Middle Ground: Being Human, Reality & the Imaginary

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MIDDLE GROUND:
BEING HUMAN, REALITY & THE IMAGINARY

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts
Visual Art

by
Ann Pegelow Kaplan
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Accepted by:
Anderson Wrangle, Committee Chair
Dr. Andrea Feeser
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Todd McDonald
ABSTRACT

Meandering through the seemingly endless spectrum that makes up contemporary visual art, it is clear that many are taking stock of the past and wondering where we go from here. Looking back, documenting, accounting, excavating. Looking forward, wondering, daring to hope. My artwork embraces both the backward glance and the lean forward by considering the present moment and what constructs it. Within three interrelated series of photographic and video works, I consider and present for rumination our individual and shared human experience of the world and one another.

This body of work draws attention through a juxtaposition of the elevated and the everyday, holds suspended consideration by presenting a meditative slowing of time, and dwells upon the role of positionality. In these series of still and moving images, people travel individually and together through natural and built spaces, from the epic landscapes of nature to glass and metallic train cars to hewn-stone holy sites. In each set of images and videos, this work presents people and their settings through a varying lens of perception, exploring how we as human beings view one another through a kaleidoscope of perspectives and meanings. Offering quiet, prolonged views, the installations display the construction of viewpoints over series of works, provoking questioning about our perceptions of the people pictured, their separation and interrelation, and what meanings these hold for the viewer. Playing upon the conventions of documentary to reveal human fictions, this body of work synchronizes an excavation of individual realities while simultaneously integrating a re-imagining of what is - the small moments that make up our experience, the constructed nature of our selves and perspectives, and the possibility of momentary communities of human beings.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my father, David Jeremy Kaplan, and my grandmother, Lillian Finesilver Kaplan. Mathematician and artist, they each embodied a deep, lifelong consideration of our world, how it is constructed, and how we experience it. It was from them that I was given the seeds of seeing, intuition, questioning... and the continual grasp and pursuit of life.

And to my partner, Thomas Pegelow Kaplan, and best of friends, Lisa Jones-Scott, each of whose dearest companionship, support, humor, intelligence, and affection continue to buoy me while on the way.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This body of work would not be possible without the efforts and dedication of the faculty of the Department of Art at Clemson University. In particular, I would like to thank my advisor Anderson Wrangle for his support for my growth as an artist. Most especially I have learned from his trust of instinct and where it can lead. The members of my thesis committee, Andrea Feeser, Beth Lauritis, and Todd McDonald, as well as Christina Nguyen Hung, were not just the best of counsel, they each played an instrumental role during the Master of Fine Arts program in my learning about my own creative process and how to integrate it with both an analytical nature and my background in ethnography and critical studies. I thank each of them not only for their academic rigor and own creative inquiry but also for their kindness as human beings and willingness to spend their invaluable time in support of my work.

All scholarship is ultimately the product of countless authors, exchanges, and points of meeting. I am so very fortunate to have had a sharp, generous, funny, and supportive community of graduate students whose ideas and help have lifted up my own work at every turn: Jason Adams, David Armistead, Katy Butler, Carly Drew, David Gerhard, Alyssa Reiser, and Aubree Ross. Truly, you are friends and I thank you.

Lastly, I wish to also offer appreciation to those teachers and fellow students with whom I have collaborated before I even began this program. From those at the University of Mary Washington and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, as well as those teachers both before and outside any university context. So much of what I have to offer is made from that which I have been given.
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CHAPTER ONE

I. COALESCENCE

This body of artwork offers a visual consideration of human beings, how they perceive and are perceived by others, in settings both commonplace and extraordinary. Clusters of human beings huddle together while viewing vast natural settings, approach and retreat from the holiest of religious sites in measured footsteps, and ride in solitary company on public transit within individual bubbles of space. In these still images and videos, contradictions abound among representations of people shown alone and together, far away and nearby, facing the viewer quite directly or looking away with their backs turned. My work is born of my own experience, informed by longstanding interest in and research into perception, and shared by my reflection on historical and contemporary photographic art.

The settings of these three series address everyday living - walking, commuting, spending time with family, interacting with our physical surroundings - and the elevated parts of human life - majestic natural scenery, super-charged religious sites, the heightened geometric sheen inside a train car. These images present a changing succession of vantage points, threaded together to present varying physical perspectives, levels of social intimacy, and modes of representation. The images move the viewer’s vantage from distant to close and back again, sometimes subtly and other times abruptly. Variation within each series, from one discrete work (or moment in time) to the next, displays those imaged variously as solitary and removed, close at hand and directly involved. These visual clues bind the image sets together, a varying succession of even control and randomness. Tiny, distant human figures explore cool and misty
landscapes and moments of brief human connection take place within off-kilter train rides. The individual images, their installation, and their assembly into a body of work consider and challenge the viewer to ruminate on individual perspective and how it creates what we experience, our connections to one another as human beings, and how we interact with the world and one another.

To describe this body of work in such a way may ring of the theoretical, and integrate a kind of consideration based on analytical ways of seeing and experiencing, but like most things hidden or obvious, it is rooted in the personal. A coalescence, this body of work arises from a juncture point of seemingly contradictory but inherently jointed issues deeply at work in my own life and history. What follows are two illustrations of my childhood and academic training to provide personal context and an introduction to the tensions, under as well as over the surface, in this body of artwork.

I have often described myself as a mutt. Insert a highly-hyphenated label: Ashkenazi-Scots Irish-Assorted Other-American with Turkish/Syrian roots. Luckily for me, this was less of an issue than it would have been for any number of other human beings who might have landed in my place. Though I only realized it later, I spent my childhood in what was an extraordinarily diverse neighborhood. My playmates and I were a multi-pack assortment in varying shades and creeds, whose families came from many cultures and continents, and who often spoke multiple languages in their homes. We fit together for many reasons, but also in part because of our individual and collective mixed heritage. The “from” always in question, we often understood one another better than our multiple communities, none of which we were completely a part. The childhood extended family that I was born and adopted into was multiracial, interfaith, and not, for the most part, based on biology. I much later came to realize that
all of this was its own kind of unusual and sheltered existence, but did not know it at the
time, accepting as many children do the normalcy of their world. Not to paint an idyllic
scene, this set of relationships also held many of the same extreme trials of life and
painful realities - including occasionally hyper-charged disagreements that erupted
specifically out of our difference - that countless other individuals and families
experience. I do not intend to describe anything utopian, yet this key aspect of my
personal history is highly important for the context and framing of my current work.

