

absurd hero

By

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ABSTRACT

My thesis exhibition, *absurd hero*, consists of works that reflect ideas of labour and process as a reflection of jobs performed by unskilled workers. The results are visual representations that articulate the idea with repetitive accumulation of marks as sets, exposing mistakes through the process and establishing a metaphor for the relative consistency in performing a task over again.

The interest came for time spent evaluating “time” itself in the context of the day to day while utilizing space as a progressive void we fill with tasks and activities. Since life is futile and the process of time only moves forward, time equates to the marks I create that fill the void of space (the given frame of the work), and thus evolving a cross hatch of the two elements of time and space.

VITA

Erick R. Figueroa was born in Tegucigalpa, Honduras on August 12, 1981 and is the son of Maria Lucilla Palma. He graduated from R. L. Turner High School in Farmers Branch, Texas in 2000. He proudly attended Brookhaven Community College in Farmers Branch from 2004 – 07, where he then transferred to the Kansas City Art Institute in Kansas City, Missouri, from 2007 – 09, where he received his Bachelors of Fine Arts.

After receiving his BFA, he moved back to Texas, where he attended Texas Christian University in Fort worth, Texas, beginning in 2011 and assisted teaching for Nick Bontrager at TCU for two semesters. Erick will be the proud receipiant on his Masters of Fine Arts degree in the spring of 2013.

Erick currently lives in Plano, Texas, with his excitable English foxhound and sensational wife Kira, who he married in the fall on 2012.

absurd hero

As I am interested in discovering noble ways of which its worth spending my time, I compare what I do as an artist to the analogous tasks I see other people perform. In preparation for my thesis exhibition *absurd hero*, I debated on whoes works, jobs, and tasks are more valuable and why. I found myself most intrigued by the unskilled labor. I believe repetition and consistancy provide many unskilled laborers not only simple tasks to learn, but also security in knowing what they have to do next within the given task. As they pass through their day, and I mine, we share a commonality in that most likely we will wake tomorrow. We both wash our hands as we tally another mark in our own personal history. Patterns can be created by anything, like the machines and tools used in labor jobs that are always specific to the task at hand becoming an extention of the user. Yet, not always are tools effective, as pencils break and pens leak I choose to accumulate marks as metaphors for time, these works show parallels to the day laborer and appreciation of the repetitious quality in there tasks.

Immigrating illegally from Tegucigalpa, Honduras at the age of seven with my mother and older sister, I was forced to assimalate into a foreign culture I had never heard of. I am not special, the United States has a long history of assimaltion through adaptation that ultimately integrate into the society. The communities I experienced were lower-class, latin immigrant communities that provided a haven for similar incoming immigrants to live. My experience with this demographic provided me information in

understanding the social dynamic of work, pay and education. These dynamics I perceive are low-pay uneducated families who typically provide unskilled labour needed in the workforce. Given the time to ponder my history with this dynamic, I'm interested in the physical patterns created by everyday unskilled labourers provide on the surface they work on, such as lawns, windows and carpets. These residual surfaces provided the empitus for the works in this exhibition, *absurd hero*.

Although there are patterns of relative consistency in our world like the rising sun or seasons, as well innate patterns in individuals like breathing or blinking, I choose to focus my work on the consistent actions chosen by individuals. Albert Camus in the *Myth of Sisyphus*, evokes a picture of an individual who attempts to escape the underworld by stealing the secrets of the gods. He is caught and condemned to rolling a stone up a hill, only to watch it roll down the other side, as he will repeat the task for eternity. Camus writes

“The workmen of today work everyday in his life at the same tasks, and this fate is no less absurd. But it is tragic only at the rare moments when it becomes conscious”

Reading this I see Camus suggesting a coming to terms with one's life, that by accepting the repetition of a task peace is made in understanding what is to come next. Much like Sisyphus, the immigrant works the same jobs for much of his/her life in order provide for

Albert Camus. *The Myth of Sisyphus and other Essays*. (New York: Vintage International, 1991),

a household. Though the worker has the ability to choose his daily task, lack of education greatly reduced his/her options, creating urgency to take what task may be readily available. Unskilled laborers typically perform jobs that demand the individual to continuously repeat a given task throughout the day, minimizing opportunity for creativity and chance, merging a relationship between machine and man. Two works in the exhibition that demonstrate these ideas are *Cramp* (see Plate I) and *Burnout* (see Plate II).

