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ABSTRACT

container (n.): One who, or that which, contains

contain (v.): to keep under proper control; restrain; to prevent or limit the expansion, influence, success, advance [of an entity]

- *Webster's Dictionary*

We live within boundaries, in containers governed by external forces. They vary in shape and presentation, form and size. Sometimes we like them – they are our comfort, our safety, our home. Sometimes we do not – they are our constraint, our weakness, our inhibitions. Such pre-conceived boundaries control interactions by forcing an entity to adapt to its exterior and change its dynamics with its surrounding entities.

As a creator, I look for the innate, seemingly contradicting, duality of materiality: inside/outside, introversion/extroversion. I devote my focus to the inherent characteristics of fluid materials, including liquid, sand, light, pixels and sound, their entropic qualities and the manner in which they are shaped by their contextual space and time. For example, liquid: its propensity to fall, to spread, to make a mark; that it must be contained to be controlled, otherwise gravity will pull it down. Liquid exists in both space and time. It has a tendency to leave a trace of its past and yet exist in the present. It creates events that occur in the liminal space, the moments of transition from one identity to the other. This process is of crucial importance, for it affects the fundamental qualities of an entity transforming it into another.

In my explorations I combine everyday, static materials with dynamic mediums such as video projections and performance. I place them within a space and allow them to interact with each other and with the environment, which brings a performative aspect to my work. Sensual awareness is evoked through the combination of subtle repetition, quiet tension and careful observation. Descriptive yet mysterious sounds often fill the space and create a dialog within the work. I make the processes visually accessible through the use of “live color,” a fundamental element of my work that allows for expression through interaction. I use color as both a tool and a means of expression. The color mixes, and the unity of the material as one single entity is visible.

BOUNDARIES TRANSGRESSED
(ACTION – REACTION – REPERCUSSION)

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The heart of my thesis work lies in the exploration of the significance of structure. Everything exists within something other: what is a country without frontiers, traditions without culture, blood without veins? Their identity is altered or lost unless bound within certain margins that define them and let them exist as such. In one way or other, we find ourselves inside certain containers and outside of others. There is a silent fight between this inherent duality: where are we and which, if any, is better? These boundaries that denote the beginning and the end of numerous containers are often crossed. Rosemarie Castoro used line to explore this idea of life existing trapped within something else by riding a bicycle with four gallons of paint dripping across twenty blocks of Manhattan. When referring to these pieces as her “cracking pieces,” she said “The idea was that the line would crack open the floor or the city, and things would emerge. [...]When you break something open, you see what's inside. You bring the inside out” (Ratcliff 38). In the process of crossing the borderline, the identity of the entity that lived within it changes, and it can never return to its previous state. It acquires a new self and lives within a new (sometimes larger) container.

In my work I focus on materiality and magnifying the fundamental essence of fluid materials, exploring how they depend so vastly on containers. I investigate what happens to an entity and its surrounding space in the process of crossing boundaries. I attempt to establish a dialog

between the medium that I use and myself, as well as the space in which we exist and the audience. In this way, my work gains a performative aspect that captures the essence of the participants (by which I mean the material, the artist and audience) with the past, present and perhaps the future of the process. With the help of external, often natural, forces, the material that I use and the space in which I create manipulate me as much as I manipulate them. Creation becomes a silent fight for dominance and power alternating the roles of controller and controlled. This allows us to interact and communicate in a way that is necessary for the work to exist. Thus turning the critical moment in which an entity crosses the boundaries of its containers and changes into an event.

I am interested in the physicality of material and work with its very own characteristics as a means of expression. Intimacy with the material is the most tangible part of the process. I work with the inherent physical qualities of sand and water, two fluid materials. These entropic materials have a tendency to spread chaotically. To understand them fully, I must get to know them personally because to every action I make there is a reaction. How does the material act within and react to its environment; how does it react to gravity? weather? How do human hands affect it? How does it mix with other materials? All these questions emerge as I learn more about the material.

In the piece *Potentate*, five bags filled with five different colored liquids are suspended from the ceiling, slowly dripping onto the floor.

