The Manual for Neocadia

Jack Michael

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THE MANUAL FOR NEOCADIA

by

JACK MICHAEL (JESSICA WYRICK)

Under the Direction of Craig Drennen, MFA

ABSTRACT

*The Manual for Neocadia* is an ongoing body of work that explores utopian yearning through an emergent fictional republic’s citizen’s handbook. This work mines my experience as a former political extremist and calls on my fascination with literary fiction, history, and intentional communities to explore utopian notions and dynamics of personal and cultural power. Works in *The Manual for Neocadia* are organized around the eponymous semi-fictional handbook for citizens of the Associated States of Neocadia (ASN). The work takes three forms: a suite of taxonomic copperplate prints; typewritten book pages; and flags. Across the work, flags are studied from three perspectives: flag as symbol, flag as container, and flag as object. Using flags and the ASN as a portmanteau for political imagination and utopian longing I seek forgiveness, cultivate empathy, and attempt to build a better version of my history, myself, and the world.

INDEX WORDS: Flag, Empathy, Nationalism, Nazi, Utopia, Installation, Sculpture, Printmaking, Textiles, Manifesto, Performance, Imaginary, Failure, Politics, Fiction, Literature
THE MANUAL FOR NEOCADIA

by

JACK MICHAEL (JESSICA WYRICK)

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MFA

in the College of the Arts

Georgia State University

2020
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to:

1) My parents and grandparents, who laid the foundation for who I am today in ways both conventional and accidental;

2) My friends Alán Martinez and Rebecca Smith, who repaired the cracks in that foundation with love, discourse, and humanity;

3) Krista Seckinger, Darren Crutch, Greg Pond, Pradip Malde, the late Michael Jenkins, and the late Mike North - all of whom were challenging, inspiring, and dedicated educators that framed the structure of my life and art practice;

4) And my husband Evan, who made me feel finally at home in my own life.
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1 INTRODUCTION

On the surface, The Manual for Neocadia is the study of an emergent fictional republic and the process of manifesting their national ethos through a citizens’ handbook and a lexicon of new flags. At its core, however, this work explores the yearning we all experience for a world and life that is utopian by our own standards. Beyond the unlimited possibilities for symbolic content, the flag as an object represents the nexus of sovereignty and identity – twin existential thorns with elevated relevance in our contemporary political climate. In this ongoing work, I exploit the powerfully seductive potential of flags to manifest a fictional utopic republic as a protected space within which I can address and mend my problematic personal history. Within that same space, I can bring to life my idiosyncratic desires for our current world through an evolving role as diplomat, inventor, and archivist in the fledgling Associated States of Neocadia (hereafter referred to as the ASN). Manifesting my utopian longing through prints, writings, and flags and observing the semantic and material failures of this work in the real world forces me to confront the fallibility of my own beliefs, intelligence, and desires. I initially respond to these failures with frustration, depression, and even grief. However, through daily ritualistic attention to my work, I have eventually come to accept the friction between my ambitions and the outcomes that fall short of my plans. This ongoing process is humbling, but more importantly it generates incredible empathy. Every time I watch one of my flags fray or sag in the wind; every time I read a belief inked on paper that conflicts with a more recently typed statement; and every time a line or color falls short of the vision in my head, I’m forced to see that my entire paradigm is so much weaker than I regularly acknowledge. For just a moment, this makes me feel both microscopically tiny and also intimately connected to a vast network of fragile beings equally filled with longing, belief, and unique experience. By making my work with increasing
frequency, I seek to increase the frequency of this feeling in my life until it is a subconscious
constant guiding my actions and thoughts. I hope this engagement with radical empathy can
metaphorically rewire my consciousness to a point where I no longer see compromise and utopia
as mutually exclusive concepts; on the contrary, someday I aspire to truly believe that cordial
compromise with others and the world at large is better than simply getting what you want. In
making this work, I seek resolution to the question “Can empathy be a path to collective
utopia?”, and I hope that answer is “yes”.

In my work – as in all utopic pursuits - aspiration is tempered by reality: clean, modernist
flag forms with boundless potential are portrayed in prints that test possible colorways for the
flags of Neocadia. When some of these forms leave the page, they materialize as earnest but
amateurish flags that have limited potential as functional banners. Accompanying these works
are typewriter-letterpressed prints on vellum that are presented as incomplete, nonconsecutive
pages from Chapter Two (Visual Lexicon of Vexillology) of The Manual for Neocadia. This
ambiance of incompleteness aims to emphasize the nature of utopia as a work that is constantly
in progress and always just beyond perfection or completion’s grasp. Chapter One of The
Manual for Neocadia is conspicuously missing. It is a foundational, ongoing work that will
eventually comprise a manifesto-based governing document for the ASN. It will not be ready for
public view at the time of this thesis’s publication.

This work is rooted in my own socio-political history, particularly my early life, my time
in JROTC, and my ambitious but frustrated involvement with white nationalism in my early
twenties. My interest in the relationship between utopia, failure, cultural optimization, and
identity stems from my (thankfully) failed neo-Nazi ambitions. My interest in flags is a longtime
fascination that began when I was a cadet in JROTC. Memories of those eras and my current
membership in other intentional communities (such as the Overland Empire) formed the idea for the ASN as the perfect vehicle to study my own utopian longings and their failure. This thought experiment will be a rich wellspring for years to come; both the ASN and my work will continue to evolve, affected by political, economic, and environmental events here in the real world.

This body of work does not attempt to resolve the frustrations of utopian longing – such a pursuit is doomed for failure, hence the impossibility of attaining utopia. Likewise, the work does not successfully dismantle the psychology of utopian longing, though this exploration is central to the work. However, through the performance of longing and the attempted construction of a national (and personal) identity via material objects, the works in *The Manual for Neocadia* represent an ongoing recuperative practice for me. By pouring out my cultural frustrations and testing my personal beliefs in the context of the ASN, I have found a productive and gentle way to resolve some of my failings and to corral my penchant for impressing my (strong) opinions on others.

This work also creates opportunities for dialogue about the nature of belief, power, and collective, lived existence. Seeing flags emptied of symbolism and stripped to bare shape and minimal color (as in the print suite) beckons questions about the nature of power. The portrayal of flag forms as empty, malleable containers ready to be filled with meaning flies in the face of nationalistic psychology and pride, suggesting that the meaning of a flag is subjective, ergo the power of meaning-making belongs to everyone. The typewritten vellum prints offer my own interpretations for each flag, warding off some of the potential for alternate interpretations. Finally, the presentation of amateurish linen flags questions the legitimacy of manifesting and performing fragile, precious personal beliefs in the space of our collective existence. The tension between these three forms – the abstracted image of the flag, the explicit textual interpretation of
the flag, and the embodied flag – is important. Ideas in the abstract planning stage are largely unoffending to the eye and personal space of the viewer and leave an aperture of potential for the viewer to occupy. That aperture begins to close as viewers interact with the text-based works, which narrow the potential meaning of the flag forms. When the flags become embodied and laden with symbolism, attempting to fly in unprotected places, they exhibit a vulnerability unique to embodied objects – they are weaker than the ideas that brought them to life. They also alter the way viewers move within their environment. Similarly, when the flags are shown in a more predictable (gallery) environment, the protruding poles and the fans that provide contrived breezes change how viewers are able to navigate the gallery space.

