

Reclaimed: Power, Desire, and the Body

by

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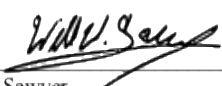
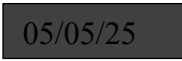
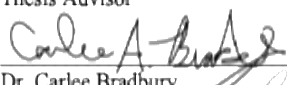


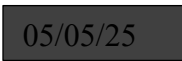
	
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Abstract

Art is a powerful tool for reclaiming agency, challenging societal norms, and empowering marginalized voices. My artistic practice is rooted in exploring the resilience of the female form, emphasizing strength, autonomy, and expression. Through clay sculptures intertwined with mixed media elements, I aim to challenge the pervasive cultural pressures that dictate how women should present themselves while celebrating the beauty and power within all bodies. My work draws inspiration from personal experiences, societal observations, and feminist theory. By sculpting bodies that defy traditional ideals of perfection, I seek to provide a visual narrative that embraces larger, scarred, and imperfect figures.

Ultimately, my work aims to foster empathy and provoke dialogue about societal beauty standards, bodily autonomy, and empowerment. By celebrating the diverse, complex experiences of women, I create a space where marginalized bodies are not only seen but revered.

Incorporating the experiences of real women has been vital to my process. Drawing from a range of models, which includes family members, my own body, and online sex workers who intentionally curate their image online. My sculptures reflect individuals who have claimed control over how they are seen. These figures command space, forcing the viewer to engage with their presence and challenging the objectification that often defines women's bodies. Through artistic expression, I aim to challenge the narratives that diminish female strength and affirm the right of all individuals to define their own identity on their terms.

Disclaimer

The history of women's empowerment, resilience, and defiance is vast and deeply complex. While my artistic practice seeks to explore themes of bodily autonomy, sexuality, and strength, it is important to recognize that these are only fragments of a much larger narrative. I intentionally chose themes that align with my current body of work, but countless other stories and struggles remain equally as vital and valuable. This is not an omission but a testament to the richness of women's history, one that deserves ongoing exploration and celebration.

Chapter 1:

Bodies of Rebellion: Power, Autonomy, and the Politics of Skin

Reclaimed: Power, Desire, and the Body is based on my life growing up in a society that teaches women to be seen and not heard, to be modest but not a prude, to be thin but heavy enough curves that a man will still find you attractive. I took inspiration from those ideals and made an army of radicalized female bodies that have their own narratives. These bodies represent how women reclaim their futures and their lives by making choices about who they are, how they present themselves to the world, and how they allow others to perceive them.

Society and social media have taught us to hate our bodies and be embarrassed and ashamed of how we look. When scrolling through popular apps such as Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest, you see beautiful people in beautiful landscapes. These beautiful snapshots of someone's life are the ideal version, not the full picture. Social media has been a successful way for major companies to profit from the self-hatred that has become more relevant since the invention of social media. You can more easily now than ever look up a picture of someone "skinnier, more pretty, more successful" than yourself, and it's damaging to your mental health. Our empathy and collective understanding of how we are "supposed" to feel about our bodies is a great connection that everyone can relate to. In the past few years, society has grown slightly to be somewhat more accepting of different bodies and imperfections. With social media campaigns of body inclusivity and diversity, equity and inclusion measures are going into action, such as hiring new clothing models that are plus size, culturally diverse, and including people who don't fit the binary of female and male. These additions have taken us one step closer to how it should be in a more inclusive and accepting world.

At the core of my historical and artistic inspirations, the Venus of Willendorf is the keystone of ideal inspirations. Venus of Willendorf is one of the earliest art figures of the human figure, a small (11.1 cm) Paleolithic figure housed in the Naturhistorisches Museum in Vienna, Austria. “Woman of Willendorf was discovered by the Jewish archaeologist, Josef Szombathy (1853-1943), in 1908. It depicts a pregnant woman with no face (typical of the Paleolithic era), who is also obese, and dates back to 22,000 to 24,000 BCE. This Nude Woman of Willendorf suggests that obesity was a normal, desirable, and even idealized feature of being human and/or being a female.”¹

Robust, full-figured bodies, especially female bodies, have historically been idealized as wealthy and well-fed. This thought is what made those rounded bodies ideal in artworks that represent obese bodies. “Flemish artist, Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), is consistent with the positive notion of being overweight or obese. The famous 1625 Rubens painting “Arrival of Marie de’ Medici at Marseilles, France” at the Louvre Museum in Paris depicts the wealthy of the 17th century as being overweight. Likewise, his “Allegory of the outbreak of War,” in 1638, depicts the theme of chronic war in Europe, which can be seen at the Pitti Gallery of Florence, Italy, and reveals that healthy supernatural and human beings are obese.”²

Venus of Willendorf is the basis of all my large sculptural body forms. I took inspiration from her stature as well as the ambiance she gives off. Being the fertility goddess, she had a very soft, feminine figure that is inviting and makes the viewer want to touch and hold the figurine.

1. Obesity: A Lesson from the venus of Willendorf - UKnowledge.
https://uknowledge.uky.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1256&context=pediatrics_facpub.

2. Ibid, Obesity: A Lesson from the Venus of Willendorf, commenting in the use of obesity in Flemish art in the 15th and 16th century art.

She is thought to have been a symbol of fertility and femininity because of her round carving. Her breasts and pubic area are more pronounced and detailed than her cropped limbs and lack of facial features. The point of her stature is not about the identity of the woman but the idea that she is the perfect example of her history and feminine power. This reverence for feminine form and power, as seen in the Venus of Willendorf, directly informs how women have continued to challenge and reshape the boundaries of art itself. Women today still seek to challenge the conventional boundaries of what women can be and can do. In art specifically, women took back what art meant.

They challenged the notion that art was merely a craft reserved for women, activities that were confined to the private, domestic spaces, and were undervalued in the larger art world. Activities such as but aren't limited to ceramics, textiles, and weaving. These art forms as we know them today, were once dismissed as "women's work" and became powerful tools of resistance and redefinition. These practices, historically tied to caregiving, homemaking, and utilitarian function, were reclaimed and transformed into vehicles for personal and political expression. Women artists began to assert that these so-called "low" art forms carried deep emotional, cultural, and symbolic weight, worthy of the same critical recognition as painting or sculpture.

Feminist sculptures played a crucial role in this shift. They infused their work with narratives of lived experience. Stories of the body, birth, labor, and trauma boldly center the female voice in a space that had long marginalized or silenced it. Their work became politically charged, deliberately confronting societal norms around gender, beauty, and power. Through provocative form, scale, and subject matter, they disrupted traditional expectations and challenged the boundaries of what ceramics could be.

This reclamation wasn't just about aesthetics; it was about visibility and validation. These artists built communities rooted in collaboration, mutual support, and shared feminist ideals. Their collective efforts not only redefined the role of women in the studio and the gallery but also expanded the definition of art itself. In reclaiming domestic materials and methods, they dismantled hierarchies within the art world and paved the way for greater inclusion, equity, and representation.

In 1969, a mere 8% of artists featured in the Whitney Museum's Annual Exhibition (now the Whitney Biennial) were women. Cary Lovelace, an art journalist for The New York Times, noted that museums often justified this lack of representation by claiming they could not find "women of quality." However, the Women Artists in Revolution (W.A.R) collective knew this assertion was false. In May of 1970, activist artists and members of various organizations convened to establish W.A.R., a New York City-based collective of American women artists and activists.³

During this period, the prevailing notion in the art world was that art lacked substantive content. Minimalist art dominated the scene, but feminist artists challenged this paradigm by redefining what constituted meaningful content in art. This shift was significant as it enabled women to express their experiences and perspectives on the world in ways that went beyond

3. *!women art revolution*. South Melbourne, Vic, Australia: Contemporary Arts Media, 2011.

!!Women Art Revolution, is a documentary that interviews many prominent female artists and asks them about their experiences and lives through working as artists in the 70s. These women paved the way for future generations of female artists to be taken seriously as "real" artist amongst men.

mere words. In an era where museums highlighted the works of white men, feminist art emerged as a crucial force in advocating for greater female representation within the art world.