It was not until much later in life that I realized my own good fortune in growing
up in this atmosphere, but even at the time, my academic and professional choices
stemmed in part from this coming up in the world. When I entered university for
undergraduate work, I immediately and steadfastly began to study anthropology, seeing
it as extension of my interest in people and as expanding the borders of that flawed but
important microcosm of global diversity I had already experienced. However, as I came
along in my studies, what happened was actually something quite different. Over the
course of my undergraduate and graduate work, though I loved much of the subject
matter, my background and conscience led me directly to critical studies and a critique of
the very subject to which I had attached myself. I became disillusioned and dismayed
with the history of colonialism and the politics of representation. Postmodern theories
about vision and identity appeared to suggest that I (or anyone looking, considering, or
attempting connection that looked like me) was the person in power, the colonizer, the
white person, the American, and the consumer. It appeared unavoidable. For reasons
that many who read this can undoubtedly identify with, this was in part true. Yet, even as
I agreed with many of the ideas I was encountering, my own early and ongoing
experiences often re-calibrated the polarizing nature of these concepts, instead pointing
to people’s resilient creation of meaning and adoption of self-appointed communities across (and sometimes because of) difference. That while they must be intently questioned, some kinds of travel across borders are, in fact, possible.

Thus, when I continued into graduate work, I strove to temper my work by turning to particular branches of ethnography and oral history, fields which specifically sought to empower people by attempting to act more as facilitators than experts. Despite the improvement, this work also presented its problems, including how it tended to essentialize identity and community, maneuver issues of power and representation, and ultimately function more to create consumable products of the field rather than to explore difficult questions. Despite of all this, and also in part because of all this, my questions concerning the discontinuity between my own experiences and what the theoretical world at large was rightfully saying continued to grow. I carried these questions on my way. With this body of work, I hold these paradoxical questions open for a different but interrelated process - one of sustained examination rather than a seeking of fully-formed answers.

This sustained examination translates into the overall formal qualities of my artworks, which offer a long gaze at people as human beings, a meditative focus on revealing small moments, and a centered look at scenes arranged to reveal much about the way we as people perceive. The settings of these scenes are themselves important, offering a comparison of everyday, natural, and cultural contexts that create a small theater of humanity, manifesting and highlighting the viewer’s suspended state of attention. It is through its quiet, centered formal qualities, feeling of fixed position, and long gaze through photographic or single shot videos that my thesis project’s play upon variations becomes clear. This steady, direct view is what makes the variation, and thus
underlying content, in each series visible to the viewer. Quietness and suspended time provides the opportunity for an atmosphere of contemplation, while the centeredness and sense of fixed position create the repetition within each series that makes variation visible. These qualities also provide a calm, even entry point to viewers coming to the work from an uncountable variety of backgrounds and, thus, ways of seeing. Using these documentary techniques to paradoxically reveal individual human fictions, this body of work sustains each individual viewer’s gaze, creating the conditions for entry through each piece’s formal qualities to its content. Each series displays a variation of the theme of the construction of perception, through individual viewpoint, proximity of subject, and the consideration or reforming of dominant societal narratives.
CHAPTER TWO

II. POSITIONALITY

Transit

A middle-aged man with a weathered face sits in a train car with his hand raised above his head to grasp a handrail, his face calm, quietly gazing out of the train car window. In the next frame, young girls further into the now off-kilter train giggle and swing on hand posts - their figures partially blocked from sight by foregrounded body parts clothed in business attire and blue jeans. These square photographs, all in a row, vary what they present on the train car... in one a quiet, symmetrical scene where everything seems to be in its place and a pigtailed woman in a violet scarf looks at her phone, then another image showing a far-off, barely seen rider with kerchief on his head looking directly at the viewer, and yet another photograph displaying a too-close, sideways, voyeuristic glance at a business man in full professional regalia.

In the center of this row of smaller images with identical dimensions hangs a photograph more than twice the size of the others. Tunnel-like, the composition pulls the viewer’s attention in through the central space of the train car, the larger scale providing the corresponding feeling that one could walk right into the image. An ordered scene, crisp and realistic, the sheen of the metallic handrails and the cool bluish tint of sky through the windows organizes the central space of the walkway. On either side, seated and standing riders line both sides from foreground to back. Almost all look away, not at one another, to their cell phones and books in encapsulated, private worlds. One standing woman wearing sunglasses stands midway back in the train car, looking with
concentration towards the center of the scene. Her countenance protests, comments, or scowls an unnamed grievance.

Each of the smaller images in the *Transit* series varies the direction and angle from which the viewer experiences the scene and riders of this mass transit train car. Whether seen straight ahead within an organized composition or an off-kilter view punctuated by the handrail lines at odd angles, these widely varying compositions direct the viewer in multiple perspectives. The organized spaces appear quiet, enhancing the bubbles of individual space and solitary nature of the train ride, while the photographs seem to look through a mass of humanity, with the visual noise of bodies and train car parts both blocking the view and adding visual dissonance. Most of the images portray riders as seemingly alone while surrounded. They are alternately seen coolly from afar and close up in a potential transgression of personal space. The group of playful girls wrestle ebulliently through the central space of their moving street car. Another man in a leather jacket peers from behind other riders, meeting the gaze of the viewer in a gentle recognition. Still other figures slump in their seats and look concretely out through the windows, avoiding contact with others. From frame to frame, the transit scenes are seen in a clear variation of perspective. The viewer has many different positions from which to view the train’s riders, up close, too close, or distant and removed. Some transit travelers clearly avoid the intersection of gazes, others have near misses where they almost look through/to the camera/viewer, and rarely a rider looks directly and interacts.

Within the series, the central image is uniquely crisp in both sharpness and cool tonal range, with a composition that invites the viewer to imagine themselves within the scene. In visually pleasing, saturated color tones, the photograph captures the riders, mostly women in this image, within in an evocative moment of mental escape from
where they are physically. In all cases but one, their minds appear to be far away in solitary spaces, their body language making their need for release from the present clear to the viewer. The one exception is one woman looking into the center of the image, whose scowling face confirms what the actions of the others express - they all might prefer to be somewhere else. As a whole, the setting and people illustrate a moment from reality yet carefully composed, suggesting the many human stories that intersect within it. They are alone, yet unified in their solitary experiences.

The central photo and sets of smaller, flanking images illustrate the real-life intersection of individuals and their stories and put on display a range of perspectives. The multiplicity of views constructed through the combination of these photographs communicate the many and varying positions of the photographer, the viewer, or any person. As a grouping, they consider the many cultural constructions of community. And lined up in a row, they create a system of presentation for viewing and consideration, a comparison of perception that enunciates difference. They put positionality within view.

