

HOW DID WE GET HERE AND WHERE ARE WE GOING?

By

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Abstract

HOW DID WE GET HERE AND WHERE ARE WE GOING? is a thesis exhibition that consists of two series of lithographic prints, All I've Seen, and Encounters on a Hog Farm and a self-portrait titled It Weighs on You Like Heavy Rain. They depict my experience working on an industrial hog confinement for four summers in Iowa. I navigate this industry in my work through my memories, through the things I saw and experienced and I focus on the things that impacted me. This collection of work depicts the workings of industrial hog farming and the complications of operating a large-scale farm. Much of this is not seen by many. Through my work, I shine a light on the realities of an industry that are usually invisible.

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I. *All I've Seen*, A body of lithographs

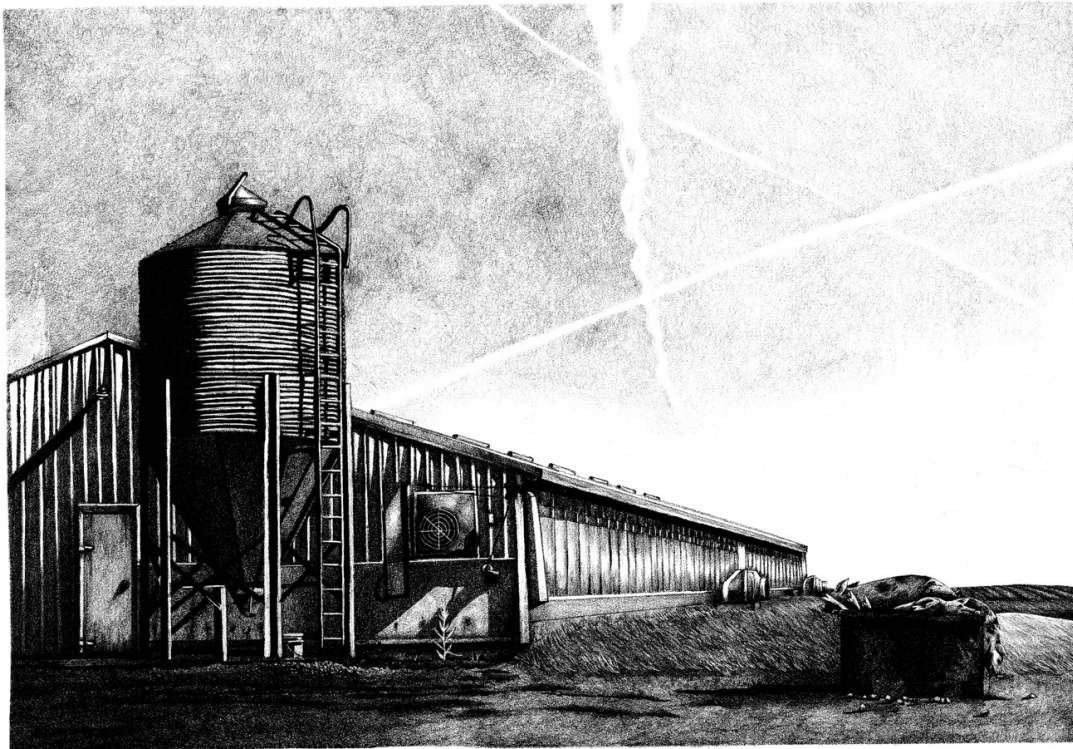
All I've Seen is a series of black and white lithographs that explore the operations of industrial farming and my experience working around these industrial hog confinements in Iowa. The prints focus on topics about waste management, hog confinements, animal welfare, transportation of hogs, proper disposal of hog carcasses and environmental sustainability. This series consists of 12 prints that are titled, *Hog Confinement*, *Humble Greetings*, *My Mower*, *Pig Pen*, *Five O'clock in the Morning*, *Slatted Floors*, *Gestation Crates*, *Compost Pile*, *From One Place to Another*, *Black Pond*, *Farrowing Stalls*, and *Down the Row*.

II. Process

Lithography is my process of making work because of the quality of drawing that can be achieved. I choose detail over color, so all my images are rendered with careful precision and printed using only black ink. I am interested in creating light and shadow in my work. I take a more nuanced approach by using the contrast of light and darkness to generate emotion in the work. I want the viewer to come to their own conclusion about how they feel about industrial farming.

In my process, I use photographic references to create my work. I use photographs that I have taken myself and images that I find on the internet to recreate the memory of my experiences working on the industrial hog farm. I choose images that I emotionally connect to. I splice these images together to create the first draft of the drawing. Lithography allows me to transfer the images on to the stone to draw from. During the transfer stage the process allows me to adjust the drawing before I commit to the composition of the image.

Grant Wood, Andrew Wyeth, Thomas Hart Benton, and Sue Coe are the artists that I have been influenced by and helped me think about my work. I was especially inspired by Grant Wood's lithographs depicting the idyllic landscape of the Midwest of the rural farm landscape. Andrew Wyeth's work enveloped the viewer in the landscape and his work has such detail that I felt the harshness of the environment. The lithographs by Benton depicted hard-working people working on farms. He depicted their struggles, tragedies, the rise of technology, and the changing times that will ensue. I also look to Sue Coe's political prints on the topic of industrial farming. Coe's fantastical depictions of industrial farming are eye catching but focused more on the emotional side and the cruelty of mankind towards animals. During my research and the early stages of development of this body of work, I found it difficult to strike a balance between showing the reality of industrial farming while not having the work be seen as too biased. I wanted to show my experience as a way to start a conversation about industrial farming and not to be an answer to it.