Cramp (Plate I), consists of horizontal marks that cascade down the surface of the paper, repeating themselves and allowing my natural inflections of the hand to create waves that end abruptly to a horizontal tear. The tear, functions as a disruption in the system of horizontal lines made from a black ball point pen. That disruption in this work, acts as an activator to challenge the consistency and create dissonance. The same can be seen in *Burnout* (Plate II), a large charcoal drawing created by using an ambersan stencil. The process consisted of tracing the stencil once, then pushing the stencil against the surface of the paper vertically above the previous drawn symbol, and then drawn again. As the process continues, charcoal residue builds underneath the template creating a drag of smeared charcoal dust from one ambersan to another. The effort of repetition is also suggested in the meaning of the symbol itself, to do one thing, “and” do it again. The template functions as a metaphor for the “easy to learn” tasks that unskilled workers asked to learn. The faster they learn and repeat, means the faster they perform. Yet repetitive tasks leave one to wonder outside of the task itself, as I did in the making in these works. Was I wasting my time, and what does that mean?

Deciding to embrace the idea of wasting time, I searched for a way to create something which could express this thought. *Tape mound* (see Plate III), is 37 jumbo rolls of grey duct tape, where I pulled approximately 72' single strips that I layed on the floor. Repeating this process, until each roll finished, the mound began to emerge, giving form to the waste. The layers of tape were bent in order to achieve the sedimentary layers seen from aside of the mound that rests on a sanded wooden plank hung about eye level giving emphasis to each horizontal strip. What came from this work was another duct tape piece that took a circular form in *Cylinder mound* (Plate IV). Here the same approach was taken as in *Tape mound* (Plate III), but the form is rolled. This is an attempt to bring the rolls of duct tape back to its original circular form while eliminating its utility, as a result, the nonfunctional object shifts from its initial intentions of being unrolled and used as conventional tape, to an expansion of the accumulated strips as a circular form. The form uses the real space around it, as its frame that it threatens to overtake, only if given more wasted time.

Tape exhaustion (see Plate XII), also made of layered duct tape strips that are just short of 4ft and are stacked along one axis of the 8' square pedestal that rises 4 ½ ft tall. This piece echoes the process used in *Tape mound* (Plate III) of layering of tape strips, but adds a variable of gravity that is suggested by the strand at its base that wraps the three sides it touches. Here the reality of the tapes physical weight is shown. Rather than simply displaying as a spectacle I wanted to force the accumulation of tape strips to have an absurd function similar to its initial function, to attach and adhere. In the tape pieces, framing is extended into the real space of the gallery itself providing the

possibility of continued additions of more layers. All other works in the exhibition, the frame is the only limiting condition.

Wade Guyton is a contemporary American artist who uses large inkjet printers that print out imperfect renditions of Daniel Buren like paintings submitted through a computer file. The paintings reflect a process of a manually agitated collaboration with machines that parallel the world we live in. Roberta Smith, a writer for the New York Times wrote a review of Guyton's retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art from 2012.

“The paintings in particular clearly tax the equipment that generates them; they emerge with glitches and irregularities — skids, skips, smears or stutters — that record the process of their own making, stress the almost human fallibility of machines and provide a semblance of pictorial incident and life.”

