

TOMORROW

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DEGREE OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS

BY


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APPROVED BY



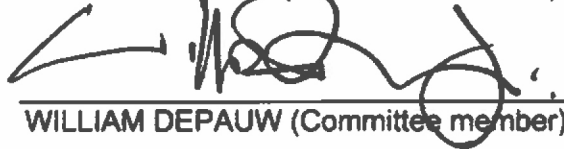
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*“The whole difference between construction and creation is exactly this: that a thing constructed can only be loved after it is constructed; but a thing created is loved before it exists.” --**Charles Dickens***

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Teresa Cole has not only been the head of my department but a mentor, now colleague and friend. I interviewed with Teresa for an hour and a half after running desperately in the rain with my portfolio trying to figure out which building, we were to meet in. Her character precedes any expectation of what a traditional printmaking professor should be. Her appetite for art production is infectious. What I have learned from Teresa is to alleviate the pressure on myself, as a student and as an artist by truly connecting with the art of making. Through her tutelage, I have embraced and celebrated the parts of myself that are process orientated. I have become less judgmental about titles in the print shop and focused solely on the work. Extraordinary circumstances deserve extraordinary responses and through this crisis of a global pandemic, I had Teresa to support and push me to this point. I want to thank her for this and for showing me the possibility of maintaining my own poise and grace in the face of a world and city that can often lean into senseless grief and violence. Thank you, Teresa, for your professionalism, punk nature and unintentional humor. *TOMORROW* would have not been possible without your critical eye and education.

Introduction

“If we hesitate between 'veiling' and 'revealing' our emotions or vacillate between 'shrouding' and 'disclosing' our thoughts, we must understand the nuts and bolts of our individual construct and underpin the elasticity of our mental frame. ("Unfulfilled meeting")” --Belgian painter, **Erik Pevernagie**

As you walk into the Antenna gallery, etchings line the corridor and at the furthest wall in the next room are three etchings equally spaced. A rich black encircles meaty fleshed figures without hands, feet and one without a head. They twist and turn, writhe and make connections to each other in their proximity. On the left side of the gallery are wooden totem like sculptures; two 8ft totems vertically stand together against the wall while another 6 ft sculpture is horizontally suspended underneath the show's vinyl lettering. “Tomorrow” is in a bright red color as opposed to the artist's name which is in black. The implication here being that “tomorrow” might be different for the artist who exist in the black as a matter of fact. The wooden sculptures are comprised of different types of wood, varying in both thickness and height. They push and pull imagery, that seems to sit atop of the wood despite being laser etched into them. At first glance, the viewer could argue and expect an architectural concept being presented. While connections of architecture can be made from the skeletal wooden imagery of benches, gates and fire escape forms to the meaty flesh like figures, the intention here is not to ask which came first, the structure or the being. Both the etchings and sculptures are meant to have the same elements within themselves but beg to ask how are we different?

In my practice I purposely exclude visual references in the early stages of my work. I want to work from life and imagery that has been conjured in me through poetry, music or theater. This imagery is manifested through me and not in response to other artists. This is

important as 2-dimensional work is representational of me as the artist and internalizes how I want to address my audience with fresh questions and not reiterations from other 2-dimensional artists. It is not a reinvention of the wheel but rather a question of authenticity to relate and communicate to those of my time. When I first began working on the etchings, it was crucial that they all were the same size and of the same technique. In this uniformity the subtlety of their actions could be magnified into great gestures.

I first began to use ballerinas, contortionist and actors as source materials for these figures. I was interested in abstracting their movements; daring to ask whether it was explosion or implosion that we are witnessing. Most of my work prior to the thesis was about investigating that form of layering. I wanted to present the body layered with other bodies to create motion and anonymity while still retaining their figurative nature. Much of what the bodies share with the sculptures exist in this process of juxtaposition. The collaged nature of layering is presented flatly and next to one another along the long planks of wood they are adhered to. It is in this notion of “call and response” the pieces exist harmoniously. As I collaged each image of wood together, I laid into the abstracted figures with different levels of resist and acid biting. These connections are however are formal as the conceptual nature of both groups of work tend to differ. The etchings are places where the bodies fill in conflict in space whereas the individual barriers and containers are representations of that space. Although the figures aren’t present in the wood etchings, I imagine them there. Layering has both its positive effects and negative ones. Intentional or “positive” layering lead to the varying heights of the wood. Whereas the “negative” effect of layering, in my process, might allow me to see something where others do not, such as bodies in the vacant spaces.

