

Seeking That Shimmering Weave
(Experiments and Encounters through Drawing)

work by Matthew Whitney

February 17–March 28, 2026

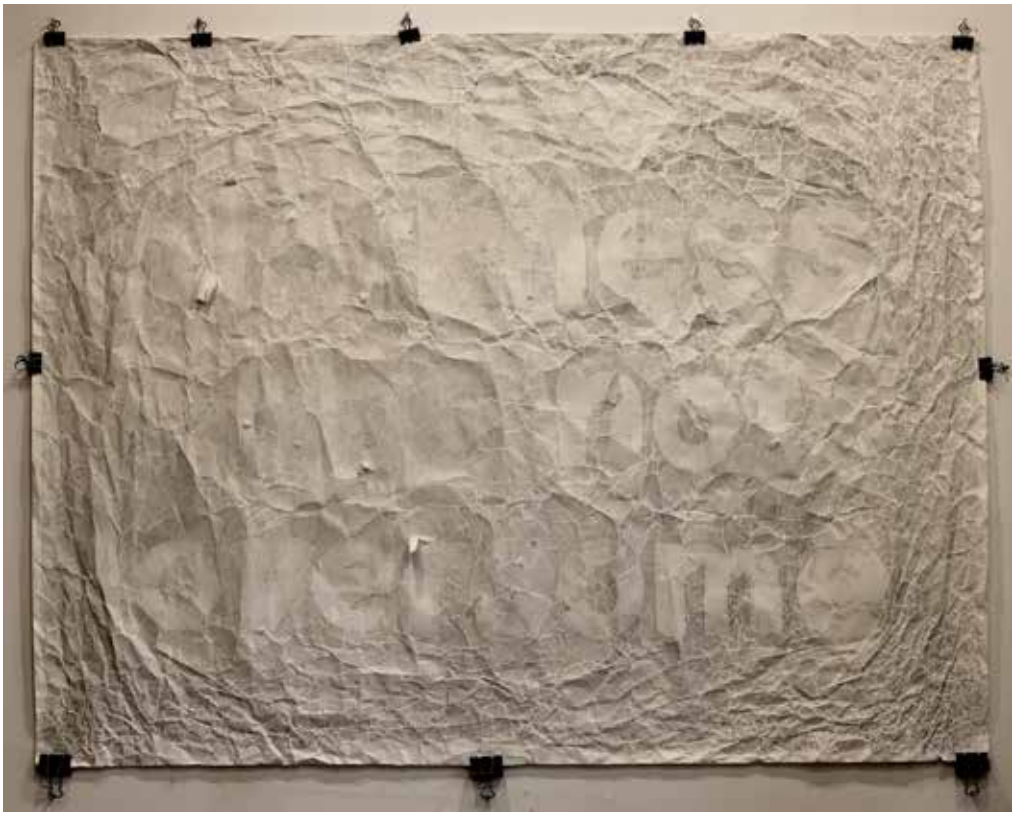
James K. Schmidt Gallery / Voney Art Center / Principia College / Elsah, Illinois
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(above) *Incarnated, 2017, acrylic on paper, 60" x 141"*
(right) *Darkness Has Not Overcome, 2024, graphite on paper, 34" x 60"*
(front cover) *Working It Out (detail), 2018, acrylic and graphite on paper, 60" x 120"*

Introduction and Acknowledgments

by Sara Phillips de Borja



The title for this exhibition references the poem "Heavenly" by Czesław Miłosz, in which the writer extols the desire to "strive unceasingly," continually aiming to touch the "shimmering weave on the loom of the world." Matthew Whitney's work suggests that yearning to embrace renewal and seek refinement. With his drawings, the artist transforms crumpled paper, with distinct signs of marred imperfections, into something that has been reinvigorated and given new life through the addition of graphite or gold. The unpredictability of the folds is developed to create beauty from disorder. This idea is highlighted in *Darkness Has Not Overcome*, a work that initially appears to be a large, crinkled piece of paper. Closer observation reveals the words "darkness has not overcome" left in relief. The imperfections of the areas around the words become evidence of striving, of the artist's personal marks on the surface. Sometimes looking for that element of light requires effort to recognize what has always been there.

Our Principia community has contributed to this art installation by creating crumpled balls, a playful addition that adds a joyful element from objects typically associated with mistakes, of early drafts or drawings intended to be disposed, so we may also participate in feeling the experience of renewal and become part of the interconnected fabric of this shimmering weave.

