

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: THE SPACE BETWEEN

Jowita Wyszomirska, Masters of Fine Arts, 2016

Thesis Directed By: Professor Shannon Collis, Department of Art

I approach my practice through the truth that art is inseparable from reality. Reducing art to a single idea is an unnatural limitation because the creative process and its manifestations result from many parallel ideas, instincts, emotions and reflections. In the following, I trace the central sources of the inspiration for work and attempt to bridge the experiential and intuitive processes that concurrently fuel my creative process.

The Space Between

By

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Confluence of Edges

Things that we cannot see are points of departure for my explorations of the edges between the tangible and intangible. My work is formed from thinking about borders and transition spaces: the ever-changing shoreline where land and water meet; the sensory experience of the wind; the warmth of a shimmering light touching skin; the interstices of language and meaning.

A border is a locus for activity. Where land and water meet, there is no defined edge—the water constantly moves, pushing the boundaries. Even standing still to observe a shoreline creates a sense of motion and flux as the landscape changes. I am fascinated with patterns in nature that have a seemingly chaotic infrastructure. A respect for underlying patterns and the organization of movement leads me back to subjects that beg to be explored, examined, and ultimately understood.

Edges between languages are a source of tension. I moved to United States from Poland as a teenager. During my first few years living here, I felt that this new home was temporary and not my “real” home. But when I traveled back to Poland, nothing seemed quite right anymore. My sense of belonging was distorted.

I still feel a residual “in-betweenness” in my life. I sense it in language in particular. There seem to be two different functions for the use of English and the use of Polish in my life, and my sense of self changes depending on which language I am speaking. To explore these two selves, I have included excerpts in this thesis of poetry by Wiesława Szymborska, in Polish and in English, whose work I am familiar with since childhood.

Poetry 1

Niebo

Od tego trzeba było zacząć: niebo.
Okno bez parapetu, bez futryn, bez szyb.
Otwór i nic poza nim,
ale otwarty szeroko.

Nie muszę czekać na pogodną noc,
ani zadzierać głowy,
żeby przyjrzeć się niebu.
Niebo mam za plecami, pod ręką i na
powiekach.
Niebo owija mnie szczelnie
i unosi od spodu.

Nawet najwyższe góry
nie są bliżej nieba
niż najgłębsze doliny.
Na żadnym miejscu nie ma go więcej
niż w innym.
Obłok równie bezwzględnie
przewalony jest niebem co grób.
Kret równie wniebowzięty
jak sowa chwiejąca skrzydłami.
Rzecz, która spada w przepaść,
spada z nieba w niebo.

Sypkie, płynne, skaliste,
rozpłomienione i lotne
połacie nieba, okruszyny nieba,
podmuchy nieba i sterty.
Nieba jest wszechobecne
nawet w ciemnościach pod skórą.

Sky

I should have begun with this: the sky.
A window minus sill, frame, and panes.
An aperture, nothing more,
But wide open.

I don't have to wait for a starry night,
I don't have to crane my neck
To get a look at it.
I've got the sky behind my back, at hand,
and on my eyelids.
The sky binds me tight
and sweeps me off my feet.

Even the highest mountains
are no closer to the sky
than the deepest valleys.
There's no more of it in one place than other.
A cloud is as thoroughly
crushed by the sky as a grave.
A mole is no less in seventh heaven
than the owl spreading wings.
The object that falls in an abyss
falls from sky to sky.

Grainy, gritty, liquid,
Inflamed, or volatile
Patches of sky, specks of sky,
Gusts and heaps of sky.
The sky is everywhere,
Even in the dark beneath your skin.

Zjadam niebo, wydałam niebo.
Jestem pułapką w pułapce,
zamieszkiwanym mieszkańcem,
obejmowanym objęciem,
pyaniem w odpowiedzi na pytanie.

Podział na ziemię i niebo
to nie jest właściwy sposób
myślenia o tej całości.
Pozwala tylko przeżyć
pod dokładniejszym adresem,
szybszym do znalezienia,
jeśli bym była szukana.
Moje znaki szczególne
to zachwyt i rozpacz.¹

I eat the sky, I excrete the sky.
I'm a trap within a trap,
An inhabited inhabitant,
An embrace embraced,
A question answering a question.