Hog Confinement, Lithograph, 9”x13”, 2021

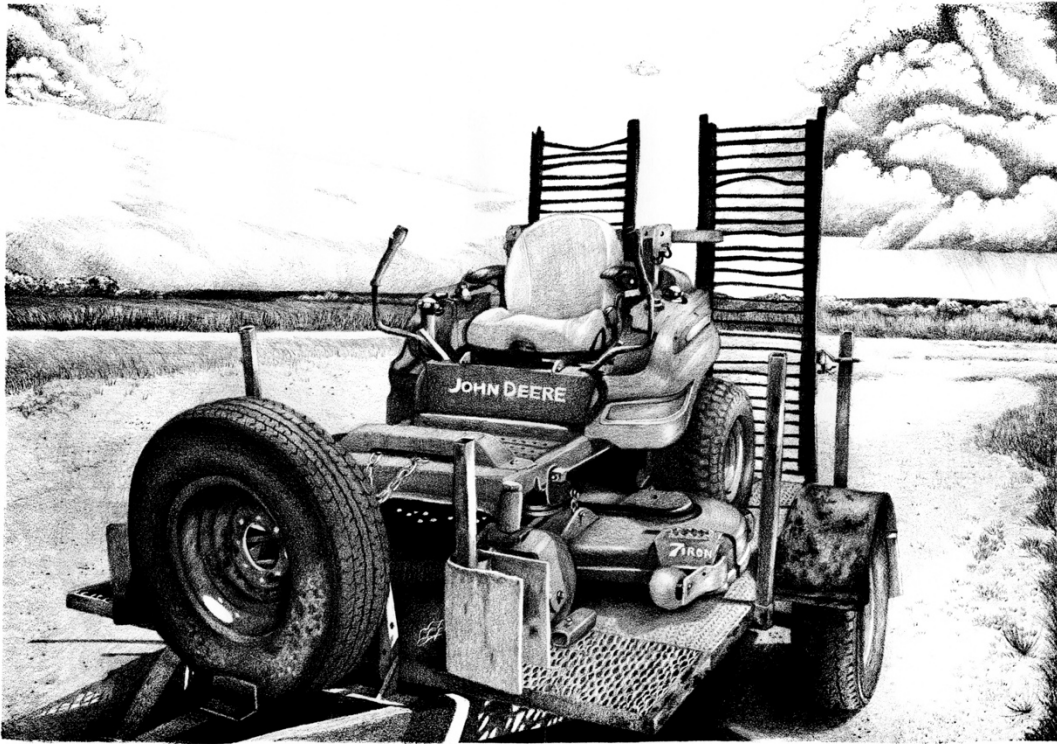
Hog Confinements

Hog confinements were created to cut the cost of production, increase profit, and improve efficiency of raising pigs for meat. The buildings are not often known or identifiable to the majority of the public and are often located in rural areas. Raising pigs in a hog confinement allows the farmer to raise more pigs at a lower cost. The buildings are computer monitored and provide the hogs with shelter, timed feeding, and heating and cooling systems to maximize comfort for the hogs. Hog confinements benefit the efficiency of pork production, but progress

comes with a price. What are we willing to give up? hogs raised in these confinements can never go outside and more antibiotics are used to prevent the increased likelihood of disease due to their proximity to one another. The smell of the buildings is terrible because all the hog waste is stored underneath the buildings. The hog waste produces ammonia which is not healthy for the animals or people to breathe in for extended periods of time. There are ventilation systems in the buildings, but they are not efficient enough to completely remove the ammonia. These buildings allow the industry to produce more but at a cost to the health of the workers and hogs.

The grain silo, the ventilation fans, electrical boxes, and the dumpster full of dead hogs next to the building are all features of the hog confinement and are important elements to the piece. The dramatic light shows the contours of the mechanical features of the building. I enjoy creating details of the Iowa landscape around the building with the unplanted corn fields in the back and in the sky, there are white contrails. I want the viewer to feel like they are in the environment.

Many people may not know what these hog confinements are, and I wanted to put it on full display.

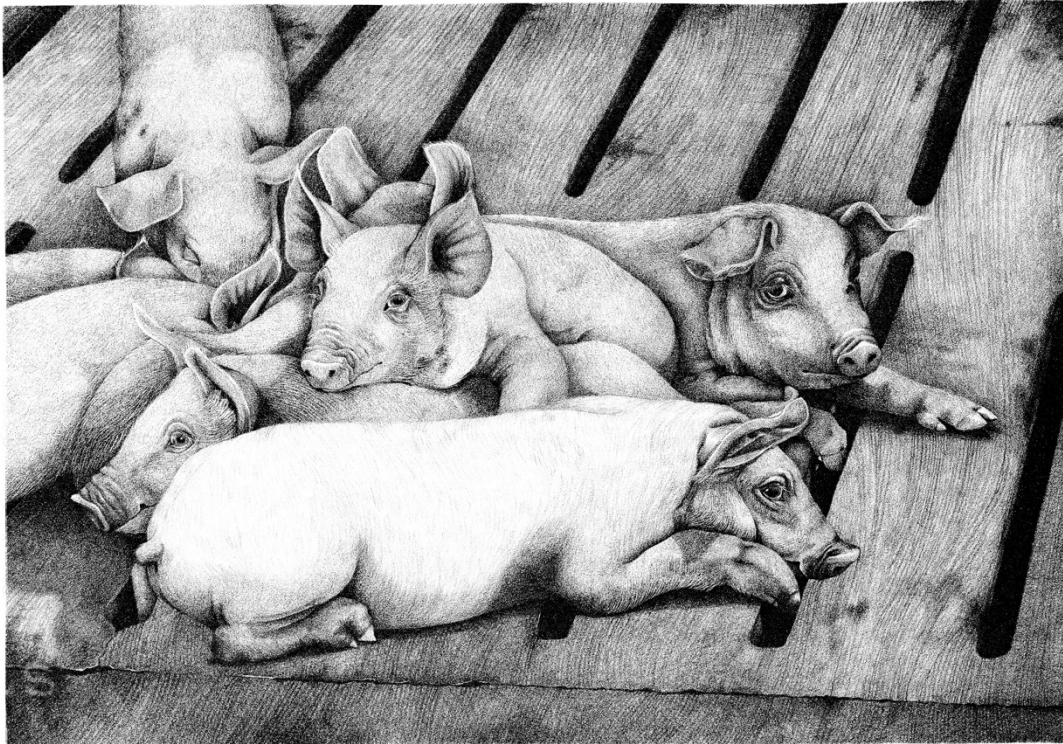


My Mower, Lithograph, 9"x13", 2020

My Mower

My job was to mow around their buildings and hog confinements and this print depicts a lawn mower that I used. The mower was a huge John Deere Zero Turn mower, and it was very loud. I spent four summers using this mower and spent countless hours driving. It is odd to think about the time spent with a machine. It began to feel like an extension of myself. It made me feel like another cog in the machine in the enormous hog farming industry. I played a small role working on the hog farm, but it allowed me to see the lives of the animals and workers and how the hog confinements operate.