Valie Export is an extraordinary performance artist from the late 1960s who engaged in numerous street performances exploring themes of the female body and the male gaze. She is an inspiration to my work by the way she confronted the idea of what the female figure was and what it represented. She has a quote that explains why I use the body as my focus for this research, “My artistic work centers on the human body as a medium of information, as a signal bearer of meaning and communication. In this sense my artistic self-representation is also the representation of society.” Export has an early performance titled *TAP and TOUCH Cinema* (1968–71), where she wore a box around her body featuring an “idealized” version of a nude female body printed on silk screen. This image was hung on the outside of the box. She challenged viewers, she invited them to reach inside the box and touch her body. She uses the contact to combat the preconceived notion of what the female body should look and feel like, allowing the viewer to contact a real woman rather than an idealized one. She radicalized what performance art could be, and what the body meant artistically.⁴

Like Valie Export, Carolee Schneemann used her body as a radical tool of communication, pushing against societal expectations and reclaiming control over how the female form is perceived. While their methods differed, Export through participatory performance and Schneemann through visceral, autobiographical expression, both artists redefined what it meant to center the female body in art. Their fearless approaches deeply

4. “Valie Export.” Thaddaeus Ropac. <https://ropac.net/artists/41-valie-export/>.

influence my practice, inspiring me to explore themes of vulnerability, confrontation, and the rewriting of feminine identity through sculptural form.

Carolee Schneemann, an experimental avant-garde artist from the 60s feminist art movement is a huge artist inspiration: she was a one-of-a-kind person. She was bold and risky with her artwork. She knew she had something important to say and chose to express those important thoughts and feelings to the world in a vibrant way. Her *Interior Scroll* piece was incredibly moving and memorable as she unraveled a scroll from inside her vagina. The scroll that she read aloud detailed her individual experiences as a woman but also educated the crowd on societal norms. I can relate to the *Interior Scroll*, while my work does not include any moving parts or performance, my works do touch on some comparable topics, such as Schneemann's.⁵

This same spirit of confrontation and reclamation seen in the work of Export and Schneemann fuels my response to the sociopolitical landscape we live in today. Donald Trump's infamous "grab her by the pussy" remark is a source of angry inspiration—a painful reminder of how deeply ingrained entitlement to women's bodies still is. That statement, and the societal support he received despite it, reflect the very power dynamics I aim to challenge in my work. Just as Export and Schneemann used their bodies to resist objectification and assert autonomy, I use sculptural forms to expose and confront the ways women are reduced, silenced, and controlled. Through bold, unapologetic representations of plus-size bodies, sexuality, and feminine adornment, I reclaim space and power for those who have long been denied it.⁶

5. Carolee Schneemann | Moma. <https://www.moma.org/artists/7712-carolee-schneemann>

6. "Why Carolee Schneemann's Explorations into Erotic Pleasure Are Even More Powerful Today | Artsy." Why Carolee Schneemann's Explorations into Erotic Pleasure Are Even More Powerful Today.

By reclaiming and subverting the language and imagery associated with Trump's rhetoric, I challenge the viewer to confront the implications of such ideology on women's autonomy and agency. I explore power dynamics and bodily autonomy themes told through the female body by the depiction of the female form, using clay as a medium to challenge societal norms and reassert control over narratives surrounding women's bodies. The presence of Trump's influence in my work serves as a reminder of the ongoing struggle against the forces that seek to undermine and oppress women's voices and experiences.

Building on the legacy of feminist artists who challenged the ways women's bodies have been objectified, controlled, and misrepresented, I find deep resonance in the work of Louise Bourgeois. Her ability to merge the personal and psychological with the physical form has profoundly shaped how I approach my practice. Like Valie Export and Carolee Schneemann, Bourgeois redefined the body as a site of emotion, memory, and resistance, offering a language that feels both deeply intimate and universally powerful.

Louise Bourgeois was a French surrealist and feminist artist and is a huge inspiration with her imaginative larger-than-life sculptures. Bourgeois was born in Paris in 1911, she was most famously known for her themes on sexuality, the body, and the unconscious mind. I am particularly drawn to her selection of hanging fabric bodies. These bodies are nondescript sections of the body suspended from the air.⁷ The general shapes and concepts of her work are very inspiring. She works with the body in such a unique and raw way. *Pregnant Woman*, a

7. Tate. "The Art of Louise Bourgeois." Tate. <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/louise-bourgeois-2351/art-louise-bourgeois>.

blush-tone pink fabric-covered sculpture with a shaggy, carpet-like texture.⁸ This work is very similar to the shaping of my works and was a reference for the height of the necks where the sculpture would end. Many of Bourgeois's works are charged with the interplay of power and fragility inherent in female sexuality.⁹ She also had some untitled works that are more abstract versions of what I see in my works while working on the fat rolls of my body.

The ability to empathize, to truly feel others' pain, whether physical or hypothetical, lets us understand the shared human experience a little better. In art, empathy becomes a powerful tool to communicate complex emotions and stories. My work strives to evoke deep feelings in the viewer while also offering insight into the lived experiences of women in society. Through this connection, the work fosters understanding, allowing others to grasp the challenges, triumphs, and resilience of women. I have taken the idea of the body and expanded on what it can be. The response society has to bodies, especially female plus-size bodies, is not a positive one. I make work that is a response to society's narrow viewpoint and aim to broaden the perspective of my audience. Female bodies have in recent years become more communal. We as women have lost rights not only to our autonomy but we have also lost the right to have a say in how our bodies are perceived and used. I work towards a goal that we will one day have control over our bodies once again.

8. "Pregnant Woman, in Collaboration with The Fabric Workshop and Museum." The Fabric Workshop and Museum, September 12, 2020.
<https://fabricworkshopandmuseum.org/collections/pregnant-woman/>.

9. "Louise Bourgeois at Sotheby's." Ocula the best in contemporary art icon.
<https://ocula.com/advisory/picks/2020-10-17-louise-bourgeoisat-sothebys/>.

Connected to control over our bodies we have the personal history of diet culture, and the generational trauma it carries plays a central role in shaping the bodies I create. My sculptures become acts of resistance. They become physical forms that reject perfection and instead honor the reality of lived bodies. By embracing curves, folds, and so-called “flaws,” I carve out space for the kinds of bodies that are often erased or hypersexualized in media and pornography. These rounded, unapologetic forms stand in direct opposition to the messages I was surrounded by growing up, that smaller was better and that control equaled worth. In my work, I reimagine the female plus-size body as not something to shrink or discipline, but as something to celebrate and reclaim on our terms.

This celebration of the plus-size female body naturally extends into how I portray it, unapologetically adorned in clothing that has often been weaponized to shame or control women. By incorporating lingerie, corsets, and underwear into my sculptures, I aim to reclaim these symbols of sexuality as forms of empowerment rather than judgment. Just as I refuse to shrink the body, I refuse to censor its expression. I aim to challenge societal norms and push boundaries by displaying women who unapologetically embrace their sexuality. These sexualized clothing choices range from but are not limited to lingerie, underwear, and corsets are more than fabric; they are declarations of identity, confidence, and autonomy. In my work, these elements become part of the body itself, challenging the viewer to confront their own biases about size, desirability, and femininity. The clothing we choose to wear is a way to express ourselves. Clothing choices are an extension of our bodies and personalities.

Revealing clothing is often unjustly correlated with women being sexually assaulted or harassed. In far too many cases, the immediate response to a survivor’s story is not one of support or accountability, but scrutiny with questions such as, “What was she wearing?” This

question implies that a woman's clothing choices can justify or excuse violence against her, reinforcing a culture that blames victims rather than holding perpetrators accountable. The notion that showing skin is an invitation for harm is deeply rooted in misogyny and perpetuates the harmful belief that women's bodies exist for public consumption or control.

