

Internal Landscapes

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After years of self-reflecting on my emotions, I can now express a fuller range. *Internal Landscapes* represents different emotions that come with dismantling learned value systems. Black paint, recurring textures, and gold frames are repeating elements throughout my work. The relationship between these three elements is meant to represent dissociation and repression, how the cultural value of strength fuels these coping strategies, and the desire for a more dynamic perspective. The accumulation and dissolution of these materials represent the process of these emotions building up over time, and the consequences that arise. Historically gold frames represent the worth of the object they surround as highly valued. The frame's gold “value” is being used to describe social values. These value systems include work ethic, success, and emotional repression. To avoid becoming problems for others, we often repress self-empathy and sterilize any bad feelings we have, and it takes deliberate effort to break this cycle. This body of work aims to explore and address these values to determine whether they are worth keeping or not.

Internal Landscapes

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by

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INTRODUCTION

Internal Landscapes consists of eleven panels, each panel representing emotions that are often repressed or ignored; shame, guilt, anger, cornered, over-analyzing, compartmentalization, overwhelmed, and exhaustion. These emotions derive from dismantling learned value systems. Black paint, recurring textures, and gold frames are repeated elements throughout my work. The accumulation and dissolution of these materials represent the process of these emotions building up over time, and the consequences that arise. These value systems include work ethic, success, and emotional repression. The goal is to explore and address these values, in order to determine which are helpful or not.

Though these panels signify individual emotions, they interact with each other visually. Representing each compartmentalized emotion interacting with other emotions. It is a visual reminder to me that these individual emotions connect, exacerbate, and explain one another. During the construction of the panels, I am breaking things down physically as I break them down mentally. Using mixed media, I built up three-dimensional volume on the panels and by painting everything black the texture falls visually into the background. The textured media surrounds and interacts with the golden frames. Gold frames historically inform the viewer that the surrounded objects are highly valued. I am cutting down and reassembling the frames to bring attention to this signifier of worth. By physically breaking the frames down, the function and responsibility of the frames to carry the notion of importance and worthiness changes. This change should encourage the viewer to question how emotions can be framed.

While this body of work began autobiographically, it has grown into a broader exploration of how we interact with feelings we feel safer repressing. The main elements are textured mixed media surrounding and interacting with frames, gold, and black paint. The relationship between these three materials is meant to represent dissociation, how the cultural value of strength fuels that dissociation, and the want for a different perspective. To avoid becoming problems for others, we often repress self-empathy and sterilize any bad feelings we have, and it takes deliberate effort to break this cycle. This work is meant to capture the process of behavioral therapy—specifically, to materially replicate the

psychological function of paper worksheets commonly assigned to therapy patients, which guide them in interrogating their own feelings. This work is also inspired by Renaissance sculptures that celebrate traditional values and Dada Readymades that celebrate questioning social practices.

CHAPTER 1: Historical References

Every panel in *Internal Landscapes* has an altered golden frame. Historically gold frames represent the worth of the object it is surrounding as highly valued. The frame's intrinsic, historic, and market “value” is being used to represent social values. In the spirit of DADA Readymades the gold frames are broken down to question socially the values represented by the frames. Man Ray, who was an American visual artist living in Paris during the early 20th century, was part of the DADA movement. DADA Readymades are celebrating breaking down social ideals and questioning them. Man Ray’s “Cadeau” disturbs the mundane activity of ironing by adding brass tacks (figure 1). This combination forces the viewer to think more about a common and sometimes mindless chore. Perhaps even contemplating the horrors of ruining a perfectly good shirt and the social consequences of not having nice pristine clothes to wear. Man Ray rendering the iron useless makes the viewer more mindful of what an iron is and has inspired me to alter the gold frames to encourage the viewer to be aware of what a gold frame is.



