

The Least Nostalgic

By Matthew Kratz
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THE APOLOGY

A secondary definition of 'Apology' is "informal: A poor substitute, for example: Make-shift". At the beginning of my second-year, while observing and reading, I constructed a vast imaginative plan for a thesis show filled with a series of narrative paintings, and immersive installations— a Gesamtkunstwerk for the senses. The drive for a good show— more accurately a monumental show — is hardly unique. Over-reaching goals in students are close to universal, if I had to hazard a guess. My graduating show materialized in its final form through a makeshift; I allowed accidents to happen to reveal hidden aspects of the work and to coalesce the past six years of my art studies. As a student, I used to be sure what painting was — what art was, but I lost those certainties and came

to identify with my own naiveté.

I need to give my sincere thanks to my Fall 2021 MFA Studio advisor Ericka Walker, and my conversations with so many other faculty, for quickly tempering my initial overreaching exhibition plans. From their observations, what to me initially was an ideal or dream of visual impact and narrative, quickly turned into a folly and an apology of what my work should be—that is to say it was a poor substitute of vision. My final MFA show began in earnest, before any work was done, through these formative conversations.

I will take a moment here to reflect on where my exhibition and paper were conceived and developed: as a guest of Kjipuktuk, Mi'kma'ki, and Turtle Island; on the ancestral and unceded land of the Mi'kmaq people covered by the "Treaties of Peace and Friendship". This place's double life as stolen land presumptively assigned the names of Halifax, Nova

Scotia, and North America, urges us to think about all that has happened to place us here now.

I've been feeling uncertain about who I am, where I've been, and what I believed in the past. Being caught up in the whirlwind of activism, reconciliation, work-life balance, personal connections, theory, networking, etc., has been for me a cloudy operation of moments. I was even anxious about the "right way" to write a land acknowledgment. I've spent my life looking for clarity. Every time that I think to myself: "It's all so clear now!", the fog rolls in.

KJIPUKTUK, MI'KMA'KI. In Forum last year, when it was just online, Karin would take a moment for us to go by a window to listen, reflect, and acknowledge our place. I'd go sit at the door to my balcony; I have a beautiful view from my balcony. I value my high-up place—my solitary watchtower—observing the world and its changes below. I can see the old suspension bridge, the Irving Shipyard, the round church, a red-roofed cathedral, the chimneys from the power station (Bob Bean refers to them as the Eiffel Towers of Halifax), a pair of

blue apartments run by the same company as mine, a small chunk of Barrington Street, Downtown Dartmouth across the harbour—Kjipuktuk, tower cranes, and a naval base. I always seem to miss the process, but the Navy periodically lifts ships up out of the water to clean and reapply their anti-fouling paint. A real treat was seeing one of Canada's aged submarines completely out of water. Some early mornings, I can often hear intercom announcements and blaring alarms. I can't sleep without my curtains drawn because they insist on aiming their lights directly into my room. When you have half of the Canadian Navy across the street, you won't have very considerate neighbours. On Sundays and Catholic holidays, I can hear the bells toll from the old red-roofed cathedral. On foggy days I can hear the floating fortresses sound their fog horns; that's how I know it's foggy outside. On rainy days, I'm so high up off the ground that unless a gust of wind pushes some rain onto the window, I can't hear anything. My favourite days are when it's windy, and the gusts buffet my outside walls and vibrate the

room. I can't describe the sound, but it's oddly soothing. Traffic is background. Sirens are frequent when the emergency vehicles come across the bridge and up Barrington. Sunsets are frequent too; the Earth spinning and

whatnot. And I can see the seasons change; by far the slowest change I perceive. **And despite the noise, it feels silent.**

"I think that style is a complicated terrain and not one that we unilaterally choose or control with the purposes we consciously intend. [...] Certainly, one can practice styles, but the styles that become available to you are not entirely a matter of choice." —Judith Butler

TO MY GHOSTS AND FRIENDS

My studio is always messy. There are groupings of takeout drink containers, the odd cloth, art supplies strewn everywhere, and an even coating of scrap paper and nonsense. If I were to choose a part of my studio for conservation, it would be the scattering of books. A word that has come up in conservation is 'Speculation'. 'Speculation' evolved from the Latin word "Specula": meaning 'lookout' and 'watchtower'. From these

towers, you can gather the lay of the land. Watchtowers are survey tools. Surveying not just landscape, but people and equipment. They not only are follies of authoritative power—they are often literal follies. The example that influenced this metaphor was Dingle Tower in Sandford Fleming Park, built to commemorate the 150th anniversary of representative government in Nova Scotia. What makes a building a folly? That's subjective; Dingle tower is a folly. It's a folly both in architectural terms because of its decorative superficiality, and a folly in the rhetorical sense because of its colonial intent.