In my work, the use of sexualized clothing such as lingerie, corsets, and underwear is a deliberate statement against this narrative. These garments are not symbols of shame or solicitation but of autonomy and expression. By adorning my sculptures in clothing that has been historically stigmatized, I challenge the viewer to reconsider their assumptions. The female body, regardless of what it wears, deserves safety, respect, and agency. Fashion is an extension of identity, not an invitation for violence. Through my work, I reinforce the idea that women should have the freedom to dress as they please: boldly, sexually, and comfortably without fear of judgment, criticism, or assault. It's a reclamation of choice, power, and presence.

Women have been wearing corsets for generations. These once-restrictive body modification torture devices are now used as empowering fashion choices. A corset is typically a strip of fabric that now has plastic rods sewn in called boning. Originally the boning was made of hand-cut whale bones. This added structure aided in the supreme curvature of the woman's waist. A quote from *Death by Corset: A Nineteenth-Century Book about Fatal Women's Fashions* paints a detailed picture of how corsets were affecting women throughout history, "*Hundreds, nay thousands, of females, literally kill themselves every year by this fashion in our own country: and if suicide is a crime, how will such escape in the day of final account!*"¹⁰

10. Comstock, J.L. "Appendix." Essay. In *Death by Corset: A Nineteenth-Century Book about Fatal Women's Fashions*, 311–311. New York, New York: Pratt Woodford and Co, 1848. <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/68215#page/5/mode/1up>.

Similarly, body piercings, another key element of my work, serve as a celebration of women's autonomy and self-expression. Just as the corset was once a tool for shaping the body, body piercings allow women to shape and present themselves on their terms. Body piercings are often seen as forms of self-expression and rebellion. By featuring piercings prominently, I celebrate women's autonomy over their bodies and their right to modify and display themselves as they see fit. I do not simply just paint on these piercings but rather I take small bits of high-temperature wire that can withstand the high temperatures of the kiln. These temperatures range from 2100° F to 2300° F. This wire is bent into shape and pushed through the clay where the piercing would go through the skin. I do this to make sure that the process is as authentic as possible. I then apply small bits of clay to the ends of the wire piercings to keep the wire in place, as well as to mimic the jewelry ends of traditional captive bead rings, that are typically found in nipple and belly button rings.

The jewelry choice becomes a symbol of individuality and resistance against societal pressures to conform to conventional standards of beauty. Adorning the body with piercings and tattoos is a profound form of self-expression, enabling individuals to redefine beauty and assert personal power. These adornments transform the body into a canvas, allowing for the articulation of identity and personal stories. Tattoos and piercings challenge societal norms by reclaiming the body as a space for autonomy and creativity. By choosing how to decorate their bodies, individuals can symbolize resilience, mark significant milestones, or visually manifest their inner strength, empowering themselves in a deeply personal and often transformative way.

In society today we are growing past the notion that piercings and tattoos have a negative connotation. Although while fighting to get past that old mindset we are still facing judgments on how many and where they are placed. Tattoos can be purely for aesthetics, or they can have deep

meanings that help heal and process life events. *Survival Against All Odds*, takes tattoos that have meaning to the heart. The multi-color glaze body form is based on the history of women who have experienced sexual assault. The right breast is forcefully ripped from the body in an upward motion. The upward motion references the Amazonian women myth. These incredible women were the most powerful and fiercest women. It is said that in early childhood they would cauterize the right breast to strengthen their right arm for archery. In ancient times, they were said to be a tribe of independent, mighty women who had rebelled against the men-dominated society. They used to live in isolated places, exclude men from their society, and make wars against them. Today, we can call them the first extreme feminists.¹¹

Including body modifications such as piercings, tattoos, and breast augmentations in my work is important because it confronts the viewer with the nude female form and the body's additions—elements that often unsettle societal expectations. Women are frequently placed on a pedestal, expected to adhere to narrow ideals of beauty and behavior, and this pressure is compounded by judgment towards body alterations. Some believe that women should not pierce or tattoo their bodies, as keeping their skin “clean” aligns with being “appropriate.” As someone who challenges these limiting standards, I intentionally create works that resist conformity. By exploring the experiences of body modification, I tap into a universal human experience of pain and transformation. Whether or not you have tattoos or piercings, you can relate to the empathy required to understand these modifications. Empathy allows you to connect with the physical and emotional sensations of those who choose to decorate or alter their bodies.

11. Elliott, J. M. “The Great Amazon Breast Question.” J. M. Elliott, June 28, 2022. <https://jmelliott.substack.com/p/the-great-amazon-breast-question>.

As humans, we can understand others' pain emotionally and physically. You can relate to my work if you have piercings for tattoos or not. You have inevitably heard about someone's experience getting both of those body decorations whether it's from media or someone you know personally. Through empathy, the ability to understand, share, and vicariously experience the feelings and emotions of others, often involving stepping into their shoes and seeing the world from their perspective and common experience, you can imagine what it feels like to physically get nipple piercings or tattoos.

The ability to empathize, to truly feel others' pain, whether physical or hypothetical, lets us understand the shared human experience a little better. In art, empathy becomes a powerful tool to communicate complex emotions and stories. My work strives to evoke deep feelings in the viewer while also offering insight into the lived experiences of women in society. Through this connection, the work fosters understanding, allowing others to grasp the challenges, triumphs, and resilience of women. I have taken the idea of the body and expanded on what it can be. The response society has to bodies, especially female plus-size bodies, is not a positive one. I make work that is a response to society's narrow viewpoint and aim to broaden the perspective of my audience. Female bodies have in recent years become more communal. We as women have lost rights not only to our autonomy but we have also lost the right to have a say in how our bodies are perceived and used. I work towards a goal that we will one day have control over our bodies once again.

Sexual Objectification is a form of sexism that treats people, particularly women, as objects to be used for sexual gratification, reducing them to their physical appearance and usefulness as sexual objects. It removed the agency of women and their bodies. When a woman's body or body parts are singled out and separated from her as a person, and she is viewed

primarily as a physical object of male sexual desire, she is reduced to an idea rather than a human.¹²

My body of work intentionally utilizes the theory of the male gaze. The male gaze is a feminist theory that states that cinema narratives and portrayals of women in cinema are constructed in an objectifying and limiting manner to satisfy the psychological desires of men, and more broadly, of patriarchal society.¹³ I choose to present the women in my work as sex-positive to challenge societal perceptions. These female figures, crafted from clay, are headless and lacking in personalities, which emphasizes the way that society has reduced women to mere sexualized forms. By stripping them of individuality, the sculptures highlight how women are often objectified and stripped of their humanity. The absence of identity further enhances the narrative of the women's experiences and struggles, symbolizing the objectification and commodification of female bodies.

My work aids in breaking down the wall that society has built around women about their bodies and how we as women represent ourselves to the world, leading to appearance anxiety. This is a form of social anxiety centered around one's physical appearance and fear of negative evaluation from others. This is the fear that everyone is looking at you and internally thinking negative thoughts about you. When walking down the street, you can think that someone is

12. Szymanski, Dawn, Lauren Moffitt, and Erika Carr. Sexual objectification of women: Advances to theory and Research. <https://www.apa.org/education/ce/sexual-objectification.pdf>.

13. Jackson, Lauren Michele. "The Invention of 'the Male Gaze.'" *The New Yorker*, July 14, 2023. <https://www.newyorker.com/books/second-read/the-invention-of-the-male-gaze>.

judging your body, but in fact, they are just making passive eye contact. This fear is not only a form of social anxiety but also a form of body dysmorphia and negative personal thoughts.

