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Day Jaw Boo

a re-collection

Rachel Van Wagoner

A selected project submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

Von Allen, chair
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Department of Visual Arts

Brigham Young University

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Abstract

Day Jaw Boo, a re-collection

Rachel Van Wagoner

Department of Visual Arts, BYU

Master of Fine Arts

For my MFA Thesis exhibition, I have collected ideas surrounding events that happened in the past and combined them with the ceramic work I have made in the three years of my master's program at Brigham Young University. I have grouped visual elements from Buck Rogers and other Futro (retro-future) pop-culture with ideas surrounding the Voyager Interstellar Mission and the compiling of the Golden Record. Combining these elements in an installation, will create an environment where people can reflect on things they have "already seen" and envision a brighter future. For that reason I playfully call the show *Day Jaw Boo, a re-collection* and allow the viewers to enter a dream-like-reality-stage of déjà vu.

Keywords: ceramics, visual arts, Voyager Interstellar Mission, play

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Introduction

We saw a nebula in a telescope

A golden mist cluster we thought we saw

In larger telescopes it could seem as

The fathomless space of a thousand suns.

Our spinning thoughts made it appear

To rise, high above earth's wars,

Away from time and space—our lives' naïveté—

To other dimensions' majesty.

No law rules there as in this life.

There reign the laws for the world of worlds.

There surge the suns away, mature

And ring into the source of all the suns.

A multitude of suns are to be found.

Each sun there beats with cosmic law

In the unbearable light of greater suns.

And all is clearness there, the day of days."¹

--Harry Martinson

Initial Concept

The universe and the cosmos revert mankind into a child-like dimension, an age of innocence and acquisition of knowledge. There is an enormous amount of information to

¹ Carl Sagan, *Murmurs of Earth: The Voyager Interstellar Record* (New York: Random House, 1978), 252.

explore and discover. It seems the more we learn, the less we know. The further we explore the cosmos, the bigger we find them and the more insignificant we see ourselves.

Carl Sagan, the American astronomer and astrophysicist, has said, “the cosmos is all there is or ever was or ever will be”² He dedicated his life to an intense study of the cosmos and became well known for his writings and research. One of his most important known contributions was that of compiling a record (made of gold) of Earth and its inhabitants to include with the Voyager Interstellar Mission.

The poem in the introduction was included on this golden record by The Swedish Delegate Anders Thunboig. The poem speaks of imagination and creation, hope and naïveté. Martinson, a Swedish sailor and poet, envisions another world high above earth’s wars, a land of clearness and hope. *Day Jaw Boo* is also a creation of imagination and innovation. It is naïve in its construction and design, yet evokes more meaning through the contrast of this simplicity with supposed content of the cosmos. *Day Jaw Boo* is a re-collection of these past quotes and documents surrounding the happenings during this time in the world’s history.

Space Race

In the mid-1960s, a group of scientists at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California were doing serious planning about the next decade of the Space Age and discovered what they called “cosmic billiard balls.” They found that in the last half of the 1970s all the outer planets (Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto) would be aligned in a pinwheel pattern on the same side of the sun.³ This type of alignment only takes place every two hundred years and

² Radiolab Podcast. *Space*. WNYC.org. May 12, 2006.

³ Margaret Poynter and Arthur L. Lane, *Voyager: The Story of a Space Mission* (New York: Atheneum, 1981), 6.

would give any spacecraft a 'gravity assist' to speed up and hurl the craft onto the next planet. This extra boost would make this type of exploration possible.

The "Space Race" of the 50s and 60s had launched many other probes that explored the inner planets (Mercury, Venus, Mars and Earth) but this would be the first in-depth exploration of what lay beyond. The mission was nicknamed the "Grand Tour of the Outer Planets" and the scientists spent years and millions of dollars constructing twin probes that would be launched within a few months of one another.⁴ They developed new techniques for construction because these probes would have to stay in space for many years, have an alternative heat-generating method for power (since they would be far away from the sun) and need to be able to transmit photos and findings back to Earth.⁵ They were planned to be in operation for only 5-7 years, but in 2007 at the Jet Propulsion Lab, they celebrated the Voyagers' 30th Anniversary in transmission.

Voyager 1 and Voyager 2 were twin spacecraft equipped with a variety of instruments to measure properties and radial evolution of the solar wind, energy spectrum of low-energy particles, energy spectrum of high and low energy electrons, high and low magnetic field intensity, and electrical field components of plasma waves.⁶ They were also equipped with various cameras and planetary and high gain antennas to transmit findings and photos back to Earth.

