Without End

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Without End

Amy Royer

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

Gary Barton, chair
Fidalis Buehler
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ABSTRACT

Without End

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This project report accounts for my final MFA project Without End. I began a journey of creating my own system that in the end relied upon chance. The process was rewarding for me personally. In addition, I became intrigued with having the viewer be a part of my dialogue. Through this dialogue, it is my hope that the viewer will be able to come into my world and catch a glimpse of my every day. I hope that they have a paralleled experience to mine - one of aesthetic engagement and perpetual discovery within patterns and what they imply.

Keywords: chance, infinite possibilities, pattern, process, systems
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Brigham Young University

SIGNATURE PAGE

of a selected project submitted by

Amy Royer

The selected project of Amy Royer is acceptable in its final form including (1) its format, citations, and bibliographical style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and department style requirements; (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables, and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory and ready for submission.

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Minimalists incorporated a unique process to create works of art. Their first concept was to remove the personal from the work, so that the viewer could interact with each piece on a more concentrated level. Secondly, they had formulated systems that either produced exact outcomes or random outcomes. Due to my own acute awareness of patterned systems, I found myself influenced by the Minimalist approach. There were other movements that used patterns that influenced me, but I always found myself coming back to the ideas of Minimalism. From these influences, I began a journey of creating my own system that in the end relied upon chance. The process was rewarding for me personally and I became intrigued with having the viewer be a part of my dialogue, and in turn understand the way I see the world. I see the world in patterned forms, and I hope the viewer, through their involvement, becomes more aware of the beautiful patterned world around them and the infinite possibilities patterns can bring.
MY EARLY DEVELOPMENT IN ART

My connection to art came through many years of exposure, whether it was during my high school silver jewelry class, multiple trips to the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, or the introductory art classes at the beginning of my undergraduate studies. Due to these exposures, I became more aware of what art was about, what it could mean, and how there were continuous possibilities. To me, as a child, art consisted of realistic portraiture, and that was the only fine art. Yet through the art history courses and core undergraduate requirements, I quickly began to see that there were many different possibilities as to what could be classified as fine art. Due to these exposures, I found myself drawn specifically to non-representational art for its infinite possibilities. While studying for my BFA, I found success when dealing with formalistic elements like shape, line, and color that in the end created different patterns and a process that fueled my creative desires. At the end of my degree, I came away with the following concept that formed the basis of my BFA thesis:

\[ \text{Developing to this point in art has proven to be both rewarding, and at times} \]
\[ \text{discouraging, as one is always trying to find their voice as an artist. I have found} \]
\[ \text{through this inquiring process, which only will continue, that art is about} \]
\[ \text{freedom, the growth, the never-ending ideas that can flow from one time to} \]
\[ \text{another. My BFA project encompasses the idea of “the never-ending} \]
\[ \text{possibilities.”} \]

As my graduate education began, I continued using this process and focused my effort to understand deeply into the meaning of why I was drawn to the endless possibilities of pattern.
In an art history class taken as an undergraduate student I was introduced to Islamic art. Islamic designs were especially interesting to me because of their ability to create a feeling of unity and order through repetition and simple formal elements that result in patterning. Although they were simplistic in form, they were also quite complex within each pattern’s conceptual meaning. Each layer or difference in pattern was a stepping stone to spiritual significance. Charlotte Jirousek, associate professor at Cornell University, mentions that:

“Islamic scholars were always preoccupied with the measuring and patterning of the world and the sky above it; astronomy, geometry, and the tools of navigation and surveying, as well as the sciences of anatomy and medicine were all religious exercises, an attempt to demonstrate the underlying order of creation. Therefore
even the geometry of pattern and the colors of the spectrum take on great spiritual significance” (Jirousek).

When I view different Islamic patterns, I do not necessarily understand all of the spiritual layers, but I can see and understand the simplification and the power multiple layers can bring. I was able to connect and become engaged by the pattern through my own personal connection to repetition. These Islamic works were more thought provoking for me than a landscape or a portrait, due to my own thought process while viewing the combination of shapes and the systematic approach. In order to understand my affinity to these visual patterns, I began to reflect on my life, my influences, and my habits. Pattern for me was more than a decorative element and provided connections to my own life as well.

I form patterned routines to function in situations that, for me at times, are uncontrollable environments. This need to create patterns comes from a condition called obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). In order to deal with these uncontrollable environments, I created my own patterned systems in my every day activities. Through these systems, I could create a sense of control and simplicity in what was for me, at times, a life of chaos and unpredictability.