I have personally struggled with, and continue to face appearance anxiety—an issue that resonates with a significant portion of the population. Over one-third of the global population experiences mental health challenges due to societal pressures to conform to specific beauty standards.¹⁴ Women have often been valued primarily for their fertility, with societal expectations tied to their ability to bear and nurture children. The ideal woman has traditionally been depicted as full-bodied yet possessing a thin physique with broad hips and ample breasts, considered the pinnacle of beauty.¹⁵ However, as social conditions and gender roles evolve, so too do the ideals of beauty. The shift from the curvaceous figures of icons like Marilyn Monroe to the slim, flat-chested looks of supermodels like Twiggy and now back to curvy women such as the Kardashians highlights how beauty standards have changed over time and limit the way women can conform to the standards, women are constantly influenced by the prevailing cultural and unrealistic social norms leading to unsatisfied women with unattainable expectations.

In my work, I draw from a diverse range of models, including myself, family members, and even sexual entertainers from the internet. These women, who have shared their videos or images online for the world to see, wield significant power simply by choosing to put themselves on display. The sexualized nature of their bodies, often intended for the male gaze, is an essential

14. Gao, Jie, Yi Feng, Shicun Xu, Amanda Wilson, Hui Li, Xiaofeng Wang, Xi Sun, and Yuanyuan Wang. “Appearance Anxiety and Social Anxiety: A Mediated Model of Self-Compassion.” *Frontiers in Public Health*, March 21, 2023. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10070730/>.

15. “The Body Project.” Bradley University. <https://www.bradley.edu/sites/bodyproject/>.

element of my work. Through the figures I create, I highlight how these women assert control over their narratives, making conscious choices about how they present their bodies and how they wish to be seen. Much like the sex workers they mirror, the sculptures embody power in their nudity, inviting the viewer to appreciate the artistry and confidence they radiate. The models I represent are not passive objects but active participants, running their pages without anyone behind the camera directing them. They hold the power to shape their presentation, from the poses with their sex toys designed for visual pleasure to the specific glaze or clothing choices I make in the sculptures. Each decision is an act of empowerment, they have the power to grant visual pleasure.

By empowering these women through their intentional presentation and self-expression, my work challenges traditional notions of objectification and highlights the agency inherent in their choices. This focus on autonomy and control extends into the very process of creating the sculptures.

Chapter 2:

Techniques and Stylistic Choices

To further explore and honor the themes mentioned in Chapter One, I employed specific techniques that mirror the deliberate nature of the models' self-presentation. The careful attention to detail in shaping, texturing, and glazing each piece is integral to conveying the strength and agency these women embody in their visual narratives.

I strive to celebrate the intricate curves of the female form by accentuating and exaggerating aspects of the body that are often sources of self-consciousness, such as the belly, sagging breasts, and fat rolls. Each body is close to, if not larger than, life scale, ranging from 31 inches in height to as small as 15 inches. Like humans, each sculpture is unique and slightly different in shape and size. Each work is based on a real-life plus-size woman, ranging from a women's pants size 12 to a women's pants size 24.

In every sculpture, I incorporate deep grooves that are carved directly into the clay using the "skin" with a wooden knife or a sharpened loop tool that is used to carve out extra clay in wheel-thrown pots. These tools are similar to the tools they use to scrape away plaque when they clean your teeth at the dentist's. The deep grooves allow the glazes to cascade over and through the grooves, resembling rivers that symbolize stretch marks. The stretch marks that cover the human skin from weight gain or pregnancy are important details because they are typically a source of great discomfort for people. Additionally, I meticulously detail skin texture, incorporating elements reminiscent of cellulite or dimpled skin, serving as a poignant reminder of the true human form. I create this texture by pushing the clay in small sections with a range of tools that include, but aren't limited to, sponges, metal spoons, plastic ribs, and my fingers.

Through these artistic choices, I aim to challenge societal beauty standards and foster a deeper appreciation for the diversity and authenticity of the female body.

I create large female-form sculptures by using a plethora of techniques that range from simple hand-building to intricate slip decoration. Everything starts with a detailed sketch on paper and has hours of research and planning. I start with small concept sketches kept in my sketchbook. Those then are transformed into charcoal drawings on large sheets of newsprint or even scrap pieces of actual newspaper pages. The newspaper allows for the concept drawing not to be so intimidating. The paper isn't stark white like a blank canvas. I use the words as noise so I can create more freely. The newspaper I collected was from the time leading up to the 2025 presidential election. The images I was sketching out were drawn on top of the news articles about Donald Trump's hateful rhetoric and harmful policy proposals. That information being layered behind the large, bodied women who make society uncomfortable was an intentional dissection.

After the planning period, I used a technique called Spiral coiling, which is a technique that I use in most of my work. This hand-building method is typically performed on a slow-moving pottery wheel or a banding wheel and has its origins in the Pueblonian tradition, though it is now heavily used in traditional Korean pottery. A coil of clay typically measures about twelve inches in length and two inches in width. These coils are long logs of clay, rolled out, that are intended to be stacked on top of each other to form a sturdy base. Each coil is placed one on top of the other and then smoothed together using a wooden rib (a kidney-shaped piece of smooth wood used for shaping and smoothing the clay).¹⁶

16. Fewkes, Vladimir J. "The Function of Paddle and Anvil in Pottery Making." *American Antiquity* 7, no. 2 (1941): 162–64. <https://doi.org/10.2307/276064>.

To thin the walls of each piece, an anvil and a paddle are used. The anvil supports the inside while the paddle is used to beat the exterior, ensuring the coils merge to become homogeneous and stronger. This process of paddling does not involve coiling with the paddle but rather integrating the clay through rhythmic, controlled impacts. This technique results in a uniform and durable structure, essential for creating stable and aesthetically pleasing pottery.

Story telling in pottery is an ancient technique of decoration. Often, slip decoration is used to depict stories told by generations. This technique is when liquid clay called slip is used in an esthetic way rather than a primarily useful way such as being the “glue” between two pieces of clay to combine them and turn them into one piece.

To make slip, you take dry clay and soak in water to rehydrate it. Clay from a completely dry state is easier to rehydrate than bone-dry clay. Once the clay is hydrated, you thin out the mixture using water or vinegar. Mixing the mixture into a pudding like consistency. This consistency is dependent of personal preference, but most potters like to have a smooth but thick slip for the opacity and easy application.

In my work, I use slip decoration to add texture and to tell stories. In the images that I added to the body sculptures, I colored the slip picture using a red mason stain. This is a colored powder that is a fine, natural mineral powder, often used in cosmetics, pottery, and food coloring. Slip decoration gives the viewer more to look at and allows you to understand more deeply how something feels visually rather than physically touching it. It helps create a mental image and feeling. The slip can be used to create intricate details that attaching a new piece of clay cannot do. The liquid clay known as slip is easy to pipe out like icing or use in a squeeze bottle to create a general shape. After the water evaporates out of the slip, you are left with a smooth blob of clay that wouldn't be achievable by just pinching off a chunk of clay and

attaching it. That smooth blob of clay can now be scraped away with small, sharp tools to create a detailed addition. The sharp tools allow you to get into each nook and cranny to get every desired detail into the work.¹⁷ This piping technique can be seen in the stacked form *Spine of Submission*. I piped the slip onto a plaster bat. The plaster material is porous, so it pulls the water out of the slip, leaving behind the clay shape.

Sgraffito is an Italian word, “graffiare,” which means to scratch. This technique can be seen in my work as a decorative way to depict a story line and bring more context to the work. To achieve the stories, colored, liquid clay called slip is applied to the surface of the piece’s body. Once dry to the touch you scratch away the sections of color that are not needed for the image creating negative space. This cutting and scraping away clay material to the surface layer leaves behind the colored section revealing the image left behind.¹⁸ In my specific work, I use sgraffito to tell stories through imagery depicted as tattoos on the body. These stories are scratched into the skin, permanently embedding the lines and shapes into the “skin” much like an ink tattoo for human skin.

Expressing and compressing the clay is an incredibly important technique that I use in every piece of pottery. In ceramics, you compress the clay into itself to align and condense the clay particles. The action of pressing the clay particles closer together strengthens the material and helps reduce cracking as well as pushing any air pockets out of the clay body. The

17. “The Icing on the Pot! Pottery Slip Decoration That Creates Texture.” Default. <https://ceramicartsnetwork.org/daily/article/The-icing-on-the-pot-Pottery-slip-decoration-that-creates-texture>.

