, processes, and ideas. Through walking, the rhythmic contact of my feet with the terrain, and the imaginary line drawn with my body, like a line on a map, suggest a sense of connectedness with place. I see this also in quiet gesture of Richard Long’s presence in *A Line Made by Walking*.

Repetition fuels the intimacy. The cycle of my footsteps and breath in my walking practice, as well as the fact that I walk through the same place again and again adds an element of ritual and elevates this everyday act. In my artworks, the repetition of certain subtle marks or shapes in a single visual work and across a multitude of works is a meditative process that leads to an extended connection with what I am making. Contemporary English artist Avis Newman describes the marks in a drawing as evoking an “essential rhythm”. She points to the “musicality” of “the hand marking out contact with the surface on which marks divide, separate, bind, and measure - marks defining a schema of space in which the mind can exist” (12). Repeated, small details encourage viewers to approach the work, regarding it from a close proximity.

Invoking the writings of Kandinsky, Tim Ingold pushes the proximity further, going so far to say that viewing a work of art can “directly touch the soul” (21). Ingold outlines Kandinsky’s views on the internal and external. One can choose to view a work of art “as if through a pane, or one can plunge into it, become an active part of it” (21). Newman asserts that it is possible for viewers to form a connection with the artist’s experience of making. For the viewer, the event of drawing “perceived in such close proximity, in its registration of the hand - draws the mind in to a space of touch.” Newman describes this interaction that the viewer has with the work as “a rhythmic encounter that... generates a unity of experience” (13). In my work, there is the view of the idea of place from above as a macro view; however, the intimate gestures and details are a way to pull viewers inward, past the removed view into a micro view that requires commitment and closeness. My aim is for the work to engage from a multitude of proximities, and for viewers to feel compelled to move very close to the work. The small, repeated marks, unquestionably hand-drawn, infuse the withdrawn nature of the viewpoint with a warmth and familiarity connecting viewers to the action of making.

PART 3: RHYTHM AND FOCUS

In *Bluff*, I dealt with a number of ideas and images through layering. While making the work, I could keep adding or cancelling by adding more layers. After completing this work, I decided to try to examine my practice more closely and pull some of the layers apart. In the following works, the *Walking Loops* project and *Ticks*, I investigate ways to focus - to home in on particular concepts, to exercise commitment, and to allow outward (as opposed to upward) accumulation to shape the work. In these works, my research considers the effect of committing to methods of repetition.

Repetition

The effect of repetition in sound and music elucidates my interest in exploring how regular recurrence can lead to a change in meaning in my practice. Music cognition researcher Elizabeth Hellmuth Margulis (American, contemporary) outlines the familiar concept of semantic satiation, where the continual repetition of a word leads to a gradual “detachment between the sounds and their meaning.” Although the actual meaning of the word becomes detached, there is a shift in focus that leads to different levels of understanding.² “As the word’s meaning becomes less and less accessible, aspects of the sound become oddly salient” (Margulis). One may pay more attention to the forms of the sounds, or idiosyncrasies in pronunciation. “The simple act of repetition,” continues Margulis, “makes a new way of listening possible, a more direct confrontation with the sensory attributes of the word itself.” My research considers how this could be linked to the transformation that occurred when listening to the repetitive *Sagittarian Domain*. This project looks at the concept of semantic satiation, and explores how the simple act of repetition in visual art could lead to a potential shift in meaning.

Expounding on the notion of semantic satiation and regarding how repetition can lead to a development or a becoming, I am drawn to a reference from contemporary Dutch ceramicist Helle Hove in her essay “The Magic of Repetition”:

The psychologist Henrik Høgh-Olesen emphasizes that every development is based on repetition: if you can get beyond the immediate boredom threshold and continue into a

² In *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Wassily Kandinsky describes this process, how repetition “will not only tend to intensify the inner harmony but also bring to light unsuspected spiritual properties of the word itself” (31).

state of immersion in the process, doors will be opened up to brand new layers of experience. Through repetition . . . you reach deeper levels than any number of new infatuations can ever give. (104-5)

Through repetition, the shape of the walk comes to mean something more than just a line on a map; it becomes a kind of icon for a particular repeated action through a particular place. Repetition can be monotonous, but it also has the ability to emphasize no matter how ordinary or unimpressive. This “deeper level” for me is a gradual awareness of the everyday and of simplicity. It is a recognition of the elegance and dignity of the ordinary.