My artworks and this thesis explore the possibilities and pitfalls of utopian longing, as well as the humility and empathy derived from the imperfect manifestation of idiosyncratic ideals. The work is a realm in which I ritually mend my history, constructing better versions of myself and world in the process. Ultimately, however, I still engage with my work in a hypocritical way, one that deconstructs the dominant model of the world (reality) and insists upon the correctness of my vision (the ASN) though is the very tendency I am critiquing. This cycle of longing, hypocritical insistence of rightness, ambition, failure, and humility is never-ending. I liken it to nuclear fusion, except in this case, the output is empathy. As with nuclear fusion, this process is volatile but necessary in order to continually harvest that energy. In the end, all utopias are built on the bones of other utopias, and all utopian dreamers are sure that they will be the ones who will finally, rightly, triumph. This hypocrisy is at the root of utopian yearning; hence it guides how I engage with the creation of work in The Manual for Neocadia.
2 THE SPACE OF NEOCADIA

Why Neocadia? The ASN is a semi-fictive space, immune to the confounding variables of the real world. Within this idealized country I can build a world that adheres completely to my beliefs and preferences. Likewise, I can test – through art and writing – potential outcomes in scenarios where I hold clashing beliefs without interference caused by other people’s credos. The ASN is the perfect laboratory for my overarching investigations into the dynamics of utopian longing. Many of my questions concern the feasibility of bringing idealized ambitions to fruition, and the ways in which small frustrations to our original plans can lead to more comprehensive systemic failures. I also constantly question the degree to which our own beliefs and preferences impinge upon the lives of others. In a conflict where one paradigm negates another and both cannot function successfully and simultaneously (for example, environmental policies regarding carbon output), can anyone truly win without proclaiming the other party’s total wrongness? Does the “right to swing your arms end just where the other man's nose begins?”\(^1\) Is what I know more important than what someone else believes? Is what I believe more important than what someone else knows?

More importantly, however, Neocadia is a space where I can address personal failures made in the pursuit of idiosyncratic utopias, and perhaps find some way to forgive myself for those failures by building a better version of myself through this fictional world. Optimization and longing are the great themes of my life; the only equally common theme is failure. From a very early age I developed a tendency to think that I was right, and that my rightness was assured by personal experience and good education; I felt unassailable. I had no doubt that my taste was

prevailing, my solutions were better, and my beliefs were superior. Of course, I was wrong, and my extreme arrogance and sense of entitlement landed me in some very dark places. However, it is human nature to feel this way to some extent, even if only subconsciously. Utopian longing is a spectrum with narcissism at one end and utmost empathy at the other. We all fall somewhere on this spectrum. For me, Neocadia is a space where I can animate my oddly specific fantasies about politics, economics, agriculture, and social life, and then observe how these different sectors conflict with one another. The conflicts and contradictions are apparent in my written works and also in amateurish outcomes that result from bringing ideas to life through artmaking. The emotional effect of this cycle of striving and failure is a blend of grandiose power and humbling frustration. When that feeling of humility overcomes my temporary aspirations of fictional power and control, something alchemical occurs: I feel a sudden, brief surge of empathy, and an uncomfortable awareness of my connection to everyone and everything. It makes me feel both powerless and grateful. I prostrate myself to this feeling for as long as I can hold onto it because this emotion heals me; it allows me to forgive myself and to strengthen my toehold at the empathy end of the utopian longing spectrum. The ongoing recuperative practice is necessitated by my past failed attempts at finding utopia within exclusionary intentional communities; specifically, my former involvement with white nationalism in my early twenties. The world-building that happens within the ASN is an elaborate series of rituals that put to rest (but do not erase) my past mistakes and address my current political and environmental frustrations. In this way, I am building a better version of myself and the world around me while answering the question, “Can empathy be a path to collective utopia?”

The liminal space between fiction and reality is central to my investigations. I say that the ASN is semi-fictive because although it is neither a commonly recognized nor embodied country,
its societies, rituals, and geography are very much based in the real world (or at least my experiences of it). Descriptions of the ASN’s geography are largely based on my extensive travels of the United States, especially the American Southeast and Southwest. Most of my investigative travel is conducted by motorcycle, and these long-haul solo journeys inspired the Guardians of Neocadia, a society whose mythology is integral to the fabric of Neocadia. Flag-based rituals in Neocadian culture are loosely based on drill and parade protocols I followed as a JROTC cadet. By using autobiographical scaffolding to build a fictive world I can gently question my experiences and beliefs in an ongoing recuperative program.

Using a fictional space tethered to reality as an arena for self-examination is not a new technique; my work is highly informed by two artists: the late Henry Darger and contemporary artist Dan Levenson.

Henry Darger’s expansive literary artwork *The Story of the Vivian Girls, in What Is Known as the Realms of the Unreal, of the Glandeco-Angelinian War Storm, Caused by the Child Slave Rebellion* rewrites the history of the Civil War to frame a story wherein enslaved children lead a successful revolt against their adult overseers. In this 15,145-page tome, Darger used various drawing, painting, collage, and photo enlargement techniques to richly illustrate a narrative that addressed personal conflicts from his childhood. Writings discovered after Darger’s death indicate that during his childhood he lived in a group home where child labor was ruthlessly enforced. It is no surprise, then, that the war in *The Realms of the Unreal* began as a child labor rebellion. Subject matter in *Realms* includes battle depictions, mythical creatures, portraits of heroes, and flags.

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2 *In the Realms of the Unreal,* directed by Jessica Yu (2004; New York: Wellspring Media, 2005), DVD.
The Realms of the Unreal was Darger’s private magnum opus, a sprawling and detailed world that wasn’t discovered until after his death in 1973. He created Realms as a place to probe personal history and rewrite the outcomes of his troubled upbringing. Like Darger, I have constructed a fictive space that is tethered to both American history and my personal history. However, unlike Darger, I do not aim to rewrite my past faults or conflicts, nor to narrate revisionist versions of specific historical events. Rather, I only hope to use broad themes of American history (like the effects of the Industrial Revolution, the persistence of racism, etc.) as scaffolds to explore my own history and sociopolitical beliefs. In the process I hope to mend
some of the damage I have done to myself and others, but only in ways that retain the scar tissue and reveal the mending yet to come. Using fictional space to grapple with my past is not based on revisionist desires, but rather the need for a protected realm where I can test my beliefs and allow myself to experience both culpability and forgiveness.