18. “Scratching the Surface: A Guide to Sgraffito.” Default. <https://ceramicartsnetwork.org/daily/article/Scratching-the-Surface-A-Guide-to-Sgraffito>.

compression technique can also be used in an aesthetic way. For the body sculptures, I express and compress the clay walls from both the inside and outside. The push and pull motion creates what you read as fat rolls on my work. I push from the inside, which thins out the walls to allow for more air space inside the vessel and creates a concave area. This area is then texturized to mimic the texture of various skin textures. Another word for expressing would be molding. I wet my hands and run my hands and fingers over the clay, moving the material until it is in the shape I want.

To adorn the bodies, I meticulously hand shape and include found objects in many of my works, allowing the ceramic sculpture to be informed by the objects it is paired with. Most of my work is paired with pieces of lingerie and other sexual props such as whips, nipple clamps, and strap-on sex toys. These items are easily recognized as sexual objects, allowing for the pieces to be understood by the viewer a bit more easily. The items I have chosen also to have physical texture and change how you look at the sculptures. They add depth and something tactile that the viewer can imagine touching from their own experiences in life. The clothing choices also highlight the curves of the bodies. The garter belts sit right under the curve of the belly, or the corset fits tightly, accentuating the breasts and creating a dramatic hourglass figure.

Each layer of glaze that is added to the stone-wear clay body is a deliberate choice. The choices are all chosen to convey a specific feeling and storyline. I use color theory and application experimentation to get the perfect combo of colors and textures. The glass-like texture reflects light off the curves on the body, where it would be naturally highlighted on the human skin. Each glaze is used to adorn the body of the sculpture with visually interesting colors that complement the added mixed media pieces and the storyline.

My sculptures are shaped by a variety of influences, blending personal experiences, feminist theory, and cultural narratives. I have created a contemporary discussion on body autonomy and societal beauty standards, pertaining to larger, imperfect forms.

Female sexuality is a touchy subject still in today's society, and masturbation is extremely discouraged and whispered about, but has been a secret topic for as far back as we can trace time. The manual manipulation of the genitals for sexual gratification dates to cave paintings. There is even an Egyptian myth that the god Atum created a whole universe by masturbation. To honor this god the pharaoh would ejaculate into the Nile River every year. Although masturbation for men was deemed a normal progression in adolescence into manhood, it is not viewed in the same way for women. It is seen as an immoral thing to do for women. In the early 1800s, women were even discouraged from riding horses and bicycles because men thought they would experience sexual pleasure. Male doctors seized this opportunity for profit. By creating false diagnoses such as female hysteria, they would then capitalize off female orgasms.

In the 1800s the first commercialized vibrator was invented. Joseph Mortimer Granville patented his electromechanical vibrating machine to soothe aches and pains in the muscles and to relieve symptoms of female hysteria. This was an external product that was sold for medical pelvic massages. In 1910, the internal "massage instrument" was invented. They called it the "Electro-Spatter" it was sold to women as a medical device to treat overworked nerves and other "female-related" illnesses. The Electro-Spatter was sold to physicians once again, they were such a medical achievement that it surpassed the X-ray in sales by five million dollars. In the 1914 census, the X-ray was valued at 2.7 million dollars while the Electro-Spatter was reported to be valued at a whopping \$7.6 million.

To show the lineage and history of women's sexual health I created a series of ceramic dildos and vibrators. They are a mixture of historical references and new imagined ideas of what a sex toy could look like. They represent the long line of items women used and were accused of using as sex toys. These items ranged anywhere from hand-carved wooden dildos to imagined futuristic sex toys. The wooden dildo is based on the 2000-year-old artifact found outside of Rome. It was originally thought to be a darning tool for mending clothing, but after further investigation, it was decided that it was most likely a dildo. This rich history of the dildo can be related to the hushed topic of underwear and undergarments used to shape the figure of the body such as the corset.

Women have an incredible capacity for resilience and adaptation, both physically and emotionally. We can transform our bodies to nurture life, and we continually adjust to the demands of the world around us.

Chapter 3:

Historical Bodies of Rebellion, Reclaiming the Politics

Despite facing personal and societal challenges, women consistently rise above, whether through healing after trauma or rebuilding after loss. My works like *Liquid Gold*, *The Survivor*, and *The Power Held Within*, highlight this strength. *The Power Held Within*, symbolizes the process of recovery, showing how women, even when torn and wounded, are still strong and capable of healing and being incredibly powerful.

Sexual Charisma, Inspired by Japanese History:

In quiet rooms, where silence holds,
Women discover the depth of their own needs.
Not for validation, nor to please,
But to feel the pulse of their own desires.

Toys, like secret allies,
Guide hands that know their own skin,
Unveiling power that doesn't seek approval, but simply exists, whole and unbound.

Pleasure becomes a language,
Written in the curve of a touch, A testament to autonomy,
A celebration of self in its fullest form.

Shibari ties are not a new concept, but it is more contemporary to be able to talk about them freely in society. I added these bondage knot-tying techniques into my work to add a layer of complexity, symbolizing both restraint and liberation. This ancient Japanese art form using rope bondage is not just about physical restraint but also about trust, intimacy, and the beauty of the human form. It originates from Hojojutsu (tight binding), a military practice to restrain prisoners of war by Japanese police. The rope ties were used to subdue and restrain the prisoner. This practice has evolved into Shibari, what we know today as rope bondage. Each knot and

shape created by the ties has a different and significant meaning. I highlight the intricate balance between vulnerability and strength, and how women can find empowerment in exploring their desires.

Japanese drawings, such as the 1954 edition of “Hen-kei Ebi-seme Go-tal” (Variations of Shrimp Torture, in Five Poses), often depict the Takate Kote Shibari ties. These illustrations frequently portray powerful, commonly larger women in vulnerable positions. The primary inspiration I took from these ties is the idea that control and constraints can be reinterpreted as instruments of female empowerment. By allowing another individual to assume control, the woman exercises agency, transforming the act into one of mutual respect rather than a mere prisoner tactic. This use of traditional techniques subverts their historical context, highlighting the woman's power in consenting to the act. Another point that is in the same theme of Shibari and Japanese bondage is *The Dream of Fisherman Wife*. This work is an Edo Period woodblock print by Katsushika Hokusai. Hokusai was a Japanese artist, ukiyo-e painter, and printmaker of the Edo period. In his time, he was Japan’s leading expert on Chinese paintings. Hokusai is best known as the artist of the woodblock print series *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*, which includes the iconic and internationally recognized print.¹⁹ *The Dream of Fisherman Wife* is a less straightforward version of the Shibari bondage technique. The woman is being bound by the tentacles of an octopus acting like the ropes or other material ties used in the bondage technique.²⁰ These Edo prints were made to be easily mass-manufactured, allowing for the prints

19. Katsushika Hokusai. <https://katsushikahokusai.org/>.

20. Hokusai, Katsushika. “The Dream of the Fisherman’s Wife.” Obelisk Art History, January 1, 1970. <https://www.arthistoryproject.com/artists/hokusai/the-dream-of-the-fishermans-wife/>.

to be distributed quickly getting the work out into the hands of the viewer. This is like the way we advertise ourselves as artists today. Some artists still do paper handouts and give out prints, but the most contemporary approach would be how we do social media blasts and promotions. The work is made to be easily pushed out to the public like the Edo prints were.

In *Sexual Charisma* color theory plays just as much of a pivotal role as the physical ropes. Inspired by the color choices in Katsushika Hokusai's *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* the blue glaze represents a calming and serene feeling, which is often associated with stability and trust. It is a cool color, creating a sense of depth. And the shape created by the ties has a different and significant meaning. I highlight the intricate balance between vulnerability and strength, and how women can find empowerment in exploring their desires.

