

Project

Cardinal Points: A Crafting of Memory in Installation Design

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The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object.¹

-- Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*

CARDINAL POINTS serves as a commentary on contemporary perception and physiological responses to historical places of memory. The installation was conceptualized as a spatial satire investigated through interpretive material processes focused on reproduction and authenticity. Motivated by the forgotten landscape of an abandoned local cemetery, the installation translates the formal, repetitive structure of the burial grounds as a spiritual typology that runs the risk of fading and ultimately being discarded. Comprised of nine repetitive white-on-white reproduced screen-prints and a single shrine artifact, the primary goal of the installation was to create, through a crafted simile, an authentic experience that is comparable to the original but distinctive for its new contemporary place location.

The notion of mechanical reproduction first came about as a reference to the perceptual condition of the headstones themselves which, lining rows of the cemetery ground, already display the characterization of repetitive copies. Through repetition, burial stones lose their individual identity and contribute to society's inability to connect on a personal level. The reproductive processes practiced through the development of the installation similarly relate, transforming lives into patterns of letters and numbers through physical and digital acts of material transcription (rubbing, digitizing, processing, screen-printing, framing, hanging, observing, reflecting). Using white ink on white paper, the effect was not just to transform the original image of the headstone, but to virtually erase it, bringing it closer to the essence of the actual perceived condition of cemetery engagement. The objective was to consider whether, with the erasure of the substantive object, it would be possible to actually heighten the aura, the ghostly apparition or the soul of the material.

In contrast to the replicated printing, the shrine offers material variations – glass, iron shavings, candle wax, cork, ribbon, rose pedals, cotton, thread, scripted writing, and oxygen. Though these are also repetitive and gridded in their own sense, they offer more immediate tactile associations to the observer. Through such juxtaposition, *CARDINAL POINTS* incorporates multiple layers of transformation to create a contrast where authentic experience is questioned and thereby potentially rediscovered.

¹ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 221.



[1] *Cardinal Points* installation exhibit by Katherine and Brian Ambroziak, 2013, peripheral view i



process [thing - prerequisite original]
tombstone, re-erected in research effort

translation of the original object

[transformation - crafted]
charcoal rubbing on trace paper

[transformation - digital]
large format scan
digital manipulation to clarify and remove imperfections
image scaled down to accommodate frame and paper size
digital file enhanced and printed onto transparent film

[transformation - filmic]
film placed on screen with photo emulsion
exposed for five minutes
screen washed and reviewed on light table

[transformation - reproduction]
white ink mixed with two percent red
pulled on bright white arches 88
proof... proof
run of sixteen nearly perfect prints

[transformation - cardinal points]
frame with floating print
gallery wall painted dark grey
grid markers located and applied
interpreted gravestones hang

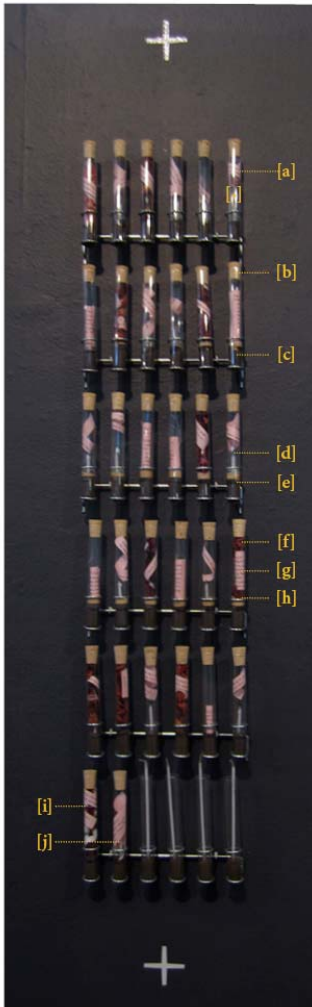
shrine hangs
[thing - life symbol]



[2a] *Burial marker of Margaret Jackson, Odd Fellows Cemetery, Knoxville; previously fallen and re-erected by research team, July 2012*

[2b] *Stone rubbing, black pastel chalk on bond, February 2013*

[2c] *Printmaking process, March 2013*



BELOVED SHRINE [replaces the seventh gravestone print]

I wonder through these Braille transcriptions – pleading with Mercator to loosen his grip – listening for whispers. A precious red cardinal led me to this secret garden and dances in the canopy as stories are reclaimed.