The use of tools to provide assistance to a given task is nothing new, such as the inkjet printer replacing the occupation of a scribe. Yet inkjet printers at times fall short of their potential because of maintenance, such as low ink or paper jams. The two drawings *Push and fold forward* (Blue) (see Plate V) and *Push and fold back* (Red) (see Plate VI), are illustrations of this mechanical failure. Showing a similar process, both contain the same three elements used; light, time, and accident. The horizontal lines

Roberta Smith, “Dots, Stripes, Scans,” *New York Times*, October 4, 2012

in *Push and fold back* (Red) (Plate VI) along with the vertical lines in *Push and fold forward* (Blue) (Plate V) are ruler drawn lines using ball point pens that reference office material. The rigid lines only exist in order to achieve the natural accident. This accident is the result of the build up of ink deposits underneath the drawing side of the ruler. Without these deposits the lines only exist as lines frozen in time, the ink blots as a result, show an evolution of the narrative in which the lines where drawn in order to fill the void of the paper. These blotted trails represent the residue of material remains from a given process. Much like a streak left on a window after cleaning, the authenticity of the accident comes from its accidental existence, and to attempt to recreate the authentic would be as futile as life itself. While the Minimal aesthetic can be seen in the vertical and horizontal lines, Abstract Expression is seen in the blots between them providing movement and gesture. While the previous drawings retain the dual axis approach, *Lets work together* (see Plate VII), loosens to make a more organic adjustment. This adjustment was made thinking about a conversation between two people with two points of views, that contain criticism, support, and context.

Using markers, graphite and red ball point pen where sets of systems integrate in a composition that play out a structured meeting of ideas. The sets of overlapping vertically organic lines are drawn with marker, suggesting a conversation between the set pairs. The sets communicate between two black graphite ambiguous forms along the sides that seem to monitor the conversation, while four perfect circles lay on top of the pair of line sets. At first the function of the red circles are unclear, but with further investigation it becomes evident they point to mistakes created in the process. They reveal a dent in

the paper, an overbleed of the marker causing a darker moment in a stroke, a vertical line drawn too long in comparison to the others, and a line that merged with another. In overlapping these sets and exposing the truths with red circles, it ironically created a veil of information that hid the errors I was attempting to reveal.

Much like the process of tasks that require repetitive motions, it is clear to me, that the distinction between one individual's final product of the same task to another individual is always in some ways slightly different. My idea of relative consistency says this is always true, thus allowing comparison and conversation between multiple sets, generates a greater lexicon of visual information. *Lets work together* (Plate VII), *Macro* (see Plate VIII), and the set of three small drawings *Left of center* (see Plate IX), *Center* (see Plate X), and *Right of center* (see Plate XI), is an attempt to broaden the frame of the an accumulated set in order to include more, by expanding the perspective. *Macro* (Plate VIII), is a dialogue between two sets of accumulated systems, one being a set of red horizontally drawn lines at the base of the painting, and the other four black circles drawn above. The lines are drawn with red ink and resemble the lines from *Cramp* (Plate I), while the circles are of black oil stick, both articulated on raw canvas. In the process of installing the show, I realized the wall *Macro* (Plate VIII) hangs on provided a distance needed in order to allow the viewer to change perspective, while in contrast to *Macro* (Plate VIII), *Left of center* (Plate IX), *Center* (Plate X), and *Right of center* (Plate XI) have forced the viewer to be intimate with the the works. The addition of layers of information in the context of these four drawings emerged in thinking about perspective in relation to a micro versus macro scale. Navigating through a dense network of streets

and highways, arial perspective at times via navigation system, can be a huge plus. With a swipe of an index finger, the digital screen expands its view of any topographical location, while it maintains its current location. That 'location' is important to consider when viewing the accumulated system relationships that begin to integrate socially in these last four works. As some pen drawn systems reflect others from other works such as *Right of center* (Plate XI) and *Macro* (Plate VIII), the idea is to simply change the perspective of intimacy in which system relations are viewed.

Using similar techniques to a day laborer as a way of studying work and action, this exhibition continues my intrigue in mark making over a diversity of tasks that expand outside the idea of labor. What is most important is not what you do, but that you do it. These works reflect my sensibilities of culture and experiences of demographic communities in relation to laborious process. As an artist, I find filling more of my time thinking rather than making. But when I do make, the processes fill my time as I navigate through space constantly filling voids, if not waste some time. So as time continues to only move forward, I add to my lexicon until there is no more time to kill. Time is precious as navigation is difficult, but forward I move consistantly adding tasks to fill my time.