This exhibition would not have been possible without the efforts of so many. Much appreciation goes to Matthew Whitney for sharing his work with Principia College. Kristin Martin has crafted an essay that thoughtfully engages with the concepts presented in Whitney's work. This exhibition has required the help of many individuals throughout our community, and I am grateful for their generous assistance. Bruce Rea and the Mail and Copy Center brought the exhibition catalog and marketing materials to fruition. With her attention to detail and institutional knowledge, Deb Wold, the James K. Schmidt Gallery registrar was invaluable. And many thanks to Zemma Kitchen, the Visual Arts PGTI, for her assistance; to Jon Hosmer, Principia College Web Director, for his work with the gallery's website; and to our Principia College facilities department. And a special thank you to my colleagues in the Visual Arts department for their support of the James K. Schmidt Gallery.

Heavenly

The poet William Blake lived to the age of eighty
and, as he lay dying, sang triumphal hymns.

For he knew that he was just moving to another
realm, invisible to the eyes of mortals.

Its inhabitants receive bodies immaterial
but substantial, like that of Jesus,
resurrected, when he appeared to his disciples
and Thomas, with his finger, could touch his wound.

It is a realm of eternal intellectual hunts
a chase after ever self-renewing meaning
and he, William Blake,will still practice there
his craft of a poet, prophet, and engraver.

I, too, want to believe, that I'll find my way to this realm
and will be able to keep doing, what I started on earth.

That is, to strive unceasingly, to be striving itself,
and never have my fill of touching
the shimmering weave on the loom of the world.

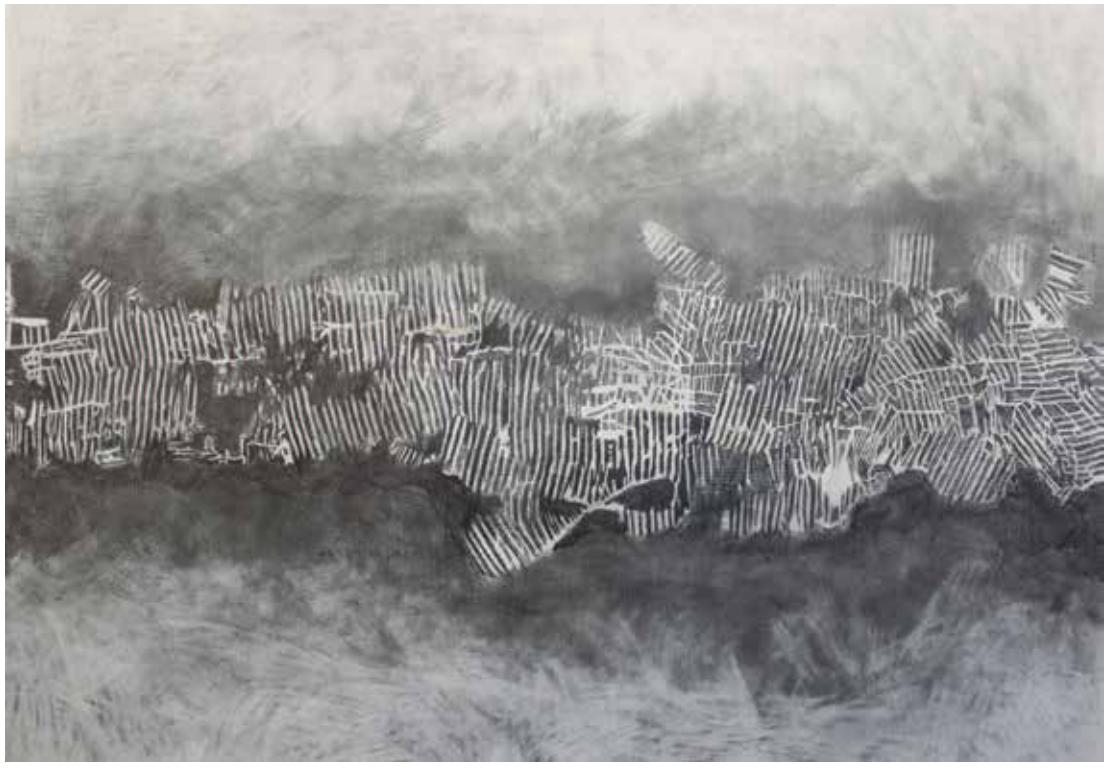
The everyday bustle will come into view
in the long-forgotten cities built of jasper,
the unimaginable civilizations of triangular masks,
the simultaneity of blink and millennia.

Under the warmth of the Sun at its zenith, in gardens,
whose rhythm's like the former pulsing of my blood.

