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## Time. Moves. Things. Change.

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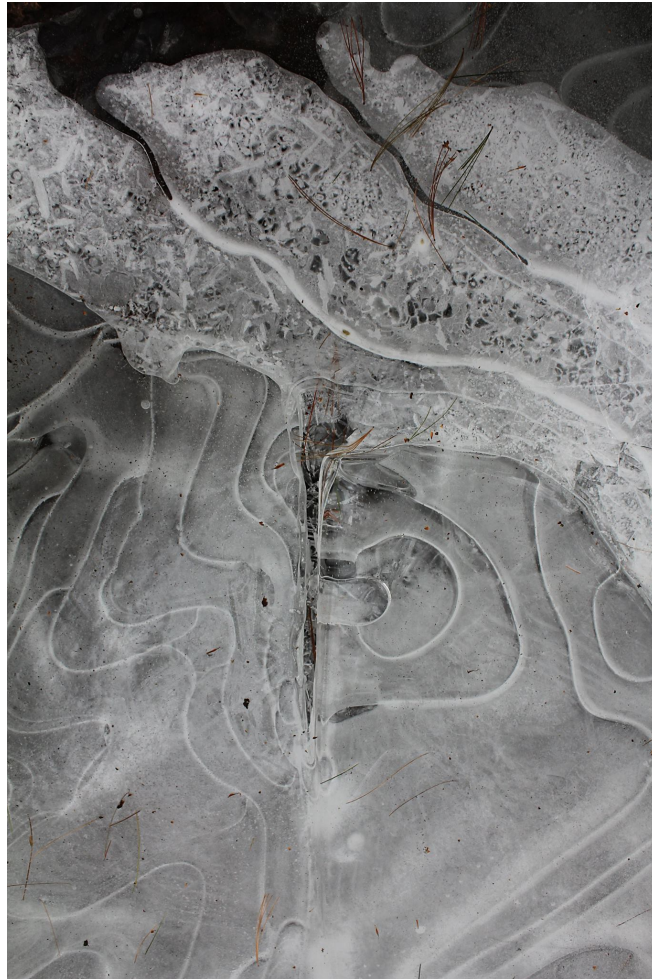
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Time. Moves. Things. Change.

In this paper, I will define my artistic process and explore how my experiences and relationship to failure and manipulation function within that practice.



*(Wester, Jennifer, Cracking Solid, 2015)*

For clarity, within my practice the following terms are defined:

- manipulation (v./n./adj.) is an intentional management of actions, emotions, or thoughts
- failure (v./n.) can be any absence of perfection or forecasted outcome.
- tracing (n.) is any drawing created in capture of energy or motion

With that vocabulary, my art practice begins reflecting on my past, navigating the present, and projecting into the future.

I spent my youngest years living in and around a rapidly urbanizing Dallas, TX. My parents were involved in computer work and metal fabrication -- systems of effectiveness and production. As an adolescent, I began living away from home to pursue aspirations of becoming an Olympic figure skater -- a sport in which bodies, informed by athleticism and aesthetics, are used as a means to curate viewing experiences through the construction of visual narratives. I worked tirelessly toward that dream and while doing so, I acquired the mantra 'get up' as a call to my own resilience. It is what I said to myself at the sound of a 4am alarm clock in below freezing temperatures, how I encouraged myself to complete high school correspondence courses in the evening hours that followed each long day of training, and what I repeated after every bone-bruising crash to an icy surface. Unfortunately, one particularly bad crash, in a vulnerable moment, was crushing rather than just bruising. I got up, but it left me too injured to continue competing for an Olympic berth and soon after ended my, up to that point, fairly traditional skating career: train, compete, perform, train, perform, compete...repeat.

Crashing.  
Mistakes.  
Falls.  
Losses.  
Wins.  
Mistakes.  
Crashes.  
Falls.

In skating, it is said that if you don't fall, you didn't try hard enough. Falling is how you find your way, your limits, your mastery. And without it, you never stake a claim to anything. Falling is part of the system that integrates the recognition of failure as a necessary lesson, not yet learned; a check and balance -- intent to outcome.

Within this context, failures are offerings of wisdom for the next attempt at x, y, or z known desire.

