

PROJECTED SURFACES

By

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I will address the philosophies of Susan Sontag, Roland Barthes and Thomas Ruff by considering the object, materials and processes of photography as my primary motivator to create art. I will examine the contrast between photographic imagery, as an illusion of the past, and sculpture, as a physical manifestation of the present, when creating works that ask, "What else can photography be?"

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES.....	vi
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2: DISCUSSION OF WORK.....	2
CHAPTER 3: CONCLUSION	17
APPENDIX: COPYRIGHT PERMISSION EMAIL.....	19
REFERENCES.....	22

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Jay Flynn, <i>Eidolon</i> , UV cured ink, Sintra board, 2014	3
Figure 2 Jay Flynn "Other Side" Ambrotype, Lens, LED Pin spot Light, Seamless Backdrop Paper, Light Stands, variable dimensions, 2014	5
Figure 3 Jay Flynn "Other Side" Ambrotype, Lens, LED Pin spot Light, Seamless Backdrop Paper, Light Stands, variable dimensions, 2014	6
Figure 4 David Haxton, Set Image of No.796, "Holes in White Lit from Behind and White Form". Edition of 3, 72 x 89.5 in. (182 x 227 cm.), 2 AP, 40x50 in., (101 x 127 cm), Color Photograph, David Haxton, 8/10/09.....	7
Figure 5 Jay Flynn "Together but Separate", UV Cured Ink, Acrylic, LED Pin spot Light, Seamless Paper, Light Stands, Clamps, variable dimensions, 2014	9
Figure 6 Jay Flynn "Together but Separate", UV Cured Ink, Acrylic, LED Pin spot Light, Seamless Paper, Light Stands, Clamps, variable dimensions, 2014	10
Figure 7 Jay Flynn "Together but Separate", UV Cured Ink, Acrylic, LED Pin spot Light, Seamless Paper, Light Stands, Clamps, variable dimensions, 2014	11
Figure 8 Figure "Leaves" Double sided Inkjet Print, Light Stands, Par Lights, Laminate Floor, Fans, variable dimensions, 2014	13
Figure 9 Jay Flynn "Moiré", Inkjet Transparency, Light Stands, Light, variable dimensions, 2014	14
Figure 10 Jay Flynn "Moiré", Inkjet Transparency, Light Stands, Light, variable dimensions, 2014	16
Figure 11 Jay Flynn, Gallery View of Exhibition	18

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

For my thesis MFA exhibition, I have created a body of work that explores photography as sculptural form. My photography installations are a direct result of my having worked with the objects and materials of various contemporary and historical photographic processes. I create works of art that decontextualize photography and ask the question, “What else can photography be?” My sculptural installations are created through an intuitive process utilizing my technical capabilities. I am interested in the theoretical discourse of photography and what photography is widely understood to be; an illusionistic representation of the past. Susan Sontag refers to photographs as “not only an image (as a painting is an image), an interpretation of the real; it is also a trace, something directly stenciled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask.”(Sontag) I work to undermine these so called stencils by creating sculptural installations that distract from the illustrative nature of the photograph. Many of my sculptures have to exist — as a substrate — in order for the viewer to see the photographic image. By exposing the construction of the sculptures I reveal the processes and mechanics of my individual works to provide more information than the image alone. I construct photographic sculptures by manipulating a photographic print with light or by physically sculpting a print. I hope my efforts challenge viewers to consider my installations as physical manifestations of the “present”, in direct contrast to the illustrations of the past recorded in my photographic images.

CHAPTER 2: DISCUSSION OF WORK

Roland Barthes discusses photography in *Camera Lucida* as “turning subject into object.” (Barthes) In the article by Robert Shore, *Post Photography*, he states, “a picture is just a platform”, and further quotes Barthes; “Whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see.” (Barthes) My artwork focuses first on the materiality and process of the installation by combining the photographic print or projection with apparatuses to create sculpture. By doing this the installations become “it that we see,” leaving the image as an afterthought or a small piece in a larger scheme. I ask the viewer to consider not only what is depicted in the image, but the object of the image and the functionality of the installation.