Not one for confusing the map for the territory, my studio's state is not in and of itself important to the work. On the contrary, it gets in the way. My papers are often sullied by stray oil, solvent, and acrylic droplets; this is not conducive to making work I'm pleased with. Things get lost over and over again, buried under the mindless sedimentation of my art shit. But the opaque environment can allow me to innovate and improvise under the pressure of missing basic supplies and irreparable paintbrushes.

It's not entirely accurate to call watchtowers follies, because they do

have purpose. The best tool for prediction, speculation, anticipation, and dream fulfillment is intelligence assessment (or intel). If I had a watchtower in my studio, perhaps a step-ladder, I would not lose so many things.

SPECIAL TROUBLE

"This moreover is the chief thing, that the painter does not use this art through the ordinary straight measures, but draws all seen things into one cone towards the eye, whose point is in the eye and whose base or foundation is the seen thing, and the measure of this, as persons experienced in geometry and perspective know, cannot be obtained without **special trouble.**" ~Albrecht Dürer

There is one recent work of mine not added to my exhibition, but I think it is important. The piece was from a scene cropped from the Caspar David Friedrich painting "Abbey in the Oakwood". Upon completing my painting, I knew instantly I needed objective feedback from others on this

appropriation of another's work as a historical reference for nostalgia.

- Was this work effective because it is his imagery?
- Was this work effective because it was made by me?

Eventually I came to realize that perhaps referencing German Romanticism was not the best game plan. I found many of the connections that resulted actually weren't that interesting to me.

This all may seem out of place, but sometimes decisions are just too consequential and important to withhold from describing a new body of work. As soon as I completed this Abbey piece, I had to get feedback from my studio advisor. Because if I continued down the path of art historical appropriation, or not, all subsequent paintings I made would be entirely different in every way. That is, I believe art historical appropriation centres the work in the virtue of tradition because the imagery is overtly embedded in a specific style and genre: Romanticism. I distrust this kind of appropriation as for being problematically nostalgic. I perceive the Romanticism of works, such as "Abbey in the Oakwood" as being embedded within a broader context

of contemporaneous nationalism. Indeed, one of the key themes of romanticism was nationalism. I find this type of romantic nationalism work difficult to justify. The method hinges on nostalgia for styles and genre, and – a nostalgia for styles and genres heavily involved in nationalism. The appropriation for the purpose of commentary or critique is therefore uncritical of nostalgia. It's important to include this paradigm-shift when describing a body of work. Often, the evolution of the work of the artist hinges on what isn't included rather than what is. Instead of my work becoming a dumping ground for problematically nostalgic inspirations, it was obvious moving forward that I will need to find my own voice, my own wish, and my own language; my own "Special Trouble".

I was sitting in the shower, where the lion's share of my thinking happens, and I was harkening back to 'Specula' – the watchtower. In undergraduate studies I was fascinated with archival imagery from the NASA Apollo program. The Apollo 7 mission, especially, has beautiful medium format colour pictures of the Earth's surface. These views of the earth were both novel and fascinating and remained so. Satellite imagery, offering a similar exclusive viewpoint, has become a journalistic form of information – another watchtower. Satellite

imaging technology is now used to confirm rumours, prove war crimes, or disprove misinformation. Putin's invasion of Ukraine has brought almost daily updates on Russian troop buildup and movement. Private satellite companies have become international intelligence agencies. This makes readers like ourselves arm-chair military analysts. The Space Race, War, and Nostalgia; all fit perfectly into what I have in mind for content.

