Between

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Between

Kendal Nisson Bryan

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

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ABSTRACT

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I feel uncertain about my place in the world and it is necessary for me to discover how I am perceived by myself and by the world by exploring interior spaces. Interior spaces are both spaces of comfort, security, and permanence as well as vulnerability, uncertainty, and transcendence. My childhood home is an important drive in my work. It has caused me to think more about space and how the places we inhabit become more than just places we live in. They are places that hide our secrets, make their mark on us, and continue to live on with us after we leave them. Interiority of the body and interiority of the space are two different things that interact and connect with each other. The body’s own interior space and the interior space that the body exists in allows me to understand how I exist in this world. Elina Brotherus says that gaining perspective of oneself is facilitated by another presence within the space and when one “projects [oneself] onto it.” In my art, I repeat my engagement with the space around me by photographing myself and becoming one within it. Being a woman, and because of cultural stereotypes and pressures forced upon women, I am aware of my body and its vulnerability. I am conscious of its vulnerability to the other objects within the space and the exposure of revealing myself to the camera. I struggle between fully showing my body and hiding my identity. I manipulate the space through my body, the objects used, and the amount of negative space shown in the photograph. I believe that my work undulates between spaces, meanings, and exists in a state of ambiguity.

Keywords: interior space, body, control, manipulate, between, ambiguity, place
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I. INTERIOR SPACE

Interior space is private and secure but simultaneously is a space full of uncertainty and vulnerability. It is made to provide protection from the forces of outside. It is a space of containment, a space of comfort. It is a place where one can escape and hide. As well as physical protection, interiors are where emotional and mental worries can rest. Interior spaces can hold secrets and cover up or hold things within its walls. But, even though the interior space may be limited by its own perimeter, it can easily remake its boundaries by transcending them figuratively. Actually, this so-called limited space is in fact limitless. It is able to expand and create its own boundaries that then become thresholds to the outside space. The interior space depends on controlling the boundaries—either by tightening the space or opening it to extend beyond its physical limitations.

When a human body exists within an interior space, it becomes a place where the fears and dangers of the world cannot penetrate the body. The body is protected because the interior space, with its walls, ceilings, and floors, has ensured that nothing can come into the room. The walls act as barriers—strong, stubborn, and permanent. The body is safe and comforted. The interior space becomes its protector and confidant. The body is at home within this place. Soon, the body trusts the interior space with all of its secrets. It can hide within it. The space holds the secrets and thoughts like a bank holds money. Like a vault, the space is locked up from the outside, it and only it knows everything about its prisoner. For soon, instead of feeling protected and safe, the body feels the weight of the walls and the ceiling. The walls, being fixed and immovable, seem to become even more powerful than the human. Instead of the human controlling its habitation, the space itself becomes the authority. It is as if the space is expanding within the perimeter of the room. The walls are permanent. However, the space is pushing
beyond its physical limitations. The walls start to act like windows. There is a way to look outside of them, and the interior merges with the exterior. Pressed against the glass of the window, the body can see outside, but does not know if the outside can see it.

When the space extends beyond its physical limitations, the objects within that space are susceptible to exposure. They become exposed within the interior because the interior crosses over into new space. The objects must reevaluate and conform into the new space. This is what the body begins to do. The body still feels trapped, but because the interior has started to shift its limits and include other spaces, which are ephemeral spaces, the body must also live in these new areas as well. So, the body explores the space it is now placed into and makes new relationships with it. When the interior is more flexible and able to change or transform into a sphere of liminal space, things become more vulnerable. Because the interior becomes mobile and exists between places and in more than one place rather than just existing in one place, the human is forced to redefine itself. The human body is vulnerable when it enters the new space. There is no way to cover up or hide anymore. The space still surrounds the body and holds it prisoner but makes the body interact with new spaces that are uncomfortable or unfamiliar for the body. The interior space is able to reach beyond itself so that the body becomes encapsulated within the interior. The interior grows to make sure that the body will stay contained.