My sculpture *Eidolon* (figure 1) is an example of how I first began to think about utilizing the object of photography, in particular how to physically manipulate the photographic print to elevate the object above the image. Utilizing digital technologies I created a photograph of a mundane landscape printed on Sintra (PVC) board, a substrate that I then heated and sculpted into a manipulated form. The physical presence of the sculpture denies the viewer the illustration the photograph depicts, and asks them instead to consider the transformed object. An *Eidolon* is an unsubstantial image or a phantom. (HarperCollins) The sculpture hangs like a phantom’s cloak on the wall, in the space that we normally view photographs.



Figure 1 Jay Flynn, *Eidolon*, UV cured ink, Sintra board, 2014

After this I began to think about the object and mechanics of photography in a broader sense than the print alone, creating works that consisted of equipment, mechanics and materials found in photographic processes and industry.

My installation *Other Side* (figure 2 and 3) is born from the experience and technical capabilities that I have gained in the photographic industry as a commercial photographer, photographers' assistant, digital image editor, and professional printer. The artwork is created with everyday tools found in the professional practices employed in photographic studios. It consists of photographic background stands, and a white seamless paper backdrop, which is used as a projection screen. Mounted on the three

light stands are an LED spotlight, a glass plate ambrotype photograph, and a lens. Ambrotypes are a 19th century wet plate photographic process, which involves coating glass with a collodion base that must be sensitized with silver to create the picture. The installation serves as a projector, with the spotlight shining through the ambrotype plate, and with the lens generating a circular image on the seamless backdrop. The image on the plate is an apple tree, which has been re-photographed via the ambrotype process from a tree image on a computer screen. When the plate and projection are inspected closely, the pixels from the monitor reveal their debt to the 19th century photographic process. Because of the projector lens the apple tree image becomes enlarged and effectively is cropped into a circular image, which mimics a camera lens and references the anatomy of the inside of an eye. The viewer first encounters the installation by viewing the tree image as a rear projection on the hanging sheet of seamless paper. The viewer can walk behind the projection, entering the installation to view where and how the projection originates. Viewers are in a sense allowed into the projector to look at and interact with the installation “backstage”, with the source of the light, the original tree image, the lens, and the resulting transformed image.