Division into sky and earth-
it's not the proper way
to contemplate this wholeness.
It simply let's me go on living
At a more exact address
where I can be reached promptly
if I'm sought.
My identifying features
are rapture and despair.²

¹ Szymborska, Wiesława. "Niebo." *Widok z Ziarnkiem Piasku*. Wydawnictwo a5 Poznań, 1997. p.140

² Szymborska, Wiesława, Stanisław Barańczak, and Clare Cavanagh. "Sky." In *View with a Grain of Sand: Selected Poems*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1995. Print. p. 173-7

Weather

When I talk on the phone with my father, we often start with the subject of the weather and compare notes on the differences and similarities between Chicago and Baltimore. Weather is a source of connection for us. Indeed, contemplations on the subject appear in the later works of J. M. W. Turner. By focusing on light and space, Turner depicts the elusive air through the atmospheric depth of stormy skies and turbulent seas. Powerful forces of nature and weather dominate the fluid landscapes with phenomena such as



sunlight, storms, rain, and fog. The mass and movement bring to mind natural catastrophes, the cleaving and converging of the physical world.

Fig. 1- J.M.W. Turner. Snow Storm: Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth, 1842. Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. Feb. 2002. <https://en.wikipedia.org>. May 2016.

There is a strong sense of landscape present in my work. A collaboration I worked on for the 2013 production of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, produced by the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts and Illinois Theater at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, explored the non-representational, non-verbal physiological landscape of body and space through stop-motion drawings. My process involved photographing a charcoal drawing, frame by frame, as it changed and evolved on a single sheet of paper. Slow-moving particles of gray matter churned, interspersed with rapid and violent flashes resembling a storm. Linear intersections swelled and disintegrated. I used strong verticals and diagonals to echo and extend from the angular landscape of the stage. I wanted to create an atmospheric depth reminiscent of fog and the movement of air.



Fig. 2- *The Tempest*. 2013, Projected Stop-Motion Drawings, Play produced by the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts and Illinois Theater at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign Playwright: William Shakespeare Director: Robert G. Anderson. Stop-Motion Art: Jowita Wyszomirska

My approach to this project's process drew inspiration from the artist William Kentridge, who works across disciplines in performance, theater, film, sculpture and drawing.

Using traditional and basic drawing tools such as charcoal and collage, he photographs scenes as they evolve on paper. Kentridge's animated films challenge social contexts and political events, transforming them into poetic metaphors.

The set work I designed for *The Tempest* was the result of a reunion of rhythm, motion and time. The viewer's perception of the work is directly linked to his or her own physical movement. Viewers become characters. The resulting piece is a synthesis of the viewers' and maker's movements and their emotional dimensions within the physical space.

Process

In the studio, I am directed by my intuition. I respond to materials, and in turn, I conduct experiments to see how materials react and combine. The creative act is driven by embodied motions that are distilled through drawing, layering and mark making. The studio is a ground for investigations that allow a certain degree of forgetting oneself, to release accumulated information, experiences, and observations.

My interest in nature and living matter attracts me to aerial views of the earth, textures that resemble skin, rivers, and veins, and microscopic images of biological forms. I am fascinated by things that go beyond what we can sense or see with a naked eye. I challenge myself to represent what is undetectable, like a process of growth and increase. I question how to map time and space and how to depict something invisible, and always in flux.

Working on site-specific pieces helps me calibrate the visual and momentary investment in the sublime and the movement of the viewer around the work brings perpetual transformation, creating fluidity in the piece.

Tracing

Initially, the work leading up to the current project *In the Liminal*, aimed to respond to effects of climate change that we have experienced with new intensity: freak winter storms, extreme weather changes and highly fluctuating temperatures.

The imagery comes from aerial photography documented by satellites. Over time, I have compiled a large image inventory of weather patterns over the Chesapeake region. When I take a screenshot from the NASA site on most days I also record the temperature. With the use of software, this visual data with aerial photographs is turned into patterns. Next, I use a laser cutter to get a wide array of shapes with precise edges. From there, I work intuitively by painting the layers of information embedded within their shapes and contours to create fluid, open compositions. I tie string and monofilament and suspend pieces of felt and Mylar to create varying densities.