I trained 6 days a week for 15 years with this relationship to failure. Consequently perhaps, part of my creative process involves a necessary recognition, even a welcoming, of failures -- a search for and expansion of my limits to understanding x, y, or z subject of interest.

Failure is the challenging reminder of how easily deluded I can be by my perceptions of knowledge, ability, and control.

It reminds me that life is not a line -- there is no point B to life's origin ray; only trails, rarely of shortest distance, between one's states of being -- be those illusions or ideals, material or metaphysical. And on those trails, success is a judgement; resilience is a mindset; and failure is a challenge.

The loss of my athletic career set a benchmark by which to set my next goal -- I can dedicate a life to a goal, what would I 'get up' for next?

Pivot. Slide. Shift.

Jump.

I applied to the Eli Whitney Student program at Yale University, a pathway to admission for students with non-traditional backgrounds. To my sincere surprise, I was accepted. It was time to get up and envision a new path to my life -- to find and push my limits.

At Yale, as an unintentional nod to my parents, I studied computer science and metalworking, and I began my formal art education. I took a number of courses developed by descendants of Bauhaus, such as Joseph Albers, a legendary professor and artist whose legacy on campus was apparent in coursework as well as in exhibitions. Albers believed that art was about discovering new theories and insights that could be shared, systematically. He had a pedagogical approach to his practice that placed emphasis on the means and methods of acquisition and transmission of knowledge. Albers thought of his work as dedicated to the development of a general training of observation and the articulation of those insights, from which students of his practice still benefit. In his book 'Interaction of Color', he explains his approach as "an experimental way of studying color and of teaching color." (Albers, Joseph, *Interaction of Color*, Yale University Press, 1963) And from this I savor the idea of an arts practice being not just my own experiments, but what I can pass forward for others to understand.

Another legendary visual thinker introduced to me at that time was Beatrice Warde and her Crystal Goblet theory which still captures my optimum desires for aesthetics in my work -- that is aesthetics to serve the work's meaning. Warde was explicit:

"Vulgar ostentation is twice as easy as discipline."

(Warde, Beatrice, *The Crystal Goblet, or Printing Should Be Invisible*, 1930)

The litmus test for successfully creating visual content to Warde is clarity of intentions and subsequent clarity in outcomes. Or as Warde more poetically put it,

"Pour and drink;  
and according to your choice of goblet,  
I shall know whether or not you are a connoisseur of wine.  
For if you have no feelings about wine  
one way or the other,  
you will want the sensation of drinking  
the stuff  
out of a vessel that may have cost thousands of pounds;  
but if you are a member of that vanishing tribe,  
the amateurs of fine vintages,  
you will choose the crystal,  
because everything about it is calculated  
to reveal rather than hide the beautiful thing  
which it was meant to contain."

(Warde, Beatrice, *The Crystal Goblet, or Printing Should Be Invisible*, 1930)

Warde's theory tied to art what I'd trained in skating: nothing worth doing is easy. Discipline is required. Intention must be tied to outcome. Outcomes must be compared to intentions.

Aside from the legacies of Albers and Warde, other artist works in my daily environment reinforced these messages, making them quite formative to my burgeoning theories about my own work and future practice.

Art by Sol Lewitt highlighted ideas of methodical iteration and leading with the idea over the ego.

Louis Nevelson's art visually related to me the idea of disparate objects, through shared attributes, joining to create new cohesive forms.

And Alexander Calder's work, whimsically appearing to shape shift and disappear while being constructed of simple, solid forms in rigid materials, helped me to frequently reflect on concepts of movement, certainty, and failures of perception.

When I began my art practice I was interested in understanding how perception is constructed. I was finding ever more noticeable the way in which external cues, such as a sheet of ice glistening in an almost empty arena, marked only by a faint etching of a few curves, or shadows in my peripheral vision, were influencing my state of mind so as to increase, or decrease, my proclivity toward specific behaviors, reactions, or emotions.

The outer world is material. How was I constructing perceptions of it as invitation, instructor, ally or foe? Is perception just the assumption of certainty on presumptive grounds, or are there more critically understood elements to it that manipulate confidence in material communications?

These kinds of questions still interest me. Because I believe that through understanding more of the external triggers for my internal responses, I will achieve more conscious control over my states of being that I can, and often do, otherwise, experience as involuntary.

