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Washington University in St. Louis Graduate School of Art

A Meditation in Three Parts

Brent Nakamoto

A thesis presented to the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts Washington University in Saint Louis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Part I (<i>An Introduction to Mindfulness, Meditation on Language, Second Meditation/The Glass Bead Game</i>)	4
Part II (<i>One Thousand Cranes, Third Meditation, Koan</i>)	14
Part III (<i>Meditation for Janet Sakamoto, La Selva Beach/Effacement, A Tale for the Time Being, Writing/Past and Present</i>)	22
Bibliography, Endnotes, and Image List	32

Abstract

I'm interested in the way we *read* images—the way we *see through* an image's surface in order to perceive its illusion, in the same way that we *see through* words in order to understand their meaning. I'm interested in this relationship, in both images and texts, between surface, illusion, and meaning. In Buddhist philosophy, the source of suffering is in our attachments to the self-as-image. The function of Zen meditation practice is to bring attention to this process of perception and, in doing so, to help see through the illusions of self-hood and ground our understanding in the reality of physical experience. In meditation practice, there is equanimity in accepting the paradox of the image—that its deeper meaning lies in neither surface nor illusion, but in the experience of *seeing through*.

In this thesis, I'm looking at the intersection of my creative and meditative practices over the past several years, focusing on projects where I have tried to incorporate the structure and awareness of meditation into my image-making. Using repetition and effacement as aesthetic interventions, I'm trying to challenge the conventional way we read images. By approaching my work as both an artist and a Buddhist, I hope to interrogate not only the paradox of the image, but also the paradox of the self, and the nature of identity, history, and suffering.

Shariputra, form does not differ from emptiness, emptiness does not differ from form. Form itself is emptiness, emptiness itself form. Sensations, perceptions, formations, and consciousness are also like this. Shariputra, all dharmas are marked by emptiness; they neither arise nor cease, are neither defiled nor pure, neither increase nor decrease.

Therefore, given emptiness, there is no form, no sensation, no perception, no formation, or consciousness; no eyes, no ears, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind, no sight, no sound, no smell, no taste, no touch, no object of mind; no realm of sight...no realm of mind consciousness. There is neither ignorance nor extinction of ignorance...neither old age and death, nor extinction of old age and death; no suffering, no cause, no cessation, no path; no knowledge and no attainment.

From the Prajna Paramita (Heart of Great Wisdom) Sutra ¹

It is an old idea that the more pointedly and logically we formulate a thesis, the more irresistibly it cries out for its antithesis.

The Glass Bead Game, Hermann Hesse ²

PART I

An Introduction to Meditation

I started meditation practice during my last term at the University of California, Santa Barbara. I went to see a school therapist because of the anxiety and panic attacks that I'd had throughout my last year of school, and he had suggested mindfulness meditation. The goal of mindfulness practice is to pay *full attention to whatever is happening around you and within you—in your body, heart, and mind* ³— and it is used as a tool for managing stress and anxiety because it helps bring awareness into the mind and the body in the present moment, and away from anxious thoughts that are not grounded in reality.

Zazen (literally, *seated meditation*), is the method of practice used in Zen Buddhism. Like mindfulness, which is largely derived from zazen, this form of meditation is a straightforward method for focusing awareness. The emphasis of zazen is on the posture

itself—seated, with back and head straight, hands placed on the lap, eyes open but cast down. This was the historical Buddha’s meditation posture at the moment of awakening, and it is the posture in which we see the Buddha depicted in sculpture and painting. In Sōtō Zen, there is no specific object of focus, no prescription for thought—simply by taking this posture, we are embodying the awakened being.

The first noble truth of Buddhism is the truth of suffering, or pain. *Birth is pain, aging is pain, illness is pain, death is pain; union with what is displeasing is pain; separation from what is pleasing is pain; not to get what one wants is pain.*⁴ The Buddha taught that the origin of suffering is craving, the desires of the self. But he also taught the path towards the extinction of suffering. *The knowledge of suffering, its origin, its cessation and the way of practice leading to its cessation,*⁵ are Buddhism’s four noble truths. As part of this larger Buddhist practice, meditation is a method designed to help find liberation from suffering. By focusing awareness on the impermanence of thought, meditation helps deconstruct and detach from our ideas about the self and the self’s desires.

For several years after I started practicing meditation, my creative practice became an extension and correlate to meditation. As a painter, I saw mindfulness as a tool to help me pay more attention, and to paint with more intentionality. In his memoir, *The Snow Leopard*, Peter Matthiessen writes that in Zen practice, *one seeks to empty out the mind, to return it to the clear, pure stillness of a seashell or a flower petal.*⁶ During these years one of my largest bodies of work was a series of small oil paintings on paper of shells, pieces of wood, and other found natural objects, surrounded by plain white backgrounds. I wanted to empty myself out, to let go of my attachments to the images that had been working with—mainly, the self-portrait, my own mirror-image.

When I talk about *image* in this thesis, I’m talking about two-dimensional images, and I’m using the term in a specific way. The basic nature of images is two-fold. First, the image is a surface. The surface is substrate—paper, canvas, etc. It is the physical medium as well as its physicality. In painting, the surface of an image is paint. In a photograph, the surface of an image is emulsion, or printed ink, or projected light. Second, the image is an illusion, or re-presentation—what the surface depicts. This is what we speak about most when we talk about *image*—the image of a face, the image of a shell. The surface of an image is its form, the illusion its object.

As a painter I have always been interested in the relationship between surface and illusion. I’ve always been aware of this quality of the image—its primary nature as a physical surface, or physical object. The image’s primary physicality is mute, silent, and abstract, but the function of its surface is always to serve its illusion, the thing it re-presents. As a painter I’ve always paid close attention to technique—the ability of certain painters to convey the illusion of reality with the greatest economy of brushwork, or a particular style, especially in portraiture. I’m referring to the economy of and depth of so many master painters—Titian, Velasquez, Sargent, etc. As much as I am drawn to the delicately modeled verism of Rembrandt’s early self-portraits, I’m also drawn to physicality, and confident looseness of paint in his later paintings—these moments where I am simultaneously aware of both surface and illusion, and their incredible inseparability.

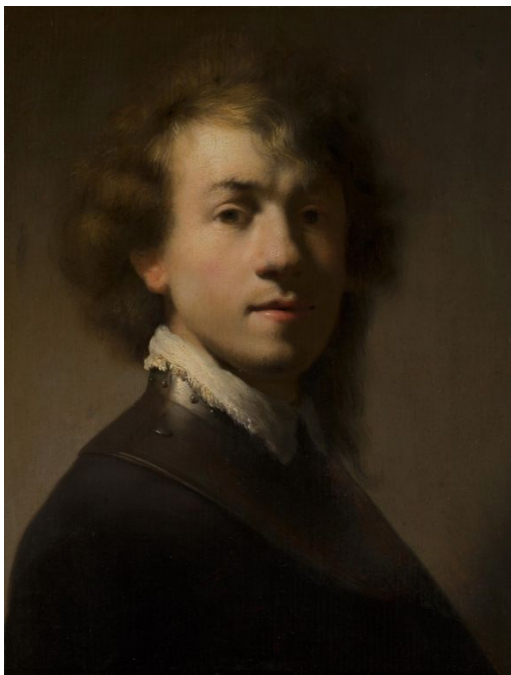


Figure 1. Rembrandt van Rijn (studio copy).
Portrait of Rembrandt with a Gorget, after ca.
1629.
Oil on panel, 37.9 x 28.9 cm.



Figure 2. *Self-Portrait, After Rembrandt* (Detail), 2013
Oil, 15 x 11.5 in.



Figure 3. *Self-Portrait*, 2011. Oil, 30 x 40 in.



Figure 4. *Self-Portrait as Miss Coco Puff*, 2011.
Oil, 30 x 40 in.

In college I was mainly painting medium-scale self-portraits in oil, based off my own photographs and photographs that I'd found in family albums and on social media. Of the photographs that I took myself, many were in costume or in drag—including the pair of self-portraits both in and out of drag, *Self-Portrait* and *Self-Portrait as Ms. Coco Puff*. I was looking most at Cindy Sherman's early work, and at Yasumasa Morimura, both photographers engaged in similar projects of exploring and challenging the construction of identity (gender, sexuality, and race, etc.) by appropriating contemporary image culture.



