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A Loud Volume Landscape

Grace Armour Buyers

BFA Thesis Paper 2023
Heather Bennett, Cherryl Wassenaar, and Jen Meyer

Washington University in St. Louis, Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Art
May 5, 2023
Abstract:

It feels more like sounding it out than constructing it. Choosing and adapting images, concentrating on the auxiliary fragments (out-of-focus elements, the corner of the table, the reflection in the window, the highway median) and the backgrounds (the sky and its clouds, the gravel ground, the movement of the water, the horizons where these meet), I then breathe them together. The final products are primarily collages, and though they are originally constructed from printed media and found objects, their final forms are scanned and rematerialized. The content of these works focuses on the relationships between the chosen fragments and how their formal attributes connect. Viewers parse through the works in various ways; poster, zine, or digital, and I hope the scope of access gives opportunities for different connections and ideas to percolate in viewers’ minds.
A Loud Volume Landscape

Walking and Feeling (A Thesis)

I like to walk and read; read while I walk.

My favorite moments are when my attention drifts between moving my feet and the contents of the book; I love when I glance up to check my path and see something to photograph, or when I read something and have to put the book down for a moment and just move forward with the words. When I'm bored by my surroundings, I can focus on the paper, and when the words aren't holding me, I can shift my gaze to what’s around. The nuances of my surroundings connect to the things on the page. I also now have beautifully toned forearms and trust my feet.

My thesis work is moving on one plane and thinking on another – how divergent movements can connect, be more entertaining, and burn even more calories, as a pair. There are things compromised when you merge and redact using movement and form, but the ultimacy of one image folded down can form a more complex and exciting idea. My works, the readable posters, are also maps, books, and a walk in nature. They connect to the joy of using your eyes.

Love (The Heart Behind the Thesis)

I judge if I actually like someone based on how many photos I send them. Gifting is a love language, but photos are the key for me. I take up the storage on family, friends, and lovers' phones; as if framing something and sharing it with them will seduce them into the way I view things. Wow, she has a beautiful brain. It's magic the way she captures that. One day someone will look at me the way I look through a viewfinder.
My thesis work, titled *A Loud Volume Landscape* is a collection of collages based on the sharing of images. Fragments of images from the New York Times paired with found materials from walking are collaged, scanned, and reprinted in a larger format. There are three versions of the same work: A poster, a large zine, and a digital NFT. The variety of forms, all public ways of sharing visual information, are democratic and provide an opportunity for the simple transmission of complex images, relationships, and ideas.

For me, this work establishes a strong set of working terms for my collective practice (oeuvre): material variety with close attention to detail, in which the viewer’s eye is cast around an image piecing together the parts, combined with a sensitivity to the ways in which formal and cultural themes are embedded in the everyday landscape. The works are dense, bold, and demand looking time with opportunities to find things.

Public Space (Highline)

The Highline Canal is my place in Denver. Before the construction of the tourist railroad in Lower Manhattan or the bluffs in LA, Denver built a very long *public* trail connecting parks of the southern suburbs. The slice I frequent is a few blocks from my house and runs miles along one of the only public marshes in Colorado. It's an elevated path with a canal that falls off to the east, just damp and steep enough to be inaccessible, and fields of grass open to the west, giving a clear view of the Rocky Mountains.

Public Space (Forest Park)

Forest Park is my place in St. Louis, and I always tell people that without it I’d walk in circles. It's gorgeous and well-maintained, with moments of entry and entrance. At the bottom of Art Hill, the expansive open area under the St. Louis Art Museum, I imagine facing the mountains at
home. And then, behind the museum, I pace in the quiet natural shrubs. Access to the public space and photographing attributes, nature, and people within have defined my studio practice. The paths are generally clear, so it's easy for me to take a book from my studio and walk there.

The Vogue Photo (Gursky)

My concerns straddle two types of photography. First, I am attracted to the vogue of large-scale digitally manipulated photographs like the work of Andreas Gursky – where the scale shows the powers of editing and printing to encapsulate the viewer in the camera's ability to capture light. Beyond the grandeur of the scenes and the printing, as seen in his 1995 Engaden I (figure 1), the striking clarity reminds us of the emphasis on post-production in our own worlds as beauty and space seem too big for a lens to accept. Further, Gursky's works transcend the final perfect surface of ink on paper but also connect to his ability to travel the world and, “find his subjects and then convince us that each scene could not have been more fully described than from his chosen perspective, “ (Cotton 84).