Figure 1: *Cadeau* Man Ray, 1921, flat iron with brass tacks

By contrast the Renaissance celebrates old Roman values of beauty and social ideals. In the late 15th century, there was a resurgence of interest in Roman literary and visual culture. Antico, or Pier Jacopo Alari Bonacolsi, was a master metalsmith and sculptor that lived and worked in Mantua, Italy. In addition to restoring antiques, he made a small collection of scaled down copies of famous Roman sculptures, but with a twist. Antico's sculptures and traditional roman sculptures main difference is his black patinated and contrasting polished bronze. This black and gold color scheme is striking, alluring, and dramatic like "Seated Nymph" made in 1503 (figure 2). The nymph looks formally like a classic roman sculpture, but Antico made it his own. In addition to finding the black and gold color scheme personally very breathtaking, I was inspired by how Antico is taking a traditional format but still finding his voice in it. I want to take my values that I have learned and find my voice or perspective within them. My goal is to find what values are still helpful to keep in mind, and what values are less relevant and could be readdressed.



Figure 2: *Seated Nymph* Antico, 1503, cast bronze (photo credit- Lee Ewing)

CHAPTER 2: Emotions that Build-Up

To change my maladaptive habits, I needed to gather evidence that it was a problem that needed to be addressed. These panels have material that were accumulated, piled up, or have been chiseled away over time. This process visually helped me see that if ignored emotions amass over time.

The Pressure to Perform; Evidence of Borrowing too Much Time (Plate 1) represents when self-expectations for work ethic build up to the breaking point. I don't usually drink caffeine in the morning so when I do, it is because I'm forcing myself to stay awake. Caffeine is a tool for me to borrow time and accomplish daunting tasks. In this piece, each coffee bean piled into mounds represents a unit of measurement, one for every time caffeine is abused to get a task done. There is a golden frame along the left side edge and a second frame straining to match it under a mound of beans. Smaller frames are being used to prop up the strained lower frame as a support. Gold frames are being used to represent ideals like hard work, grace, and independence. I have arranged them in such a manner that they look as if they are breaking under pressure.

It is common for me to not respond when someone is making me uncomfortable because being pleasant or likable is more critical than personal boundaries. A singular uncomfortable encounter can be easily ignored. It is just this one time. Every time discomfort is unvalidated it builds a reflexive mentality to put the other person's wants first, which reinforces feeling undeserving. Sometimes discomfort is inevitable, like the anxiety that can be felt in an overcrowded airport. Other times it is important to address feeling discomfort head on. *Cornered Build-Up; My Feelings Are as Important* (Plate 2) has a constructed nook that guides the viewer to approach the panel at a specific angle. I used pieces of yarn to build up a pile in the corner of the panel to represent the times I have felt trapped, objectified, uncomfortable, or unsafe. The panel visually shows how ignoring these small instances is a good short-term solution, but long-term the consequences build up. The open frame at the bottom represents compassion for others and allows the yarn pieces to fall through. The accumulation continues on the other side as a reminder that compassion for others is important but can lead to an accretion of self-indifference.



Plate 1: *The Pressure to Perform; Evidence of Borrowing too Much Time*, 2021
wood, frames, mix media, acrylic paint, coffee beans. 12 x 24 in



Plate 2: *Cornered Build-Up; My Feelings Are as Important*, 2020
wood, frames, mix media, acrylic paint. 12 x 26 in.

Digging Deep; The Need for Accomplishment at Any Cost and *Pile Up; The Cost of Needing Accomplishment at Any Cost*

are two separate panels in a vertical diptych. The top panel, *Digging Deep; The Need for Accomplishment at Any Cost* and *Pile Up* (Plate 3), addresses how grinding through any situation is a common coping strategy. Out-endure and “pick yourself up by the bootstraps” were values instilled from multiple environments as the only way difficult situations will work out. Out-enduring is a particularly difficult value to address because resilience is an effective way to survive. Sometimes things get so bad that digging deep felt like the only option because I didn’t want to ask for help. Sections of this panel are chiseled away including the frames to literally represent the act of digging deep. During construction of the panel the physical exertion it took to force the wood layers off made the arms and chest tighten. It was exhausting and time consuming. Some areas have been dug away so deep that holes ripped through the back. The gold frames represent the golden ideal for hard work. To be strong, self-sufficient, determined, unhindered, and triumphant. Parts of the panel are so thin that it is only being held together by the frames. There is an aftermath for this level of exertion and the panel below, *Pile Up; The Cost of Needing Accomplishment at Any Cost* (Plate 4) catches all the chiseled-out material.