A photograph of my mower is one of the few pictures I took while I worked at the hog confinement. This print of the mower is drawn directly from the picture. The mower is important part of the series because it helps the viewer to understand what my job was at the hog confinement and adds to the narrative. I enjoy creating the details and features of the mower and the trailer. The trailer is unique and has interesting features like the ramps that are made from old pig gates. It is details like this that may go unnoticed but are meaningful to me that I like to include in my work.



Slatted Floors, Lithograph, 9"x13", 2021

Slatted Floors

Slatted Floors focus on the environment the pigs live in until they reach market weight of 280 lbs. The pigs will spend most of their lives standing on cement slatted floors. The slats on the floors allow the hog excrement to fall into the pit under the hog confinement to keep the floors clean and provide minimal maintenance. The hog waste will remain under the building until it is pumped out into a man-made lagoon or into a semi-truck tank which will transport the material to be used as fertilizers on crops. A problem with waste management is that the smell of ammonia can be harmful to the respiratory system in people and as well as animals in hog confinement. This waste is at time irresponsibly placed on surrounding fields and can run into waterways and end up in rivers and lakes.

The composition of the piece directs the viewer's eye to the pig's eyes and slatted floor. I wanted the direction of the gaze of the pigs to be directed towards the viewer. The eyes of the pigs have a lot of emotion and expression. I use the expressions of the pigs to create the sorrowful feeling of the piece. I created an intimate space where the viewer is looking down on the baby pigs and the environment. I wanted the viewer to also have their attention drawn to the floors. The details of the floors in the piece show that the baby pigs are so small that they can fit their feet into the slots in the floors.-



Compost Pile, Lithograph, 9"x13", 2021



Five O'clock in the Morning, Lithograph, 9"x13", 2021

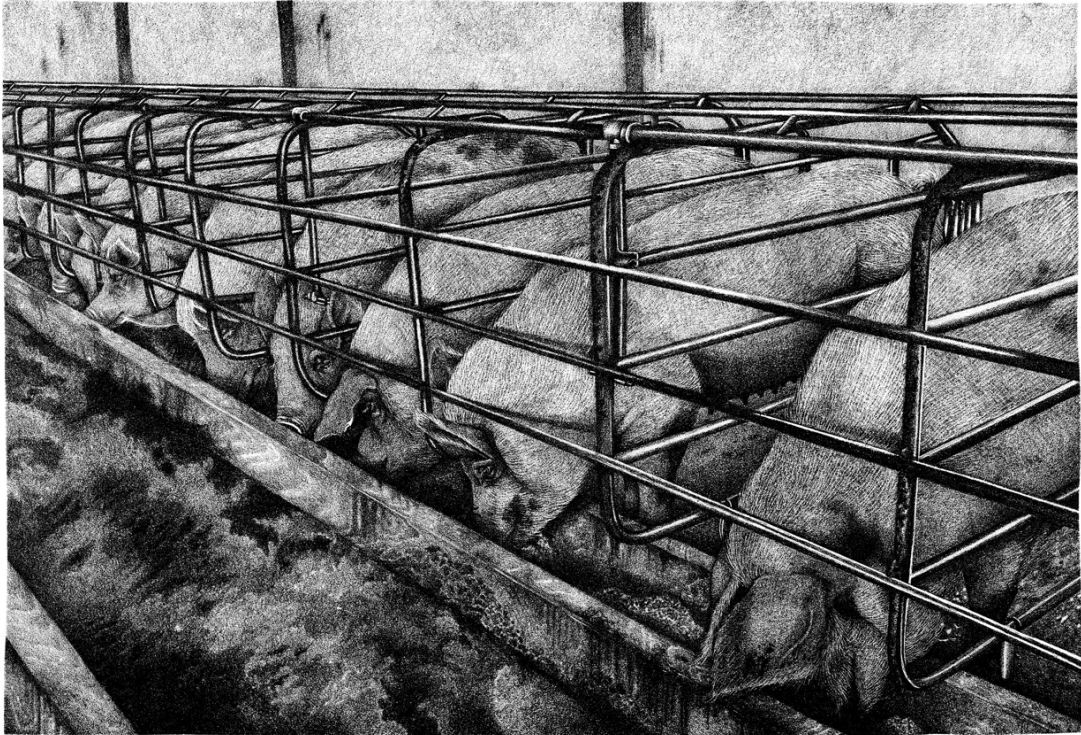
Compost Pile and Five O'clock in the Morning

Every hog confinement has a place where the dead pigs are disposed of. The methods of disposal depend on what the pigs are raised for. Pigs are raised for meat or reproduction and for this reason there are separate hog confinements for each. There are compost piles or dumpsters that are used to dispose of dead pigs. Gestation barns where pigs are raised to be bred to sell piglets to other farmers and these buildings will have a compost pile. It is a cement structure built into the side of the hill that provides easy access for skid loaders to come and mix in sawdust to the compost pile to help with decomposition. The sight and smell of the rotting pigs is jarring. The smell hangs in the air like a thick musk in the humid summer heat. It is an incomparable gut-