The paintings of Polish artist Roman Opalka (1931-2011) demonstrate how a seemingly ordinary or mundane subject (consecutive numbers, or the action of counting), becomes a poetic reflection on presence and time through profound repetition. His work *Opalka: 1965/1-∞* is a series of canvas paintings he began in 1965, where he painted consecutive numbers on 77” x 55” canvases. The first painting began with the numbers 1 2 3...; the series finished with his death in 2011, reaching a number in the 5 millions. A visual rhythm is apparent in Opalka’s work formulated through the repetitive practice of charging the brush with paint, using the brush until the paint is gone, and then recharging again. Not only does this draw attention to and connect viewers to the physicality of Opalka’s actions, this simple undertaking groups the smaller units - numbers that consecutively increase by one - into visibly apparent larger cycles created by dipping and painting. An awareness of this is only evident through the repetitive and consistent action, and this allows viewers to contemplate the enormity of the artist’s project. Artist and art historian Desa Philippi (English, contemporary) indicates that the significance of Opalka’s process is derived from its “ceaseless realization” (154). And I see this echoed in the cycles and rhythms of everyday life. Because the work could only be completed through Opalka’s death, the intense commitment and repetition of a simple concept allows the work to transform over time - in this case “how an abstract sequence becomes a form we recognize - a biography” (Philippi 156).



Fig 6. has been removed due to copyright restrictions

Fig. 6: Roman Opalka, *Detail 1-35327* (detail), from the series *1965 / 1 - ∞*, 1965. Acrylic on canvas, 77" x 53".

Walking Loops project

Walking Loops, the project exhibited for the Emily Carr graduate program's interim exhibition, is comprised of two works, the drawing *Walking Loops 1*, and the sound piece *Walking Loops 2*. Both works in the project are informed by my repeated daily walk - a loop that begins and ends at my front door. The walk itself is a larger unit made up of smaller repetitions: there is the cycle of my breath, the beat of my heart, as well as the metronomic rhythm of my footsteps. I have repeated this walk so many times that it has become a kind of ritual for me. Drawing a parallel between semantic satiation and ritual, Elisabeth Hellmuth Margulis outlines how ritual encourages individuals to consider gestures at a basic level. "Outside of ritual," she writes,

“individual gestures are not usually interpreted on their own terms; they are absorbed into our understanding of the larger flow of events.” As a ritual, I am moved to consider my walk’s particularities, such as the quality of my breathing, the way I turn a particular corner, at what point the sun rises, or the fact that I often pass the same people on their own daily walks. “Ritual,” claims Margulis, “shifts attention from the overall pattern of events toward their component gestures.” By repeating my walk, the particularities, as Ben Highmore suggests, become inescapable. Ritual, as an aspect of the everyday, is a way to “register the unregistered.”



Fig. 7: Sarah Nordean, *Walking Loops*, 2013. Drawing and sound recording, dimensions variable. Installation in the Concourse Gallery at Emily Carr University. Photo: Minttu Maari Mäntynen. Used by permission of the artist.

Walking Loops 1

A further repetition in *Walking Loops 1* is the consistency in the mark-making technique. Using a tightly controlled, angular scribble with coloured pencil on frosted drafting film, the final work is comprised of 22 layered and overlapping shapes that stretch to 13 feet across. Through repetition, my aim is to draw attention to the particularities of the drawing. When the multitude

of drawings are layered and laid out horizontally, one is drawn to distinctions of the shape, small recurring details, the material quality of the drafting film, the effect of the layering - the component gestures that make up the overall pattern.