The wood chips used in *Digging Deep; The Need for Accomplishment at Any Cost* were utilized in *Pile Up; The Cost of Needing Accomplishment at Any Cost*. This pile of woodchips becomes a record of my exertion and hard work. Simultaneously it also becomes a reminder that over exertion is not worth the toll it can take on one’s health.



Plate 3: *Digging Deep; The Need for Accomplishment at Any Cost*, 2020
wood, frames, mix media, acrylic paint. 12 x 24 in.



Plate 4: *Pile Up; The Cost of Needing Accomplishment at Any Cost*, 2020
wood, frames, mix media, acrylic paint. 12 x 24 in.

Chapter 3: Self-Reflection

As I think about the emotions that have built up over time, I reflect on my personal experience, past reactions, and how I want to react in the future. The panels that have reflected surface elements are; *Self-Reflection; Exploring Compartmentalization, Concentric Tightening; Trapped Between Guilt and Shame* and *Self-Reflecting on the Tension of Anger*. As the viewer explores these panels, they will catch a glimpse of themselves in the work. My hope is for the viewer to be momentarily self-aware and encourage them to contemplate their personal reactions to the emotions the panel represents.

Self-Reflection; Exploring Compartmentalization (Plate 5) represents the activity of decompressing compartmentalized emotions by analyzing and reassessing them. There are three frames on this panel that resemble open draws. The materials pouring out of the drawers are from different panels; *Cornered Build-Up*, *The Pressure to Perform*, and *Puzzle Within a Puzzle*. Seemingly separate panels are directly related to and influence one another. Feelings in one situation will impact or be affected by feelings in other situations. The reflective drawer pulls represent self-reflection and metaphorically pulls the frames out to examine what has been tucked away. This panel is the only one finished with a glossy clear coat so the viewer can see their reflection shift and morph on the bumpy surface.

Concentric Tightening; Trapped Between Guilt and Shame (Plate 6) consists of frames inside of frames that represents how it is difficult to make an argument against an ideal because of the entrapment of guilt. Feeling guilty that one is not doing more for themselves, family, friends, or career can be overbearing. Even if one relationship of guilt is resolved, another barrier is right there. Pieces of the frame's gold foil are pulled back revealing a rectangular black texture representing guilt and shame. This pointy, uninviting, and threatening texture visually jets out from between the frames. The centermost frame is reflective and implies self-reflecting on if these feelings are helpful or unhelpful.



Plate 5: *Self Reflection; Exploring Compartmentalization*, 2020
wood, frames, mix media, acrylic paint, brass drawer pulls. 12 x 24 in.



Plate 6: *Concentric Tightening; Trapped Between Guilt and Shame*, 2020
wood, frames, mix media, acrylic paint. 14 x 26 in.

In behavioral therapy, anger is addressed as the emotional reaction to protecting rights and resources. Anger is the emotion I will do anything to avoid expressing because it is shameful to not be under control. Anger also sparks guilt that my personal frustration will hurt or upset someone else. The method I was taught to dissolve anger is to take a deep breath, grit the teeth, and accept the ensnarement of whatever the situation is. Another stand out method is to make excuses or arguments that whoever or whatever is causing the anger is justified and more important, so everything is perfectly okay. Grinding forward or deleting self-compassion is an effective short term coping strategy to move forward in a situation but it is not effective long term. In *Self-Reflecting on the Tension of Anger* there is a main frame screwed to the panel and coated in hair like fibers that are then dusted in gritty sand. A second interior frame is suspended by taut threads that weave between the screws, which were left proud to the surface of the exterior frame. Creating this panel was a meditative process that required the arms to be clenched the whole time to keep the thread tight. Not only does the thread visually and physically tighten around the inside frame, but during the time of its creation my body had to be flexed the whole time to keep the threads tight. I keep most of my anger on my shoulders, so the process of making mimicked how I physically experience anger. The viewer will be able to see their reflection being cut by these ensnaring threads. This metaphorically means to self-reflect on one's relationship to anger, self-empathy, frustrations, pain, and its consequences. It is important to acknowledge consequences so steps can be made for improving relationship boundaries or maladaptive coping strategies.