The most important property of the material contained is its liquidity: its propensity to fall, to spread, to make a mark. Liquid must be contained to be controlled. The containers that I have used in my work, plastic bags, are also flexible. Fluids take the shape of the container in which they exist. Therefore, the two materials together create a unique shape that resembles a large drip of water, emphasizing the downward pull of gravity. By suspending the bag from the ceiling, a visual tension is created by the negative space between the object and the floor, as well as with the physics of the string holding the work up. The fluid quality of any liquid gives it its innate characteristic of being able to spread chaotically unless contained. When these containers are punctured, the liquid will drip out of its container.

As I get to know the medium, a dialogue emerges. To get to know the material fully is to be able to realize its potential and utilize it adequately. I let the material do as it needs to do, while making sure that it also does what it is told to do. In *Untitled (Drawing)*, the bags were carefully positioned and hammered onto a white wall to create a composition taking into consideration their aesthetic qualities. Since the bags are fragile and contain liquid, they have a tendency to tear easily when being installed. I let the liquid drip as it needs to, while also making sure it is dripping where I want it to. If a bag demands a place to drip on the wall (that is, if it tears in an unexpected place) I listen to it and work around what it commands.

“The canvas has ‘talked back’ to the artist [...] to provoke him into a dramatic dialogue. [...] each stroke had to be a decision and was answered by a new question” (Rosenberg 33). This relationship described by Rosenberg between the artist and the material cannot be underestimated. He analyzed the approach of an artistic movement known as the Action Painters, characterized by their approach to paint as a material rather than a tool. “[The artist] no longer approached his easel with an image in his mind, he went up to it with a material in his hand to do something to that other piece of material in front of him. The image would be the result of this encounter” (Rosenberg 25). This was a pivotal moment for the relationship between the material and the artist, for they became two individual entities trying to communicate with each other’s needs.

Jackson Pollock changed the meaning of painting by exploring it as a material and stripping it down to its very essence – he saw paint in its rawness. His explorations focused on the qualities of the materials he used, not only for what they are useful for, but also for what they were themselves. This is what gives birth to the dialogue between the artist and the medium, and it is one of the most important elements of my work: how material acts within our space and time and our role as users in its definition.

In the piece *Ode to Pollock*, bags filled with a large variety of colored liquids are suspended, pinned on a wall and also found on a floor covered

with canvas. Like Niki de Saint-Phalle's shooting paintings, the intensity of the color highlights the reaction of the liquid to a new unidentified puncture or wound, "it's like making the paint bleed" (Tate Online). Once they are outside of their containers, these substances are free to mix with each other. Although my work does not seek to depict the violence that Niki de Saint-Phalle portrays in her shooting paintings by using a rifle to puncture or "kill" the plaster objects in front of her, the essence of my objects – their internal substance – is also drained from their body. This event that exists in time is recorded, the canvas absorbs the paint that is dripping from these punctured bags, thus tracing the past of the drips while also highlighting the space around it. While the bags are suspended, the drips occur in real time. The slow paced present drips exist simultaneous to the dried marks of the past drips and the ones to come.

A drop exists in both space and time. It can leave a trace of its past and yet exist in this present. It is an event and a single moment in time, and it cannot be repeated exactly as it was. In the piece *Tending (Blue)*, James Turrell frames a part of the sky with an open roof building. He allows time to alter what is framed by the structure, and each second the work is different than the one before. Therefore, passing of time and our natural surroundings are a very important element in his work. What the viewer observes is how time is involved in the making of a work. The framed skyspace becomes gray when it's cloudy, glittery with the stars, or

a live drawing when a plane passes by. The inclusion of time plays a significant role in my work, as it does in Turrell's work.

The piece *If This Is Now* more explicitly addresses the element of time. Two bags filled with blue and yellow paint diluted in water are suspended from the ceiling. Projected onto them and the space behind them is a video of drips of the same two colors. The viewer is presented with three different time elements: the past in the shape of the video projection, the future in the potential held within the hanging bags, and the present, in the way these objects exist now. This raises the question of what happened when and if, perhaps, something is yet to happen. Awakening this sense of expectation and desire for the bags to actually drip in real time, an awareness of the present moment draws in the viewer.