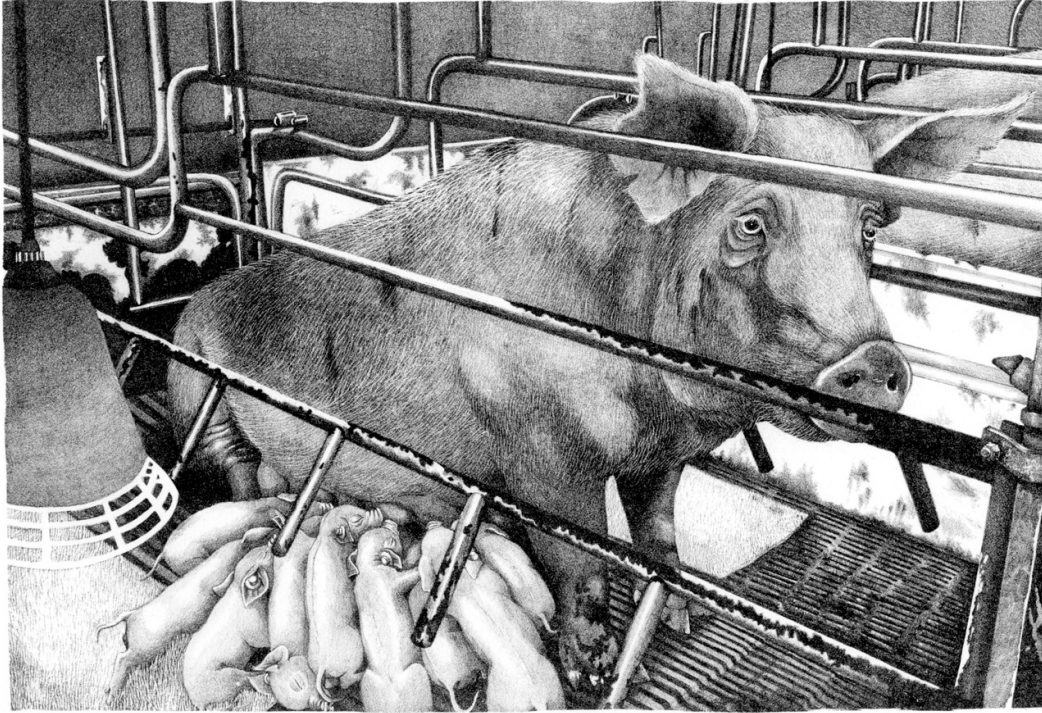
wrenching smell. Hordes of flies come and swarm the carcasses. The circling turkey vultures will also come and pick away at the hogs. As grotesque as these sites can be, this method of disposal is unavoidable for large scale farming.

I used several photos to construct the piece *Compost Pile*. It was difficult to find photos of the compost piles on hog farms and I had to rely on my memory. I researched compost pile structures and found ones that were similar ones on the hog farms I worked at. I found multiple pictures of pigs to place in the pile and I made sure to incorporate the range of ages in the pigs. The placement of the compost piles on hog farms are always down the hill from the hog confinements. The vultures are some of the few creatures that appear around the hog farms. In this piece, the vulture flies away from the pit as if it has been spotted by the viewer. The storm clouds represent the sorrow and disgust I felt when looking at the compost piles. It is a horrible and gruesome sight to see hogs piled up rotting in the hot sun.

I used the composition of the piece to draw the viewer's eye to the dumpster full of dead pigs. The hog confinement's diagonal line points to the direction of the dumpster as well as the storm clouds above. These features of the piece help highlight the dreadful sight of an animal in a dumpster. The storm clouds represent my turbulent emotions towards the hog industry itself. The placement of the dumpster at the forefront of the composition with the hog confinement in the background alludes to the cycle of life and shows where the pigs start and where the pigs can possibly end.



Gestation Crates, Lithograph, 9"x13", 2021



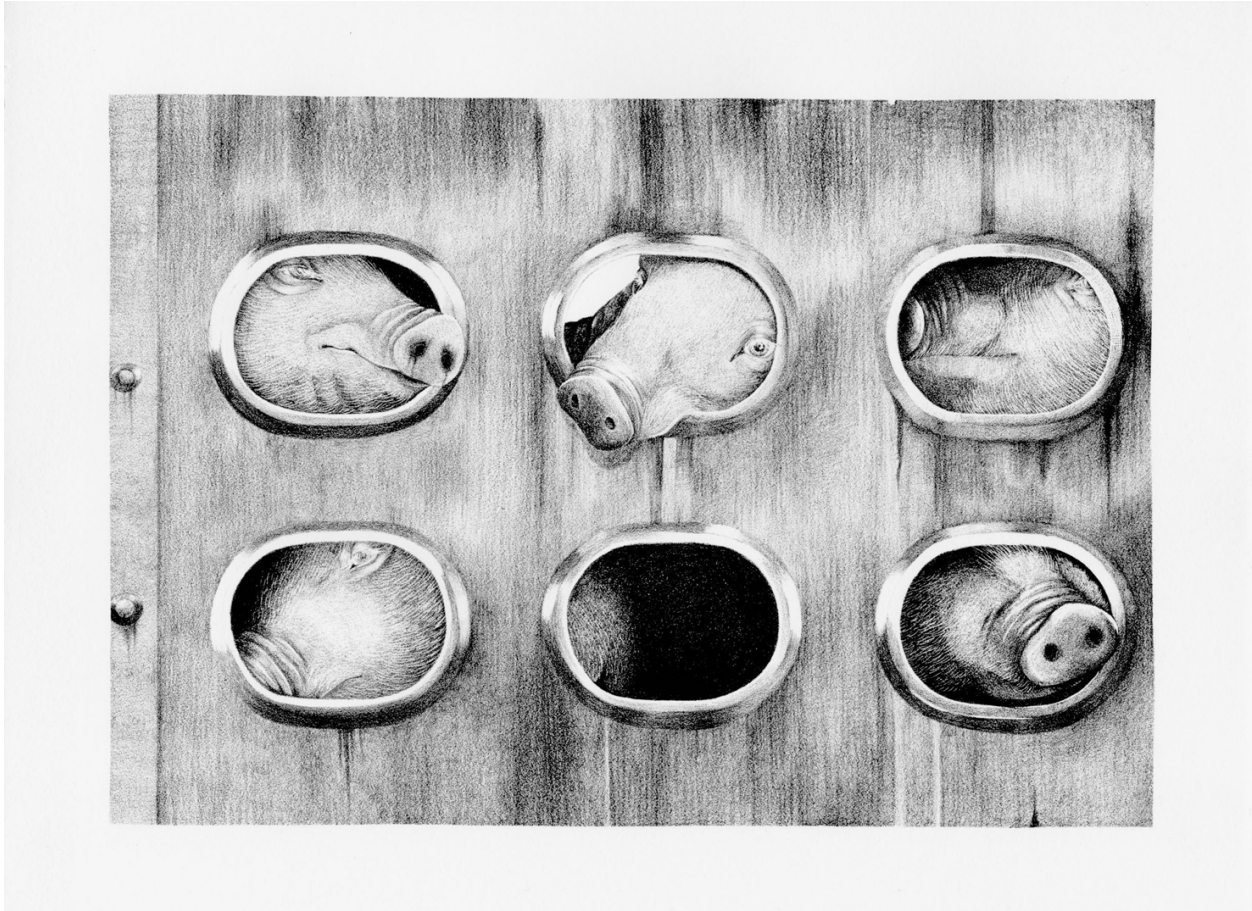
Farrowing Stalls, Lithograph, 11”x17”, 2022