After my decision to abandon art historical appropriation, I've decided that my goal-moving forward is to use Gumoil, Modified Diazo Gum and other found or invented printmaking processes—to recreate drawn and/or photographic images in photosensitive paint. Nothing gets me excited more than working out new processes for expressing new subject matter. These print procedures offer intriguing potential for interweaving painting, drawing, printmaking and photography. What voice will this new process allow me? Perhaps the voice of a fortune-teller, someone who speculates about the future. Like the fortune-teller/tarot card reader in the opening scene of the French New Wave film, Cleo from 5 to 7, what I speculate upon can be taken as cynical or pessimistic, but to me, it's freeing. The theme of the film is how outlooks can change. Cleo is

told in the beginning that she is doomed by the fortune-teller and she is distraught and fatalist. In the end, she receives the results that she has cancer, but now she feels happy. Her situation never really changed, but her outlook did. I want to speculate about the future of nostalgia, so here are two questions.

- What will our nostalgia look like in the future?
- Why do I bother recreating *these* images in particular?

I think I can answer both of these questions, but first, I would like to add some context into a small chapter of my own life story. Sitting high up in my watchtower, looking out to find nostalgia; for something I can write— I see a lot of things. I see my family. I see my friends. I see my past experiences. Speculating the future is a lot like walking forwards while looking backwards.

Intakes of Breath

A lot of what inspires me is didactic storytelling, narrative historiography, and internet browsing; all of the subjects that my dad instilled my interest in. Lessons of history, geopolitics, history of technology, macroeconomics; the history of consumer culture, culture in general; and scientific ideals.

My Dad joined the Canadian Armed Forces in his young-adulthood, received his Bachelor's in Computer Science, left, and pursued a successful career in technology and stock trading services.

As a child, he would tell me these sweeping stories of war and peace, economic instability and progress, theories of mind on historical figures; hours upon hours of flowing conversation with no clear motivation or set subject matter. Conversation that begins with Human evolutions ends with a debate on bilingualism's effect on intelligence. However, military subjects and Earth history were always my favourite. Something about the multifaceted complexity of logistics combined with the high

stakes of human-on-human combat; and the long breath-takingly complex history of a relatively gigantic planet. And then such big topics suddenly turn to tiny observations of the immediate surroundings.

On a cold windy summer day on Vancouver Island, my family and I are on a road trip to Vancouver and Victoria. We go to a small sandy beach, with an ocean too cold to enter, surrounded by grey bleh. This is the first time I saw an all-ocean horizon.

On the end of the beach is a creek that flows down into the sea. My dad tells us we'll perform some experiments, which me and my younger brother Anthony are excited about. But not before making us taste the seawater to prove its saltiness.

The First Task: Dam the Creek.

No matter how much Anthony and I pile up: sand, stones, and sticks; the river just diverts elsewhere, or erodes away the structures.

This is a lesson in legacy. What takes seconds in sand, takes millennia in stone. No matter what we do to introduce our influence, it will eventually be eroded away.

The Second Task: The Tides.

My Dad marks out lines on the sand from the Ocean. And overtime the Ocean comes up to meet them.

We already know what tides were and why they happen, but it is cool to take in.

THE LEAST NOSTALGIC

"Both reanimation and re-enactment have been called nostalgic reflexes, but those painters whose work can be seen in relation to these terms do not reconstruct the past to quell a longing for it. In fact, it is a trait of atemporal painters to not be nostalgic at all." ~Laura Hoptman

In my Painting 224: Critical Theories class at ACAD (now the Alberta University of the Arts), I was just entering my second year and was already set on majoring in painting. Even though majors aren't finalized until year 3, I was dead set on pursuing a promising medium. In Painting 224, our professor, Gwenessa Lam, introduced a book to us about painting: The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World. It was an accompaniment by Laura Hoptman of a MoMA exhibition. Today, it is my favourite book on painting. Back then, it was not. I was, in retrospect, a naïve student. I thought, "atemporality isn't possible—the world is temporal". "Frankenstein"? "Isn't the idea of synthesising work from past material and breathing new life from it a long-held methodology?" In hindsight, this is the reading that spawned my interest in nostalgia and the past: "How do I breathe new life into my art?"

Nostalgia is a challenging emotion.