Figure 5. Cindy Sherman
Untitled Film Still #13, 1978



Figure 6. Yasumasa Morimura
Self-Portrait, After Greta Garbo 1, 1996

My interest in the photographic image is in its detachment. The physical photograph is the result of a purely mechanical process. The camera looks but doesn't see. This detachment allows for the unique visual effects of the photograph—its blur, and focus—as well as for its sense of presence. In *Hawthorne on Painting*, American painter Charles Webster Hawthorne argues for painting with the detachment of a camera. *The hardest thing in painting is not to paint what we have seen*, he says. *Don't think of things as objects, think of them as spots of color coming one against another.*⁷ For Hawthorne, the most difficult challenge for students was to paint without thinking, to paint only what their eyes could perceive, without also conceptualizing. The best painting *is an impersonal beauty—not a literary beauty.*⁸

This sort of detachment, of *awareness without criticism or judgment*⁹ is the goal of meditation practice. In the classic introduction to meditation practice, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, the Sōtō Zen priest Shunryu Suzuki, talks about the openness of the detached mind. *The goal of practice is always to keep our beginner's mind. Suppose you recite the Prajna Paramita Sutra only once. It might be a very good recitation. But what would happen to you if you recited it twice, three times, four times, or more? You might easily lose your original attitude*

towards it.¹⁰ The beginner's mind is an innocent mind, like an empty canvas. *If your mind is empty, it is always ready for anything; it is open to everything. In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities; in the expert's mind there are few.*¹¹

Because of my use of photography, my work has often been described in relation to photo-realism, though I've always been more interested in the painterly qualities of the photograph than in the hyper-realism of the American Photorealist school. I'm less interested in the *truth* of the photograph than I am in its presence, in its specificity. Much of my interest in photorealism in my own work is in the specificity of the face and its relation to the figure.

One of my first challenges as a younger artist was to my assumption of the face, and of photographic likeness as an indicator of identity—this conflation between the self and the face. During my last year of school my advisors asked: *Could I make a self-portrait that didn't include my own face?* This challenge was concurrent with—and related to—my panic attacks. And the anxiety that this question caused me was instrumental in pushing me to explore meditation practice—its benefits both to my well being and to my creative work.

There is, of course, another deeper layer of illusion in image. The surface of a printed word is a flat image, silent like any other. Its illusion is the word that we recognize, the word that we speak. But beyond that is the *meaning* of the word, both its definition as well as its context and connotations. When we look at images, we read them in the same way that we do a text—as surface, as re-presentation, and as meaning. One of the problems with writing about art is that the meaning of an image is less fixed, and less bound, than the meaning of a text. Much of my anxiety about those early portraits lay in the recognition that their meaning to me as objects of personal expression was invisible to my audience. I was overwhelmed by the potential complexity of image-meaning, its non-fixity.

In his translation of the *Dhammapada*, the written record of the Buddha's historical teachings, Buddhist scholar Glenn Wallis uses the term *obsessive activity and complexity*¹² to describe what I would call the anxiety created from the infinite potential for conceptual meaning. Later he uses the term *mental proliferation*.¹³ The term in question is *papañca*, in the words of another scholar: *the psycho-linguistic proliferation of cognitive-conative projections onto experience; or the linguistic 'excess' responsible for and resulting from mistaking interpretation from reality*.¹⁴ Buddhist meditation practice questions where the line is between reality and illusion. It is easy to distinguish between surface and illusion, but how do we distinguish the visual image from a conceptual one—from history, criticism, judgement?

In Buddhist terms, the *self* is an illusion. Every idea that we have about the self is impermanent, subject to change, subjective. But it is an illusion paradoxically—and necessarily—grounded in the experience of the body. (*It's your body and it's also a complex idea at the same time. As it should be.*¹⁵) Meditation, and the larger Buddhist path, can be understood as a practice for deconstructing our assumptions about the nature of the self, helping us to understand and see through this illusion, and experience a greater sense of meaning.

If there is one photorealist whose work I admire, it is Chuck Close, especially his early portraits, including his iconic self-portrait and portrait of composer Philip Glass. What I enjoy about these works is their absolute and overwhelming verism, and the experience of observing

them closer to see their illusion slowly break down into absolute flatness—just dark and light, and whatever is in between. This experience is essentially the function of meditation practice.

As a younger artist I sought meditation practice as a way to distance myself from that complexity, and to let go of my own attachments to meaning. But the goal of meditation practice isn't to get rid of conceptual thinking. Rather, in my spiritual and creative practices, sitting zazen has helped me to ground the potential for meaning within the bounds of my own experiences. Since beginning zazen, my creative practice has been a way for me to parallel this awareness by deconstructing our assumptions about illusion in visual images.

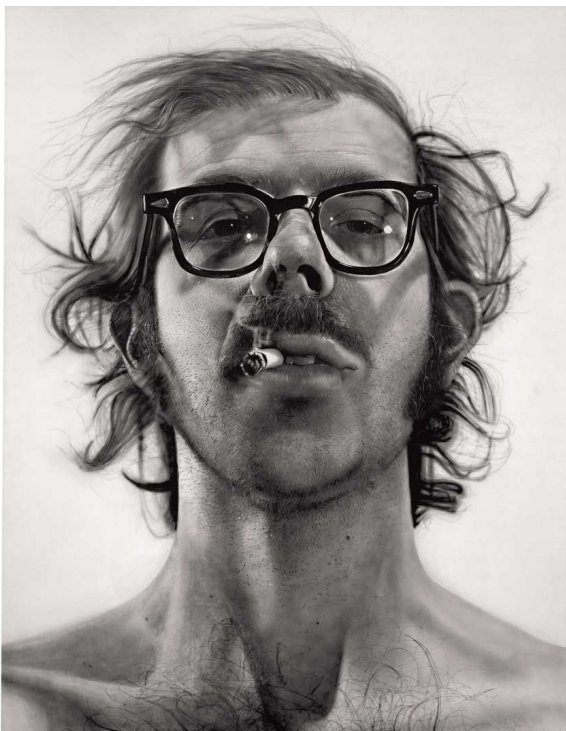


Figure 7. Chuck Close. *Big Self-Portrait*, 1967-1968
Acrylic on gessoed canvas, 107.5 x 83.5 in.



Figure 8. Chuck Close. *Phil*, 1969
Acrylic on gessoed canvas, 108 x 84 in.

Meditation on Language

One of my first attempts to point at the textual meaning of images was in *Meditation on Language*, from 2013. This work is a series of three small paintings on three separate, vertical canvases, each copied from the same self-portrait photograph. Each painting was painted individually, in sequence, and each is a slightly different (and unintentional) translation of the original image. Included on the bottom of each canvas are writings copied from three separate writers: Meister Eckhart, the 14th century Catholic mystic, from his collected writings; Hermann Hesse, from *Narcissus and Goldmund*, his novel about a reckless and creative youth searching for meaning in art and sensuality; and Marshall McLuhan, from *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, his 1962 book about the effects of Gutenberg's movable type on Western social and political structures.

These three works are connected superficially—they all deal with with the technological and social changes of the late Middle Ages, and in Germany specifically—and ideologically: these changes led to our modern understanding of the individual in relation to God. For each of these writers, the body and the senses are medium, not only the language through which we apprehend the physical world, but also through which we make meaning, through which we understand unity, God.