**Seeing Iceland**

Individuals and clusters of people traverse the rugged, scenic natural landscapes. They wear the uniforms of eco-tourists: water-repellent jackets, sturdy hats and hoods, and heavy boots with tread that grip with each footstep. A man wearing brightly colored clothes steps on the green grass, just past a white line drawn onto the ground, to peer over the edge of a cliff. Several people, including one with a bright orange cap, stand together but with distance between them, with their backs turned, facing the sea and its distant horizon. A toddler romps energetically, making thorough use of her play set, a very small person seemingly alone in an expanse of open wilderness complete with craggy mountain peaks overhead. This series of images
display quiet, orderly, sometimes wry, and occasionally awestruck views of human beings seeing and being seen in majestic natural places. In cascading perspective from close at hand to far in the distance, this succession of photographs portray human beings making small explorations of vast spaces, alone and together.

Displayed in a row, these scenes shift incrementally in physical distance. In the first photograph, a duo of tourists is perched on a dark grey cliff. Before the sight of a massive glacier, its icy tonalities rolling in aged variation from blue to white to grey. However, the photograph’s view is not poised upon the view, instead cropping in close to the two people in all their realistic humanity. The viewer sees a female figure with her back turned to look out over the ice, her windbreaker jacket pulled around her and hood raised up against the elements. Intervening in any viewer expectation of a perfected landscape, her creased blue jeans emphasize the normalness of her figure, that of any-woman rather than an idealized form. Her companion on the cliff gazes out from his tucked position within his jacket hood, not out at the scene before him, but downwards at his camera and screen image of the scene in front of him, were he actually looking at it. Geared for pursuit and out in this wild setting, these seeming seekers and explorers are fallible, comical, and human.

From this closest view, the subjects of the photographs move slowly away in distance from the viewer. An image midway through the series presents a light blue sky patterned by white cumulus clouds, rolling umber hills, and a foreground of steaming water pooling around large smooth stones. A horizontal line of semi-distant people intersects the middle of the photograph, a few hundred feet away perhaps, slight figures in their varying shades of colorful clothing, but too far to discern each person’s distinct features. They stand poised - looking, waiting. The image displays a still moment, a puff
of steam hanging in the air, without clear activity or sign of what the viewer is supposed
to concentrate upon, leaving one to look at the line of waiting people submerged in the
landscape, also waiting. The waiting people, neat in a row, appear to be the focal point.
Further down the row, as the series of images nears its conclusion, there is an even
greater distance between the photographer/viewer and the traveling figures. Returning to
the glacier scene, a dramatic image shows three silhouetted figures standing atop the
wet, rocky cliffs, surveying the grand view before them and the mist cloaked plateau
almost made invisible in the distance. Two of the figures simply gaze, while one points
emphatically, tiny but excitedly animated. In contrast to the first image, this one delivers
the grand, elevated landscape not shown in the first photograph of the series. Yet now
the viewer has knowledge of who is there, having seen a closer view of the explorers,
with perspective on their humor and humanness.

Finally, the series comes to a grand finale with the final photograph in the set.
This image provides the majestic natural landscape with a smooth, cloud ridden sky
above and deep grey water below. Icebergs, arctic blue and white punctuated by grey,
float below a lone, almost central hilltop with tiny, distant human figures atop. On the
edge of the image and continuing out of view is a neatly parked row of the cars that must
have carried these tourist adventurers to the scene. Whether serene or melancholy, the
view is dramatic, otherworldly, and removed. These people within and seeing Iceland are
no longer close to us where we can see them in their reality but far in the distance,
points of perfect perspective in the scene. The view has changed into a romantic
landscape and yet the viewer now has knowledge of those figures in the distance. The
viewer’s best access to this not being an early explorer’s landscape is perhaps the neat
rows of tiny automobiles behind the hill, conveniently tucked out of the contemporary explorer’s grand view.

This final image works in opposition to the first photograph. It portrays this small set of people as being immersed in a pure experience of a pristine and romanticized landscape; where the first image illustrated a scene of visiting the wild as foreigners from a native land of comfort and technology, with an impulse to see their view of the view, undoubtedly to be delivered after the holiday is over. In contrast to the first image portraying people with imperfect, wry humanity, within the last, the figures exist immersed in the scene, rendered as much as perspective points, secondary to and overwhelmed by their setting. The series as a whole displays in small, even increments how the position of the photograph/image/viewer constructs perspective and thus the meaning that is communicated. At the same time, these clusters of quiet explorers address positionality in their relationships to one another. One or two of the photographs, such as the brightly clad people all in a row waiting for a geyser to erupt, show families traveling together. Teenage children linger just far enough away from their parents. Yet most of the images show scenes of people gathering, strangers who have joined one another within these natural sites, lingering close together for a view and contemplation. They do not spread themselves over the landscape, rather they cluster together in ephemeral communities of the moment, and just as quickly stroll on to the next location and moment of consideration. In the image of the group of people looking out to the sea and horizon, they are clearly lingering and have stepped to a place where others are doing the same. There is no single point of their concentration, the wide horizontal space of the sea and soft parallel lines of clouds offering an expanse rather than some clear object of attention to be seen. If they are to be called communities or gatherings, each
momentary lingering appears to be random, only the shared experience brings these individuals together. Yet the elevated natural settings seem to assign some unknown meaning to these quiet groupings. The placement of these human beings in the landscape lends an unnamed gravity to their rhythm of walking and lingering together, moving on and joining others once again. Wandering and repeating.

*Jerusalem / Views*

Within two video screens, the center of each image is a stone courtyard. Large, warmly colored, smooth walking stones line the ground. A mixture of people walk to and fro in the courtyard, all the way to the furthest point and back again, passing closely by the camera and thus nearly brushing the viewer who is watching. In each of Jerusalem’s two videos, a similar stone-lined courtyard is in the foreground and center of the image with a Jerusalem religious site at the furthest point. These two locales are the Dome of the Rock, the third most holy site in the Muslim world, and the Western Wall, the most sacred site in the Jewish world. Within each video, the human figures walking include varied groups, with various nationalities and cultures visiting, made visible through dress and language, as well, presumably, as some locals recognized by women’s traditionally modest skirts and headscarves.

These videos are each single periods of time, not edited to join different scenes but rather to offer the viewer an extended look at people who simply (or not so simply) walk back and forth, whether to reach or return from their locations of prayer, visit as tourists and take photographs, or both. Functioning as a diptych, viewers witness people moving through these spaces during the same moments, and the everyday presences of women dominate both scenes. Women descend the staircase in front of the shrine and carry bags perhaps on their way to do errands; women slowly walk backwards, stepping
away from the Western Wall and stop on their way for their female companion to take another photograph before leaving. Placed together, the two moving scenes portray the collective movement of people through these spaces, performing the normal tasks of everyday life or tourist experience.