Los Angeles-based artist Dan Levenson’s artwork draws on history – art history, specifically – by building on rather than rewriting it. His expansive practice hinges on a fictional Swiss modernist art school, the State Art Academy Zurich (SKZ). His fictive universe expands outward from this nexus in surprisingly detailed avenues that muddle the space between fiction and reality in both profound and whimsical ways. Many of his works take the form of paintings produced by the fictional students of the SKZ, and furniture that lives in the SKZ studios.

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Figure 2. Dan Levenson, Lorella Schwartzbach, 2016, oil on linen, 11.75 x 16.5 in.
One unique work-in-progress is a “potato pancake project” that includes “growing real Swiss potatoes in real Swiss soil” in Los Angeles. At the end of this semi-performative agricultural experiment, Levenson will create a fictional Swiss fast food restaurant (complete with branded tablecloths) to serve rösti\(^4\) made from his potatoes.\(^5\)

By studying the specificity within Darger and Levenson’s work, I concluded that making work about an entire fictional republic without some self-defined boundaries would result in a maddeningly vast field of possibilities. Therefore, I have focused my work through a discrete lens: The Manual for Neocadia. This title refers not only to my proposed thesis exhibition\(^6\), but also to the semi-fictional citizens’ handbook of the ASN. Works in this vein will be ongoing for quite some time but will shift to new chapters in the “book” as my practice unfolds. The focus of my current work as reviewed for this thesis is from Chapter Two (Visual Lexicon of Vexillology). I chose flags as my foray into embodying Neocadia because of my intense familiarity with their symbolic, communicative, and physical properties. Likewise, the power and structure of books is deeply rooted in my personal history. Both flags and books connect to my pursuit of utopia and my worldview established long before I became an artist.

3 FRAMING UTOPIA: KIN, LITERATURE, & RITUALS OF STATE

The foundations for my ideas about utopianism were forged during an uncommon childhood. I was born and raised in a low-class rural neighborhood a stone’s throw from Paradise Gardens, Howard Finster’s experimental Christian art compound in Summerville, Georgia. I grew up in a very tribal culture. My tight-knit family consisted of my parents, my sister, my mother’s kin, a dozen-plus cousins, and a rotating cast of motorcycle riding “aunts” and “uncles”. Our clan was

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\(^{4}\) A giant potato hash pancake widely considered as the national dish of Switzerland (according to the artist).

\(^{5}\) Dan Levenson, interview by Jack Michael via FaceTime call, March 5, 2020.

\(^{6}\) Postponed indefinitely due to COVID-19.
so close that parents and children were somewhat interchangeable in each other’s households: just as many of my childhood memories take place in my own home as in my cousins’ houses. Still more memories are set in pickup trucks, campgrounds, garages, and truck stops. Our extended family members were frequent travelers fiercely anchored by ideology, blood, and a zeal for “gittin’ t’gether” for unshakable annual traditions (usually involving harvesting, barbecuing, moonshine, and/or religion). Our tribe had very particular ideas about how the world was and how the world should be: girls can wear overalls but boys can’t wear dresses; most cops are bastards; people who litter are going to hell; potato salad is mayonnaise-based; Jesus was as good as American; and our daughter will not be going to prom with that “mixed” boy from down the street. These beliefs were shared amongst almost everyone in our small town, but because of my somewhat sheltered upbringing I did not know how pervasive these beliefs were at the time. My whole life consisted of going to our small local school, coming home to my parents and cousins, and spending occasional weekends on my best friend’s dairy farm or cruising between fishing holes and antiques stores with my dad.

During summer holidays, however, I lived with my well-to-do paternal grandparents in a cottage on the edge of Weiss Lake in Alabama. My grandfather vigorously educated me from an early age. He encouraged me to read anything I could get my hands on, setting me loose in his personal library without the threat of adult supervision. I read the *Wizard of Oz* series; wilderness survival handbooks; Stephen King novels; American poetry; political biographies; war histories; and German fairy tales. Books taught me to codify the world around me in terms of survival, agrarian romanticism, moral fables, magical realism, and political revolution. Three works that stand out in particular are Thomas More’s *Utopia*, Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography*, and Wendell Berry’s poem “Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front”. Each of these writings is
a manifesto in its own way, very much like my own work. They are all radically personal even when dressed as fiction or poetry, and they all posit that the beliefs and teachings of the writer carry some authority through this solemn transmission of knowledge (though this is true of most things laid down in printed book form, hence my preference for printmaking and the concept of books). *Utopia* describes a fictional society of islanders who live by moral and civic codes that Thomas More idealized as largely humanist, including a zeal for self-directed education, a disdain for riches, and - controversially - slavery. Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography* plainly lays out thirteen “virtues” and a weekly schedule for internalizing them. Wendell Berry’s “Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front” commingles observations with poetic declarations, exhorting us to “denounce the government and embrace the flag”. In my grandfather’s library, I began to absorb the conceptual power of a manifesto.

Besides literary learning, my grandfather had another profound influence on me: I observed how he asserted his characteristic sense of rightness and perfection on the people and environments around him. He was handsome, brilliant, and a fabulous orator and businessman…and quite ungracious when he lost an argument or when things didn’t go his way. In his quest for personal perfectionism he voraciously read the news and studied science, history, business, and politics. Likewise, he took great pains to be a fabulous cook, keep a perfectly pressed wardrobe, and maintain his picturesque pompadour. My grandfather was very much in command of himself and the world around him. By molding me in his own image and unwittingly teaching me the importance of self-centered control, he instilled in me an obsession with idiosyncratic perfection. The immensely satisfying feeling of molding my environment

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exactly to my liking through numerous small examples of control has never left me. This feeling manifests through a love of symmetry, specific number groupings, objects being placed just so, and specific tactile sensations and surface treatments. These are tenets I wholeheartedly embrace in within the space of Neocadia and its manifestations, but only so I can relinquish the need to control those things outside of the space of the ASN.

I stopped staying with my grandparents once I reached high school because I joined JROTC. Rather than spending summers in my grandfather’s library, I was now part of a cadet corps that trained in rifle drill, parade ceremonies, and wilderness orienteering. I marched in perfect unison with my corps to enact rituals of state in rifle and flag color guard drills. These are not the exuberant, frivolous displays seen in football halftime shows. These are solemn military ceremonies in which two or more flags – the American flag, state flag, and branch or ceremonial flags – are flanked by two cadets carrying rifles. This group of four-plus uniformed guards executes a complex, emotionally-restrained series of synchronized steps and flag movements, maintaining perfect line and cadence throughout most of the performance. The guards may march in a line shoulder-to-shoulder; march in single file; rotate in a pinwheel around the center axis of the group; or rotate with the left or right guard as a hinge for the group. The flag bearers wear the flags in a chest harness, and from this position the flags typically stand upright, but the state and ceremonial flags may dip in salute at specific points in the drill.
In addition to color guard performance, cadets in our corps learned other flag-based rituals including parade protocols, raising and lowering flags on poles, and folding flags. Beyond flag rituals we also studied American civic trivia that seemed arcane to most non-military folk, including the symbols on state flags, Revolutionary and Civil War battle strategies, and the military alphabet. My time in JROTC spawned my interest in the relationship between flags, symbols, history, and civic life; it is also the basis of my fascination with flags and their simultaneous existence as symbols, containers for meaning, and embodied objects.
4 FLAG AS SYMBOL