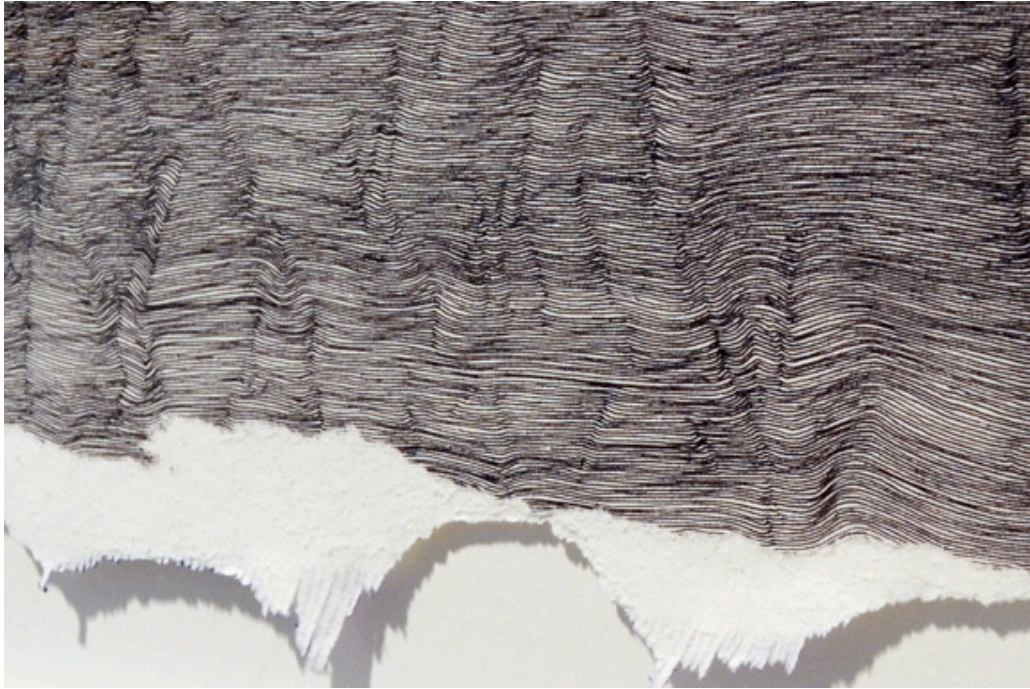
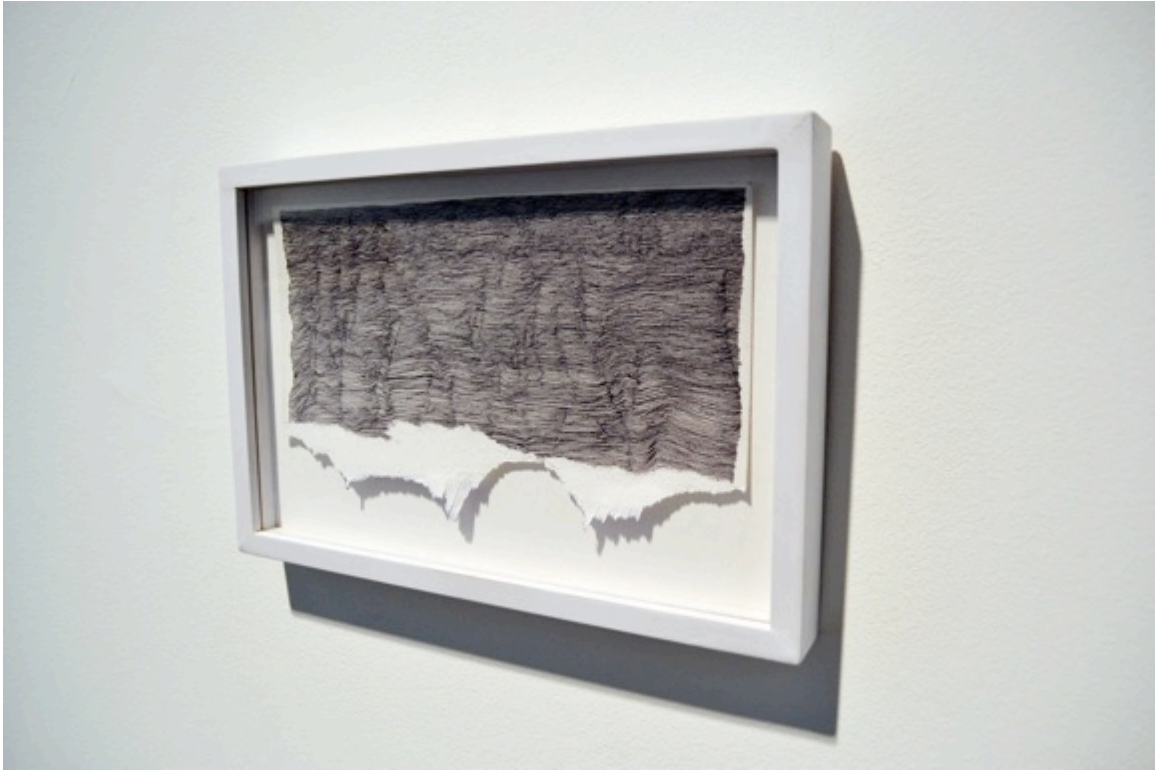


