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# RIT

## **Only That's Not Enough**

by

**Joe Cuccio**

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Fine Art in  
Photography and Related Media

School of Photographic Arts and Sciences  
College of Art and Design

Rochester Institute of Technology  
Rochester, NY

May 1, 2024

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## Abstract

My emotions and feelings towards life have always been a bit all over the place. At one moment I feel the world is full of joy and serenity, and in the next moment, I feel it is a string of disorderly events with no rhyme or reason. As my internal feelings turn, I continue to remain engaged with an image-making practice. My camera allows me to venture into the world and follow my heart as it guides my eyes to respond to what is around and inside my head. Making images became an extension of my presence in the most holistic sense. I started to see that black and white photographs can contribute to madness, and stillness can be seen in color too. Images of all kinds offered me a way to respond to the threads of my existence, the good, the bad, and the confusing experiences. What's most important to me is embracing a diverse range of moments in life and valuing them equally. *Only That's Not Enough* is an image-based series that responds to the various emotions I experience - the constant fluctuation shown by the speed of life, and the struggle to stay connected to my loved ones.

Before I began seriously making images I was overwhelmed by the world's rapid changes. To alleviate this feeling, I found solace in the act of meditating; a simple action that requires the ability to sit and embrace each day through steady breathing and stillness. This practice informed my choice to begin to make images as a response to a world that I couldn't stabilize. Photography became an extension of my daily meditation practice, assisting me in feeling grounded. With this, I honed in my ability to bring presence to the everyday. Presence is the act of focusing on the moment in front of us and embracing it for what it offers; it allows for real participation in change and helps us move forward. In Zen philosophy, one must enact non-attachment tactics to each moment and not attach the individual identity to each moment in order to achieve presence.<sup>1</sup> Focusing on presence pushed me to have very tamed and restrained reactions to life. Experiencing the world around me was centered on accepting it with a steady mind and attention to remain collected. As I began to photograph, I was fixated on solely embracing this stillness, and that is what I sought out.

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<sup>1</sup> Jody Condit Fagan, "Observing Change in the Present Moment: Lessons from Zen Leaders and Teachers," presented at *Leading Change Inaugural Conference: Interdisciplinary Perspectives in Leadership Studies*, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA, 2019, accessed April 30, 2024, <https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/leadcc/2019/1001/1/>.



Figure 1. Untitled, 2022, from the series *Only That's Not Enough*

Continuing this practice of meditation and photography I amassed many peaceful and quiet images. My photographs were indicative of a time in my life when I felt safe and secure. That stability caused me to make very stable decisions as an image maker. I executed technically proficient images, finding myself using black and white to focus on tones which brought my compositional choices to light. Photographs were exclusively in pinpoint focus using small apertures to depict entire scenes from foreground to background. An image like Figure 1 is a great example of that clarity. The texture of the rocks in the foreground along with the soccer goal in the background are both in focus. Often, I found myself making long exposures in the dead of night to find moments that were the most silent and serene. I always wanted the frames to feel as steady and undisturbed as possible. As each day went on, I found improvements in my ability to remain calm and collected, but I still wasn't convinced a full change had taken place. I appreciate the understanding of the presence that Zen philosophy taught me. I learned to let go of

my visceral reactions, but I did not feel it was properly representative of my life as an image maker. Making peaceful simple images did not give the full scope of the human experience, specifically my experience.

Most of my life has been full of angst and confusion. I grew up seeing things from a pessimistic perspective and I was constantly full of distress. Making images was an act that I looked to find peace in, providing a total escape from engaging with the not-so-great parts of life. What caused a crucial shift in my image-making practice was a specific event I experienced in 2023. I am lucky to have a close family dynamic; not just my immediate family, but also the extended parts. My aunt and uncle lived next door for most of my adolescence and at one point lived in my childhood home with my family. We were so close that I would constantly stroll over to have lunch with them and chat for hours. I received a random call from my mother one Thursday night, and I remember sitting at school when I was told this would be her last few hours on earth. I packed my bag and drove home with a heavy heart, hoping I got the chance to tell my aunt I loved her one last time. Once I arrived, my parents were asleep so I decided I would do the same before stopping over to see her the next morning. I woke up, walked over to their house and when I opened the door, I was disoriented. I peeked into their bedroom where she was supposed to be, but the bed was stripped, and my uncle was sitting alone at the kitchen table. I stared at that bed knowing that if I had only gotten that call a mere few hours before or left school a few minutes earlier I could have seen her and said goodbye.