Restricted Liberation, Inspired by Woman's Clothing History:

Once they bound us in whispers,
tight - laced and breathless
our bodies shaped to please,
our ribs pressed like secrets.

But now we pull the strings ourselves,
cinching not to confine,
but to command.

The corset curves where we say,
A frame for strength, not silence.
We walk taller, breathe deeper
each stitch a statement:

I choose this. I choose me.

Restricted Liberation is a large sculpture that confronts the tension between oppression and empowerment through the use of a corseted torso adorned with body piercings. The central focus of the piece is the highly exaggerated, compressed midsection that was created by first sculpting a regular-sized body form. I then applied a rigid corset around the abdomen, just beneath the bust. Once the corset was positioned, I threaded strong silk ribbon through the metal

eyelets and tightened it mercilessly until the edges overlapped, physically distorting the form into an unnatural, constricted hourglass shape.

This visceral manipulation of the body speaks to the historical relationship between women and restrictive garments. For centuries, corsets symbolized societal expectations placed upon women's bodies: containment, discipline, and submission to an aesthetic ideal that prioritized form over function, beauty over breath. By pairing the corset with body piercings the bodily autonomy and self-expression, the sculpture challenges the traditional narrative, reclaiming and complicating the story of adornment and control.

Today, the corset has undergone a powerful evolution. No longer a mandatory tool of oppression, it has been reclaimed as a fashion statement, its rigid structures softened to accommodate freer, more active lifestyles. This transformation highlights a larger cultural shift: the corset has moved from a symbol of bodily restriction to one of self-stylization and empowerment. In *Restricted Liberation*, the viewer is asked to wrestle with this dual history of the pain and endurance of the past alongside the reappropriation and pride of the present.

Unbound and Unapologetic, Inspired by Woman's Clothing History:

Our love bends like rivers
fluid, winding, wild.
No scripts, no rules
just bodies learning each other
in soft, electric language.

Fingers trace maps unknown,
Mouths speak heat without words,

each breath a whispered yes.
 We know that pleasure isn't measured
 in thrusts or ticking clocks
 it's in the pause, the sigh,
 the way skin hums beneath a careful hand.

What we share is ours.
 Valid, vibrant, and whole

Unbound and Unapologetic is another sculptural work that continues my exploration of women's history, fashion, and bodily autonomy, focusing on reclaiming narratives of control and liberation. In this piece, the body form wears a leather strap-on harness, an object designed to hold a dildo, yet here it functions as far more than a sexual device—it becomes a powerful symbol of resistance, agency, and queerness.

The harness serves multiple conceptual roles. On one level, it pays homage to the queer community, specifically celebrating the ways non-heteronormative individuals have redefined sexuality outside traditional male-centered frameworks. The strap-on challenges the assumption that sex is inherently male-driven, offering instead a narrative where pleasure, gender roles, and power are self-determined and fluid.

Simultaneously, the piece draws on a darker historical reference: the medieval chastity belt. Historically imposed on women to ensure their “purity” and fidelity to their husbands, chastity belts were mechanisms of surveillance and control over the female body and sexuality. By reimagining this historical device as a contemporary harness—an object now chosen and worn by individuals on their own terms. *Unbound and Unapologetic* transforms a symbol of oppression into one of empowerment.

In this act of inversion, the piece asserts that the body is no longer a site of control by external forces, but a site of self-expression, agency, and unapologetic ownership. The title itself demands recognition of this shift: unbound from historical restraints, unapologetic for embracing

a liberated, self-defined identity. Through its visual tension between historical allusion and contemporary reclamation, *Unbound and Unapologetic* invites viewers to reconsider how clothing, sexuality, and bodily autonomy have been weaponized and how, through reclamation, they can become instruments of radical freedom.

Survival Against All Odds, Inspired by Women's Statistics of Sexual Assault and Tattoo

History:

They stole her breath,
pinned her voice beneath their weight
but she found it,
a sharp and burning thing
that would not stay silent.

Now Medusa watches from her skin,
serpents twisting in endless motion fangs bared, eyes bright with warning.

A reminder carved in ink:
She is no stone, no shadow
she moves, she speaks, she thrives.
Her body is her own,
and no hand will ever take it again.

Survival Against All Odds is adorned with three tattoos: a large Medusa head just below both breasts, and two snake heads on the back of the arms. The tattoo content was particularly important, the Medusa is a well-known symbol for women who have been sexually assaulted. According to Greek mythology, Medusa was a young and beautiful woman who served as a virgin priestess of the goddess of war and wisdom, Athena. One day, her beauty caught the attention of Poseidon, the god of the sea. She was brutally raped by him in Athena's temple. This story is why survivors of sexual assault get Medusa as a reminder of strength and a way for survivors to reclaim power over their bodies and their stories. The history of women surviving sexual assault affects not only the women but also the people around them. Assault changes how

you interact with people in your everyday life. According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, one in five women has experienced full or attempted sexual assault in their lifetime. Nationwide it is estimated that 734,630 people were threatened, attempted, or sexually assaulted in 2018 alone.²¹ These statistics do not decrease yearly, in the United States alone 91% of victims of rape and sexual assault are female, and nine percent are male. The medusa tattoo is a widely recognized symbol of survival for but not exclusively for women, the tattoo is more common in women survivors.

Roots of Rebellion, Inspired by Greek Mythology and Color Theory:

In the shadowed depths were darkness lays,
She walks with quiet, green-filled grace.
The earth within her hands still grows,
A world of life where shadow flows.

With every seed, her power blooms,
Through roots and vines in silent rooms.
No longer bound by his cold might,
She reclaims the day, ignites the night.

The underworld may claim its reign,
But in her garden, she breaks the chains.

Roots of Rebellion uses the Greek myth about Persephone and Hades. Hades the god of the underworld, fell in love at first sight with Persephone the daughter of Demeter, goddess of the harvest. One day, as Persephone picked flowers in a meadow, Hades burst from the earth in his chariot and abducted her, taking her to the underworld. Demeter searched endlessly for her daughter. In her sorrow, she neglected the earth, causing crops to wither and famine to spread.

21. "Statistics." National Sexual Violence Resource Center.
<https://www.nsvrc.org/statistics>.

Seeing this, Zeus, the king of the gods, intervened and ordered Hades to return Persephone. However, before leaving, Persephone ate six pomegranate seeds, thus binding her to the underworld, as anyone who consumed food there could not fully leave. A compromise was struck. Persephone would spend part of the year with Hades as queen of the underworld and the rest with her mother. When she returned to Demeter, the earth flourished with spring and summer. When she descended to Hades, the world grew cold, bringing autumn and winter. Thus, Persephone's journey explains the cycle of the seasons, symbolizing death and rebirth, loss and reunion, and the balance between darkness and light.

The modern retelling of the myth of Hades and Persephone often reframes Persephone's story as one of empowerment rather than victimization. While the original myth portrays Persephone as a passive figure, modern interpretations emphasize her agency and resilience. In feminist retellings, Persephone actively chooses her role as Queen of the Underworld, reclaiming her power and establishing herself as a force of balance and growth. These narratives can be seen in *Roots of Rebellion*, celebrating her strength, autonomy, and ability to thrive in spaces once defined by male dominance.

Together: A Riot has Begun, Inspired by Women's Rights and Protests:

They draft laws like chains,
inking ownership on skin —
my ribs, my hips, my womb
mapped without my consent.

They speak of life in cold commands,
while I bleed in quiet defiance.
As if my body were theirs to sculpt, to bend, to break, to bear.

But this flesh is not a battleground.
 It's a voice - fierce, loud, mine.
 No man's pen can silence the fire that burns in the marrow of choice.

I carry the power they fear —
 the strength to refuse, to reclaim,
 to rise with fists unclenched
 and say: I will decide.