Plate I.
Cramp, 2013
Ink pen on paper,
6.5 x 10"



Plate II.
Tape mound, 2012-13
37 rolls of industrial duct tape on wooden plank
12.75 x 72 x 3.5"



Plate III.
Burnout, 2012-13
Charcoal and prisma color on torn paper
42 x 47.5"



Plate IV.
Cylinder Mound, 2013
4 rolls of industrial duct tape
8.35 x 8.5 x 2.5"



Plate V.
Push and forward (blue), 2013
Blue ink pen on paper
19 x 25"

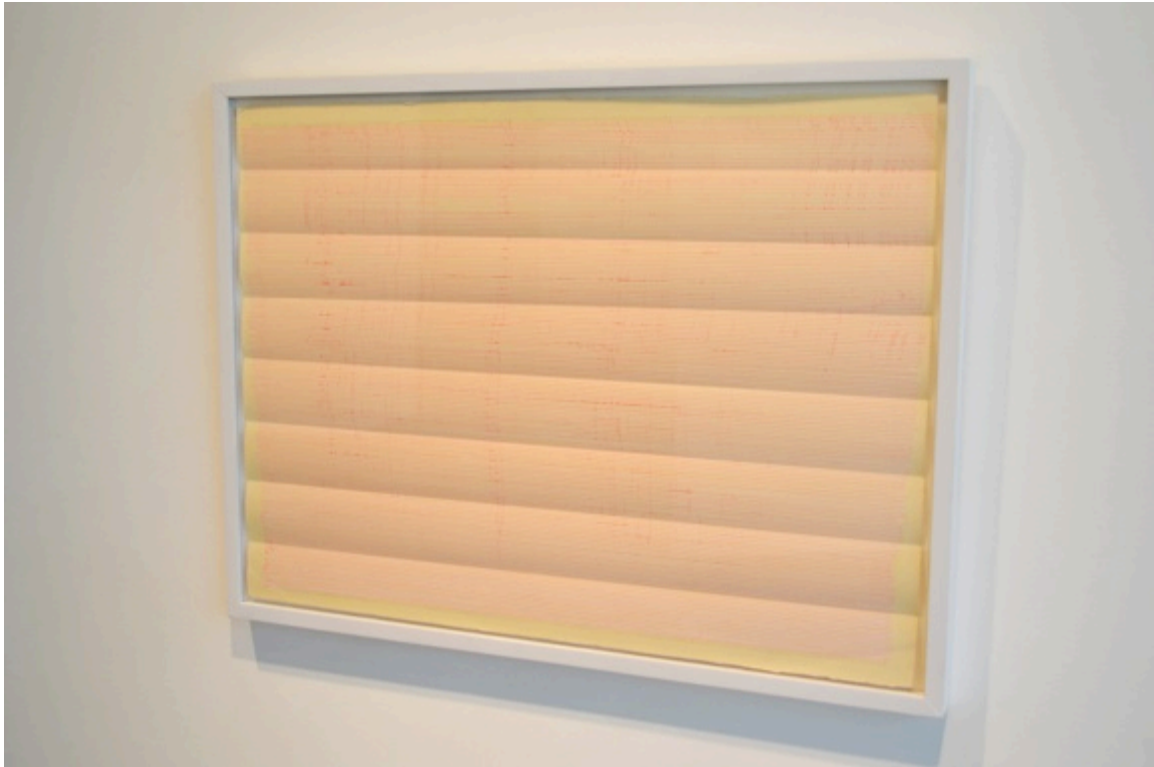


Plate VI.
Push and fold back (red), 2012
Red ink on paper
22 x 30"



Plate VII.
Lets work together, 2013
Graphite, red ink pen, marker on paper
19 x 25"

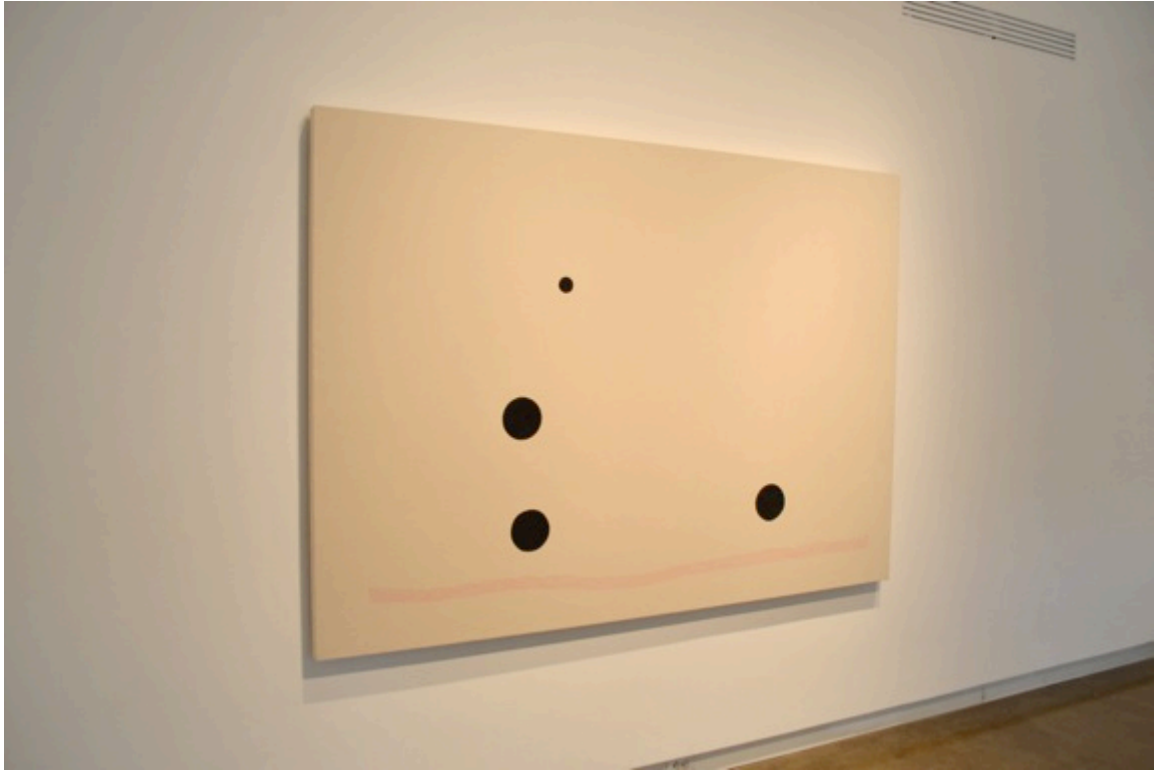


Plate VIII.
Macro, 2013
Red ink pen, oil stick on raw canvas
60 x 84"



