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Temporal Cycles

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TEMPORAL CYCLES

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agriculture and Mechanical College

In partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

in

The School of Art

by

Sarah Anne Shearer

B.F.A., University of Wyoming, 2009

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ABSTRACT

Temporal Cycles explores how systems and changes in the human body parallel those in nature. The investigation takes the form of a print installation, which captures the essence of bodily processes. The serial nature of printmaking and the organic world plays an important role as biomorphic forms and hourglass shapes are repeated in numerous renditions that breathe, pulse, expand, wither, ovulate, and transform. Labyrinths of pattern, texture, and color connect the symbolic forms as the installation tracks the evolution of processes in the body, and the forms reveal themselves through their pictorial associations.

TEMPORAL CYCLES

*I watched.
Afraid, but curious, the
dissipating throb suddenly
pulsed.
Then after a trembling instant,
rested in my hands. I knew then, in that
moment,
the
heart would never beat again.
The bone flood
reflected
white light from the moon. I
looked up at the night sky and knew the
stars
could never be counted.*

Tales of constellations and of the moon told to me by my grandmother when I was young still echo in my mind. The feelings of immensity that came over me when following her distorted finger up into the vastness of the sky are still with me today. Growing up in rural Wyoming, I was always able to look at the night sky and became particularly fascinated by the moon. The monthly cycle of the moon parallels menses. “The word menstruation is etymologically related to the moon. The terms menstruation and menses are derived from the Latin *menses* (month), which in turn relates to the Greek *mene* (moon) and to the roots of the English words *month* and *moon*.”¹ Relating inner cycles to the larger world has become second nature for me as a result of my cultural experience, which is based largely on natural cycles and an acute awareness of the natural world.

From a very young age I was collecting objects while hiking such as bones, fossils, foliage, as well as images of these objects from books. To this day I can’t walk by a pod or interesting object without picking it up and bringing it with me to deposit on the shelves I have designated for such things. Becoming interested in print media was

¹ Wikipedia, *Chemical Element*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chemical_element (March 28, 2013).

natural. For me, the idea of the multiple in print related so clearly to the multiple in the world and beyond (Fig. 1-4). Being able to create multiple images from just one matrix fueled my compulsion to collect and vise versa.



Figure 1. Sarah Anne Shearer, *Transcend II*, Intaglio and Chin Colle, 30"x14" 2009

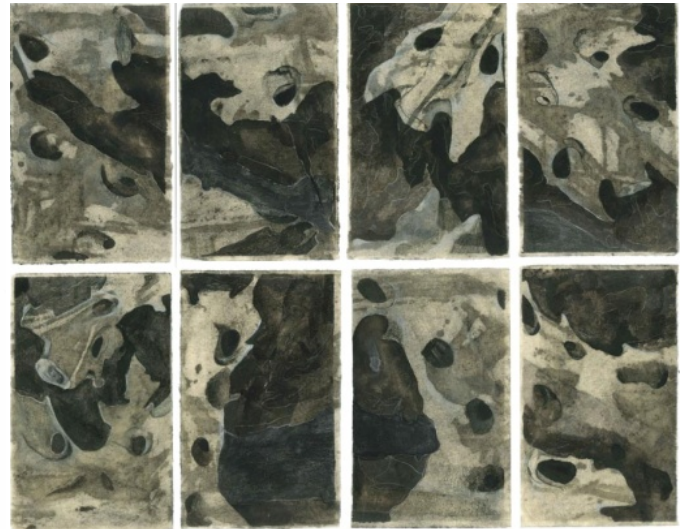


Figure 2. Sarah Anne Shearer, *Fractured*, Ink and Conte on Japanese Paper, 24"x30", 2008



3. Sarah Anne Shearer, Collecting bones in Wyoming, 2008

*Fantastic seedpods
overwhelming
the ground, whimsical arrays of moss
suspending
from the trees, shells
nestling
into the Mississippi mud,
and the cicada exoskeletons
creeping
up from beneath the needle covered soil.*