There's a sexy quality to the prints in their composition and gloss… he is able to seduce with one image like a painting. His work created a new dignity for photography. Susan Sontag states, “Photographic images are pieces of evidence in an ongoing biography or history and photography, unlike one painting, implies that there will be others,” (166). The ability for Gursky to just produce a one-of-one digital image is possible because of the printing technologies of large inkjet printers and the finances of affording paper and ink – this is the opposite of the mass production of the newspaper and social media and brings the work into high art.

The Modest Photo (Davey)
Ink on paper is so compelling that I find myself frequently mesmerized, wanting to translate all light to ink to see how it looks, singing on a surface, and tapping into that inviting element of mechanically placed ink on paper. In contrast to Gursky and his monumental images, I find myself snapping scenes of decay and nature's gestures because of my position within St. Louis as a post-industrial city and my sensitivity to landscape. Therefore, my work aligns more with the modest photographs of Moyra Davey whose subject matter is commensurate with her surroundings focusing on intimate interiors and dust and books (Long Life Cool White, Davey 13). The works are humble and mundane but then step further within their sharing and presentation.

In one example of this, in her 2011 series *Coffee Shops, Library* (figure 2), Davey collapses the photographs in a system of folds that are taped and labeled, then mailed. Through this process, she instills a mystery of the photograph having a life beyond a creator and a viewer while also taking the process of developing past a darkroom or printing as it becomes marked and worn on its own private journey in the mail – it connects to the wear and tear of the viewer themselves and pokes and the inaccessibility of large vogue photos like Gurskys.

**Contrast the Vogue and the Mundane (Substrate)**

The collages operate between these two forms of photography, and because of the way I build space and content, as well as print them, they are photographic. On the one hand, their large printing scale, around thirty by forty inches, and high definition, where you can see the texture and halftone of the newspaper, reference the seductive scenes and landscapes of Gursky. On the other hand, the folding into a zine form, adding creases and history to the paper, brings it into the material and accessible realm of Davey’s photography. But unlike both of these artists, this work...
is not just about the photograph but the compilation of many into a larger piece to be interacted with. My thesis piece *Half & Half You Say* (figure 3), directly references reading in its reflexive use of a full spread, cuing the ideas of Davey, but the image is constructed in a landscape manner connecting to large format photography.

Collage Scripts (Ruby)

A collage is an opportunity to tease out an idea, not by stating it as a matter of fact, but through implication. Humans have “Scripts” or chunks of internalized, learned conclusions describing an object, action, or belief. Scripts are pre-conceived parts of us and part of cultural understanding (Weem 42). Where jokes activate verbal scripts, and puns activate linguistic scripts, collage works to activate visual scripts between images or gestures. There are multiple options for blending and surprising viewers by playing with their associations in college. One of my favorite examples is by Sterling Ruby in his, *Physicalism, The Recombine 1-6*, 2006 (figure 4), where the artist places portraits of muscle builders with images of candles. The portraits of humans and objects are treated with similar smoothness, high contrast, and formal shapes. But beyond just the formal similarities, the viewer connects the materiality of flesh to wax and the possible molding and sexual implications of the human form. Here, the collage uses scripts of both forms to create a formally visually stringing image that adds nuance to the subject matter.

In my thesis piece, *Where Do We Go?* (figure 5) I also tease and question the scripts from the images I pull. Placing a turned female form as the central element, I surround her with other fragments to draw out different relationships to her body, gesture, and coloring. The range of pink accents concentrates attention on her pink slip, but by placing a slice of a doll beneath her, I am making the color more childish rather than sexual. Or is she growing up? Her gesture of a

Buyers 7
hand on her backside is a punctuation to the out-of-focus photographer to her left. Lines and cords at the top of the work lead to her shoulder, adding space and causing the eye to understand a built environment. Where I collage using my formal abilities and scripts, viewers will each concentrate on different moments within the work, expanding what I have presented to them.

Collage To Unified Image (Polke)

I find beauty in the exquisite, painted collages by Sigmar Polke. A fusion of newspaper references with the combined dimensionality and added layers of texture and color, Polke picked at the relationship between painting and photography, the permeability of culture and artistic categories, or, further, the ambiguity of images (Polke 56). Pulling banal illustrations from newspapers and reworking them with a painterly sensibility, as seen in his 1972 Alice in Wunderland (figure 6), Polke uses the subtle toning differences between the selected background and the dots of the painted images as optical effects and traps for our visual perception.

Within the works I create, there are similar tendencies of color and the use of dots. Through enlarged prints of the newspaper collages, the halftone original printing process and the layers they create distort the perspective of the images. The pieces play with not only the images but the fabrication of them in the newspaper — how the machine that distributes them enhances or distorts the reality of the form. It is beautiful that in some prints, the tone or registration of the colors is off, changing the weight of the image.