⁴ Dennis B. Fradin, *The Voyager Space Probes* (Chicago: Childrens Press, 1985), 18.

⁵ Margaret Poynter and Arthur L. Lane, *Voyager: The Story of a Space Mission* (New York: Atheneum, 1981), 33.

⁶ "Voyager: The Interstellar Mission." Jet Propulsion Laboratory: California Institute of Technology. Technology. <http://voyager.jpl.nasa.gov/index.html>. Accessed November 24, 2009.

Since NASA knew that the Voyagers would be traveling farther than any other man-made spacecraft, they decided to also equip them with an interstellar message for other intelligent space-faring citizens of the cosmos to decipher. Ann Druyan, who headed the team to record sounds from Earth worked alongside Carl Sagan in preparing the Golden Record, which would be attached to the Voyagers. To Druyan, the Golden Record was intended to communicate a story of our world to extraterrestrials and was meant to say, “We want to be citizens of the cosmos, we want you to know about us.”⁷

This interstellar message contained greetings in the principle languages of Earth, pictures, music and sounds of Earth. Engrained on the surface of the record are codes and drawings of how to make the record play and show the stored images. Many of the explanations are given in binary code or simple graphical depictions.

One document stored as an image is a greeting from Jimmy Carter, who was president at the time of the launch. It says:

“This Voyager spacecraft was constructed by the United States of America. We are a community of 240 million human beings among the more than 4 billion who inhabit the planet Earth. We human beings are still divided into nation states, but these states are rapidly becoming a single global civilization. We cast this message into the cosmos. It is likely to survive a billion years into our future, when our civilization is profoundly altered and the surface of the Earth may be vastly changed. Of the 200 million stars in the Milky Way galaxy, some – perhaps many – may have inhabited planets and space-faring civilizations. If one such civilization intercepts Voyager and can understand these recorded contents, here is our message: This is a present from a small, distant world, a token of our sounds, our science, our images, our music, our thoughts and our feelings. We are attempting to survive our time so we may live into yours. We hope someday, having solved the problems we face, to join a community of galactic civilizations. This record represents our hope and our determination, and our good will in a vast and awesome universe.”⁸

⁷ Radiolab Podcast. *Space*. WNYC.org. May 12, 2006.

⁸ Carl Sagan, *Murmurs of Earth: The Voyager Interstellar Record* (New York: Random House, 1978), 28.

As Carl Sagan has noted, “The spacecraft will be encountered and the record played only if there are advanced space faring civilizations in interstellar space. But the launching of this bottle into the cosmic ocean says something very hopeful about life on this planet.”⁹

A Small, Distant World in a Vast Awesome Universe

My MFA thesis exhibition, *Day Jaw Boo* (see [Fig. 1](#)), is meant to embody childhood imagination and hope. Déjà vu literally means “already seen” in French. I hope to help adults reminisce in the playful “already seen” imaginations of their childhood selves and that children take the advantage to explore an awesome, foreign world. In a sense it is a re-collection of all my previous work from my time as an MFA candidate at Brigham Young University and also a recollection of previous joys and innocence.

Quotidian phrases that we use like déjà vu, to a child may seem strange. The child might recognize the phrase and even know how to use the phrase, but if asked to spell it, would not know how to do so. I imagine they would pick words they already know that represent the sounds. That is *Day Jaw Boo*, how a child sees déjà vu. I want this show to be seen through a child’s eyes.

When you enter the room you will see the Fashion Fighters, creatures wearing outlandish spandex space suits, each of them carrying a Super Soaker® (See [Fig. 2](#), [2.1](#)). There are overhead lights that brightly “beam” them up, although they stand stalwart in their playful fight. Their suits vary in color and design, some containing a zipper up the front or a large, oversized collar. I wanted to design playful outfits that recollected the past ideas of what people would be wearing in the future, but added a twist of my own.

⁹ Radiolab Podcast. *Space*. WNYC.org. May 12, 2006.