For instance, while presuming that my motions were governed by balance as understood by my trained muscular structure, inner ear and visual system, I started skating on in-line wheeled skates instead of ice skates. I expected to be as confident of my physical movements on pavement as on ice. The equipment had extraordinarily similar dynamics. Instead, I was almost immediately confronted with a stressed and uncoordinated body struggling to calibrate it's movements through space. At first, I thought this response was natural and temporary. But as I struggled to understand what was keeping me from moving as I knew how to for the tools, I recognized an environmental factor I'd failed to consider as effective -- sound. The sounds of the wheels were either absent or entirely different in tone, timing, and texture than those I was accustomed to on the ice. Sounds were affecting my balance. I didn't have an auditory map on pavement by which to calibrate my balance -- and until that moment, I didn't have any idea of how impactful that could be on my movements. In a quick effort to remedy the interference of sounds, or their lack thereof, in my in-line skating, I put a headset on, cranked up the music, and tried the same simple moves I'd been failing to complete up to that point. This, with the knowledge that any sounds from the skates I did hear were not yet connected into my constructed perception of my balance, allowed me to then turn, rotate, and curve exponentially better -- I was more fully transferring my ice skating skills to the

new environment because I was now buffering detrimental external cues. I'd turned my reading of sounds into a voluntary experience where I'd been experiencing the effects of sounds involuntarily up to that moment.

If an involuntary response can be freed by choice and able to choose its controller, external cue or internal desires, the being attached to that response gains unbefore experienced agency and efficacy of the direction of their discourse. Art being a shared medium, this is how I began studying others' reactions and reactiveness to external stimuli proposed in my art. But the questions still remained, how do I do that? How do I construct effective systems by which to guide a perspective and potentially new conversations?

Coming out of undergrad, I did not have the answers to these questions.

But, I did have many different ideas about what to do next for my practice. And an awareness of the constants amidst the many different influential lines of thought being communicated:

- 1) Define and prioritize my intentions
- 2) Seek to find limits to understandings
- 3) Determine critical characteristics for my art practice, so as to hone a system by which to competently maintain its integrity amidst potentially antagonistic atmospheres.

And with these guiding objectives, I developed my methodology for ideation in my practice. Which is, systematically speaking, as follows:

$$\text{SubjectXa} = \sum_{\text{all components}} = x_0 + x_1 + x_2 + \dots x_n$$

$$\text{SubjectXb} = \sum_{\text{all components}} = y_0 + y_1 + y_2 + \dots y_n$$

Iff there exists a component  $y_n$   
equal to some  $x_n$

Replace  $y_n$  with SubjectXa

So as to present SubjectXa  
through the value system  
and lens of SubjectXb.

Through this process, SubjectXb becomes a vehicle for  
a different perspective on SubjectXa.

This method of combinatorics in an artistic practice, if you will, has so far produced the following ideas and works.

Analyzing Line & Perception through Pressure & Motion

*Drawing Balance*

While exploring ways in which to push forward ideas of movement as drawing, I began working on a set of body scale drawings in 2019.

Rather than creating the marks on these drawings with tools in my hands, I shifted my relationship to gravity and pressure against the vertical surface by putting charcoal between my toes, standing on my hands, and cantilevering over to the wall so as to draw with my feet. This elevated ideas of weight and body pressure into my mark making practice.

The restriction of my bodily mark to the limitations of my hand and arm pressure prior to this experiment felt akin to a dismantling of my muscular hierarchy. I wanted to feel more conscious of the energy I was exerting through the ground and onto the paper and become more insightful of the relationship I was forming with each.

Flipping myself over, I became the hypotenuse to the right angle where my floor and canvas support meet.  $a^2 + b^2 = me^2$ , if you will.

For motions, I took on my rehabilitation routine. These are somewhat meditative motions intended to focus me, mentally and physically, on what is out of alignment and unbalanced within my physical system; movements that forefront imbalances in my perceptual field.



*(Wester, Jennifer, Performing Body Drawings, 2019)*



*(Wester, Jennifer, Body Drawings, 2020)*

Similar to the performance of these drawings, the resulting images forward mechanical failures of pressure and movement in my body through the repetition of marks and an imbalance in the forms on the page. They use the vehicle of drawing to talk about bodily balance and resistance; addressing drawing as a function of human forces -- pressure and movement tying the actor into a relationship with their surface.