Gestation Crates and Farrowing Stalls

In gestation barns the hogs are kept for breeding. The sows (adult female pig) live in small stalls to maximize the number of hogs in a building. The stalls allow for limited movement for the hog. They can only stand and lay down but are not able to turn around and are kept in these stalls for the duration of their pregnancy. Farrowing stalls work the same way as gestation crates but are used when the sow is about to give birth. The farrowing stalls are designed to protect the piglets from being crushed by the mother when she lays down, which is a frequent problem in the hog farming industry. The piglets have more room to run around both sides of the stall to access the

mother for nursing. A sow can be kept for up to four to five years to be used for breeding and it will be kept in stalls for a good majority of its life.

The repetition of the pigs in gestation crates help to show the huge scale of the industrial hog farming industry. This piece shows a portion of the hog confinement's interior that reveals how these buildings and equipment are designed to use every foot of space to allow for more pigs to be kept in the space. The farrowing crates are different from the gestation crates, and I feel it is important to incorporate both. The expression on the mother pig is slightly anthropomorphized on the face to exaggerate a tired expression.



From One Place to Another, Lithograph, 9"x13", 2021

From One Place to Another

The most contact that the public has with industrial farming is on interstate highways. In this print, pigs can be seen sticking their noses out into the world from the back of a trailer of a semi-truck. Many of these trucks can be seen going down interstates across America, especially in the Midwest. These hogs are most likely being transported to another hog confinement to be raised until market weight. I imagine the stress of the animals being transported to unfamiliar places and the loud sounds of the interstate can be overwhelming.

The different expressions of the hogs poking their snouts out the little windows represents the emotions that the pigs may be feeling, the stress, anxiety, and curiosity. These baby pigs are looking out to the world with uncertainty. The visual proximity to the baby pigs in the piece allows the viewer to get a greater sense of the pigs crowding together in the semi-trailer. The piece focuses on the five baby pigs to create an intimate space for the viewer.



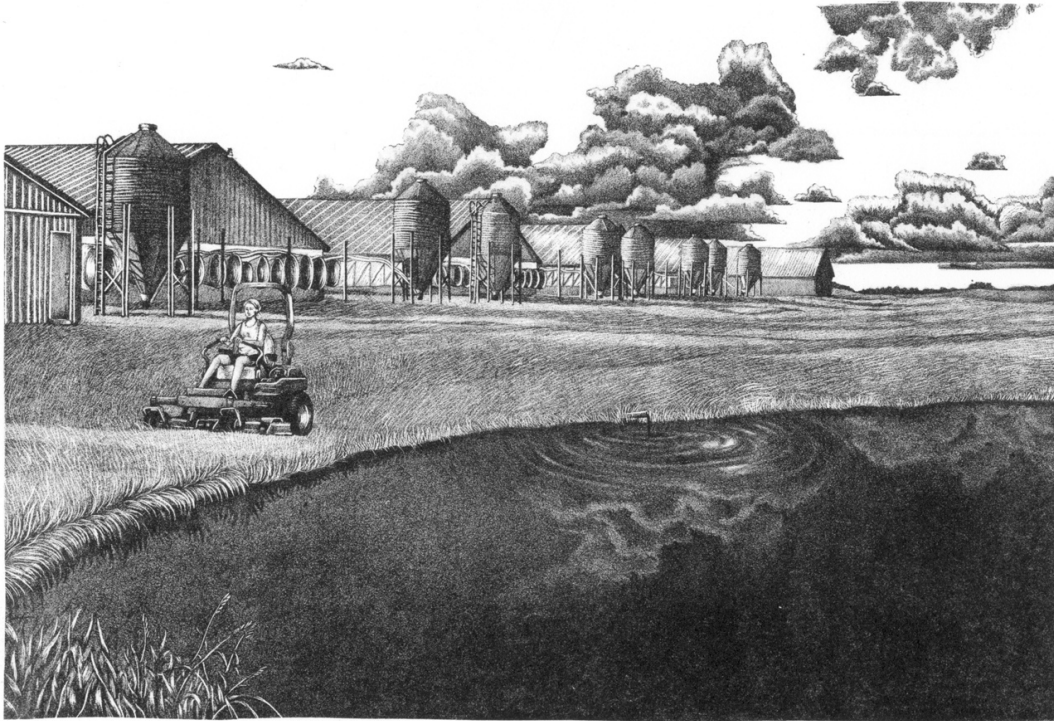
Pig Pen, Lithograph, 9"x13", 2020

Pig Pen

When the days are nice and the summer heat is not too overwhelming, I could investigate the inside of the hog confinement and see the pigs when the curtains are lowered to allow the breeze to pass through. Occasionally I will see the sight of a dead pig in a pen being trampled and

ignored by the rest of the pigs. The workers will often check up on the pigs in finisher barns and if they find a dead pig, they will dispose of it into a dumpster. It is a gruesome and sad sight, but it is an inevitable result of raising animals for meat on large-scale farms.

In this piece I wanted to show the environment that the pigs would live in. The slatted floors are dirty, the metal pen gates are rusting, and the paint is chipping away. The pig's expressions are more interested in the viewer or the person looking down on them in their pens and are unfazed by the dead pig in their pen. In the background, the pigs are more abstracted and become heaps of fleshy masses as to foreshadow their inevitable fate.