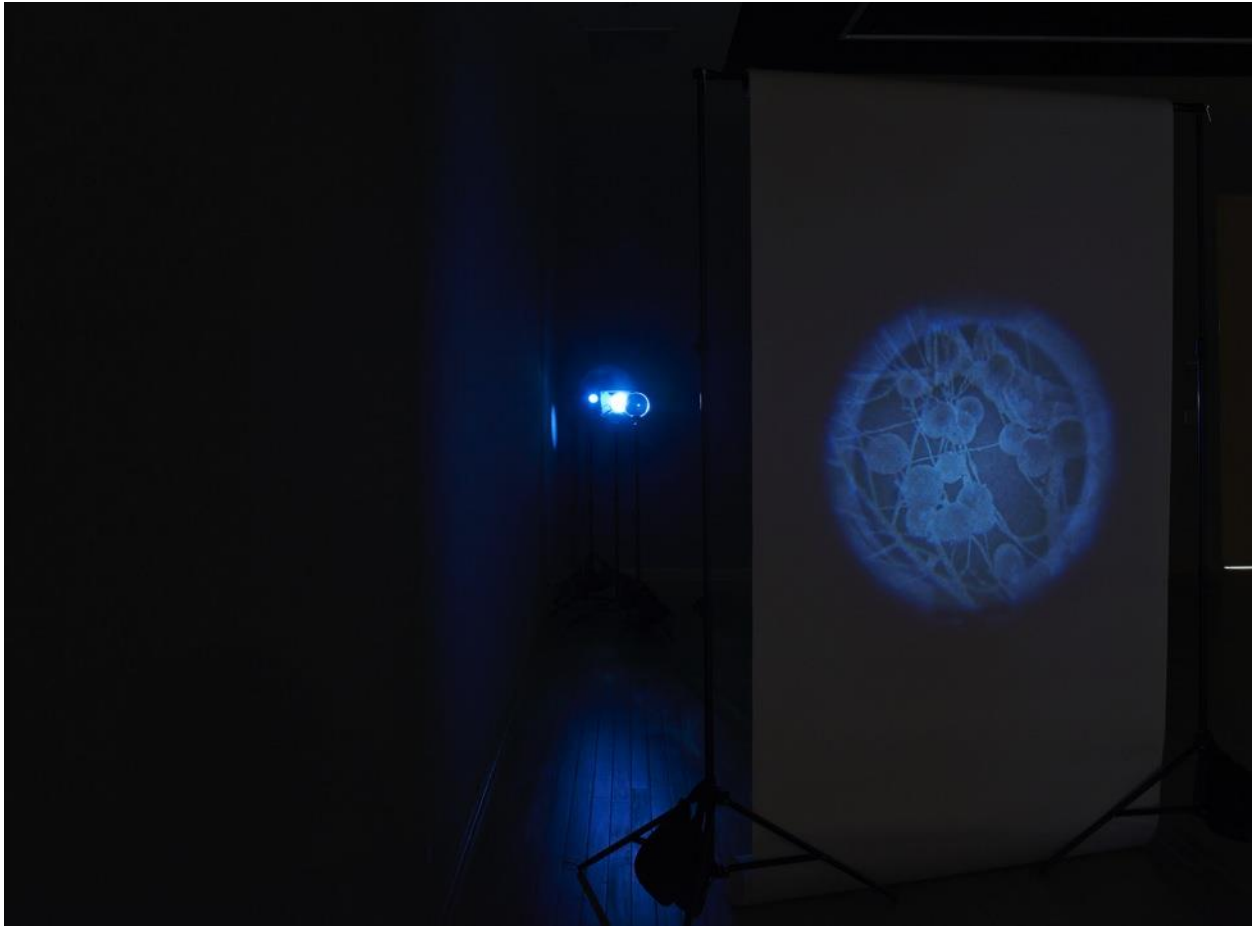


Figure 2 Jay Flynn "Other Side" Ambrotype, Lens, LED Pin spot Light, Seamless Backdrop Paper, Light Stands, variable dimensions, 2014