During my therapy appointments, my therapist would challenge me to change my compulsive behaviors, yet as I attempted to do this, I became more conscious of my own process, and it increased my awareness of pattern around me. I would find patterns while walking and noticing the cracks in the wet cement, the broken ice melting on the window, and in the way my professors would address me during critiques and their speech patterns or body movements. I found pattern everywhere and in everything, and this knowledge offered me connections to life and creation around me. I found solace in this new awareness. I also
recognized how different aspects of life, layered together, created an even more complex pattern that for me was even more beautiful. To see elements of life brought together allowed me, for a short period of time, to feel normal. It was at this time that I found myself drawn to art movements within Modernism, specifically Minimalism and its approach to systematic patterns.

While reading articles by Frank Stella, art critics, and Sol Lewitt regarding Minimalism, it appeared to me that Minimalism represented an ease within form just like what I found within Islamic art. However, Islamic artists hoped that the individual viewing their patterns would have a spiritual experience, where the Minimalist artists tried to remove personal expression in order for the viewer to be able to bring their own content to interpret the work, and then in turn become a part of the work. By removing the personal, the Minimalist artist felt the viewer had fewer distractions and was able to interact with each piece on a more concentrated level. This idea resonated within me. I enjoyed the thought of inviting the viewer to participate by interpreting and bringing their own content to a work of art or an entire show. I can appreciate why the Minimalist artist felt it necessary to leave out the personal in order to create a deeper conceptual
basis. Even for me as a viewer, this art movement allowed me to have a more concentrated viewing experience. The system, for these artists, became more important and was the foundation of their complex concepts. One artist whom I found inspiring and had systems based off complex concepts, was Sol Lewitt.

Sol LeWitt, a Minimalist artist, based his systems off mathematics. These systems were implemented through wall drawings, sculptures, painted wall murals, etc. Due to the outcome of the systems, repetition of rich patterns played a huge role in his work. The outcome could be a result of a defined process or it could be based on chance. The idea of chance resonated with
me, and I found it quite remarkable. Sol Lewitt, I believe, was a great example of both kinds of pattern processes. His work prompted me to be inquisitive and examine his process. In the end, this examination affected my own methods for generating ideas and resulting systems.

In addition, I found his wall pieces to be of particular interest. Each piece had appealing elements that stood out in their rhythmic qualities and repetition. For me, the rhythmic quality was felt more abundantly when viewing the entire wall drawing, where repetition was more evident within the details of the whole. The way that the repetitions played off each other created a contrasting dialogue within my own mind. I found myself asking simple questions on how a line layered and positioned in different directions could make such an impact on the overall pieces for me as the viewer. This dialogue started to turn into a form of communication for me. Juxtaposed compositional sections began to take on the characteristics of two individuals having a conversation yet no words were being spoken. Instead the words were layered, repetitious systems of line and shape. Each individual piece was responding to the corresponding shape, line, or gridded section. Within the “conversation”, I found myself being able to be a part of the space and, in a way, a part of the art work. This was unlike other works where I was one entity and the artwork was another. I did not have to be focused solely on artistic concepts; I was able to bring my own narrative, my own conversation into the dialogue already being presented. This idea resonated within me, and I wanted to incorporate it into my own work. I could see within Minimalism, a process that was a monotony of acts and a complexity of concept shown through a simplified overall form. What could have seemed chaotic to some was for me complete with order and paralleled what I experienced each day with the patterns I create to simplify and make sense of the world around me.
THE EVOLUTION OF PROCESS

Having discovered through Minimalism the attraction that chance has for me, I needed to evaluate my approach, which was that of a very controlled system. This system offered multiple ways of experimenting, but when I came into the MFA program, I felt like my work needed less control and more random applications to broaden the concept of the overall process. This new idea of less control created a challenge for me personally because of my frame of mind and the OCD systems I created in my daily routines. What was fascinating to me, in the end, was that less control and more randomness fueled ideas and the desire to create. It became exhilarating to lose that control and allow something in my own life to be less calculated. It was very freeing, and, in the end, creating a less calculated system became a part of my new creative process.
THE GRID AND RESULTING SYSTEM

In the beginning stages of creating this new system, I assembled collages via a grid. I found the grid to be a great starting place for me. It offered a sense of control within the beginning steps of the system. All of the squares, within the grid, were defined and equally spaced, which in turn satisfied my initial obsession with complete order. Ironically, however, I found as this new process evolved, that the more control I took away, the more interesting the process and artwork would become for me.