I never got the chance to say goodbye and was angry at the loss of control. My life was so caught up in trying to control the formulation of a vivid and clear visual style, making this event even tougher to cope with. Meditating and enacting presence not only taught me about harnessing control, it also helped me realize how little control I have over what happens outside



my being. The world around me will keep moving and all I can do is react to the emotions I feel, which are not always at ease. I felt lost and slowly was losing sight of that calmness I attached to every frame. This was something that happened before I lost my aunt and was a part of my experience growing as an artist in my graduate studies. As I drove back to Rochester, I thought of how I could make images that were representative of how I felt at that moment. Thinking of how to embrace the overwhelming feeling of loss, I questioned whether to let it be a ball of chaos and confusion or to uphold the mindfulness I built up since the beginning of my image-making practice. I learned to develop my sense of presence. One that is drawn to the peaceful images I had long known while desiring to make something more dynamic and perplexing.



Figure 2. Untitled, 2023, from the series *Only That's Not Enough*

After going from total stability to losing my way, I began to feel a shift in my image-making practice. A shift that was truer to my personality - breaking away from stillness and exploring new ways to make images. To utilize color and harvest a sense of a rapid shift (Fig.2). These images were not as tamed as before and still rendered something incredibly impactful that conversed with my serene images. Black and white remained engaging with the calm moments I encountered (Fig. 1). To me, presence is about facing the world and embracing it for EVERYTHING that it can offer. It is a mix of motionless and rapid changes. It is a fusion of the calm and chaotic. When staring at a world full of twists and turns, I find myself making images to process the volatility.

My emotions and feelings towards life have always been a bit all over the place. At one moment I feel the world is full of joy and serenity, and in the next moment, I feel it is a string of disorderly events with no rhyme or reason. As my internal feelings turn, I continue to remain engaged with an image-making practice. My camera allows me to venture into the world and follow my heart as it guides my eyes to respond to what is around and inside my head. Making images became an extension of my presence in the most holistic sense. I started to see that black and white photographs can contribute to madness, and stillness can be seen in color too. Images of all kinds offered me a way to respond to the threads of my existence, the good, the bad, and the confusing experiences. What's most important to me is embracing a diverse range of moments in life and valuing them equally. *Only That's Not Enough* is an image-based series that responds to the various emotions I experience - the constant fluctuation shown by the speed of life, and the struggle to stay connected to my loved ones.

Prolific minimalist sculptor Tony Smith elaborated on an experience he had on the New Jersey turnpike that elicited a revelation on art. As he drove down the unfinished roadway he saw no markers, lines, railings, or lights, but all that existed was the dark pavement moving through the landscape. After experiencing the bareness of this artificial landscape, he concluded that experiences are art. He shifted his practice into honing on the experiential while embracing his roots.<sup>2</sup> Smith had a background in architecture and mathematics which allowed him to have a keen attention to geometry. Even with his understanding of geometry, his pieces were intuitive, uncontrolled, and under-designed. He wanted to see what would happen if he attempted to make a chance piece, by adding elements to a sculpture without a scheme in mind.<sup>3</sup> His complex works were all about playing with materials to create something that would simply stand on its own. Smith's artwork is intuitive and minimalist, he never overdetermined the shapes he made, but rather allowed for a mix of chance and expertise to guide his work.

