NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

DOCUMENTATION OF THE ONE-PERSON EXHIBITION

A DOCUMENTATION OF THE ONE-PERSON EXHIBITION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

SCHOOL OF ART AND DESIGN

BY

Sarah L. Napp

DEKALB, ILLINOIS

August 2021
Certification: In accordance with School of Art and Design and Graduate School policies, this documentation is accepted in partial fulfillment of degree requirements.

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Chair, Graduate Advisory Committee

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Date
CATALOG

WAITING TO BE SEEN

(One-Person Exhibition)

BY

Sarah L. Napp

The following work is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Fine Arts degree at Northern Illinois University. The work was produced between August 2020 and December 2020. It was presented in an exhibition from 3 May 2021 through 7 May 2021 in the Johns Gallery, Room 214, Visual Arts Building, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois.
List of work

**Undertow**, Gouache, cray pas and coloured pencil on paper cut out, light, 24” X 24” X 12”, Fall 2020

**Sight Unseen**, Rubber cement resist, gouache and graphite pencil on paper, 9” X 12”, Fall 2020

**Invasion**, Rubber cement resist, gouache, Sumi ink and permanent marker on paper, 9” X 12”, Fall 2020

**Unlikable**, Rubber cement resist, gouache, coloured pencil and graphite pencil on paper, 9” X 12”, Fall 2020

**Barrier**, Cotton fibre, gouache and graphite pencil on paper, 9” X 12”, Fall 2020

**Space Between**, Gouache and wax pencil on paper, 9” X 12”, Fall 2020

**Elision**, Gouache and wax pencil on manipulated paper, foam board, light, 18” X 24”, Fall 2020

**Invisible**, Paper cut outs and light, 6: 12” X 12” individual pieces, modular, Fall 2020
WAITING TO BE SEEN

Technique and Process

*Waiting To Be Seen* is a collection of paintings produced amid generating sculptures. Oscillating between two- and three- dimensional bodies of work establishes two independent dialogues while simultaneously creating stepping-stones for each practice. My intentions were never to show this work but for the pieces to act as private journal entries for no one other than myself. By not considering the viewer’s expectations, the process for this body of work was more about solitary moments and less about how I and the work would be interpreted or altered due to outside circumstances. By not having an audience in mind I, also, felt the burden of performance lift as space for unfettered introspective responses grew. This freedom allowed moments to learn how to eliminate my fixation for tidying the surface of my work. Eventually, I found an acceptance for the marks that I made and ultimately for myself as I began understanding how to release control and curtail overthinking. My personal exploration of self and as Artist was equally as important if not more so than the work itself.