Before any graphic symbols are added to a flag - and even before a flag becomes embodied - the idea of a flag symbolizes belief, identity, meaning, boundary, ownership, and power. These topics are central to discussions of utopian longing. Any attempts to form a utopic community or pursue a utopic goal are innately based in belief. Whatever tenets are central to this belief system are hinge upon the individuals’ identities who choose to pursue or participate in this utopic objective. In the process of building this utopia, boundaries must be established; things that are good or useful or right within the scope of a utopian enterprise must be fixed and respected. These new boundaries might exclude certain hopeful citizens of the prospective utopia; exclusion may even constitute one of the new utopia’s core beliefs. Power is crucial to this architecture: who holds the authority to initiate and shape a utopia, and why? Where does that power come from? Does ownership of this power stay the same, or does it evolve over time? Lastly, how can the meaning of a utopian enterprise and its symbols change over time, and what do we lose when we lose sight of the original longing? Does this shift in meaning indicate a weakness in the original idea, or are the most enduring utopias the ones that foresee evolution? I believe that the most enduring things (be they utopias, art, people, etc.) are the ones that embrace the radically personal while also visually, symbolically, and ideologically leaving room for evolution. Because this paradigm prioritizes soft endurance over rigid idealism, a core idea can be transmitted over time, allowing itself to evolve while surviving fluctuations in audience and environment.

My studies of this “soft endurance” are informed by the work of contemporary artist Amy Pleasant. Pleasant’s taxonomic drawings and paintings reduce the human body to simple silhouettes. She repeats these silhouettes, searching for a specific iteration of shape that “feels right” before enlarging that shape and painting it onto paper or canvas.
Figure 4. Amy Pleasant, Arms III, 2018, ink and gouache on paper, 5.5 x 4.25 in. (In The Messenger’s Mouth Was Heavy, Institute 193, 2018, 188.)
Pleasant’s work is driven by what curator and historian Katie Geha calls “pareidolia”, a tendency to see something specific in an ambiguous object, especially faces where there are none. More broadly, Pleasant believes “we are always looking for ourselves – in clouds, rocks. I think it is our biggest search.” The artist simplifies our search by eschewing ornamental details such as eyes, fingernails, and genitalia, creating spaces of possibility with just enough specificity to be suggestive. She presents portions of the body so that they can read as either landform or lacuna, each awaiting us to occupy them.

In June 2018 I attended a residency in Bisbee, Arizona, a small former mining town on the U.S.-Mexico border. The boundary there is a permeable place, defined more by a brackish union of cultures than by the border wall. During my stay I produced a suite of copper intaglio prints illustrating traditional American and Sonoran fabric patterns. Each print featured a trompe l’oeil quilt patch with real hand-stitching. The two fabrics were demarcated in the same shape as the Arizona-Mexico border, maintaining distinct separation but painted in compatible colors. Alongside the patch, circles and crescents of gold and copper leaf floated above various border fences. I etched names of animal species threatened by border wall expansion in a childlike schoolhouse scrawl, transcending the line of the border fence. In Mending Sonora II, a red-and-white striped fabric reminiscent of the American flag occupies the Arizona portion of the patch, while a fabric with a stylized donkey and ferns in various blues occupies the Sonoran section.

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Figure 5. Jack Michael, Mending Sonora II, 2018, copper plate etching with sand aquatint, watercolor, metal leaf, cotton thread, and rust pigment on paper, 11 x 17 in.
Although neither of these illustrated fabrics nor the patch itself is a flag, each stands in for the country it represents, much the way a real flag does. More importantly, each fabric (and the combined patch) is specific enough to evoke a momentary feeling of familiarity, but not so specific that viewers are forced to interpret the area as only a patch or only a flag. This ambiguity outlines a specific idea but leaves room for interpretation and layering meanings. The gold-and-copper-leafed circle and crescent shapes perform a similar function. Are they suns? Moons? Currency? Food? Merely shapes? How might any of these interpretations relate to the border barricade and animal names floating in the horizonless assumed desert in the print? What do each of us see when we look at a gold circle, a copper crescent, or a rectangle of cloth?

My print-based thesis work pushes the idea of pareidolia beyond the physical and into the conceptual, not unlike my work from Arizona. Building on Amy Pleasant’s vitally rendered human shapes and the symbolic potential of flags, I have started making work that acts as a suggestive vessel. What if within an abstracted shape we saw a specific *idea* rather than another form, pattern, or being? This possibility inspired my *Arrays* print suite.
These intaglio prints feature a taxonomic arrangement of possible Neocadian flag shapes drawn from memory and observation which are etched onto copper and printed in black ink on white cotton paper. Each print in the series is pulled from the same copper plate, exploiting printmaking’s reproductive capacities to create a template for testing variable colorways. After each print is pulled, specific flags are painted with gouache or watercolor in the national palette of the ASN: sinopia, peacock, black, and honey. These colors (with the exception of peacock) were chosen because of their proximity to the colors in the German flag, representing a softening and expansion of the palette that I associate with my history as a former white nationalist. The
addition of peacock is a nod to the blue of the American flag. Each color gets a dedicated array.

White is also part of the Neocadian palette, but no prints were produced for a white array because several flags are left white within each print. Aside from the pleasant visual effect of negative space, the white flags are a nod to “raising the white flag”: surrendering, admitting defeat, or confessing wrongdoing. Within these prints, the combination of white flags and colored flags seems like a harmony of compromise. The prints are floated in their frames to show the deckled edge of the paper, echoing the selvedge edge of linen flags also in The Manual for Neocadia thesis work. Each print is named for its color as well as a description of the array and its page in The Manual for Neocadia book. Like all Array prints, From the Manual for Neocadia (Chapter 2: Visual Lexicon of Vexillology, pg. 29, Sinopia Array [Including Casket Flags]) illustrates swallowtail banners, rectangular standards, and flags in both folded and unfolded casket forms. The color of red Georgia clay inspired the sinopia hue.
The main objective of these prints is to experiment with variable color within a control group of shapes, and to play with impossible relationships of scale between flags and their means of flying (poles). This relationship mismatch is not unlike our longing for utopia and our inability to bring it to functional fruition. There is also a goal beyond formal investigation in the Array print suite: ambiguous possibilities are at play, but the vagueness is not optical. Unlike in Pleasant’s Arms III, pareidolia doesn’t apply here, at least not visually: we know that each flag is a flag. The mental leap from what is there to what is not there is a conceptual one. The assemblage of flags – some totally empty, others bearing only color – creates a pattern of
familiarity with *just enough* emptiness to stimulate a moment of *filling*. In extreme cases, viewers may leap to fill the empty flags with symbolism. Some may imagine that certain white flags should be filled with color. For others, the flag shapes may simply recall memories of real flags and the feelings associated with the time or place they saw those flags. In any case, the simplicity and near-emptiness of the *Array* suite of prints invites a kind of conceptual pareidolia. This turns each print and each flag outline into a vessel that we can then fill with our meaning, memory, and fleeting moments of subconscious connection.