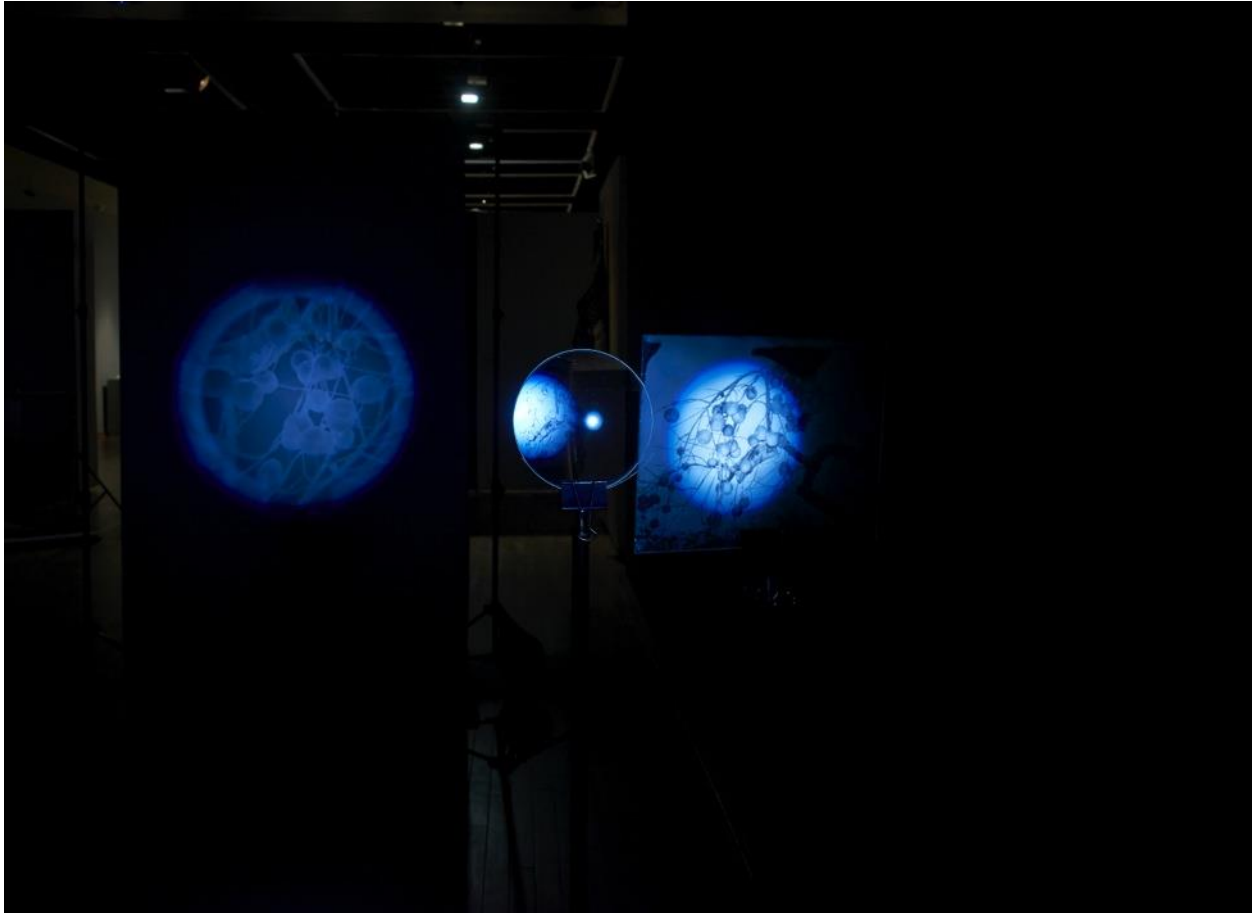


Figure 3 Jay Flynn "Other Side" Ambrotype, Lens, LED Pin spot Light, Seamless Backdrop Paper, Light Stands, variable dimensions, 2014

The photographer and filmmaker David Haxton creates photographs depicting photographic sets and equipment (figure 4) to explore how “light creates space.”(Haxton) “For two decades Haxton has photographed abstract tableaux that he creates in empty studio spaces with paper backdrops employed in conventional studio photography.” (Cutler) He also creates films, which explore the “transfer of three-dimensional space to the two-dimensional film plane.” (Haxton)



Figure 4 David Haxton, Set Image of No.796, "Holes in White Lit from Behind and White Form". Edition of 3, 72 x 89.5 in. (182 x 227 cm.), 2 AP, 40x50 in., (101 x 127 cm), Color Photograph, David Haxton, 8/10/09

His work has influenced me because, like him, I also utilize the processes, mechanics, and articles of photography as subject matter to create my work. David Haxton states that his “photographs are made for the camera.” (Haxton) However, my sculptures are created to energize the image and provide the viewer with more information than the illustrative space of the photograph alone would provide. Like Haxton’s, my work explores the transfer of physical existence to the photographic print or, as Barthes

stated, makes “the subject an object.” Unlike Haxton I return the object that is “inside” the photographic image to its “real” three-dimensional existence—as a sculptural form.

James Turrell is another artist who influences my work. He creates architectural spaces and sculptures with light. “Turrell has worked directly with light and space to create artworks that engage viewers with the limits and wonder of human perception.” (Turrell site) Turrell’s light sculptures like *Afrum 1 (White)* are created with one light that is projected into the middle of two adjoining walls. The light is controlled in such a way that a three-dimensional cube appears to form in the space.

As do James Turrell’s light sculptures, my installation *Together but Separate* (figure 5 and 6) utilizes light as an essential aspect to the viewing of the photograph and the sculpture. And just as a James Turrell light installation requires well thought out architectural environment, so does mine. Such an environment requires sufficient space and darkness for the proper viewing of the projections and light installations. *Together but Separate* continues my themes about the objects and materials of photography; it utilizes backdrop stands, seamless backdrop paper, light stands, an LED spotlight, and a photographic image printed on acrylic. The image floats like a glass pane below the backdrop cross bar, about one foot from the ground. The image is a landscape of uprooted trees. Beneath it lies a roll of white seamless paper, which stretches the length of the installation. The paper marks the optimal viewing position for the print, physically separating the viewer from the print. The seamless paper acts as a reflected-light source, enabling the viewing of the print by backlighting it, which can only

be seen at a particular angle of view. An LED spotlight on a light stand beams a circular cool light source onto the white paper. When one looks at the image, the light being reflected off the paper both illuminates the print and becomes part of it by creating a vignette, mimicking a sunset on the horizon.