Thus very little happens in these videos except for the view of the scene and small moments and interactions. Yet when viewers step before a screen to see a moving image, something different is expected than from a still photograph. Not only the anticipation of movement, but another expectation creeps up. Lifetimes of media watching define our expectation and the corresponding definition of what a video is supposed to do, which is to deliver a story. While stories have a narrative arc - conflict and resolution - the Jerusalem videos offer a set of corresponding contemplations. The viewer leans forward in anticipation, perhaps more so as time passes, of action and storyline. What they find is that there are people simply moving through the space of these settings, leaving viewers to ask for what one is supposed to be looking. Many will undoubtedly come to these scenes with anticipation of a storyline of conflict, referenced by the images’ locations and their dichotomy, which points to the larger narrative of Muslim and Jew, Palestinian and Israeli. Yet the moving images display human beings moving through these super-charged spaces, no more. While some viewers may not anticipate conflict, many will. In this work’s disengagement with the dominant storyline regarding these places and peoples, the installation points out the expected narrative itself, how this overarching storyline is carried through the individual’s perspective, and the potential narratives that viewers themselves may create.

In the last and only piece in this body of work without the presence of human figures, within Views two video screens display conjoined images of quiet movement. In
one, an open landscape looks over the sea, where lines of waves of turquoise water lap against a golden stone shoreline with small, smooth rocks and low, arid desert bushes in the immediate foreground. Time passes and nothing happens except the movement of the sea and the occasional buzzing of a car passing nearby. In the second video, a partially transparent curtain rolls subtly across a closed window, not enough to reveal the view beyond, but enough that it seems to be in a perpetual state of soft motion. Cool morning light gives the fabric a sheer, glowing quality and, in barely discernible sound, air hums from vents in the enclosed, encapsulated space. Viewers experience this set of two videos together in a perpetual, looped stream that corresponds to their calming flow of movement. Together they gently pulsate.

For many viewers, these videos will be about serenity, calmness, and a meditative experience. Essential parts of the work’s content, these qualities fill the screens with cool tonality, hushed sound, and subtly ambient movement. Another layer of content arises, however, when the viewer’s attention moves to the title of the work, communicating its subject matter. View, Dead Sea at the Israeli-Palestinian Border and View, Tel Aviv Window both refer to the location of the views that these videos display on their screens, which deliver contextual information to the previously disembodied scenes. Simply looking at these views, in these locations or in any other, is not enough to know the deeply complicated realities of the place. With the addition of location, contextual knowledge of place informs the serene view, calling into question their histories, politicization, and realities as places directly related to millennia of intense human conflict, suffering, and bloodshed. Despite the visual content of the work as views without human presence, these few words provide complex and multilayered content that will mean something different to each viewer, depending on their own positionality.
The contrast highlights both the viewer’s initial enjoyment of the view and the striking moment of realization of the depth and horror of what one has been looking upon without knowing. These layers of awareness implicate the viewer in their own viewpoint and what that perspective can and cannot provide.

This body of artwork looks to human beings, points to their individual stories, and the places in which their lives intersect with one another. Through presentation and arrangement, each series both makes the viewer consider that these could be and, in some ways, are images of us - challenging us consider the role of our positionality in our construction and experience of the world and one another. Within the context of each series, these photographs and videos illustrate some of the uncountable ways positionality can look. Rather than allowing viewers to rest within their own ways of seeing and understanding the world, by revealing the constructed nature of our own viewpoints, these works have the potential to open our perspectives to new ways of seeing and other ways of experiencing beyond our own.
The three series of photographs and videos in this body of work, *Transit*, *Seeing Iceland*, and *Jerusalem/Views*, look upon human beings through a continually changing lens of perspective that mines the workings of positionality. The artworks excavate these shifting viewpoints within a theater of humanity: the everyday scenes of public transportation in Charlotte, North Carolina, the city where I live; the majestic natural landscapes of Iceland; and Jerusalem, the holy city central to Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. The everyday at home; the most dramatic of natural places; and the holiest of religious sites. Playing upon the conventions of documentary to reveal human fictions, these images draw viewer attention through hybrids of the elevated and the everyday, hold one’s suspended consideration by presenting a meditative slowing of time, and ultimately dwell upon the role of positionality in the construction of our viewpoints and selves.

*Thin Places*

Perhaps the first response achieved by these settings is that of increased attention. The photograph itself calls to be looked at - its apparent freezing of time, displaying a world more real than we can see with our own human eyes. These works continue that trajectory with an invitation to gaze at blue icebergs, brooding glaciers, verdant grassy sea cliffs, and wildflower sprinkled nordic wilderness. Golden stone lined holy places, a jewel toned shrine, women garbed in brightly flowing dresses, the long skirts and headscarves of traditionally observant Muslim and Jewish women. Even the
interior of a public transport car gleams with silver handrails and cool afternoon light wafting through the wide windows. These series pull in viewers’ attention with supercharged high and unexpectedly elevated low settings, which the images mix and weave together with the everyday workings of human beings passing through them.

Within the young, dramatic geology of Iceland, travelers look at their cameras rather than the view, romp on play sets better suited to a suburban housing development, and stand out brightly in vibrant coats from the shopping mall and blue jeans from the back of the closet. The presentation of the Transit images organizes the works into a central photograph, offering entry into the work, and repeated, smaller prints with variations on the scene. The central print offers the viewer seeming passage directly into the central focus of the work, even as the smaller images compete with their multiple viewed variations on the theme. This arrangement of works calls to mind instructional religious art, even as it focuses on the most mundane of the everyday. And in the midst of some of the most super-charged holy sites existing in our era, apparently average people move about their everyday business, swinging their shopping bags, posing and clicking pictures. These moving images focus on human activity rather than the holy site itself. Within each elevated setting, these series focus on everyday and commonplace, in moments of intersection between human experience and scenes that connote something bigger.

This hybridization of the commonplace and elevated calls into question viewer expectation of the nature of grandness and separation between the high and low. In the highest places, people check their phones and carry plastic shopping bags. Within common areas, their presences are outlined by gleaming metallic lines and streaming sunlight. To some, these images might suggest a greater complexity in human meaning
making, the ever-present nature of the everyday even within what are viewed as sacred settings, or the meaning and elevation of the commonplace itself. The photographs and video images in this body of work carry this generation of complexity further, displaying a permeable barrier of meaning, where thin places illustrate where human experience of their own world and our conception of other, elevated existences meet and mingle, not necessarily in the ways we expect.