Upon moving to Louisiana I was completely captured and fascinated with the vegetation, and the magnolia tree in particular. The exquisite white blossom makes the whole south smell sweet. The landscape of Louisiana was so drastically different than that of Wyoming. The sheer amount of foliage and growth in Louisiana was overwhelming. While I was busy translating the massive collections in my studio into prints and arranging collected objects to create imagined worlds of mystery and whimsy, I was left longing for something more personal. Nature to infer nature was no longer enough. (Fig. 4-7) I began to simplify forms and depict cross sectional looking imagery, which lead to the flattening of forms, and creating shapes that became personal symbols and inferred multiple ideas. At the same time began to question my attraction to collecting and discovered that the way in which seedpods and other organic objects are beautiful from their creation through their decay parallels my interest with the human body and the processes the body undergoes. The way human skin wrinkles, shifts in color, and wilts is beautiful in the same way the magnolia tree is beautiful, but there is also something about it that evokes sadness and longing. I wish I understood the beauty of decay: wrinkling, crinkling, stretching, and shrinking.

*Penetrating blissful white petals, the seed-pods
emerge.
Blood red seeds
push out, connected by invisible threads.
Quivering with heat in the wet air.*



Fig. 4 Sarah Anne Shearer, *Studio Shot*, 2010



Fig. 5 Sarah Anne Shearer, *Magnolia Seeds*, 2010



Fig. 6 Sarah Anne Shearer, *Studio Shot*, 2010



Fig. 7 Sarah Anne Shearer, *Cicada Collection*, 2010

The body undergoes numerous processes and great transformation. Through the process of printmaking, I describe the essence of those bodily cycles using symbolic forms and labyrinths of patterns to connect the principal shapes. These patterns and shapes are organized into animated compositions that repeat and permute to echo cycles in the human body (Fig. 8).



Fig. 8 Sarah Anne Shearer, Minuscule Dynamics, Lithograph, 42x126 in., 2013

While there is a history of observing external influences in the natural world, the prints created for *Temporal Cycles* are made to capture the essence of what is inside. Intuition, memories, personal desires, and the complex interwoven moments that occur on a daily basis serve as a catalyst for creation. The work is guided by questions rather than answers, and is driven by a burning curiosity for discoveries found when images take over and words cease to form. The shift from external to internal was made through creating intuitively and learning from my senses as I discovered different ways of perceiving and recording. The biomorphic forms that resulted enable me to explore the world without representing it directly and become very personal interpretations of what I see, and more importantly, intuit from the physical world. I use forms that can take on multiple identities, and have the ability to infer other forms and ideas. Using a serial approach, I often use an hour glass shape because it represents a vessel, that is re-generated in different ways, as a symbol for the body, but also to infer the tracking of

time, its ebb, and flow, its constriction, and expansion (Figs. 9-11). I am drawn to artists who worked with biomorphic forms in the early twentieth century, especially Hans Arp. His oval forms were originally derived from pebbles and leaf forms, but took on multiple identities, natural connotations, as well as associations with cells, eggs, buds, the navel, torso, and human head. Arp used the oval as a symbol for metamorphosis and organic growth, and rather than copying the outer appearance of nature, he captures its essence and its principles.²



Fig. 9 Sarah Anne Shearer, *Inclusive Explosion*, Lithograph, 28x68 in., 2012

I connect with contemporary printmakers such as Akiko Taniguchi and Eva Isaksen who look to environmental phenomenon and cycles, and create guided by intuition and emotion. Their work contains abstract forms that reflect their inner life as related to larger cycles of nature. Like them and many others, I considered art a process that always changes and grows. Emulating the processes in the natural world, creating these prints was a process that evolved over time.

² Crowther, Paul. *Meanings of abstract art: between nature and theory*. (New York [u.a.: Routledge, 2012), 17



Fig. 10 Sarah Anne Shearer, *Interior Tempo*,
Lithograph, 2012



Fig. 11 Sarah Anne Shearer, *Receding Edge*,
Lithograph, 2012

*Rhythmic motions become
Frantic but smooth,
Fast but careful.*

Meticulously Unsatisfied.

