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## Devastation Experienced When Two Individuals Stop Kissing One Another

Isaiah Jones

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, [isaiah.jones@huskers.unl.edu](mailto:isaiah.jones@huskers.unl.edu)

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DEVASTATION EXPERIENCED  
WHEN TWO INDIVIDUALS  
STOP KISSING ONE ANOTHER

By

Isaiah Jones

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College of the University of Nebraska  
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

Major: Art

Under the Supervision of Professor Francisco Souto

Lincoln, Nebraska

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DEVASTATION EXPERIENCED  
WHEN TWO INDIVIDUALS  
STOP KISSING ONE ANOTHER

Isaiah Jones, M.F.A.

University of Nebraska, 2021

Advisor: Francisco Souto

The work in *Devastation Experienced When Two Individuals Stop Kissing One Another* is an excavation of the private self in relation to love and desire and an exploration of the chaos that ensues in their passage. Desire describes a state of attachment to a person, an object, or an idea. It produces a cloud of optimism between that which is desired and she who is full of desire<sup>1</sup>. It presses against need, the obsessive phenomena of all amorous sentiment, and in its dissolution, total devastation ensues<sup>2</sup>.

With this work, I explore my own desires, observations, uncertainty, and anger, finding ways through the wreckage of a broken heart. Within me is a being that is fearful of love, but so hungry for it. She is an obsessive, aggressive monster, fueled by memory and trauma; a messy product of the events that have unfolded throughout my life. She is also a quiet and longing lover; a hopeful being that sees love between individuals as tangible, reasonable, and possible.

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<sup>1</sup> Berlant, Lauren, *Desire/Love* pg.6

<sup>2</sup> Barthes, Roman, *A Lover's Discourse*, Pg.16

The unrelenting aggressor is fearful, monstrous, and self-obsessed, while the quieter, contemplative observer speaks with clarity and reason. I amplify these oppositional forces through printed works, sound, and video installation.

Writing is central to my creative practice. The way I sketch an idea, a feeling, or a person, is with written words. It is a fertile process of discovery, like remembering something from more than one angle. A mixture of free writing and crafted written work animate etched plates, outpouring scrolls of text, and kites. The impact of desire and the dissolving of romantic idealizations is embedded in the printed text as I braid narratives and repeat a word or phrase over and over; fleshing out an idea or an experience until I have some new understanding of it. Hasty letterpress work helps me to prototype emerging thought-forms: *What if everything I thought about appeared all at once?*

I work intuitively, generating with careless haste as words and sentences are overprinted, layered, and echoed. The innate, repetitive nature of letterpress printing and the restating of a single word or phrase are highly generative processes. I stand behind the press, clacking the individual pieces together like teeth, moving the rollers back and forth, and as I work, more content bubbles to the surface and is expelled.

Using a machine-made wood type, that is condensed, san serif, and set in all caps, is like finding a channel through which my aggressive interior self can move. In an age in which women—particularly in heteronormative situations—are responsible for maintaining the comfort of the individuals within their sphere<sup>3</sup>—using a machine-made type form grants me anonymous authority to excavate interior possessive thoughts and fragmented internal narratives. Scrolls of

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<sup>3</sup> Berlant, Lauren, *Desire/Love* Pg.100



text, amassed and impulsively arranged and rearranged, feed my internal aggressor, one who is obsessive, combative, and constantly shifting.

To counter my inner aggressor, I produced my own set of type that is a character of what my careful interior voice might look like: human, awkwardly spaced, always transparent. This alternative typeface explores desire, lust, and loss in a calmer and less aggressive manner. The handmade typeface speaks in tandem with the machine-made typeface. The two need each other as a dialectic—because the author is the same, but the type is a character.

Etchings, which carry a separate narrative, are obscured and ghost-like. My own handwriting is embedded into the surface of a copper plate, then scraped away, leaving behind residual marks. In the removal of marks, lines and scratches accumulate, obscuring the written words. The physical act of scraping away the etched metal is like pretending to forget something that I remember. The harder I try to remove it, the more amplified it becomes.

Using sound, I entice the viewer with the intimacy and vulnerability of whispered secrets<sup>4</sup>. In layering multiple whispers on top one another, the secrets become difficult to understand; I beckon only to push away, distancing the viewer from the power of the legible word<sup>5</sup>. These works are positioned in proximity to one another, etchings animated by sound, passing whispers conversing with permanent marks.

Soaring kites function as moments of clarity within the deluge of interior turmoil. They are objects of hope<sup>6</sup>, created within the furious regurgitation of interior dialogue. Sending a kite

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<sup>4</sup> From Interiority to Intimacy pg.115

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> See Roland Barthes, How blue the sky was

into the air, holding tight to the line, and feeling it move away from my body allows a burden to pass from heavy to light<sup>7</sup>; an act of reconciliation in release.