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<sup>2</sup> Samuel Wagstaff Jr, "Talking with Tony Smith," *Artforum*. December, 1966, accessed April 30, 2024, <https://www.artforum.com/features/talking-with-tony-smith-211513/>

<sup>3</sup> Tony Smith, *Willy*, 1962, steel, 7'7-1/4" x 18'8" x 11'3," Tony Smith Estate, accessed April 30, 2024, <http://www.tonysmithestate.com/artworks/sculpture/willy-1962>.

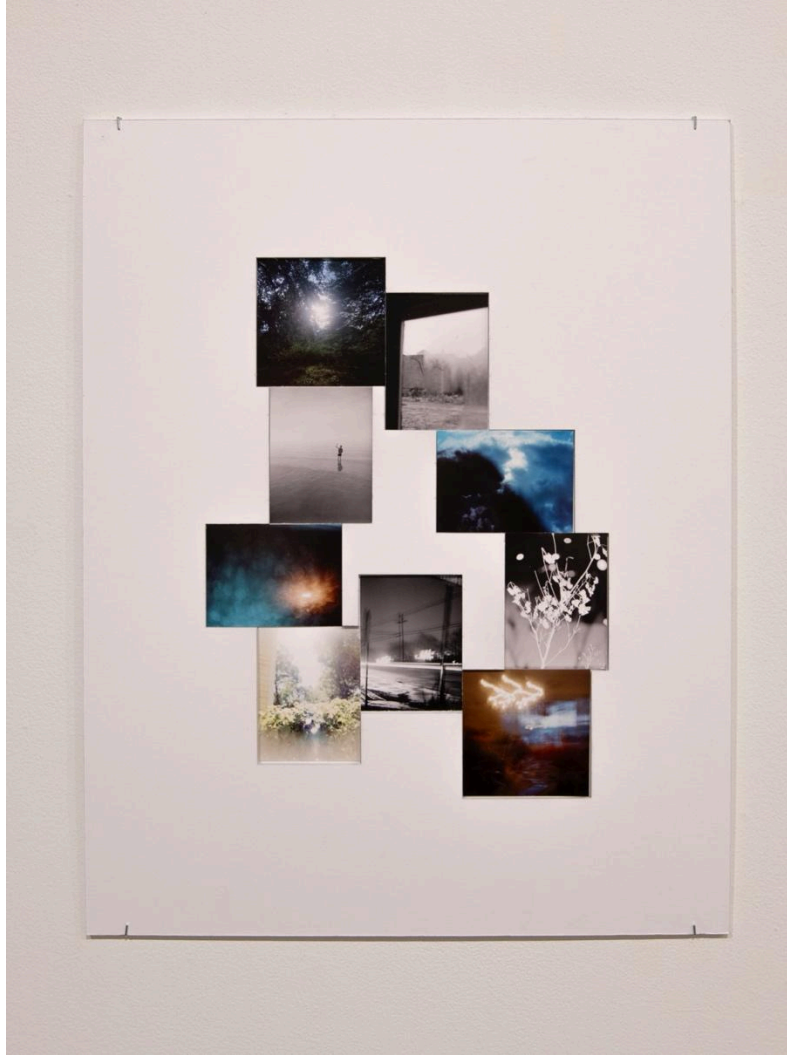


Figure 3: Untitled Cluster, 2024, from the series *Only That's Not Enough*

The experience of creating a collection of images is a huge part of my practice in this series. I create groups of images called clusters (Fig. 3) and they are aligned with Smith's experiential approach. My process is to play with small prints and see how they can connect through trial and error. To start there is no specific scheme I follow, but rather an uncontrolled connection that is being made from one image to the next. All that I require is the loose idea that I never want two images to look the same in a singular piece. There must be an immense feeling of diversity from one image to the next. Confusion and chaos may come via motion or blur, and stillness is set to appear through pinpoint focus. All these seemingly unrelated reactions come

together to form the experience of a cluster. I also pay close attention to the geometric positioning of each image contained in its entirety. Never will I overlay images, but rather I use the various four-sided frames to create an interaction between the images and the empty white space that exists throughout. My attention to the white space is fueled by the sense of play and chance that is experienced in the act of making. I find ways to create breaks from one image to the next to provide little pockets in between images to give a breath to a tightly connected cluster.