—Czesław Miłosz
from *Selected and Last Poems: 1931–2004*,Trans. by Anthony Milosz ©2011



(above) *Movement In Kind*, 2015, Pastel and graphite on paper, 34" x 60"
(right) *Bridge*, 2017, graphite on paper, 60" x 70"



PILGRIMAGE OF PARTICIPATION: A WALK THROUGH MATTHEW WHITNEY'S WORK

by Kristin Martin

Art is not a thing–
it is a way.[1]

The Old English word 'wealcan' (which gave us the familiar verb 'to walk') did not originally mean striding in a direction with some intention from one place to another. This early Anglo-Saxon sense of walking comes from the rolling of waves and the pounding of wool cloth (to clean it and hook the fibers together, making a fabric that is warmer and more impervious to the elements). It also relates to the meditative action of rolling things around in one's mind.[2]

Crossing the Threshold

Perhaps the Moon was watching Matthew Whitney as he awoke and strode towards his Seattle studio just after 4:30 a.m. sometime in late 2018. The temperature probably hovered in the mid-forties Fahrenheit and it would still be dark for another three hours.

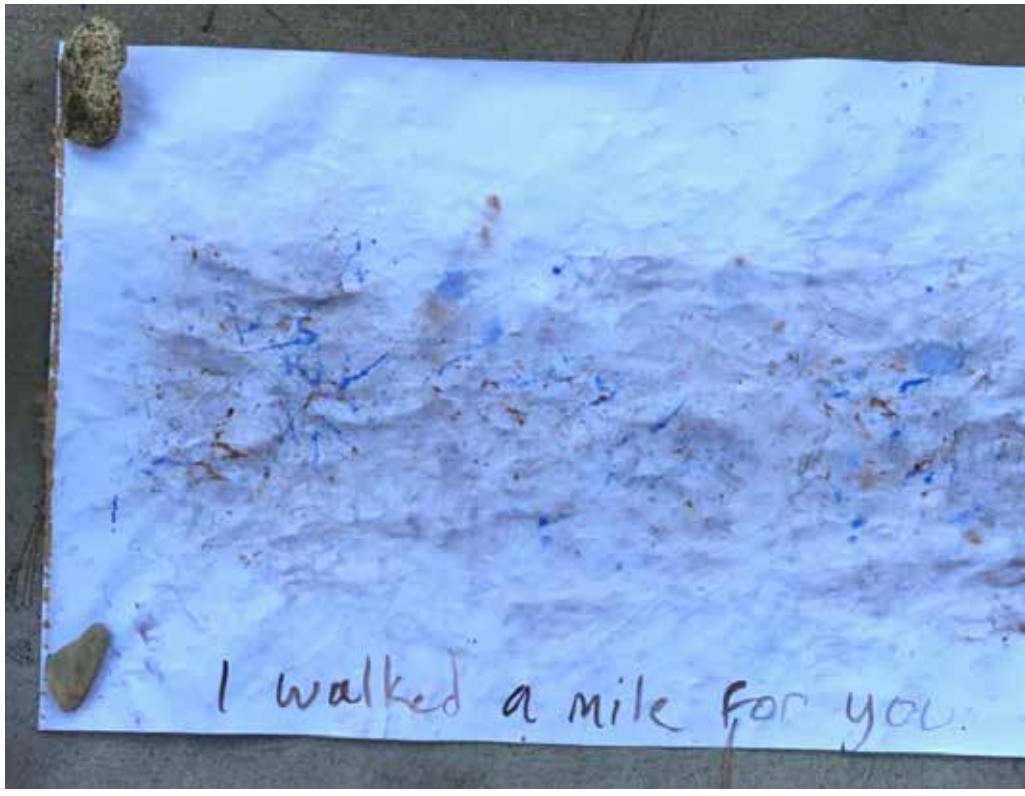
One historic name for the full moon that falls in November is the Travel Moon[3]—a fitting sign to illuminate the exploration of Matthew Whitney's walking and drawing practice. Let's imagine it heard the hollow curl of the artist unrolling a piece of heavy drawing paper, the hiss of smoothing it against the floorboards, and the soft thunking of him walking back and forth across its surface.

If you were the Travel Moon, you would have seen him periodically emerge from the light of his studio to take a few steps in the wet grass before turning back and intentionally tracking the patterns of his boots onto the paper.

When enough individual boot prints had been layered on top of each other to make a scrabbly track lengthwise through the center of the paper, Whitney "spent the next month drawing with soft graphite in the areas around the tread – paying attention and being careful to not draw 'outside the lines' of the scuffs and dirt marks" until he had created a work that vaguely resembles a map.[4] Or a breaking wave.

Whitney's December 2018 blog entry about the making of this piece (a work he first titled *Here, Illuminated*, but now appears in this exhibition as *Bridge*)[5] showed up in my social media feed because we had overlapped during our graduate studies at Vermont College of Fine Arts six years earlier.