In his *Talks of Instruction*, Eckhart writes: *Practicing earnestly and often, one learns to write, acquires the art. To be sure, each letter must first be considered separately and accurately, reproduced over and over again, but once having acquired skill, one need not pay any attention to the reproduction [of the letters] or even think of them. He will write fluently and freely whether it be penmanship or some bold work, in which his art appears. It is sufficient for the writer to know that he is using his skill and since he does not always have to think of it, he does his work by means of it.*¹⁶

Though not a Zen monk, Eckhart's mysticism shares much with Zen and Taoist philosophy. (It also earned him his excommunication from the Catholic church). In this passage, Eckhart is using the alphabet as a metaphor for spiritual practice and for language. In the same way that we learn to write, when we learn to read, we begin looking past the surfaces of words in order to perceive their meaning, unconsciously. We learn through repetitive action, and it is only through the complete internalization of these actions that we fully internalize their meaning. The goal of Buddhist practice is also a learned internalization of *right behavior*, but the function of zazen is to cultivate a continual awareness, so that our actions don't slip into the unconscious. (*But what would happen to you if you recited it twice, three times, four times, or more? You might easily lose your original attitude towards it.*)

In the years that I was beginning meditation, I was interested in seeing how much I could incorporate the structure and process of zazen into my work. I was looking at and reading works by artists like Robert Irwin and John Cage—both artists influenced by the arrival of Zen in the United States around the 1960's. I was interested in the idea that, through spiritual discipline, art could be a medium for *self-alteration*, rather than *self-expression*.¹⁷

I've always been interested in Philip Glass, especially his works for solo piano, which were written as much as spiritual études as they were musical ones. In his music, his characteristic, relentless repetitions not only challenge expectations of music, but also invited listeners to go beyond the music itself. For Glass, *repetition never analyzes but merely insists. Repetition makes the listener participate not by comprehending it but by knowing it.*¹⁸

As a painter, this repetition was first a way of forcing myself to slow down, to be more skillful, more conscious, more mindful. In working from photography, it is easy to become more concerned with the outcome than with the process. This repetition was a way of challenging my usual way of working—to try to find the space for mindfulness, for an experiential, rather than purely textual meaning.

But it was also a way of challenging my own expectations of what painting and portraiture can be. In performing this repetition, I was trying to position painting as a learned and internalized action, rather than an original and inspired creation; and I was trying to

fracture the assumption of portraiture as an individual and cohesive expression of identity. By including these texts I was attempting to point at this fractured relationship between image and text—the learned way that we read both—as well as the way we attempt to synthesize the two.



Figure 9. *Meditation on Language, with text from Eckhart, McLuhan, and Hesse*, 2013. Oil, Three Panels, (18 x 36 in.) 54 x 36 in.

Second Meditation/The Glass Bead Game

About a year after completing the *Meditation on Language*, I began working on a second *Meditation*—the same in format, except this time extended to six paintings and now painting directly from the mirror instead of the photograph. These panels included texts from Hermann Hesse’s novel *The Glass Bead Game*, from the *Heart Sutra*, one of the central texts in Zen Buddhism, from Eckhart’s writings on spiritual striving, and from my own writing. After the previous meditation, I wanted to see if I could really utilize this repetitive structure as a way of breaking down my own expectations of what the work could or should be. Through this repetition, could I learn to let go, not only of the image, but of the ideas that I hold about myself?



Figure 10. *Second Meditation (The Glass Bead Game)*, 2014. Oil, Six Panels, (18 x 36 in) 108 x 36 in.

This project was inspired by my continued study in Zen and mystic philosophies, as well as my first reading of Hesse's nobel-prize winning *The Glass Bead Game*, from 1943. In the first chapter of the novel (*The Glass Bead Game: A General Introduction to its History for the Layman*), Hesse describes the founding of the academic province of Castalia, following the *century of wars*, as a refuge and safe haven for pure, intellectual exploration. In its few centuries of existence, profound achievements in the study of mathematics, music, philology, etc., have been possible in Castalia because of its complete renunciation of the profane world.

The pinnacle, and symbol, of Castalian life and philosophy, is the Glass Bead Game, an exercise in aesthetics and analogy, developed as a way to integrate all branches of knowledge into a single symbolic language—*a new alphabet, a new language of symbols through which they could formulate and exchange their new intellectual experiences.*¹⁹ Over centuries, the Game has developed so completely that its language includes and synthesizes all fields of academic study. *Theoretically this instrument is capable of reproducing in the Game the entire intellectual content of the universe.*²⁰

When I read *The Glass Bead Game* for the first time, I was inspired by this vision of unity, of synthesis—the goal, not only of finding ultimate meaning, a complete understanding, but also of the *lingua sacra*, the unified language describe it. I thought that this was very power of art—to speak across disciplines, and to bring them together. By combining my own writing with others', and by pairing these writings with painted images, I was attempting to create my own kind of synthetic language, which pointed to the textual reading of images beyond their illusion.

PART II

One Thousand Cranes

My decision to return to graduate school was conflicted. When I applied to graduate programs, I was still in a transitional period in my work. What felt most solid to me was meditation, and I worried that the academic environment would be hostile to a regular practice—that I would always be too busy, or too distracted. I worried not only that my practice would suffer, but that my creative practice would suffer in turn—that I would lose whatever detachment I had found, and that I would lose my trust in myself.

The 2016 presidential election happened during my first semester at Washington University in St. Louis, and the general anxiety that followed did nothing to help my doubts. I wanted to lose myself in my work, but I didn't have anything that I was really working on. Shortly after the election, I started folding origami cranes as a way to keep my hands busy, and keep my thoughts focused on something productive. Between November 2016 and September 2017, I folded one thousand cranes from paper cut from the New York Times. About 800 of the cranes are folded from a single issue of the paper from November 9, 2016, the day after the presidential election, and the remaining 200 from a special election section in the November 10 paper.

According to Japanese tradition, anyone who folds one thousand origami cranes will be granted a wish. I heard of the one-thousand cranes for the first time when I was in the third grade and read *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*, a novel about the real life of Sadako Sasaki, a Japanese girl who was two years old during the American atomic bombing of Hiroshima. Sadako developed leukemia from the bomb radiation and folded one thousand cranes with the wish that she might live. When I first read about Sadako I imagined that I might one day fold my own thousand origami cranes, but I didn't know what I had worth wishing for.

I'm interested in the dual nature of the newspaper as a medium—as a symbol of what is most current, most now, and also as what is worthless, discarded, thrown away. I wanted to fold these cranes from newspaper because I was thinking about recycling—not just the re-use of physical materials, but the continual return of historical narratives. I wanted to bring the focus of anxiety into the meditation in a concrete way. Even though these cranes were a way of finding moments of quiet, of stillness, it was also important to me that they be a reminder of the real suffering that is and always has been.

The first noble truth is the truth of suffering, and the paradox of this truth is that we cannot really be free from suffering until we stop trying to push it away. Meditation is integral to this path, as a practice in awareness and acceptance. When I first started sitting meditation I was trying to create a refuge from fear and doubt. I was trying to protect myself from anxiety. But this practice isn't a way of escaping complexity, it's a way of embracing it.

It's important to me that these cranes are a part of Japanese culture. My grandparents were both born in California, children of immigrant farmers from Japan. My grandmother was twelve years old when she and her family were removed from their homes and sent to the Heart Mountain internment camp in Wyoming, where they lived for almost three years during World War II. For the rest of their lives, my Grandparents were average Americans. They didn't like to talk about internment or what it was like growing up Japanese before—or after—the war.

When I grew up I never heard my family speak Japanese. My father cooked Japanese food once or twice a week, but I didn't learn to use chopsticks correctly until I was in high school. There was little else to remind me of that history. My grandmother didn't teach me how to fold origami, but she bought me paper and books of instructions, and when I fold these cranes I think, first, of her.

When I fold these cranes I think also of my family and their history. I think of the displacement of immigration, and the displacement caused by war. I think about culture and tradition—how it ties people together—and I resent that what connects me most to my family is a sense of culture that has been lost, rather than shared. I resent that I no longer know what it means to be Japanese in the same way that my grandparents, and their parents did. I think about trauma, individual and collective—the displacement of people, the dropping of bombs, the building of walls—and I wonder what I can do to help move forward.

Folding these cranes was a way of bringing contemplative practice into my life as a student. I wanted to show myself that it was possible to retain an attitude of healthy detachment, even in the midst of academic pressure. And I wanted to show that it was possible to retain this detachment in the midst of political pressure as well—a way to make space for meditative and contemplative action in political discourse. Yet I still had doubts about the validity of this process as a means of making artwork.

