

Latent

A Bodily Exploration of Hybrid Potentiality

[The artist] speaks to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity, and beauty, and pain; to the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation—and to the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions, in hope, in fear which binds together all humanity—the dead to the living and the living to the unborn.

Joseph Conrad

Procedural memory has a way of connecting the body to the unconscious mind. By thinking through the body, we are able to recall facets of the self buried by conscious logic, pride, fear, and mistrust. My practice commits to trusting the body and responding to its needs in order to realize the needs of the whole self. I employ the immediacy and malleability of charcoal, performance, and video to express, capture, and translate this alternative thought process. Combining this intuitive trajectory with an open, responsive mindset, my thought process while making is a heavily layered negotiation between myself, the work, and the environment. The results of this layering are hybrid creations such as drawings combining textures into hallucinatory imagery, sculptures acting as drawings and enterable structures, and performances intermingling drawing, improvisation, and choreography. My own diverse ethnicity has played a significant role in questioning normative categorizations to which hybridity does not conform. Through various composites of media and content, I explore hybridity as a potential source for discovery, expanded perception, and empathetic capacities.

The Hybrid

The hybrid has historically been depicted as monstrous, ominous, and not to be trusted, expressing a moral stance against the countercultural. Classic mythologies would create interspecies omens; modern cinema highlighted perversion in transgressive identity; and even recent governing laws opposed interracial marriage. Ambiguity of these layered hybrids can cause discomfort and confusion, encouraging strict categorization and definition. However, I am familiar with the power of hybrid ambiguity to act as a revealer, shining light on the connections in life by embedding multiple perspectives into one lens. Unclear or indefinable situations can stimulate imagination and curiosity, creating opportunities to uncover these connections, discover new possibilities, and reflect on our predispositions. These ambiguous hybrids disrupt what we expect to encounter and force our perception from a passive acceptance, to an active

investigation. Challenging recognition creates deeper understanding of what is thought to be known and the complex way information interconnects. This sharpened cognition heightens our capacity to empathize with the world around us.

Guillermo Gómez-Peña, a performance artist and founder of the performance troupe, *La Pocha Nostra*, is renowned for his work that presents hybridity as a multicultural, multiracial, polylingual, genderfluid community of unified contradictions.¹ His experience growing up in Mexico and immigrating to the United States, along with fathering a son of both European and Latin American heritage, has conversed with his elaborate theatrical productions presenting himself and many collaborators as 'cultural bastards' the rough translation of *La Pocha Nostra*. In his book, *New World Border*, Gómez-Peña discusses the evolving roles of hybrids:

An ability to understand the hybrid nature of culture develops from and experience of dealing with a dominant culture from the outside. The artist who understands and practices hybridity in this way can be at the same time an insider and an outsider, an expert in border crossings, a temporary member of multiple roles in multiple contexts. [...]. S/he speaks from more than one reality. His/her job is to trespass, bridge, interconnect, reinterpret, remap, and redefine; to find the outer limits of his/her culture and cross them. The presence of the hybrid denounces the faults, prejudices, and fears manufactured by the self-proclaimed center, and threatens the very *raison d'être* of any monoculture, official or not. It reminds us that we are not the product of just one culture; that we have multiple and transitional identities; that we contain a multiplicity of voices and selves, some of which may even be contradictory.²

The idea of denouncing the self-proclaimed center resonates within my practice as I denounce the over-simplified categorizations that stem from this center. I embrace a hybrid mindset where layered, liminal, interconnectedness is normative and content isolation is both impractical and restrictive to empathy.

¹ Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *The New World Border: Prophecies, Poems, and Loqueras for the End of the Century* (San Francisco: City Lights Publishers, 1996), 11.

² Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *The New World Border: Prophecies, Poems, and Loqueras for the End of the Century* (San Francisco: City Lights Publishers, 1996), 13.



Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Saul Garcia Lopez, *The Dangerous Border Game* performance series for La Pocha Nostra, 1995

While the visual aesthetics of my work differ from Gómez-Peña, conceptually his works speaks to my personal and artistic identity as a ‘border crosser’. While I belong to multiple ethnicities and associated cultures, my work, too, draws on multiple sources of inspiration and states of mind to form its ambiguous and liminal identity. This mindset conjures up works, which during and after the making process embody several contradictory identities at once.