Figure 5 Jay Flynn "Together but Separate", UV Cured Ink, Acrylic, LED Pin spot Light, Seamless Paper, Light Stands, Clamps, variable dimensions, 2014

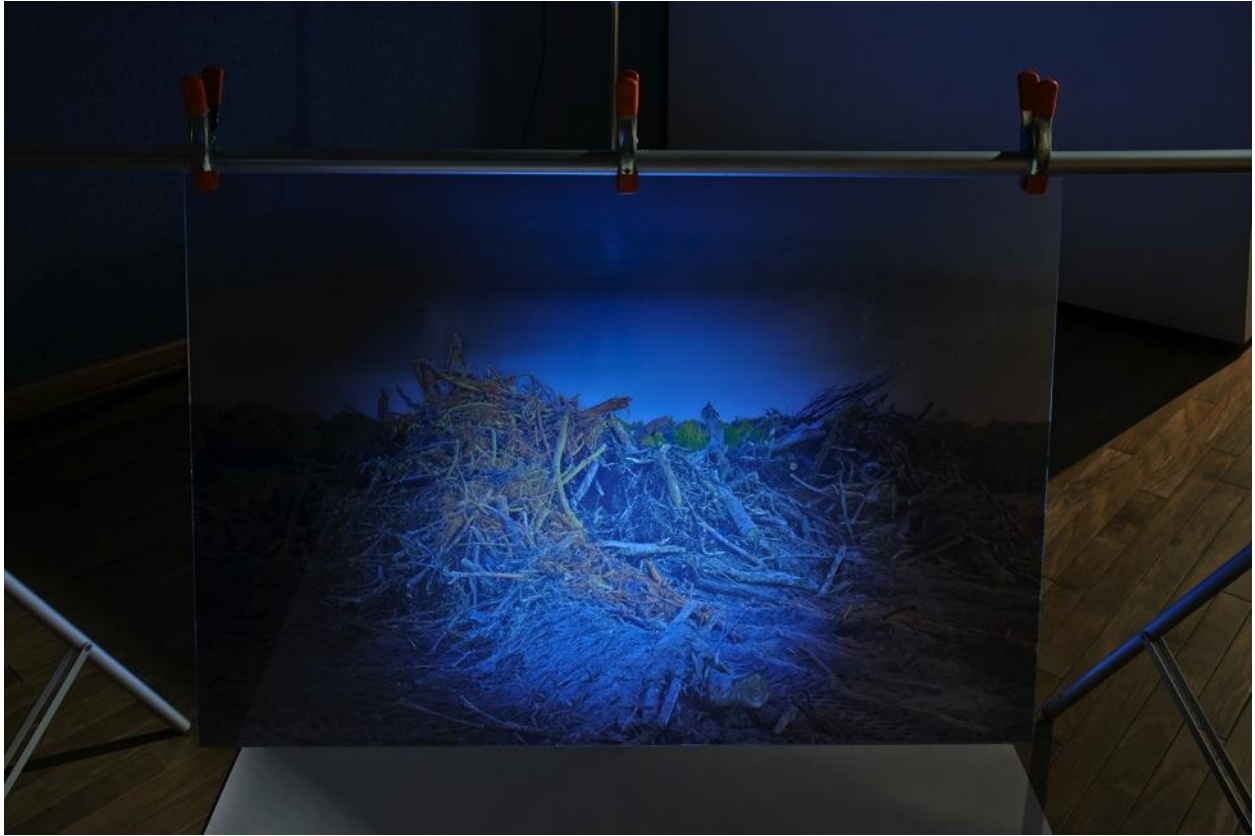


Figure 6 Jay Flynn "Together but Separate", UV Cured Ink, Acrylic, LED Pin spot Light, Seamless Paper, Light Stands, Clamps, variable dimensions, 2014

When one observes my installation from the reverse side (figure 6), the print loses its illumination. The light instead pools on the floor in front of the print. As the viewer's eyes adjust to the print, the scene now appears dark, like a nighttime landscape. The viewer is left to consider how the same light can also illuminate the print on the opposite side. On this side the print and the light are separated; they no longer co-exist.