My clusters are small and that is because the size means as much to me as it does to Masao Yamamoto. The print has become an object in Yamamoto's work through his attention to detail and novelty that he embraces as he makes each print. He also is recognized in the photography world as *the* small print specialist. His prints are typically hovering around 5x7 inches, sometimes going smaller but never larger than 11x14. This way of making is a tactic birthed from the idea that he is drawn to prints he can easily hold. The smallness of the print invites the viewer to get close and see which nuances each image reveals. His installation is rhythmic, and he embraces the flow from one image to the next. His images focus on elements in the natural world and at times engage with parts of humanity.<sup>4</sup> Photographs that encapsulate the glory of natural as-is blossoms, are often greeted by elegant depictions of people stripped bare. At times we see a combination of the vulnerable figure embracing the natural elements. He takes inspiration from Zen philosophy and focuses on the meditative qualities of images.

I believe that an image can act as a contemplation. After I amass the many images I print, lay them out, and reflect on what is in front of me. I begin to handle and examine the prints, thinking of what aesthetic each image offers and what feeling I associate the image with. Each

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<sup>4</sup> "Yamamoto Masao | Jackson Fine Art," Jackson Fine Art, 1999, accessed April 30, 2024, <https://www.jacksonfineart.com/artists/yamamoto-masao/>.

image is meant to act as a small piece of the larger experience that is me finding ways to react to life. Certain images are embedded in the turmoil I feel as they show rapid movement or dramatic darkness. Others hold onto the peace through sustained still looks at the sky overhead or any objects that entice my eyes. All of these images are brought into the physical world through printing, and I begin to find how individual emotional responses can fit together to convey something bigger than a singular reaction or emotion. The ability to mix and match small prints within clusters creates a physical bond between myself and my images. This personal connection to each image allows me to find a flow or rhythm from one image to the next. After I get my hands on each image, I begin to apply the experiential working methods from Tony Smith and seek out a suitable rhythm just like Yamamoto does.

It is not about the single image, but how disparate scenes and objects can transition from one to the next. I find myself mixing and matching images for hours until the final pair presents itself to me. I will grab a slew of vertical, horizontal, and square images and follow my loose rules as I place prints in connection to each other. As I handle the prints, I look for images that can add new notes to a larger piece like the structure of an Avant jazz song. These jazz artists tend to make sounds of all shapes and sizes appear from their instruments, and when this mix of sounds comes together it creates something special. I look at the disparate images coming together in the form of a cluster, and I think of a song like *Baghet* by Gianluigi Trovesi. This song starts smoothly and is traditionally rhythmic making listeners feel an easy sensation. The initial riff is consistent and allows for a palpable sound to be at the forefront of the song. As the song goes on it finds itself going to a crazy place where the saxophone screams at the listener deploying mass chaos. Listeners hear an uptake in tempo, less consistent notes, and sounds reminiscent of a screech. At the end of the song, listeners find their way back to something in

between chaos and calm. The conclusion is where the hard-hitting upbeat sounds wind down into consistency and stable order. The variety of pitch, tempo, and feeling that arrives within each part of the song allows for a complete piece to exist. This sense of variation helped me see that things do not always have to sound or in my case look the same to form something complete.<sup>5</sup>



Figure 4: Stills from *Essence of Existence: Part 1*

I became more comfortable with an immense amount of variability through making a video piece (Fig.4) entitled *Essence of Existence: Part 1*. My photographic practice has long been steeped in the ability to slow things down and find peace. I needed to find something that could provide me with the opposite. Something quick and not as restricted, and ultimately intuitive. I thought back to my childhood and the first camera I ever had – a handheld camcorder. I remember running around my house, with my siblings and friends, reacting to the happenings as they unfolded. There was no care in the world for the narrative or structure of the clips, just simply seeing and reacting. This camera was the entryway for my life as an image maker. Later in life, I picked it up again to see what it could offer me in my contemporary practice. Once I got my hands on it, I fell in love with this tool all over again. I strung together images of driving