5 FLAG AS CONTAINER

The space of a flag is one of unlimited potential. More than just a symbol or an object, a flag is a container. Whether depicted as a two-dimensional symbol or experienced as an embodied object, flags are ultimately vessels for meaning. Aesthetic preferences, sociopolitical beliefs, and whimsical markers of identity can all be loaded into the blank field. More often than not, though, a handful of people determine a flag’s aesthetics even when the flag will represent a larger population. However, the *meaning* of that flag’s visual elements and the flag’s usage evolves over time, becoming both personally and collectively defined by various people and groups. Consider the design of the original American flag: mandated by the Naval Committee of the Continental Congress in 1777, the flag decree did not elaborate on the meaning of any color or element of the flag except “that the Union be Thirteen Stars, white in a Blue Field, representing a new Constellation”\(^\text{11}\). At that time, flags were largely used as identification and communication devices for naval vessels and official buildings. The American flag did not become an icon of freedom and liberty until after the Civil War. Its status as an object of

reverence comes from meaning and mythology accrued through the course of history – not from a miracle of forethought scripted into the initial design.\textsuperscript{12}

Because a flag can simultaneously contain personal and collective meaning, putting a personal message into the container of a flag can harness our universal tendency to assume broader and more profound meaning when we see a flag. The hybrid possibilities at the nexus of personal meaning and profound container are present the in the flag-based work of Postminimalist feminist artist Ree Morton. In \textit{Something in the Wind} (1975), Morton made flags dedicated to people she knew and installed them aboard the schooner Lettie G. Howard while it was docked at New York City’s South Street Seaport Museum. Each flag bears an appliquéd name with painted and drawn imagery that is symbolically significant to that person.\textsuperscript{13} By dedicating the powerful space of a flag to these people, Morton publicly proclaimed their importance in her own life and shared their identities and importance with the world. These works amplify the perceived worth of the people featured on the flags simply by harnessing the flag’s totemic nature. This potential is at the core of my interest in flags: their innate emptiness as an object category, their totemic power, and their potential to be filled with personal meaning that evolves through embodiment, time, visibility, and performance.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{13} Susan Richmond, “The Sentimentality of Ree Morton's Signs of Love,” \textit{American Art}, 30, no. 3 (2016): 103.
In my work *Buy Less Be More/Own Less Do More* (2019), I harnessed the message-amplifying capacity of flags in a way similar to *Something in the Wind*. Though *Buy Less* lacks the overt sentimentality innate in Morton’s work, it too features a neatly “packaged” quality with its activist moral directive. *Buy Less* is a 5’ x 3’ red satin flag with white satin appliqué letters bearing the message “BUY LESS BE MORE” on one side and “OWN LESS DO MORE” on the other. I made this flag with high-speed outdoor performance in mind, sewing robust machine appliqué stitching around the raw edge of every letter. I took *Buy Less* to the Outer Banks of North Carolina in July 2019 for a one-day “scud” residency with the OBX Art Truck. The term “scud” comes from the native brogue language of Okracoke Island and means “to

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*Figure 8. Ree Morton, Something in the Wind, 1975, approximately 100 nylon flags with acrylic paint and felt-tipped pen. South Street Seaport Museum, N.Y. Estate of Ree Morton. Courtesy Alexander and Bonin, N.Y.*
cruise for pleasure by land or by sea”.\textsuperscript{15} For my scud residency with the OBX Art Truck, \textit{Buy Less} was mounted into the sidewall of the truck bed from an aluminum flagpole and flown as we drove across Roanoke Sound and down the length of South Croatan Highway from Nags Head to Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.

Onlookers reacted to my idiosyncratic with a mixture of puzzlement, approval, and apathy. This brackish space where public presentation and private sentiment meet can disarm highbrow interpretations of the work. Morton, however, believed as I do: that this intermingling of symbolic private belief and theatrical public presentation enables further exploration of the complex and ever-shifting relationship between the personal and the social.\textsuperscript{16}

In \textit{The Manual for Neocadia} thesis work, personal meaning is scripted into the flags through the series \textit{Pages from Chapter 2 of ‘The Manual for Neocadia’ (Visual Lexicon of Vexillology)}, a suite of typewriter-letterpress prints on vellum. These prints explain the design and mythology of the flags in \textit{Manual}, laying down a foundation of meaning that will inevitably

\textsuperscript{15} Interview with Nora Hartlaub, Okracoke Island native and founder of the OBX Art Truck residency.

be built upon over time by both myself and viewers.

Flag for the Guardians of Neocadia

The flag for the Guardians of Neocadia is a rectangular standard of approx. 52 inches by 36 inches, and is constructed of linen blend in four colors: sinopia, peacock, honey, and white. Handpainted details in black acid or natural dye adorn the fish and ginkgo center icon. The field consists of two white triangles (upper and lower), and two peacock triangles (left and right), the proportions of the triangles being dictated by straight lines drawn diagonally across the field by connecting the opposite corners of the field. As in all Neocadian flags, black thread is used as the primary means of textile construction.

Centered on the flag's field is a ginkgo leaf (autumnal coloring) and a fish with spine arched, head and tail thrust upward. These two icons overlap, with the fish being superimposed over the leaf. The ginkgo is cut from sinopia linen blend, as is the fish's eye and mouth. The body of the fish is cut from sinopia linen blend. The veins of the ginkgo leaf and the fish's scales and facial features are handpainted in a black waterbased dye of natural origins.

Symbolically, the peacock hue of the flag's field represents the forests, fields, and waterways of Neocadia — those places that the Guardians are sworn to monitor and protect. The white of the flag's field represents the sky and the road. The Guardians of Neocadia monitor the wellbeing of our republic's natural world by motorcycle, living a semi-nomadic existence on the highways and back roads of the ASN, forever chasing the sky's horizon and observing points in between their nightly camps.

The ginkgo leaf on this flag represents survival and tenacity, its form inspired by the ginkgo trees that still grow today after surviving the atomic blasts at Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Anthropocene Era 2 of the First Twilight Age; see Library for full history, Aisle 1, Section 4).

The fish that floats in front of the ginkgo leaf represents abundance, natural wealth and luck.

Together, these icons harmonize Eastern and Western nature symbols regarding the health, wellbeing, and prosperity of Nature, even in the face of great duress (akin to the kind caused by our forbears pre-Revolution. The Guardians of Neocadia are sworn to uphold these symbols and their principles for as long as they can ride and live.

