

## Ecstatic Art and Travel

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### Abstract:

With support from the Miller Art Scholars and the University Award for Project in the Arts, I was presented an amazing opportunity to devote myself to a two-part, year-long project involving travel and art. The first part of my project took course over the summer of 2017, during which I backpacked across Europe and created an artist's book based on my experiences. It is a book that explores the ecstasy inherent to travel. The second part of my project has been ongoing since I returned from my travels and has resulted both my first solo exhibition and my thesis body of work as a studio art major.

### Original Intent:

I initially proposed a two-part project which was to result in both an artist's book and a body large scale oil paintings. I proposed to make an artist's book exploring the ecstasy inherent to travel--‘ecstasy’ being derived from the Greek word, ‘ekstasis,’ meaning “movement of the soul outside the body.” I planned to travel between Madrid, Dublin, and Rome--making a book of visual poems throughout my travels focused on my experiences and observations.

### Process:

Travelling alone through Europe was one of the most remarkable experiences of my life. Throughout the month of June 2017, I visited Madrid, Paris, London, Edinburgh, Genoa, Florence, Venice, Siena and Rome. Prior to this project, I had never before travelled abroad or alone. Needless to say, the experience was life changing. I was inspired by everything I saw and experienced. I spent my days exploring, studying art, and drawing.



Rome



Venice



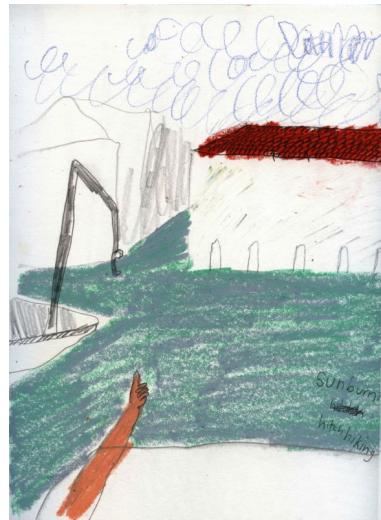
Madrid

However travelling alone was also challenging at times. There were many moments where I found myself lost and confused--fumbling with unfamiliar language. There were moments where my gender became a vulnerability. Being alone in these moments forced me to rely on myself in a manner I never had before. I found that the solitude of these moments became a source of ecstasy in my travels.

I journaled extensively and created a 62-paged artist's book over the course of my travels which I have deliberately left untitled. Each page references a separate ecstatic moment of my trip, which I define as a



*busting my toe (Paris)*



*hitchhiking in Venice*



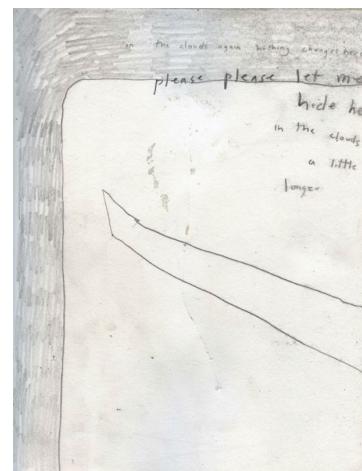
*street shrine (Rome)*

moment of hyper awareness--when time swells up and the sense of self becomes inseparable from the present surroundings. These ecstatic moments are of a certain suspension, paradoxically both infinite and ephemeral. I allowed myself to work intuitively--stopping at any moment it felt appropriate to draw.

Because I was constantly moving (and with only a carry-on bag) I worked with limited materials. I brought only the supplies that could fit into a pencil bag: a tube of white paint, some pastels, pencils, and an eraser. The limitation of materials at my disposal however forced me to work inventively. I found myself using the materials to create a sense of immediacy on the page, dancing between the lines of abstraction and illustration. The book does not explicitly narrate my journey, nor does it necessarily follow a chronological progression. Rather I like to imagine it as a collection of lyrics: visual poems grasping at the ephemeral.



*that sun*



*"nothing changes here in the clouds"*

It is a sense of immediacy which I have come to understand as characterizing the ecstatic in art. This sensibility is present in the work of Howard Hodgkin of whose I stumbled on during my travels in the UK. In his statement, he describes his painting process as an attempt to “capture an ephemeral moment accompanied by its fleeting emotions and to give those nebulous sensations a physical reality.” In other words, for Hodgkin art becomes an ecstatic space for which the unnameable (human experience, emotion, etc.) becomes tangible. The creation of his work depends on his ability to lose himself in a moment of ecstasy, if only so that he might re-capture the fleeting moment in a painting.



*“suddenly there was all this wind in the  
courtyard / all of the leaves / the papers / a flurry /  
spinning”  
(Florence)*

When I returned from my travels and reviewed the book I found myself intrigued by the sense of time that unfolded across and within the pages. It inspired me to explore how time might unfold in a painting. I developed a painting process in which I isolate, translate, and layer bits of diaristic drawings onto the canvas. I work my paintings for months at a time, allowing the ecstatic experiences of my drawings to bury each other as the painting develops. The paintings will go through countless stages. The end result is often an abstract landscape that speaks to my personal experiences, queerness, and femininity. I see this process of painting as a way to process certain moments and periods of my life. However I have come to understand this art process as ultimately a response to the ever shifting nature of time and the fleeting mess of the everyday.



Outcome:

I created a 62-paged, singled edition artist book and 12 large scale oil paintings. Seven of those paintings were exhibited at New City Arts in December, which was my first solo show in a professional art space. Five of those paintings are to be exhibited in Ruffin hall between April 16th-April 20th as part of my thesis for my studio art major. This project has helped me grow tremendously as an artist--building both my portfolio and my skills as an artist.

A full scan of the book can be viewed on my website at:

<https://kmhemrich.wixsite.com/mysite/the-book-1>

The paintings I exhibited at New City Arts in December as well as my thesis body of work can be viewed on my website at:

<https://kmhemrich.wixsite.com/mysite/2017>

My budget broke down as follows:

Transportation	flights in and out of Europe, bus fare, flights between cities	1655
Food	\$30-40 per day; 28 days	1120
Lodging	\$40 per night; 28 nights	1120
Travel Gear	backpack, toiletries, etc	275
Museum Fare		320
Passport		135
Art Supplies	paints, stretcher bars, canvas, frames, pens, film, etc.	875
Studio Rent	Charlottesville during summer-- 2 months	500
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>6000</b>