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<sup>5</sup> “Baghet,” on Track 3 Gian-Luigi Trovesi, on *Series Jazz Contemporaneo*, Dischi Della Quercia, 1978, vinyl.

down highways or small roads followed by buildings standing strong and windows glowing in the dead of night. With this camera, I tap into the acknowledgment of the passing world that encompasses my affinity for varying emotions and velocities.

Each day I experience encompasses both gentle and swift speeds. I choose to practice meditation that helps me embrace the slow. I choose to drive over the speed limit, which engages the fast. This balance between the fast and slow led me to a presentation by historian Stephen Kern entitled *Pace in the Internet Age*. Kern posits that the ability to choose between fast and slow has emerged from the technological period that began in the 1980s. Kern suggests advancements in production, transportation, and communication before the 1980s have irreparably accelerated the speed of our lives. He points to the idea that with faster technology people can appreciate the slowness that exists in contrast. No one wants to revert to dial-up connections. We love the convenience of our modern-day technology. We also feel drained by the instantaneous nature of social media and news swirling around us. I agree with Kern's notion that there is a need to appreciate both the slow and fast speeds humanity can operate at.<sup>6</sup> That is why in my video piece you will see land rapidly pacing followed by quotidian objects at rest.

My fascination with fast and slow comes from my formative years when I learned to travel throughout the landscape frequently. My family was consistently on the move; traveling to family gatherings, hustling to sporting events, or going on vacations. One of my impactful experiences was when my family of six packed up our SUV, better known as 'Big Blue' and set off for a 12-hour trip from New Jersey to Maine. My family loved to make jokes about objects we would see. From weird license plates to strangely worded billboards, if someone saw it, they said it. When the jokes would die down, one of us would inevitably get irritated by noises of

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<sup>6</sup> Stephen Kern, John Brooke, and Chris Otter, "Pace in the Internet Age," recorded at The Center for Historical Research at the Ohio State University, March 25, 2022, accessed April 30, 2024, 1:26:00, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wq70YzTAZnk>.



fidgiting or heavy breathing that would interrupt the white noise of the ride. During this trip, it was challenging to get a quiet moment. I remember my brain searching for an escape from all the stimulation. When I found relief it was through my gaze out the window examining the landscape. My eyes would become fixated on not just one thing, but the experience of miles of land fusing and becoming one sustained view of the world as it zoomed by. I equally found refuge in the inevitable bathroom breaks at the random highway pit-stops and little towns where we found ourselves as we waited for the car to fuel up. There was a sense of stillness that emerged from the quaint areas we would stop in and even the far ends of parking lots offered me relief from the craziness found inside the car. Within those instances of staring at the bare streets of small-town USA, I noticed my attraction to the experience of the slow speeds of life and began to compare them to the experience of traveling at high speeds.

Before I had even thought about making images or meditation, I was finding personal presence in a prolonged look at the moving landscape and the oddly transient spaces at rest. I have been conditioned to see the world in this ‘moving landscape’. Mitchell Schwarzer, a historian, coined the term “moving landscape” to explain how we view the land and how it is entirely different from the way of the past. He argues that moving vehicles have functionally altered how people conceive spatial boundaries and the built environment. Depictions of the moving landscape in visual culture work to cement this idea in the collective imagination of the American public. This is why Americans are enamored by a world moving through the land. The advertisements and mass media use cars in motion as key factors in our lives. Images of roads passing, highways being driven through, and objects in motion are seen every day.<sup>7</sup> When I create imagery, I ponder how to convey a sense of being swept through space at high velocity

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<sup>7</sup> Mitchell Schwarzer, “The Moving Landscape” in *Zoomscape: Architecture in Motion and Media*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004).

because it is part of my visual understanding of the world. I also consider what are our breaks from a world in such rapid motion. I find myself loving the balance between these two ways to move about life.