Many consider thin places to be locales of permeable barriers where the people encounter a (super)natural, or more powerful entity. Yet within these series of photographic and video works, thin places also represent a place of middle ground or hybridity, both in terms of artistic formal qualities and individual identity. Both a mid-point in perspective and a meeting place between more polar positions, occupying a middle ground provides a view of various perspectives from one vantage point. Hybridity not only allows one to see multiple positions but from within, a personal position of these points of perspective, real or imagined. Through an embrace of the middle ground and individual hybridity, this body of work looks at viewpoint as representative of political standpoint, embracing the personal as political. While examining this variety of experience, the work’s formal qualities of apparent openness and quiet gaze paradoxically juxtapose with the work’s ultimate content, obviously strongly rooted in personal and political position.

The work functions by through first providing a camera position which sees human beings through a centered, long look. This perspective and viewing acts as a middle ground, encouraging viewer entry into the deeper content of the work and issues embedded there, appealing to people of many different backgrounds and perspectives. While artwork where intervention lays directly upon the surface will often deflect the
attention of many, if not most, the apparent neutrality of these work is open, inviting viewers in and pulling them further as they seek a clearly presented object of attention. Finding none, or only small moments, most will question for what they are looking, arriving at their own version of the many layers of content, from the veneer and momentary qualities of community, to the multiplicity of potential perceptions and how we arrive at them, to their own viewpoint and whether they agree or not with my own personal perspective embedded in the works. The veneer of openness in these works, constructed through a “neutral” viewpoint, is what makes the possible the viewer’s entry into the underlying content and, once inside, questioning that changes in tone and depth as one travels further in.

The works look upon human beings that I did not know before I began these series - fellow riders on public transportation in my home city, tourists with whom I shared the scenes of Iceland, people with whom I walked the holy courtyards of Jerusalem. In each locale, the human beings exist together, yet separately. The Transit riders sit and stand closely grouped in enclosed space, breathing the same air, even as their facial expressions clearly communicate their isolation from one another. The explorers in Seeing Iceland stand together for contemplation, yet only for brief and anonymous moments. The women of Jerusalem go about their similar tasks of worship and taking care of the tasks of life, in parallel segregation within joined holy spaces of the old city. And within these series, starting with Transit through Iceland and to Jerusalem, the series begin in close physical proximity and move towards greater distance. People begin close at hand, move to the distance, and walk back and forth. In the final work, Views, the viewer sees no human figures at all.
Looking into and among the images of *Transit*, viewers might feel the urge to physically stabilize themselves against the motions perceived within the works. Inside each image and among photographs in the series, metallic hand rails, transparent walls of windows and passing views, and the bodies of riders vary in angle and position, communicating the rocking and forward thrust of the car. These signs of geographic and temporal motion immerse the viewer in space and time, and the recognition of this physical motion offers a stark contrast with the photographic sensation of a frozen moment of reality. The larger scale of the central image enhances this sensation of a realness. The composition is more stabilized than in the other, smaller photographs and the scale offers a feeling of possible real, physical entry. Within the *Transit* series, the flux of these various formal elements dislodges and disorients viewers from their physical and temporal locations.

In contrast to *Transit*, the photographs in *Seeing Iceland* present a stabilized viewpoint, which formally invites comparison between the works in the series in their slowly distancing perspective. Clad in bright colors, a man in a hat has just crossed the white line meant to keep him safely away from the cliff’s edge. Human figures, clothed mostly in black, gaze out to sea. A tiny child in bright red examines a large rock in a grassy, mountainous valley. Frozen moments, each image is saturated in color, evenly composed, and portrays scenes centered within the dimensions of the work. The viewer enters each scene *in medias res*, into the middle of things, within images both visually calm and quiet, qualities which extend the moment of viewing. The saturated tones and entry into the midst of action provide a sensation of reality captured, while the even...
compositions that integrate wide open spaces provide an invitation to ruminate upon the scenes and contemplate their meaning.

Some of the people of Jerusalem walk into the scene, their backs to the viewer, traveling through stone courtyards to the furthest points within view. Others walk towards the viewer, their steps retracing the paths that others have taken. To and from, they punctuate their rhythmic steps with pauses - to look, adjust an article of clothing or a bag they carry, or take a picture. Human bodies travel into the depth of the image frame and back out. Periodically, the path of one of these travelers passes just barely to the side of the viewer, feeling until the last moment that we are going to be bumped into or brushed slightly. Voices chatter, the wind blows, the light changes as the sun disappears behind a cloud and then resurfaces, and little else happens. All happening within the old city of Jerusalem and the briefest distance apart, these many realities exist both at the same time on the clock and yet different, individual moments. While these scenes take place in the same city, nearly atop one another, they point to the paradox of geographically overlapping worlds. While dominant narratives describe these locales as completely socially and religiously stratified, the viewer sees the passage of a wide variation of everyday people traveling through, their bodies mingling within the same physical spaces. Within sight of the viewer, these videos embody multiple human experiences all at once, the passage of people moving forward in space and back, their pauses and continuation, their separation and intersection. This calm witnessing of locations looks at courtyards of human beings, rather than at the many other details available. The scenes construct a democratizing focus on people in one long view rather than an edited series of cuts, enhancing the viewer’s concentration and slowing their sensation of passing time. With less to see, what is there is not only more visible, but one’s concentration is
available to see it. This work does not provide an overarching narrative of action despite the popular conventions of video, rather using these conventions to invite the viewer through expectation to lean forward into a steady observance of these small scenes.

The construction of these videos, through looping, asynchronous meeting points, looping, and extended fade to black also create points of jarring, disjunction, and interruption to the viewer perspective. Not only the actions of people, in the form of walking two and fro, is repeated within each screen. Each video segment repeats over and over, leaving the viewer to ask why the people walk to and fro, the women walk away from the stone wall backwards, and the entire set repeats endlessly. Their repetition implies significance, leading to questioning of why the scenes are important and for what one is supposed to be looking. Within their endless loop, the installation pairs the videos asynchronously, never perceptibly meeting at the same point twice, so that within varying moments, different people’s paths intersect in time and space. These intersections point to the randomness of the scenes, which popular media and the news portrays as so highly charged, and yet each separate but shared micro-moment seems unlike any other, resonating with unseen possibilities. Eventually, each video stream fades during separate times to extended periods of black. These moments overlap with the continued video stream on the other diptych screen, providing separation from the viewer to the experience, as well as separation from one video stream to the other. The videos do not simply start again, but hold within black for several seconds, providing the sensation of one’s eyes closing. At varying points, different images intersect, one stream’s eyes closed as the other continues on its way, communicating non-synchronized rest, reflection, negation, or separation. These small moments and ever
changing intersection of different scenes reinforces the sensation of many brief periods of time, visual and auditory details, and human beings intersecting in time.