When I created the initial collages, I took previous monoprints and cut them into 1-inch squares. When I started to think about each collage, I began with an intuitive structural concept that would accommodate chance. Each square was divided into separate colors that were selected randomly and glued onto the gridded structure. As each collage evolved, I made intuitive choices about pattern and found a great deal of satisfaction in the uncontrolled evolution of the piece. Even though the squares were predominantly the same color, each square had unique feature such as white lines, transferred black lines, differing textures or different colored shapes. Due to these unique features, the overall collage had optical play of color, value, line, and shape which created secondary patterns. These combinations and dimension to the pieces could not have been planned. The unexpected became like a game. I, who previous to this discovery had to have control in almost every aspect of life, found this to be exciting and liberating! This new idea of chance ultimately played a larger role in my concept within systems. My thoughts were captivated by the discoveries within the process and the outcome. I had found my match, and because of this fascination, I could let go of the control. I live in a chaotic, patterned filled day, and in this way I found reprieve.

When I found simplicity through another pattern, for those few brief moments of discovery, I left what I knew and had a moment of calmness. I no longer had to make all the
decisions and found the resulting effect to be serendipitous. The end pattern had more life and added another level of interest that went beyond a simple line, shape, or color.

While I made many discoveries working within this system after awhile I felt like control was too apparent in the overall composition. One day, while bored in one of my classes, I was looking at a sheet of notebook paper and wondering how I could take my process and system to another level. In my mind a piece of paper was based off the grid, and I enjoyed starting off with the grid. I wondered how I could use this piece of paper and assert less control over the outcome of a pattern. I seemed to have a mental block of ideas and became frustrated. I could not come up with an idea that would accomplish what I was looking for. I wanted to have more chance play into the development of the pattern. In my frustration, I crumpled the piece of paper. When I reopened it, it revealed something very interesting – a new and more complex pattern! The control within the placement of each shape and the resulting pattern was even more random and did not render a stiff composition like the beginning collages did.

With this newly discovered pattern, I began to trace the lines as closely as possible and found that the sheet of paper revealed, in its own right, a work of art in beauty, variety, interest, and possibilities. To continue the process, I scanned each paper into Illustrator and arranged the composition(s) to fit onto an 18”x24” copper plate. The new, enlarged pattern was printed out to then be traced onto the copper plate. Each line was exposed to be etched and then finally printed. Every time I handled the pattern, it varied slightly from what it was in the beginning due to the human hand. It was interesting for me to think about how these patterns could begin with one form but could be molded into something different. This, I felt, connected to my continued thoughts on how pattern has connections to the patterns of life.
CREATIVE PROCESS AND THE CONNECTION TO LIFE

I realized that there needed to be more variety than just my piece of paper. If life needed variety, so did my art, and that gave me an idea. I decided to ask numerous individuals’ of different backgrounds, races, ages, etc. to crumple paper. While viewing each individuals understanding of my instructions, I began to notice a pattern even within the act of crumpling. One such example was in the approach to the paper. I had assumed that men would be quite aggressive and rough with the paper while woman, on the other hand, would be softer and gentler with each piece. My assumption was wrong and the approaches were actually the opposite.
Inviting individuals to be a part of the process added another layer of fascination. This approach made it more fun for me, but in the end, I recognized that its main function, in terms of the art, was to take control out of my own hand. Of course there were other factors besides their gender that could play a part in how an individual crumples a piece of paper, but for me, each crumpling resembled that individual at that moment in time – like a portrait.

Even more fascinating to me, is the complexity and symbolism layering created for each composition. Each print created thoughts on the differences between us as individuals. When we come together and blend our differences, new beautiful and complex patterns can be created. This complexity of creating relationships with other individuals is yet another layer of the fabric of humanity. In my opinion, these new complex arrangements are thought provoking. They are full of unity from all perspectives and at any level examined. This was very meaningful to me, and so I began a process to explore these ideas associated with layering. I created five 18”x24” copper plates (see pages 17 - 21), for Intaglio printmaking, that allowed for these numerous possibilities. The plates were inked in either vine black or graphite Intaglio oil-based ink which in turn, were printed in multiple layered combinations. Through this process, I was able to create well over 100 prints (see pages 22 - 54). Layering presented all of this potential and was exciting.

