

Holding it together is a part of it

Cloud (2008) is the initial work encountered upon entering Greg Streak's solo exhibition, *Accumulative Disintegration*. This piece sets the tone for the exhibition. It features a stainless steel arc (1500 mm x 500 mm) suspended in mid-air by four steel wire cables, reminiscent of a kite in flight. The underbelly of the curved plate faces the viewer, illuminated by spotlights to reveal 2000 razor blades meticulously embedded into the steel surface. The precise and sleek construction contrasts sharply with the inherent menace of the razor blades. This hazardous surface hovers above, evoking a sense of imminent threat, akin to a guillotine. The reflective stainless steel casts a large, dark shadow on the gallery ceiling, resembling a foreboding zeppelin. This juxtaposition challenges the conventional notion of clouds having silver linings.

The initial confrontation upon entering the exhibition is difficult to avoid. However, as one progresses through this intense introduction, the subsequent works appear deceptively gentler. These works evoke a sense of calm and meditation, yet on closer examination, they reveal underlying distress and trauma.

The triptych print series serves as a delicate counterpoint to the brutality of *Cloud*. The series consists of three original ink drawings, scanned and digitally printed with archival ink onto 600mm x 400mm Hahnemühle archival paper. The 300mm diameter drawings float within the paper's space, suggesting interrelation and continuity of scale.

The first print, titled *Someday I Will Find You*, features an intricate accumulation of connected circular dots, forming a matrix of interconnectedness. However, this analogy oversimplifies the surface intensity, which remains difficult to fully perceive even under close scrutiny. Small patches of unconnected minuscule hollow circles amplify the concentration of the remaining surface. Both this print and the subsequent one, *...a rush of blood*, possess a corporeal quality, resembling microscopic views of blood-filled veins or an out-of-control tap root system. *...a rush of blood* is both manic and delicate, and is the most visually satisfying of the three. The final print, *The End Always Has a Beginning*, is similar in scale and format but conveys a more cosmological impression. Its densely woven maze covering the entire surface resembles the atomic detail of a meteorite shard from outer space.

Greg Streak has stated that "Accumulative Disintegration deals with the interstitial space between conflict and resolution. It's about trying to pull things towards a whole whilst they disperse around us. It looks at our need, and at times failure, to control the chaos of our everyday lives."

Secrets (for those who don't have)" (2008) is a poignant work consisting of a Perspex box approximately 200mm x 150mm x 30mm, fastened to a white bracket. The box contains 2000 miniature envelopes, sealed and glued together to form 20 stacks of 100 envelopes each. These envelopes are compressed within the sealed box, their contents suffocated beneath the transparent surface and locked away indefinitely. This potentially represents 2000 confessions captured and necessarily buried, evoking a

sense of hidden truths and suppressed narratives. The reflection from the Perspex lid casts a spiritual light onto the floor, further enhancing the contemplative atmosphere.

Above, the shadow of *Cloud* looms, adding to the work's ambiance. The envelopes in the Perspex container originally held the razor blades from *Cloud*, creating a metaphorical interplay of light and dark, both physically and symbolically. This duality can be likened to the human condition, where light and shadow coexist, as observed by Carl Jung: "One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious."

The work resonates with themes of secrecy and revelation, echoing Louise Bourgeois's exploration of hidden emotions and personal history. Bourgeois once stated, "Art is a guarantee of sanity. That is the most important thing I have said." In *Secrets (for those who don't have)*, the act of concealing and compressing the envelopes can be seen as a method of coping with and containing the chaos of human experience, much like Bourgeois's own works.

By juxtaposing the oppressive containment of the envelopes with the ethereal light cast by the Perspex, *Streak* creates a powerful visual and emotional narrative. This interplay of elements invites the viewer to reflect on the nature of secrets, the weight of unspoken confessions, and the eternal struggle between concealment and exposure.

Accumulative Disintegration (2008), the eponymous large print, blurs the distinction between an aerial map and microscopic detail, suggesting a complex, layered narrative. This piece 900mm x 600mm features an original ink drawing that has been scanned and enlarged, yet the detail remains sharply focused. Upon closer inspection, the print reveals individual marks that resemble stitches: two small drawn dots connected by a line. Additionally, it evokes a molecular feel, reminiscent of a vibrating double helix.