Another theme that runs concurrently with layering in my work is “mirroring”. As with layering this process can be a hit or miss. As wood sculptures and the etchings may seem separate to the viewer, I believe they act as mirrors for one another. This is as if to say what they have in common is this eternal interaction, a ceaseless dialogue by reflecting how there are different and how they are the same. From both groups of work acknowledgement comes from what the other work tends to lack. This type of mirroring can be objective, for example it could speak on the differences/ similarities of the etched mark in both the wood and copper. But it is in subjective mirroring I find the most relation between these works. Subjective mirroring acts much like any-body dysmorphia, whereas we perceive the mirror is providing more information than is actually there. It becomes an esoteric feeling based on non-factual or temporary information.

Whatever the read of both works and how they relate to one another, whether through layering or mirroring, both works want to discuss what’s on the surface as a whole. Inside and outside becomes as one and are presented on the surface as foreground. Background, both physically and metaphorically do not have as much presence or importance as what sits on top of the picture plane. This is also not to place so much importance on the surface as the lack of background is just as necessary to highlight this disconnect. Just as the background in the etchings shift from white to black or as the varying construction colors don’t completely disregard wood grain; these details become just as important as the perceived subject matter on the surface. These background details set the stage for the surface to exist.



Coleman, Kelwin. (L) *Study of Men*. 9"x12" Pencil on Tracing paper. 2020 // (R) *Cholos*. 24"x36" Digital print & white impasto paint. 2020

Origin Story

Tim Nelson of Architectualdigest.com writes on the collapse of the Hard Rock Hotel in New Orleans:

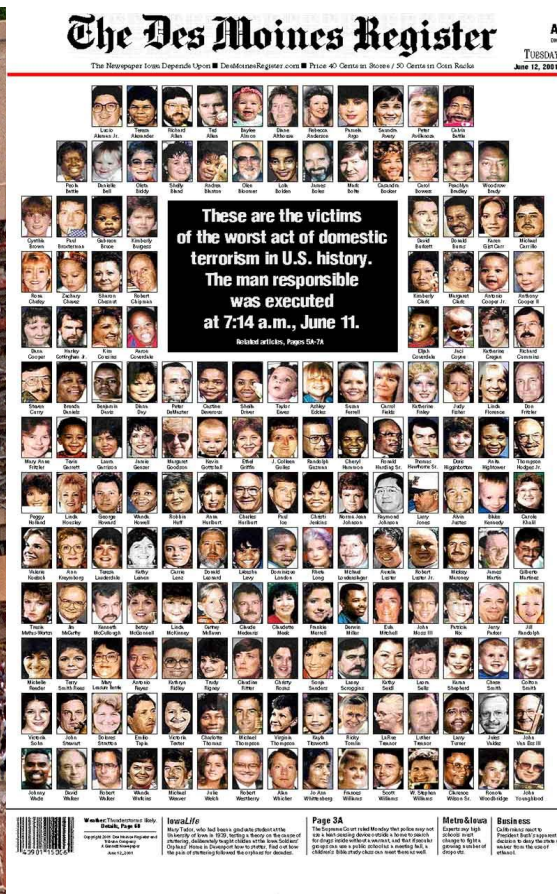
"The collapse of the Hard Rock Hotel in the heart of downtown New Orleans has left at least two people dead, with another still missing. On Saturday morning, six to eight upper floors of the site, which is currently under construction, appeared to pancake onto one another, eventually sliding down onto North Rampart and Canal Streets near the southwest edge of the French Quarter. [...] While there's no official word yet on what caused the collapse, one eyewitness with a view from a 23rd-floor classroom at the nearby Tulane School of Public Health told nola.com that "it looked like the concrete just slid from the top all the way down to the street." Another witness reported seeing a crane "just sort of dangling there" as the front of the building fell away.

In the immediate aftermath, 18 injured people were transported to nearby hospitals. All were reportedly in stable condition as of Saturday night. Luckily, no pedestrians or motorists in the areas on or around North Rampart and Canal Streets sustained any injuries from falling debris.