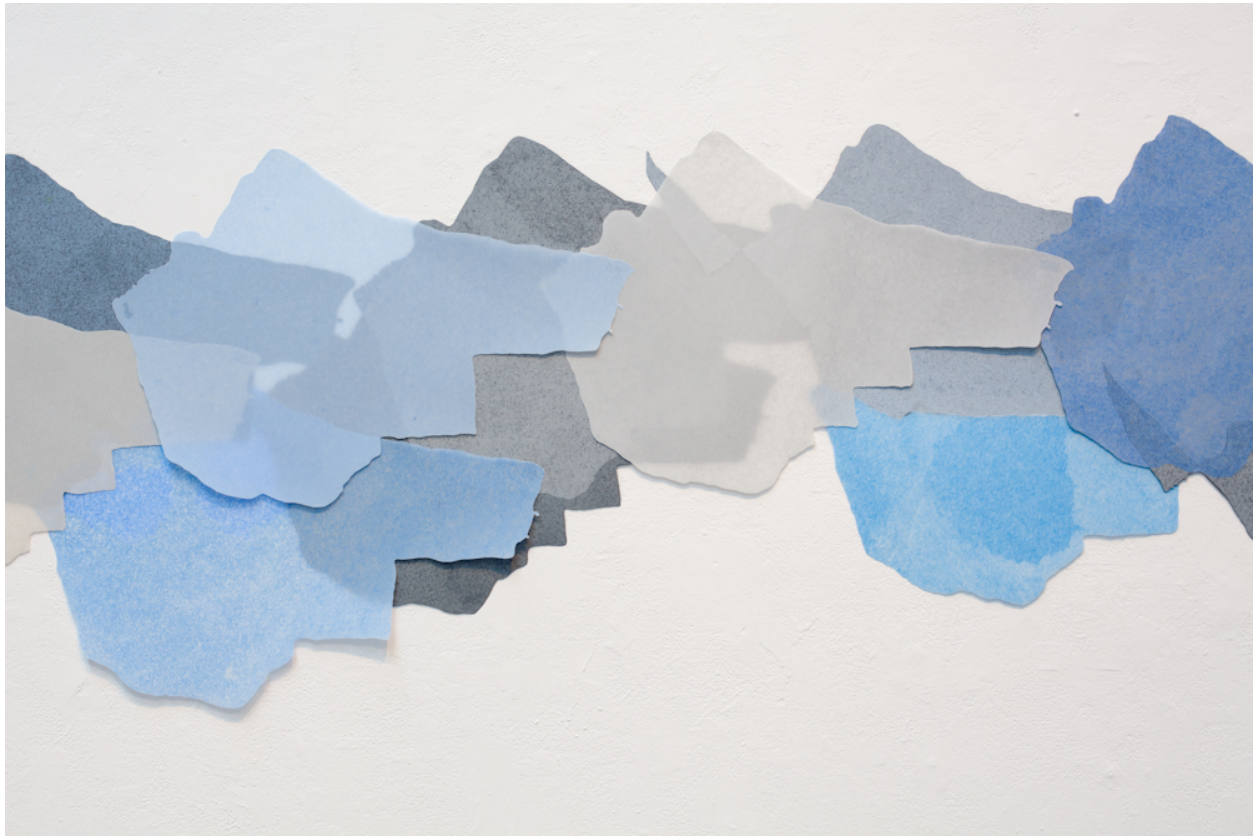


Fig. 8: Sarah Nordean, *Walking Loops 1* (detail), 2013. Coloured pencil and acrylic on frosted drafting film.

Photo: Minttu Maari Mäntynen. Used by permission of the artist.

It is through repetition that we notice difference. “Not only does repetition not exclude differences,” writes Henri Lefebvre, “it also gives birth to them; it produces them” (17). In *Walking Loops 1*, there are slight differences between the overlapping shapes, areas where the GPS routes differed slightly, or inconsistencies in my drawing. Slight changes in shape, variations in drawing pressure, or differences in colour become evident. The value of allowing differences to emerge through repetition, as opposed to purposefully producing them, is indicative of my interest in making art that is understated and simple. Inspired by Richard Long and Roman Opalka, among others, my practice considers the effect of making work that builds up over time and

reveals complexity through cumulative gestures. This has led to the development of a sort of rhythmic methodology that I use when generating new ideas and projects. With this methodology, rhythms and differences are generated through repeated actions. It begins with my walking practice, which becomes a generative tool for art making where it becomes possible to notice randomness and difference. Solnit writes that, “the random, the unscreened, allows you to find what you don’t know you are looking for, and you don’t know a place until it surprises you” (11).