What initially caught me about this drawing was the layering of two ancient ways of human exploration—walking with the feet and markmaking with bits of rock held in the fingers. I like to use his process as an opening project in my Drawing I classes because it strikes me as a useful way to subvert the claim that a person can't draw. (Once, it even worked out for Whitney to send video feedback to the students about their efforts, for which I was very grateful.)



I Walked a Mile For You, 2024, watercolor on paper, 36" x 200"

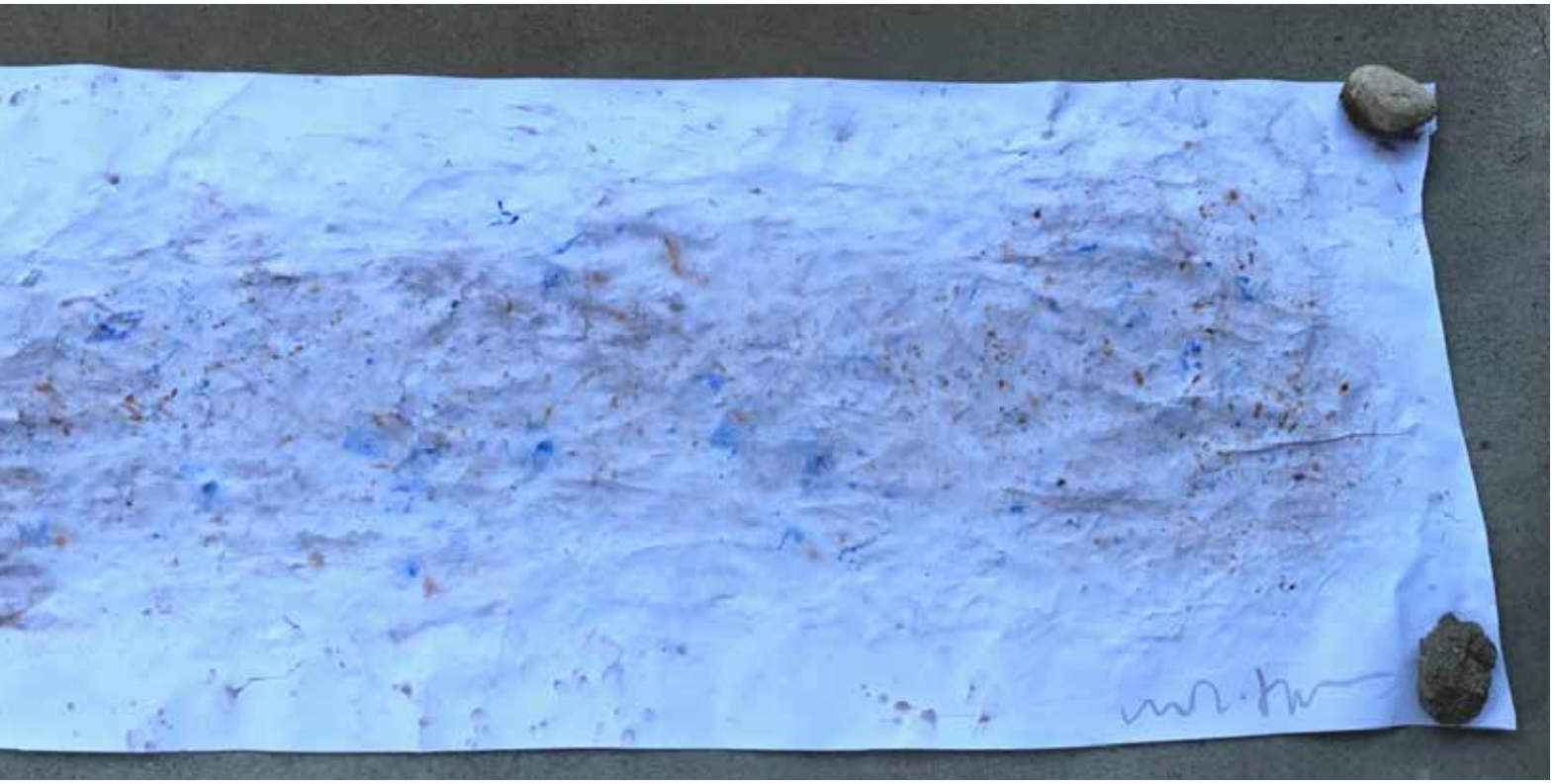
There is one conceptual quality of *Bridge* (hinted at in the artist's title change) that I was never able to replicate with my students, however. It is his practice of throwing open the double doors of experience and repeatedly crossing the threshold between *doing* and *making*. The drawing on the wall only tells half the story; other than the artist's blog entry, there is no record of Whitney walking out, over and over again, into the dewy darkness that morning, nor of any pauses that might have happened before returning to the light of his studio. So how does an artist make both states visible?