It was coined as a disease of the cerebellum in the late 17th century by physician Johannes Hofer to describe the symptoms of homesick Swiss mercenaries in France. Nostalgia's medical definition however, was lost in the 1870s— and became known for the feeling of homesickness and longing to return home— but even now, this use is now uncommon. These days, nostalgia means “the bitter-sweet yearning for the things of the past”. Nostalgia is complicated because its understanding is contradictory; I'll explain. The older definition implies experience, or belonging. The newer definition removes experience and replaces it with the past. Nostalgia no longer requires experience of a thing or an event to yearn for it. In marketing, this is known as “Vicarious Nostalgia”, though “Re-appropriated Nostalgia” is also used. In my mind, these terms are an attempt to reconcile the newer conception of nostalgia while still holding up experience in the eminent domain of the nostalgic.

Nostalgia, in relation to my work, has an emphasis on “bittersweet yearning” and “things of the past”. The changing definition of nostalgia is important in answering the question I posed earlier: “What will nostalgia look like in the future?” — All one has to do

is look around, it has already happened before. Temporality redirected the creek. And it will happen again. The question is a conditional one; the answer will depend on how one understands culture and nostalgia.

Gary Cross notes in Consumed Nostalgia, "Nostalgia just isn't what it used to be." Before the modern age (from a Eurocentric frame of reference) there was nothing much to be nostalgic for; village festivals, the seasons, never really travelling far from your habitat—nothing changed radically. Nostalgia was exclusively built around creation and the recurring sequencing of events, "most built around a 'myth of eternal return'"¹. Nostalgia since the 17th century was evolving, but only as soon as there was a discernible lost history to long for. Anthropologist Grant McCracken highlights that before the 20th century, when nostalgia was new, he argues that the patina of time accrues value onto objects, strictly heirlooms – with focus given to the emphasis on the past². This value coexists with that of fashion

¹ Cross, Gary. *Consumer Nostalgia*. Columbia University Press, New York. 2015

² R. Sassatelli, "*Consumer Culture: History, Theory and Politics*", SAGE Publications Inc, 2007.

(newness: emphasis on the present) as defined by Georg Simmel. This is where terms like "Vicarious Nostalgia" and strategies like "Re-appropriation" can come in handy, not to describe nostalgia itself, but how these values can be simulated. "Re-appropriation" is nostalgia purely as a marker for taste, vicarious, insofar as these markers originate beyond a target's frame of experience. This is neither nostalgia for experience, or yearning for the past— but the past as only a visual aesthetic.

The Least Nostalgic is a critique of nostalgia. Nostalgia is used towards anything related to the past, which is a mistake. One critique I received from a student in an artist talk I gave while I was a teaching assistant was that nostalgia wasn't in my previous work and couldn't be, because nostalgia is about personal experience. This might be true in one sense, but then why did a younger generation return to Polaroid? Or use digital filters for Instagram that mimic old forms of photography? Or spend time and money collecting and maintaining a vinyl record collection well after its utility? It's a tendency to "return to" or "yearn" for past-oriented experience. It doesn't have to be personal. There are numerous contradictions and tensions in the study of nostalgia (for

which there isn't a name, because 'nostology' is taken by medicine), because nostalgia is a concept not easily understood. The work doesn't have to be nostalgic (to quell longing) to discuss nostalgia. My work is seen in relation to using these concepts as a stepping stone for cultural critique, and to some extent material/technical critique. Laura Hoptman writes in The Forever Now, "Both reanimation and reenactment have been called nostalgic reflexes, but those painters whose work can be seen in relation to these terms do not reconstruct the past to quell a longing for it. In fact, it is a trait of atemporal painters to not be nostalgic at all."

CONTENT IS DISTRACTING

The imagery of my exhibition, *The Least Nostalgic*, are archival images from the Apollo missions.