The Materials

One way of balancing the spectrum of possibilities offered by hybrid ambiguity in my studio practice is through consciously limiting materials to be fairly homogenous. In my drawings I tend to use only compressed charcoal on the whitest paper I can find. This paper selection allows me to achieve highlights by erasing rather than adding pastel. I treat my white-felt sculptures in the same manner, substituting black ink for the charcoal. The use of one or very few material sources is something I also explore in my performance practice, which is heavily influenced conceptually and materially by my drawings. Each performance consists of a vague

singular task, which is carried out improvisationally. Similarly in my video work, I focus on a muted or monochromatic palette, perform minimal editing by shooting a wide shot of one setting, and loop the content. These limitations expose the expansive possibilities of expression that can come from very little material, something that adds further investment from me as I work and muse on the hybrid's multifaceted nature. This interplay between my layered conceptual interests and the limited tools with which I deploy them helps me to achieve a personal aesthetic voice while maintaining my belief in the value of hybrid potentiality.

The natural world also heavily influences my aesthetic structure. Textures from plants, animals, geological structures, and the elements intermingle with the body to create new indefinable hybrids. Differing levels of abstraction are applied to these fragments of the realistic, forming hallucinatory environments. These hallucinatory elements are visualized in *Constant* and *Echoes*, two large-scale charcoal drawings able to wrap around the room, bringing those



Echoes (Section 1), 2015

environments to life. When pulling these natural source materials together I recall John Dewey's thoughts on how our unity and passion for nature can manifest to enrich our interest in life,

describing the captivating subtlety of a blade of grass as “The mystic aspect of acute aesthetic surrender”.³ One main source from nature that is transformed often in my work is water and the many textures it takes on. Water has been deemed purifying throughout many cultural, religious, and spiritual teachings with the power to transform, transcend, and cross spiritual barriers.

Both charcoal and felt have historically been used to purify water; therefore, water functions as a visual element in my drawings and sculpture, while also acting as a mystical metaphor in performance rituals. In the drawings, water textures are directly drawn, exaggerated as they may be. Sculpturally, the felt has an implied sense of water through the movement of the fluid ink and the physical use of felt for water purification. The felt also serves as a three-dimensional extension of the drawings on paper with its stark white fibers contrasting the black ink and charcoal as demonstrated in *Threshold*, an enterable structure that begins where *Constant* ends. Performatively and generally speaking, water flows in and out of mind as a layered metaphor of connectedness from which no living thing can remove themselves, no matter what aspects of life, experience, or identity they take on.

Body=Mind

As a visual artist with a strong background in traditional performing arts, I have integrated these two pillars of my identity through my performance practice and video work. Integrations of this practice manifest through stream-of-consciousness movements, highly physical tasks, and ritualistic meditations in recorded documentation and live iterations. My large-scale drawings bridge the gap between my performance and visual practice, as they require my whole body to interact with the process: reaching ambidextrously, jumping, crouching, bending, and climbing on and off chairs. Bodily improvisation is used to create a reveal-and-

³ John Dewey, *Art As Experience* (New York: The Berkley Publishing Group, 1934), 29.

response system between my unconscious and conscious mind. This system dismisses the hierarchy of conscious logic and reason being the driving force of process. This physicality draws out a way of thinking through the body that alters the evolution of each piece, from erased ghost lines of a drawing being integrated, to the twists and turns of the body feeding or starving momentum of future movements.

South African artist William Kentridge's work is one example of the malleability of drawing to act as artifact, performance, and documentation by creating drawings that function as films, videos and performances of his drawing process, and sculptural pieces which interact with reflected drawings. He discusses his gestural charcoal process as being intuitive and "responding to what is revealed".⁴ I identify with this approach in my process and conversation with materials. Kentridge is also concerned with the way we see and how drawing searches for a balance between knowing and seeing. He often creates emotional dreamlike or nightmarish scenarios dealing with incomplete memory and social conflict.