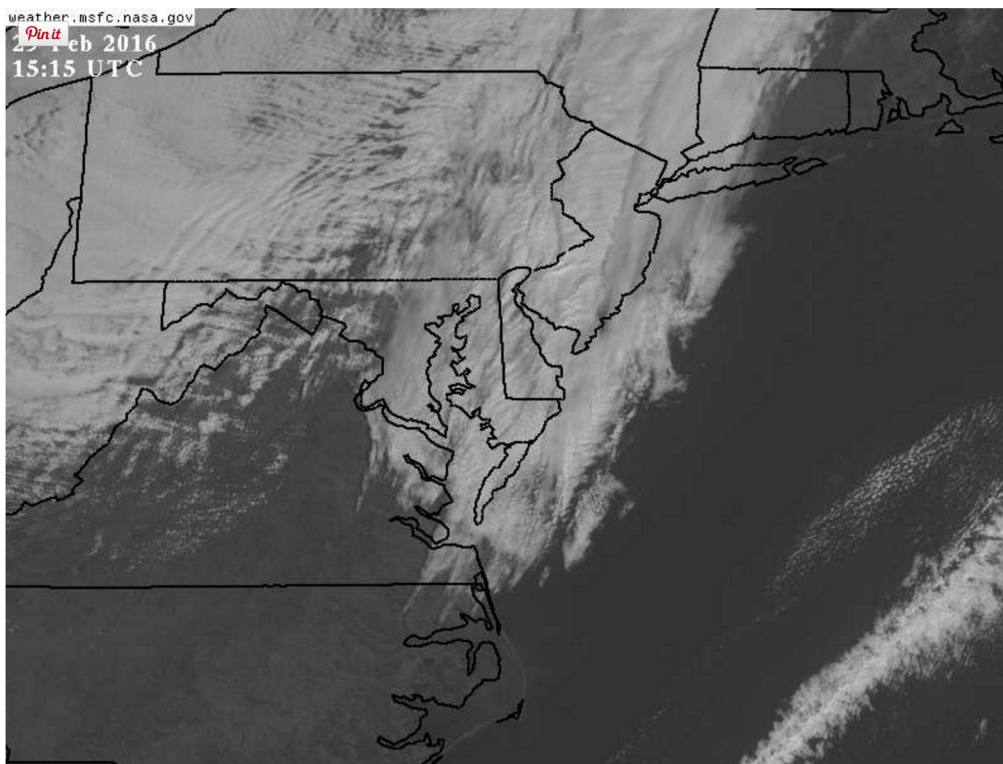


Fig. 3- Interactive Global Geostationary Weather Satellite Images. NASA. Feb. 2016.
<http://weather.msfc.nasa.gov/GOES/> Accessed Feb. 2016

The installation created for my thesis show, *In the Liminal*, breaks into the exhibition space and pulls the viewer into an all-encompassing journey. In the initial view of the monochrome room, the deeply layered paint, mostly black and white, forms various overlapping conglomerations on the surrounding walls that simultaneously conceal and reveal drawn and painted lines and recurrent yet irregular patterns energetically erupting out of the confines of other layers. From a distance, it may appear that the work lives purely on the walls, but a closer approach discloses other layers that occupy the middle space of the gallery. Felt and Mylar pieces ranging from palm- to body-sized are suspended with black thread and monofilament. Vertical lines start tied off in different points in space, resembling some form of precipitation. And as some reach the floor they continue spreading creating topographical contours.

Various arrangements of tightly grouped felt reverberate throughout the gallery, creating voids of almost immaterial densities. Despite their sizes and proximities to one another they feel nearly weightless because of the surface treatment that allows light to pass through small holes that speckle all surfaces. Some appear to slowly disintegrate through frail edges and fractures.

Inside the room the sphere of action moves between the wall patterns and the center of the space occupied by suspended shapes. All of the complexities of two-dimensional and three-dimensional shapes cannot be taken in at a single glance. One after another, painted sections on the surrounding walls and suspended pieces evolve from voids to occupy the foreground. They alternate, distorting the perception of what is a plane and what happens in space. The viewer is able to meander through the piece to view it from the inside out, taking in various points of view. The space is in flux when one moves around the entire exhibition.