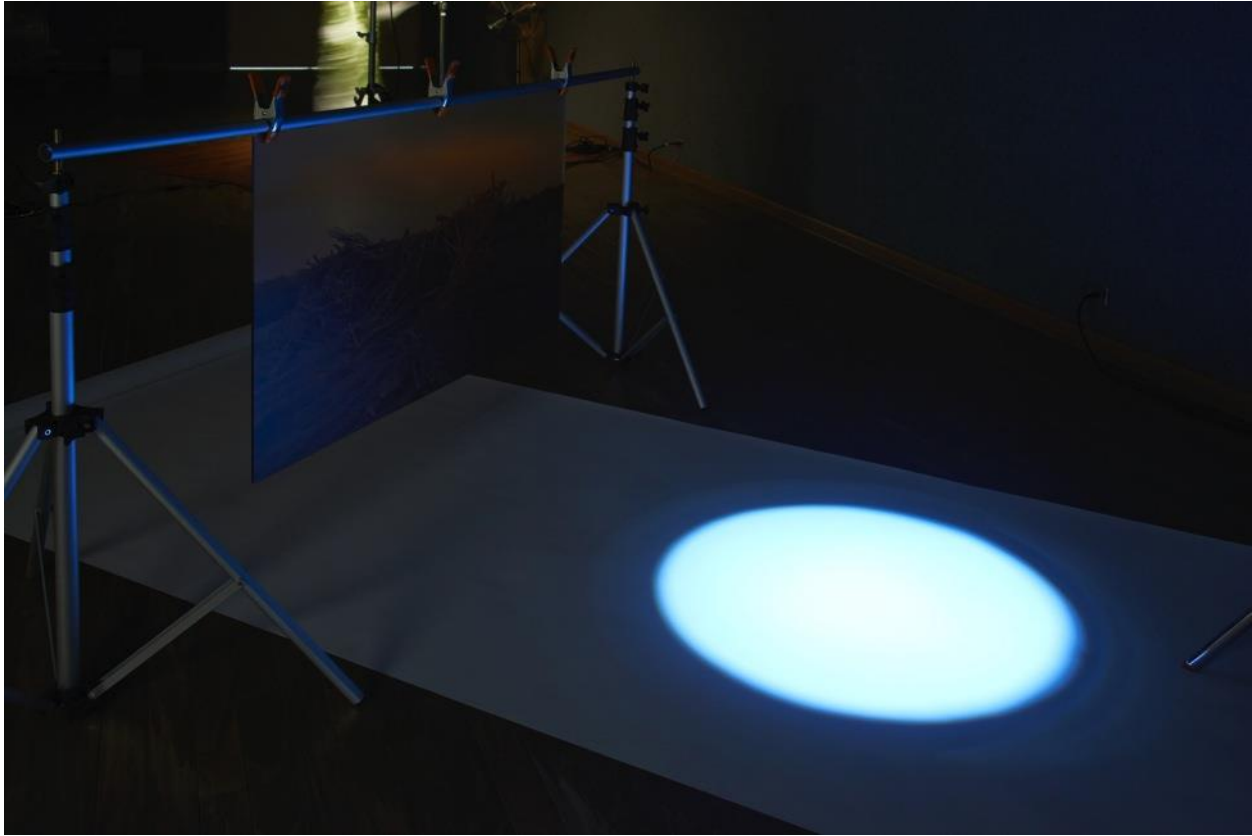


Figure 7 Jay Flynn "Together but Separate", UV Cured Ink, Acrylic, LED Pin spot Light, Seamless Paper, Light Stands, Clamps, variable dimensions, 2014

The photographer Thomas Ruff explains, photographs can only record the “surface of things”. (Viviane) This statement also applies to my work because the images in the photograph are not the reason for the work. All my photographs contain mundane subject matter, but they are transformed by the physicality and mechanics of the installations. My installation titled *Leaves* (figure 8) is composed of a two-sided print of green tree leaves, while one brown leaf is positioned near the center of the print. The print hangs from an upside down “L”-shaped century light stand in one corner, reminiscent of wet darkroom prints hung from a clothesline to dry. The century stand

sits on an 8'x8' wood floor that is used to mark the boundaries of the installation. Two floor fans on either side of the print face each other to create a breeze. This breeze rustles the print to mimic leaves blowing in the wind. Like real leaves, the print will tear and fall to the ground. The gallery staff is instructed to re-hang the print when it falls, just as photographs can be re-used and duplicated. The torn piece of the print that remains in the clamp is allowed to fall to the floor and remain there like a real leaf. This work began as visual joke, asking what it would look like to create a sculpture that contained a normally static photographic print in motion. The humor continues as the sculpture progresses — as a pun conflating windblown leaves with a windblown image of leaves.