In the Rinzai school of Zen, students work their way into the teachings by answering a koan, a paradoxical kind of riddle. A koan doesn't have a single, simple solution—meditating on its inherent contradictions is a tool for helping the student to let go of logical ways of thinking and learn to accept what cannot be fully understood. While folding these cranes, I held each square of newspaper in my hand as if it were a koan. I asked myself, over and over: How can sitting in meditation create change in the world? How can folding paper be of any use?

In the novel, and in real life, Sadako never gets her wish. There is no real magic in origami. We talk about paper as a metaphor for fragility, weakness, thinness. Paper cannot stop a bomb, or tear down a wall. Folding these cranes hasn't given me an answer to that question, at least not an answer that's easy to explain. What I can say is that this project was successful, both as an artwork and as a meditative (*self-altering*) act. It's not so much that the meditative practice taught me to better find my quiet space, but that, through the repetition, I got used to the fact—the insistence—of the news, of politics, of the world. If it was a practice in anything it was in realizing that the news continues every day. And if I am different now, it is that I am no longer surprised, I no longer react to the news as if it were unexpected.

There have been no other projects that have remained so constant in my life for so long—and one thousand repetitions is still more than I can really conceive. With this project,

I've learned to rely on the process, to gain a level of faith without feeling like I need to question or interrogate it. I've learned to hold something in my hand gently—to hold without grasping—to acknowledge without naming.



Figures 11-14. (Clockwise from top left.) Selections from *November 9, 2016 (One Thousand Cranes)*, 2017. Digital photographs

I had folded about 500 of the cranes, when I realized that I needed to photograph them. While working on the cranes themselves I was absorbed in the activity as a meditative act. I wanted to share this primary experience of letting go, but the actual cranes were incapable of doing so. In the years that I was deepening my meditation practice and working on the first and second *meditations*, I was trying to get closer to the immediate experience of reality that I had found through practicing non-attachment. I thought that I could only re-create this immediate

experience by distancing myself from mediating technologies. But I found that the ability to share this experience comes from this same detachment, and the translation into something new.

Through the detachment of the camera, these photographs make the folding a remote activity. Instead of presenting the meditative experience itself, these photographs document the cranes as the result of that meditation. Photography allowed me to replicate the meditative experience as a visual experience, looking at each crane individually—to treat them as portraits, or as letters in an alphabet—and to present them as a single archive of unique parts. In installations of this project, and in projection of the images, I've been able to show all one thousand images simultaneously. This presentation has allowed me to do replicate the meditative process for the viewer—recreating in the act of looking the overwhelming scale of the project. By forcing the viewer to look at these images simultaneously, I'm asking them to confront the powerlessness of language.

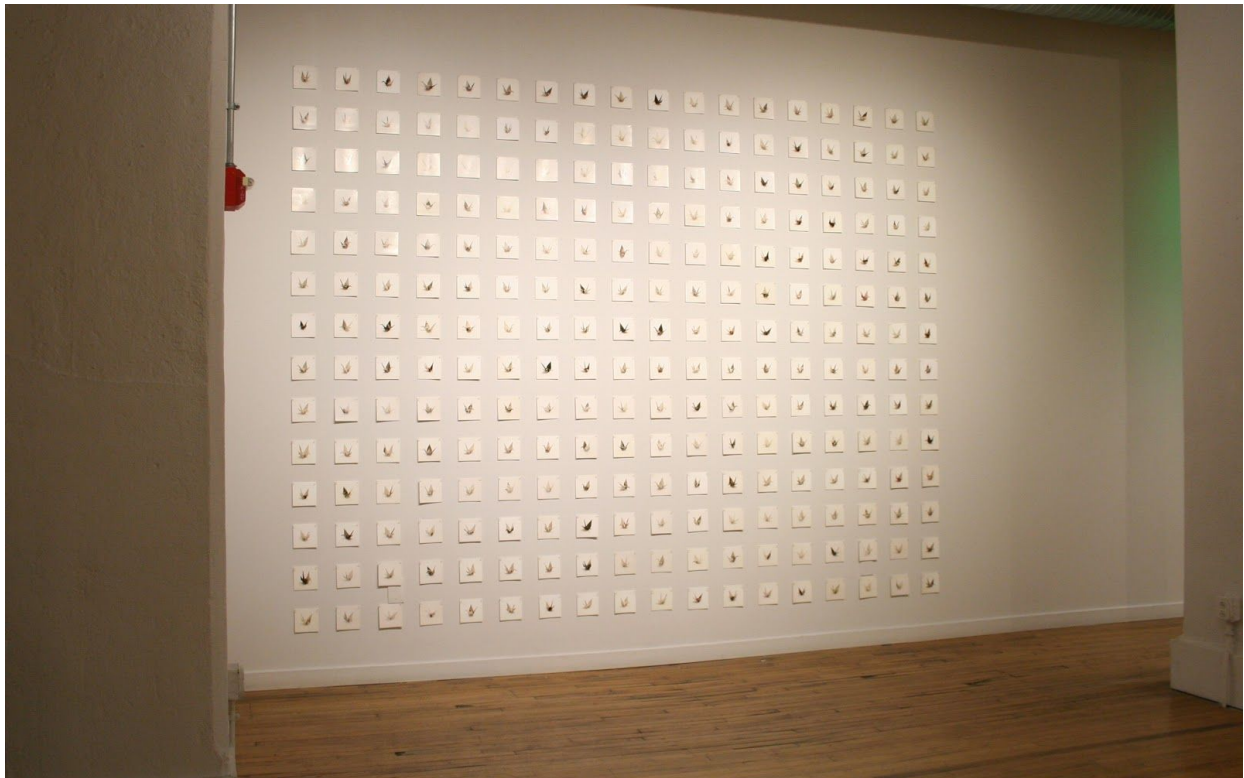


Figure 15. *November 9, 2016 (One Thousand Cranes), 252 of 1000*, 2017. Inkjet prints.

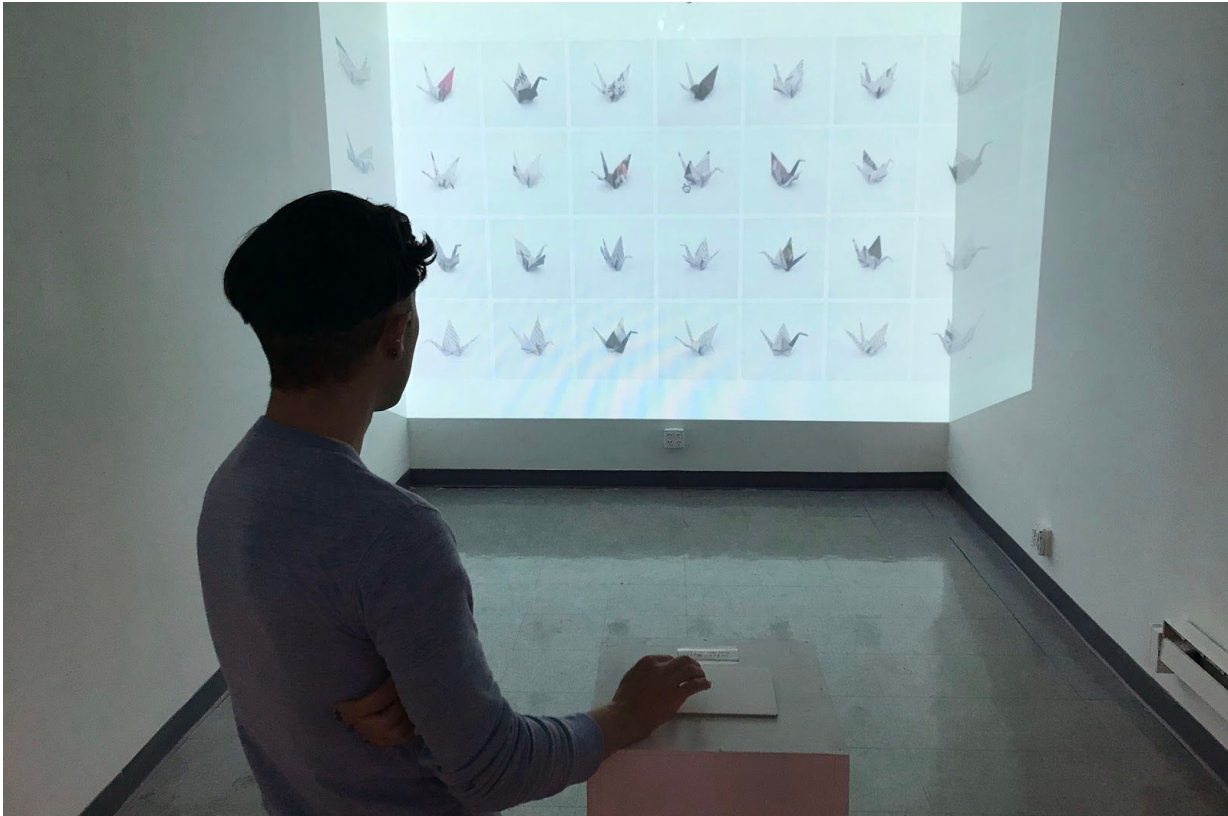


Figure 16. *November 9, 2016 (One Thousand Cranes)*, 2017. Interactive digital Projection

