

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: Median
Rob Hackett, Master of Fine Arts, 2015

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This thesis discusses the idea of median as it relates to both a physical barrier as well as a reference to the center point along a set of information. The navigation of the built environment and the memories generated by the interactions with it inform my current body of sculptural and print work.

Median

By

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	ii
List of Figures.....	iii
Chapter 1: Space as Experience	1
Chapter 2: Experience as Space	3
Chapter 3: Median.....	5
Chapter 4: Image as Sculpture	8
Chapter 5: Sculpture as Image.....	10

List of Figures

Figure 1. *Imagined Surfaces: 1* Screenprint on BFK 2013

Figure 2. *Archway* Wood, Steel, Paint, Hardware 2014

Figure 3. *Reimagined Surfaces: 2* Collaged screenprint on BFK 2014

Figure 4. Staging *Median* for thesis

Figure 5. Instillation view of “Median”

Chapter 1: Space as Experience

I have always been fascinated with the built environment. From the meticulous planning that goes into creating the perfect grid in Chicago where navigation becomes completely intuitive, to the undulating sprawl of Pittsburgh where a cyclist needs a wealth of information to get from point A to point B without encountering hills that could induce cardiac arrest. The built environment provides not only an amazing cache of textures and source material, but also an ever-changing experience in which to gain new data on how we navigate the space around us. There is a fascinating contrast between times where the built environment affects how we experience our surroundings and the less frequent occurrences where our actions impact the built environment.

This discrepancy can be seen between two forms travel, the College Green at Ohio University and the Metro in Washington DC. The DC metro is a prime example of how the built environment affects it's interactants. Commercial and rental property are at a premium around public transportation because of the convenience they provide. On the other hand, the walkways in the College Green at Ohio University were re-done to reflect the paths most traveled by pedestrians, breaking the standard grid to allow for the most efficient and frequently used pathways between campus buildings. While the idea of breaking away from the pathway for pedestrian travel is far from new, the major redesign

of the walkways is an interesting example of how our actions can impact the existing physical structures.

Chapter 2: Experience as Space

Often our experience in a particular location determines how we remember that space. The same room can be remembered in dramatically different ways based on what occupies the space. Without furniture a room can feel colder and smaller because we think of it as less inviting. A large room filled with an overwhelming sculpture may stick in our memory as being tight and claustrophobic.

The way a space is remembered also has a strong impact on the way the artwork in that space is perceived. The Mattress Factory Museum in Pittsburgh houses two permanent installations that can illustrate this point. Jene Highstein's 1986 *Untitled*, and Sarah Oppenheimer's 2008 *610-3356*, both occupy a room of similar size, identical hardwood flooring, the same white wall paint, and both have two exterior windows. Although I have seen both of these pieces many times, the way I remember the two rooms is dramatically different. The Highstein piece is a large spherical concrete structure that takes up the majority of the room. There isn't much light that makes it around the back of the piece, and the room often feels dark and cold. The hardwood floors lose their warmth and texture and everything in the room feels constricting dark and cold. In contrast, the Oppenheimer piece that is made of aircraft grade plywood and appears as only a hole in the floor that extends to the garden outside, brightens

the room and makes it feel larger than it is. It invites you to gaze into the outside world and brings the light and foliage of the exterior into the gallery space.

Chapter 3: Median

When approaching a work of art we make immediate decisions about many of the aspects of what is presented to us. While the separation between two and three dimensional work is usually clear, I am interested in the space between.

My work initially falls into two camps, sculptural work and print based work. The distinction between the two doesn't last long though, as the two heavily influence each other. The work is a constant push and pull between source material generated in sculpture, photographed, adapted to print, cut up and collaged, examined, and used to again inform sculpture. The way the two elements dovetail into one another in the process and generation of ideas creates a relationship where neither one holds up the other, but rather they work together in order to stand.

The idea of median presents itself in two ways in my recent work, both as a physical barrier to navigation and movement as well as the signifier of the center point on the dimensionality spectrum of my work. The physical incarnation of median is seen in the way that my work funnels the viewer through a space. It directs the movement to specific vantage points and often divides the room into sections. This idea is also explored pictorially through collages and prints where the elements divide the picture plane, frequently into

two halves. That physical barrier is crucial to changing the way we think about the gallery space. It can create interior and exterior spaces, pathways, tunnels, and obstacles, all that change the experience of a space.

The idea of median, as it relates to the spectrum of my work, is very different from just the intersection of two and three dimensional work. We can think of intersection as a single point and median as a reference to the center along an entire spectrum. Because of the way my process takes me to both ends of the dimensionality spectrum, with the end points being as important as the median, the median wouldn't be where it lies without paying close attention to the entire field.