*Yearning, desiring, craving, longing.
Impregnated forms undergo
Reactions, which
Delineate the
Architecture of the Edge.*

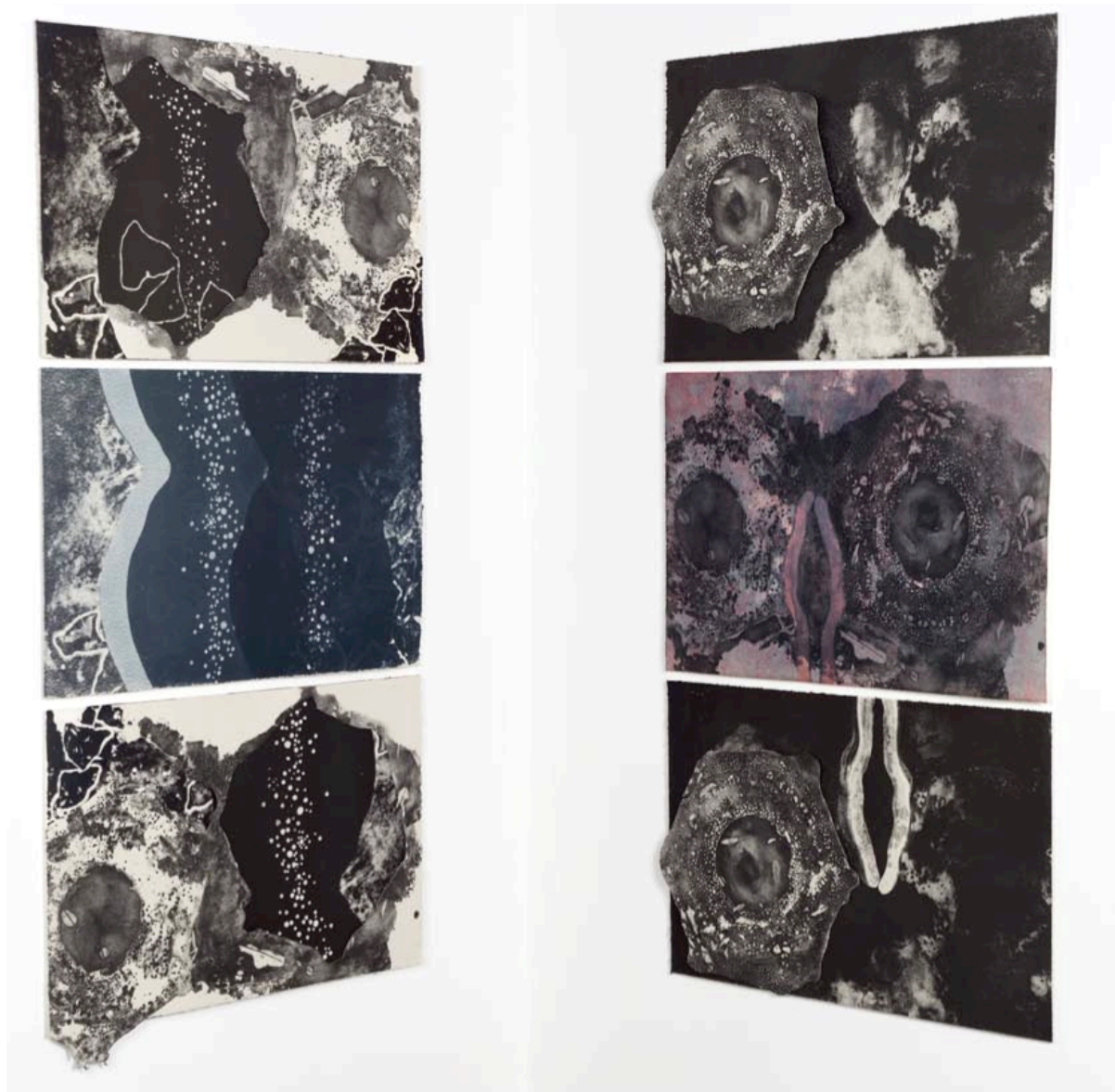


Fig. 12 Sarah Anne Shearer, *Edge Reflection* (left), *Depths of Infathomability* (right), Lithographs, 2012

Does a human being come to life at the moment of conception, or has their spirit already existed in another form? Do cycles begin and end, or are they continuous? Echoing change and time in nature, the transitions, transformations, and cycles of my imagery have their own pace and sequences in which they move from one state to another. In *Syntropic Gestation*, (Fig. 13) the vessel shapes morph and shift through fields of color. The definition for Syntropy is “a force which causes living things to reach

higher and higher levels of organization, order, and dynamic harmony.”³ This image is the essence of a transformation, and was pared down to basic shapes and colors that move through the composition to depict forms. The forms are birthed from figure to ground in continuous flux.