Hand made type and projected video of kites collide within the exhibition space. While the handmade type is fixed in place and rambles on endlessly, the kites move about, offering opportunity for escape, change, and reinvention. The kites are metaphoric of a weight being lifted, clarifying thoughts, and as a voice of reason.

My work teeters between cavalier and careful, between aggression and vulnerability. I borrow from my interior self to make sense of what it means to have a heart that is heavy, to be full of desire, and to make sense of the devastation experienced when two individuals stop kissing one another.

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<sup>7</sup> In Tal Streeter's, *The Philosophers Kite*, he states, "all the important things that gave meaning and substance, weight we might say, to our lives: politics, death, and so on--I guess it was the weight as much as anything that eventually gave me the feeling of being cornered. Despite a lifelong affinity and love for the sky, (a sentiment I strongly relate to) in my primary role as sculptor of heavy, earthbound objects, 'Lighten Up!' was a self-administered admonition I've had to shout to myself all of my life." pg.19

## Exhibition







I KNEW IT I KNEW IT I KNEW IT I KNEW IT I KNEW IT I KNEW IT I KNEW IT HERE'S A SECRET

I BET YOU THOUGHT I WOULD FORGET BUT THE PROBLEM IS I DID NOT FORGET THE PROBLEM IS THAT I REMEMBER

I DON'T REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENED. I WAS BETTER AT IT THAN I THOUGHT I WOULD BE. WHICH I KNOW ISN'T SAYING MUCH, NOT TOO FAR OFF FROM SHOVELING SHIT.

**THE RIGHT WAY**

SOMETIMES, I TRULY BELIEVE THAT WRAPPING BOTH OF MY LEGS AROUND THE TORSOS OF VARIOUS HUMAN BODIES IS

SOMETIMES, I TRULY BELIEVE THAT WRAPPING BOTH OF MY LEGS AROUND THE TORSOS OF VARIOUS HUMAN BODIES IS THE RIGHT WAY

IT RAISED TINY BUMPS ACROSS MY BODY MY LEGS TINGLED MY FINGERS BENT OUT OF SHAPE I DIDN'T EVEN GO UP

I KNOW I SHOULD'NT

I KNOW I SHOULDN'T

AM AFRAID OF NOT KNOWING

ALL I CAN REMEMBER IS THAT SOMEONE HANDED ME A SHOVEL AND POINTED AT THE GROUND AND I STARTED DIGGING.

**I THOUGHT**

AND RAN AS FAST AS I COULD BEHIND MY KNEES TO TRY AND GET BACK

MY HEART FEELS LIKE GHOST DOG RUNNING BACK AND FORTH BEHIND A WAIST HIGH CHAIN LINK FENCE THAT, WITH A MODEST RUNNING START, COULD BE

BACK AND FORTH BACK AND

IS GHOST DOG HAPPY BEING GHOST

OUR STEPS WERE FROZEN IN PLACE FOR DAYS AND DAYS ON THE GROUND.