The performative element of these works is a commitment to the relationship of me to the exterior, material world. I cannot easily step out of the engagement when standing on my hands, as I might if drawing with them. Instead, I have to consciously work with the surfaces that support me. And I have to recognize that dependency, that imbalance.

This line of my practice brings together the dry, confrontational nature of discipline to my treatment of mark-making actions. It is reminiscent of the Zen Buddhist practice of Enso in which it is said that the state of the practitioner can be read in their execution of the circle.

*(Seo, Audrey Yoshiko, Enso: Zen circles of enlightenment, Weatherfield, 2009)*



## Analyzing Line &amp; Perception through Pressure &amp; Motion

*Skate Paintings*

From the earliest days on the ice I can recall noticing the inescapability of drawing while skating. The ice being cut under my blades, creating a monochromatic etching, destructive and elegant, of my and the surface's failures and fleeting moments of perfection. This is, to the best of my knowledge, the beginning of my fascination with lines. But that intrigue and true interest in their study didn't come to light until I took a course by the name of Biological Perception and Computation Vision taught by Prof. Steven Zucker. The course, a cross between biology and mathematics, explained and questioned how animals, from horseshoe crabs to humans see lines. It exposed the line as a concept rather than a tangible item.

Line is Contrast.

We do not see 'line', rather we see contrast.

And our ability to see this contrast that we conceptualize as line derives from a need to sense, to recognize, edges in our environment rather than marks. Edges signal objects, changes in and of surfaces, hazards, tools, resources, predators, etc.

Painting while skating began as an attempt to better experience, in a more didactic way, the tracings of my motions in a more lasting manner.

Ice melts.

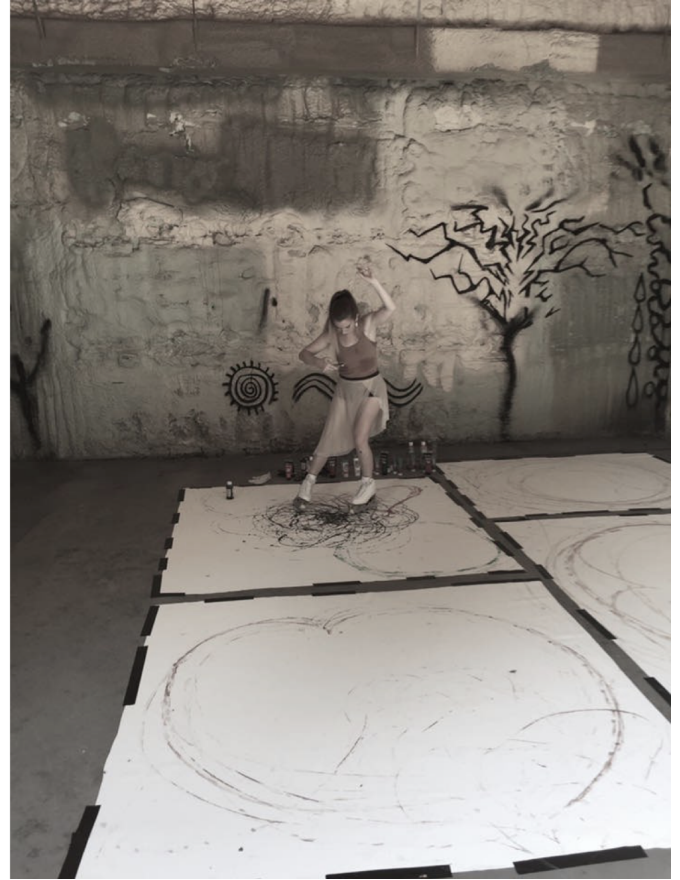
I needed a vehicle for my subject known for lasting impressions.

Painting, revered for its time honored preservation of thought, appeared an obvious option. But paint was difficult to impossible to work with on ice. So, I began skating on customized in-line wheeled skates, designed with a rocker (a boat like curve to the wheelbase) so as to function more like figure skates, where different weighted positions, to the front or back of a blade, effect how much surface area, and therefore the turning radius, of the skate and skater atop it.