The viewer walks into the ‘drawing’ not knowing where the work begins and where it ends. The work is directly linked to physical movement, functioning as an ‘extended’ drawing that viewers experience by defining their own perspectives of space and time. This experience resembles how we see the world; the perception is framed by constant motion and shifting points of view. Just as Helen Fielding expresses in *Multiple Moving Perceptions of the Real: Arendt, Merleau-Ponty, and Truitt*, the feeling of a singular point of view and experience of “*the real world in terms of static matter*” is, therefore, an illusion: “*capacity of bodies to gather multiple perceptions together also lends itself to the illusion that we see from only one perspective*”.³ Constant motion with simultaneous points of view collapses the perspective representing the perception of reality; a reality that remains incomplete despite continual attempts to explain it (in order to gather a complete understanding and a complete picture of it):

*“At the same time, phenomenologically understood, the real world does not exist in terms of static matter, but is instead a web of contextual relations and meanings. An ethics that does not take embodied relations into account—that allows for only one perspective—ultimately loses its capacity for flexibility, and for being part of a common and shared reality.”*⁴

³ Fielding, Helen A. "Multiple Moving Perceptions of the Real: Arendt, Merleau-Ponty, and Truitt." *Hypatia* Vol. 26, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 518. Accessed March 2016.

⁴ Fielding, Helen A. "Multiple Moving Perceptions of the Real: Arendt, Merleau-Ponty, and Truitt." *Hypatia* Vol. 26, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 518. Accessed March 2016.

Paper/Plane

In temporary installations, my work functions as an act of extending two-dimensional and three-dimensional components, separating layers to slow time down. By comparison, working on drawings forces me to use heavy layering to compress time. Change is embedded in the strata of layers. Drawings become a repository of time.

Another visual source trickled in with radiological imaging subtly visible in the Prześwity (interstices) series of drawings. I was pregnant in the beginning of my MFA program, and although my pregnancy didn't have a direct effect on my work, I notice an impact on my formal choices in radial arrangements and use of black and white. With the technology of radiology, we are able to see through matter and expose its underlying structures, which I seek to do in my work. As with satellites imagery, radiology exposes views we can't see with the naked eye.



Fig. 4- Sonogram Image. November 2013.

Using these different points of view results in depiction of the invisible, of emotional states and hidden forces. When using mechanical tools to trace and to cut, I am able to give up control and distance myself in order to achieve neutrality. *"A trace is a mark by means of which we can interpret and understand the past."*⁵ In this way, the process of tracing extracts and exposes layers the eye cannot see, of frequencies beyond the spectrum of human sight. Using mechanical tools such as a laser cutter distills the information into primary patterns. Using technology and working from multiple perspectives, exposes the invisible.

In my process collecting empirical data and translating it into subjective compositions reflects parallels and reveals recurring patterns. Repetitive engagement with—marking, connecting, stringing, cutting, folding, erasing, layering— all represent the passage of time. The resulting work operates in the liminal. The in-between space of overlap and displacement at the border and on the margins is an intersection of the depth of mortal existence and time that belongs to the world outside of self.

⁵ Casey, Edward S. "Part Two: Glancing Earlier and Farther Afield." In *The World at a Glance*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007. Print. p. 231



Fig. 5- Wyszomirska, Jowita. Przeswity 2 (Interstices 2), 2016, 26.5 x 34", ink, markers, acrylic, graphite on paper

Motion

While enrolled at the University of Maryland, my long commutes from Baltimore to College Park have sharpened my attention on my shifting frame of vision. I have always paid a particular attention to the way I see while moving: walking, running, biking, or driving. Each mode of travel makes me aware of the shifting nature of my perception.

The material physicality of artwork conveys what words cannot. For me, making is a revelation—a quest to learn about the surrounding world, a process of discovery. I often watch and marvel at swarms of insects, or flocks of birds moving in unison, swooping through the sky. One of the most amazing performers in nature is the starling: starlings gather in groups of hundreds or more and create incredible spectacles of movement. Each is influenced by the movement of every other one, as if each bird were connected to the same network.

Scientists describe the patterns of birds as “phase transitions,” like the transitions between solid, liquid and gaseous states of matter. Starlings transmit signals and perform an immediate response from bird to bird, even when hundreds of birds, from the distance of hundreds of feet, comprise the flock. Some experts compare a chattering of starlings to an avalanche. Both are systems that are capable of near-instantaneous transformation. Universal principles, yet unknown to us, operating in movement patterns in proteins and neurons, guide these phenomena.⁶

⁶ Keim, Brandon. "The Startling Science of a Starling Murmuration." *Wired*, August 2011.