The juxtaposition of being vulnerable and imprisoned, as well as feeling secure and uncertain is why I am interested in interior spaces. The imprisonment of the body inside and the feeling of vulnerability are parallel to traditional views of the women’s role inside the home and contemporary views of the women as being made to feel susceptible by men, the internet, and cultural ideals. These two ideas link interior space to the female gender and domesticity. From Johannes Vermeer’s paintings of women performing daily tasks in homes to Edward Hopper’s
interior paintings of bedrooms with women sitting on the bed or standing near a window, women become the dominate object, or subject within that space. The definition of object and subject is ambiguous in these spaces. Objects exist in spaces and can be there alone, undisturbed—safe and secure. The objects only become subjects when there is something around them or when the perception of the object is fixed into narrative. It is then that they are vulnerable. The ambiguity of subject versus object is manifest especially in empty spaces where there may be just one object interacting with it, or when the space itself becomes a thing to interact with. Interiors are made “intimate to the body and perception” and the “visual manipulation of space.” Just as the human body is manipulated in space, so the space of the interior is manipulated. The perception of what is the real and what is artificial blurs more when the depiction of the objects is stripped of familiarity and simplified. Uncertainty of space creates a confusion of establishing sure knowledge of what the things exist there. I believe the female body is used as an object especially when placed into a place where it can be manipulated. When the perimeter of an interior increases, so does its power over the objects in the space. The female body is objectified and made to conform to it. Yet another complexity lives within this statement. As the perimeter is made larger, the object becomes smaller. The body is vulnerable to this new and demanding space around it, yet because its size is insignificant compared to the size of the space around it, it escapes the necessary gaze of the viewer. Thus, the female body is not objectified because it is not forced to be seen, but only is seen when it is accidently noticed. Because of the scale and manipulation of the body’s depiction though, it is hard to see exactly what it is. Unable to distinguish, the female body’s appearance and meaning is distorted. The visual manipulation of

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1 McCarthy, “Toward a Definition of Interiority.”
space causes the things within that space to appear unclear. A human body becomes lost or unrecognizable.

I am drawn to architectural interior space because it becomes a place of comfort, security and a place where I can hide, but at the same time I feel that the walls poses human characteristics and that I am being watched or being held prisoner. My uncertainty of myself within this space makes me want to have a relationship with the space. Each wall I come upon, I must make my body redefine itself next to it. I am attracted to the walls of the space because they are proportional and mathematical—calculated and controlled. But because it is so controlled, or perhaps even too orderly, I, as an imperfect human feel vulnerable. I feel the interiority of my own body both conforming to and fighting against this perfect space. Yet, I am human and I am able to control my body’s interiority. I “determine the limit of the outside…visible or invisibly defined…” and I control what objects or space is close to my body.\(^2\) This necessity to know how to define and perceive myself in the world is why I want to work through spaces of interiors and understand how they can transcend the real space in which I exist today.

II. ARCHITECTURE, THE BODY, AND THE GAZE

I have always felt an affinity towards architectural spaces. The home I grew up in has played a crucial part in my gravitation towards interior spaces, especially modern interiors. In my daydreams, I wander back to my room in this house. It had large ceilings and stainless steel trim on the doors and closet. It was geometric and every detail was straight and proportional. The window stands out to me the most as I travel back in time. I see it and the sunlight is pouring into the room and casting a shadow of the window onto the floor. I am always alone and I feel

\(^2\) Ibid.
encompassed by the room. Sitting in that room alone and with the door shut gives me privacy and allows me to hide. At the same time the floor to ceiling window makes me feel vulnerable and unsure of what those outside can see. I know the window has a deep tint on it and reflects the sun in order to shut out full accessibility of seeing into my room. But, I do not know how much of this is true. By my window, I still feel unsure and the window allows for a transcendence of space into the outside. I also feel very small compared to the size of my room and I even feel powerless or belittled by the walls. Even with the unsettling feelings experienced in the room, I will always feel attached to this space. In *Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard claims that the childhood home is the place to which one’s mind will always return. Furthermore, returning to the home while daydreaming produces “images of intimacy,” and that this home is a “tool to analyze the human soul.”³ The childhood home is a sanctuary. It is a place where humans are nourished, comforted, influenced, and even manipulated. Bachelard then states, “the house we were born in is physically inscribed in us.”⁴ The soul still exists in that home and the home survives in our souls.

As a woman, this sure attachment to the home brings up ideas of domesticity and women’s traditional placement in interior spaces. I have always been uncertain about the perception of myself in a room and how others perceive me in that space. In *Being and Nothingness* Jean-Paul Sartre argues we are not aware of our own beings until the “other” exists in the room. As the “other” becomes the subject, our being can exist again because it obtains its “objectness.”⁵ In fact, Sartre claims that one’s “being is dependent at the center of a freedom which” is not owned by one himself, but is “the very condition of being.”⁶ I regain my awareness

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³ Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, xxxvii.
⁴ Ibd., 14.
⁵ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 257
⁶ Ibd.
of my being once the “other” is present. Because I exist within the world, I must discover who I am by interacting with the objects and spaces in my surroundings. “I exist alienated and I cause myself to learn from outside what I must be.” I feel that the “other” is sometimes my thoughts and consciousness. They seem to live within me and simultaneously outside of me. I feel at conflict with myself. Allowing for my thoughts to transcend from my body and take their own entity in the space is both liberating and also vulnerable. They become the “other” and only by them existing outside of me makes me feel like I exist too. I feel even more vulnerable when I place myself next to something in the space—a wall, a couch, or a vase of flowers. I am no longer the subject because they become the subjects, perceiving me and making me become more aware of my being and my vulnerability.