As for the physical process of *Waiting To Be Seen* I employed resist techniques for most of the paintings. With the use of rubber cement and tape I blurred the lines between positive and negative space. The absence of materials was only revealed once I had applied a permanent gouache wash exposing a patterned by-product of the initial
temporary additive. Objects cut from paper, also, acted as a “resist” in the form of barriers between light sources and shadows. By marrying light with the interruption of space I echoed a cause-and-effect sentiment akin to the blocking and revealing actions of the resist techniques. Grids and shadows dominated the paintings exhibited in *Waiting To Be Seen*. Regardless of grids being viewed as masculine, my connection to the grid is more of a respite from the chaos of processing emotions and information and less about a gender belief linked to a structure. The grids that I portray are organic, emotional, and some-what biological, but not necessarily feminine. With the progress of each painting the subsequent painting linked to and depended on the prior piece. The chain began with precisely drawn rectangles, either vertical or horizontal, then determining how many dots looked aesthetically pleasing within the limitations of each rectangle. Once I had decided how many rows and columns of dots pleased me, I then closed my eyes and began plotting circles, drawn with pencil, on an imaginary grid; the circles became dots further along in the building process. As I re-established my vision, I realized that perfection, in terms or precision, was not likely to be achieved nor could I deny the expressive beauty of imperfection. By eliminating my vision, I removed any chance of doubting myself, editing my marks or conforming to the predetermined perimeter. Another restriction I placed on myself was that no matter the outcome I would not correct any “unsavory” marks. I did not allow myself to view any part of my work as a mistake or being wrong; once the medium was on the substrate there it stayed. At this point I created a single grid using the same blind technique opposing a rigid shape yet this time by adding fibre to each circle creating low relief dimensional dots (*Barrier*, 2020). Placing a harsh low light source on the miniature mounds
produced long shadows that I then traced and added pigment. Barrier and the following piece, Space Between, were integral moments in developing Waiting To Be Seen. Shifting my thoughts - I stopped closing my eyes and drawing circles and began using a collapsible grid, not displayed at the show, made from balsa planks, and connected with wire rings. Having zero structural integrity like a skeleton marionette I began blindly tossing and tracing the puppet-esque grid onto paper. Combining the “blind/resist dots” (Invasion, 2020; Sight Unseen, 2020; Unlikable, 2020) and the “skeletal grid” gave me a third type of grid (Space Between, 2020). By tracing the negative space of the physical grid, the substrate became the positive space (Space Between, 2020). My immediate reaction to making the negative space prominent was to then remove the shapes. This led to cutting out tracings of the collapsible grid from paper. Flooding each cut out with a light source to increase visual mass and soften the connection between the paper and gallery wall (Invisible, 2020) gave the illusion of the wall peeling or protruding into the gallery’s void. From this point I traced cast shadows produced by Invisible and layered the previous techniques – resist, blind dots and grid toss (Elision, 2020). With Elision I also pushed the negative space of the collapsible grid outline into space by partially cutting and curling the paper under and forward; backed with black foam core the piece has an implied shadow because of the exposure of the foam core through the cut substrate; additional shadows came from the gallery lights. Unlike the previous works I added short white lines, similar to tally marks, to fill the entire background (Elision, 2020). The final piece, Undertow, is a tracing of a cast shadow from Invisible; cut from paper, jutting out from the wall, and creating an altered shadow also like Invisible; the cut and curled negative spaces filled with white tally marks mimic Elision.
(Undertow, 2020). As with each step the grid and shadows deteriorated from one stage to another but transform into something new.

**Structural Concept and Physical Layout**

*Waiting To Be Seen* was structured so that the viewer, walking into the gallery, first observed the five un-glassed framed pieces: *Sight Unseen, Invasion, Unlikable, Barrier, and Space Between*. I made a conscious choice to not place the work under glass so that the viewer could intimately see and understand my marks and my choice of saturated colour. Otherwise, the sheen of the glass would have sharpened the pigment thus removing any evidence of a handmade object – evidence of human touch – evidence of my touch. Spacing the paintings evenly along the longest wall in the gallery allowed an ease and comfortability for the audience viewing the paintings. The balanced and systematic formation gave each piece enough of a gap to breathe independently from the next painting. To have placed the paintings on any of the shorter walls in the gallery would have been detrimental to the viewer’s rhythmic timing while considering each piece. Also, a downfall of using another wall would have been a blatant dismissal of the dialogue between, *Invisible*, a paper cut out series mounted on the parallel wall, and the five small paintings: *Sight Unseen, Invasion, Unlikable, Barrier, and Space Between*. By opposing the rigid lines of the frames with the quasi-organic meandering grids and shadows of *Invisible* I balanced the visual weight of the addition and subtraction of materials. Higher than the other work in the show, *Invisible*, despite being minimal, used the wall as a backdrop yet seemingly dwarfed the viewer. Balancing the absence of
information is equally vital to balancing the inclusion of information. By enlarging the myopic (Invisible, 2020) and shrinking the broad (framed paintings) I created an unseen connection tethering positive and negative space; mass and void; and light and shadow. As for the final two paintings, Elision and Undertow, father apart yet facing each other, they also carried on a conversation. Both pieces echoed the same relationship between the framed paintings and Invisible. The rectangle substrate of Elision, slightly elevated by foam core, mimicked the five framed paintings: Sight Unseen, Invasion, Unlikable, Barrier, and Space Between. And Undertow acted as a variation on Invisible. I placed Elision on the wall farthest from the gallery door simply because it was larger than Undertow plus it was the culmination of my investigation. Being the apex of processes and pigment, Elision, was about the omission and the joining of layers of ideas confined by standard paper dimensions. Therefore, hanging the painting where I did gave the viewers an understanding of the piece being pride of place. Had I mounted Undertow on the wall that Elision was on there would have been a conflict with the lighting. More about the environment, Undertow, used the wall as a substrate and a space for the shadows to expand. Considering Undertow as a falling leaf I placed the painting above the head of the viewers so that the action of looking was up and under. In terms of the lighting, despite having harsh light on two of the walls in order to create cast shadows, I designed a scheme that felt inviting and calm to the viewer.
Philosophical and Aesthetic Concepts