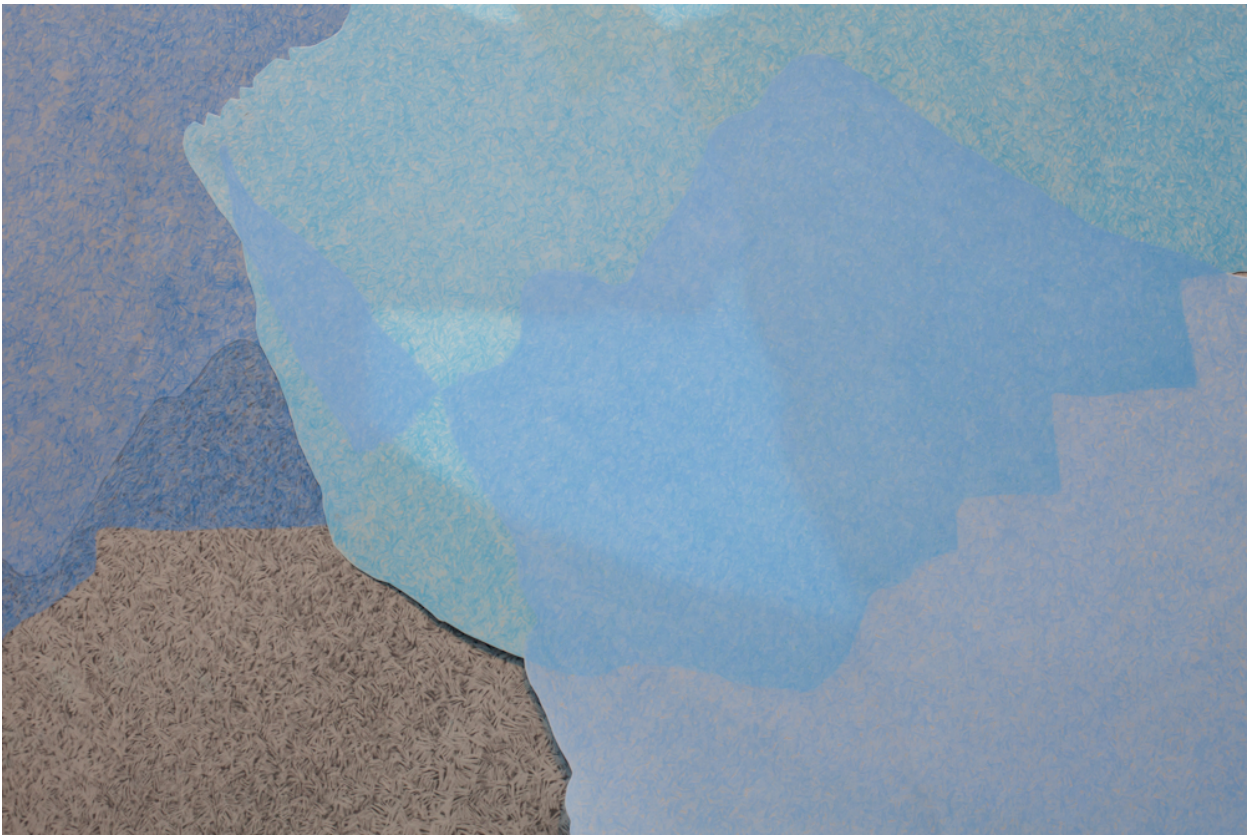


Fig. 9: Sarah Nordean, *Walking Loops 1* (detail), 2013.

Photo: Minttu Maari Mäntynen. Used by permission of the artist.

Walking Loops 2

Listen to Walking Loops 2 here: <https://soundcloud.com/windkick/pedestrian>
or here: <http://lowresgradstudios.ecuad.ca/snordean/projects/walking-loops/>

Sarah Nordean, *Walking Loops 2*, 2013. Single channel sound recording, 08:42.

Engineered by Arran Fisher

While *Walking Loops 1* visually presents the removed, cartographic view, *Walking Loops 2* is more aligned with the act of walking as an immersion into place. It is the representation of a direct experience. For this 8:42 minute sound recording, I took a sound recorder with me on the usual route of my daily walk, capturing the sounds of place. The sounds have been sliced, looped and repeated, imposing a regulated measure onto existing urban rhythms. The piece begins with a droning loop of the hum of traffic, then the metre is established with the muffled clicks of my footsteps on the sidewalk, and a backing beat of the thump of wind hitting my microphone. Sounds gradually build on to the metronomic rhythm of the footsteps: choppy traffic sounds layer and swell, and construction noises bring the work briefly to a throbbing cacophony. The gradual building and constant rhythm suggests movement through space. The continual movement of walking pauses briefly as the motion of the LRT, Calgary's Light Rail Transit, interrupts the footsteps, yet maintains the rhythm. Isolated moments of difference punctuate the repetition: bird calls, static interference, the sound of a gate slamming.

During the process of slicing and looping the sounds, I was not sure what the effect would be. As I arranged the individual sounds, I would play it back, and it sounded like random chaos to me. However, as soon as I repeated the sounds as a loop, they seemed to become organized and eventually came to sound musical. After working on the piece for a whole day, I found that I was humming along to the sounds of traffic. Margulis asserts that, "repetition is so powerfully linked with musicality that its application can dramatically transform apparently non-musical materials into song." In *Walking Loops 2*, a repeated looping of the LRT reveals a three-note melody that would not be evident without repetition. In this work a rhythm is created, and the sounds of the city become music. Margulis explains that just as in semantic satiation and ritual, the "musicalisation" of sounds through repetition "shifts your attention from the meaning of the [sounds] to the contour of the passage (the patterns of high and low pitches) and its rhythms (the

patterns of short and long durations).” Shifting to the visual, it is repetition that reveals the contours and rhythms in the drawing.