Third Meditation

My third and final *meditation* is a return to photography—three paintings based on a single self-portrait photograph. In this image, my eyes are cast down, in the posture of *zazen*. The painted images are the same dimensions as the first two *meditations*, but there is a solid border around each image, and no text. I wanted to photograph myself in this position not only because it is the posture of *zazen*, but also because it is an image that I can never see without the aid of photography. I can never look in the mirror without also looking into my own eyes, without confronting the self. Assuming this posture allowed me to see something that I could not on my own, and allowed me to give myself entirely to the camera, to resist the need to return the camera's gaze.

There is an energy in this image that the previous *meditations* don't have. The casting down of the eyes is an effacement of my self, as well as an evasion of the viewer, and a challenge to the connection that we expect when looking at portraiture. This idiom owes everything to *zazen*—not only visually, but in practice as well. It has allowed me to let go of my relationship with the viewer and to fully give myself to the transformational power of the camera, and to let go of the text, of the need to speak.

With these paintings I wanted to repeat what I had learned from the previous two *meditations*.

I was interested in the psychological effect of looking at this image, fractured and repeated. I'm specifically interested in the relation between images as a set of three. I'm not interested in doubling—in repetition in binary relationship. As I worked on these paintings, the first two panels together created an uncomfortable, and even slightly violent dissonance between the two, highlighting their dissimilarities. The third painting goes beyond that duality, and hints at the possibility of continued repetition. Looking at these paintings, similarities and dissimilarities are no longer so easy to grasp, or even necessary.

There is still a dissonance, but the third image allows for a movement between images, rather than just back and forth. I wanted these paintings to grab your attention, to make you stop and look at them, but I wanted the thing that grabbed your attention to be their subtle differences. I wanted these interventions in the conventions of portraiture to induce an awareness of the act of looking— an awareness of awareness.



Figure 17. *Untitled, Third Meditation*, 2017. Oil, Three Panels, (14 x 22 in.) 42 x 22 in.

More than either of the previous *meditations* these new paintings get closer to the heart of Zen practice. This repetition is not only about challenging myself as a painter, better—forcing myself to come face to face with my own work—but also about acknowledging the process of imperfection and growth. As I've worked on these *meditations*, my original question—*Could I paint a self-portrait that didn't include my own face?*—transformed into its inverse: *Could I make a painting of my face that was not a self-portrait*, and, by extension, *Could I let go of my self by painting my face?* By structuring my paintings this way I'm trying to disrupt assumptions about traditional portraiture, the convention that the portrait represents an interior experience of the figure. I am less interested in what's inside than what's outside. (Both are illusions.) I'm interested in how the act of observation informs our relationships with each other—what can we know by looking, and what can we not know?

If I am trying to communicate anything, it is an attitude of not-knowing. With these paintings, I'm not trying to assert, but to equivocate, to challenge the fixity of ideas. I'm trying to open up a space for an undeniable presence, even in the absence of words to describe it. *These hard rocks instruct my bones in what my brain could never grasp in the Heart Sutra, that "form is emptiness, and emptiness is form... The secret of the mountains is that the mountains simply exist, as I do myself; the mountains exist simply, which I do not. The mountains have no "meaning," they are meaning; the mountains are.*²¹

In his essay *What do Pictures Really* Want?*, W.J.T. Mitchell asks us to reframe the way we think about the power of images. *Images are certainly not powerless*, he writes, *but they may be a lot weaker than we think. That is why I shift the question...from the model of the dominant power to be opposed, to the model of the subaltern to be interrogated or (better) to be invited to speak. If the power of images is like the power of the weak, that may be why their desire is so correspondingly strong, to make up for their actual impotence.*²²

In order to understand what an image is asking us, what its power is over us, we need to understand that *the power they want is manifested as lack, not as possession...we need to ask what the picture wants in terms of lack.*²³ If these paintings want what they lack: In their repetition, they want to be one, in their fragmentation they want to be whole. In their subtlety they want to be noticed. In their coldness they want to be alive. With eyes cast down, these images want to be able to see, to engage with the viewer, to connect. In remaining calm, they want to act.

Koan

For years I'd wished that I had a more formal Zen practice, or any formal Zen training. I'd wished that I'd been given a koan to practice with—a singular thing to focus on, and a marker to quantify how much I'd learned since I began practicing. When I came to this program I was trying to work through my questions by incorporating meditation structure into my creative practice. Finishing the *One Thousand Cranes* photographs helped me to recognize that my work is not just a way of working through, but also a way of posing my own questions.

The face is the subject of one of the most known koans. (*Show me the face you had before your parents were born. Show me your original face.*²⁴) I have always been drawn to the face—and the mirror-image—because of its paradox. In this koan, the face is a marker of the self, of the absolute specificity of the individual and identity, but also of the universality of the face as the medium of our most universal language. The face is a surface—at once mute, *semantically meaningless*²⁵—and yet it is also a frame for expressing the entirety of human experience. The face facilitates not only our ability to communicate with one another, but our ability to transcend (and transgress) the bounds of the self and the other. When I look at my face in the mirror, or in the photograph, I feel impossibly bound, but also the possibility that through the visual interaction—this literal self-reflection—I might come to know myself better.

The face is a metaphor for both the surface of the image and the surface of the text. In my practice, I'm trying to ask—and to propose—the question: are images real? And if so, where do they exist? In a famous koan, a group of monks are observing a banner waving in the wind: *Is it the flag that moves? Is it the wind? Neither, said Hui-Neng, the sixth Ch'an* Buddhist Patriarch of China: It is your mind.*²⁶ However, in a ninth century koan from China, the nun Miaoxin disagrees: *What moves is not the wind, nor the banner, nor your mind,*²⁷ she says. (Nothing moves.)

In *What do Pictures Really* Want?*, what Mitchell suggests is like the idea of image-as-koan. If the image wants what it lacks, then the image is less presence than absence, less assertion than proposition. The koan works by subversion, by challenging our assumptions about what is real or what is true. The image doesn't necessarily reward viewing with knowledge, but like the koan, it must be interrogated in order to yield to understanding.

The finished photographs of the *One Thousand Cranes* are now available online in its entirety. In the time between completing the photographs and getting the website online, I started uploading the photographs onto Instagram. This was my first use of Instagram as a platform for showing my work, and the first work that I had posted on social media since I was in college. I wanted to share this work with a larger community, but I was also concerned that putting these images on social media was, inherently, a devaluation of the contemplative experience they were meant to represent.

I kept asking myself if I could use even this experience to further let go of idea of self—of ego, of popularity, of uniqueness—but this posting has nothing to do with contemplative experience. Photographs show what I made, not my experience making them. They confirm my activity, but are also a documentary work in and of itself. I was interested in the idea that doing something uncomfortable to me could be an opportunity for growth. But using social media is an exercise in patience of a very different kind—and not every repetition affords the same potential for transformation.