BUT I KEPT GOING THE SAME WAY

HEART KEPT RUNNING BACK AND FORTH BACK AND FORTH OVER AND OVER AND OVER AND OVER AND OVER WITH THE

HAD SOMEHOW GOTTEN TALLER "I BEAT MY HEELS INTO OUR FROZEN FOOTPRINTS UNTIL MY TEETH RATTLED IN MY MOUTH

UNTIL MY TEETH RATTLED IN MY MOUTH

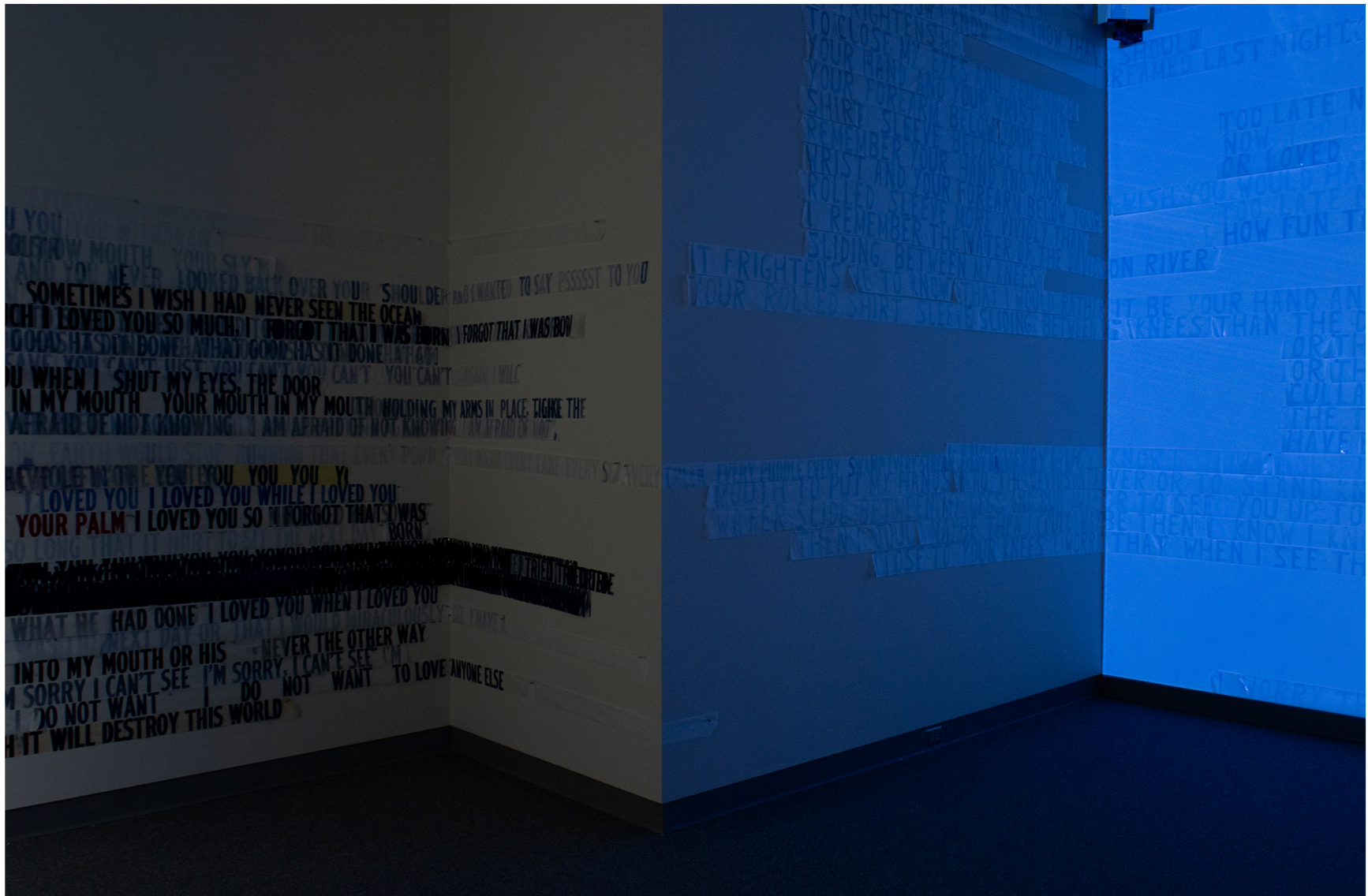


[illegible]



[illegible]







REMEMBER YOUR WRIST AND  
REMEMBER YOUR WRIST AND  
ROLLED SLEEVE BECAUSE I CAN  
I REMEMBER YOUR FOREARM BELOW YOUR  
SLIDING BETWEEN THE WATER OF THE DAVIDSON  
HTENS ME TO KNOW THAT I WOULD RATHER  
ROLLED SHIRT SLEEVE SLIDING BETWEEN

MIDDLE EVERY SWAMP EVERY STRIP  
TO PUT MY HANDS INTO THE DAVIDSON RIVER OR TO  
R SLIDE BETWEEN MY LEGS AND RUN WATER  
THEN I COULD MAYBE THEN I COULD MAYBE THEN I  
CLOSE TO YOUR KNEES I WORRY

TOO LATE NOW YOU WISHING  
NOW OR LOVED ANYONE EVER TOO  
WISH YOU WOULD HAVE SPILLED WATER  
TOO LATE NOW TOO LATE NOW  
HOW FUN TO TELL THE PERSON  
ON RIVER

IT BE YOUR HAND AND YOUR WRIST AND  
KNEES THAN THE DAVIDSON RIVER OR  
OR THE PIGEON RIVER OR  
OR THE CATAWBA RIVER  
CULLASAJA RIVER OR THE  
THE TUCKASEEGEE RIVER  
HAVE EVER WADED KNEE D  
KNOW I KNOW I WOULD CUT MY OWN  
TO SEE YOU UP TO YOUR KNEES IN THE DA  
I KNOW I KNOW I KNOW I KNOW I  
THAT WHEN I SEE THE RIVER AGAIN IT  
OR THAT I WILL  
THE PLACES WHERE