The drawing presents rhythm in space, while the sound work presents rhythm in time. Before making this work, I would have considered myself exclusively a visual artist, but I am very interested in exploring how sounds and images work to convey similar sorts of experiences through unique circumstances. My use of sound to characterize a walk is inspired by the audio walks of contemporary Canadian artist Janet Cardiff. Cardiff’s walks involve guiding participants through a place as they listen to a layered narrative soundscape that includes sounds sourced from the place itself. Cardiff writes of how sound interacts with the visual: “I am interested in how audio affects our perception of the physical world. We understand three-dimensional space by using our vision, but also by the character of sounds we hear” (Collier 81). The inclusion of a sound work in *Walking Loops* contributes a quality of three-dimensional space to the flattened space of the aerial view.

Sound can enrich a visual experience. It “enlarges one’s spatial awareness to include areas behind the head that cannot be seen,” (16) writes Yi-Fu Tuan, and I think of this “enlarging” as relating to the data cloud that tracks my movements through GPS. “More important,” Tuan continues, “sound dramatizes spatial experience” (16). While the drawing and sound piece are separate works that exist on their own, *Walking Loops 2* has the effect of bringing forward more direct notions of movement, time and experience to the project. Additionally, the project is significantly defined by the notion of the “loop”. Both the drawing and the sound piece use recordings of my walked loop as the bases for their separate compositions - GPS data and recorded sound. The drawing presents a spatial representation of the walked loop, and the sound piece expands on this, “looping” the sounds as an enactment of repetition to create rhythm. Presented together, viewers/listeners can engage with both works at the same time, and this becomes a way of being able to layer sound and images. Each work may influence the other, and I am excited about the possibilities of being able to fuse the non-objective drawing with repetitive and recognizable sounds of the everyday.

Ticks

Ticks, the final work of my thesis project, follows directly from *Walking Loops* in its concern with temporality, place, rhythm, and the everyday. This composite drawing was started in Vancouver at the end of the MAA program's 2013 summer intensive, and has been slowly growing. The work was initiated out of a desire to make something that was directly connected to the idea of time, to rhythm and also to walking. Solnit reflects on how walking begins with a regulated unit, but leads to something more: "It starts with a step and then another step and then another that add up like taps on a drum to a rhythm, the rhythm of walking" (3). While a step is the "beat" of a walk, the "tick" is the single rhythmic unit of this work. Additionally, just as I see my walking practice as continuous, there is not a planned end for *Ticks*.

This cumulative work is comprised of small drawings of tally-like marks with a dip pen and ink on toned grey paper. I make rows and rows of the ticks allowing the accumulated marks to form an organic shape that is determined as it is made. The paper is shifted occasionally, and the rows of marks change direction, responding to the previous rows. In determining the form, I continue to think of the work as a metaphor for place. As I try to make a shape that resembles a natural form, I am thinking about landforms and bodies of water. The marks, however, are a decidedly human impression, as they resemble the organized structures of the grid, or written language. Each small, island-like drawing is completed in one sitting, and the date and number of minutes it took to make it is recorded. Similar to *Walking Loops 1*, each drawing is cut out around its edge. The smaller drawings are displayed together as a larger conglomerate, the form of which is determined by the amount of drawings completed as well as the particularities of the exhibition space.

The absence of representational imagery in *Ticks* allows the process of repetition, the action of making, and the forms and materiality to be a clear component of the work's voice. The allover and consistent nature of the mark making means that the work lacks an obviously defined and central subject, an image (objective or not) that helps to focus the meaning of the work for the viewer. This highlights the repetitive action of the tally mark spread out across myriad drawings. The lack of representation is connected to a lack of melody in music, and I will again

quote Mondrian on music, who is struck by the “destruction of melody, which is the equivalent of destruction of natural appearance [in painting].”³

However, like noticing an unexpected melody, and in spite of its non-objective form, through contemplation *Ticks* is suggestive of the material world. Viewers of the work have indicated that it suggests to them, variably, rows of crops in a field, balls of yarn, stones, or a malignant growth. To me, the drawings are places and I consider the marks as property lines in an ever growing, and decidedly tumorous city not unlike my own city, a rapidly expanding victim of urban sprawl. In this sense, *Ticks* expands on the thoughts driving *The Islands* and *Bluff* about parks as places of pause within a city. As *Ticks* grows it becomes an unfathomable map of an impossible place. If this tumorous mass is a city, it is a place without pause, without escape. *Ticks* is relentless.