I want to see myself as nothing, says the narrator in Lydia Davis' short story, *New Year's Resolution*. The narrator, a student of Zen, is struggling to live up to her aspirations of equanimity. This is the same resolution that has guided me through years of practice. But the questioning of Davis' narrator points to the deeper paradox: *But how does a person learn to see herself as nothing when she has already had so much trouble learning to see herself as something in the first place?*²⁸

PART III

Meditation for Janet Sakamoto

Over the past few years, I have been making paintings based on photographs from an old album I found in my grandmother's attic the summer before she died. The photographs start just before her internment, at age twelve, and go through high school. Many of the photographs are of her, but many are of her family, her friends. Later, in high school, many of the photographs are of her friends, signed, *Dearest Janet, Love Sumi. Helen. Kunio.*

In the last years of her life, my grandmother often asked me to help her write her life story. I didn't understand why this was so important to her at the time. She had spoken so rarely, so reluctantly, about the past during my life—why did it matter now? And how could she have expected me to tell a story I didn't know? I found this album of photographs the summer before she died. She had invited my parents and me to visit so that she could tell us more about her life, so that she could explain why she was the way she was. But when I asked her about the photographs, she didn't even want to see them—she didn't really want to remember.

For years, I struggled to find a way to write her story. I felt guilty that I had not tried hard enough while she was alive, but the harder I tried the more I realized that I had never really known her.

After her death, these photographs became a reminder to me of that guilt. In the months after her death, I searched through these photographs. I thought that if I looked at these photographs with enough compassion, I might come to understand her better. I thought that I might find what was needed in order to tell her story, and that I might absolve myself of that guilt.

As I looked through these photographs I found myself searching for images of the woman I had known. Like Barthes, in *Camera Lucida*, this part of my story begins with the search for a memory validated by the photograph—for something that I knew I would never really find.²⁹ Though I had no difficulty recognizing her face in these images, I found myself drawn most to the images of the woman whom I did not recognize. When I saw her smile in these photographs, I imagined a woman lighter and more carefree than the one I had known. I wished I could have known her then, but I know that this was a lie: the photograph makes us long for a memory which has never really been.

I started painting from these photographs as a way of try to tell her story. I made *Meditation for Janet Sakamoto* shortly after she died, a series of six images, paired with my own writing. I called the piece a meditation, not because it was repetitive in the same way as my previous portraits, but because it required spending time. Because I expected—and did—learn through the process of making them.



Figure 21. *Meditation for Janet Sakamoto*, 2016. Oil on paper, with cotton twine and found wood, 43.5 x 47 in.

This project was a personal experiment, and the paintings of my grandmother are small sketches, done in grisaille. In all of them, I left her face unpainted. I found that I could not paint her face, at so small a scale, in a way that matched the image of her that I had in my mind. When I looked at these blank faces, the images were so familiar to me that it felt unnecessary to paint her face at all. Within the empty space, I could imagine her more clearly. The loss of the face was a necessary step, without which I would have felt unable to paint her image at all.

In *What do Pictures Really* Want?*³⁰, Mitchell speaks specifically about the terror that his students felt when he asked them to destroy the eyes in a photograph of a loved one. But I am not destroying anything—the photograph is still safely stored in its album—it’s the painting itself that is the aggressive act. So this blank space is in some way a protection, against that violence that the painted image may have caused against her memory.

When I finished these paintings, the issue of this effacement was still unresolved. I worried that this erasure might seem aggressive, or even violent, that it removed all that is most unique to her and what connects me to her, and would therefore reduce her to an historical

anecdote. At the same time, the erasure still felt necessary: perhaps I know my grandmother most as a sense of loss—that her life is defined to me by her sense of removal, her lack of her own image, sense of self. And I am powerless to give it back.

La Selva Beach/Effacement

After finishing the *Third Meditation*, I've started working on new paintings based on my grandmother's photographs, but not those of my grandmother. The work that I am showing for the thesis exhibition is a set of three paintings of young men at La Selva Beach, just southeast of Santa Cruz, around 1948—*Donald Yamamoto, Osamu Shimada, Earl Santo*. These images are each 60 x 40 inches, painted on 64 x 44 inch canvas stretchers. Around each image is a two-inch border of gesso and raw canvas. In these paintings as well, the figures are effaced—here, obscured by gestural brushwork, rather than left blank.

In the *Third Meditation*, the posture of the figure rejects observation and challenges our assumptions not just about portraiture but about our relationship to others. These paintings literalize the effacement suggested in the *meditations*—physically obscuring these faces with paint—and this effacement also challenges our ability to read these images as traditional portraits.



Figure 20. Gerhard Richter, *Familie Rubnau*, 1969
Oil on linen, 51 in. x 78 3/4 in. (129.54 cm x 200.03 cm)

There is a clear parallel between these paintings and Gerhard Richter's photo paintings, especially the black and white paintings, blurred by his iconic brushing of wet paint across the canvas. With his characteristic handling of paint, Richter foregrounds the materiality of of paint as the surface of these images. But their extreme flatness, and the visibility of this blur

only draws attention to the fact of their translation from photography. I'm interested in this blur, in the way that the effacement of detail paradoxically opens up the space to imagine a greater realism.

Here it is not hyper-realistic detail that proves the photograph, but rather their uniform effacement. This blur creates a visual and figurative distance, mimicking the detachment of the camera, as well as the separation of time. These paintings challenge our assumptions about the image surface in a related way to Chuck Close, invoking a closer inspection, and the inevitable realization of the painting's illusion. In a similar way, I'm trying to disrupt the image plane in order to draw attention to our relationship with the photograph, and with the past. But in my paintings this disruption is not uniform, it is singular, and specific. It doesn't reduce, or equate the figures with their background, but pulls them away from it.



Figure 21. *Donald Yamamoto, La Selva Beach, 2018. Oil, 64 x 44 in.*

The act of performing this effacement is a way of deconstructing identities, or at least *ideas about* identity. Having the paradox of the mirror image in the *meditations*, I'm now turning towards images of others, but this deconstruction is necessarily complicated by my relationship to these people—my grandmother, as well as these three men—and it requires a different idiom.

When I painted my grandmother's photographs, I didn't initially intend to leave her face unpainted. And when I began these images I was surprised to find the same discomfort. I was drawn to the images of my grandmother in relation to how much they reminded me of her, how much I missed her, and how much I wished for something different, something lost. But I have no relationship with either these names or these faces. Their story may be tangential to my own, to my grandmother's, but theirs are stories over which I can claim no ownership.

What makes me uncomfortable then, is not that the painted image is incapable of corresponding to memory—I have no memory—but rather that there is still something I see in the photo that does not translate into paint, something I'm looking for which the photo does not satisfy and which is asserted in that translation. There is a spontaneity, and an innocence, in these faces, that feels inappropriate, improper even, to labor over. Then again, like my grandmother's image, I am drawn to these images by a sense of longing. Perhaps, still, a longing to understand her story, my story, but more specifically, the story that is embodied in these specific figures. I am interested in my own relationship with these figures, and the extent that I see myself in them.

I am drawn to these images as much by what I know as by what I don't know. They present both an object of desire and a reminder of trauma—of something lost—and between the two, the possibility of the unknown. Aside from their names, I know nothing about the men in these photographs except from what I can infer. *La Selva Beach. 1948*. I am drawn to these images not because of what they once meant, but because of what they still mean. And my interest has less to do with what I know, than with what I can imagine. Who are these young men? Did my grandmother take these photographs? And if so, was she looking at them for the same reasons that I am looking at them now?

In my practice, the essential quality of the photographic image is this impossible longing—the illusory, always, always, longing to be real. The translation of the photograph into paint is an attempt to real-ize this illusion. In a way, the photograph is realized through the act of painting, realized in the movement of the body and its internalization, but the painting itself is no less illusory. Even though the paint medium is a more tangible presence than the flatness of the photograph, the image itself is still distant, ungraspable.

The photograph is a denial then, as well. The photograph denies my ability to realize it. The photograph also denies my ability to connect with the people they represent, to truly understand their experiences. Whereas my very first self-portraits relied on the specificity of the face in order to communicate, here the specificity of the of the face denies my access.