TEST TUBE · [a] *Medical sampling, medical intervention; environmental sterility; content visibility; fragility of each day.*

CORK · [b] *Tenuous seal.*

IRON SHAVINGS · [c] *Grounding element, soil; polar reaction; 'I'll be your magnetic north.'*

CANDLE · [d] *Meditative devotion; liturgical taper for the Easter season; an increment of time...*

WAX · [e] *Evidence of the burn; a hint of snow on the ground.*

ROSE PETALS · [f] *pink. A day marking birth; joy. red. Fortification; kinship; extracted fragments from a temporal, gentle bloom; our Beloved.*

HANDWRITTEN NOTES ON PINK PAPER · [g] *Scripted passages of favorite stories, tightly bound; open prayers of encouragement/love; memories in a journal.*

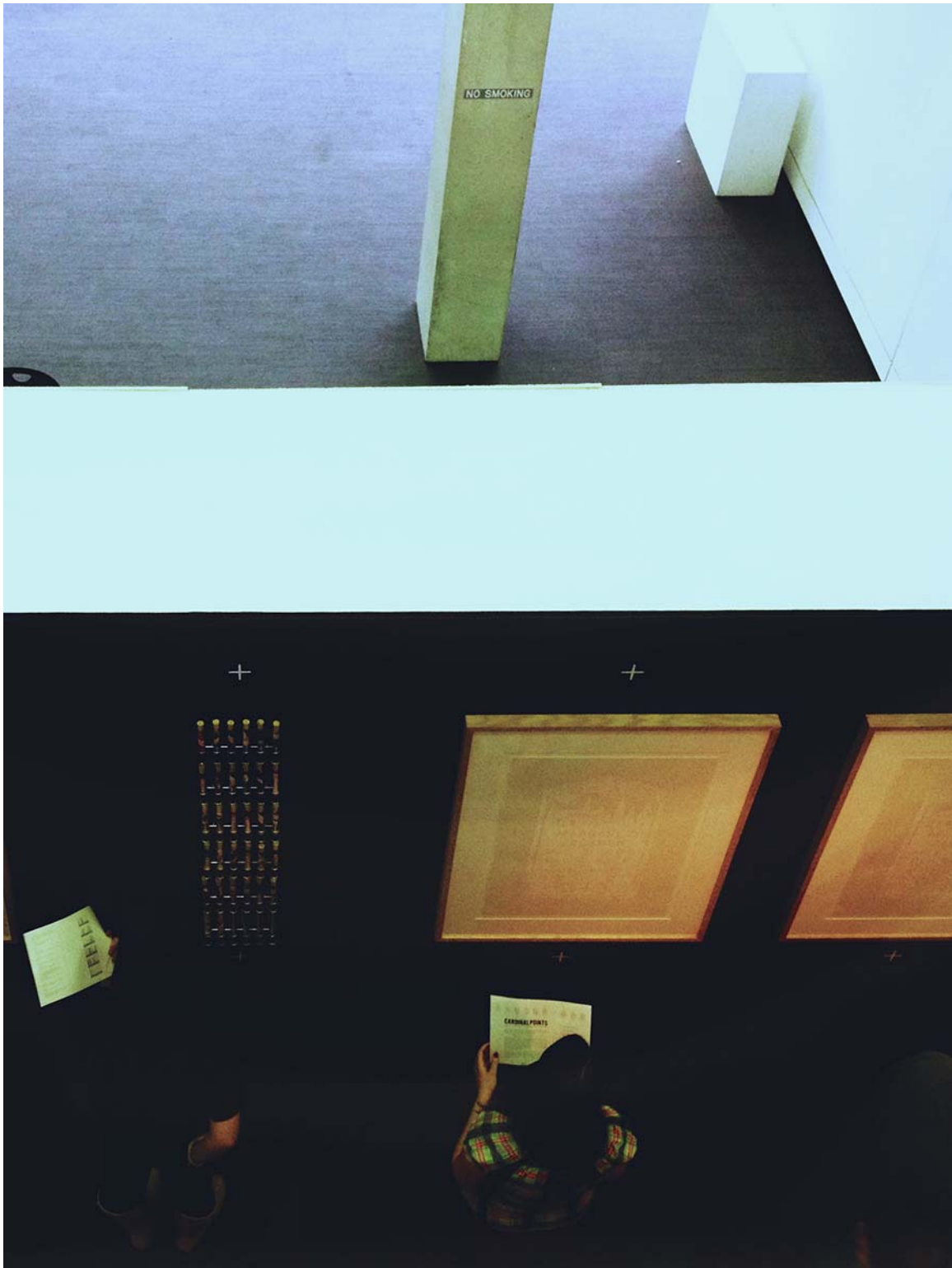
PINK THREAD · [h] *Slender strands; stitched binding, tied with a bow; stitched wound, knotted.*

COTTON · [i] *Blessings on an irrevocable night; initiation into a world greater than ours; the formalization of your name.*

RIBBON · [j] *A short length; a final gift left unwrapped.*

OXYGEN · [·] *Substantiated prerequisite to life. The purity of the element cradled beside you, pumped into your lungs; tempered words reassure you and prompt your own natural rhythms.*

- [3] *Singular shrine, relics of a contained life unique to individual burial; interrupting pattern of repetitive grid in Cardinal Points installation exhibit*



[4] *Cardinal Points installation exhibit, peripheral view ii (from above)*



[5] *White-on-white print, straight-forward view rendering image invisible*



[6] *White-on-white print, oblique peripheral view revealing full graphic*