Black Pond, Lithograph, 9"x13", 2022

Black Pond

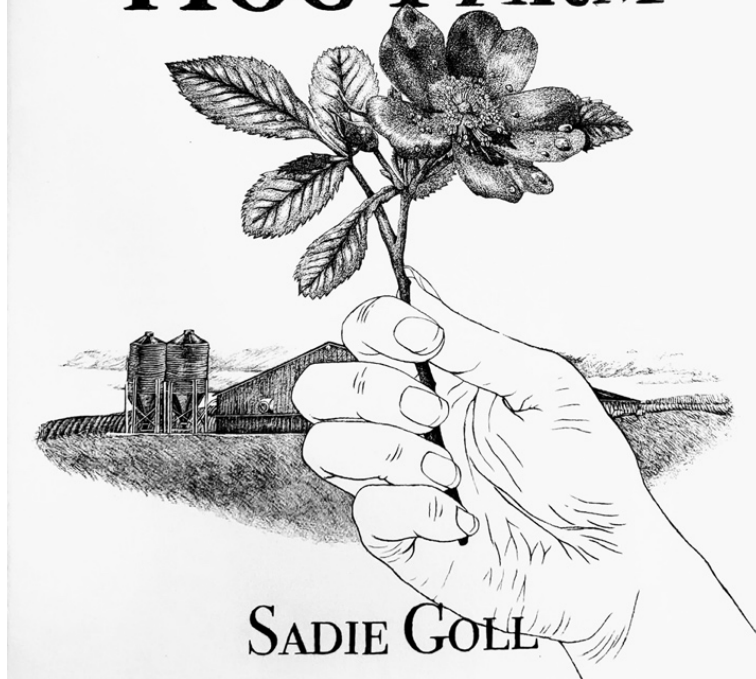
Pigs can produce four times more waste than humans. One of the biggest troubles with industrial hog farming is waste management. The buildings are designed for low maintenance and cleanup. The slatted floors allow the waste produced by the pigs to fall into the pit below the building. The waste will later be pumped out and transported to be spread onto crop fields as fertilizers. The waste is stored in different ways depending on the size of the hog confinement. Pigs produce more waste than can be used as fertilizers and man-made lagoons are systems made to store excess waste. The smell of ammonia is extraordinarily strong coming off the lagoons and ponds.

It was one of the worst things to mow around and I would smell much worse on the days that I had to mow around them. As I have discussed, the ammonia that is produced from the waste is not healthy to breathe for long periods of time. During the few months that I worked around the hog confinements, I developed a cough. I only worked outside the hog confinements, so I can only imagine what it would be like to work inside one of these buildings. I got my dose of ammonia from the fans that are built onto the sides of the hog confinements that blow air out to expel fumes, dust, and gases to regulate the temperature and air of the building. I often held my breath when I mowed past these fans. After I stopped working at the hog confinements, my cough went away.

I reconstructed this image from my memory of mowing around the lagoon pond at a hog confinement called Windridge. I wanted to show the scale of the hog confinements and placement of the buildings to allow the viewers to see rows of hog buildings one after the other. I am seen mowing around the lagoon pond which is the only piece in the series that I am seen in the landscape. The lagoon pond needed to have a reflective quality and still show the blackness of the pig waste. The clouds reflect off the pond as a pipe pours more hog waste into the lagoon. The balance of the peaceful, mundane day mixed with the gruesome sight of the lagoon pond are crucial to the piece.

III. Encounters on a Hog Farm

ENCOUNTERS ON A HOG FARM



Title Page, Lithograph, 11”x17”, 2022

Encounters on a Hog Farm is a collection of six lithographs that depict memories of the animals I have encountered while mowing around hog confinements. In this print collection, there are a total of seven black and white lithographic prints. These prints are housed in a handmade portfolio. The order is as follows: *The Fucker Bit Me! A Friend Came to Say Hello, Uncover, A*

Mother's Display of Protection, Swarm, and Rats! Each of these animals tells their own story about their interaction with me and how they live around hog confinements. I remember each of these encounters and how they made me examine how industrial farming has changed the landscape. It has shaped the land to be used as efficiently as possible for agriculture. Much of the land in Iowa is used to produce corn and soybeans. The prairies that once grew so abundant in Iowa now only make up 1% of the land. I think about how the animals will come in more contact with humans due to their loss of habitats even in these rural landscapes.

This series of work is meant to be seen as more whimsical and playful. They illustrate the stories of my memories interacting with these animals. An element that ties the work together is my hand. In preparation for my drawing process, I would photograph my hand in various positions to recreate the memory of the interaction with the animals. The hand has multiple ways to be interpreted and can be viewed as humans intruding and invading the environment of wildlife; the two worlds colliding into each other. I feel that we often perceive the wild to be a separate world from ours, but it is not. The hand can also function as a way to create an intimate space for the viewer to feel as though they were experiencing my memories through my work.

The grass is an important element in the work. It is a gesture towards my job as a lawn management worker. The grass is stylized and expressive and it often overtakes the background of the pieces. It is used as an environment for the animals in every piece except in, *A Friend Came to Say Hello*. I wanted to make the grass as interesting and as important feature as the animals themselves in the piece. It helps to enhance the environment and emotion of the work.



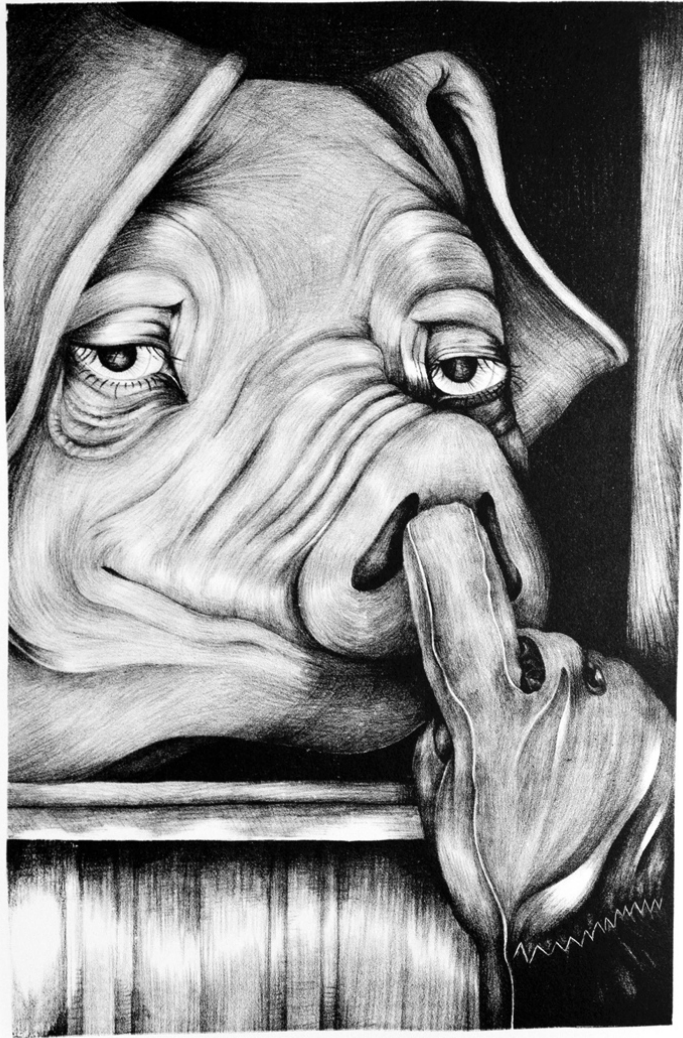
The Fucker Bit Me! Lithograph, 11"x17", 2019