A Rolling 'Transubstantiation':

Consisting of 10 large works on paper attached to the wall with beefy binder clips, looped video projections, and an installation of approximately 7500 crumpled sheets of copier paper covering the gallery floor, *Seeking That Shimmering Weave (Experiments and Encounters through Drawing)* puts process and product back in proximity. In doing so, Whitney takes Baudelaire's *flâneur* (or *flâneuse*, as the case may be) on a pilgrimage of participation. Rather than observing at a distance, his work invokes a kind of rolling 'transubstantiation': paper as body; body as pencil; pencil as path; path as communion; communion as paper.

Paper as Body

In *That Which Is* (2017), Whitney explores "the flawed body, and work[s] within the creases, indeed making them a vital part of the composition" by first crumpling a 60" x 84" sheet of drawing paper into a ball, (imperfectly) smoothing it out again, and then penciling in the shapes created between the creases.[6] You can see him perform his crumpling and smoothing process in the *crumpled paper–concept* (2026) video. The paper begins to register more as a body the more it is crumpled, embraced, and smoothed, particularly when the artist pauses after enfolding it in his arms. Is it becoming more flawed …or more alive? Whitney sanctifies this exploration with the addition of warm gold acrylic in *Working It Out* (2018) and *Incarnated* (c.2017).



Body as Pencil; Pencil as Path

In 2005, UK-based GPS artist Jeremy Wood[7] spent three months creating a work called *Meridians*, in which he spelled out "It is not down in any map; true places never are,"—a sentence written by Herman Melville in his 1851 novel *Moby-Dick*—by walking a line that turned out to be over 44 miles long on the Greenwich Peninsula in London, while carrying a GPS tracker.[8]

Following in Wood's footsteps (so to speak), Whitney did not have to carry an extra device, because GPS tracking apps are now built into the smartphones that most of us wear everywhere as extensions of ourselves. Whitney's work does not stop with the digital rendering of the GPS data, though. To create works such as *Clairvoyance* (2013) or *Movement in Kind* (2015), he first takes himself on a walk to make the line, and then (in the spirit of Paul Klee) takes a line for a walk to make the drawing.

Path as Communion

In a departure from his other renderings of GPS drawings, Whitney illustrates a section of the Seattle map in *Glass Half* (2015) with wine-red pencil. His walking path outlines two vessels—a water glass on the left and a wine goblet on the right. Each includes a line through the center representing the liquid level. For scale, the distance from the goblet's foot, which sits on the north edge of Woodland Park, to its rim at NW 85th Street is 1.3 miles (2.092 km). Given other biblical references in Whitney's work and writings, the shapes in this path could call to mind the "cup of cold water" in Matthew 10:42 (KJV) and the sacramental wine of Mark 14:23. Instead of taking communion in a church where congregants can perceive the ritual, though, what does it mean to walk those shapes (if that is what they signify) on such a large scale that they become invisible to the public encompassed in them?

Whereas *Glass Half* could be seen to expand a ritual of communion beyond recognition, *I Walked a Mile For You* (2024) condenses a devotional walk down to a relic of that experience. For whomever (or whatever) the You is in the title, Whitney brought a 200" long sheet of drawing paper into a pine forest at the Grunewald Guild,[9] "put some watercolor in a vat, and walked back and forth across the paper for roughly a mile."[10] All the

marks were made with his bare feet. If you look closely, you can see the impressions of the pine needles carpeting the forest floor where he laid down the paper.

Communion as Paper

Aside from the religious ritual of bread and wine, *communion* can also mean "the sharing or exchanging of intimate thoughts and feelings," a "relationship of recognition and acceptance,"[11] and "the act of sharing something or holding it in common, or the state of something so held."[12] One can see Whitney using these ideas as materials to crumple, (re)mark upon, or hold—the same ways he treats his paper.

For example, in the video performance piece *Eat This Scroll (for breakfast)* (2026), the barefoot artist, in black t-shirt and pants, performs a kind of ceremony: "written words are crumpled, tossed toward a pail, burned to ash, mixed with water, eaten, and then used as a drawing medium. The meaning and medium are filtered and consumed, back into the means of mark-making."[13] The title of the piece is a reference to Ezekiel 3:1, where God instructs Ezekiel to eat a scroll covered in "words of lament and mourning and woe" (Ezekiel 2:9, NIV) and then communicate His words to the people of Israel. (Christ would later say: *Take, eat; this is my body.*) Here, because Whitney does not digest the scroll, the communion (the recognition and acceptance) comes back to the paper.