Together: A Riot has Begun is a large-scale sculpture of the female body that is covered in handwritten quotes, comments, and poster lingo. The script written all over the body is in a dark blue stain made of powdered cobalt and water; this is a very messy and permanent product. It becomes very dusty and can be smudged very easily. The dust that it produces is similar in an artistic way to tear gas. The name tear gas is misleading; the “gas” is a powdered chemical called ortho-chlorobenzylidene malononitrile that is suspended in the air using aerosol cans.²²

The hands that are on the piece are inspired by some of the first forms of art, the Paleolithic hand prints. Archaeologist Dean Snow of Pennsylvania State University analyzed hand stencils found in eight cave sites in France and Spain. By comparing the relative lengths of certain fingers, Snow determined that three-quarters of the handprints were female.²³ Like the ancient murals, the handprints on my work are created by dipping the hand into pigment and pressing it onto a surface, as well as blowing pigment over the hand to create the “shadow” of the hand. The hands seen in my work are both male and female. The smaller blue handprints are female prints. They are in comforting areas that you would be able to reach in a self-soothing

22. “Riot Control Agents.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
<https://www.cdc.gov/chemical-emergencies/chemical-fact-sheets/riot-control-agents.html>.

23. Hughes, Virginia. “Were the First Artists Mostly Women?” *Adventure*, October 10, 2013. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/adventure/article/131008-women-handprints-oldest-neolithic-cave-art>.

action. A larger dominating red handprint can be found on top of the female hands. The red hands are placed in controlling areas and sensitive places such as the belly and the breasts. The red represents male dominance in general, but also hints at the idea of the red hats in government. So many men in power have their hands on women and women's rights over their bodily autonomy.

Finally, the bottom of the sculpture is broken down. In the pubic area, I have broken the foundation of the sculpture. Those pieces are cemented back together in precarious ways. The pieces are placed at odd angles, and there are purposeful gaps. The unevenness of the base creates an uncomfortable feeling for the viewer. It does not look like it should be able to balance in that way or that it will crumple under the weight of the body, but as women do, the piece works with what it has and continues to stand tall and move forward. The body is fragmented, then restored in strength. The work reflects the broken but mended part of women. I took inspiration from these powerful signs and advertisements. The "reassembled" aspect ties into the visual of something fractured but pieced back together, symbolizing resilience and ongoing struggle in the fight for rights over women's bodies.

The words decorating the body are a collection of quotes from media campaigns and protest signs from various protests, such as the Women's March. The Women's March on Washington took place on Saturday, January 21, 2017, one day after the inauguration of the 45th President of the United States, Donald Trump. Marchers congregated at the intersection of Independence Avenue and Third Street SW, near the U.S. Capitol, and after a rally, marched to the White House. Approximately 200,000- 400,000 marchers were expected to take part;

however, it is estimated that between 500,000 and 1.2 million people attended.²⁴ The march was a reaction to not only Donald Trump taking office but also as a response to the government being led by “The Billionaire Boys Club.” The women at the march then and now fight for concrete fixes to our broken system like, like student debt abolition, paid parental leave, and an increased minimum wage that will bring us closer to a democratic economy that supports all women.²⁵ The writings on the body are inspired by the handmade signs women throughout history have carried during protests. In Evansville, Indiana, in the late 1800s and early 1900s, a small but determined group of women dared to organize a protest. These women were some of the first of many influential women of the women’s suffrage movement. They created signs that I used as inspiration for the style of mark-making on *Together: A Riot has Begun*. The handwritten quality of the signs allows the viewer to read them, but also understand the human quality of the words. The uneven lettering and drips of paint allow for the words to show haste and the importance of time.

Together: A Riot has Begun serves as a compelling critique of societal control over women’s reproductive rights, integrating text from various sources such as political speeches, news articles, and protest posters. This combination of text and imagery emphasizes the ongoing struggle for bodily autonomy in the face of restrictive abortion laws. The fragmented body form

24. “GSU Library Research Guides: Women’s March on Washington: About the Women’s March on Washington.” About the Women’s March on Washington - Women’s March on Washington - GSU Library Research Guides at Georgia State University. <https://research.library.gsu.edu/womensmarch>.

25. “Our Vision and Values.” Women’s March. <https://www.womensmarch.com/about-us>.

symbolizes the reduction of women to mere reproductive vessels or “incubators,” reflecting a societal perception that disregards their agency.

Through the deliberate use of brokenness in the sculpture, the work evokes a sense of disempowerment, illustrating the consequences of policies that prioritize the fetus over the woman. This brokenness resides only in the bottom half, leaving the body unrecognizable due to its missing pieces. The central question posed, “After you save the baby, then what?” calls attention to the lack of comprehensive social support systems, specifically highlighting the strain on the foster care system. The work critiques the broader implications of these policies, suggesting that while the fetus is saved, the resulting systemic neglect often leads to further societal issues, such as overcrowded foster care and inadequate care for children. The incorporation of bold color choices and protest-inspired imagery amplifies the message’s urgency, while the text evokes the emotional weight of the political and social discourse surrounding reproductive rights. My work talks about the real-world consequences of these policies, the work positions itself within the larger feminist tradition of challenging structural inequalities and advocating for reproductive justice.

Liquid Gold, Inspired by Women’s Resilient Bodies and Motherhood:

We craft life in silence,
our ribs expanding to house the storm.
Bones shift, skin stretches,
and still, we endure.

When the flood comes
pain splitting us open like earth torn wide
we push, we bear, we survive.

And then, from our bodies,
We pour rivers of gold
Warm, sweet, and endless
A gift only we can give.

We are both the wound and the healer,

the storm and the calm
Soft, strong, unstoppable.

Robust women who represent fertility are exactly what *Liquid Gold* is all about. Like all of my sculptures, the general shape of the body is based on the Venus of Willendorf. She is a modern take on the concept of breastfeeding and the importance, but somehow the vulgarity that society has placed on women breastfeeding. Mothers are shamed for needing to either breastfeed their hungry, growing children or pump their breast milk. It is seen as a shameful thing rather than a natural gift that women provide. Not only do we grow human beings in our bodies, but we can also feed and nourish our children with our bodies. *Liquid Gold* is a celebration of that miracle as well as a critique of how society sexualizes women to such an extent that women aren't welcome to breastfeed in public, for fear that a man will see. *Liquid Gold* is also inspired by the feminist movement "Free the Nipple." This movement emerged in 2012, advocating for body equality and challenging censorship, particularly when it comes to female breasts. This movement argued that women's nipples shouldn't be singled out for censorship while men's are not.²⁶

Pulsing Boundaries and Landscapes of the Body, Inspired by Heat Mapping and Arousal:

Landscapes of the Body

Lace against skin, silk on shoulders

26. Shapiro, Emma. "Free the Nipple: A History of a Hidden Movement." Hyperallergic, July 13, 2022. <https://hyperallergic.com/681937/free-the-nipple-a-history-of-a-hidden-movement/>.

each thread chosen; each strap placed.
 No gaze claims this power.
 It blooms from within.

We dress for ourselves
 for the way satin clings like a whisper,
 for the strength in sheer defiance.

Lingerie isn't surrender
 Its armor stitched in softness,
 a quiet rebellion in ribbons and lace.

We wear it not to be seen
 but because we see ourselves,
 and we know we are powerful.

Pulsing Boundaries

Fingers roam like whispers,
 mapping warmth beneath the skin -
 the swell of breath, the curve of ribs,
 where heat pools and pulses.

Under breasts, a quiet blaze,
 embers tucked in softness.
 Lower still, the fireflies,
 each inch a flicker brighter.

Downward, downward -
 where thighs gather shadows
 and flesh hums molten,
 A furnace aching to be stoked.

Pulsing Boundaries (Heat Mapping of Sexual Touch) and *Landscapes of the Body (Heat Mapping of Foreplay)* both display the themes of how the body reacts to sexual touch. They are both studies on what areas of the body are warmer and become even hotter when aroused. Like traditional heat mapping, the bodies emit heat more intensely in the groin and under the breast areas. Heat mapping is a technique often used to visualize data through color-coded systems, where different colors represent varying levels of intensity or activity. In art, heat mapping can be applied to create a visual representation of temperature changes. In ceramics, temperature variations during the firing process can be crucial for achieving desirable effects in glazing or

texture. Heat mapping is used to understand how heat is distributed across a surface or space. In this case, it is used as a tool to see how the blood under the skin rushes to certain areas of the flesh when aroused. By tracking where heat is concentrated, I intentionally manipulate the thermal conditions to produce unique visual results in my work.