The idea of tallying or recording is present in *Ticks*. The cliché of prisoners counting their days in confinement, or a castaway recording the days stranded on an island prompt thoughts about time, routine, restriction, waiting and boredom. Highmore writes that the notion of “marking time” suggests “the standardizing of time and the routinization of daily life that accompanies it.” He cites Susan Stewart who writes in “On Longing”:

The pages falling off the calendar, the notches marked in a tree that no longer stands-- these are the signs of the everyday, the effort to articulate difference through counting. Yet it is precisely this counting that reduces differences to similarities, that is designed to be ‘lost track of.’ Such ‘counting’, such signifying, is drowned out by the silence of the ordinary. (9)

And *Ticks* is the ordinary act of stealing moments of time alone. Each small drawing is a record of what might seem like a notable moment alone in my routinized day. While the drawings are all different and each moment may feel unique, the work is characterized by consistency and monotony, putting forward notions of labour and obsession. Repetition and predictability prevent anything from standing out as the focus.

³ I see this as related to minimalism in music and art that developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In regards to such artists as Sol LeWitt, Hanne Darboven, and Steve Reich, Gerhard Daurer writes: “Instead of representing time and space (in the illusionist tradition), artists recognized in repetitive procedures the potential for a tactile-phenomenological experience of spatialization and temporalization. A linear and organic concept of time ceded to a presence- and place-oriented concept of synchronicity in the sense of spatially located time” (351).

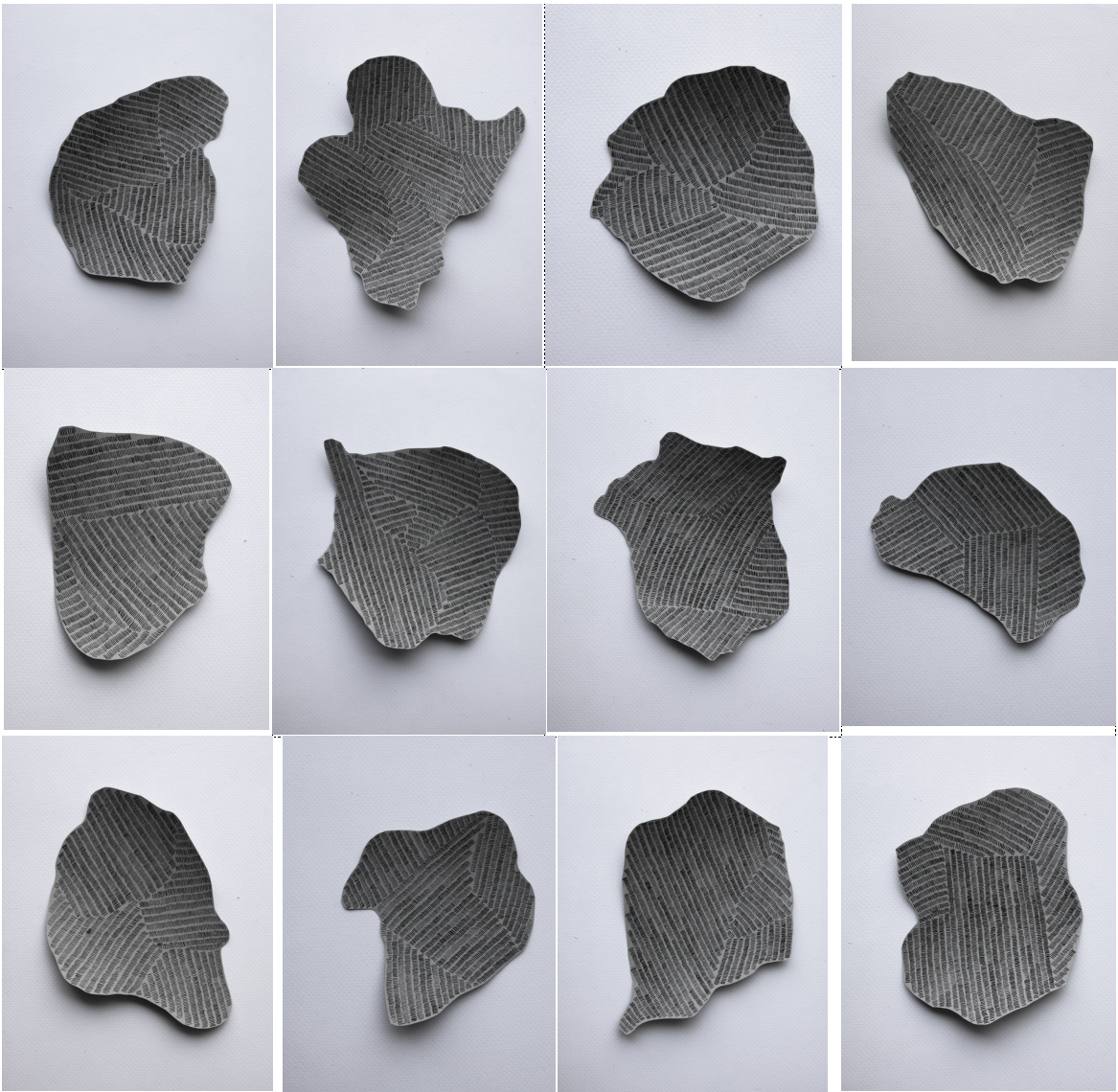


Fig. 10: Sarah Nordean, individual drawings from *Ticks*, variable dimensions.