The male gaze and the discussion of subject versus object are found in Manet’s *Olympia* (1863). At the time of the painting, prostitution in France was at its peak and because of the blatant representation of the woman as a prostitute—the painting caused an upheaval in the art world. This however, is not what interests me in this painting; it is the importance of the male gaze’s shifting power and the critics’ description of the woman’s body. First, she possesses her own look, it is “unmistakably hers; it is particular and individualized in a way the nude’s dreamily abstracted gaze is not.” She stares at you, unabashed, resilient, and aware of the gaze. She does not succumb to it. Her eyes meet the gaze equally as she stares back. She has power over the male gaze for the first time in the history of art. This is remarkable and a victory for women. However, the description of her body undermines this power. Her body is described as being “defused, dismembered, and derealized” transforming her into an artificial construction.”

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7 Ibid., 290  
8 Manet, *Olympia*, 1865  
9 Bernheimer, “Manet’s Olympia: Figuration of Scandal.”  
10 Ibid.
These words objectify the body and make it appear as inhuman as possible. However, looking closer, her body is both made up of “hard breaks that appear to sever her body” and also “soft, fluid bodily territory where transitions are not clearly defined.”\textsuperscript{11} Thus she is both fragmented and whole. I believe this gives the woman more power because her body becomes ambiguous to the eyes of the gaze.

Elina Brotherus shows how the male gaze and the use of the words object and subject can become ambiguous within a work. Her piece, the \textit{Green Lake}, there are two figures, both with their backs turned to the camera.\textsuperscript{12} A man stands in the forefront and looks at the woman who stands in front of him in the background. However, because the man’s face is hidden from view, it is debatable if he really is starting at her. Also, the viewer is unaware if she perceives him because her face is also not visible. To complicate the gaze even more, the viewer starts at both of them. So who is the “other” and who, asks Brotherus, has the last gaze?\textsuperscript{13} The man is usually the one to look upon the woman, but in this photograph, there is no sure knowledge of his gaze. Indeed, the woman may have the last gaze as her head faces the large ominous lake in front of her, for she could be looking at him in the reflection of the water. Her insignificant position in the background could perhaps be a deception to her powerful gaze over the man. The object-subject relationship is misrepresented and the \textit{Green Lake} becomes an ambiguous study of two figures.

III. WORK

Architecture related to buildings and architecture referring to the body are different because the former is inanimate, geometric, and organized and the later is living, irrational, and

\textsuperscript{11} Bernheimer, “Manet’s Olympia: Figuration of Scandal.”
\textsuperscript{12} Brotherus, \textit{Green Lake}, 2007.
unpredictable. The seemingly opposite descriptions of the two show how different they are, but they are common in many ways. Both are structures, contain interior space, and are created by another. I believe my work falls into an endless circle of conflicting ideas. Both security and vulnerability is manifest in my work of interiors. Structures of permanent physicality and presence versus transcendence and decay are a continually found together in my paper cuts. The dead flowers show decay as well as a longing for revival or return of something. My work shows my body in the images and then gone, and then a depiction of only inanimate objects. Although seemingly disconnected, all of my work reveals my own uncertainty within the world.

My strong attraction to large windows and the merging of interior and exterior spaces in modern architecture causes me to want to create simple geometric space in an ephemeral way. Do Ho Suh’s Staircase III, 2010 was the first work I saw that made this necessity become real. Translucent nylon is sewn into simple minimal architectural forms. Because the material is transparent, the architecture appears as if it is floating and existing between two worlds. Paper cuts are how I represent this ephemerality of architecture. The paper allows me to show this in-between space, how the materiality of an object can transcend and make way for a new perception of the thing. Untitled 6 deceives its own physicality and depth by the layering of paper, use of transparent material, light, and shadow. The three gessoed papers have their own manipulative appearance because the heaviness of the gesso makes them look like fabric rather than paper. The archival paper is covered in gesso causing it to bend, crack, and rip. Modern buildings are the source for the square and grid-like window cut outs. Painting white gesso over the paper alludes to minimal form and color found in modern architecture. But, the dropping and tearing of the paper subvert the strong structure of a modern building. Instead of a firm and