While in the realm of video, I harness the ability for this medium to capture time. In the films *Empire* and *Sleep*, Andy Warhol uses this medium itself to challenge the notions of time, action and purpose by exploiting one of the most obvious qualities of film: its ability to capture time. He frames and presents a moment of utter stillness using a time-based medium. In his films, change occurs very slowly. Similarly, I approach my video works with the intention of encapsulating the viewer in a space where time is prolonged. The video *Transpire* has slow-paced, repetitive motions that emphasize the passing of time. The source of the dripping water is left undefined and mysterious. There is a contrast between the movement of the dripping and the stillness of the blue liquid

inside the container. Although full of movement, the ambience they create is very still. Their repetitive quality, along with the sound, contributes to the mesmerizing effect, and a sense of tranquility evoked. The viewer becomes immersed in the process and loses possession of her/his mind through the subtle yet dynamic gestures. There is comfort in the predictability of the video.

Similarly, my video work *Status Quo*, has a sense of expectation. This video explores the desire to keep things structured within certain containers. The source of the dripping is left a mystery, for what is highlighted is rather the trapping of the drips. Each colored liquid falls in its own bag and one expects them not to mix. In actuality, this does not happen so precisely. Colors mix, and not all the drips fall within a bag. Thus that sense of expectation is broken, while the predictability of dominant action, the bags filling up, remains. Contrastingly to *Transpire*, the video is cut short by an unexpected and abrupt happening: the bags fall from the wall at once, as their weight has overcome its capacity. This is a rather humorous surprise for the viewer.

The video *Sand* holds a larger sense of mystery. The closeness of the shot and the movement of the sand awakens the senses intensely. The role of sound is very important in achieving this effect as the sound is descriptive of the motions yet remains enigmatic. This video treats containers in a very different way, for the frame of the shot itself acts as a container in addition to presenting us with a moving image of a physical

container. In a sense, this renders the sand uncontained in its own physical environment, yet it is contained in the viewer's visual space. Including the audience in the experience of a moment is one of my main objectives.

The action of the artist causes a reaction by the material and environment, which are all part of the making process. Yet this dialogue between the material and the artist is not enough. Actively embracing presence is important as it provokes sensual awareness in the viewer and heightens the intensity of an event. As Rosenberg puts it, "What matters is always the revelation contained in the act" (Rosenberg 26). Yet unlike the paintings of the abstract expressionists, I am not solely concerned with the artist's actions and relation to the material, but also the viewer's relation to the work as a repercussion of the act. The dialogue continues between the viewer and the work. Hence, careful observation is desired and necessary. Mark Rothko often found it hard to write about his own work because he placed all his trust in his "sensitive observers" when they approach his paintings, so that they, too, play an important role in letting the work be what it is: "For if there is both need and spirit there is bound to be real transaction" (Rothko ed. Lopez-Remiro 91). The work becomes a shared moment in time.

There is a difference in the dialogue that occurs between artist and medium than between audience and medium. In *Bilateral Contamination: Three Phases*. I explore this difference, and try to relate the audience's

experience to the artist's as much as possible. In Phase I, nine plastic squares lay on a grid-like structure on the floor of the gallery, each containing a different color of hand-dyed sand. The audience was presented with the raw material – they could touch it, smell it, and get to know the qualities of the sand for themselves. They were not presented with a set of instructions, which allowed them to act in the way they find appropriate for themselves within that setting. Slowly, there emerged handprints, bundles and drawings on the squares with sand. The audience became participants.

Phase II re-introduced the artist in the work, but this time as a performer. The nine squares of sand were moved into one larger square in the middle of the space. As the performance progressed, different qualities of the sand were introduced to the audience: its weight, the sound it makes as it is being poured onto another square and its ability to mix with different colors. It was no longer a dialogue just between the performers and the sand, but among the performers, the participants, and the sand, so that the participants themselves could get to know the material as the performers did. Like liquid, sand, although solid, is fluid and also takes the shape of its container. It spreads chaotically in a different way than liquid does, for it is made up of tiny grains of sand that together form a whole. Each grain can be separated and given its own identity, but as a group they create a mass of the same substance. The intensity of the color of each bundle of sand was accented by the action of mixing as the two

performers rhythmically moved around the bundles of sand and poured one color into the other. Color served a dual purposes. While it deepened visual expression, it was also used as a tool. When the color mixed, sand as one single entity was made visible. It also made the space present by highlighting the white of the surrounding walls.