The adjustments were not as immediate as anticipated. The lack of grip provided by wheels in paint is far more destabilizing than edges cutting into ice. As a result these paintings came to confront me with bold statements of imperfect radii and a multitude of shifting, redirecting, and misdirected motions of my body within a constant state of instability.



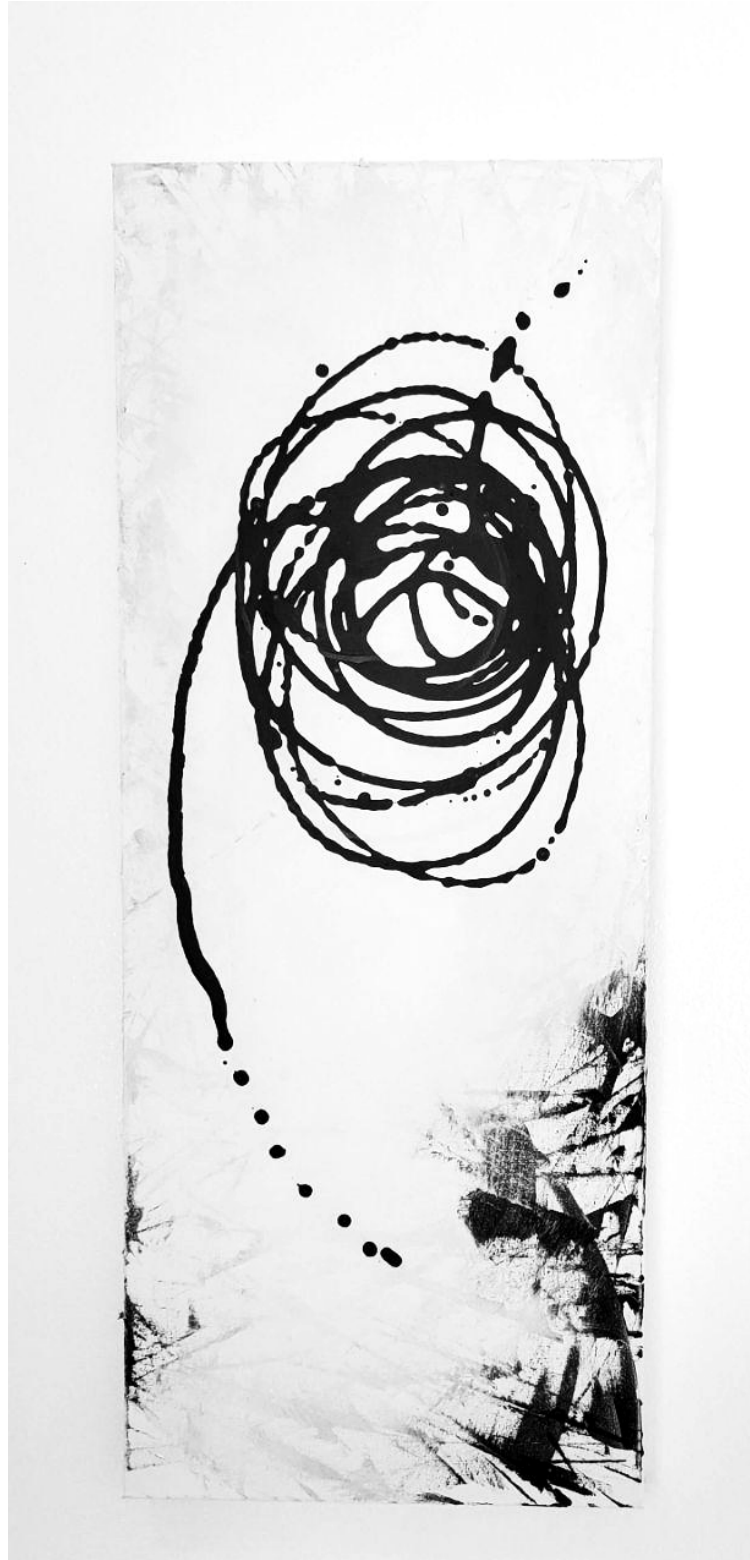
*(Wester, Jennifer, MultiCanvas Skate Painting, 2017)*

A lack of clear direction, a need to constantly re-involve myself within the space, and the emergence of involuntary organizing principles to my tracings push forward the idea of reflecting on my actions as not random or normally distributed, but compelled by many silent and subconscious patterns and impromptu reactions. Reactions lead by perceptions of change -- contrast -- in my environment.