Figure 8 Figure "Leaves" Double sided Inkjet Print, Light Stands, Par Lights, Laminate Floor, Fans, variable dimensions, 2014

There is a contrast in my work, a struggle that exists between the photograph as an illustrative representation of the past and the physicality of the sculptural installation, which is manifest in the present. Clement Greenberg discusses in his essay, "New Sculpture," how sculpture is "inherently less illusionistic, because of its ties to the third dimension." (Greenberg) My photographic installations underscore the difference between illusionistic photographs and my "less illusionistic" photographic sculptures. Although I create photographic images, they cannot exist without physical objects for subject matter. My photo installations also—uniquely—require sculptural forms to serve as the substrates for my photographic images. The mechanics of the installations also change the meanings of the photographs. Greenberg continues to discuss "New Sculpture" as "materials created out of industry, foregoing brass, lead, wood, and instead working with plastic, steel, and glass."(Greenberg) This approach is evident in my installations in that I employ photographic industrial materials to create the works.

My installations begin with photography, and my outcomes reflect the processes and phenomena that occur in the materials and practice. My sculpture, *Moiré* (figure 9), is created out of the optical phenomena of moiré patterning, which is defined as, "denoting or showing a pattern of irregular wavy lines produced by the superposition at a slight angle of two sets of closely spaced lines."(Hobson) This phenomenon occurs frequently in digital photography when certain line patterns that are photographed are similar to the line patterns of the pixel grid on the digital sensor. The result is an optical

illusion of wave-patterned lines that did not exist in the physical scene being photographed but nevertheless occur in the reproduced image.



Figure 9 Jay Flynn "Moiré", Inkjet Transparency, Light Stands, Light, variable dimensions, 2014

Moiré consists of two photographs of a landscape pictured from inside the screened porch of my apartment. The screen is depicted in both images and moiré patterning occurs in the print because the screen pattern closely matches the pixel pattern on the camera sensor. I enhance this effect further by re-photographing the landscape from a computer monitor with a macro lens. This breaks the image up into the pixel grid created by the monitor. I then layer two transparency prints over each other to create more moiré patterning. The sculpture holds moiré patterning in the prints and creates moiré patterning by superimposing them. The prints hang from century stands in front of a wall that has been painted black. The black wall contains a white rectangle that is the same size as the transparency prints. The white rectangle is used as a reflected light source, which illuminates the prints when the viewer looks at them and enhances the optical excitement generated by the moiré.