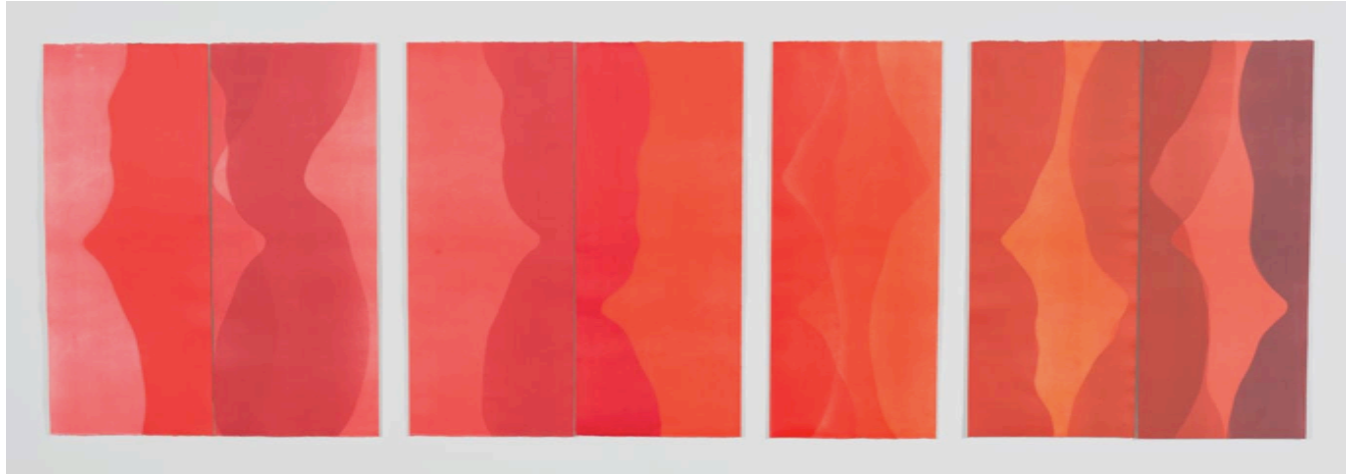


Fig. 13 Sarah Anne Shearer, Syntropic Gestation, Monoprint, 42x126 in., 2012

*Burning pink vessels,
Ejaculating
cloud pumps into the
Abyss.
Venerating
the rhythmical throbbing of the cosmos, I
Listen
to nature and its cadence.*

Color becomes essential, alluding to the chemical elements, which are thought to have been produced by various cosmic processes.⁴ When mixing colors I think about pigments that, to me, represent microscopic worlds of organic material: cells dividing, matter forming, and the inner workings of human body systems; macroscopic worlds: skin wrinkling and withering, veins throbbing with blood, the first breath of a baby, and

³ Hmolpedia, *Entropy antonyms*, <http://www.eoht.info/page/Entropy+antonyms>, (March 15, 2013).

⁴ Wikipedia, *Chemical element*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chemical_element, (March 28, 2013).

last breath of a loved one; cosmic views: stars exploding, dust gathering, and galaxies colliding. Varieties of pink became important in many of the works and began to clarify and complement the idea of femininity and feminine forms in many of the prints (Fig. 14).