“... Merleau-Ponty shows how it is a capacity of our prereflective bodies to allow impossible perceptions to coexist in one body: our bodies are always in motion, which provides different perceptions. ... Nonetheless, this same capacity of bodies to gather these multiple perceptions together also contributes to the illusion that we see from only one perspective.”⁷

I am interested in the intrinsic psychological state embodied by this movement and the heightened spatial awareness it evokes. Investigation into patterns of movement in nature that have a seemingly chaotic infrastructure provides a shift of perspective; from my own motile body to the organization of movement outside of me. What exists is an amalgam of the motions of the past, influencing us each in nearly imperceptible ways. The past is embedded in present. Our sense of selves is built on our motions, our perceptions.

⁷ Fielding, Helen A. "Multiple Moving Perceptions of the Real: Arendt, Merleau-Ponty, and Truitt." *Hypatia* Vol. 26, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 532. Accessed March 2016.

Conclusion

The practice of making is a union of rhythm, motion and time. In my work, I explore the transitory nature of perception and its dependency on place and movement to provide new ways of relating and perceiving the work. *"When reality is created through making sense of what is there, then meaning is not simply imposed on what is, but is rather created through a perceptual, motile, affective encounter."*⁸ Movement plays an integral part in interpreting the reality and active encounters build relationships through the embodied perception.

An edge is a transition, a meeting point, an intersection; something ends when another thing becomes. Contours follow embrace. There are the precise mechanical edges defined by machine and the soft, dispersed, rough, and fragmented borders made by hand. Some connect while others divide.

Considering the relationships between edges and borders, my work creates temporal experiences for the viewer. As with language, identity, art, and meaning, it operates within "a plurality of perspectives of the same world," an amalgam of geography, lines, and atmospheric buildup.⁹ The work pivots as an 'extended' drawing that viewers experience by walking in, moving around, and defining their own perspectives of space and time.

⁸ Fielding, Helen A. "Multiple Moving Perceptions of the Real: Arendt, Merleau-Ponty, and Truitt." *Hypatia* Vol. 26, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 532. Accessed March 2016.

⁹ Fielding, Helen A. "Multiple Moving Perceptions of the Real: Arendt, Merleau-Ponty, and Truitt." *Hypatia* Vol. 26, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 532. Accessed March 2016.

Poetry 2

Trzy Słowa Najdziwniejsze

Kiedy wymawiam słowo Przyszłość,
pierwsza sylaba odchodzi już do przeszłości.

Kiedy wymawiam słowo Cisza,
niszczę ją.

Kiedy wymawiam słowo Nic,
stwarzam coś, co nie mieści się w żadnym niebycie.¹⁰

The Three Oddest Words

When I pronounce the word Future,
the first syllable already belongs to the past.

When I pronounce the word Silence,
I destroy it.

When I pronounce the word Nothing,
I make something no non-being can hold.¹¹

¹⁰ Szymborska, Wiesława. "Trzy Słowa Najdziwniejsze." *Widok z Ziarnkiem Piasku*. Wydawnictwo a5 Poznań, 1997. p.182

¹¹ Nobel Prizes and Laureates. Szymborska, Wiesława. "The Three Oddest Words." Nobleprize.org. http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1996/szymborska-poems-3-e.html (Accessed March 2016).

APPENDIX

The following figures are images of selected works on paper and installation images from *In the Liminal*: an MFA exhibition, on view at the University of Maryland's Art Gallery, May 11 – May 27, 2016.



Fig. 6- Wyszomirska, Jowita. *Stery nieba (Heaping sky)*, 2016, 34 x 26.5, ink, markers, acrylic, graphite on paper



Fig. 7- Wyszomirska, Jowita. *Przeswity 1 (Interstices 1)*, 2016, 32 x 43", ink, markers, acrylic, graphite on paper



Fig. 8- Wyszomirska, Jowita. Installation shot from the MFA thesis exhibition.



Fig. 9- Wyszomirska, Jowita. Installation shot from the MFA thesis exhibition.