In the August 2009 edition of Good magazine, Jason Polan illustrated the history of a water gun. As early as 1936 water guns were made to resemble laser/space guns. They had names like “Atom-matic Water Rocket Gun,” “Buck Rogers Liquid Helium Water Gun,” “Space Gun,” and “Cosmic Liquidator.” During the 50s and 60s a substantial amount of water guns looked like they came from outer space.¹⁰ When I grew up, Dr. Lonnie Johnson was creating his own genre of water gun, the Super Soaker®. There is a similar cosmic feel to these water guns. I chose to sculpt a Super Soaker® from 1991 and then reproduce it through molds and slip casting. I attached these porcelain slip casted guns to the Fashion Fighters and automatically made those guns space worthy. The viewer may not notice at first that it is a Super Soaker®, but upon closer inspection will recognize and recollect their own memories with the double-tanked water gun.

On the far wall, across from the entrance is posted in vinyl the poem by Harry Martinson. Next to the poem is an old clock radio (see [Fig. 3](#)). The digital numbers flip through in fast forward, “warp speed” and sounds emanates through the old speakers. There is a robotic voice which reads the poem out loud every five minutes. The voice is dubbed over the top of “An Ending (Ascent)” by Brian Eno which plays on repeat throughout the day. The ethereal feeling of the song adds to the entire atmosphere inside the gallery. The peaceful audio makes the whole installation more contemplative and thought provoking, helping the viewer envision the magnificence and expanse of the cosmos, our human imaginations and the concept of time.

In the center of the gallery is an archipelago of islands (See [Fig. 4](#)), fashioned after the geometric Surrounded Islands of Christo and Jean-Claude. I used their forms as a guide and inspiration because I like the artists’ ideologies and designs. Christo and Jeanne-Claude have

¹⁰ The Evolution of The Squirt Gun.” Good Magazine Website. <http://www.good.is/post/the-evolution-of-the-squirt-gun/> Accessed February 21, 2011.

said time and again that they wish to “create works of art of joy and beauty.”¹¹ I also aim to inspire and create a world that causes the type of hope and determination Carter spoke of in his message to citizens of the cosmos.

Resting on the islands are landscapes, reminiscent of the red rocks of southern Utah and Nevada (See Fig. [5](#), [6](#), [7](#), [8](#)). Moab is often used for lunar rover tests, because the terrain is so similar to the moon and Mars. I took this type of rock formation and created my own designed landscape that would hint of those things but also combined geometric and organic shapes.

The creatures are nestled comfortably in these landscapes. Obviously, this is their home. I have arranged them in positions that convey dialogue, controversy or bewilderment. The robot/alien/creatures seem to come alive and speak the collected quotes that are posted in vinyl on the wooden islands. Ann Druyan’s words (“we want to be citizens of the cosmos, we want you to know about us.”) are attributed to these inanimate objects, along with selected quotes from Jimmy Carter and Carl Sagan.

In the corner of the room is the control panel consisting of sheet metal and 100+ slip-cast ceramic knobs (See [Fig.9](#)). Everyone has seen, or imagined, a control room behind the scenes of a major operation. This part of the installation is an allusion to rooms like the Apollo Mission Control room, filled with scientists and engineers, buzzing with the act of making decisions. There are thin lines of electrical tape connecting the various panels. They weave a geometric web across the corner of the gallery and tie in the line drawings from across the room.

¹¹ An Interview with Christo and Jeanne-Claude.” Christo and Jeanne-Claude Official Website. <http://christojeanneclaude.net/eyeLevel.shtml>. Accessed January 18, 2011.

The simple line drawings of the creatures in their homeland flank the west wall of the gallery (See [Fig. 10, 10.1](#)). There are three panels of sheet metal that are suspended with wire from the ceiling and hang evenly across the wall. The drawings and some monotype “blue” prints are arranged with magnets on the three different panels. In a storyboard fashion they are hung haphazardly, suggestive of the work environment where these short histories were created.

Feeling and Focus

When I was in G.A.T.E. (Gifted And Talented Education) in 5th grade, our efforts for the whole school year were focused on an archeological expedition in which we would participate in the spring. All the schools in the Las Vegas valley were also preparing. We started by inventing a past culture and civilization. They had different rituals, customs, languages and even bodies. Our’s was a Band-Aid® man civilization. We created many documents, some with drawn pictures of this lost civilization and most of them contained words in our fictional language explaining the pictures and the customs of this Band-aid nation. It was creatively exhilarating as we pushed our minds to think of truly alien customs and languages. We also created the key to translate all these rich, historical finds that would explain our civilization. We engraved that key upon a stone, broke the stone up into many pieces and buried it in the ground in Mount Charleston, just outside of Las Vegas. All the participating schools did the same thing. On the weekend of the dig, we were assigned another school’s civilization and told where to dig and we went to work. When we found all the pieces of the stone tablet with the language inscribed upon it, we could translate the documents and learn about their lost strange culture. Even though the nations were invented we felt the excitement of discovery and development. As children we

were presented with the grander scheme of the world and an overarching view of our own “lives’ naïveté.”