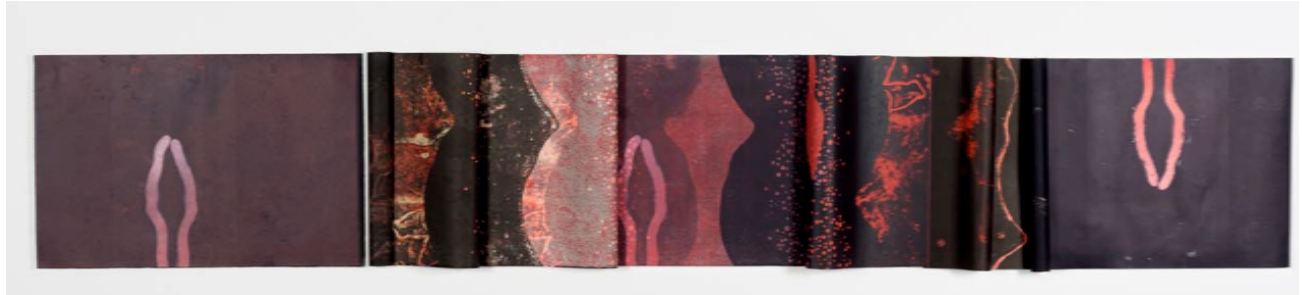


Fig. 14 Sarah Anne Shearer, *Inclusion*, Lithograph, 22x136 in., 2013

Printing these repetitive lithographs and monoprints was laborious, but at the same time meditative. The process of rolling ink in the print process becomes ritualistic with rhythm and repetition. A rhythm is developed for each image both physically and visually. My use of repeated forms has numerous connotations: to emphasize the repetition that happens with cycles in the body and the nuances in the intervals of those cycles. Guided by intuition for each print, one piece leads to another and to more variations.

The air we breathe into our lungs is the same air that is exhaled and moves between our inner world and the outer world. My ancestors expired this air, the only air that has ever existed. The figure and ground speak to one another. This sharing of components emphasizes the idea that we are part of a greater whole. In works such as *Interior Separation* (Fig. 15) dots become a unifying patterns that connect the figure and ground. This composition alludes to the inspiration and expiration of breath.



Fig. 15 Sarah Anne Shearer, *Interior Separation*, Lithograph, 28x68 in., 2012

The edge of the figure and the shape of the negative space around it shifts, changes, and morphs, in *Architecture of the Edge*. The fact that more life is found where two ecosystems meet than in the heart of either of the two systems is called the “edge effect,” and this concept becomes interesting as the edge of the figure becomes important.⁵ Forms are illuminated by the moon’s white light as ominous shapes whirl and react, creating transitions. (Figs. 16, 17).



Fig. 16 Sarah Anne Shearer, *Architecture of the Edge*, Lithograph, 22x34 in., 2012

⁵ Free Online Dictionary, Thesaurus and Encyclopedia, *Edge Effect*, <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/edge+effect> (March 4, 2013).



Fig. 17 Sarah Anne Shearer, *Architecture of the Edge*(installation shot), Lithograph, 22x170 in., 2012

For some time now, I have been creating prints that can be placed next to each other, in a variety of combinations, as part of my creative process: the serial approach I mentioned at the beginning of this paper. The past eight months I have been striving to depict something that was nearly just felt and knowing that my vision would not be fully revealed before the installation of the prints. Numerous hours were spent organizing, splicing, and vivisecting, to build an environment in the gallery. Individual prints could stand alone, but reached their potential through the installation and relationships each image had to the next, and to other images in the gallery. Over the course of this

project the importance of the serial approach I have been using for years became engrained in my creative process. Looking at the moon today, I still get the same feelings of immensity as I did as a child, and I hope to pass on the same stories I heard from my grandmother as my finger becomes twisted with time. My creative approach undulates with natural phenomenon. These processes are in my blood; they are passed on through ancestry.

*The glowing dot began
engulfing
the midnight sky.*

*Beautiful but haunting forms
emerged
out of the darkness.*

Pulse. Throb. Beat.

*Blinking, I awoke,
realizing
the dot of the moon had
forever
illuminated my eyelids.*

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VITA

Sarah Anne Shearer was born and raised in Newcastle, Wyoming, where her Mother and Grandmother instilled her love of collecting and observing natural phenomenon. She learned about the creative process of visual art from her long time mentor Rede Ballard, who continues to inspire her through his example as an artist, and wise words. Sarah moved to Powell, Wyoming after graduating from high school, where she had attended Northwest Community College, and had an amazing experience learning to hone her drawing skills. Moving to Laramie, Wyoming several years later to attend the University of Wyoming, she met and worked with Mark Ritchie, who helped her develop as an artist, both conceptually and technically. He helped Sarah realize she could make a life learning as an artist. Sarah received her Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of Wyoming, in Laramie, Wyoming. After graduating with her Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree, Sarah served as the Post Baccalaureate student assistant in printmaking for Mark at the University of Wyoming. During that year, Sarah traveled to Louisiana and immediately fell in love with the south. She then moved to Baton Rouge, Louisiana to enroll in the graduate printmaking program at Louisiana State University, where she has been studying with the outstanding printmaking professors, Leslie Koptcho, and Kimberly Arp.