I curated images to highlight the amateur photographer in the astronauts—who were only trained in the very basics of photography. These images are framed in ways that mirror how I compose photographs; I am not an especially trained photographer. Photography was a technical skill I put some effort into only for use as

reference material for traditional painting. These space-based images are enigmatic, because they lack a cohesive visual style, composition, or theme. I intended to use these images to highlight the place and the hand of the artist (in this case, the astronauts). But content is not entirely the point of *The Least Nostalgic*. To reiterate, the nostalgic reflexes aren't used to quell past longing, but to scrounge the past for ways of creating new experiences and to feel like one is experiencing something for the first time— "...it is a trait of atemporal painters to not be nostalgic at all." In Understanding Media by Marshall McLuhan, he states plainly that, "Indeed, it is only too typical that the 'content' of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium." I must ask though, how do you exhibit a medium—or a technique?

One night, I woke up at around midnight thinking about my work and the gallery space in the Anna I was assigned. What will be the experience of the space the art is exhibited in, where the space itself becomes the work? That is, what's offered in the space that calls to be explored — as the sum of its parts. A few days prior, I had met with Karin Cope about my show, anxious over whether I had enough work (I only had 2 resolved gumoil

prints). We went down to gallery 2 during the Canadian Slavery exhibition. I noticed how the portable exhibition wall was positioned in front of the door. There was a video projection; walls were full of research documentation and the spot lights illuminating the exhibition— warm-balanced lights. Karin suggested I leave a wall blank. Embrace minimalism. Give the work room to breathe. So, I lay in bed awake, thinking about all of this— wracking my brain over what to do next. Over and over again, I mentally walked through the virtual gallery in my mind. Was I naïve? I'd never hung my own show before, outside of year-end undergrad panel critiques. That was hardly an equivalent experience to my upcoming solo exhibition. "I want to get this right," I thought, "I need this thing to flow." One convention I knew I needed to buck was the placement of the portable wall. Most exhibitors placed this bulky wall on the right of the door between the front windows and where you enter. Doing so blocks the view and often interrupts the flow of the main window-lit space. So, I put the partition on the left of the entrance door, which led to a satisfying shift in how I feel the space when walking in. The whole layout is reminiscent of a Fibonacci spiral. The next convention I've always wanted to buck

in this exhibition space was the very warm spot lights; I wanted a daylight feel. An easy fix. I find it perplexing that I would spend so much time making work in daylight or white-balanced light, only to show it under an orange one. The stark white illumination lends the space a sterile, scientific, and analytic quality that feels appropriate to my relationship with nostalgia. It is essential for me that nostalgia be explored without the cliché of a warm and inviting atmosphere which pervades this subject matter. The daylight spotlights I'd installed were unlike anything I've seen in that gallery before. They elevated the individual black-square pieces into a cohesive work, and to me, vibrated with energy from the black and white colour contrast.

THE QUIET

During the installation of *The Least Nostalgic*, the daylight-balanced light bulbs I purchased and installed began to annoyingly flicker and buzz. They were the wrong bulbs for the fixture. After an emergency trip to the hardware store, the problem was fixed. "Quiet" is the primary descriptor of my work. The quiet in the space lends itself to the idea of romanticism—the

self-reflective. Indeed, I left one long wall empty to reinforce this state of quiet reflection. Despite an urge to fill things up, I wanted the works to have lots of breathing space. The decision provided the viewer space to move and not be surrounded on all sides by work.

The quiet clinical atmosphere and the generous amount of space given to each piece is, in my view, a romantic self-reflection on painting, photography, and invention. In On Photography, Susan Sontag refers to photographs as offering "...instant romanticism about the present. In America, the photographer is not simply the person who records the past but the one who invents it." Material aside, the content of photography, and its interrelation with nostalgia, elevates the show as an exhibition of found objects. Yet these found objects are views into real photographs rendered in an alternative technique to the original.

Photographs are, of course, artifacts. But their appeal is that they also seem, in a world littered with photographic relics, to have the status of found objects – unpremeditated slices of the world. Thus, they trade simultaneously on the prestige of art and the magic of the real. They are clouds of fantasy and pellets of information.