If time is slowed in Jerusalem, the corresponding video installation Views suspends it almost completely. Similarly, Views is a pair of images installed as a video diptych, in which the conventions of video elicits viewer expectation that something, an action, will happen. On both screens, the something delivered is mere gentle motion. A wide expanse of clear blue sea fills the view, rippling shallow waves across a sunlit, shallow waterline and shadowed shore. A glowing curtain of fabric waves in a trance-inducing vertical play of light and dark, creases and folds, and hinting at areas of textured translucence. The pair together provides separate but mirrored motion, contrastingly distant and obstructed views, and unclear content, posing the question of what the subject matter might be. And then one glances at the title. An intervention into serene views, offering new and perhaps unconsidered depth, the title of the work presents both another perspective and a new thing to contemplate. View, Dead Sea at the Israeli-Palestinian Border. View, Tel-Aviv Window. These words bring the eyes back to the imagery in their reference to extended historical conflict that is highly specific in time, contrasting starkly with the peaceful and lulling nature of the views. Contrasting so sharply with the work’s formal content, the insertion of context intervenes in its timeless quality. The diptych creates an intersection between the physical beauty of these constructed views and the act of naming their locations of human conflict. This intervention both creates dissonance and poignancy to the viewer’s experience, as most would approach these views as serene, only to be met with the disturbing context that this perspective is a trance-inspiring mirage.
Each series in this body of work relies upon the stretching of time to invite a longer, closer examination of what is pictured and consideration of why. Alternatively inviting, disrupting, and meditative, they are three temporal spaces of consideration and rumination. This work provides the viewer a space of prolonged attention - a chance to observe other people and themselves perceiving the world and thus creating meaning... without the expectation of definitive understanding and an acceptance of human ambiguity and where it might lead.

Multiplicity

One might consider the “thinness” or hybridity of this work, in locations of crossing from one place to another or of integrating multiple perspectives, represented in the context of historical and contemporary photograph and video work.

While many refer to photography as “indexical,” they speak about its reference to that in the world which we actually see, this body of work is indexical in another way - that of its referencing various ways of (photographic) seeing. When a person looks, views, or sees, the ways in which they see communicate as much or more about the person/photographer themselves than the person, place, or thing of which they make an image. What the photograph says, as a document not necessarily describing reality but rather the maker, about the photographer’s positionalities also describes meanings communicated by the image to its viewers. The three series in this project each display multiple ways of seeing, and thus, the many and assorted meanings that images both communicate and viewers create.

The individual photographs of Transit lay out within one installation view a variety of human perspectives, relating that each of these and other people have their own stories, experiences, and points of view. While in their urban portraiture, they might
bring to mind the photographs of Beat Streuli, these images differ strongly in their seeing of people together in context and the complexity that communicates about the intersection of human lives. Combining historical and contemporary styles, the series uses a straight-ahead perspective reminiscent of traditional documentary photography in a lineage one could trace to Walker Evans, but also blends a multiplicity of perspectives and varying takes on reality related strongly to the work of David Hockney, as well as a concern with unknown stories and histories with inherent similarity to Jitka Hanzolva’s images.

In their growing physical distance and thus changing perspective, the *Seeing Iceland* works also display an indexical view of photographic perspective. Though the works as a whole might tempt comparison to Massimo Vitali’s peopled landscapes on European coastlines, the variation in the *Iceland* series points to the variety and underlying content of the work. Seen through increasing physical distance, the construction of the changing view communicates that how one sees changes what one sees, and thus that human seeing creates the views and their meaning. The first images in the set consider people up close in humanity and humor, in a quietly wry perspective related to that of works by Martin Parr, though the visual qualities of his operate in a significantly louder visual volume. The series continues through slowly distancing ephemeral communities that resonate with the surfer images of Catherine Opie. And images towards the end of the series, which show human figures at a great distance and their individuality engulfed by the scene around them, the manner of seeing relates more so to the work of Thomas Struth, whose scenes ultimately favor a serene and orderly composition where view ranks highest. The close-together installation of works and interrelated order of *Seeing Iceland* also relates strongly to work of John Pfahl, whose
photography series excavate the history and cultural meaning of the Western view and how it is constructed. Though the *Seeing Iceland* works differ in their integration of human presence, essential to the series and body of work, in their excavation of how we look upon one another and the meanings behind that act.

Like the photographic series, the video works also ruminate upon multiple, simultaneous views and what meanings they hold and communicate in ways directly tied to contemporary film and video work. Though the two moving scenes within *Jerusalem* linger upon a single, stationary viewpoint, like *Transit*, the work looks at the physical intersection of many and different human lives. And while *Transit* offers a line of varying perspectives and *Seeing Iceland* considers gradually receding physical proximity, both *Jerusalem* and *Views* create (or consider upon already existing) dichotomies of physical, religious, and cultural space. Through their physical forms as diptychs with text-based names as separate video channels, each of the two works address the societal division of Israelis and Palestinians. In its seeing of two physical spaces of the culturally distant but geographically close courtyards of the Dome of the Rock and the Western Wall, *Jerusalem* considers their proximity, separation, and division within dominant narratives of these locales, which display stories only of direct conflict, warfare, and none of co-existence. Looking straight ahead at the courtyards of these sites, the videos image much of the same subject matter - mainly women and female tourists and the large, golden stones that make up the courtyards and architectural elements. The two videos vary slightly in that the *Dome of the Rock* views the scene from slightly further away, making it possible to see part of the actual building, while *Western Wall* looks slightly closer, where the wall is visible and the camera does not enter into the close physical space of the women praying and visiting the site.
In contrast to *Transit* and *Seeing Iceland*, *Jerusalem* does not offer a physical or formal assortment of viewpoints; rather the work’s mechanism to give viewer access to its content is its seemingly disconnected but ultimately paradoxical documentary viewpoint. Given dominant narratives surrounding conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Territories, viewer expectation of conflict is understandable and expected. *Jerusalem* provides quiet entry to viewers of varying backgrounds and positionalities through a formal assumption of “neutrality” provided by a documentary aesthetic. A device that operates as a doorway, it provides many different kinds of viewers a way to address the multiple levels of content rather than deflecting them from the material. This operates similarly to work by film artist Tacita Dean, who often displays long, quiet takes of charged scenes, with many layers of historical meaning that change and twist depending on how one looks at them. Similarly, Claudia Joskowicz makes use of single shot pans in her video works to address scenes that live large in the popular imagination, ones that are both real in that they historically existed and fictional in the popular conceptions of what actually took place in those locales. Both artists play upon the realities of historically and politically significant moments in time in which groups of people interacted - and how the meaning of those moments change radically when we look at them from another perspective.

