

Where do we dwell?

At the core of my work as an interdisciplinary artist is an interest in place /locale/ environment. The landscape, whether natural or human-built, is riddled with stories of habitation and perseverance. Where we dwell is a question running throughout my work. It is where I find inspiration and imagination.

My practice has always utilized painting, sculpture, drawing, photography, installation, curatorial methodology, and graphic design, with an approach to these media and strategies that is both critical and aesthetic. For example, "Recipe Paintings" (1988) is a series of paintings on aluminum panels of actual and mock recipes hand-painted in a small, delicate script that hovers on larger surfaces of shimmering, marbled auto-body paint. "Hirsch Farm Project, an arts-based think tank" (1990-2000), invited an interdisciplinary group of participants to travel to different locations globally to talk privately (no recordings, prior to the internet), speculate about topical concerns in the last decade of the 20th century, and submit a visual contribution to a book that reflected each gathering.

In 2009 I developed a new digital format, following a cerebellar stroke that caused me to lose my ability to walk or balance. My challenge was how to look forward in an inventive way especially on a psychological level. I had to reinvent not only how to walk, but how and on what scale I could visually communicate. Because I work in a variety of mediums it was crucial to keep the creative door as open-ended as possible. As I settled into the challenge, the limitations turned into possibilities (the problems are often the solution). I began to conflate my disparate interests (art and non-art alike) and started to create graphic narratives – multi-paged images that tell a story. Adjusting to my new physical state, I asked what if I rid my artwork of a physical body? What would be left? This is when "i-o-i-p" (2009-present) came to be.

Producing "i-o-i-p" as an ongoing series of visual graphic narratives in PDF form, shared via the internet, was liberating. The title "i-o-i-p" comes from "Images/Objects/Information/People," which represents a vast range of potential forms and subjects within a flexible design format. Stylistic consistency was not relevant; any possible style, scale, and material output was fair game for communicating and resolving the questions and narratives at hand. Producing work that was not dependent on the materiality of exhibition models was crucial and beautifully problematic. "i-o-i-p" offered me permission to translate photography, painting, text, and graphic design into a unified visual story. Similar to the narrative of "Hirsch Farm Project," "i-o-i-p" operated in the realm of conceptual dynamics and not the physicality of the experience.

In my current work, experience is primary. Utilizing a variety of materials and forms of representation, such as drawings (hand-made and subjective), photographs (the familiar/recognizable), and texture studies (a context of daily life), I respond to experiences borne out of place. The work represents specific moments of 21st century complexities of place/locale/environment.

We all have unique experiences and how we triangulate them provides a unique visual truth to whom we are as individuals. Throughout the day, we shift back and forth between tangible, physical real-world observations and forays into technology/social media spaces. I consider navigating these types of experiences as "post-experiential." For example, I can be painting in the studio, then take a break and go on the computer/phone to research, catch the news, play a game, etc. By all accounts these are everyday incidents, but nonetheless there is a rupture. Maybe a rupture that I am unaware and do not even notice, but there is a difference.

My current work dwells in this rupture. It is ontological and resides simultaneously in everyday experiences (analog/material/tangible) and mediated (digital/ media/ space). Individually, each picture follows its own internal, formal, and intuitive logic and sensibility. The images are intentionally conflated, happening simultaneously. The colors are fugitive. These works do not necessarily add up to specific meaning in a traditional narrative or pictorial sense. They are fragments of information that are observed and accumulated into a larger story.

-Mitchell Kane, 2025