

Rachel Walter

CMSC388E

Rachel_Walter_Project1.pde

When thinking about composition, I'm reminded of an exhibit I saw at the Smithsonian Hirshhorn Museum in an exhibit called *What Absence is Made of*. This exhibit explores **“What does absence look like? How can loss—of objects, of memory, of yourself—become a tool for artistic expression?”** (Smithsonian Institute). Sometimes it is not what is in a piece of art, but rather what is not there which creates a meaning.

One piece that particularly resonated with me was “Nomad” (1988) by Annette Lemieux. Lemieux created the piece to mimic the path she took pacing her to studio when trying to “re-enter” a painting (Gopnick). When I was talking to a volunteer at the Hirshhorn, she thought it also represented Lemieux’s migration around the United States as a military brat. (As for me, I saw dance step diagrams for learning the basic steps and paths for ballroom dance styles.) Her original intention of pacing and “re-entering” was the one that inspired me most. First, this class is my way to break a creative doldrum in my life and re-embrace forms of expressing myself, just as Lemieux imitated her reabsorption into art. Secondly, I feel like with technological mediums of art there can be a feeling of separation between the piece and the viewer. In Lemieux’s piece, there was a physical as well as an artistic form of expression. I hope this choice will reduce the artificial feeling of computer-generated art.

The main facets of composition I used were space, movement, and texture/value. I used random generation of x and y coordinates to create the meandering, pacing feeling of the piece. There is an initial random placement of x and y. After each iteration of draw, a new direction (up-right, up-left, down-right, or down-left) is selected. Based on this selection, the x and y values are incremented or decremented by a random value. There is no specific place or path that

the imaginary artist must take. This creates interesting use of space, because by random the imaginary artist may be huddled in one corner or pacing the entire canvas.

To make the random pacing have a sense of cohesion, I put bounds on how far the imaginary artists could move in one step. They can only move in the x or y direction between 40 and 60 pixels. I rotated the feet were pointing to roughly match the directionality of each step i.e. if the imaginary artist is moving up and to the right, the feet are either pointing to the right or pointing up at the next call of draw(). It also helps give some realism in the movement of the piece. In future iterations of this project, I might work on making this more organic with the feet pointing at angles rather than at the cardinal points. I tried using the rotate() method, but I could not figure out how to make the rotation and movement related. There was no path being walked but rather seemingly random rotation and placement. I would rather have the boxy movement with a path that can be followed than the disconnected movement.

Another compositional choice I made was to decrease the opacity as the footsteps iterated. This plays around with texture/value. Not only does this give the piece more realism (you can only walk around on paint for so long before there is no paint!), it also tells a compositional story. I had a hard time telling what was the upper bound of opacity, so I start at value 200 and decrement after each iteration. The artists wanders but has to restock on paint again to keep documenting her process; there are always things in the way between an artist and the creation of their art. Additionally, as more and more footprints are added, the changing opacity also helps the viewer track where the artist is. It creates an interesting composition as well because footsteps and paths become layered, but we can still see the journey beneath the clutter.

Original Version of Piece (Using Rotate):



Final Version of Piece (Using Random Directionality):





Figure 1: "Nomad" (1988) by Annette Lemieux

Retrieved from: <https://news.artnet.com/opinion/annette-lemieux-elizabeth-dec-670778>



Figure 2: "Untitled (Nomadic)" (1988) by Annette Lemieux

Retrieved from: <https://www.nehomemag.com/on-second-thought/>

Works Cited

- Gopnik, Blake. "Annette Lemieux Paces-Out Painting's Coffin." *Artnet News*, Artnet News, 26 Sept. 2016, <https://news.artnet.com/opinion/annette-lemieux-elizabeth-dee-670778>
- Smithsonian Institute. "What Absence Is Made Of." *Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden*, 2017, <https://hirshhorn.si.edu/exhibitions/what-absence-is-made-of/>