My belief is that drawing is at the root of all art and that dots and lines are at the root of drawing. As like many, learning how to draw begins with charcoal. Acting as a substitute for charcoal I used neutral materials, such as, cotton duct, muslin, and plaster, throughout the MFA program. During this time of understanding, by eliminating color and designed patterns I avoided the interruption of superfluous information. Taking a formal approach to minimalist abstract art was another level of omitting details that potentially altered my journey of discovery. I was interested in getting to the source of the source – understanding a drawing in relation to a dot (examining from broad to myopic). And when the time was right, I added pigment to paper. Choosing paper as a substrate, material, and object for the entirety of Waiting To Be Seen was due to the action the process of making paper. Like my personal process and awareness, paper making is about the reduction, collections, and reformation of materials beginning anew.

Main Objectives

Mark making for the sake of grades and graduating was not my primary reason for being part of a practice-based degree seeking program. At the beginning the goal was for my art to be more focused than it had been a few years prior – I wanted the work to change. Instead, by the end of the three-year program, I could acknowledge that learning how to be vulnerable was the change that I had been looking for. I realized that changing myself was the main objective all along. My self-discovery was not “art therapy” but an opportunity for a deeper understanding of myself so that in the future I
can give more of who I am to the world – to myself – to art. I have been thinking with my hands for quite a long time and yes, the work would have somewhat shifted but had it not been for my desire to begin therapy, confront my past and address the present my work would not have meant much. Albeit my work has always been personal it was only at surface level. Now I am aware of the depth of the shape of my thinking and how personal my work truly has become.

Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it faced.

- James Baldwin
Historical and Contemporary Influences

Alina Szapocznikow
Eva Hesse
Louise Nevelson
Phyllida Barlow
Anna Hepler
Agnes Martin
Rosa Verloop
Iris Apfel
Isabel Yellin
Kiki Smith
Rei Kawakubo
Louise Bourgeois

I am a light
in doubt
My whole
sour
Sleeping
My body
very wide
I can not control
Everything I ever
DOCUMENTATION OF ARTWORK

File List for Waiting to Be Seen by Sarah L. Napp

01 _Undertow_, Gouache, cray pas and coloured pencil on paper cut out, light, 24” X 24” X 12”, Fall 2020

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03 _Large wall in Johns Gallery (Rm 214, VAB).

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07 _Barrier_, Cotton fibre, gouache and graphite pencil on paper, 9” X 12”, Fall 2020

08 _Detail: Barrier_, Cotton fibre, gouache and graphite pencil on paper, 9” X 12”, Fall 2020

09 _Detail: Barrier_, Cotton fibre, gouache and graphite pencil on paper, 9” X 12”, Fall 2020

10 _Space Between_, Gouache and wax pencil on paper, 9” X 12”, Fall 2020

11 _Elision_, Gouache and wax pencil on manipulated paper, foam board, light, 18” X 24”, Fall 2020