William Kentridge, Drawing for the film *Sobriety, Obesity & Growing Old [Soho and Mrs. Eckstein in Pool]*, 1991

I have long been influenced by my experience with sleep-related hallucinations that occur in the liminal states between sleep and consciousness. Hypnagogic hallucinations, as one falls

⁴ *Art:21: Art in the Twenty-First Century Season Five*, directed by Susan Sollins (New York, New York: PBS Video, 2009), DVD.

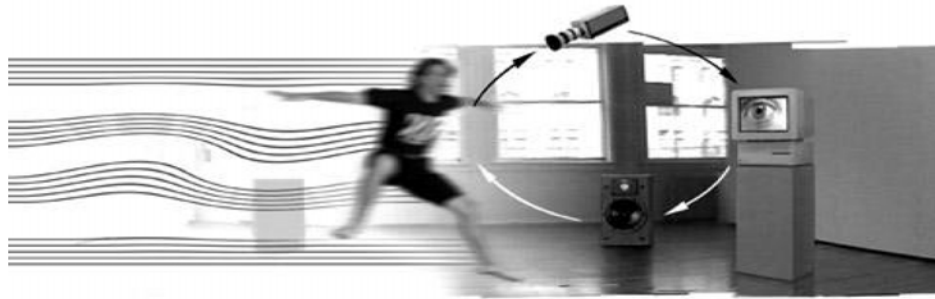
asleep, are said to occur due to a lack of sensory information. As such, the brain creates patterns, shapes, and colors to fill the loss. *Threshold*, a felt cave-like structure housing the video *Silt|Slag*, demonstrates a similar effect to hypnagogia while also resembling the ambiguous Rorschach ink-blot tests used in psychology. As such, *Threshold* references both the liminal and subjective areas of interplay between unconscious and conscious thought. Hypnopompic hallucinations, as one is waking, are hallucinations related to lucid dreaming in which the subconscious splices information into hybrid imagery, typically associated with strong emotional concerns.⁵ These visuals appear often in my drawings, both through ambiguously distressed bodies or foreboding hallucinatory spaces. Hypnopompic hallucinations are most frequent in children and individuals with frequent default tendencies towards empathy.⁶

Becoming familiar with visuals produced from my unconscious mind, it is intriguing to respond to what is revealed, while acknowledging that it is self-revealed. The mind has processed information unconsciously and been given a physical outlet to deliver it to the conscious mind. This process of revealing and responding is something that is concisely demonstrated by the work of David Rokeby's video-installation, *Very Nervous System*. In this piece, Rokeby uses a variety of software including cameras, synthesizers, and sound systems to create music from responses to body movement. While much of Rokeby's work has some element of interface interaction with human response, *Very Nervous System*, in particular revealed to him the timeline of this interaction and how it affected the outcome. While the camera had a 1/30th of a second delay between capturing his movements to creating sounds, his brain had a 1/10th of a second delay to being consciousness of his own movements. This gap in

⁵ Oliver Sacks, *Hallucinations* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012) 210-215.

⁶ Sacks, *Hallucinations*, 210-215.

time meant that he began to alter the future sounds by unconsciously responding to the initial sounds he helped the equipment produce.



David Rokeby, *Very Nervous System* diagram, 1986-1990

This delay that is the fulcrum to Rokeby's work is relative to what I discuss with the functions of procedural memory. Many kinds of memory and many ways to remember are the focus of Viktor Mayer-Schönberger's *Delete: The Virtue of Forgetting in the Digital Age*. Early on Viktor lays out some basic ways that prehistoric communities could communicate and survive through remembering. One of those ways was through demonstrative instructions or learning by doing until something becomes routine and automatic.⁷ Routine and muscle memory are more active in these situations than declarative memory, such as in remembering how to tie a shoe *without* thinking about it versus recounting an abstract piece of information. Procedural memory, part of implicit memory, is memory that we acquire and recall without realizing it.⁸

Continuing these thoughts on the body's ability to access different kinds of memory and experience, I had the opportunity to work with Tony Orrico, a performance artist with an MFA in Choreography, who imbues his work with dance by documenting his movements, primarily with graphite, for video and performance pieces. During a workshop, *Symmetry and Suspension: Options for A Performing Body*, he shared his process of isolating and expanding the body's perception of internal and external relationships to space. One aspect was noticing the micro

⁷ Viktor Mayer-Schönberger, *Delete: The Virtue of Forgetting in the Digital Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009) 18.