~ Susan Sontag

UNPREMEDITATED SLICES

In March, I was given four and a half hours of access to the printmaking studio's darkroom, to experiment with alternative print processes that utilize paint. The darkroom has a large vacuumed exposure table, a counter, and a sink coated in leftover emulsion crossed along the bottom with wooden slats. It's a hot, sweaty, and orange-lit space. The process explored and developed within these print facilities was Gumoil. Gumoil is a process invented by Karl Koenig in 1990 as a positive-to-positive photographic print process. It involves photosensitized gum-arabic coated onto paper, oil paint, and a water bath. The gum arabic is exposed to create a negative resist, then oil paint is applied in a thin layer over the paper, which is then immersed in the water bath and vigorously rubbed. The oil paint that remains is in the gaps in the gum, allowing the paint to adhere to the paper. I gave up on this process because it is very time-intensive and I was unable to repeat any successes I'd managed to achieve.

I moved on to a process that uses gum-arabic as well, but forgoes the oil paint by pigmenting the gum itself.

Unlike Gumoil, the Diazo-gum process (an alternative to gum bichromate) is a negative-to-positive process, and is most often used for colour prints by layering CMYK-style. I tinkered with this process and one day decided to heavily pigment the gum; one to one. To go back to Diazo-gum, it has to be a very dilute pigmented solution to allow the light to fully cure it when it hits the top of the emulsion. Another process that was too impractical for me to try, is the carbon process. Not to get into too much detail, the important aspect of this process I used was the idea that you expose the final image from the back, and melt away the gelatin above.

To use my newly high-pigmented gum, I needed to be able to expose it from the back, which led me to use frosted mylar as the support. Admittedly, I didn't think it would work as the gum is repelled by the mylar, and indeed, when it dried, it was easily flaking off. On 1 April 2022, I immersed it in the water bath after exposure to wash away any unexposed gum arabic, but the gum was too pigmented to immediately leech into the water. So, I was left with this small piece of mylar with a featureless black colour-field, not too dissimilar to Malevich's black square. "I had to do something," I thought. I grabbed a paper towel, and

dabbed the immersed print, and immediately the print, and my hand, were engulfed in a black cloud. I pulled it out, and there was the image. Not only that, but the image was as if it was embedded in the mylar— no flaking, no peeling. I had just invented a new process by combining (then modifying) material and borrowing other printmaking principles. I made three more experiments, a portrait of ballerina Cléo de Mérode by Reutlinger. After those experiments, I moved on to the Apollo images.

What stands out in my recreations of the Apollo mission photographs I'd selected was the technical variability in the results. These variabilities highlight the technique relative to the content. In this sense, they mirror the original NASA photographic archive's artificing, variations and errors in film stock which have always been of particular interest to me. Due to the planned irregularities around my measuring and exposure times, each series (roughly three to four prints) showcases a different accident. These twists help me, as the experimenter, find out more about the process. Below is a list of some lessons for posterity.

- Too much pigment; hard to dab all of the unexposed gum off.
- Too much exposure; dark image.
- Mylar is sized with PVA; a warm and metallic finish—more detail retention.

Then of course comes the matter of framing the material, which I have so far not discussed. I define and consider myself a painter. The connection I made, between print and photo is this: Gouache is defined as highly pigmented gum-arabic. Gouache is paint. The diluted pigmented gum from before would not be considered gouache because of its extreme transparency. This new mylar process is best used when exposed from the back, because when exposed from the front, the light seems to only expose the outermost layer— unable to reach where the gouache meets the mylar. I've tried it; all the gouache just washes away. Gouache, as far as I can tell, can ONLY be exposed from the back in the manner I found. I have embraced technical failure — the failure of photographic reproducibility. I have yet to fit in the content in relation to the material. However, I feel I am still too naïve about the process to help fulfill my wishes of being a painter, which these Apollo images fail to provide.

DOWN/AGAINST I TURN/TWIST

'Catastrophe' more or less translates in Ancient Greek to "Down/Against I Turn/Twist". The Catastrophe in Ancient Greek Drama was the moment something suddenly changed in the narrative: paradigm shifts.

Recent events have caused a paradigm shift that is yet to be defined. We are seeing decades-old policies being overturned: Germany raised its military budget by 150%. Moldova and Georgia have applied to the EU. Sweden and Norway are increasing their military budget/cooperation and their populace is increasing their willingness to join NATO. Many have shifted, it seems, to a wartime worldview not seen in over 75 years, but this time, like last, we're carrying the lessons and progress made since. The times are asking for anticipation or speculation on what can happen next. And what am I asking for? Preserve the progress we've made rather than lament the progress we haven't. Ultimately, catastrophes lead to catharsis.