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15 Bryan, Untitled 6, 2016.
upright structure, the piece is in decay. The pushing away from true modern buildings is also 
found in the transparent material of the plastic tarp. Even though it has grid-like proportioned cut 
outs, its transparent material allows the light to penetrate and cast shadows behind it. The 
combination of the transparent tarp with the light and shadows makes its position on the wall and 
physicality ambiguous. I want the building to transcend itself into a different space. I want the 
structure to be both fixed and ephemeral. Similarly, No. 3 from the series December is a 
projection of a photograph.¹⁶ The photograph is a tangible physical thing and the projection 
references video and is a space between real and artificial, a screen into another world. The 
photograph is an empty minimalist space, but instead of referencing exteriors, I am presenting an 
interior of a building. The interior suggests increased intimacy with the space.

The intimate relationship I have with these modern spaces also points to another conflict 
in my work: the conflict of control and freedom. The modern building is a space of rigidity, 
perfection, and control. My paper pieces show a likeness of these descriptions in the use of the 
grid, white color, scale, and rectangular form. However, when the tears, rips, and deterioration of 
form occur there begins to be a breakdown and a pull away from the control. The paper becomes 
vulnerable to the gesso, yet free from the rigidity of its previous structure. Also, in my 
photographs, I control the cropping of the space—what will be seen and what will be hidden. I 
control the objects within the space as well. But my choice to portray my own private space of 
my apartment and then later my body, is liberating for me. I feel a need to put my body into the 
space because of my deep affinity for the space and in order to yield to the part of me that needs 
a freeing of the control that constantly is present.

¹⁶ Bryan, No. 3, from the series December, 2015.
Having a strong attachment to these modern and minimal spaces made me want to document my own body in the space. Elina Brotherus’s photographs became inspiration for me.\textsuperscript{17} Although the spaces she uses are not minimal spaces and do not include only interiors, I am drawn to the melancholy and lonely placement of her body in the space. She does not invoke sadness or despair, but more a contemplation of melancholy. She “projects” her body onto the space and meditates upon the meaning of it.\textsuperscript{18} I, too, want to know how the space changes once I am in the space, and especially once I am part of the image. Although I am using my body to define the space, I reference the modern building: rectangular composition, geometric lines running in the background and objects used, such as the screen and table, and a large amount of empty space. The rectangular shape provides comfort and familiarity and an authority of control. I hide behind these shapes in \textit{Untitled 2} from the \textit{Between} series.\textsuperscript{19} I need something to cover my body, to secure me in a perfectly contained space. Then the conflict arises. I want to be seen. I want to make myself vulnerable so that I can experience the world, know myself. I come close to succeeding because the screen is not completely opaque, my legs and feet are visible and the screen is only a part, it does not completely block off an area of security. I fail to be completely vulnerable though because the screen blocks my entire body and my true identity is kept hidden from the viewer.

In \textit{Untitled 9-24} from the series \textit{January}, I reveal more of my body, but it becomes more of an abstract shape to fit into the view of the camera.\textsuperscript{20} Because my body is again cropped and unidentifiable, I am an object. However, the photograph only contains my body, the rest of the photograph is negatives space, or the space of the room. So, I am the subject, too.

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\textsuperscript{17} Brotherus, \textit{The Wanderer}, 2003.
\textsuperscript{18} Louisiana Channel. “Elina Brotherus: The human perspective.” \url{http://channel.louisiana.dk/video/elina-brotherus-human-perspective}
\textsuperscript{19} Bryan, \textit{Untitled 2} from the \textit{Between} series, 2015.
\end{flushleft}
object and subject. I want to become one with the space. The relationship I make with the space is important because I must rediscover myself and perceive myself in a new way. In *Untitled 9-5*, I lay on the ground, pressing my body into the floor. The positioning of the photograph and scale of it shows me literally being one with the ground. I try to conform to the space, and feel as if the space literally holds me captive. I become part of it. In Charlotte Gilman Perkins’ short story *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the narrator grows increasingly obsessed with the wallpaper in her bedroom and feels that she herself is trapped within the wallpaper and at the end escapes the prison of it by tearing it off the wall. I am curious how interior space can overwhelm, encompass, and hold the body prisoner. For me, interior spaces possess anthropomorphic qualities.