⁸ Mayer-Schönberger, *Delete: The Virtue of Forgetting in the Digital Age*, 18-19.

movements and responses to the environment, such as coplaning, which connects two symmetrical points of concentration on the body such as both ends of the collarbone, to an external source, anything from a physical spot, to a light, to a noise. This experience has helped



Tony Orrico, *Waning*, 2012.

me to deepen my understanding of the way my body moves and reacts to space and gravity with the materials I use. While his practice is more conceptually driven to focus on these bodily experiences for their own value, I have been able to integrate these insights into my practice to become more consciously aware, or as much as I can be, of the decisions my body reveals to me.

As I attempt to more thoughtfully respond to the things that are revealed in my process, it is still important to emphasize that no matter the level of introspection, my conscious response is not the source, but rather a partial translator. Time spent noticing details in the Orrico workshop, or studying Rokeby's work, are direct examples of how the conscious mind only displays the information that is generated by the unconscious.⁹ Our unconscious minds are aware of and respond to many external stimuli that are undetectable to our conscious minds. Neuroscientists have conducted tests gauging awareness of bodily changes brought on by imperceivable weights, light, vibrations, and images presented to blind eyes or in different languages, all with telling results.¹⁰ In all of these cases, with the subjects' conscious minds ignorant of the stimuli, they

⁹ David Livingstone Smith, *Why We Lie: The Evolutionary Roots of Deception and the Unconscious Mind* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004), 24.

¹⁰ Leonard Mlodinow, *Subliminal: How Your Unconscious Mind Rules Your Behavior* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012), 4, 45, 184.

were able to successfully respond to the test, while only the scientist running the programs knew why they were correct. Realizing how frequently these intuitive, “knowing” moments occur, my practice relies on my body as an informant between my unconscious and conscious mind, noticing and listening to these fragmented messages of deeper understanding.

Experience

Overall within my practice, John Dewey's *Art As Experience* has been a main point of reference in this integration of different aspects of my creative expressions. I see his concepts of what it means to have an experience, in addition to artistic experiences, as pivotal in envisioning the ways in which hybrids relate to their environments, specifically to the word *expression*. Dewey makes distinctions of impulse from impulsions, experience from *an* experience, and being from expressing, to discuss what it means to have a comprehensive aesthetic experience that carries forward meaning.¹¹ Dewey argues the way in which raw impulses and impulsions are turned into expression through conscious effort, is the same as turning raw materials into art objects and performances, as such “when the natural and the cultivated blend in one, acts of social intercourse are works of art”.¹² The distinction of art as an intentional experience of life is important when contradictory and harmonious parts create hybrids that are not seen as horrific or monstrous but as necessary integrations of selfhood and community.

An example of this integration can be found in the art practices of indigenous communities such as the Warlpiri of Central Australia. This community integrates life, art, and ritual, in performances that express several values. Improvisation, makeup, playfulness, dance, music, acting, and community participation are all utilized to round out the performers’, participants’, and viewer’s experience of what is expressed and embodied. Performative agency

¹¹ Dewey, *Art As Experience*, 64.

¹² Dewey, *Art As Experience*, 65.

of the Warlpiri is discussed by anthropologist Jennifer Biddle in her book *Breasts, Bodies, Canvas: Central Desert Art as Experience*. Biddle spent time with the indigenous communities in Central Australia, learning about their values and how they apply their artistic practices to their social structures. One such example of this is body painting, in which women paint on their exposed breasts with symbols signifying parts of the culture, and perform coordinating dances illustrating the use and nature of both the imagery and their bodies.¹³ Each image or shape has a few translatable meanings for the community, acting as a primary form of language for the people in these communities. Much of the discussion around the imagery includes Western viewers assuming the culture to be illiterate, as they do not utilize an equivalent alphabetical system. Rather, it is a conscious decision on the part of these communities to communicate through art and ritual as they align with their hierarchical and spiritual values.¹⁴ In this performance-based example, the everyday is elevated through art and celebration. These performances are also rare in masquerade-like activity in their lack of actual masks. Instead, the exposed, painted skin, and taken-on persona functions as the mask.¹⁵ The absence of a traditional masking is significant in further contextualizing the performer's identity into the performance.