Plate IX.
Left of center, 2013
Ink, charoal on paper
9.75 x 7.25"

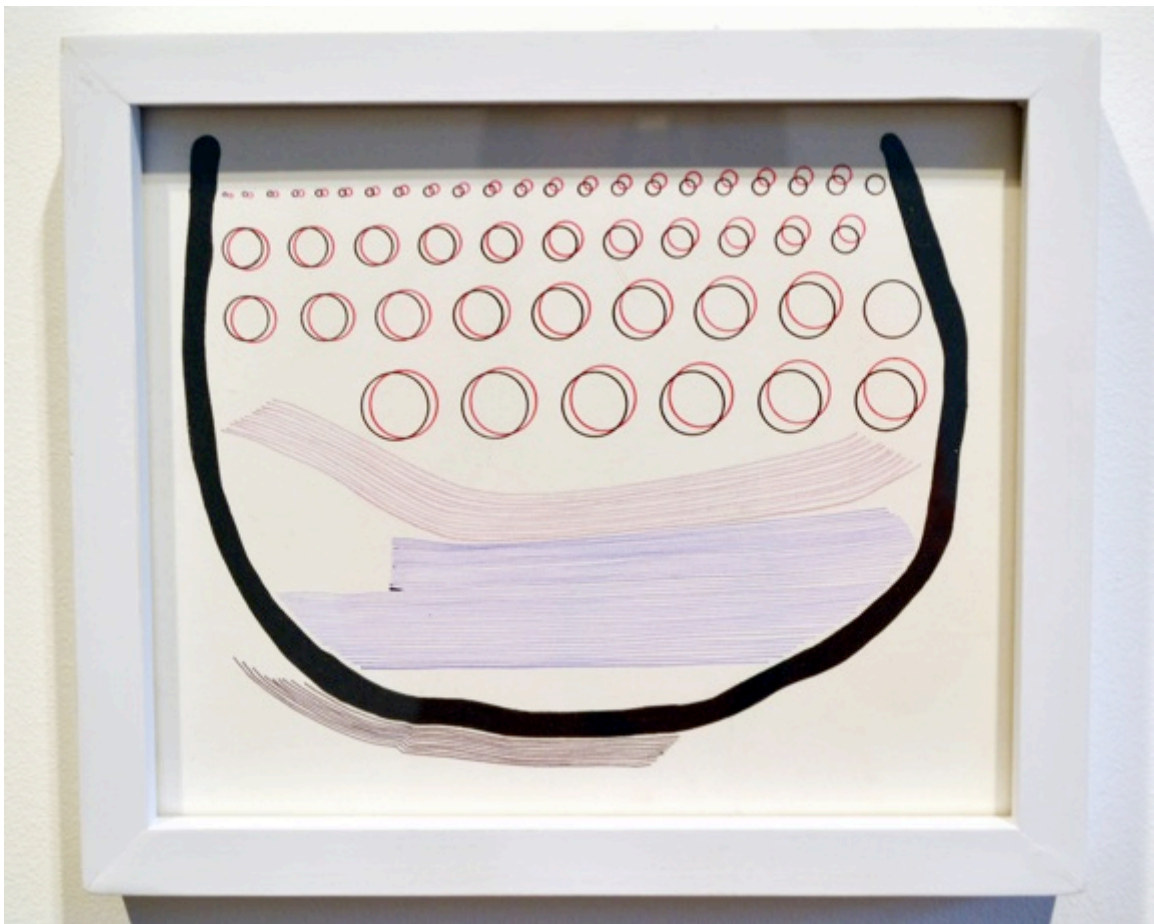


Plate X.
Center, 2013
Ink, prsimacolor, graphite on paper
8.75 x 9.5"