Recalling this childhood memory has allowed me to focus on the feeling I set for this exhibition/installation. I hope the viewer can recollect their childhood moments of discovery and innovation. I’ve created another world, small and seemingly insignificant, but hopefully with the same naïveté as the Band-Aid® Nation. *Day Jaw Boo* suggests a world similar to ours and with this insinuation gives the viewer the opportunity to explore differences between the two. The human viewer will naturally relate to my “nation” because of the dialogue and anthropomorphic gestures even though the forms and figures are completely foreign.

Conclusive Data

My final show is an exploration of the ideas of simplicity and innocence versus contrasting themes of arrogance and complexity. I have combined a variety of elements to play between these disparities. The geometric forms of the islands and landscapes smoothly round to become more organic. The polished, round creatures seem to carry a pride in their complex man-made knobs and outfits. The simple form of the creatures and the simplicity of the entire installation contrast the complex concept of the cosmos as I examine the hopeful difference between knowing arrogance and naïveté. The re-collection of the voyager data and my own artwork combine to create an analysis of our understanding of the world, as we know it now, and our insignificance in everything else outside of this world.

Images

Figure 1

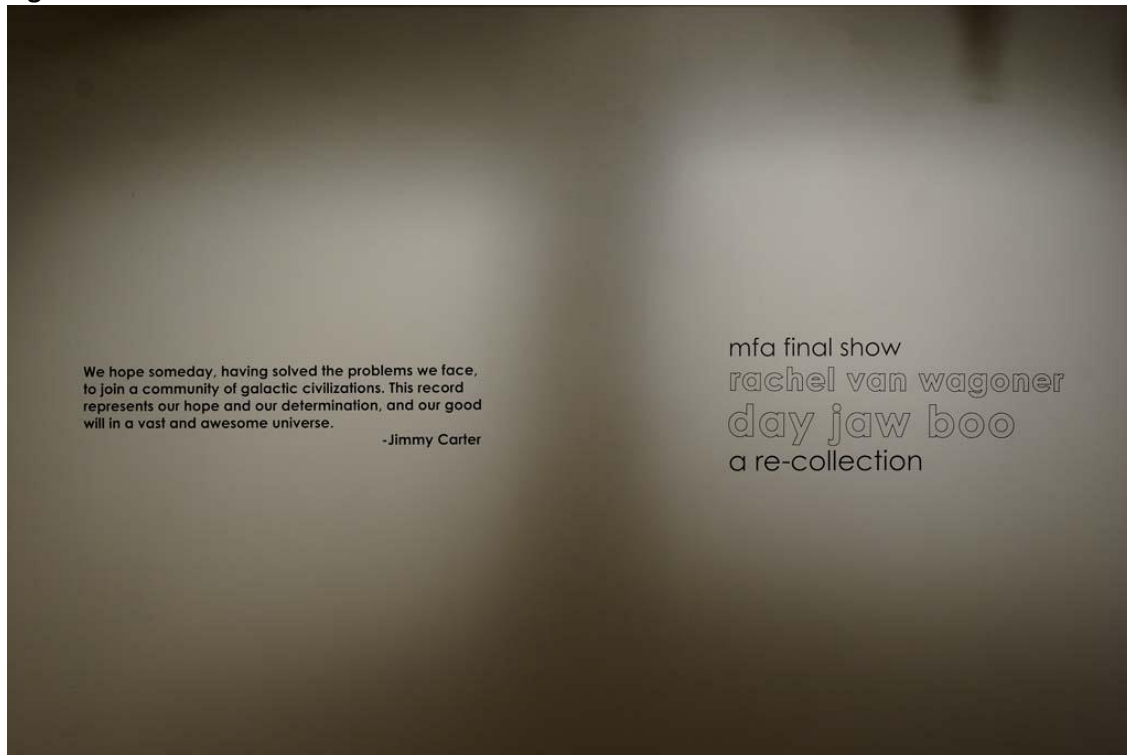


Figure 2



Figure 2.1



Figure 3

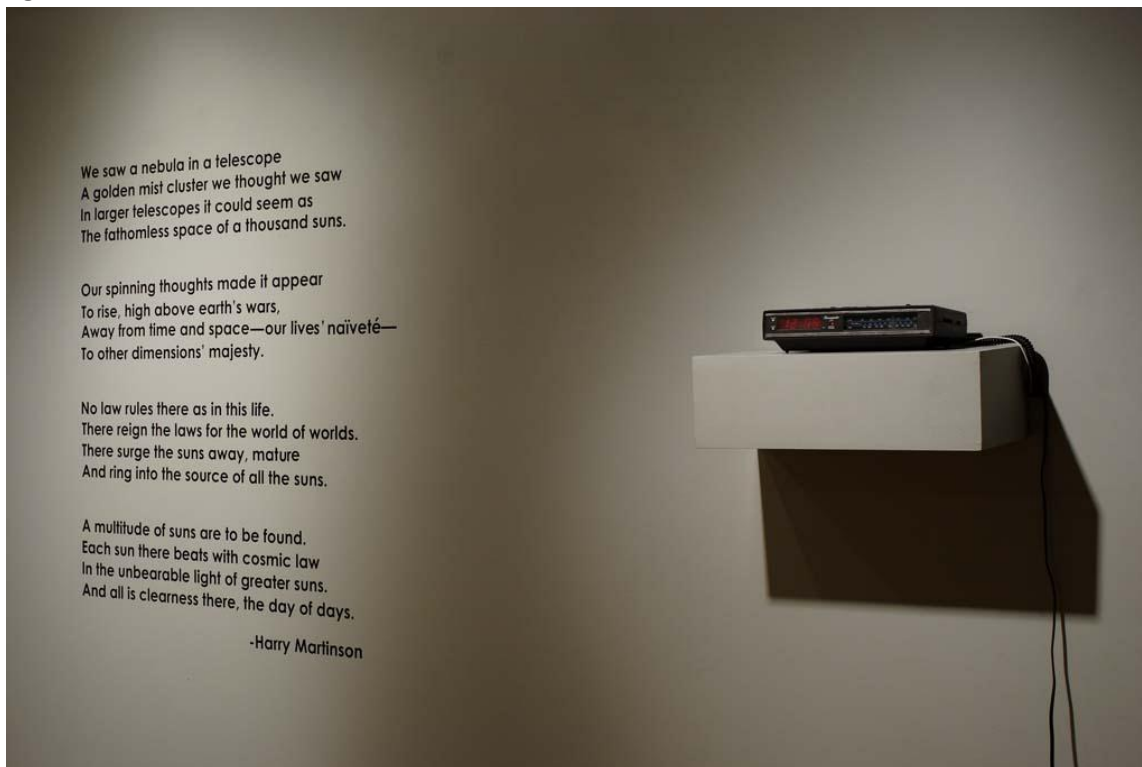


Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9

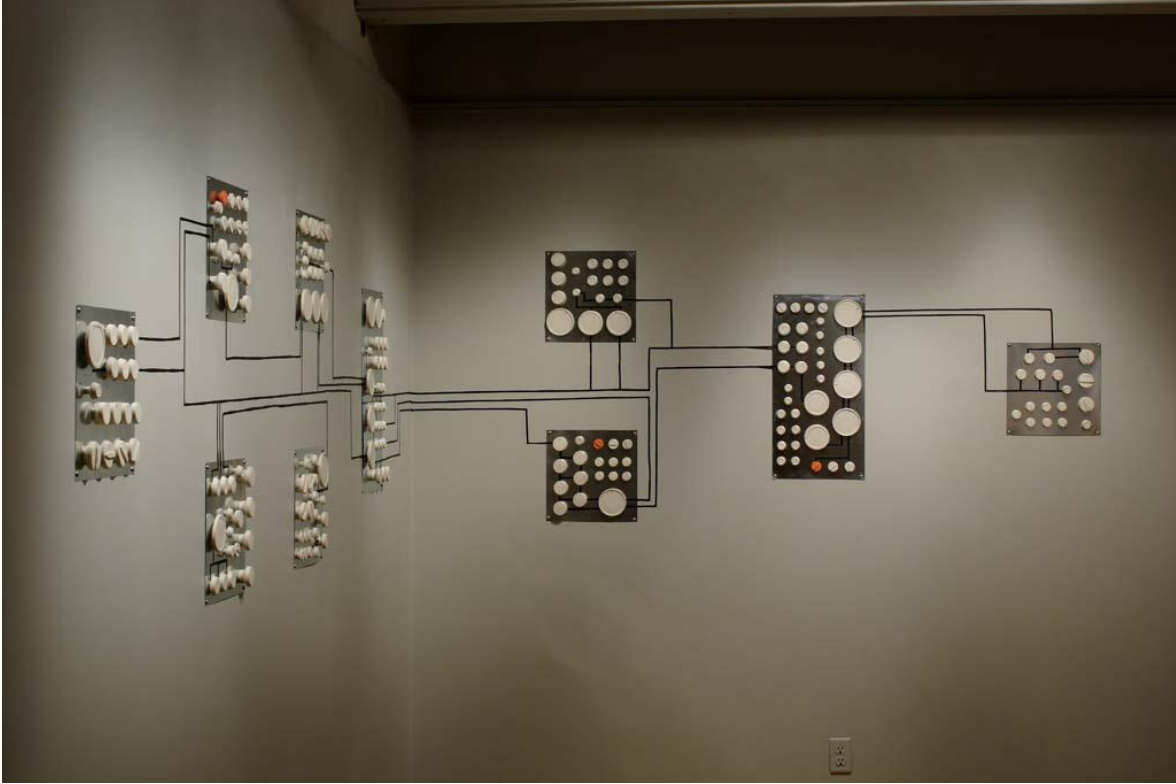
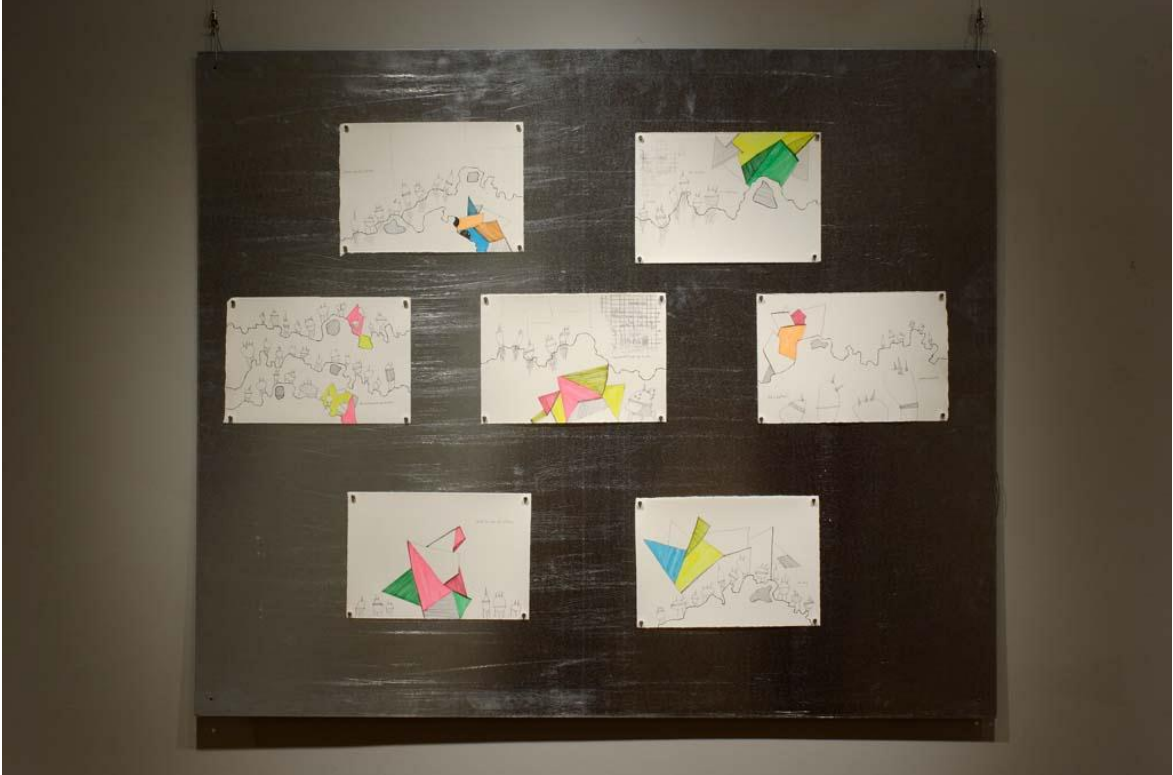


Figure 10



Figure 10.1



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