The Fucker Bit Me!

This print depicts a kitten that was abandoned at a hog confinement. While I was mowing, I stopped to find a kitten crouched down on the ground right in front of my mower that was heading towards it. It was scared and waiting for death to claim it. It was not an uncommon

reaction for the animals to have when encountering the mower. The animals will either run or crouch down and be frozen with fear, too afraid to move. My mower was big and very loud and to me it sounded like a helicopter. I went to pick up the kitten and when I did, it quickly spun around and bit me right on my thumb with its long fang and ran off into the corn field. My thumb was very sore and even a kind gesture can be an unwanted one.

This is the funniest piece in the series. I depicted the moment right after I was bitten by the kitten. It shows the gesture of holding my hand up to see the damage from the bite; the tightening of the muscle in the wrist and trying not to touch the injured thumb with my fingers. In this piece, I included my own philosophy when dealing with hard topics and that is to deal with them with humor. The intention of making this series more whimsical is to balance the exhibition and not make it too emotionally heavy.



A Friend Came to Say Hello, Lithograph, 11"x17", 2019

A Friend Came to Say Hello

I would weed whack the tall grass and weeds around the hog confinements where the pigs are raised. The pigs would often come running up to the edge of the window and stare up at me. I discovered that pigs are very curious creatures. The pigs would stick their noses up and sniff the air while making low grunts as they stared up at me. This is the first time that I touched a full-

grown pig; I touched its snout. The snout was strong, flexible, and wet and it had a wide range of movement. It was not at all what I was expecting. I also noticed that pigs could have bright blue eyes and it was very astonishing to me that pigs could have that color. It is odd to think about how few people will ever interact with these creatures.

In this piece I stylized the pig's face to give it a more human expression. At the beginning of the development of this body of work, I often would anthropomorphize the pig. This series, *Encounters on a Hog Farm*, is the first series of the exhibition. I created this intimate moment between me and the pig in the hog confinement. This piece was made to create sympathy for the animal and be a recreation of the memory of me interacting with the pig.



Uncover, Lithograph, 11"x17", 2020

Uncover

I have encountered wildlife that live around the hog confinements. I have seen hundreds of baby rabbits that nest there. They huddle together in shallow holes in the ground covered by dried grass and rabbit fur. I never had an opportunity to see baby rabbits up close to see or even touch

them until I worked on a hog farm. Soon, I began to be able to spot rabbit nests and avoid running over them with my mower.

The composition of the piece depicts me unveiling the baby rabbits from their nest. The grass swirls around the rabbits nestled in their shallow hole in the ground. I depicted the baby rabbits as sleeping innocent creatures unaware of the presence of me invading their home. It balances between danger and harmlessness. This piece is a lot about intrusion and control and the idea of humans trying to control nature to fit their needs. It is about killing of animals and plants that are deemed as pests and weeds that hinder the efficiency of production.



A Mother's Display of Protection, Lithograph, 11"x17", 2020

A Mother's Display of Protection

A Mother's Display of Protection depicts a type of bird called a Killdeer. The mother Killdeer will pretend to have an injured wing to lure the predator away from her offspring and once the predator is close enough to attack, the mother bird will take off in flight. I discovered this protective technique when I was mowing around the hog confinements, and I got too close to

their nests. The Killdeer likes to lay its eggs in rocky areas because it camouflages their eggs.

The hog confinements are an ideal place because of the gravel that is put around the building to keep the weeds down. This creates a great environment for the eggs and chicks to hide in plain sight. I was even able to hold a killdeer chick because it was running away from my mower, and it couldn't get out of the way fast enough. The chick panicked and crouched down on the ground scared. I stopped my mower and picked it up and moved it to a safer location. When I picked up the chick, the mother was incredibly stressed and began to do her injured wing display to get my attention and made very loud sounds. The mother was very relieved when I put her chick down and it ran back with the rest of its siblings.

The enjoyment of nature and its beauty is the focus of this piece; the joy of learning about these animals that live in our environment. I would never have learned about the Killdeer if I did not observe them living around the hog confinements. Experiences like this were one of the few joys that I got from this job working outside and seeing the animals that live around the hog farms. In the piece, I displayed the mother in sheer panic while I was holding the baby bird in the palm of my hands. This memory is shown in the moment I was able to touch a wild baby bird. For me it was an extraordinary moment. This is the closest contact that I have ever gotten to those birds, and I wanted to depict that in the piece.