Figure 10. Jack Michael, Pages from Chapter 2 of The Manual for Neocadia (Visual Lexicon of Vexillology), pg. 34: Flag for the Guardians of Neocadia, 2020, typewriter letterpress print on vellum, 9 x 10 in.

Vellum’s translucence and material lightness offers myriad dynamic installation possibilities.

The individual pages can be hung unframed near a door where each opening causes them to gently flutter. They activate with the slightest puff of air, turning them into small flags in their
own right. Direct light causes them to cast shadows; some of these result from the pages overlapping, while other shadows come from the opaque typed words. This combination of shadow, movement, and overlap confuses the hierarchy of message and meaning between the prints themselves and the accompanying flags. Each textile flag design is based on specific autobiographical experiences and sociopolitical beliefs, but vellum prints’ minimalist aesthetic pares down personal ornamentation, leaving some room for viewer interpretation. However, rather than leave designs completely open to viewer explication (as in the case of the American flag), I have chosen to partly protect the importance of my own beliefs and experiences by very specifically establishing the meaning of every icon and color through the Pages series. However, I acknowledge that the language in these prints is not an impermeable barrier against evolving meaning; to think so would be folly. Given a long enough timeline, the innate container-ness of the flags will win out and my disquisitions about my flags will merely exist alongside myriad personal and institutional interpretations.

6 FLAG AS OBJECT

When a flag exists as a symbol or is considered a container for meaning, it is still an idea. As such, it can be ideologically assaulted but has limited capacity for actual failure as an entity. However, when a flag becomes embodied as an object it becomes subject to the same environmental forces that plague all physical things: gravity, time, weather, friction, inertia, etc. What does it mean to create a flag that has limited capacity to function as a flag? Furthermore, as a female-identifying artist, what does it mean to engage in textile craft to create objects central to the history of power, colonialism, and nation-building? How is the capacity of a flag changed when it is crafted by a woman? Does this personalize rather than historicize the flag by placing it within the tradition of domestic handicraft, thereby relegating its importance to only domestic spaces? And does that personalization and domesticity make it lesser than other flags, or does it
harness the power of the flag form to amplify the importance of personal belief and intimate environments?

Contemporary artist Bean Gilsdorf poses similar questions with her “anti-commemorative” flags. Gilsdorf creates flags that combine photographs or paintings from mass-produced history books with cloth selected for its cultural connotations: “wool suiting as the costume of capitalistic conformity; silk and satin for their dignified luster; spandex and metallic Lycra for their association with down-market glamour.”17 Using flags for their association with ownership, boundaries, and identity, Gilsdorf engages the material and cultural properties of these fabrics to sew flags that are then installed and photographed in slumping gestures. In this way, she parodies the solemnity of flags to undermine notions of American virtue and national allegiance. It is worth noting Gilsdorf’s flags are constructed with fashion fabrics, not cloth designed to handle the environmental demands placed on functional flags. Gilsdorf uses these fabrics associated with the body to underscore “the presentation of the icon as a puppet—a contrived, artificial corpus.”18 This artificiality adds to the perceived weakness of the flags, calling into question the credence of their symbolic contents and the power of the form itself. The result is a banner that is intended to function solely in a protected, idealized space. This limited arena of existence underscores the fragility of collective ideological allegiance as well as the presumed power of flags and their malleable messages and meaning.

18 Ibid.
Like Gilsdorf, my work also employs flag forms to study the dynamics of weakness, virtue, and authority. The previously mentioned work *Buy Less Be More/Own Less Do More* became a prime example of these qualities despite my original intentions for the work. During the performance, the appliquéd lettering on the fly end of *Buy Less* began to detach and fray; even my industrial-strength stitching could not withstand the Atlantic Ocean crosswinds and highway speeds. In retrospect, the reason for the flag’s structural failure was twofold, and attributable to the collision of my overly-zealous aspirations and amateurish skills. For this flag’s construction, I chose polyester bridal satin, which has an eye-catching luster and elegant drape; I did not know how easily it would fray. I also unintentionally exacerbated the problem by using a dense machine appliqué stitch instead of a lighter satin zig-zag stitch to attach the lettering. This heavier stitch resulted in a thickly concentrated line of needle holes that disrupted the weave of
the slick fibers at the vulnerable edges of each letter. The outcome was disastrous: each letter within a foot of *Buy Less*’s fly end began to fray at the edges and fall off of the flag. Luckily no letters were lost, but many were severely unraveled. The residency director and I stopped at a gas station, bought a cheap miniature sewing kit, and continued the scud with me mending *Buy Less* in the passenger seat of the OBX Art Truck. The flag today looks quite different from the flag that left for the Outer Banks.

![Image of the mended flag](https://example.com/flag_mended.jpg)

*Figure 12. Jack Michael, Buy Less Be More/Own Less Do More (Mended), 2019, satin flag with applique lettering and reparative hand stitching, 5 x 3'.*

Initially, *Buy Less* was not a “gallery” flag, made simply for show. It was intended to perform outdoors, in the elements, the way that flags typically perform. I designed it to powerfully and publicly deliver a personal commandment from the pulpit of a space typically reserved for collective meaning. Because of the friction between my desires, my abilities, and environmental
realities the work failed to deliver its message. Instead, *Buy Less* took on a more complicated meaning: it became a living object that caused me to question the rectitude of performing my personal beliefs in a way that foisted my ideals on others. Now this mended flag operates exclusively as a gallery flag, sometimes hung in a static position (against the wall with only half of its message showing), other times installed in a more dynamic way (attached to a pole protruding from the wall, activated by an electric fan).

Since the day I decided on flags as a visual portmanteau for my work, one of my core concerns has been ongoing material experimentation aimed at creating flags that are beautiful and pleasant to handle, but also susceptible to material weakness. Although I now understand the principles behind flag construction thanks to a practical guide from Sailrite, I choose to make flags from a less durable linen-rayon blend for several reasons: it is wonderfully tactile; it is available in an array of colors; it has prominent selvedge edges; and it retains linen’s associations with finely crafted goods. Working with materials such as satin and flag nylon did not fit my utopian visions, nor did they serve the mythology of the ASN. The ASN was formed as the result of a labor rebellion led by female-identifying textile workers. The linen blend fabric I use has prominent selvedge edges; I eschew traditional edge finishing techniques in an homage to the process of weaving. This linen blend also makes lovely gallery flags but still weathers quickly when I choose to conduct an outdoor material experiment. The linen’s weight also helps the flags achieve a beautiful drape when stationary but makes them a little clumsy when flown outside or activated with fans in a gallery. This clumsiness is a useful vehicle to discuss the imperfections of personal ideals within collective environments. Linen also wrinkles easily, like the best-laid plans. By creating flags that are purposefully weaker and heavier than typical flags, I aim to

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undermine the authority associated with flags with the ideals – both collective and personal – that flags are meant to contain. In doing so, I question the hierarchy of personal versus collective power regarding the establishment of values, identity, and belief. My own beliefs and their place in the world is the primary target of my flag-based investigations and rituals.