While the seeming neutral perspective of the Jerusalem diptych provides entry to viewers of the work, once one enters, what one sees provokes questioning and the exploration of viewpoint. In scenes which, according to the reasoning of great conflict, should be so different, why is there so much that is the same? Women in modest clothing, the sounds of prayer, varying lighting caused by the changes in the sun and clouds, shopping bags carried for everyday tasks, and many, large golden stones. The
courtyards that people step upon, the walls, architectural features all built of the same stone. The seemingly neutral perspective suddenly appears not so when these questions arrive of why the videos represent this dichotomy of locations, with millennia-long history of bloody conflict, full with quiet women going about their business. Women at the Western Wall walk backwards away from the holy site, in a tradition of respect, heightening their visible presence and the questions of why they are there and what they are doing. Whether seen as generally democratizing or some sort of equal sign in the form of a diptych, the many of the countless viewer meanings constructed will point towards this sort of form questioning.

The stonework constructing the two holy sites also tie together the two video channels, visually, textually, and through unseen content. The physical construction of the courtyards with stonework is clear, while the viewer discovers it when reading the text-based names of the video channels - the Dome of the Rock and the Western Wall, both built from and about stones. These sites exist on the same small piece of land, built upon golden stones used for construction and naming. These stones also have vast religious importance embedded within them, through story after story within religious texts, whether Torah, Bible, or Quran. Tradition tells that these very rocks were the place of Adam and Eve, the location of Isaac and Abraham, the setting of the Temples, the locale of Jesus Christ, and the rising of Muhammed to the heavens. Stories saturate the rocks themselves, and yet these rocks are also the contested ground over which people fight with one another, creating millennia of war and bloodshed. Golden stones that line and inhabit these video scenes of women - walking to and fro, living their daily lives.

Similarly to Jerusalem, the Views diptych operates through two channels of similar formal means, in this case of gently pulsating imagery of sunlit seashore and
rippling curtains. Within Views, the paired videos also provide viewer entry through a subversive beauty which calls for the viewer’s attention and individual opening to the scenes and then presents them with the gravity of human conflict. The dichotomy again points to unseen content - in references to the Israeli-Palestinian Border and Tel-Aviv. Operating poetically, the scenes contain multiple layers of content, contrasting the serenity of the Israeli and international vacationland of the Dead Sea with its disturbing reality as a contested borderland with a history of human killing. The viewer’s perspective on this reality is that what one person might declare to be a necessary security measure, another would refer to as a form of apartheid. Either way, the conflict and killing are ongoing. The quiet beauty of the scenes contrasts sharply with their geopolitical and military realities, the azure sea rippling as endlessly as the reasons and individual perspectives on why the conflict exists and continues. The lightly swaying curtains mirror this endless motion, blocking any view of what might be seen - any viewpoint of what is outside or external. Set in Tel-Aviv, often referred to as “the bubble” for its association with secular Israel and lifestyles more European/American than religious Israeli, the curtained non-view refuses information or consideration - in contrast with the flanking distant ocean horizon, laying out scenes where nothing can be seen.
CHAPTER FOUR
IV. THE IMAGINARY

With their continual repetition of the formal qualities of a quiet, straight ahead view that slows time and their series arrangement with the common theme of multiples positionalities, the experience of these series together communicates more than exists within the dimensions of each image. Greater than the sum of its parts, the body of work examines the relationship between fact and fiction, making use of competing and intermingled styles of contemporary documentary and visual arts.

In their appearance of capturing and replaying reality, still photography, film, and video present a veneer of truth, hence their position in historical debates regarding photography’s relationship to reality. Yet when these debates refer to accurate photographic representation, this reference itself rests upon an assumption that reality consists of one, objective set of facts. This while the same postmodern turn that I described at the beginning of this essay, which continues to complicate contemporary thinking through its recognition of and endless play within subjectivity, denies the existence of one, objective reality. Even more recently, neurobiologists and consciousness studies have further problematized our idea of a single experience of the world. What neuroscience has moved to consider are the qualities or attributes of the actual experience of awareness. Ironically, these fields have met at a quantitative, objective description of what are subjective “building blocks” of experience -- those of qualia. Ultimately indescribable in any specific way through language, the qualia (singular: quale) of life are the qualities of minute experiences by an individual. A central question has been how one can look at these small moments of experience and
measure what is an ultimately personal, subjective experience. The consensus view of these researchers reads similarly to what postmodern concepts communicate. Their work communicates that our individual reality is made up of the tiniest of sensory flashes, which we subjective human beings construct into seemingly concrete and objective descriptions of reality.

In efforts by such recognizable figures as the Dalai Lama, practitioners of neuroscience and Buddhism have made recent surprising jumps across the science-faith boundary to co-explore the ways in which subjective experience forms our notion of reality, including multiple awarenesses within each person. Interested in the same philosophical and lived examples, this group of people have entered into a common area of discussion, despite the dominant narratives of our time which separate science and religion. Both because of and in spite of difference, they look towards common interests in the permeable barrier of supposedly oppositional pursuits, occupying a middle ground. Across their perceived divide, neuroscience and Buddhism agree in the finite nature of human perception - that we have limited attention in each given moment and that those details which arrive in our view after we reach sensory capacity have limited, if any, saturation into our knowledge or consideration.

The content of the three series of artworks that make up this project explores the nature of varying viewpoints and the possibility of reaching across borders both because of and in spite of difference. It looks towards a construction of ourselves and reality that makes each of us unique and yet is shared as human process. And it embraces the both the experience and constructed nature of multiple viewpoints within an individual, as well the benefit of excavating the connotations and ramifications of one’s own perspective. This body of work communicates through photography and video
- paradoxically, art forms that many look to as representing reality - that our individual “truths” are a kind of fiction. . . but in considering and exploring that fiction, we can generate greater understanding.

My artwork’s overall formal qualities combine the details within each piece and arrangement of each series to allow details extraneous to the overall concept to fall away. The quiet, straight ahead style stretches our perception of time, allowing maximum opportunity for consideration as well as the perception of even more through simple, repeated composition that does not require extra effort to process. The spare placement of pieces within each series communicates content. Many individuals and their differing points of view come into contact in Transit, forming both multiple narratives and an overarching story of intersection. Within Seeing Iceland, being close up and far away from people in landscape deeply affects our perception of who those people are, how much we might know them, and what we believe to be true about their contexts. And though we are handed the dominant storyline dichotomies concerning the people in Jerusalem/Views, continued observation points to hidden perspectives and alternate interpretations not present within dominant narratives.