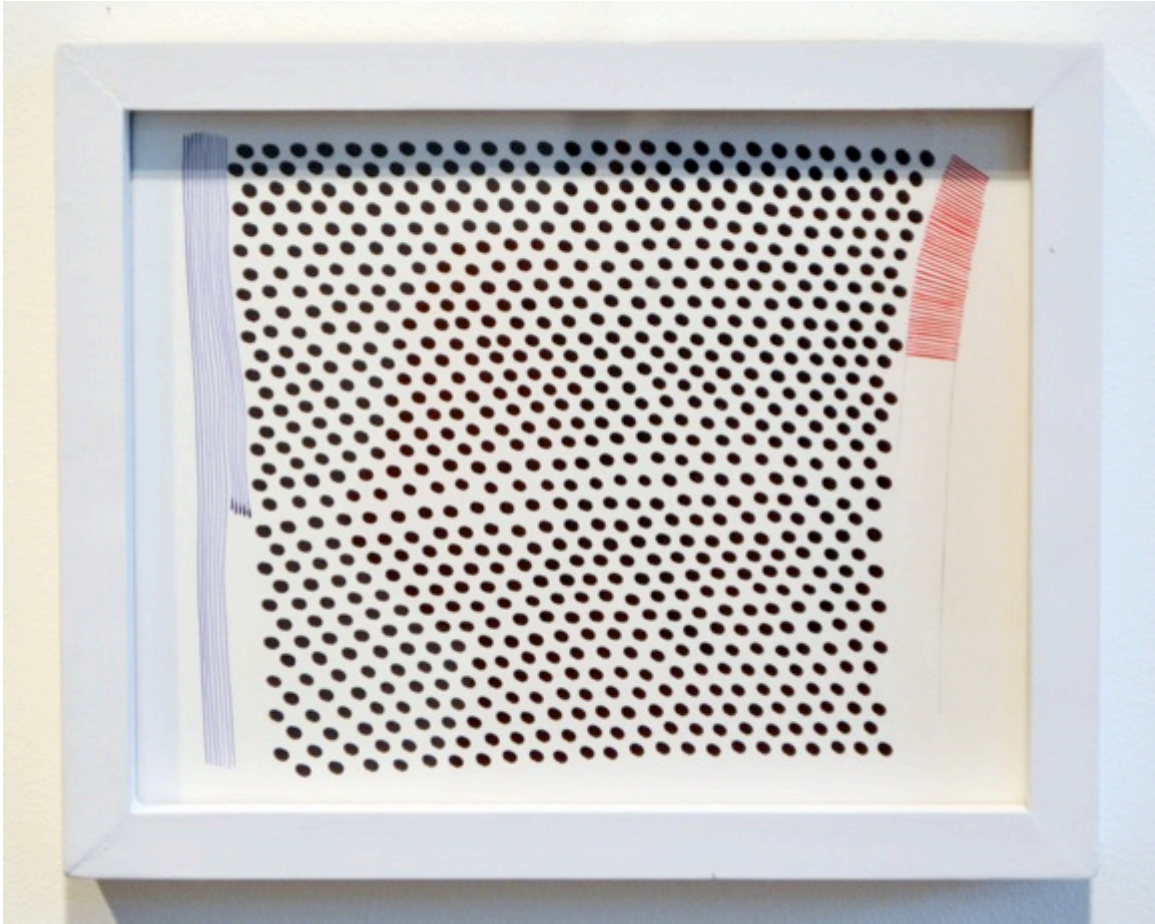


Plate XI.
Right of center, 2013
Fabric pen, ink, graphite on paper
7.75 x 9.75"



Plate XII.
Tape exhaustion, 2013
8 rolls of industrial duct tape
25 x 20 x 2.5