Figure 5: Contact Sheets, 2023-2024, from the series *Only That's Not Enough*

This focus on variability has shifted the way I make photographs in the field. I began to truly lean into the idea that each frame can have importance. My photographic practice is NOT

steeped in the idea of using a full roll of film to work the scene and find the right angle. I find myself approaching objects, spaces, or close friends by making a single image and moving on. My contact sheets (Fig. 5) reveal that I enjoy moving through space, trusting my attraction to an angle, and moving on to the next frame or experience. There is a mix of night and day, blurred and still, and an assortment of orientations or shapes to engage with the world around me in multiple ways. Photographing has given me a direction, a reason to stare intensely at a world moving fast or slow or any speed. At times I may not be certain as to what it is I am enamored by while I am out making, but I am eager to get as much out of each roll as possible. This is my way of fully feeling the ups and downs that I go through and responding with imagery is what fuels my existence.

*Koyaanisqatsi* is an experimental feature film that has inspired my work. This title translates from Hopi to English as 'life out of balance'. It is a meditation on clashing worlds; the natural and the ultra-technological. The two worlds collide in a non-linear way that pushes and pulls viewers through many different parts of humanity. The movie shows the vastness of the desert and then cuts to the bustling streets of New York City existing in reverse and slow motion. Even night views of highways show vehicles that ride along in rapid succession and become just simple depictions of lights. That ferocious speed is followed by the slow rise of the sun casting its power along the side of a skyscraper. There are choppy waters, blooming flowers, artificial lakes, dust kicked up by mining trucks, oil fields, and atomic bombs exploding. While it shows so many different scenes it still holds to its overarching theme, the presence of humanity seeping into every corner. It also uses no dialogue throughout the feature, but rather a

harmonious soundtrack. Musician Phillip Glass elicits an innate sense of wonder and fascination as his music works alongside the varying visuals.<sup>8</sup>

My video is visually influenced by using non-linearity and engagement with a plethora of spaces to convey a larger theme. Where my video differs from *Koyaanisqatsi* is through the way it is created. I use a small handheld mini-DV camcorder, shooting on one tape, and making all edits on the tape and in camera. I started by filling up the 60 minutes available on the tape, and once it was full, I began to record over the reactions that I had previously created. I rewound the tape and broke up the scenes that existed with something entirely different. While watching the video there are abrupt cuts from a dark railway passage and into a daytime detail like the last ripe berries of the season or mountainous regions in the distance. There are depictions of day and night, sunny and rainy, as well as blurry and clear. By rewinding and taping over the initial scenes, I jump from all times of the year that I exist within. I do not care for linearity, as I feel when it falls apart, I can respond in an instant. What quantifies our time is the way we engage with space. We as people can make our time significant if we call attention to the minute and major details of our lives. That is why being able to react both in an instant through video and a more methodical way through photo has offered me engagement with space and time.

This method of in-camera editing has left me with drop-out lines, which fuse two of my clips. These lines are a result of stressing the tape and pushing it to its limits. At times there is a blend from one clip to the next, and frequently they are disparate scenes that are days or even months apart fusing. Through these dropouts, there is a new response to space coming through the video piece. One that says this moment and that moment may be different, but they hold the same value. I not only allow that distortion to take place, but I lean into the grit that this

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<sup>8</sup> *Koyaanisqatsi*, directed by Reggio Godfrey (United States: Island Alive, 1983), DVD, 16:36-17:09.

handheld camera can offer. I deploy maximum zoom to allow for a shaky video to exist along the way, at times depicting the unstable and chaotic nature inside my mind. I use a slower frame rate to see slower depictions of the world around me to show how the speed of every day can be slowed down or sped up by our perception. And I still respond with still clips that only reveal they are moving images through the slight breeze swirling through the air to convey a certain calmness as a counterweight against the more maniac portions of the video. All these ways of creating a video clip with the mini-DV have allowed me to gather holistic depictions of the everyday.