THE SHOW – WITHOUT END

In my mind, I brought those individuals together that participated in the crumpling of the paper, through line and layering. This process created an environment of harmony, even with all of the differences between the individual lined patterns. The awareness of these differences and how they, when combined, represent infinite possibilities is beautiful. It is this concept that formed the foundation of my MFA presentation, “Without End” (see pages 61 - 65).
Hopefully the entire show brought to light the concept of infinite possibilities. Under the show’s title and artistic statement, there was a pedestal that had the beginning crumpled paper stacked together. This invited the viewer to explore the ideas that were the foundation of my systems. It is not my intention that the viewer will fully understand my approach, but instead, I am inviting the viewer to begin their own dialogue.

Hanging on four walls was a number of works based on patterns created from the crumpled papers. On two of these walls that opposed each other, were alternating framed prints and collages. The collages came from prints that were cut into strips and then punched with circles (see pages 55 – 60). The circles were then placed into a zip lock bag. This allowed for more random selection to be implemented into the process. Each circle was picked from the bag, and placed within the grid. In the end, the patterned collages revealed serendipitous outcomes – optical illusions resulting from the unexpected play of various formal elements. They related to the framed individual prints and in these ways the prints and collage related to one another.

On the other two walls, there were wall pieces. One was of all the individual prints placed seam to seam, creating one large print, and on the opposite wall there was a collage of all the strips used to produce the framed collages. Each wall had a different effect. The framed pieces are seen individually where as the wall collages hopefully drew the viewer into a more intensive viewing experience. With multiple viewing opportunities, it was my hope that there would be a beginning of infinite ideas and possibilities for the viewer.
THE VIEWER AND HOPEFUL OUTCOMES

The concept of endless possibilities and the phenomenon of serendipitous outcomes will forever be a part of my art process. Although I am at the end of my final project, I have come to understand why I am drawn to certain concepts. I have utilized systems to produce work, and these systems correlate to my life and the world around me. As these systems developed, chance played a huge role in the make-up of my process which often brought unexpected results. In the end, for me, the works brought a beauty of individual patterns and an interplay of chaos and order that I found exciting.

It is important for me to have the viewer become a part of the work, to bring in their own content just like the Minimalists intended. However, though I use similar systems and processes, I cannot eliminate the personal from my work. My work is a reflection of who I am. The viewer will be able to come into my world and catch a glimpse of my every day. I hope that they have a paralleled experience to mine - one of aesthetic engagement and perpetual discovery within patterns and what they imply.
WORKS CITED


Plate A, 18” x 24”, copper, 2009
Plate B, 18” x 24”, copper, 2009
Plate C, 18” x 24”, copper, 2010
Plate D, 18" x 24", copper, 2010
Plate E, 18" x 24", copper, 2011
Etching, 16” x 22”, 2010
Etching, 16” x 22”, 2010
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Etching, 16” x 22”, 2011
COLLAGE

Mixed Media, Wall Collage, 42” x 116”, 2011

Mixed media, 11”x15”, 2011
Mixed media, 11"x15", 2011
Mixed media, 11”x15”, 2011
Mixed media, 11”x15”, 2011
Mixed media, 11”x15”, 2011
Mixed media, 11"x15", 2011
THE SHOW
One day, while binding a series of motes, I was holding it, a stack of handmade paper and something in my process and separated to another level. I considered how I could use this piece of paper and focus on the visual outcome of a pattern. I could not come up with an idea that would incorporate what I was holding. The chance played into the development of the pattern. In my reflection, I scavenged the piece of paper. What I revealed something very interesting - a line and more complex pattern. This enabled within the space; the resulting pattern was seen more familiar.

I decided to ask continuous explosions of surface backgrounds, lines, ages, etc. to consider a mandatory understanding of the presentation. I began to notice a pattern even within the set of rules. I was in the approach to the paper. I had assumed that there would be quite aggressive and rough on the other hand, would be softer and gentle with each piece. My assumption was wrong limb of the opposite. Of course, there were other factors besides the gender that could, such as self image, piece of paper, but for me, each step required that individual at that moment was fascinating to me. In the complexity and symbolical learning created for each composition, the differences between us as individuals. When we move together will show our differences, can be created. For me, these new complex arrangements were thought provoking.