Artists of note that became important to me in understanding paintings as residues of bodies in motion include members of the Gutai Art Association like Shiraga Kazuo who, among others, made paintings while skidding through paint across a canvas and performatively acted in full body experiments to mark surfaces that then became displayed residues of their actions. And the performance drawing work of Joan Jonas, that frequently investigates the infidelity of mark making in capturing a body's intentions.



(Wester, Jennifer, Residue of Spatial Memories, 2020, Angelina College Gallery, Lufkin, TX)



(Wester, Jennifer, Everyone Spins Backwards, 2020)





(Wester, Jennifer, Acrylic on Canvas, 2021)





(Wester, Jennifer, Studio Image, 2020, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX)



(Wester, Jennifer, Acrylic on Canvas, 2021)

Over time, each painted surface became a body of motion, painted drawings transparently stacked atop one another to relate information less apparent in each individual interaction with that surface.



As these 'bodies' lingered in my space, I began desiring a further transformation of my perception of them. They have a particular evidence of my existence, a certain kind of ableism in the quantity of motion embedded in their making and simultaneously significant constriction on that motion, to a specific way of moving and the limits of it.

In my final semester as an MFA student, I hung a few of these works in a gallery to observe their collective presence. These paintings' rectilinear formats seemed to be calling out for intervention. Growth was on my mind so I began thinking of structures and how certain methods invite expansion and growth whereas others restrict.



(Wester, Jennifer, Video Still -- ReStructivist, 2021, Pollock Gallery, Dallas, TX)

This is how I came to perform a deconstructing of a 16' x 8' skate painting. With a camera to document the time, movements, sounds, and transformation, I tore and clipped, repetitively left to right and in reverse, until the structure became a mess consisting of one long strip -- a thread of my history that is now ready to be used, as architectural spolia, to weave a form more suitable for and representational of growth and becoming from one into another.



*(Wester, Jennifer, studio image, 2021)*

## Analyzing Motion &amp; Composition through Temporal Structures

In an effort to manipulate a conversation about motion, from the actions of a body to the experience of space via the movement of body, I leveraged my practice so as to show motion and composition via temporal structures. This topic felt especially relative to life in 2020 and 2021 as the Covid-19 Pandemic forced large amounts of time to be spent confined to computer screens and virtual experiences, meanwhile bodies have been absent of physical sensations of space and exploration.

In a line of work I call Floor Drawings, line segments and dots offer imaginative structures around which bodies, in the form of viewers to the work, compose and recompose the space with their placement and movements. I am interested in these works as dances to re-experience space.

*Floor Drawings*

*(Wester, Jennifer, 2021)*

To compose these drawings, I take marks from travel -- dashes such as one might experience on a road -- and from play -- dots often associated with connect-the-dots and other playful activities -- to ephemerally divide and guide movement within a space. The marks have no legend to explain their meanings or references which allows each viewer to bring their own interpretive engagement to the work. At the same time, because we are so often exposed to this language of motion and play, viewers naturally begin to navigate the area in reactive ways. Some areas hold the viewer's attention and body longer, others not at all. As others add in, physical structures -- bodies -- augment the illusion of structure in the line placements.



*(Wester, Jennifer, SMU MFA Candidate Qualifying Show, 2021)*

In these works, the experience of the space is shifted from one of passive motion -- in the case of a gallery, from work to work --, into a continuum of interpretive, active viewing, highlighted by reactionary movements of the viewers shifting and shuffling bodies across and around the work.



I look forward to continuing this line of exploration as evidence to date suggests a wide variety of applications for it. Architectural conversations often form around physical movements through a space, but this intervention of an almost universal language for re-experiencing a room or environment has far less overhead than those of an architectural nature.

As my work expands, and my process applies to an ever growing library of subjects, I look forward to tracking the evolution of my ideation theory, the lines of work I produce with it and the discussions that arise out of those works.

For as Marcel DuChamp is credited with saying:

“The artist is only one part  
of the creative process.  
The onlooker completes it,  
and it is the onlooker  
that has the last word.”  
*(unknown source)*

Success is a judgement.

Resilience is a mindset.

And failure is a challenge.

But art is experience.