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# Ripple, Surge, Release

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RIPPLE, SURGE, RELEASE

by

Meryl Engler

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

Major: Art

Under the Supervision of Professor Karen Kunc

Lincoln, Nebraska

May, 2016

# RIPPLE, SURGE, RELEASE

Meryl Engler, M.F.A.

University of Nebraska, 2016

Advisor: Karen Kunc

There is something primal and instinctual about living through the physicality of one's body. The body reacts to the world through feel, ruled not by logic and rational thought, but rather energy, movement and impulse. While this might seem mindless, focusing on the physical for me leads to a state of mindfulness, where every action serves a purpose and I seek to reach clarity through repeated exertion. In art, I seek to slip into this mindful state so each layer of carving, printing, and paper comes from the decisive awareness of my movements and energy.

Growing up playing among the waves breaking on the beaches of Southern California, I learned how my body could interact with my environment, how to respond to the power of the waves and also the power inherent within me. Playing sports fostered the growth and awareness of my physical body. The harder I pushed myself, I found the more at peace in my mind I had to be. Rowing became my tool for the convergence of mind, body and environment just as art became a way to concentrate and coordinate my body into a visual record. I seek to reach a state where I can transcend the limitations of logical thought and outside influences. I am fully aware of what I am doing in that moment so all else ceases to exist. It happens during the last part of a race when I push through thoughts of exhaustion and finish

with a surge of power. It happens in the making of each piece, as I get lost in the actions of carving and cutting.

For me, the woodcut becomes my sole place of existence while I am working. Nothing but the rhythmic carving of the gouge matters. The carved mark offers a different approach to the action of a gesture. By carving something that was first made in a flash of impulse, I put in the time to truly explore the intricacies of the mark, forming a physical and conscious familiarity. In the act of carving, I memorize the action, and seek to understand the impulse, consequence and importance of each gesture. It is the same in collage; the act of cutting each shape is reminiscent of carving the form in wood. Therefore each action, while on the surface physical and impulsive, has a level of intimacy.

Wood captures the action in the carved mark, but it also fights, resisting my control of the carving. It is imperative to know when to be delicate and when to be powerful in the relationship I have with the material. Paper does not fight back in the cutting, but also requires the same sensitivity. It is light and airy, something that must be held down or else fly away. It must be coaxed into moving and falling a certain way. The thinnest paper catches the slightest movements and looks impossibly fragile. But paper can also be altered, stretched, ripped and printed on, and still withhold its basic structure. It is strong enough to capture the gesture without hindering the energy reflected in it.

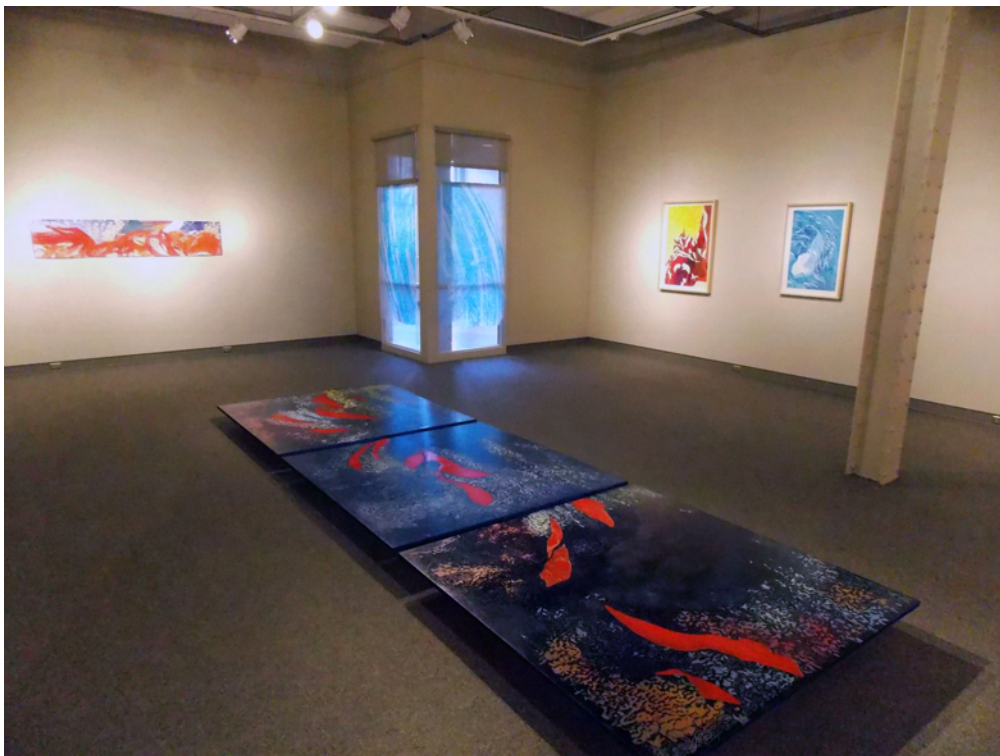
My gesture is strong and big and powerful because I am strong and big and powerful. Therefore, I exert my power in a large scale. The scale overwhelms through force but also can form rippled patterns of contemplative emptiness that

reinforce my intimate relationship with each form. The patterns of both broken and unbroken rhythm are the lights dancing along the ever-changing surface of the water, reflecting a symphony of color. This use of color goes back to my childhood, watching the changing light reflect off the ocean at different times of day.

In *Ripple, Surge, Release*, I focus on my relationship and use of movement, energy and power. Something that starts out small and contained continues to expand over time until it grows in power and crests. The release is both physical and cathartic. The finished print, drawing or collage is the trace of my body and my action. Art is a way to visually capture, freeze a moment in time, without limiting the power of that moment, therefore providing a release.



Installation shot 1, north wall



Installation shot 2





West wall installation shot



Window installation shot





*Passages Detail*



*Gathering/Becoming Installation shot, south wall*





*Gathering/Becoming* bottom detail



*Gathering/Becoming* pile detail