I keep my work bleak; Nostalgia can be bleak instead of warm. I keep the subject matter simple, keeping its

content twisting down to give the hints of narratives an uncynical, quiet, and authentic ethos – an ethos of the astronaut, the amateur photographer, and the inventor. My thesis show is the turn – the turn towards attempting to find something different. Perhaps it's my disillusionment with traditional painting, or a new way to sense the medium's quality. "They were true painters in spite of their lack of tradition by virtue of their sensing the miraculous qualities of the medium through which they communicated," (Hans Hoffman). Painting, for me shouldn't be about history; it's about the present. Atemporality in Painting is inextricably linked to the artist and their reanimations through the characteristics of paint—not their longing. For the work to encapsulate the complexity of the nostalgic – I can't be.

I believe one challenge that I have yet to overcome in my work is that of content. By choosing the NASA Apollo mission images, I created a false sense of understanding in the viewer. Thus, I distracted too much from my abstract concerns over medium and nostalgia—concretizing it further into the feeling of nostalgia, instead of the study and critique of it. The challenge becomes to embrace the reality that this "false sense of ubiquity" is photography's

nature while providing enough information in my works so they speak to theoretical and material concerns without the "deceptive mastery of experience"³.

A written note in the margins of my copy of Hawthorne on Paint: It's all just mud on a canvas. If someone sees a landscape – it's luck. All music is one note after the other.

³ Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., Toronto. 1978.

SPECIAL THANKS TO...

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ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Described on the back as “the identification of a new aesthetic: the study of nostalgia”, *The Future of Nostalgia* is the pinnacle document for defining the relationship between nostalgia and art; culture and art. The must-read chapters are the two to do with reflective and restorative nostalgia: two nostalgic tendencies that are inborn in all of us that define our reactions towards past-sickness. Reflective nostalgia is defined by Boym as “...more concerned with historical and individual time, with the irrevocability of the past and human finitude. *Re-flection* suggests new flexibility, not the reestablishment of stasis.” In tandem, restorative nostalgia “signifies a return to the original stasis, to the prelapsarian moment. The past for restorative nostalgic is a value of the present; the past is not a duration but a perfect snapshot. Moreover, the past is not supposed to reveal any signs of decay; it has to be freshly painted in its ‘original image’ and remain eternally young.”

In relation to my exhibition and thesis, restorative nostalgia is the anti-thesis. Restorative nostalgia upholds the concept of the past as a perfect snapshot, but I demonstrate in my exhibition that reproductions can be imperfect *and* still uphold their content and value. One aspect of restorative nostalgia I embrace, however, is that “the past is not a duration but a perfect snapshot”. At first glance this is a contradiction, but remember that all of the past happens simultaneously for an atemporal artist. I think the subtlety in this contradiction lies in separating out “past as a value” and “the (a)temporality of the past/present”. A poem in the final chapter of the text stood out to me. It encapsulates nostalgia’s many contradictions:

The Last Homecoming by Giorgio Caproni
(Translated by Toma Tasovac and Svetlana Boym 1989)
Poesie 1932-1986

I have returned there

where I had never been.
Nothing has changed from how it was not.
On the table (on the checkered
tablecloth) half-full
I found again the glass
never filled. All
has remained just as
I had never left it.

Cross, Gary. *Consumed Nostalgia*. Columbia University Press, New York, 2015.

Consumed Nostalgia outlines the consumerist perspective and the utility of nostalgia. It conveys, moreso than *The Future of Nostalgia*, the past of nostalgia and how it's evolved as a concept in just a few centuries. The reason I would choose the quote "Nostalgia just isn't what it used to be" is because it conveys both ideas that surround the study of nostalgia: (a) the emotion and universal notion of longing and homesickness (in terms of using the idiom "...just isn't what it used to be), and (b) that our understanding of this mysterious tendency can shift and open up the question of what nostalgia can be used for or what its future holds.