However, according to the Washington Post, two individuals have been confirmed dead, while authorities are still searching for another missing person. On Monday, New Orleans mayor LaToya Cantrell said in a statement to the public that the effort "continues to be a rescue mission at this time. Those rescue and recovery efforts have been complicated by two damaged cranes at risk of falling. Over the weekend, New Orleans Fire Department superintendent Tim McConnell described the building as "unstable" after the initial incident, noting that "a collapse is still possible." That risk has prompted officials to expand an evacuation area to include several surrounding blocks, closing streets and temporarily moving local residents of the area into hotels. Citadel Builders told the Post that it would investigate the incident. Meanwhile, Hard Rock International clarified in a statement that it was not involved in the building of the hotel: "Hard Rock has had no involvement in the construction of the

project,” the company said. At a Monday morning press conference, Mayor Cantrell and superintendent McConnell noted that a September 24 inspection of the building site did not raise any red flags that would have kept the development of the 18-story project from going forward. Federal inspectors will begin a proper investigation into what caused the deadly accident at the conclusion of the ongoing search and rescue efforts.”

In the last few years, through civil unrest, prior and during the Covid-19 global pandemic, “after the death of George Floyd in late May (2020), more than 130 Confederate statues and tributes to divisive historical figures have come down in a flurry of protests, acts of vandalism and government decrees” (Ortiz). Masses of people surrounding one body, pulling in attempts to dethrone these lifeless, yet lifelike statues, are juxtaposed with the efforts to recover bodies from collapsed buildings; this is the origin story of my art show, *TOMORROW*.



Starting from the Oklahoma City bombing to the images from 9/11, I have stood shoulder to shoulder with family, friends, and strangers as we watch destruction unfold. Building floors

are often flattening, referred to as “pancakes,” as the world wonders about the hidden bodies unseen in the demolition. I have often imagined these bodies reflecting the facades of these opened spaces. Bodies replicating the twisted and exposed metal rods as a skeleton would past the skin of a body. We search for life in this devastation and we denounce a history in those statues we seek to destroy.

This thought seems to pale in comparison to the blame or collective social contract we passively accept among the devastation. The September 12th, 2001 New York Times Headlines exclaims “*U.S. ATTACKED - HIJACKED JETS DESTROY TWIN TOWERS AND HIT PENTAGON IN DAY OF TERROR*”. Underneath that headline reads “*President Vows to Exact Punishment for ‘Evil’*”. There’s a disconnect in emotion when foreign powers destroy monuments, we build in prosperity versus monuments we’ve created and then destroyed. This is as if to say, we can only celebrate destruction if we are authored in its creation. Beyond that horrifying notion is the one that ties back everything to the South. It is mostly Southern war heroes and politicians memorialized in monuments deemed as relics of racist culture contested. It is as Nelson writes, that corporations hold no responsibility to subpar construction as it relates to the Hard Rock Hotel in New Orleans.

This continuous process of discovery and destruction can only be resolved by our collective society if we can associate or identify a name, face or history to them. *TOMORROW* is an observation before this process: the unmanned empty spaces and anonymity of bodies that exist only through their imagined visibility and historical destruction.

THE END OF NOT LOOKING becomes TOMORROW

I enter the art world as a commodity without retaining the rights of ownership over my identity and artwork. After my public art lecture and being in *Images and Meaning*, an art history class offered at Tulane, I began to question how my art reflected my identity as an artist. Most of the work I had made prior to the program was about presenting my intersectionality and also providing a resolution. These resolutions would either take the form of a semiotic nature or would present as an obvious conclusion to narrative based allegories. For example, using the narrative of the biblical figure, Job, I could mirror his faith in God to my faith in myself and art. The preface of this work was to create characters marred with the expectation of a different or exotic nature in their own right. The concept originated with the spectacle or grandeur of biblical figures and athletes; figures in our society that provide us with some form of entertainment. These archetype characters were not the genesis of the characters i.e. bodies presented in my thesis work. However, they did share one similarity; I wanted these bodies to inspire a continual investigation through being viewed. What resonates deeply with these characters I created is their expectation of being observed--or lack thereof. "The coliseum, the arena" were words that repeatedly came up in this process. My thesis began with individual spectacle, scrutinized and observed by the mass public. This would be the concept for the "end of not looking". The reception of these characters was inconsequential as what was most important to question was why an observer cannot look away. Does the viewer of any person or event need a resolution to

understand the person or event? Or, perhaps, could something more sinister be at play? In the Poetics book, Aristotle writes:

“We assume that, for the finest form of Tragedy, the Plot must be not simple but complex; and further, that it must imitate actions arousing pity and fear, since that is the distinctive function of this kind of imitation. It follows, therefore, that there are three forms of Plot to be avoided. (1) A good man must not be seen passing from happiness to misery, or (2) a bad man from misery to happiness. The first situation is not fear-inspiring or piteous, but simply odious to us. The second is the most untragic that can be; it has no one of the requisites of Tragedy; it does not appeal either to the human feeling in us, or to our pity, or to our fears. Nor, on the other hand, should (3) an extremely bad man be seen falling from happiness into misery. Such a story may arouse the human feeling in us, but it will not move us to either pity or fear; pity is occasioned by undeserved misfortune, and fear by that of one like ourselves; so that there will be nothing either piteous or fear-inspiring in the situation. There remains, then, the intermediate kind of personage, a man not pre-eminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice and depravity but by some error of judgement, of the number of those in the enjoyment of great reputation and prosperity; e.g. Oedipus, Thyestes, and the men of note of similar families.”

Tragedy as a narrative was not resonating with my viewer. Questions seemed to go unanswered and the consumability of the pre-existing experience with these characters lessened any effect of spectacle. The presentation of these bodies was not to have them respond to any preexisting narrative stories of tragedy but to question their existence in this perceived origin of tragedy. It is important to note that I question not only the complete narrative of these bodies presented but the viewer's need for narrative to be present at all.

“Not being able to look away from a car accident” was a phrase I grew up with. However, there are so many factors and questions that arise from such a phrase. Why can't the viewer look away? Beyond the viewer's acknowledgement This sensation is limited in time--like a snapshot--and thus the level of observation becomes focused on a moment. Is it the small flaw in our nature to witness carnage to feed the small part of depravity shared in our existence? Often in casual conversations with residents of the Hard Rock Hotel, an exhausted response can often feel comedic without the intention of offense. How is it possible for this event to hold both tragedy and comedy in one response? At the very heart of this juxtaposition where my work looms.

“The tragic fear and pity may be aroused by the Spectacle; but they may also be aroused by the very structure and incidents of the play—which is the better way and shows the better poet. The Plot in fact should be so framed that, even without seeing the things take place, he who simply hears the account of them shall be filled with horror and pity at the incidents; which is just the effect that the mere recital of the story in Oedipus would have on one. To produce this same effect by means of the Spectacle is less artistic and requires extraneous aid. Those, however, who make use of the Spectacle to put before us that which is merely monstrous and not productive of fear, are wholly out of touch with Tragedy; not every kind of pleasure should be required of a tragedy, but only its own proper pleasure. The tragic pleasure is that of pity and fear, and the poet has to produce it by a work of imitation; it is clear, therefore, that the causes should be included in the incidents of his story. Let us see, then, what kinds of incident strike one as horrible, or rather as piteous. In a deed of this description the parties must necessarily be either friends, or enemies, or indifferent to one another. Now when enemy does it on enemy, there is nothing to move us to pity either in his doing or in his meditating the deed, except so far as the actual pain of the sufferer is concerned; and the same is true when the parties are indifferent to one another” (Aristotle).

Tragedy holds our attention as long as it incites pity and fear, Aristotle argues and that it must retain a level of relatability. However, this type of visibility traps us in narrative. The theory determines connection only through self-interest and empathy within the parameters of the event. Is there a possibility for abstraction to replicate the same emotions, long enough to keep the viewer's attention fixed?

TOMORROW

In a series of copper etchings and laser cut woodcuts, the juxtaposition between anonymity and tragedy spark a new conversation. The dichotomy between the organic gestural nature of tragedy and a mechanical reproduction of scaffolding reimagine destruction as we see it.

The bodies, which were inspired by painful contortions observed in modern dance, are translucent veils presented both as foreground and background. The tar-based process of stenciling and opening areas onto a copper plate reveal authoritative contours in which the mass weaves in and out. This supposes that the body is in constant movement, never being contained

by its imagined and unimagined mark. Mostly mass, the bodies are torsos shown from the front and back. They are meant to be read without identity and without gender. Their extremities obscured or omitted to further the sense that these are bodies without desire or expectation in their own right. The bodies do not exude traditional historical narrative but rather action. By removing these identifying markers, the viewer is left with a body that solely exists in presentation. There is however one marker left that marries the bodies together and that is the nipple.

The nipple as an identifier denotes a mammal-like recognition. It is meant to unite with the viewer despite its obvious metaphorical reputation. In the mass of our bodies, it carries many ambiguous roles as an item that represents sexuality, a nurturer and fingerprint. It was not important to have this be a prominent factor to these masses but an inconsequential remnant of what is possible to the deconstructed figure. It is an unavoidable marker, especially since I wanted these bodies to have the opportunity to present renewal, even as a destroyed figure.