Existing between the living and the unreal is another space I present in my work. Using dying or dead flowers forces me to have another relationship with an object in the room. Now I must perceive myself in a room with an object. Laura Letinsky’s *Ill Form and Void Full series* reinvents still life by using objects, specifically food, that are half-eaten, rotten, and cut in simple but complex compositions. The arrangement of the objects seems happenstance but at the same time methodically composed, with objects strewn and scattered making sense as a whole. The objects are both real and artificial. They are cut outs of images of objects previously used in Letinsky’s own photographs, or found images from magazines. The combination of real and artificial and the manipulation of the positioning of the objects in space negate a true depth of field. In my *Flower Series no. 3* I too use an object, like Letinsky’s fruit, that is decaying, past its prime, and now considered waste. Dead flowers have been a recurring motif in my work for three years now. I believe I come back to this object because of its complex symbolism, its allusion to beauty, its vulnerability to decay, and its ability to live on after death. After the

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23 Bryan, *Untitled 3*, from the series *Flower Series no. 3*, 2015.
flowers die they are still very present in the room. They live on in the vase. The four photographs of the flowers each show them in an empty room, on top of a white rectangle table. I want to keep the room as clean and minimal as possible to emphasize the presence of the object. Like Letinsky, I use straight lines and leave a copious amount of space around the object. The flowers also are comparable to food because they are in a state of decay and are altered from their usual appearance. The positioning of my arms and hands next to the object is what makes these images uncertain in depicting the full truth. Here, I begin to manipulate the perception of the space through the objects and positioning of my arms with them. The flowers become part of me and I part of them as I connect my body to them.

IV. POST-GRADUATE

Interior space will always be a place I return to in my work. I honestly feel that a large part of my soul is still within the walls of my childhood home. I keep looking to buildings and those that especially remind me of this home. I would like to find a new way of composing the buildings within the photographs in order to reveal different perspectives. And I believe the rectangular shape of buildings will always be an inspiration to my work. When I place my body into the interiors, I attach myself to the space. I make a relationship with it to where I feel at one with where I am. But later, when I look at the photographs, I feel vulnerable and uncertain about my relationship that I was certain about before. The photograph shows me something about myself that I had previously not known. Every time I take a photograph, I expose my secrets, my weaknesses even more. And at the same time, allowing myself to be included in the photograph is liberating. After placing myself in the images, I also re-apprehend the gender of my body. I see that I am a woman and that being a woman brings in a plethora of thoughts, ideas, and theories about how I am perceive myself and should perceive myself according to contemporary society.
Realizing that the most influential books I have read are books with woman protagonists such as *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, and “The Yellow Wallpaper,” I began to explore those pieces of literature in depth this semester. My favorite part of *Jane Eyre* is when her role as the heroine manifests itself at the end of the book. The entire book consists of her thoughts and her perceptions of the things she is experiencing. I have studied Virginia Woolf and her thoughts on women in the early 20th century. She claims women are belittled, kept in ignorance, and are purposely kept at home. These claims are a hundred years old, but I still see women as being trapped in their interiors and oppressed by certain worldly conditions. I am currently reading *Mrs. Dalloway*. This book is a stream of consciousness from characters that are not aware of each other, but seem to be in similar places at the same time. Their thoughts flow into each other through long paragraphs of run-on sentences. Sometimes the thoughts are even incoherent and confusing, but I like to reread them and enjoy the challenge of deciphering someone else’s complex thoughts. A lot of times, I cannot fully make sense of what I am reading which is exciting to me and also reminds me of my own inner complex and sometimes conflicting thoughts. I will continue to explore women within aspects of entrapment, psychological disorder, and placement in interior spaces.

Finally, there are two new directions I want to experiment with in my work. One is photographing my body in outside space, either next to building exteriors or in a void space without anything around it. I wonder what would happen and how I might react to being outside instead of under a roof and surrounded by walls. I think I would feel more vulnerable, but I want to figure out a way I could still hide from revealing the full truth. The perception of myself would be skewed and also be remade again. Perhaps the meaning of my images would change. I have become interested in man-made architecture versus the natural architecture of the
landscape, as I have used my body in my photographs. Elina Brotherus made a video in 2010 titled *The Black Bay Sequence*. In this work, she walks out into a body of water and disrupts the still water as it creates ripples from her body. She walks all the way into the water until she cannot touch, at which point she turns and walks back to the camera. I am mesmerized by the silence and simplicity of the video and by her body interacting with the landscape. The video is long and forces me to watch her move until her body becomes a repetitive movement causing me to meditate on it. I want to start making videos that incorporate the ideas already found in my work. For now, I will keep making photographs and paper cuts that continue to redefine my being and create new perceptions of who I am in the world. When I come to fully understand how my body is perceived in this world and the space I live in, I will perhaps move to something else, but I cannot see myself ever fully understanding—and this what I like about it and what keeps me making my art.


Bryan, Kendal, No. 3 from the series *December*, 2015.


Bryan, Kendal, *Untitled 3*, from the *Flower Series no. 3*, 2015.
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