Something I want to explore in the future is described in the chapter "Dilemmas of Heritage in an Era of Consumed Nostalgia". This chapter discusses the difference between something Cross calls "Heritage nostalgia" and "consumed nostalgia" and centres the discussion on the evolution of themed heritage parks such as Colonial Williamsburg. The dilemma, implied in the chapter heading, is the dilemma between faithfully re-enacting/restoring real history and the commercialization required to reanimate history for generations more interested in popular entertainment. What I find interesting is this idea of heritage and consumerism, and having nostalgia become a possession. Whether this possession is one of ethnic belonging (heritage), cultural belonging (heritage/consumerism), or fashionable belonging in the abstract world of consumable "retro" goods (consumerism). In conversations about my exhibition, *The Least Nostalgic*, it often gets brought up that someone "was alive during Apollo" over my choice of using the Apollo images. And to emphasize the consumerist intrigue, I have had multiple professors in two cities tell me that they owned some form of Apollo memorabilia in their childhood.

Hoptman, Laura. *The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World*. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2014.

This is my favourite book on contemporary painting. This text has a richly detailed introductory essay that explores atemporality in contemporary art practice. The chapter “Corollary: Nostalgia” is where my exhibition title, *The Least Nostalgic*, originates from: “Both reanimation and re-enactment have been called nostalgic reflexes, but those painters whose work can be seen in relation to these terms do not reconstruct the past to quell a longing for it. In fact, it is a trait of atemporal painters to not be nostalgic at all.” This quote is a source of my critique over nostalgia, since in *The Future of Nostalgia*, Boym highlights that Nostalgia (belonging and longing) are universal human characteristics. However, Hoptman says that atemporal painters aren’t nostalgic at all. This contradiction is beautiful to me, because finding a compromise between the two led me to this playful idea of pursuing becoming the least nostalgic.

McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media*. McGraw Hill, 1964. Pp. 8.

“Indeed, it is only too typical that the 'content' of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium.” This quote is imminently important to my exhibition, because it provides a mission statement for why I organized the gallery space the way that I did. I felt after reading this quote, that it would be more productive to primarily think about how to exhibit a technique/medium effectively, and think about subject/content as a secondary concern.

R. Sassatelli, “*Consumer Culture: History, Theory and Politics*”, SAGE Publications Inc, 2007

A supplementary text to Cross’s *Consumed Nostalgia* that further investigates consumed nostalgia among other topics. It provides useful commentary and historical context to ‘nostalgia’, ‘fashion’, and ‘the patina of time’.

Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., Toronto. 1978.

Susan Sontag walks through photography's relationship to other art disciplines, focusing on surrealism and photography as artifact/object. As I find with most of Sontag's work, there is a rich supply of tantalizing quotations. Here are some unused quotes and thoughts:

"Believing that the images they sought came from the unconscious, whose contents they assumed as loyal Freudians to be timeless as well as universal, the Surrealists misunderstood what was most brutally moving, irrational, unassimilable, mysterious – time itself. What renders a photograph surreal is its irrefutable pathos as a message from time past, and the concreteness of its intimation about social class."

As in my chapter, "Special Trouble", I avoided quotes with a surrealist angle such as this, to dodge art historical appropriation or center my work too much into the virtue of tradition and art history. By using this quote, would I be saying my work is related to the surrealist? Or am I critiquing surrealism? None of which are questions I can feel I can answer at this time.

"Fewer and fewer Americans possess objects that have a patina, old furniture, grandparents' pots and pans [...]. Instead, we have our paper phantoms, transistorized landscapes. A featherweight portable museum."

This quote seems dated (1978). It's interesting looking back on it though, now having observed and participated in the trends that counter this quote's sentiment. Though, I like that Sontag describes photographs as "paper phantoms", considering photography's early usage in the occult and paranormal.

"The effectiveness of photography's statement of loss depends on its steadily enlarging the familiar iconography of mystery, mortality, transience."

Increasing the effectiveness of my statement on loss and longing was one of my secondary goals: by expanding one of these three iconographies (mystery). I chose to pursue and develop this line of alternative process using gum-arabic, because many of these processes were first developed to re-introduce the hand of the artist *back* into photography. The material definitions between painting and

photography, I find when blurred, creates enigmatic images with certain subjective qualities of mystery and intrigue.

“Photography’s ultra-mobile gaze flatters the viewer, creating a false sense of ubiquity, a deceptive mastery of experience.”