Inspired by the music brilliantly composed by Phillip Glass, I felt it essential that there be music to accompany my moving image. I elicit the help of my dear friend, Samson Pojdl, to make an ambient track that doesn't overpower the visuals, but rather helps guide them along. This soundtrack is simple and consistent while allowing for small hints of diverse sounds to creep in along the way. It has droning tones, uncomplicated piano chords, and an assortment of ethereal sounds. The music assists in guiding the viewers through a visual experience that jumps all about different threads of existence.

Through contemplation, I recognized that all I can control is my actions and reflections. I find myself trying to touch upon my presence not solely because of my meditation practice, but also my interest in existential philosophy. Jean-Paul Sartre and his writing entitled "Existentialism is a Humanism" is my biggest inspiration. He established the phrase "Existence Precedes Essence". Meaning that we as humans formulate our meaning in life through experience and not through predetermined ideals set in place for us.<sup>9</sup> Our essence is who we are

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<sup>9</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism Is a Humanism," in *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, ed. John Kulka, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 17–72.

at our core. If we want to make time for friends and family, our essence is focused on being a family man. If we want to go live off the grid and be alone, our essence is that of a mountain man. We have the freedom to define ourselves through our actions. I define my existence by embracing the freedom to feel. My emotions are at the forefront of this work I have built, and I do not shy away from the variety of emotions and experiences I respond to.



Figure 6: Untitled Cluster, 2024, from the series *Only That's Not Enough*

With Sartre's phrase 'existence preceding essence' in mind I conduct my image-making and cluster-making. My existence distinctly defines my images, and I am concerned with building a collection of images that harness the diverse paces I experience the emotions I feel, and the connection and disconnection to other people. My clusters contain an assortment of these

experiences in one piece. It is an assortment of images that fluctuates from peaceful, to chaotic, to confused. There is no preference over the still of the chaos or the confusion because they are all equally a piece of my essence. I refuse to shy away from my chaotic side to fit the mold of a peaceful person or vice versa. What I find to be the most stimulating is the holistic experience of being a piece of each of these emotions.



Figure 7: Untitled, 2024, from the series *Only That's Not Enough*

A big part of embracing my existence is allowing myself to engage with a life that feels deeply connected and disconnected simultaneously. In this moment, I felt overwhelmed by the joy, love, and warmth I feel as I am surrounded by those around me. Being able to have summer nights

relaxing, telling stories, and embracing friends is a special experience. I felt so moved by this moment I jumped at the chance to respond to it, and in the act of reacting, I felt confused.

Confused by the idea of what is the right thing to do at this moment and how is it possible to do it justice? I couldn't possibly encompass everyone in the frame properly, and I struggled to find the right angle. Instead of putting my camera away I faced this feeling head-on and made a photograph that was indicative of the confusion I felt. The subject is left open-ended here as it may be the people fragmented or out of focus in the background or if it's the smoke billowing from the fire. The subject is the feeling of confusion and disorientation that comes when feeling both connected and disconnected from those around me. The smoke obscured many of the other people who were there with me that night. This image calls to attention that I can feel deeply ingrained in my community and isolate myself through the act of making a photograph. It is because while I make images, I am not doing it for them, but rather to process how I encounter life's moments. I am fully present with them, but as I make an image a part of me is focused on an internal headspace that is outside of the communal moment itself. This is how I create a physical manifestation of how I appreciate both the feeling of connection and disconnection.