Figure 1. *Imagined Surfaces: 1* Screenprint on BFK 2013



Figure 2. *Archway Wood*, Steel, Paint, Hardware 2014

Chapter 4: Image as Sculpture

When working with two dimensional media, primarily screenprint and collage, I am generating associations to three dimensional objects as much as possible. The imagery both directs the viewer towards associations of dimensionality through the use of the imagery found in the plywood my sculptural work, as well as leaving the background void of information that could lead to judgments of size and scale. The absence of background information allows the viewer to overlay their own memories and baggage associated with the materials and forms depicted in the work. The collages depict elements that are modeled with shading and illusionistic volume as well as completely flat elements in order to allow for a flux between whether the thing you are seeing feels like it could exist in three dimensional space, or is physically improbable. The work for me, similarly to the sculptural work, is always in a fluid state of finality. The work oscillates between a final product and a generative piece in an evolving process.



Figure 3. *Reimagined Surfaces: 2* Collaged screenprint on BFK 2014

Chapter 5: Sculpture as Image

My sculptural work is as much about creating an image as it is creating an experience. The dovetailing of printmaking and sculpture, alongside the prevalence and importance of the documentation of sculptural work has lead me to constantly examine how the sculptures I build can live after they are inevitably de-installed. Often I find myself intrigued by how the sculpture affects the experience of the space it is occupying, but If it does not read well in documentation it feels as though it is missing a crucial element.

This urge to create work that is effective both as a primary experience as well as in documentation has shaped the way I create sculpture. Originally developed as a way to run through installation ideas at a more rapid pace, the use of steel cable and modular elements has become a way for me to create installations that can adapt and take on new life depending on the environment they are in, as well as responding to the documentation and collaged based works that are generated from previous iterations.

Creating specific vantage points, by directing the viewer to certain spots in the gallery through the use of the modular boxes and bisecting cables, helps to unify the memories of the sculptural work into specific and targeted viewpoints. By limiting the pathways around the gallery and the vantage points from which the work can be seen also relates the experience of viewing the sculpture to the print work that is generated from the documentation.

Documentation of the sculptural work creates a starting point for the screenprints. The two dimensional work starts as a direct translation of the sculptural documentation as a way to create a strong visual tie between the two bodies of work. That connection is then altered through the use of collage and becomes the genesis point for the next iteration of the three dimensional work.

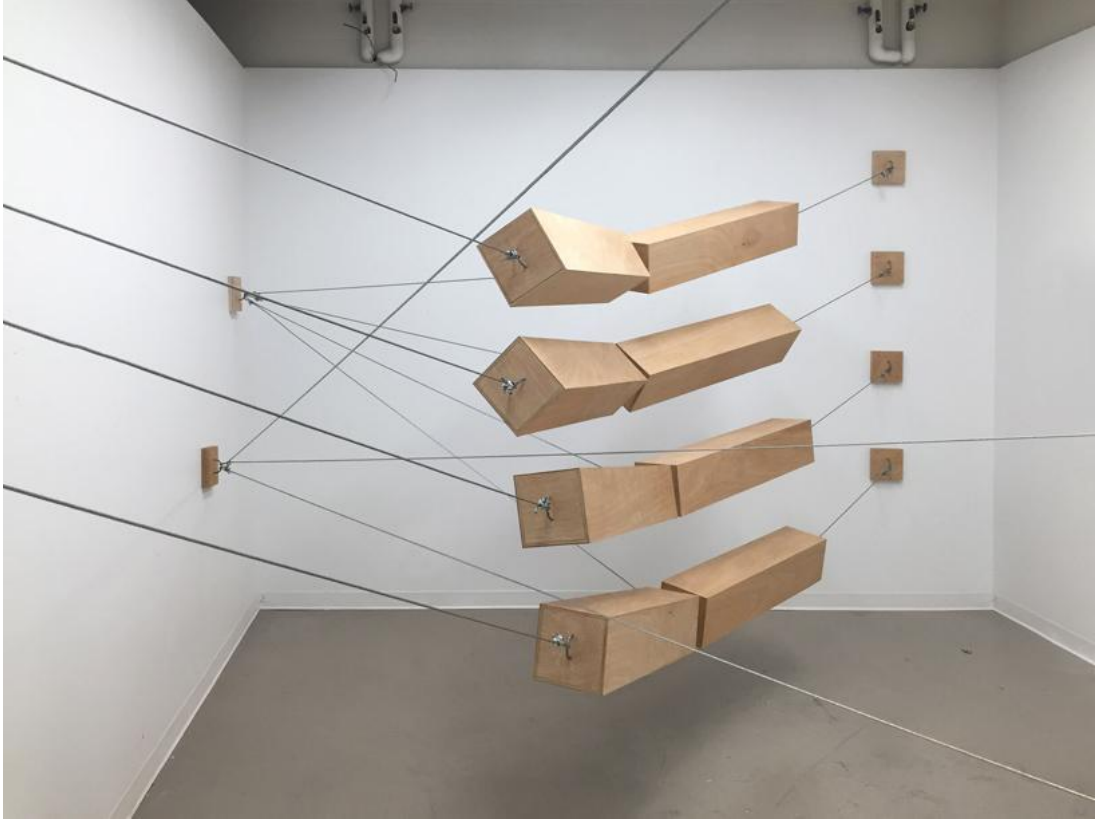


Figure 4 Staging *Median* for thesis



Figure 5 Installation view of “Median”