

*Interview with Ari Norris 2017*

*In terms of “style,” or “category,” your work acts incredibly sculptural through the use of light and shadow, strong dimensionality, and incorporation of layered or staggered panes, yet generally exists on a flat surface. What do you feel like has influenced your work and decisions regarding your approach?*

I have made 3 dimensional pieces, but seem to be able to say more of what I want to say in 2D, or perhaps it's at the edge of that boundary.

I'm drawn to things like tape, fabric, thick paper that will take some abuse, things that are somewhat malleable but not quite sculpture. I'm interested in the physical perforations, sanding, scoring and cutting, and the idea of palimpsest and translucency. The first time I was given a canvas to paint as an undergrad, I ended up cutting through it. I couldn't think of it as a blank surface, I couldn't get myself to deny it as an object with a warp and weft (even if I didn't know what those terms meant at the time).

*Entanglement* is a recent 3 dimensional piece that developed directly from my current studio practice yet addresses space and boundary in a completely different way.

*I understand that you completed your MFA at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and BFA at Northern Illinois University; is it safe to say that the correlation that exists between agriculture and architecture in your work could be derived or influenced from your time spent at both of these contrasting locations?*

*If so, could you expand on that?*

I never thought of the NIU/SAIC contrast in terms of agriculture and architecture, although I can understand how it would appear so, given the polarities in my work.

I came to architecture and blueprints more as embodiments of belief systems...manifested in a physical ideal. For example, the body of work which grew out of research spent in Rome was a rumination on the tension between the iconic religious architecture of Rome and the beauty of the detritus and living city in which it resides. The original references are my photographs that focused on stains, cracks, and refuse as well as architecture. I created a series of drawings using masking tape to render these structures. I felt that the masking tape pieces were sort of like husks of their former selves, a history that remains as a trace. Currently I live and work in a suburb that is right on the edge of Chicago, so it doesn't feel that remote (the streets mostly follow that familiar Chicago grid); however, I have a yard that's decent sized by most urban standards, so I'm able to have an apiary and chicken coop. The honeybees in particular have inspired my work in the last few years (architecture, navigation, boundaries...)

*When taking on site-specific work, can you tell me about how and if your process adapts, and how it is influenced from location to location? Any moments or examples that stick out in particular you can expand on?*

I usually love the constraints and immutable characteristics of a site as it requires another layer of investigation of the work. It's not just about presentation, but providing another lens to influence the meaning of the work through a different iteration.

I knew that the piece at HPAC (*Pantheon Wave*) would be strongly influenced by the architecture of the space and the natural light, and of course I knew there would be shadows cast; however, I didn't anticipate how strong they would be and how the movement of those shadows over time extended the physical perimeter of the piece in an exciting way. Eventually, I

omitted the powdered graphite originally employed to delineate the image, so that the majority of these images are made with masking tape alone. The site provided intense natural illumination to reveal the image.

*Can you tell me about your process in regards to working with graphite and masking tape? How did it begin?*

I'm a strong believer in making material studies. It usually happens naturally, but has become somewhat codified over the years...noticing the way materials behave and interact with each other, investigating surfaces. I have always been interested in "where things collect", sometimes metaphorically, sometimes physically, and so of course I would always notice how the slightly sticky edge of a piece of tape on a sketchbook or other surface would eventually darken over time and seize upon that natural occurrence.

*Containment Sketchbook* is a recent piece that began with this kind of attitude, capturing these tiny studio fragments in small glassine envelopes. It was very improvisational, and in becoming a piece that I would share with the public, it still maintains the smudges and marks of the process.

*On your website, I see that a lot of your work interacts and interprets human and geographic history, (i.e. "Fault Lines,"); Can you tell me about how this story in particular resonates with you, and how history relates and impacts your work?*

As a younger artist, I engaged in a practice of mistake cataloguing. The *Mistake Book* project was sort of a pastiche of religious ritual where I kept a recording of every mistake I made on a daily basis. At one point I even organized and 'curated' my list, creating hierarchies of mistake groupings. This in turn informed my other work, but also became obsessively scrupulous, underscoring the ridiculousness of tracking such things. More recently the story of the S A Andree arctic expedition (*Fault Lines*) was fascinating to me as a large historic failure. This was an anomaly for me as it was derived from a single narrative, but the story and photographic evidence left behind were so compelling. The first image I worked with was the balloon on its side. Its perforated vulnerability reminded me of the frailty of the human body. I think this and other aspects of the story led me into some of the ideas I'm working with now.

*I came across your "Documentation of Cracks and Posters in Mexico," from 2008; After exploring these images, there is a very clear relationship with the subject matter that these images focuses on, with your statements on everyday interactions, leftover faith, pilgrimage, etc, along with your work in general; tell me about how photography, film, and documentations of other kinds, influence your work, and where did this relationship begin?*

I applied my curiosity about impotent (or leftover) faith, places where things collect, suspension of disbelief and the capricious nature of personal belief systems to Roman architecture, and then to films that correspond to the above thought process. I re-viewed these films, looking for what I think of as a tectonic moment and photographed them. The photograph became a source for the resulting piece made of masking tape and powdered graphite and the 'lines' that make up the drawings are simply where the graphite drifts into the space between the cut and torn tape. Although this body of work began with photographs of iconic religious architecture, re-visiting these films over time became a pilgrimage to a different sort of site. The documentation in Mexico certainly relates to these ideas as well as the physical surfaces of my work: decollage, layers and remnants. Recent map based work such as *Vouchers* and

*Despite (St. Louis)* touch on some of these ideas as well, while also referencing illuminated manuscripts and conflating the boundaries and borders of the body with geographic boundaries.

*As far as material choices, is there anything you are currently experimenting with, or new methods you would like to incorporate in your future work?*

Recently, I created a subtle pattern in Photoshop to be etched on glass. It's different from the other pieces in that I'll be working with a texture cut into the glass as I incorporate collage and paint into the surface. My most recent mixed media work on paper incorporates the vibrant hues and intense chroma of the colored gels used in microscopic visualization. I've been looking at human genome mapping as well as other interior views of boundaries within the body which has influenced my color choices this past year. *Genome Tectonics* is a piece that most clearly reflects this.

*Can you tell us about any future opportunities coming up that you have?*

This Spring I'm curating a group show at the Riverside Art Center that will include my work and 3 other artists. The tectonic implications of the title STRIKE/SLIP, where the ground shifts horizontally in an earthquake, suggests our shared interest in borders and boundaries. I am also collaborating with other artists in video work. Later this spring I'll have work in a group show which addresses the serial or structural qualities of book pages, and I'm exploring other exhibition and curatorial possibilities.