Indigenous Australian breast painting

¹³ Jennifer Biddle, *Breasts, Bodies, Canvas: Central Desert Art as Experience* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2007) 97.

¹⁴ Jennifer Biddle, *Breasts, Bodies, Canvas: Central Desert Art as Experience* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2007) 34.

¹⁵ Elisabeth Cameron, "African Arts Women=Masks: Initiation Arts in North-Western Province, Zambia," *African arts*, Vol. 31, No.2 Special Issue: Women's Masquerades in Africa and the Diaspora (1998) : 57.

This bodily agency over their individual and communal identities is of particular interest to me as my performative works come from me as much as the communities to which I belong. An example of the parallel between the Warlpiri breast painting and my intentions is in my piece *Cyclical*, in which I cover my body in charcoal and attempt to wash it off. This piece expresses a personal and political identity as someone of diverse ethnicity, while focusing on the bodily interaction with the material as both a physical costume and metaphorical removal of costume.



Cyclical, 2015

The whole process of *Cyclical* references something that, similar to the differing masquerade performances, happens on a recurring basis noting a significant moment. Most of my performance-based works, though from my Western perspective, have an underlying aspiration towards the integration of life art that these indigenous practices maintain. I relate this aspiration further to Dewey's ideas of artistic expression(s) being integrated and shared experiences for communities to grow with and learn from. Additionally I value the use of the body, and artistic expression, as a primary and legitimate form of communication and understanding, whether more focused on general tasks such as in *Against Self-Sabotage*, improvisational movement as in *Impulsions*, or meditations on identity such as in *Cyclical* and *Commune*. Overall my practice values bodily and material agency as core part of that expression.



Against Self-Sabotage, 2016

Tying Ends Together

Latent presents an enveloping composite environment, inviting viewers to enter a comprehensive space in which they place themselves within a hybrid as opposed to being given a separate, specimen-like object of hybridity to scrutinize. This immersive approach begins with the large-scale drawing *Constant*. This continuously evolving drawing evokes a psychological landscape which visually plays with positive and negative space as it wraps around the room leading to *Threshold*, an inked, felt, cave-like structure, which viewers are able to physically enter, creating further immersion. Nested within *Threshold* is *Silt|Slag*, a video that tightly zooms in on the bodily interaction with charcoal and ink, both materials used in *Constant* and *Threshold*. Mirroring these visuals on the other side of the room is a projection of *Impulsions*, a dance-based video piece, onto undulating transparent theatre scrim. Though the materials of the mirrored side containing *Constant* and *Threshold* are not physically present in *Impulsions*, they are implied through the abstracted bodily movement and color palette. The audio components of both *Silt|Slag* and *Impulsions* also abstract and combine bodily elements with nature, without illustrating specific reactions.

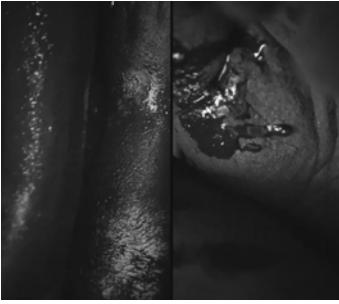


Impulsions (Five Expressions), 2016

These hybrids are indefinable by their very nature of being synthesized composites. As fused elements they are both new and old at the same time, building a connection between familiarity and the unknown. The ambiguity of the vaguely familiar yet unrecognizable becomes most useful when the compound perspective of a hybrid lens confronts the viewers' individual perceptual lenses. The disruptive nature of the hybrid challenges our perception in order to find meaning and understanding. In challenging recognition, hybrids question our understanding of what is thought to be known and the complex way information interconnects. Utilizing the hybrid lens, my intent is to broaden the scope of accepted realities by revealing alternate interpretations that can help us become aware of our biases, subtleties of shared experiences, or what we think we know.