While Jerusalem and Views integrate perhaps the clearest personal-political narrative, each of the three series address the politics not only of photographic representation but positionality itself. When many others look upon me, they would see a fair, white American woman who they might assume lived whatever sort of life they are accustomed to seeing fair, white American women live. Whereas my own identity is of a mutt, someone from a mixed background - Jewish but non-Jewish, Caucasian but Middle Eastern, “white” but with family who are “black” and “yellow”. These personal perspectives are inherent in my artistic methods of comparing, mixing, and complicating
viewpoints while simultaneously pointing to positionality. As someone from a place of hybridity, the complexities of many situations immediately call out to me. My position is both clear and unclear, just as many of the small moments of life represented in my artworks both at first seem clear and yet are progressively revealed as unclear, leaving the viewer to question just what they should be focusing on. In relation to the Jerusalem/Views work - the positions often appear to conflict. I am politically progressive, someone very empathetic with coerced peoples including the Palestinians; yet with relatives murdered in the Holocaust, I believe in the right of Israel to exist, I am technically able to have Israeli citizenship; however when I am among traditionally observant Israelis, I have been subjected to slurs about “mixed-breeds” and fair women who are overtly sexualized and do not acquiesce to modes of traditional, ultra-modest dress and attitude. I am but an example, for we each have multiple positionalities, which may not appear on the surface or often seem to be conflicting. These many viewpoints both render the popular conception of a single identity untrue and through their existence, offer multiple points where one might find commonality with other people. Possibilities to reach across perceived borders exist.

Both neuroscience and Buddhist thought shed light on the importance of one’s own internal narrative as essential to understanding how one’s positionality helps to construct one’s experience of the world, an awareness that also parallels post-colonial concepts of the resisting of internalization of dominant narratives. Thus personally, these markers of positionality pull in sometimes opposing directions, aiding an occupation of the middle ground. Thus, it also corresponds to a post-colonial awareness of position as inherently linked to power and hierarchy and the willingness to engage with those concepts on a personal level. The straight-ahead, documentary style of the Jerusalem
videos not only provide an appearance of neutrality that allows for entry into the content by viewers from diverse and alternating perspectives, but also act as a tie towards a middle ground for my own, highly invested perspective. They both provide a weight towards a dispassionate center point where multiple perspectives can be considered and offer a critique of the many individual and group positions that have created millennia of war and bloodshed in the places pictured. And thus this middle ground avoids reduction to the multitude of generalities, stereotypes, and expectations we each carry with us and more easily fall into when standing singularly in our own perspective.

The series also vary in their increasing physical distance from close at-hand to far away. Moving from the crowded quarters of Transit, through a transition from close to distant in Seeing Iceland, to a traveling back and forth through this space in Jerusalem, until no people are present in Views. These formal qualities again make reference to my own positionality as an ethnographer-artist critical of the representation of human beings by many contemporary photographers. In the present moment, the style of photography of people seems to be not just close-up, but so close as to reveal intimate physical details of that person, to the point of not only making the viewer feel as though they really know the person portrayed, but also enacting a sort of knowing that promotes a feeling of voyeurism. In an age of instantaneous, intimate knowledge of other people via social media and grotesque portraits of human beings on reality television, much of contemporary photography of people appears to claim a narrative of humane diversity, while it actually provides an unearned and dominant feeling of knowledge about an other, whom most viewers could care less about and just as quickly walk away without another thought of that person. These images generally do not appear reflective of an actual photographer-subject relationship but create a false sense of knowing or
understanding another person. To one from an anthropology and critical studies background, these images inspire a critique reminiscent to that of participant observation. These images appear to state that somehow by seeing other human beings up-close and creating one’s own narratives about them, one has come to understand them. One “knows” them. When in truth, what the photographer has done is to look closely in a manner which makes the viewer feel authority, with some type of mastery over the other.

The formal qualities of my work simultaneously act as a critique of this up-close style of photographing people that I do not know and illustrate the humanity of each person through the interconnection of their stories, willingness to see them as multifaceted, and through in many means of visual approach. The work contemplates the ways in which human figures have been represented in the landscape with the alternate effects of humanizing or romanticizing them. And it reflects upon people as they themselves move as actors through space - moving away, towards the object their own attention, and moving towards the camera, brushing and nearly colliding into us, in the midst of our viewership. Finally, this work abandons the human form, rather relying on a poetic imaging of places full of human presence, history, and complexity, yet seemingly empty of answers.

Much of contemporary photography of people is deeply ironic. Sometimes it finds humor in a “freak show” aesthetic, looking at fellow human beings as Others. Other times it reveals the presence of the photographer through humorous means, visually declaring that there is no need for the viewer to actually take seriously what else takes place in the image. Instead, my own body of work again acts as a foil, critiquing the notion that life is a carnival in which everyone is available as part of the freak show. It
examines how we perceive and our positionality, as a call for each viewer to consider how they look and experience. Quite the opposite of an ironic perspective, this work operates from a position of problematization of our viewpoint, illustration of varying ways images relate to this process, and a simultaneous desire for sincerity. Similar notions occur in contemporary literature, as represented within the works of writers W. G. Sebald, David Foster Wallace, and Zadie Smith, whose writings have in common with my project the possibility of considering multiple perspectives, histories, and political positions all at once. Our works look to a recognition of the incredible gravity of experience and representation, the unfathomable enormity our uncountable human perspectives, and yet a corresponding wish to still, despite all odds, connect. The intersection of experience has been recently discussed within the concept of contemporaneity, which addresses the experience of a multiplicity of perspectives, knowledges, and times within the same moment.

This body of artwork demonstrates that though we each experience many small, seemingly concrete moments, there is no single reality. Rather, between the many and among individual human beings, multiple realities exist, which we construct into narratives of experience and feed back into ourselves into our creation of our positionality. The realities that we construct, the narratives we form, and the positions that we create from all these combinations, these are quite real and yet they are the imaginary.
APPENDICES
Appendix A

List of Artworks Appearing in Exhibition

1.1 Transit I
1.2 Transit II
1.3 Transit III
1.4 Transit IV
1.5 Transit V
1.6 Transit VI
1.7 Transit VII

2.1 Seeing Iceland (series)
2.2 Seeing Iceland (series)
2.3 Seeing Iceland (series)
2.4 Seeing Iceland (series)
2.5 Seeing Iceland (series)
2.6 Seeing Iceland (series)
2.7 Seeing Iceland (series)
2.8 Seeing Iceland (series)

3.1 Jerusalem, Dome of the Rock; Jerusalem, Western Wall

3.2 Views, Dead Sea at the Israeli-Palestinian Border; Views, Tel Aviv Window
Appendix B

Images

Transit I
Transit II
Transit III
Transit V
Transit VI
Transit VII
Installation View, *Transit*
Seeing Iceland (series)
Seeing Iceland (series)
Seeing Iceland (series)
Jerusalem, Dome of the Rock (Video Still)

Jerusalem, Western Wall (Video Still)
Views, Dead Sea at the Israeli-Palestinian Border (Video Still)

Views, Tel Aviv Window (Video Still)
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