Plate 7: *Self Reflecting on the Tension of Anger*, 2020
wood, frames, mix media, acrylic paint, string, screws. 12 x 24 in.

Chapter 4: Reassessing, Reorganizing

In these panels I am reassessing and reorganizing how I want to address my emotions in the future. These panels acknowledge there are positives and negatives, balance, and spectrum with my emotions. My goal is to find flexibility.

Puzzle Within a Puzzle; Lost in Thought (Plate 8) is addressing the idea of balancing the good and bad that comes with valuing problem solving. On a positive note, problem solving allows independence, freedom, options, and more opportunities for good things. The ability to think through things in depth is an excellent skill to have. Unfortunately, this skill gets out of hand quickly for me and transitions from reasonable preparation to neurotic anxiety. Double checking for a passport before leaving for the airport translates to wanting to double-triple check if the front door is locked. Feeling inadequate and incompetent, which stems from believing that more could have been done, spirals into overthinking and analyzing everything. It is important to find the balance between celebrating strength and readjusting when it becomes neurotic. The cast Rubik's cubes represent individual problems that need to be solved. The maze of frames represents the values that influence and affect the individual problem. The frames get thinner and thinner, and the negative space gets smaller and smaller, representing how locked in a problem I can get. The composition of the gold frames are positioned to look like there are two different entry points for Rubik's cubes to enter: from the top in a slow organized fashion, and from the side swimming in a frantic sea of sharp and pointed texture. The textural contrast visually represents solving a problem vs. feeling anxious or neurotic. Different planes of the panel are folded and fractured, adding layers of complexity.



Plate 8: *Puzzle Within a Puzzle; Lost in Thought*, 2021
wood, frames, mix media, acrylic paint, cast Rubik's cubes. 12 x 24 in.

Trying to change perspective, adjust and find the balance between ideals is no small task.

Perspective Shift; How I Want to be Known, What I Want to Keep Private (Plate 9) is about shifting perspective. It is made up of 4 sections of frames that are attached to a panel at an angle (Plate 10). Three of the frame sections look as if they were torn in half. Their appearances change depending upon your perspective. Standing to the far left of the piece, the viewer can only see a gold frame with a gold center which is painted particle board with a torn edge. Looking from the far right-side reveals a painted black interior. The space between each angled frame allows the viewer to peek in between to see what the gold side is concealing; it is not pretty, and it is messy. As the viewer moves, they visually shift along a spectrum of perspective with variable balances of gold and black. The concealed material vs the best angle addresses how I manage my outward personality. Privacy, reputation, relationship types, and disposition are some incentives for me to put my best self out there. Keeping a golden front all the time however is impossible, caustic, and unsustainable. Finding the balance between presenting one's best self while still acknowledging and addressing one's flaws is a constantly shifting relationship because both exist at the same time. The flaws do not eclipse or destroy the best self and vice versa. Both deserve time, attention, and care. Both are okay for others to know.



Plate 9: *Perspective Shift; How I Want to be Known, What I Want to Keep Private*, 2020
wood, frames, mix media, acrylic paint. 12 x 24 in.



Plate 10: *Perspective Shift; How I Want to be Known, What I Want to Keep Private*,
different viewing angles: far-left, center, far-right.

CONCLUSION

I learned a lot from this body of work. Feeling, seeing, and understanding the compiling of emotions over time has been helpful evidence to keep me honest about the changes I've wanted to make. To have more self-compassion. A more balanced schedule. To not worry so much about accomplishing everything at once because my value and worth are not dictated by how much I produce. It is also important for me to understand I can lean on other people and ask for help. That not asking for help has a cost, and it doesn't have to. I can live a more comfortable life and still accomplish everything I want to achieve. The shift in perspective is sparking my next body of work. *Internal landscapes* has given me the journey, and my next body of work will express what I have found.

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