Finally, the crumpled paper rolling around the gallery floor that began as a communal activity (Principia College faculty and students participated



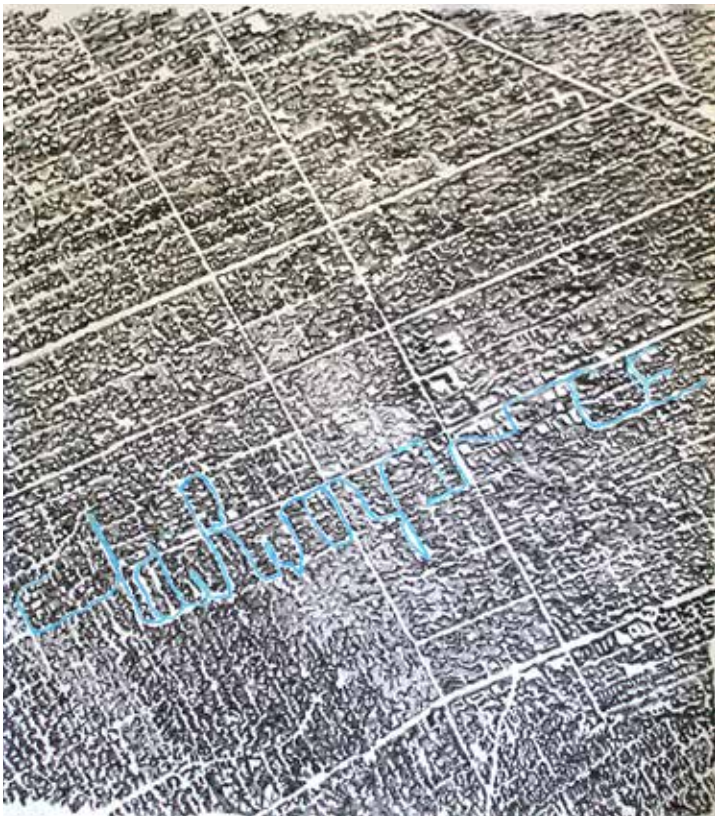
(above) *That Which Is, 2017, graphite on paper, 60" x 84"*
(right top) *Clairvoyance, 2013, pastel on paper, 70" x 60"*
(right bottom) *GPS data of walk through Greenwood neighborhood of Seattle*

in the crumpling), smooths out into an installation when the gallery is empty, and will reactivate into a shared experience whenever people enter the gallery. "...You, the viewer, can interact with them. Pick them up. Read them if something is written. Toss them at each other (playfully!). Or shovel a path through them — which is what I seek to do in my life. Seeking."[14]

And so…

In these times, walking for any duration through an American city or town as someone who both belongs to the place and brings their own metacognitive gaze is no small thing. Is it an act of privilege? Of necessity? Of curiosity (which, etymologically, carries with it the expression of care)?[15] Of devotion? Of responsibility? In some parts of the country, the costs of walking and watching are becoming unusually high.[16]

As I wake to finish writing this essay (and feed my baby) sometime just after 4:30 in the morning on February 2, 2026, perhaps the Snow Moon is patiently waiting for nearly two dozen Buddhist monks to rise, gather their saffron robes about themselves, and set out from Kingsland Baptist Church in Richmond, Virginia to continue their 2,300-mile Walk for Peace.[17] They will mark the 100th day of their pilgrimage from Fort Worth, Texas to Washington, D.C. by inviting people to walk with them from Fire Station to City Hall.