Photos: Sarah Nordean. Used by permission of the artist.

Ticks presents a collection of sequential moments, but unlike a walk or a song which conveys the temporality of the sequence, allowing rhythm to develop through time, viewers are presented with the entirety of the marks at once. In his essay “Audiovisual Perception”, contemporary Viennese multi-media artist Gerhard Daurer writes, “the ear... tends to specialize in the perception of temporal processes and the eye in the detailed resolution of static phenomena.” Because of this, sound is associated with “ephemerality” and, images with “permanence” (330). The desire to record, to make a mark, is partly inspired by the desire to transform something fleeting and make it permanent. There is a certain anxiety in *Ticks*, an

urgency that suggests a desire to remember, to record, to capture the present. Each mark is a “now”, “now”, “now”. However, once recorded, the present slips into the past, and now becomes then. Thus *Ticks*, in spite of its simplicity, is characterized by paradox. This proof of presence is a record of absence; an individual mark is just one of many.



Fig. 11: Sarah Nordean, *Ticks* (1,678 minutes), accumulated drawings as of Feb 13, 2014. Pen and ink on grey paper, approx. 42"x48". Photo: Sarah Nordean. Used by permission of the artist.

Ticks builds up and takes shape as it is made, and the amount of time that is put into the work determines its limits. In addition to *Ticks*, each work in this thesis project reveals a boundlessness, echoing the incessancy of every day life. Avis Newman discusses how the enclosing frame in a finite artwork can be a “reassurance”, suggesting “ordered limits or completion” (9). Although the smaller constituent canvases of *Bluff* are framed by their individual stretcher bars, its variable grouping suggests an ambiguous border. *Walking Loops 1* expands horizontally across the wall space, and could potentially expand further in either direction. *Ticks* expands outwards, each new smaller drawing changing its overall boundary. Newman describes the effect of the unframed, unbound nature of a drawing: “There is no pressure from the outside

inwards; in drawing, it is all pressure from the inside outwards” (9). And this suggests that there could always, potentially, be more. The form of each of the works in this project builds up and accumulates over time. They did not begin with a finite, defined space to be filled. The unbound nature of a work suggests that it is not in a state of completion. However, through the *process* of mark-making, Newman suggests, “a somewhat precarious frame [is] constructed, almost as the byproduct of the articulation of marking thoughts, which by definition are open-ended, in a state of flux, and suggestive of a perpetual potentiality” (11). Indeed, the work does not feel finite or complete to me. For each of the works in the thesis project, I made as much as I could, with exhibition dates compelling me to stop. My research considers the works’ potentiality - because there *could* be more, I want more. While each piece was ready to exhibit when it was, there is the possibility of adding additional components for future exhibitions.

The accumulation of labour and time in *Ticks* is an indication of a commitment to a particular way of working. Repetition without significant deviation demonstrates dedication and imbues the simple action and simple marks with a significance. The commitment is driven by a soft adherence to a set of rules that keeps me on track and prevents distraction. In “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art”, Sol LeWitt suggests, “the idea becomes a machine that makes the art” (80). *Ticks* is propelled by the initial idea, though perhaps not as rigidly as LeWitt’s conception. The rules, which are not elucidated as part of the work, are that each small drawing is timed, recorded, and completed in one sitting. The form of each small drawing is not predetermined. Decisions that dictate its shape during completion are the amount of time remaining, aesthetic pleasure, and preventing the shape from incidentally resembling something. Committing to and following through with an idea is about an artist trusting and respecting a project’s initial plan, and dedicating the effort and time required to see it through. Part of the impact of Roman Opalka’s work is his dedication to a simple concept. Distractions and “what if?”s can be tempting to an enthusiastic artist eager to have some time in the studio; however, committing to some prescribed guidelines provides a focus, which allows for an immediate engagement with process. The idea and processes are machine-like, ensuring that the time available is used toward an end, and is thus recorded in *Ticks*.



Fig. 12: Sarah Nordean, *Ticks* (detail). Photo: Sarah Nordean. Used by permission of the artist.