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Silt|Slag
5'30"
Single-channel
video
2015
(Video and still)



Impulsions
8'46"
Single-channel
video
2015
(Video and still)



Threshold
Dimensions Variable
Felt, ink, and charcoal
2016
(*Silt|Slag* inside)



Latent
Install of
Constant,
Threshold,
Silt|Slag, and
Impulsions
projection



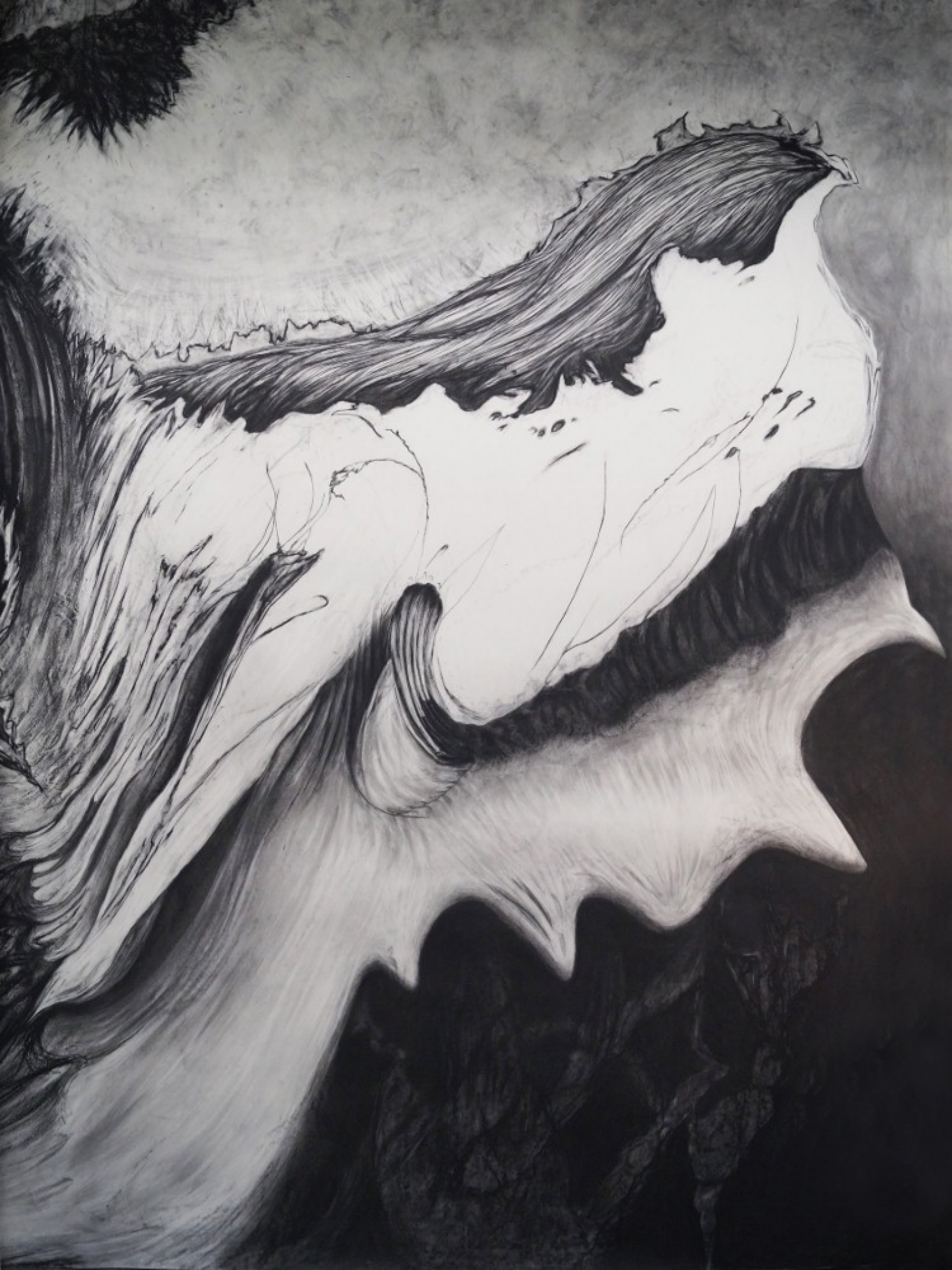
Constant
9'x36'
Charcoal
on paper
2015-2016
(Five
sections)



Impulsions Projection
Impulsions on theatre
scrim
Appx. 10'x14'











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UPCOMING EXHIBITIONS