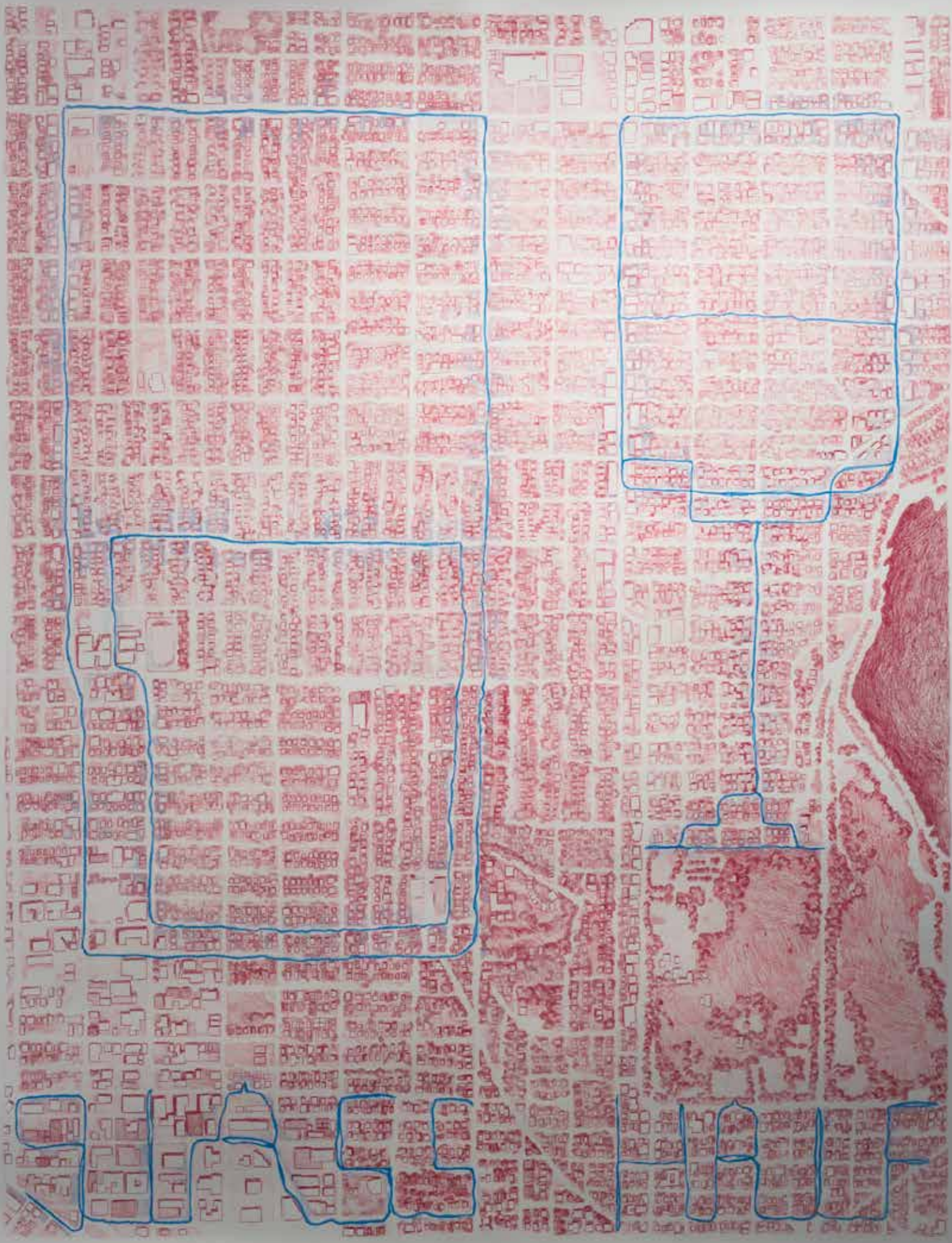
People will bow to the monks and give them flowers. The monks will give the flowers to children farther down their path.

Heat or no heat.
Snow or no snow.

Being that shimmering weave.



Kristin Martin is an assistant professor of Visual Arts at Principia College. She earned her MFA from Vermont College of Fine Arts.



Notes

1. Elbert Hubbard, *Little Journeys: To the Homes of Great Teachers (New York: Wm. H. Wise & Co., 1916).*
2. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "walk," Accessed January 29, 2026, https://www.oed.com/dictionary/walk_v?tab=etymology&tl=true.
3. Royal Museums Greenwich, "Why do we have special names for full moons?" Accessed January 29, 2026, https://www.rmg.co.uk/stories/space-astronomy/what-are-names-full-moons-throughout-year
4. Matthew Whitney, "Here, Illuminated (Bridge)," Matthew Whitney: art, life, and wanderings, December 27, 2018, https://www.matthewwhitney.com/here-illuminated/
5. ibid.
6. Matthew Whitney, "that which is," *Matthew Whitney: art, life, and wanderings*, December 23, 2018, https://www.matthewwhitney.com/that-which-is/
7. Elaine Sexton, "The Sensation of Being Lost: A Micro-Interview with Jeremy Wood," *Tupelo Quarterly,* June 8, 2015, https://www.tupeloquarterly.com/visual-art/jeremy-wood/
8. Jeremy Wood, "Can't Be Elsewhere When GPS Drawing." *GPS Drawing*, accessed on January 30, 2026.
9. "The Grünewald Guild is a nonprofit arts education retreat center nestled in the heart of Cascadian woodland, on 16 peaceful acres by the Wenatchee River in Plain Valley, Washington." Its mission is to "welcome and inspire all who seek to explore the relationships between art, faith & community." https://www.grunewaldguild.com/purpose
10. Matthew Whitney, "i walked a mile for you," *Matthew Whitney: art, life, and wanderings*, May 19, 2025, https://www.matthewwhitney.com/i-walked-a-mile-for-you/
11. *Oxford Languages*, s.v. "communion." Accessed on January 31, 2026, https://www.google.com/search?q=define+communion
12. *Dictionary.com*, s.v. "communion." Accessed January 31, 2026, https://www.dictionary.com/browse/communion
13. Matthew Whitney, "Eat This Scroll (for breakfast)," *Matthew Whitney: art, life, and wanderings,* January 4, 2025, https://www.matthewwhitney.com/eat-this-scroll-for-breakfast/
14. "...A mass spectacle, inspired perhaps by the millions of porcelain sunflower seeds of Ai Weiwei made by his army of craftspeople, or the pile of candy representing the dying partner of Félix González-Torres…" Matthew Whitney thus situated his crumpled paper installation in an unpublished statement shared with me via Instagram on November 26, 2025.
15. *Oxford English Dictionary,* s.v. "curiosity," Accessed January 31, 2026, https://www.oed.com/dictionary/curiosity_n?tab=meaning_and_use#7543278