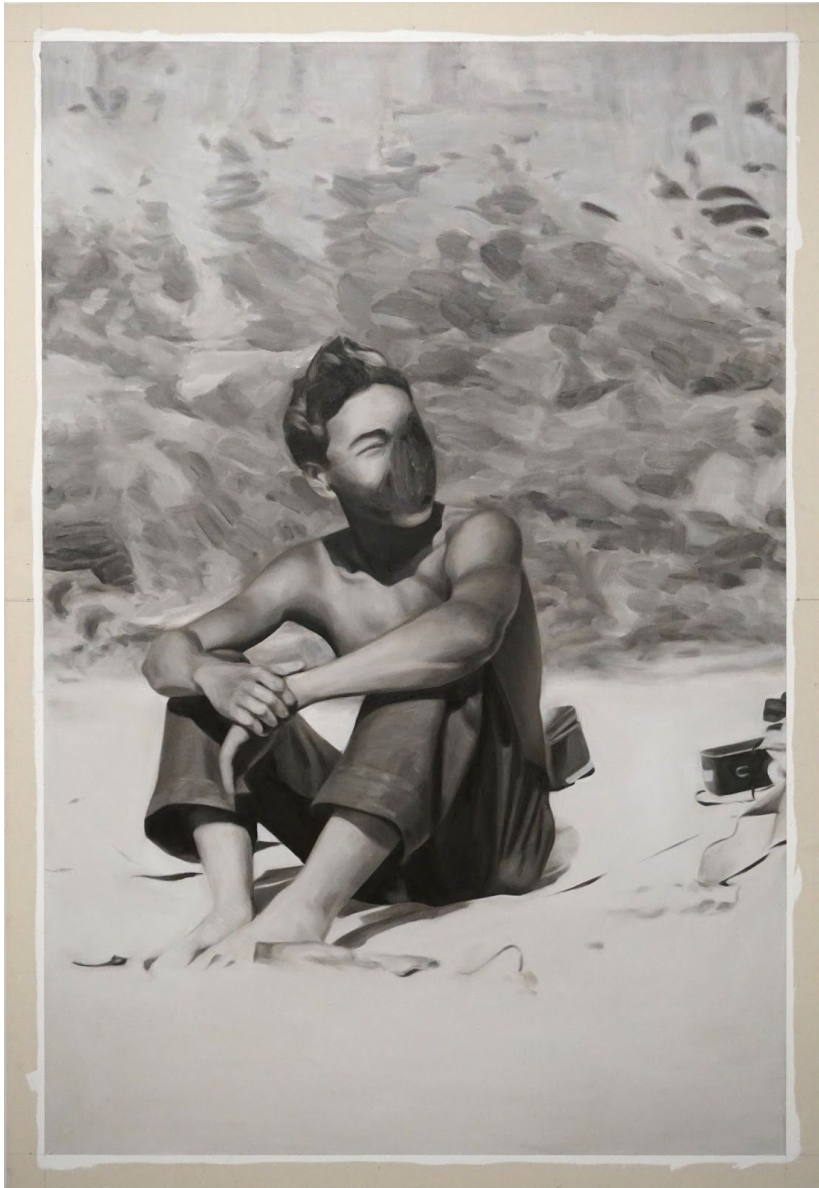


Figure 22. *Osamu Shimada, La Selva Beach*, 2018. Oil, 64 x 44 in.

The erasure is, perhaps, a response to that denial. The erasure isn't a solution, but, like in the *Third Meditation*, a form of equivocation. This effacement appears as a vandalism, or a wound, but it is also a marker of trauma and loss. These marks are disruptions, as if on the surface of the photograph, which deny our access at the same time as they draw us further in. Though these marks may seem to be erasing their identities (their specificity), the act of effacement only draws more attention to what has been erased. The figures in my paintings are already anonymous—their identities have already been stripped away by time. The erasure is a violence, but a violence that calls attention to the history of violence that lies beyond its surface. The effacement is a koan: it may be an empty space, but it is an empty space that is still a deliberate act of mark-making.



Figure 23. *Earl Santo, La Selva Beach, 2018. Oil, 64 x 44 in.*

Since I started meditation practice I have mainly been painting small images. The *La Selva Beach* paintings are the largest that I've made, and the size of these new paintings has presented the opportunity to engage with the canvas on a more physical level—painting with more of my body, and incorporating more looseness of gesture in the final image. My previous, smaller paintings, are rigid by comparison. I felt like I needed this rigidity in order to get at the detachment of meditation, but the purpose of meditation is to create space for this freedom, this spontaneity, not simply to push it away. Joan Mitchell described her painting as *riding a bike with no hands*,³¹ and there is so much pleasure in allowing myself to give into the looseness of painting—its natural resistance to control—and finding a new sense of freedom in that letting-go.

When I stopped painting from photography a few years ago, it was in part, because I could not then answer this question: What does the painting do that the photograph does not? What does painting add that the photograph does not already have? The answer is not so much in either medium, but in the space between them, and in the translation from one to the other.

What is added in the translation from photograph to paint is the painted surface. (And this is what is lost when the painting is translated into photograph.) In my practice, photography has been an invaluable method for distancing myself from the world. The photograph settles the perceptual experience within a flat surface. The gesture of painting unsettles, disrupting that flatness. The photograph can activate a narrative imagination, but the painting opens up a perceptual one.

A Tale for the Time Being

My Japanese-American heritage has become an increasingly important part of my work over the last few years, as I've spent time reckoning with this history. And as I've deepened my meditation practice, I've become more interested in Japanese history as well—culture, aesthetics, philosophy. The *One Thousand Cranes* project felt to me like an embrace of traditions and heritage that had previously been unimportant in my life.

I've written and spoken about how important origami is as a reminder of my grandmother and of my past. But one of the ironies of the project is that my grandmother never taught me how to fold origami. She gave me paper and books of instructions, but I never saw her fold origami. My family, too, has never practiced Zen Buddhism. My father and Grandparents grew up going to Buddhist church in San Jose, but this was a Jodo Shinshu, a Pure Land, Buddhist church, far removed from the austerity of Zen practice.

I do not know how much claim I have to these traditions. And it is frustrating to have to ask these questions of myself: To what extent am I appropriating these traditions for my own use? To what extent can I say that I am trying to reclaim a tradition that's been lost—or that I have been ripped away from? And how useful is it even to ask the question, to differentiate between the two?

After re-reading the novel again recently, I realize that the idea of folding cranes from newspaper was surely inspired by Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being*. The two main characters are Naoko, or Nao (*NOW*) Yasutani, a sixteen-year-old who grew up in Sunnyvale, CA, my own hometown, now adjusting to life in Tokyo, and Ruth Ozeki herself, a Japanese-American woman writing from her home in the Pacific Northwest. Throughout the story we meet Nao's great-grandmother, a Zen Buddhist nun, and her father, an *bikikomori* who spends his time folding laborious and complex origami insects from the pages of *The Great Minds of Western Philosophy*.

I was fascinated by the poetry of this fictional origami the first time I read it. But also remember thinking that he might have been better off if he had been folding from Lao-Tzu,

rather than Nietzsche. *I don't think it was helping him find the meaning of life,"* Nao says about her father, *"but at least it gave him a concrete goal, which counts for something. I believe it doesn't matter what it is, as long as you can find something concrete to keep you busy while you are living your meaningless life."*³²

Writing/Past/Present

What my grandmother wanted most—what she needed most—was to be able to tell her own story, to be able to make sense of the past. For so many reasons she was unable to do this, and so she was never able to move forward, unable to forgive, unable to grow. I understand now that she asked me for help not simply because she was demanding, but because she trusted me to find the words, to understand.

Throughout my life, writing has been a method for me to help understand myself and my work.. I write in a journal regularly, as a self-reflective practice. I write privately and I write selfishly. I write not in order to get something out of myself, but to get something out of the practice—to receive some gift, some insight, without having to work for it, without even, really, being there. The pleasure—the gift—of listening to myself speaking rather than the burden of having-something-to-say, of knowledge-without-thinking. But my relationship to words, and to writing, is complicated, and I have struggled to find the words to talk publicly about my work.

When I came to this program I knew that writing the thesis would be the biggest challenge for me—not because I don't know what to say, but because I have too much. It's hard to know where to start, or where to end. Writing this thesis has been a learning process—learning to speak more directly, to stop pointing at empty spaces. I'm glad that the writing, as well as the work, has been an opportunity for self-reflection.