These bodies are meant to exist in a state of “stasis,” revealed through destruction with the possibility of reconstruction. The use of soap-ground aquatint furthered this concept for me. If the bodies’ contortions and movement are their resume, the soap-ground aquatint marks are their references and educational background. Content does follow form in place of narrative. Soap-ground as a resist, as opposed to etching’s traditional tar-based cousin, offers both random and chance encounters of the historical mark. The historical mark is equivalent to what in printmaking is known as the “journalism of the line”; which is the etched line processed through the act of printing. These torso-based bodies are an accumulation of this acid burned mark. They represent both muscle and history simultaneously. The aquatint affords the line to both breathe and represent the intentional and unintended movement. The figures become their own through

this process, as individual as marks made on a monotype. The monotype as a unique, gestural interpretation of information discovered is the same way these bodies reveal themselves to me.

For these bodies, color exists in its referential nature of grayscale. The etchings are printed in a mixture of intense black and another black ink to soften their experience on paper. They are tonally made up of themselves, superimposed as veils on tan paper. Proofs of these plates on white paper revealed them to be stark and overwhelming. The choice of a slightly toned paper reflects the evidence of inhabitation. These are not bodies that are supposed to overwhelm with anonymity, but they exist with a space and history unknown but preoccupied. They exist within their own time and within their own version of tragedy.



The laser woodcuts exist in the same fashion but offer a different context. Smaller images or forms, they comprise themselves of burned exposed wood in larger constellations. Sometimes alone or paired with a solid block of white, they are intentional in mirroring the bodies in their anonymity. Three planks of wood, two 8ft tall and one 6 ft, back the collaged pieces; one presented horizontally and the other two verticals. Their ensembles mimic a construction site, both in collection of new and disintegrated objects. Individually these pieces are awkwardly cut

representations of objects that dictate or encourage the space in which the human body should occlude, either in regard to safety or control. These objects range from the fire escapes, crowd control barriers or benches mixed in with thresholded images of cement, brick and steel. Laser engraving into wood seems to make the most sense, as wood is a building material and often the counter material to work with in a printshop context.

CONNECTIONS

Both bodies of work were developed separately but continuously respond to one another. They are both housed under the concept of construction and destruction. Placement is an important factor not just in curation but the evolution to the etchings and opposition to the wood structures. The etched body went from ethereal bodies melting into their void like backgrounds to emerging from rich black spaces. Same actions of bodies challenging their compositions but evolving to dominate the spotlight inform the static and repetition nature of the wood planks. After all, construction has an order of operations as destruction does not. Destruction in these etchings exist on a fibrous, cellular level from within and these blocks of woodwork together to create form.

Assemblage is important in the idea of building. It was important to echo and mimic this just as the way that the Des Moines cover of people affected by the tragedy and the destroyed Oklahoma building did (p.6) Pockets of empty spaces and the way we view bodies in this tragedy co-exist in the same space. This process calls into question how we fill spaces after a destructive tragedy? I propose that if it's with our own bodies, we fill it with action and motion, whereas if it is inorganic, we fill it with ideals of cold architecture and promises of tomorrow.

I'm counting on this range of both body and steel to be a gap in which the viewer can rest equally between both views. What makes them similar and different? I want the viewer to focus on the necessity of scale to reflect the importance of both idealizing the body in such a space while resonating with the historical devastation of a collapsed building. As we as a culture move past tragedy is there a conscious promise of tomorrow through the devastation of today?

CONCLUSION

This thesis show is a culmination of all my time at Tulane. The issues that arose for me were tied into identity and resolutions, that are tied to my intersectionality. I struggle with overexplaining my work as I fear that it will color the viewer's experience; that I'll end up under explaining. This is a negotiation I often have to struggle through. Easily accessible content kills considered appreciation. Art is often contextualized by an authority and narrative seems to be an unchallengeable feat. This thesis is about holding loose general concepts in order to reach a larger audience. These looser concepts are intended to be assessable in ways that can become personal for the viewer. Tragedy, comedy, introspective, heavy concept and light joking are themes that can be found in most art but in this buffet, I almost feel as though the viewer must decide. This work is a critique not just on the experience of observing the ins and outs of deconstruction/ construction but also on the way the public deals with artwork on display in general.