(above) *Bullseye!, 2025, graphite and charcoal on paper, 36" x 55"*
(left) *Glass Half, 2015, Pencil on paper, 73" x 60"*

16. While walking in public with a sense of agency is becoming newly complicated for certain groups of American residents in parts of the United States, it is worth recognizing that many of our African-American neighbors have been living in "these times" for the last 400 years.
17. The Vietnamese Theravada Buddhist monks started their journey in Fort Worth, Texas on October 26, 2025. Walking in silence each day, they aim to reach Washington, D.C. in mid-February (coincidentally, pretty close to the opening of this exhibition). *See Walk For Peace* Facebook account.

Artist's Statement



My work arises from a lifelong pursuit of experience rather than representation. Influenced by Czesław Miłosz's reflection on William Blake—an ever-seeking chase after self-renewing meaning—I understand myself as an "ever-seeker," attentive to this one life as it unfolds through the body, the senses, and lived encounter.

I distinguish experience from thought. Thought organizes, categorizes, narrates; experience disrupts. It is felt before it is understood. Art, for me, is not primarily an object or a story, but a site where experience can re-emerge—through touch, intuition, material resistance, and play. In moments when thinking recedes, making becomes sensory and immediate, and occasionally something ineffable appears—beauty, sublimity, or what one might call the sacred.

My earlier work centered on walking as a practice of attention: personal cartographies that traced the relationship between body and ground, often within the urban grid of Seattle. While these works moved closer to lived experience, their reliance on reference—mapping, depiction, documentation—eventually felt insufficient. I seek to narrow the gap between referent and experience, allowing the work to function less as record and more as invitation.

The current body of work begins with crumpled paper. Rather than treating creases, tears, and folds as flaws to be avoided, I accept them as the starting condition—mirroring how we inhabit our bodies, histories, and cultures. Through acts of manipulation, marking, and "deskilling," the chaotic structure of the paper determines the composition. Order emerges from unpredictability.

These works function as trailheads rather than destinations. They invite viewers into an encounter—tactile, open-ended, and participatory—offering not a singular meaning, but spaciousness for many. In a world shaped by disorder and collective pain, I approach chaos not as failure, but as a logic we may learn to meet with curiosity, trust, and care.

Artist's Bio

Matthew Whitney (he/him) is a multidisciplinary artist, educator, and pedestrian whose work explores lived experience as an embodied encounter rather than a representational one. Working across drawing, painting, photography, collage, video, performance, and installation, his practice privileges process, material responsiveness, and attention over fixed meaning.

Rooted in contemplative traditions, the work has long engaged walking as both method and metaphor—producing personal cartographies that trace the relationship between body, ground, and place. In recent years, his practice has shifted toward materially-driven processes that embrace fragmentation, chance, and imperfection as generative conditions. Through acts of manipulation, "deskilling," and intuitive mark-making, his work invites viewers into open-ended encounters that foreground presence, vulnerability, and reflection.

Matt holds a BA in Art from Whitworth University and an MFA in Visual Art from Vermont College of Fine Arts. In parallel with his studio practice, he is engaged in teaching, facilitation, and community-based work. He currently serves as Creative Director at Spiritual Directors International, an interfaith nonprofit dedicated to contemplative practices of spiritual direction and companionship.

Further work can be viewed at matthewwhitney.com • Instagram: @mattpwhitney • Youtube: @mattpwhitney_longwalks

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This exhibition was initiated and curated by the James K. Schmidt Gallery.

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