Fig. 10- Wyszomirska, Jowita. *In the Liminal*. 2016. Dimensions varied. Paint, markers, Mylar, felt, thread, pins.
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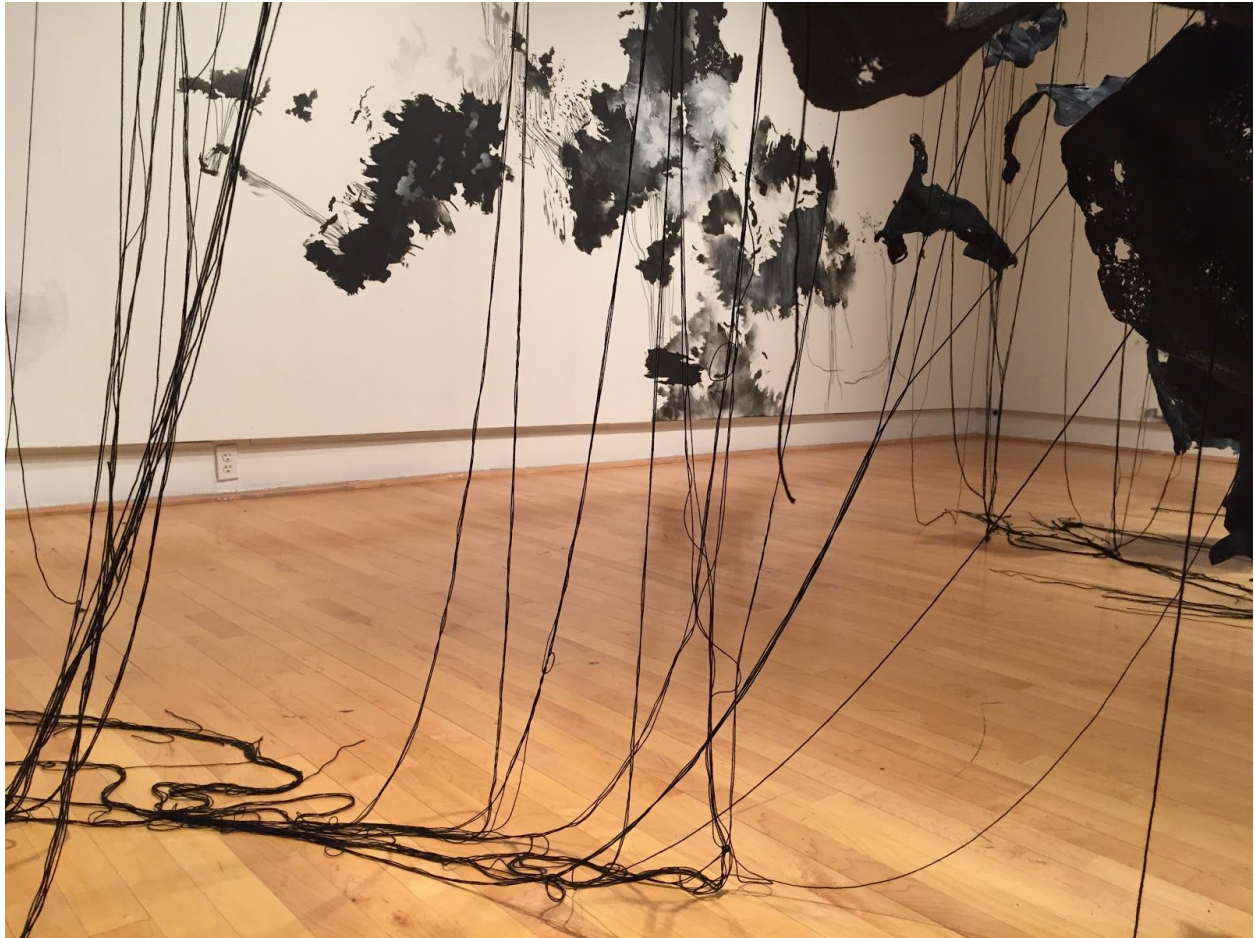


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Fig. 15- Wyszomirska, Jowita. *In the Liminal*. 2016. Dimensions varied. Paint, markers, Mylar, felt, thread, pins. Installation shot the MFA thesis exhibition.

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