12 _Elision_, Gouache and wax pencil on manipulated paper, foam board, light, 18” X 24”, Fall 2020

13 _Detail: Elision_, Gouache and wax pencil on manipulated paper, foam board, light, 18” X 24”, Fall 2020

14 _Invisible_, Paper cut outs and light, 6: 12” X 12” individual pieces, modular, Fall 2020
15 _Detail: Invisible, Paper cut outs and light, 6: 12” X 12” individual pieces, modular, Fall 2020

16 _Detail: Invisible, Paper cut outs and light, 6: 12” X 12” individual pieces, modular, Fall 2020

17 _Detail: Invisible, Paper cut outs and light, 6: 12” X 12” individual pieces, modular, Fall 2020

18 _Detail: Invisible, Paper cut outs and light, 6: 12” X 12” individual pieces, modular, Fall 2020

19 _Announcement poster, 8” X 10”

20 _Poster for gallery door, 18” X 24”

21 _Show card – front

22 _Show statement

23a _Collapsible grid opened

23b _Collapsible grid closed
**FIGURES**

**Figure 1** - *Undertow*, Gouache, cray pas and coloured pencil on paper cut out, light, 24” X 24” X 12”, Fall 2020

**Figure 2** - *Undertow*, Gouache, cray pas and coloured pencil on paper cut out, light, 24” X 24” X 12”, Fall 2020
Figure 3 - Large wall in Johns Gallery (Rm 214, VAB).

Figure 4 - Sight Unseen, Rubber cement resist, gouache and graphite pencil on paper, 9” X 12”, Fall 2020
Figure 5 - *Invasion*, Rubber cement resist, gouache, Sumi ink and permanent marker on paper, 9” X 12”, Fall 202

Figure 6 - *Unlikable*, Rubber cement resist, gouache, coloured pencil and graphite pencil on paper, 9” X 12”, Fall 2020
**Figure 7** - *Barrier*, Cotton fibre, gouache and graphite pencil on paper, 9” X 12”, Fall 2020

**Figure 8** - Detail: *Barrier*, Cotton fibre, gouache and graphite pencil on paper, 9” X 12”, Fall 2020
Figure 9 - Detail: **Barrier**, Cotton fibre, gouache and graphite pencil on paper, 9” X 12”, Fall 2020

Figure 10 - **Space Between**, Gouache and wax pencil on paper, 9” X 12”, Fall 2020
Figure 11 - *Elision*, Gouache and wax pencil on manipulated paper, foam board, light, 18” X 24”, Fall 2020

Figure 12 - *Elision*, Gouache and wax pencil on manipulated paper, foam board, light, 18” X 24”, Fall 2020
Figure 13 - Detail: *Elision*, Gouache and wax pencil on manipulated paper, foam board, light, 18” X 24”, Fall 2020

Figure 14 - *Invisible*, Paper cut outs and light, 6: 12” X 12” individual pieces, modular, Fall 2020
Figure 15 - Detail: Invisible, Paper cut outs and light, 6: 12" X 12" individual pieces, modular, Fall 2020

Figure 16 - Detail: Invisible, Paper cut outs and light, 6: 12" X 12" individual pieces, modular, Fall 2020
Figure 17 - Detail: Invisible, Paper cut outs and light, 6: 12” X 12” individual pieces, modular, Fall 202

Figure 18 - Detail: Invisible, Paper cut outs and light, 6: 12” X 12” individual pieces, modular, Fall 2020
Figure 19 - Announcement poster, 8" X 10"

Figure 20 - Poster for gallery door, 18" X 24"
Figure 21 - Show card – front
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is a collection of paintings produced amid generating sculptures. Oscillating between two- and three- dimensional bodies of work establishes two independent dialogues while simultaneously creating stepping-stones for each practice.

Figure 22 - Show statement
**Figure 23a** - Collapsible grid opened

**Figure 23b** - Collapsible grid closed
A special thank you to my committee – Cindy, Nina, and Frank.

I appreciate your feedback and time.

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