I play up the range of printing in my collage, The Fourth, but I Asked for a Q (figure 7). This collage collection of American flags uses a range of printing with a consistent, potent subject matter to pull at the prominence of a symbol and its range of interpretations and applications.
We can think about the collection of images and textures as separate or one; “Photograph collections can be used to make a substitute world,” (Sontag 162). And the act and art of collaging by using toning and dot comparison pull the viewer and me between the fragments and a whole. This reinforces the collages as books to be inspected, dots to be seen, and posters to be appreciated.

Source Images A (NYT)

My source material for my collages mostly comes from the New York Times; reminiscent of other actors who have seen The Times as a political and aesthetic contributor, like Andy Warhol, James Rosenquest, as well as my professor Michael Byron.

My focus within the images is on ruins, traces, and vestiges – remnant moments and their situated space within a scene. There is a reference to destruction in my collages, not only in the subject matter, which frequently references the crumbling of things and the blowing up of this and that, but also just in the act of tearing and cutting and reshaping. It's making something, “performing with the knowledge of the materiality of the world and life as a material process,” (Grois 35).

In using scraps of news, advertisements, and my own photographs, I am shifting the aestheticization of reality from a teleological to a non-teleological interpretation of specific modern actions. What perspective are you looking at this with, and what is the original purpose of the image? The beginning, the action, and the end dissolve into each other till what is left is the residue of the consequences rather than the claims of an idea. The works are more poetic than assertive, more stimulating than lecturing, and break down how images capture action to build a new form.
Most of the time, what I build is fragments that were captured by another hand. But I'm taking from the photographer just as they take from the camera. As Susan Sontag states, “Photography is not [necessarily] dependent on the image maker’ photography guides the image making but is part of a machine,” (165). The incorporation of the camera as a machine and then the other machines of layout as well as printing make it so the use of others’ images is benign and allows enough distance that I'm not completely hung up on the source… which is usually just Getty images anyway.

Image Play (Gifting)

The process of building is a game and a puzzle to me. It extends beyond formally connecting lines of landscapes and tones of the foregrounds to the activation of scripts as defined before. The construction is exploratory while responding to a thought or connection.

In my work Friend (Gal) (figure 8) and Friend (Pal) (figure 9), the collages taught me how I can subtly embed content through relationships. Though the motivation for the work was inspiration from friends, gifting them collages on their birthdays, I learned more about how color and form can direct energy. This was a process of love and fun. An opportunity to connect with the people I appreciate and visually represent the impact they have had on me through work that does not demand excessive force but instead aesthetic and narrative appreciation.

Images as Light (Dan Graham)

My collages have elements of multidimensionality beyond space compressed into an image because of their range of tone and light. Dan Graham’s Bisected Circle (figure 10) is a work that transformed my ability to see surroundings and reflections in a playful experience of combining and exposing images. “As the sunlight changes, the work surface and the images of the people
inside and outside superimposed on each other constantly altered.” (Graham 18). It is the active changing of light and perspective that comes through in concrete collages. The leading lines and merging of colors within my pieces activate the time of a photograph and the space created in the boundaries and backgrounds.

My work *Lightspeed* (Figure 11) does this in a painterly way. Taking my own images from reflections on cars and then collaging them, I then rounded and affixed the print to a stretcher. The illusion of this work is one of reflection in space because of the image choices with further dimensionality due to the presentation of the print in a sculptural manner.

Just as in this work, I referenced the thing I was photographing and built a new space, my thesis work, in scale and folding, responds to the materiality of newspaper and returns the final work to the format of the source material — reflexive production.

**Materialism (Mika Rottenberg)**

There is part of art that accepts materialism, the understanding of objects as a certain cultural, economic, and political implication. By using objects to secure or transcend our position, “We are merely able to improve the material conditions of our existence – but we cannot overcome them. We can find a better reposition inside the whole of the world,” (Grois 10). Materialism uses something to question yet accepts what is around us.

The work of Mika Rottenberg pokes at this material relationship between product and production. Building scenes, sculptures, and videos that investigate our material conditions, she shifts between documentary and fiction. Her 2011 piece #11, *Ponytail With Cabbage* (figure 12) performs between still life and purchased objects and interactive collage. It questions the
relationships between the materials and our position to them. What is real? What is for sale?
What is working? What are mine and yours?