A reflected pool of light on the floor leads the viewer to the next work. *Paper cuts on the skin (random, but deliberate)* (2008) consists of paper-thin pewter sheeting wrapped around a 500mm x 300mm MDF panel. The reflection on the floor is a result of the spotlight bouncing off the polished pewter surface. Although the surface is smooth, it is uneven, characterized by random welted marks. These raised cuts are intentional, suggesting a ritualistic demarcation of transgression. The surface is simultaneously ominous and arresting.

The largest work on display, *For Every Time I Wish You Hadn't* (2008), has a commanding presence from the moment one enters the exhibition space. Its pitted surface continuously flickers in peripheral vision, and up close, its physicality is both imposing and overwhelming. This piece features a grey and black polished panel, measuring 2750mm x 1830mm, supported at an angle by a steel frame bracket, resembling an easel. The entire surface is covered with small inflections—scars of varying depth and thickness. The density of these marks creates a vibrating intensity, making the surface appear as if it is simultaneously disintegrating and coalescing, akin to magnetized iron filings. The surface evokes imagery of a windswept grassland, a

disturbed water surface, or a virus under a microscope. The title suggests a comprehensive complicity to some form of indiscretion, which could refer to intimate contraventions or colonial impositions. The work's dark aesthetic is both imposing and captivating.

Penance in Progress (2007-2008) introduces the only colour in the exhibition. Red cotton thread on grey canvas creates a random mapping of intense stitching. It is uncertain whether the red thread is inherently luminous or if it appears dramatic due to the monochromatic nature of the rest of the work. The reference to blood is inescapable. Small sewn red scars, which never overlap and remain separated, signify individual indiscretions that collectively map a journey of sin. The work is open-ended in two ways: its meaning is open to interpretation, and the title suggests it is a process rather than a conclusion. In some areas, the canvas is slightly gathered, creating small welts that evidence the laborious handmade effort as opposed to machine precision. This work also recalls *Paper Cuts on the Skin* (random, but deliberate).

Collectively, it is challenging not to notice the interconnections between the works. The connected nodes in *Someday I Will Find You* resonate within *Accumulative Disintegration* and manifest as large raised welts in *Paper Cuts on the Skin* (random, but deliberate). In *For Every Time I Wish You Hadn't*, these welts have transformed into excavated scars. The razor blades in *Cloud* become a literal and symbolic accomplice to the various forms of cutting depicted in many subsequent works.

Streak offers a moment of respite with what can be considered the two most poetic works in the exhibition, positioned as a lead-out past the ever-glistening *Cloud*. These pieces, while not necessarily uplifting, are imbued with significant pathos. *Envelopes for Tears* (2008) features tiny three-dimensional envelopes ingeniously crafted from white household insulation tape. Hundreds of these envelopes are randomly affixed to a white plastic surface and enclosed within a white wood and glass frame. The minimal space between the envelopes and the glass front evokes a sense of claustrophobia or suffocation. The frame, reminiscent of a museum case, suggests the containment of objects of value or historical significance. The envelopes themselves resemble small white sailing vessels or beacons on a map indicating conquests or victories. Although empty, they suggest numerous interpretive possibilities, leaving the final meaning open to the viewer.

Reflecting on the work's silent narratives and the hidden depths within seemingly simple objects, Walter Benjamin's perspective on the aura of art provides a compelling context:

"What withers in the age of the technological reproducibility of the work of art is the latter's aura. The process is symptomatic; its significance points beyond the realm of art." – Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*

Anatomy of a Captured Snowflake (2008) exemplifies *Streak's* ability to transform the mundane into something nuanced. This work consists of a simple molecular structure

made from co-joined circular pieces of Scotch tape, placed on the floor and enclosed within a Perspex dome. The title evokes a heightened sense of melancholy. The articulated mass of glued tape resembles the DNA cross-section of a snowflake, and the delicacy of this implication is poignant. The confinement of the piece compounds its emotional resonance.

This work serves as the final piece of the exhibition, forcing the viewer to pass by the menacing *Cloud* once more upon exiting. This juxtaposition encapsulates the exhibition's overarching contradiction. The exhibition, *Accumulative Disintegration*, presents a cohesive yet fragmented reflection on contemporary issues. As I leave the gallery's controlled light and re-enter the harsh reality outside, the exhibition lingers in my thoughts. The disjointed realities of a world grappling with climate change, industrialization, colonization, and globalization become more unsettling. The exhibition, *Accumulative Disintegration*, offers a psycho-minimal snapshot of our times.

- Jose Ferreira (2008)

Jose Ferreira is an artist and Assistant Professor at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He teaches Sculpture and film studies and post-colonialism.