Within the past two years, meditation practice has allowed me to find myself in the present moment. I'm excited about where my work is going, but also recognizing that the present, and the future, cannot exist without the past—without the ability to look back, to understand where I've come from.

The Buddhist path is not only a repetitive practice but a recursive one. So much of my creative and spiritual practice is about doing things that I have already done, of doing things over and over, in order to see, and in order to show, how much has changed.

In *The Argonauts*, Maggie Nelson writes about the recognition of this repetition—*the pleasure of recognizing that one may have to undergo the same realizations, write the same notes in the margin, return to the same themes in one's work, relearn the same emotional truths, write the same book over and over again—not because one is stupid or obstinate or incapable of change, but because such revisitations constitute a life.*³³

In *Silence*, his book of collected writings, John Cage shares a story from his teacher, and scholar of Zen Buddhism, D.T. Suzuki: *Before studying Zen, men are men and mountains are mountains. While studying Zen, things become confused. After studying Zen, men are men and mountains are mountains. After telling this, Dr. Suzuki was asked, "What is the difference between before and after?" He said, "No difference, only the feet are a little bit off the ground."*³⁴

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¹ "Chants and Rituals," *Kannon Do: Zen Meditation Center*, April 1, 2018,
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² Hermann Hesse, *The Glass Bead Game*. (New York: Picador, 1990), 20

³ Jan Chozen Bays, *Mindfulness on the Go*, (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 2014), 4

⁴ Glenn Wallis, *The Dhammapada: Verses on the Way: A New Translation of the Teachings of the Buddha, with a Guide to Reading the Text* (New York: Modern Library, 2007), 155

- ⁵ Ibid. 155
- ⁶ Peter Matthiessen, *The Snow Leopard*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), 86
- ⁷ Charles Webster Hawthorne and Marion Campbell Hawthorne, *Hawthorne on Painting*. (New York: Dover Publications, 1965), 47
- ⁸ Ibid. 64
- ⁹ Bays, *Mindfulness on the Go*, 4
- ¹⁰ Shunryū Suzuki, and Trudy Dixon, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*. (New York: Weatherhill, 2001) 21
- ¹¹ Ibid. 21
- ¹² Wallis, *The Dhammapada: Verses on the Way*, 156
- ¹³ Ibid 157
- ¹⁴ Dan Lusthaus, *Buddhist Phenomenology* (London: Routledge-Curzon, 2001), 55
- ¹⁵ Maggie Nelson, interview by Colter Ruland, *Fiction Advocate*, October 3, 2016.
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- ¹⁷ John Darnielle, *There are Other Forces at Work: John Cage comes to Halberstadt*. Harper's Magazine, January 2016.
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- ¹⁹ Hesse, *The Glass Bead Game*, 36
- ²⁰ Ibid. 15
- ²¹ Matthiessen, *The Snow Leopard*, 208
- ²² W.J.T. Mitchell, "What to Pictures Really Want?*" . *October* 77 (1996): 74
- ²³ Ibid. 76-77
- ²⁴ Janwillem Van de Wetering, *The Empty Mirror: Experiences in a Japanese Zen monastery*, (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1999) 41
- ²⁵ *There have been many kinds of writing, pictographic and syllabic, but there is only one phonetic alphabet in which semantically meaningless letters are used to correspond to semantically meaningless sounds.* Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 83
- ²⁶ Matthiessen, *The Snow Leopard*, 111
- ²⁷ Florence Caplow, and Susan Moon. *The Hidden Lamp*, 286
- ²⁸ Lydia Davis. "New Year's Resolution." *Samuel Johnson is Indignant: Stories*. (New York: Picador USA, 2002), 45-46
- ²⁹ *Now, one November morning shortly after my mother's death, I was going through her photographs. I had no hope of "finding" her...* Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), 63
- ³⁰ *Everyone knows that a photograph of their mother is not alive, but they will still be reluctant to deface or destroy it.* W.J.T. Mitchell, "What to Pictures Really Want?*" . *October* 77 (1996): 73
- ³¹ Joan Mitchell, interview by Marion Cajori, *Joan Mitchell Foundation*, April 18, 2018,
<http://joanmitchellfoundation.org/work/artwork/cat/paintings>
- ³² Ruth Ozeki. *A Tale for the Time Being*. (New York: Penguin Books, 2013), 80
- ³³ Maggie Nelson. *The Argonauts*. (Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf Press, 2016), 112
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- Figure 1. Rembrandt van Rijn (studio copy) (1606 - 1669). *Portrait of Rembrandt (1606-1669) with a Gorget*, after ca. 1629, oil on panel, 37.9 x 28.9 cm. The Hague, Mauritshuis, inv. 148. April 13, 2018.
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- Figure 3. Nakamoto, Brent. *Self-Portrait*, 2011. Oil, 30 x 40 in.
- Figure 4. Nakamoto, Brent. *Self-Portrait as Miss Coco Puff*, 2011. Oil, 30 x 40 in.
- Figure 5. Sherman, Cindy. *Untitled Film Still #13*, 1978. April 13, 2018.
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- Figure 6. Morimura, Yasumasa. *Self-Portrait, After Greta Garbo 1*, 1996. Gelatin silver prints, 44 x 34.5 cm. April 13, 2018.
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- Figure 7. Close, Chuck. *Big Self-Portrait*, 1967-1968. Acrylic on gessoed canvas, 107.5 x 83.5 in. (273.1 x 212.1 cm). April 13, 2018. <http://chuckclose.com/work007.html>
- Figure 8. Close, Chuck. *Phil*, 1969, Acrylic on gessoed canvas, 108 x 84 in. (274.3 x 213.4 cm). April 13, 2018.
<http://chuckclose.com/work017.html>
- Figure 9. Nakamoto, Brent. *Meditation on Language, with text from Eckhart, McLuhan, and Hesse*, 2013. Oil, Three Panels, (18 x 36 in.) 54 x 36 in.
- Figure 10. Nakamoto, Brent. *Second Meditation (The Glass Bead Game)*, 2015. Oil, Six Panels, (18 x 36 in.) 108 x 36 in.
- Figure 11. Nakamoto, Brent. *November 9, 2016 (One Thousand Cranes), #137 of 1000*, 2017. Digital photograph.
- Figure 12. Nakamoto, Brent. *November 9, 2016 (One Thousand Cranes), #216 of 1000*, 2017. Digital photograph.
- Figure 13. Nakamoto, Brent. *November 9, 2016 (One Thousand Cranes), #905 of 1000*, 2017. Digital photograph.
- Figure 14. Nakamoto, Brent. *November 9, 2016 (One Thousand Cranes), #986 of 1000*, 2017. Digital photograph.
- Figure 15. Nakamoto, Brent. *November 9, 2016 (One Thousand Cranes), 252 of 1000*, 2017. Installation, Des Lee Gallery, Saint Louis, MO.
- Figure 16. Nakamoto, Brent. *November 9, 2016 (One Thousand Cranes)*, 2017. Interactive digital projection, Lewis Center, Saint Louis, MO.
- Figure 17. Nakamoto, Brent. *Untitled, Third Meditation*, 2017. Oil, Three Panels, (14 x 22 in.) 42 x 22 in.
- Figure 18. Nakamoto, Brent. *Meditation for Janet Sakamoto*, 2016. Oil on paper, with cotton twine and found wood, 43.5 x 47 in.
- Figure 19. Richter, Gerhard. *Familie Rubnau*, 1969. Oil on linen, 51 in. x 78 3/4 in. (129.54 cm x 200.03 cm) The Doris and Donald Fisher Collection at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. April 13, 2018.
<https://www.sfmoma.org/artwork/FC.531>
- Figure 20. Nakamoto, Brent. *Donald Yamamoto, La Selva Beach*, 2018. Oil, 64 x 44 in.
- Figure 21. Nakamoto, Brent. *Osamu Shimada, La Selva Beach*, 2018. Oil, 64 x 44 in.
- Figure 22. Nakamoto, Brent. *Earl Santo, La Selva Beach*, 2018. Oil, 64 x 44 in.