A separate work that is connected to *Ticks* is the performative drawing *Keeping track* (fig. 13), which took place at the Charles H. Scott Gallery in Vancouver. This work is intended to be performed in an enclosed window space that has been lined with paper. I draw on the paper in the same manner as *Ticks*, and as time passes, the window gradually fills with marks. From the other side of the window, the work could be viewed as I was making it, with a suggestion of my presence visible through the translucent paper. Continuing themes of labour, obsession and counting in *Ticks*, this work also puts forth ideas of confinement and presence. Witnessing the continual making of marks has the potential to highlight the futility of the action.



Fig. 13: Sarah Nordean, *Keeping track*, 2014. Performed drawing. Ink on paper-lined window.
Photo: Scott Massey. Used by permission of the artist.



Fig. 14: Sarah Nordean, *Keeping track*, (detail). Photo: Scott Massey. Used by permission of the artist.

CONCLUSION

A rhythmic way of working has contributed to the definition of a methodology for the development of new projects. In concept, format, and process, I consider how I can use repetition to allow a rhythm and a potential illumination to emerge over time. *Walking the Arbutus Line*, a component of contemporary Canadian artist Germaine Koh's *League* project, repeats the familiar process of walking, but in a new place. In July 2013, Koh invited participants to investigate the history of Vancouver's Arbutus rail corridor and find their own way to walk the line (Koh). My participation in this walk was undertaken without a predetermined plan, as a way to be open to what Solnit describes as "the random, the unscreened". I am currently working on the art that walk elicited, taking into account that the corridor is now, one year later, undergoing many controversial changes. The more extensive project *Avalon* also uses walking in an unfamiliar place. For this project, which has been ongoing for the past year and a half, a walk is repeated while drawings, paintings, photographs and sound recordings are made in response. The timeframe for this project is much larger, and through accumulation, rhythms are emerging.

I am also using the research from this project to undertake a more developed version of *Keeping track* (fig. 14) that will look at rhythm and time at an extended level. I am using the documentation from the Vancouver show to apply for a project residency at a window space gallery in Calgary. Ideally, the exhibition would run for several weeks, and I would add to the work on a daily basis, allowing the larger drawing to build up in the paper-lined window over the course of the exhibition. These new works are about trusting and committing to a process, and allowing for the accumulation of actions and marks - small gestures that work together to form a rhythm of pattern and potentiality.

This potentiality relates to the form of the work. The creation of small pieces that form a larger whole, result in works that exhibit a boundlessness that could amass further. There is also a potentiality relating to the emergence of differences, or the possible transformation - akin to semantic satiation - that occurs through extended repetition. Ben Highmore suggests that the most characteristic aspect of everyday life is its "ceaseless-ness" (21). This project is an attempt to echo the potential and constant nature of everyday life as a way to elevate simplicity, to create an awareness of small differences, and to acknowledge the inevitable complexities. Attending to the everyday and giving it focus means attempting to record absence, capture the present, or represent moments from an incessant flow allowing rhythm to emerge.

ADDENDUM

Graduate exhibition: Transactants



Fig. 15: Sarah Nordean, *Ticks (5,404 minutes)*, 2014. Pen and ink on toned grey paper, approx. 60"x80".

Photo: Scott Massey. Used by permission of the artist

My graduate exhibition, titled *Transactants*, was a group show in the Charles H. Scott Gallery. In addition to my drawing *Ticks (5,404 minutes)* (fig. 15), the exhibition included works from the six other artists: four separate installations and two large sculptures. In some ways it

could seem that my work would be lost in the spectacle of the show, but in other ways, it quietly asserted its presence as the only work on the wall. I had two main concerns for the exhibition of *Ticks*. Firstly, I was concerned that I would not be able to settle on a satisfying way to compile and organize the drawing for display. This concern was founded on the struggle I underwent in the previous year to display *Walking Loops 1*, a similarly cumulative and modular drawing. Secondly, I was concerned that the work would not adequately express the impact of the repeated, simple marks that comprise the drawing. Regarding display, assembling the work was surprisingly un-complicated and relatively faithful to its year-long trajectory. The form is satisfying in its rhythmic accumulation, the interaction between the smaller drawings, as well as its material qualities - including the curling of the paper and its play with light and shadow. However, as I suspected, I found the work to be underwhelming in its size. While bigger art does not mean better art, a quality of monument does benefit a work that considers the repetition of an ostensibly mundane gesture to the point that it seems important. What I take from this is that this exhibition is an initial iteration of the work. My satisfaction in other areas, combined with this disappointment in size points to an obvious next step: make more.



Fig. 14: Sarah Nordean, *Ticks* (5,404 minutes), (detail). Photo: Scott Massey. Used by permission of the artist.

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