Artists who taught me how to elevate visuals from vernacular to fantasy and deeply personal are Dani and Sheliah ReStack. Their experimental video piece entitled *Future From the Inside* has inspired me. This duo is a married couple that makes videos that are on the verge of vernacular. Their videos engage with their domestic lifestyle together but allow for various slivers from micro-narratives to come together. Scenes of family trips to the lake are met by intimate discussions on the facts of life, as well as depictions of the couple watching a video together, and even oddly directed gestures from their daughter and mother. All of these micro-narratives are assembled through intuition and do nothing overly formulaic. Through the



free-flowing style of editing from one scene to the next, we get a sense of how the ReStacks bring their domestic lifestyle to a fantastical place that represents their feelings on things like aging, awkwardness, and pain among other things.<sup>10</sup>

My own family and an engagement with domestic life do play a role in my video piece. Throughout my 60-minute tape, I laid a foundation or base layer of significant family moments. The graduation of my sister, the impending birth of my niece, and the funeral of my most beloved aunt all take their place in my video. As I continued to build this piece, I slowly recorded over these instances to create breaks in my micro-narratives to pull away from any specific narrative at all. The familial happenings are integral to personal growth and markers of personal presence, but by recording over those moments with depictions of quotidian objects and views I posit that those large familial occasions and the minute details seen in every day all play integral roles in my life. Each sliver of my presence creeps into my video piece and does not outweigh the significance of domestic events. It rather compliments them and hints at the fact that I find meaning in all threads of my daily life.

A photographer who engages with those she loves and holds attention to the ordinary objects around her is Rinko Kawauchi. In Kawauchi's book, she depicts her young daughter as she is approaching the age of 3. She creates images of her daughter existing in their shared domestic life and juxtaposes those photographs with depictions of the ubiquitous objects she gazes upon. Kawauchi uses attention to light to help elicit a response to the portraits of her daughter. Certain images are straightforward depictions of the glory of the light that surrounds her life and complement loving images of her young daughter. In one specific pairing, Kawauchi's daughter stares off into the distance, and the other half of her head falls into shadow,

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<sup>10</sup> Dani & Sheilah (Wilson) Restack, *Future From Inside*. (2021; Chicago: Video Data Bank, 2022), <https://www.vdb.org/titles/future-inside>.

highlighting her puzzled gaze off-frame. Fixing this portrait with a depiction of light that is ambiguous and a bit dumbfounding, is a great complement to the bewildered look on the face of Kawauchi's child. The obscure image is full of pockets of cool tones and the strong attention to light is undeniable through the glow that illuminates from various parts of the image. Although the subject cannot be made out clearly, what can be noted is that light has guided her to make this image. When in conversation with a contemplative portrait we not only see the power of light on display, but a more in-depth understanding of both images included in the pair. Both convey a sense of awe, reflection, and impending change. Light may come and go just as the adolescence of a loved one will fade. All Kawauchi can do is cherish these moments as best she can, and that is what she does well in this entire series. <sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Rinco Kawauchi, *as it is*. (Tokyo, Japan: torch press, 2020).



Figure 8: Untitled Cluster, 2024, from the series *Only That's Not Enough*

The attention to relationships with people I care deeply about is something reflected in my cluster pieces. At the top right of the cluster, there is a figure depicted at a distance and obscured by trees preparing for winter. This image represents the internal struggle between feeling connected to them as well as disconnected. The other images that are in this cluster are attentive to time's passage. The picture of a person is read alongside the light reaching its daily close, and the flash revealing an odd interior space. My connection to light varies, but it helps me enhance the emotions I explore in my image-making practice. Both images in relationship to my depiction of a loved one complicate the reading of that photograph of the figure. By using the

natural light, the pastes across the world beautifully I can give a sense of natural closure and excitement. With the use of the flash, I can reveal what may go unseen, and find strange and disorienting scenes. Fixing together the various light depictions and images of the presence of people creates compounded meaning that can be taken from clustered photographs.

Through the act of making this thesis work, I have realized that where I create essence is through an existence that unpacks my emotions, the speed life operates, and my attention to connection and disconnection. My images uplift the many parts of my being; the calm, the chaotic, and the confusing are all equally a part of me and always will be. This is just the beginning of my project *Only That's Not Enough*, because as the title says, it will never be enough.

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