Under the See

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by

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Artist's Statement

Water is life's matter and matrix, mother and medium.   Albert Szent-Gyorgyi

Fiction is fact selected and understood; fiction is fact arranged and charged with purpose.   Thomas Wolfe

The surface of the photograph and the way we see and process physical stimuli are distinct. My thesis questions the seamlessness of photography and examines the ways photography influences our understanding of how and what we see.

I call attention to the role of perception in interpreting photographs by dissecting images into their constituent parts—pixels of color data. This requires viewers to piece together an experiential vision of water, asking them to scrutinize their own perceptual assumptions and inviting them to challenge their notions of photographic representation**.**

I highlight phenomenology as a "way of seeing" in my pieces by layering and collapsing increments of time, space and movement. This works on two levels: by showing how the digital image can represent a dynamic record of a specific experience and by creating a site for the viewer to examine their own perceptual tendencies and actively participate with the work. In doing so, I uncover a new meaning embedded within the photographs by enabling the viewer to experience my subject matter in a way that can only be achieved through digital photography.

This is especially important in the pieces *Overexposure* and *Digital One-Second Exposure*. In both works, I digitally recreate a patch of the Charles River. *Overexposure* is the aggregate result of a system of combined shutter speeds and apertures that captures a section of the river over a period of two hours. By rearranging these photos in a large grid, I take the viewer into the scene to see the whole two hours at once. The grid format reminds the viewer that each exposure is comprised of data and pixels. This is reinforced by the metadata in the bottom row of the grid detailing the exposures that create the piece.

Similarly, *Digital One-Second Exposure* collapses an event into a single image comprised of one hundred layers. Each of the one hundred exposures lasted $1/100^{th}$ of a second, and the piece as a whole represents one second of time taken over a ten-minute span. Digital data, unlike an analog signal, is stored with finite boundaries – either 1 or 0 – with no transition states. Just as the color data in this piece is split up into 1s and 0s, the structure of the whole piece breaks time down into discrete packages ($1/100^{th}$ sec) that are then reassembled to form an event which would be unattainable without digital photography (one second recorded over ten minutes).

Water is ubiquitous in our experience of the world because it is central to our very existence, yet any attempt to capture it photographically raises questions about representing motion accurately with still photography. Anyone who has seen a high-speed photograph of a water drop or a long exposure of a flowing river knows that water can look very different depending on how it is exposed. Yet at the same time, both are "accurate" records of water. When digital choices are layered on top of the chaos of water's constant motion, photographs reveal the complexity of assembling precise or accurate records. The images presented here are phenomenological in nature, allowing perception and mutability to enter into an understanding of the nature of water and the nature of photography.

In *"Truth in Travel,"* I appropriate the carefully crafted photos of Condé Nast *Traveler* magazine. These are perfect examples of the way images can be made to affect one's perception. By isolating the garishly jewel-like colors of the Caribbean seas that Condé Nast sells to its readers and by pairing them with an illusionary form, I make a playful representation of the Caribbean waters. I arrange and assemble the contrasting colors in such a way as to create an optical illusion of movement.

I break down these images in my thesis in order to examine the perceptual processes through which we understand photographs. By aligning engineered illusions with photographic ones and highlighting the malleability of images, I want to reveal the processes behind photography's seamless surface. I also use photographs to create representations of reality by fictionalizing building blocks of raw fact. To do so, I deconstruct my images and focus on color, shape and layers and how those otherwise static elements are seen and accepted as surrogates for what is actually constant movement in the world.

With *Box of (G)rain (Bahamas)*, I push the atomization of color and the construction of illusion in *Truth in Travel* one step further. I do this by focusing on the movement of "pixels" of color — sushi rice dyed with Epson printer ink. To deconstruct the piece Bahamas further, I analyzed the CMYK distribution ratios of the Bahamas image file and then translated these colors into rice "pixels" by maintaining the proportions of color that are in the original image file. The viewer physically animates the "pixels" when they turn the handle and see these points of color as a representation of rippling water.

Within these four pieces, I build a heightened and altered reality by playing with conceptions of time, movement and photography. I reveal the mechanics of fabricated visual representation while examining what lies behind the act of perception.