The textile flags in *The Manual for Neocadia* thesis work aim to create a specific national ethos for this fledgling republic. This ethos is rooted in ethical humanist spirituality; environmental stewardship; fair labor practices; a self-sufficient warrior mentality; education; self-care; and historical memory. Among the dozens of ideas I have sketched for flags, these seven are of paramount importance to the ASN’s national identity. I plan to make all of the flags I have envisioned (and the list grows daily), but these seven values target the most pressing sociopolitical and personal problems. Some of the flags, like *Flag for National Days of Rest* and *Flag for the National Militia* address ideology related to my personal history. I was raised in a factory and farming town where overworked men and women would often struggle to stay awake through dinner. My time in JROTC and my extended family of military men instilled in me an appreciation for hierarchy and the sometime necessity of physical violence. Other flags, like *Flag for the Society of Mystics* and *Flag for the Guardians of Neocadia* address my primary political frustrations: religious fundamentalism and environmental degradation. Still other flags, namely *Flag for Academic Institutions* and *Flag for Revolution Remembrance Day*, are linked to values that could directly deconstruct the nationalist organizations to which I once belonged to. I firmly believe that if all people had the opportunity to receive a rigorous, thorough education there would be fewer sociopolitical extremists. Likewise, if our collective memory as a society were not so short and abstracted, and we were not so myopic, we would be more likely to see
early indicators of systemic social, environmental, and political problems that become nearly insurmountable as time marches on.

*Flag for the Society of Mystics* is a rectangular standard composed of a black linen field adorned with two white linen hands, one reaching down and the other reaching up. Between the two hands is a lightning bolt of honey linen. The hands are marked with prominent lines, alluding to the practice of palmistry and the relationship between mysticism and the human body. The opposing orientation of the hands (one coming from above, the other from below) is symbolic of Western spiritual associations with heaven and hell; however, the lack of visual hierarchy between the hands signifies an equal relationship between these two powers and suggests a leveling of moral hierarchies. The lightning bolt that arcs between the thumbs of each hand symbolizes the connective energy of human interaction and the discovery of electricity. The Society of Mystics is an organization composed primarily of agnostic scientists and atheists who acknowledge the possibility of forces beyond their control but do not subscribe to any specific spiritual possibility. Members of this society are very political, seeking and holding office as a way to maintain a balance between reason and broad spirituality at all levels of government and civic life.
Flag for the Guardians of Neocadia is the organizational flag for a semi-nomadic, loosely organized group of environmental stewards that patrols the ASN by motorcycle or overland vehicle. Members of this group monitor the health Neocadia’s natural environment, as well as advocate for the well-being of the nation’s animal inhabitants. The vision for this flag is rooted in my own extensive motorcycle travels and my membership in the Overland Empire. Flag for the Guardians of Neocadia is a rectangular standard with a diagonally divided field of white and peacock linen. The upper and lower triangles of the flag are white linen, symbolizing the sky and roads. The left and right triangles are cut from peacock linen and symbolize waterways, forests, and uncharted wilderness. In the center of the flag, a sinopia fish arches under a large honey-colored ginkgo leaf. The fish symbolizes bodies of water and carries Western cultural
associations of abundance, faithfulness, and divinity. The ginkgo leaf symbolizes of longevity and endurance. The combined meaning of these central symbols speaks to the Guardians of Neocadia’s personal and spiritual dedication to protecting Nature in the face of adversity.

![Image of a flag with a ginkgo leaf symbol and a lidded eye](image)

**Figure 14.** Jack Michael, *Flag for the Guardians of Neocadia*, 2020, linen, cotton thread, and water-based dye, 52 x 36 in.

*Flag for National Days of Rest* is a banner flown by all citizens of the ASN on nationally prescribed days of rest. The flag is a rectangular standard composed of an equally divided horizontal field. The upper portion of the field is sinopia linen, symbolizing a sky at sunset; the bottom half of the field is peacock linen, symbolizing the calm, uniform horizon of an open field. Centered on the flag just above the horizon is a lidded eye cut from black, honey, and white linen. The eye appears to be closing in a gesture of fatigue, and its honey-colored iris is also evocative of a setting or inverted sun going down under the horizon.
Flag for the Associated Militia is a plain rectangular standard of sinopia linen with a central stylized skull cut from white linen with black linen eyes and nose. The sinopia color of the flag’s field draws on Western symbolic associations to war, blood, and strength and also to the dirt (clay) from which we are all metaphorically formed and to which we must all literally return. The skull is composed of a traditional cranium, but the handpainted design on the mandible is two hands clasped in greeting. This refers to the motto of the Associated Militia, “gratus vince aut morire” (welcome, conquer, or die). Members of the Associated Militia are trained in the art of conflict mediation equally as much as they are trained in the art of war. Soldiers first seek to befriend potential and real enemies through cordial compromise. If that
fails, they the Associated Militia will wage war to conquer said enemy. Failing all else, soldiers
die trying to protect the ASN's citizens and lands.

Figure 16. Jack Michael, Flag for the Associated Militia, 2020, linen, cotton thread, and waterbased dye, 52 x 36 in.

*Flag for Academic Institutions* is a rectangular banner of peacock linen bearing a white
book containing two symbols: a flame and a piece of wheat, each cut from honey and sinopia
linen. The book form on the flag represents both *The Manual for Neocadia* and the transmission
of generational and practical knowledge through books. The flame on the flag, similar to the
flaming torch often seen on academic institution logos, is instead uncontained. This symbolizes
the Neocadian belief that learning should occur both inside and outside traditional educational
structures; education should occur and spread both formally and organically. The wheat stalk
symbolizes education’s roots in agriculture, elevating the importance of learning trades to equal status with academic learning.

Figure 17. Jack Michael, Flag for Academic Institutions, 2020, linen, cotton thread, and waterbased dye, 52 x 36 in.

Flag for the Beloved Revolutionary Original Arcadian Daughters (B.R.O.A.D.S.) is a white linen standard with a central icon resembling a flower cut from sinopia, honey, and peacock linen. This symbol portrays three crossed weaving shuttles united by a central ball of yarn. This battle flag was carried by the female-identifying textile workers who led the revolution that formed Neocadia. Today the surviving B.R.O.A.D.S. are still textile workers, but also serve in positions of political power and educational stewardship. Like most Neocadians,
they espouse a form of neo-Luddism due to the abuses of both technology and workers in the pre-Revolution era.