In my thesis collages, I embed found objects into the composition. These serve as a material reference to our world while breaking up the halftone texture, reminding you it is a construction. In my thesis work, See Thirteen (figure 13), I incorporate a small, orange reflective fragment as the focal point of the figure in the top right; It is as if she is looking at the scene as well as the one scrap, and upon understanding that the reflective fragment is not like the others, the viewer feels surprised like they stumbled upon a fun treat.

Archive-ability (Hesse)

A stressed concept from the beginning of art school is “Is it Archivable?” as if the preservation of the stuff you make the night before is worth the rest of time. I have become attached to the misleading idea that everything I create is important enough to be saved. Similar to the conservation of knowledge, things in book form are more likely to be conserved as they are read. Conservation protects the environment through the responsible use of natural resources. Preservation protects the environment from harmful human activities. Art is seen as a human reflection of an environment and, therefore, must be “saved.”

The originals of my colleges are in newsprint, an inherently unstable and temporary media. Newspaper captures the perspectives of a single moment in time and, once consumed, is meant to be discarded or recycled – historical artifacts that exist in a temporary scope. Most of the photos within them point to the stories of a month, week, or day but are as fleeting as the promise of more action in the world. In building the collages of printed images that yellow into
dust, I consider other canonical works of ephemeral material, whose point and impact come from its eventual decay.

*Expanded Expansion* by Eve Hesse (Figure 14) beautifully encapsulates the possibilities and future of something too beautiful for all of history. The fiberglass, resin, and latex echo issues I contemplate in collaged newsprint from the work’s yellowing, cracking, and eventual disintegration. But unlike Hesse’s large work, my smaller collages can be photographed and reprinted, even digitally shared, lasting through time. “As an artwork’s existing material support decays and dissolves, the work can be copied and placed on a different material support – for example, as a digitized image on the Internet,” (Grois 12). I am creating work in conversation with time as, “the individual form of an artwork as it is inscribed in the archives of art history remains intact – unaffected or only marginally affected by material flux. The fluidization of the art form is the means by which modern and contemporary art tries to gain access to the world” (Grois 30).

A Final Lap (Conclusion)

The final collage books will be published and shared in different materials: original, reprinted, digital, and minted. I want to poke at the idea of an archive and the preciousness of different formats while almost overdoing the need to preserve what I made. There's the original, the digitization, the photograph, the NFT, and the archival documentation. Which one matters more? Content comes from the range of images and the relationships between the formal and action moments. I want viewers to find something in the work that surprises them or makes a connection specific to the way they see things within the work as a space, as a material, or as a readable source. At what angle do they access the work? And from there what direction do they
go? *A Loud Volume Landscape* is a map without a compass or a long question excited by the fun of exploring and the final kick of discovery.
Figure 1
Inkjet-print. 82 1/2 × 140 1/4 in | 209.6 × 356.2 cm

Figure 2
Moyra Davey, *The Coffee Shop, The Library*. 2011,
25 C-prints, tape, postage, ink, each 12” × 17.5”.
Figure 3
Grace Buyers, *Half & Half You Say*. 2023,
Newspaper Collage, Inkjet printing, 36”x42”.

Figure 4
Lambda print, in 6 parts 10x18
Figure 5
Grace Buyers, *Where Do We Go?*. 2023
Newspaper Collage, Found Object, Inkjet print, 36”x43”

Figure 6
Sigmar Polke, *Alice im Wunderland*
Mixed Media on Patterned Fabric, 125” x 115”
Figure 7
Grace Buyers, *The Fourth, but I Asked for a Q*, 2023
Newspaper Collage, Found Object, Inkjet print, 34”x40”

Figure 8
Grace Buyers, *Friends (G)*, 2022-23.
Newspaper Collage, Inkjet print, four of 35”x35”
Figure 9
Grace Buyers, Friend (M), 2022-23.
Newspaper Collage, Inkjet print, four of 35”x35”

Figure 10
Dan Graham, Bisected Circle, 2012.
Washington University in St. Louis, Kemper Art Museum
Figure 11
Inkjet print, 39” x 36” x 6”

Figure 12
Mika Rottenberg, *#11 with cabbage and ponytail*, 2020
Mixed Media, found objects, and Crank
Figure 13
Grace Buyers, *See Thirteen*, 2023
Newspaper Collage, Found Object, Inkjet print, 34”x40”

Figure 14
Eva Hesse, *Expanded Expansion*, 1969
Fiberglass, polyester resin, latex, and cheesecloth
Bibliography


Graham, Dan. *MORENUGGETS or Evolution of the Museum and other new writings*.