Kelwin Coleman
TOMORROW
Plate & Price List

ALL OVER

*Soap-ground Aquatint Etching on BFK
2020 \$1300*

TWIST FIRST

*Soap-ground Aquatint Etching on BFK
2020 \$1300*

LEFT UP

*Soap-ground Aquatint Etching on BFK
2020 \$1300*

MAYBE HER

*Soap-ground Aquatint Etching on BFK
2020 \$1300*

CURL

*Soap-ground Aquatint Etching on BFK
2020 \$1300*

CHEST FORWARD

*Soap-ground Aquatint Etching on BFK
2020 \$1300*

CHEST BACK

*Soap-ground Aquatint Etching on BFK
2020 \$1300*

BACK FRONT

*Soap-ground Aquatint Etching on BFK
2020 \$1300*

BUTT DOWN

*Soap-ground Aquatint Etching on BFK
2020 \$1300*

COLLAGED CONSTRUCTIONS

1, 2 & 3

*Mixed Wood, laser engraved, paint, ink,
pigment on plywood
2020 \$3000*

**SMALL TOKENS OF
TOMORROW**

*Acrylic on wood 2020
\$100*

PLATES















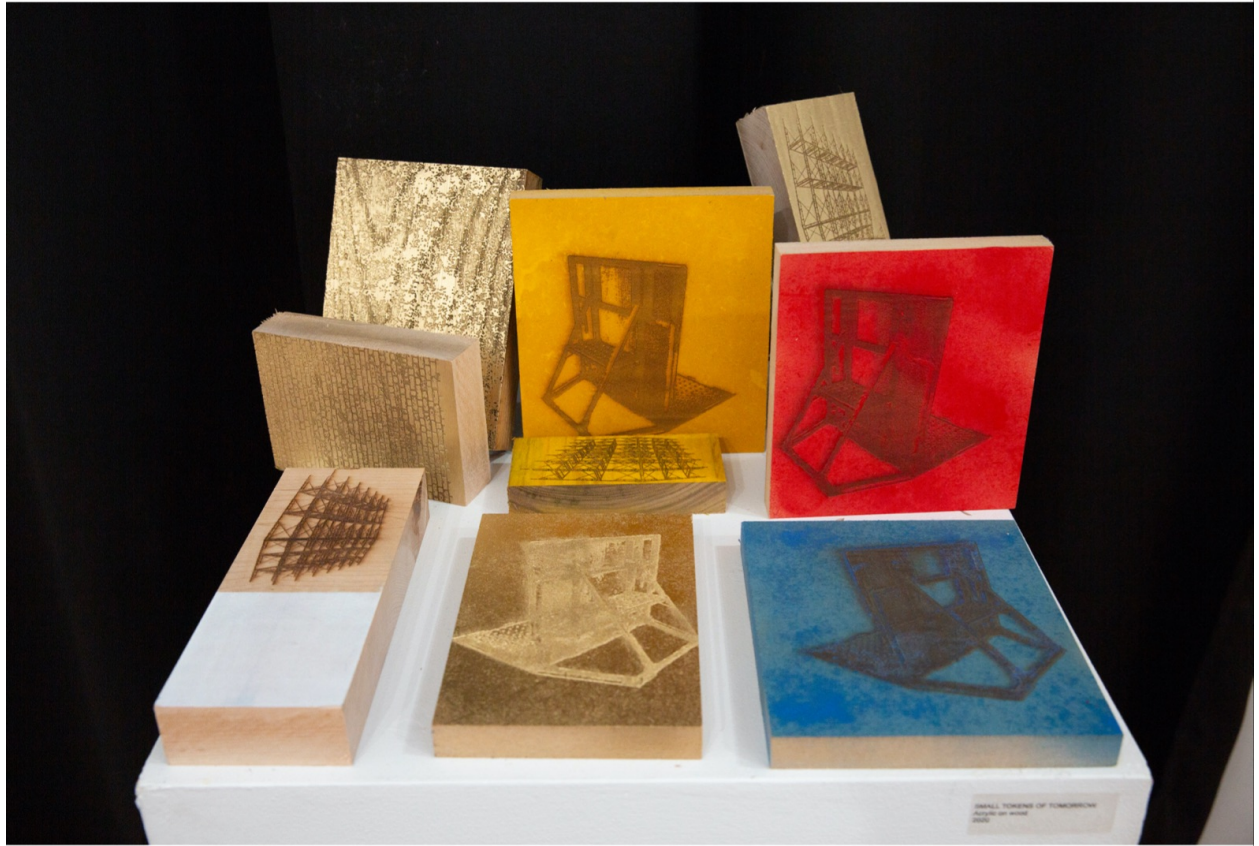












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