Flag for Revolution Remembrance Day is a rectangular black linen standard adorned with a sinopia triangle radiating outward from a honey-colored circle toward the flag’s fly end. The circle is stitched with a crescent shape symbolic of the moon, but as there is no dark side present in the circle, it also symbolizes the sun. The triangle is painted with slightly waving lines radiating out from its rightmost point toward the fly end of the flag. When viewed horizontally, this flag seems to illustrate a celestial body radiating energy or light into the darkness. When viewed vertically (an alternate orientation allowed by Neocadian protocols for this particular flag), the symbols appear as a landscape: a mountain ascending to the sun or moon. This
symbolism tells the story of how Neocadia brought its citizens back into a sustainable, abundant life: by realigning the daily lives of its people with the cycles and pace of the earth (represented by the sun/moon circle), the darkness of pre-Neocadian society was broken (symbolized by the light/energy ray in horizontal orientation), and the Earth was once again appreciated for its monumental glory (represented by the mountain stretching to the sun/moon, in vertical orientation). This flag is flown on the annual Revolution Remembrance Day (RRD), which marks the last day of the revolution that formed the ASN. Rather than being a day of meaningless pageantry, this day is one of deep historical remembering and skill-based lessons in weaving, combat, hunting, farming, and other essential skills for people of all ages. Attendance at RRD events is compulsory so that not a single person of any generation forgets the history and conditions that gave rise to the Revolution. This day also passes on generational knowledge and skills and serves as the day when master craftspeople choose their new apprentices.
7 CONCLUSION

We did not begin at the beginning of *The Manual for Neocadia*, and likewise we are not ending at the end. I started making this work as an attempt to cast a world in my own image, to bend the way things are into the way I feel they should be. In the process of watching my aspirations fall short both materially and philosophically, I arrived at a surprising conclusion that should not have been a surprise: I am not fit to rule any kingdom, even a fictional one of my own design. I am not sure that any of us are.

We all subconsciously yearn for a world and life that is utopian by our own idiosyncratic standards. When we cannot realize that yearning, it is easy to blame impersonal external forces like politics, economics, and other people for friction in our lives – and sometimes those forces
are to blame. However, my experience is that our own desires are often foiled by internal conflict and personal shortcomings just as often as they are squashed by outside forces. That experience crystallized in the course of making this work, and it has imbued me with newfound humility and restorative empathy beyond measure. Though there are technical aspects of the work that I will approach differently in the future, namely cloth appliqué methods, I am glad for the amateurish foibles that I experienced as a printmaker working in textiles. Accumulating small, repeated failures was at first an unintentional frustration but over time evolved into a ritual for generating humility. In the process of making this work that humility has grown into an overwhelming empathy for others, especially those with different beliefs and approaches to life than my own. That empathy has helped me finally begin to repair some of the emotional and psychological damage sustained in my former life as a white nationalist. Though I don’t consider myself totally healed, I hope that the ongoing ritual of bringing the ASN to life through art and writing will act as a kind of scar tissue: a visible marker that mends us while telling the story of the trauma that caused it. Scars are potent reminders of the causes and consequences our decisions and actions. Scars remind us of the past and may serve as warnings to others.

I truly believe that cordial, intellectually honest compromise is the beating heart of any collective society. We cannot be isolationist or absolute rulers of anything, not even ourselves. To that end, I will continue fleshing out The Manual for Neocadia over several chapters and decades, always muddling the edge of fiction and reality by bringing parts of my fictional world into our real world. In the space of our real society, aspects of The Manual for Neocadia will inevitably meet with friction and be subject to compromise and revision. Potential collaborative projects will undoubtedly test how honest I am when I say that compromise is paramount to collective life. My role in Neocadia will always be creator, but not in the godlike sense.
Ultimately, I hope to sink deeper into my role as the sort of “Benjamin Franklin” of Neocadia: not the ruler of the place, but rather the founding father and penultimate diplomat who also moonlights as inventor, designer, archivist, political philosopher, printer, activist, and even postmaster. Much like Franklin, I want to wear every hat – except the crown. I imagine that this evolution of roles will unfold over the decades and chapters of *The Manual for Neocadia*. In future positions I may speak and create as the Minister of Agriculture, the Consigliere of Economics, or even Hippocratic Advisor to the Chief Surgeon. I imagine that these perspective shifts and the associated foibles of amateurism I experience within the ASN will be a rich wellspring of empathy, inspiration, and visual material for the rest of my life. I hope that the sum of my artistic output and associated ephemera and writings will someday culminate as a published tome, a real edition of *The Manual for Neocadia*. Until then, I will continue yearning as we all do for that perfect circumstance that is always just beyond our horizon.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX

GLOSSARY

All entries in this glossary should be understood as defined by the writer for the purposes of this thesis and accompanying documents, not as defined by dictionaries or other scholarly reference publications.

Associated States of Neocadia (ASN) (n.): the fictional, sustainability-driven, feminist, politically left-of-center utopian republic that serves as the conceptual vehicle for all the work mentioned in this thesis. The ASN is loosely based on the geography of the United States of America, whose revolution-based dissolution in the late 21st century brought about the formation of the ASN.

Flag (n.): a cloth banner in any shape, hung in any orientation from any type of hardware, which may or may not be activated by wind (artificial or otherwise), and may or may not be visible to the general public.

Fly End (n.): the edge of a flag that is opposite its mounting points. This side (or point, in triangular flags) experiences the most movement and disturbance from wind in outdoor applications.

JROTC (n.): Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps. This military program engages high school students in military training including wilderness orienteering; rifle drill; flag and parade protocols; physical conditioning; SERE (Survival, Evasion, Resistance, & Escape) training; flight training (for Air Force JROTC); and U.S. military history. These programs are largely funded by the U.S. military, and include active pre-recruitment of cadets into various branches of the military through direct enlistment, ROTC (in public colleges), and military academies.

Nationalism (n): identification with one’s own nation, which can include a non-geographically defined group of people, and support for its interests, especially to the exclusion or detriment of the interests of other nations or groups of people. Where used to describe nations that are not geographically defined, but rather defined by race, ethnicity, and/or sociopolitical ideology, nationalism is often referred to as “neo-nationalism” or preceded by a defining trait (as in white nationalism).

Overland Empire (n.): unofficial moniker for the loosely associated tribe of people who engage in adventure-based travel largely without the use of conventional roads. Members of the Overland Empire typically travel by means of a four-wheeled vehicle, motorcycle, or other custom vehicle that is equipped to withstand the demands of total isolation from civilization for up to several months. While this is not quotidian life for most members of the Empire, most participants do organize their lives around it. Members meet between 1-3 times per year at regional gatherings known as Overland Expos.

Semaphore (n): a method of communication in which a performer holds two flags in various positions based on an alphabetic code. This can also be performed without flags.
**Utopia** (n): an imagined place or state of things in which everything is perfect. From the Greek *ou* (not) *topos* (place). The word was first used in the book *Utopia* (1516) by Sir Thomas More to detail the people, environment, and customs of the island nation of Utopia, a fictional society based on More’s personal ideals. He was later executed for his ideals.

**Utopic/utopian** (adj): a place or a set of circumstances or aspirations that attains or attempts to attain perfection as defined by an individual or collective. The term *utopian* can also be used to describe a person who plans, acts, and/or lives based on personal utopic visions and aspirations.

**Vexillology** (n): the study of flags, their symbolism, their history, and their performative and communicative capacities.