In phase III, it was clearer that the audience was free to mix the colors around so as to get to know the newly introduced aspects of the sand. By placing the sand in an authoritative setting, I created an experiment on personal and social pre-established boundaries: How far will you as an individual be dictated by your surroundings? As time passed, more and more changes would occur in the piece itself and in the way people approached it. Slowly, the identity of the sand changed, and in its final stage it became one larger entity. It was then put inside thirty clear plastic bags that held the history of the sand, the participants and the moment itself and was presented in a straight line, a piece entitled *Memories*. Yet within those bags lay more than just the past of the sand, it held potential: its future.

This sand was later used to explore possibilities for the piece *Exude*. Sixteen hand-sewn plastic bags filled with different color hand-dyed sand hang from a twenty-foot tall ceiling outside of a building. In the span of the exhibition, I was to puncture one bag every day, letting the sand pour out of its container and into the space. However, as time passed and the audience interacted, they were driven to puncture the bags themselves. I

only punctured four out of sixteen bags myself. The work became a public piece and no longer belonged to me, but to the moment and the space. In time, layers of sand form on the brick floor, keeping track of the history of the sand as it lives each day differently. The different color sand mixes on the floor and is no longer kept isolated from the other colors. Its identity is bound to be affected by its surroundings. Living in an outside environment, they are prone to climatic conditions like wind and rain. In the end, the contained substance no longer lives within a bag, but it has crossed the boundaries that denoted its original living space. What remains is but the carcasses of the bags, evidence of a once orderly structure.

There is an implicit, often inconspicuous, exploration of the need for structural systems in my work. Focusing on the characteristics of materials and the way in which they act in our surroundings allows me to explore these ideas in close detail. Starting in a micro scale, I explore smaller ideas through the tangibility of material to discover its true identity and gain insight into a larger framework. In the processes, this identity changes as do its surroundings. What occurs by crossing boundaries or staying within containers, is an alteration of the entity itself in time. Time, within a social context, is fluid and, like liquid, it cannot move forward without leaving trace of its existence behind. Thus, traces of an entity's previous state remain behind as time moves forward. It creates layers of existence, physical and ideological, that merge with each

other and create new truths. This change often searches for a sort of inner peace and tranquility of the self.

The dialogues I establish mirror our ever-changing technological society in which the fight over who controls whom is ongoing. What does this mean in terms of the materials available for one to work with? Like sand, many things are made up of tiny grains. Pixels are like digital sand, where one is but a tiny part of a greater bundle. They are unique in that they only exist within certain containers and cannot exist otherwise. They are fluid and can be controlled, though in a different structural way than controlling sand or water. They also control you as the maker, because you are limited to what they do. The invisibility of liminal space is clearest through this digital medium, for it does not exist in our physical world but in a cyber space of its own. To disregard technology as a medium is to ignore its subtleties. I ask myself, what are the implications of this “digital age” and what are its characteristics? How and where, if at all, does it exist in our entropic space – is it a control and power tool to denote boundaries, or are we submissive to the boundaries it itself denotes?

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CD-ROM Information

1. *Potentate*
2009 mixed media installation
2. *Untitled (Dialogue 3)*
2008 mixed media installation
3. *Untitled (Ode to Pollock)*
2009 mixed media installation
4. *This Is Now*
2008 mixed media and video installation
5. *Transpire*
2008 video: 6 minutes 22 seconds
6. *Status Quo*
2008 video: 7 minutes
7. *Sand*
2008 video excerpt: 45 seconds
[original video: 12 minutes]
8. *Bilateral Contamination: Three Phases*
2008 mixed media installation and performance
documentation: 3 minutes 19 seconds
[original performance 10 minutes]
9. *Memories*
2008 mixed media installation
10. *Exude*
2009 mixed media installation
11. *Dripping*
2008 thread installation