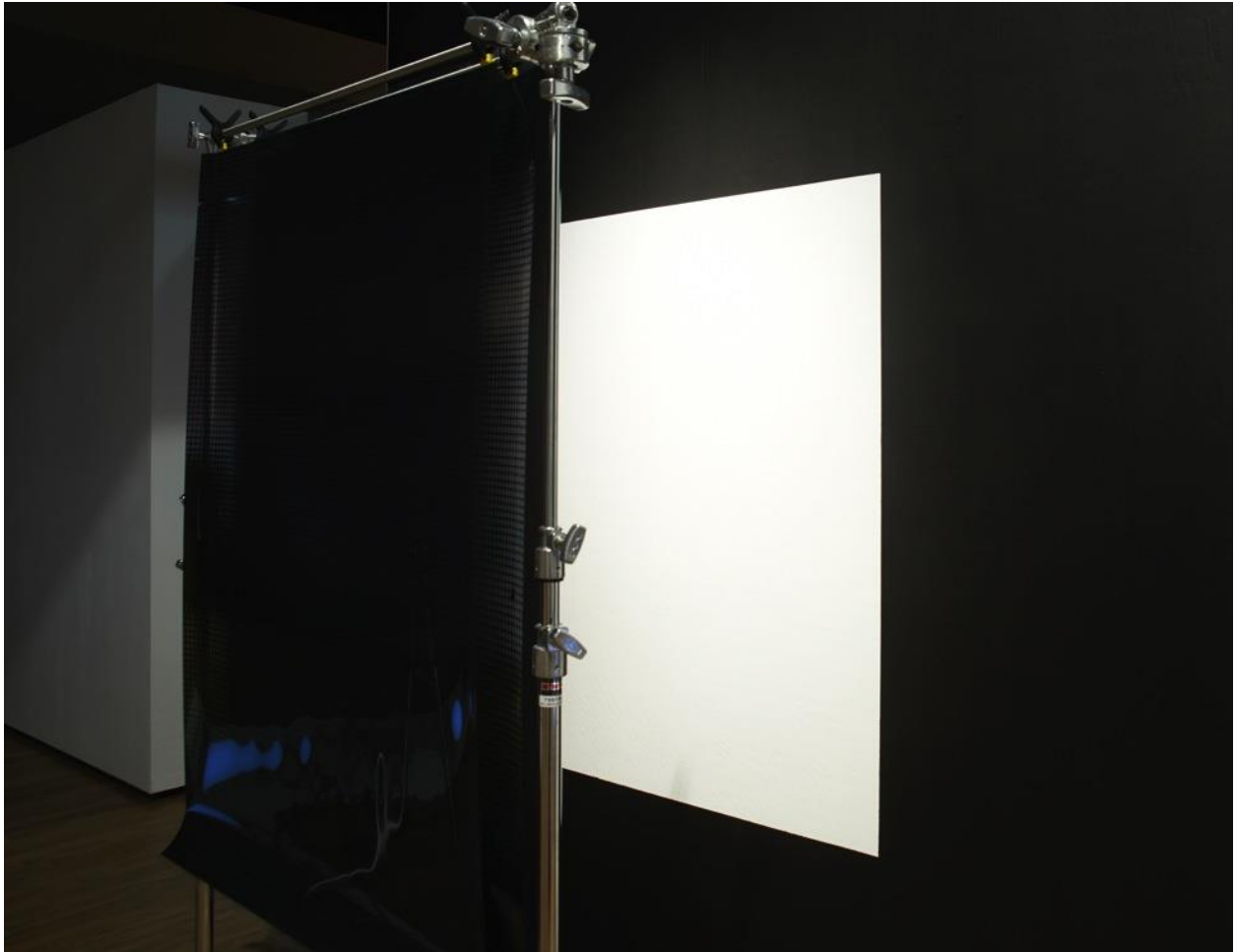


Figure 10 Jay Flynn "Moiré", Inkjet Transparency, Light Stands, Light, variable dimensions, 2014

The moiré pattern generated by the superimposing the prints negates the subject matter of the image being depicted because the viewer is asked to look more at the objects and the optical phenomena that are occurring than at the image of the landscape itself; alluding to Robert Shore's claim "that a picture is just a platform." In this piece I use the "picture as a platform" to reveal to the viewer other optical curiosities that occur in photography.


CHAPTER 3: CONCLUSION

I hope to engage the viewer in my art by demonstrating that photography does not stop with the image that is depicted. The “trace” as Sontag explained is an important and powerful thing but may lack truth. In my work the “trace” lies in the process of transforming photographic imagery into something else that inspires me. This inspiration comes from a duality that I believe exists in my work. This duality is the poetic struggle between the illustration of the past recorded in my photographs and the physical present created in my sculptural installations, which manipulate, energize, and physically alter the photographic imagery. My hope is that the viewer will experience a transcendent moment when he or she discovers the mechanics and processes of my installations as he or she moves through the gallery. (figure 11)



Figure 11 Jay Flynn, Gallery View of Exhibition

APPENDIX: COPYRIGHT PERMISSION EMAIL

From: Jay Flynn UCF jayflynn@knights.ucf.edu 
Subject: Image use for Thesis
Date: January 31, 2014 at 5:49 PM
To: david HAXTON d.haxton@icloud.com

Hi David,

I hope all is well and congratulations on your review in VV! I am writing to ask for permission to use one of your images (please see attached) in my thesis paper. I was introduced to your films in the late 90's and have been influenced by them since. I am exploring the creation of sculptural installations borne out of photography which utilize the mechanics of photographic sets, equipment and light to view and transform photographic imagery. The ability to reference your work pictorially will greatly help me in explaining what I think about and how I create my work.

Best,

Jay Flynn



From: David Haxton d.haxton@icloud.com
Subject: Re: Image use for Thesis
Date: February 1, 2014 at 8:11 AM
To: JayFlynn JayFlynn@knights.ucf.edu

Jay: That will be fine. Thanks for asking. I am planning to come down to CEM this coming week. David

[See More from Jay Flynn UCF](#)

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