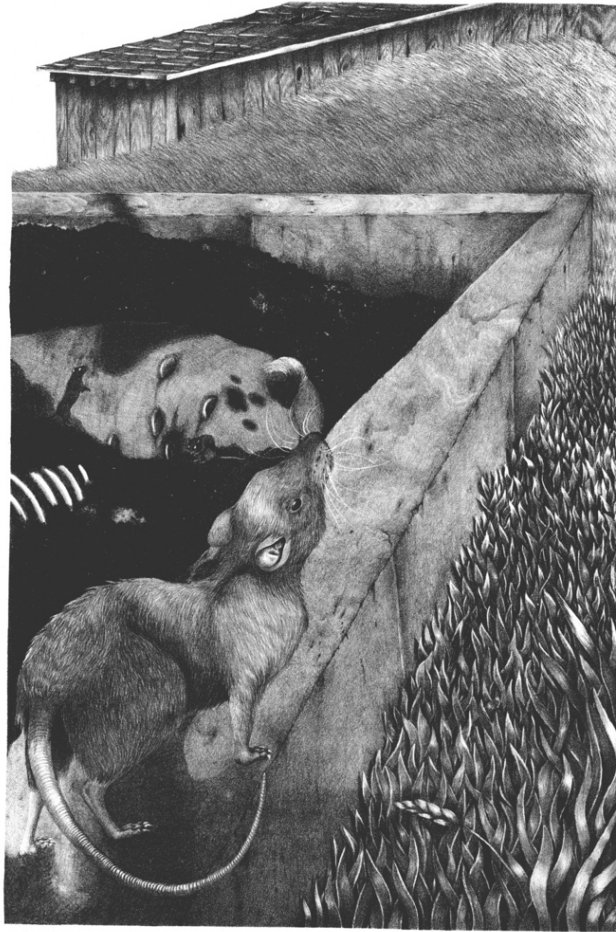
Swarm, Lithograph, 11"x17", 2021

Swarm

I was attacked by a swarm of carpenter bees. As I was mowing, I blew grass in the direction of their nest which was under an old wooden ramp that was used to load and unload hogs from the hog confinement. The bees were agitated, and the female carpenter bee stung the inside of my lip and male carpenter bees followed and stung the sides of my face and forehead. It was hard to escape the bees because I was on a zero-point turn mower, which doesn't have a steering wheel

and only the handles to drive the mower. It was disorienting trying to get away from the bees. I used my hand to peel the female carpenter bee off my lip and flung her away. I sped away on my mower and got into my truck to safety. I noticed that my lower lip where the female bee stung me began to swell. I did not know if I was allergic to bees stings, so I was beginning to get nervous. I drove quickly back to the truck shop to clock out as I felt my face swelling larger and larger. I had to go to the office and fill out an injury form and answer strange questions like, what did you say when you got injured? I think I wrote down some sort of profanity. I had to stay home for a couple of days because my face continued to swell, and I was miserable.

The composition in the piece is intended to be confrontational for the viewer. It is an alarming sight to see a swarm of bees coming toward your face. This piece is more animated, and it is like a snapshot before the disaster occurs. The placement of the center bee is rendered in detail showing the closeness of that bee, which created a sense of urgency. Playing around with perspective with the distance and size of the bees created more drama and alarm. I also wanted to express the emotion of panic with the gesture and movement with the hands swatting away the bees and missing. The hands heighten the emotion of the piece, and the viewer can feel as though they are defending themselves from the bees.



Rats! Lithograph, 11"x17", 2021

Rats!

Rats are dangerous creatures around a hog confinement because of the rapid reproductive turnover and because they are prone to carrying diseases. The hogs are more susceptible to diseases due to their close proximity to each other within the building. Rats like to scavenge around the compost piles to feast on the hog carcasses and old corn feed. The first time I saw a rat that was not in a pet store was on the cement ledge of the compost pile. I was surprised at the

size of the rats and how large they can grow. When I mowed around the compost pile, I saw dozens of rats scurrying away into the tall grass. I could also see that there were holes in the carcass of the pig where the rats had burrowed in and made a new home for themselves.

This piece is the only one without my hand in the composition. It was the only animal that I did not touch. This compost pile was at the hog confinement called Home Farm. I recreated the image from my memory of the compost pile and included the old wooden shed in the background that was next to the compost pile where I mowed. I wanted to show the gruesome sight of the rotting pigs and some of the pest control problems that would occasionally happen on the hog farm. The rat on the cement ledge of the compost pile is positioned as if it is pausing before scurrying into the tall grass by the ledge.

IV. It Weighs on You like Heavy Rain



It Weighs on You like Heavy Rain, Lithograph, 20"x25", 2022

The industry is like a storm; I have no control over it. I can only watch the storm roll in and wait for the rain. My time working on a hog confinement created a feeling of helplessness, the inability to invoke fast change to improve the lives of the hogs and the workers. I feel that the industrial hog farming industry is stagnant and will continue down this path.

The narrative is tied together with my self-portrait with the rest of my work. The self-portrait allows the audience to know who the person is that is observing various aspects of industrial farming. I depicted myself as a worker in my work clothing and hairstyle that I would wear when I mowed around the hog confinements. I often wore a bandana to cover and protect my hair from the grass, dirt, and the smell. I photographed myself for this piece. I posed myself in profile to the viewer because I didn't want to appear aggressive or confrontational. The expression on my face is contemplative while looking out to the horizon. My body language and expression on my face are not affected by the oncoming storm and I am relaxed and calm. This piece focuses more on how I was feeling internally about industrial hog farming. I use the landscape and weather as a form of expression to stand for my feelings.

IV. Gallery Installation



The flow of the show *HOW DID WE GET HERE AND WHERE ARE WE GOING?* Starts with the self-portrait, *It Weighs on you like Heavy Rain*, followed by *All I've Seen*, and lastly *Encounters on a Hog Farm*. I displayed, *It Weighs on you like Heavy Rain*, alone to let it have its own space to allow the viewer to contemplate the details of the piece. It is the largest print in the show, and it allows the viewer to know who the narrator is and whose experience the work is about.



All I've Seen, is displayed together in a grid format to show the collection of memories and experiences I had on the industrial hog farm. Each print informs the others and helps the viewer to understand more about industrial farming and the operations of it. The order of the pieces can be rearranged. I organized by the topics that the pieces discuss. I didn't want to cluster the prints that talked about similar things to be displayed together and I placed the prints next to each other that discussed different topics. This grid format allows me to add to the collection in the future.



In the gallery, I displayed the collection of prints, *Encounters on a Hog Farm*, in chronological order in the way they were created. The prints were created in pairs and my original plan was to have the work bound into a book. Later, I changed the direction and decided to encase the collection of prints in a portfolio. The portfolio was displayed in a glass case with the portfolio open with the prints sprawled out. All the works were also framed in ebonized red oak and hung on the wall.

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