I used commercial glazes in a range of colors that were cool-toned whites and blues all the way up to warm reds, pinks, and yellows, also adding in a few neutral shades as well. These glazes were placed in sections that reference the original heat maps for thermal medical diagrams. In addition to that, mapping in *Pulsing Boundaries (Heat Mapping of Sexual Touch)* there are red handprints that represent the connection of skin-to-skin contact. This brings the other partner into the equation of sexual touch.

The Power Held Within, Inspired by Women's History and Audience Engagement:

They chip away at us
a word here, a hand there,
sharp glasses slicing skin- deep.
Too loud, too bold, too much.

They pick us apart like petals,
tearing away softness,
knocking strength,
leaving us smaller each time.

But we are not so easily undone.
We gather what they tried to steal
our voices, our power, our fire
and fill ourselves back up,
whole again, and stronger still.

The Power Held Within draws inspiration from pioneering feminist artist Hana Wilke, who was born Arlene Hannah Butter in 1940, in New York. Wilke used the various media of photography, performance, sculpture, and video to examine and challenge prevailing notions of femininity, feminism, and sexuality. During the 1970s, she began to use her own body for performance pieces that she called her “per formalist self-portraits.” These performances, immortalized on video or in photographs, confront erotic stereotypes by calling attention to and making ironic the conventional gestures, poses, and attributes of the female body. In one well-known piece, the *S.O.S. Starification Object Series* (1974–79), Wilke posed half-naked for a series of black-and-white photo stills, adopting the accouterments and attitudes of female celebrities, but with her torso literally “scarred” with chewing gum shaped into tiny vulvas. The chewing gum interrupts the viewer’s desiring gaze, calling attention to the objectification of women's bodies. This work *S.O.S* is a work that I am very drawn towards. During the opening of this show, she passed out chewing gum and requested that the audience chew the gum and give it back to her. She placed the chewed wads of gum on her naked body in female genitalia shapes. When questioned on why she chose chewing gum, she stated that gum has a quickly fading sweetness. “I chose gum because it’s the perfect metaphor for the American Woman,” Wilke explained. “Chew her up, get what you want out of her, throw her out, and pop in a new piece.” This is how society views women.

Another artist that influenced my piece was Yoko Ono, a Japanese multimedia artist, singer, and peace activist who has been working in the contemporary art field for over 60 years. Ono collaborated with her late husband, Beatles legend *John Lennon*, including *Bed-In* (1969), a weeklong antiwar protest in their honeymoon suite, boldly communicated her commitment to social justice. Ono’s collaborations with her late husband, Beatles legend *John Lennon*,

including *Bed-In* (1969), a weeklong antiwar protest in their honeymoon suite, boldly communicated her commitment to social justice.²⁷ She is a strong artist who has many things to say. In *My Mommy is Beautiful*, Yoko Ono continues to articulate her thoughts and feelings, but this time, rather than war protests, she writes a poem to her deceased mother, which led to her viewer engagement project *My Mommy is Beautiful*. In this work, she invites the audience to participate in the active piece. She asks the audience to write their thoughts and memories about their mothers and/or other maternal figures in their lives. Each response was pinned onto the gallery wall, creating an overwhelming display of inspiring stories and thoughts. The piece celebrated how diverse motherhood is.

Taking inspiration from *S.O.S. Starification Object Series* and *My Mommy is Beautiful*, I created for my own body of work *The Power Held Within*, this work included viewer engagement. The piece is a plus-size body form that has rips and holes, and missing parts of the body. This represents how women are torn down by society, and people pick and prod us until parts are damaged and missing. As a woman who has lived through a lifetime of trauma, I thought it would be fitting to fill the void of the body back up with letters so that you can read small details through the missing and torn sections of the body. I asked my female family and friends to write me letters containing personal details of how being a woman in today's society had affected them. I asked various women in my life to contribute their thoughts. The group of women ranges from their early twenties to their late eighties. There are mothers, nurses, secretaries, psychologists, and retired farmers in the mix. The viewer engagement that I have introduced is for the audience to have the opportunity to add their thoughts and stories. I placed

27. Yoko Ono | Moma. <https://www.moma.org/artists/4410-yoko-ono>.

paper and pens out for the viewer to use and asked them to add their letter to the body sculpture.

The question the audience was asked to answer was, “In what ways have you witnessed or experienced women being treated differently than men in modern society, particularly in ways that diminish, belittle, or undermine their achievements, abilities, or identities?”

In conclusion, my artistic practice is rooted in reclaiming power through the female form, exploring themes of resilience, autonomy, and self-expression. By sculpting plus-size bodies adorned with elements such as lingerie, corsets, and sexual objects, I seek to dismantle societal expectations and celebrate the beauty and strength inherent in these female figures. These sculptures do not merely depict bodies: they command presence, drawing viewers in and demanding recognition. I use mixed media to invite audiences to confront their preconceptions about femininity, sexuality, and beauty. The combination of clay, texture, and symbolic adornments challenges restrictive narratives that often define women by their size, desirability, or conformity to idealized standards. By showcasing bodies that are unapologetically bold, scarred, and imperfect, I emphasize the courage and power that exist within women.

In connecting my work to the experiences of real women, including models from my personal life and sex workers who curate their visual presence, I highlight the agency these individuals maintain over their bodies. The choice to reveal, conceal, or express themselves on their terms is a profound form of empowerment. Just as these women reclaim control over how they are perceived, my sculptures similarly reclaim space by boldly occupying the room and reshaping the narrative of what it means to exist in a female body.

Through this work, I strive to foster empathy and connection, encouraging viewers to reflect on their assumptions about beauty, strength, and identity. By creating bodies that celebrate vulnerability, survival, and sexual autonomy, I aim to inspire conversations that challenge social norms and affirm the right of all individuals to define their narratives. Ultimately, my work is a testament to the enduring strength of women and the power of artistic expression to reclaim what society has long tried to suppress.

Reference Image List



Figure 1.
“Venus” (or Woman) of Willendorf, c. 24,000–22,000 B.C.E., limestone, 11.1 cm high



Figure 2.
Peter Paul Rubens, *Arrival (or Disembarkation) of Marie de Medici at Marseilles*, 1621-25, oil
on canvas, 394 x 295 cm



Figure 3.
Peter Paul Rubens, *The Consequences of War*, 1638-39, oil on canvas (Palatine Gallery, Palazzo Pitti, Florence)



Figure 4.
Valie Export, Tap and Touch cinema, 1968



Figure 5.

Interior Scroll, Women Here and Now, East Hampton, NY, August 29, 1975. Photos: Anthony McCall Telluride Film Festival, Telluride, CO, September 4, 1977



Figure 6.
Louise Bourgeois, in collaboration with The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia,
Pregnant Woman, 2002. Fabric, glass, and aluminum. 12.75 x 12 x 12 inches.



Figure 7.
Shelton Electric Vibrator, 1910, New York, NY



Figure 8.
 “Hen-kei Ebi-seme Go-tal” (Variations of Shrimp Torture, in Five Poses), 1954



Figure 9.
Katsushika Hokusai, woodblock print, 1814



Figure 10.

Katsushika Hokusai, *Under the Wave off Kanagawa* (*Kanagawa oki nami ura*), also known as *The Great Wave*, from the series *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* (*Fugaku sanjūrokkei*), c. 1830–32, polychrome woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 25.7 x 37.9 cm



Figure 11.
Hannah Wilke, *S.O.S. - Starification Object Series*
1974-82



Figure 12.
Yoko Ono, My Mommy is Beautiful, 2004

Body Of Work:

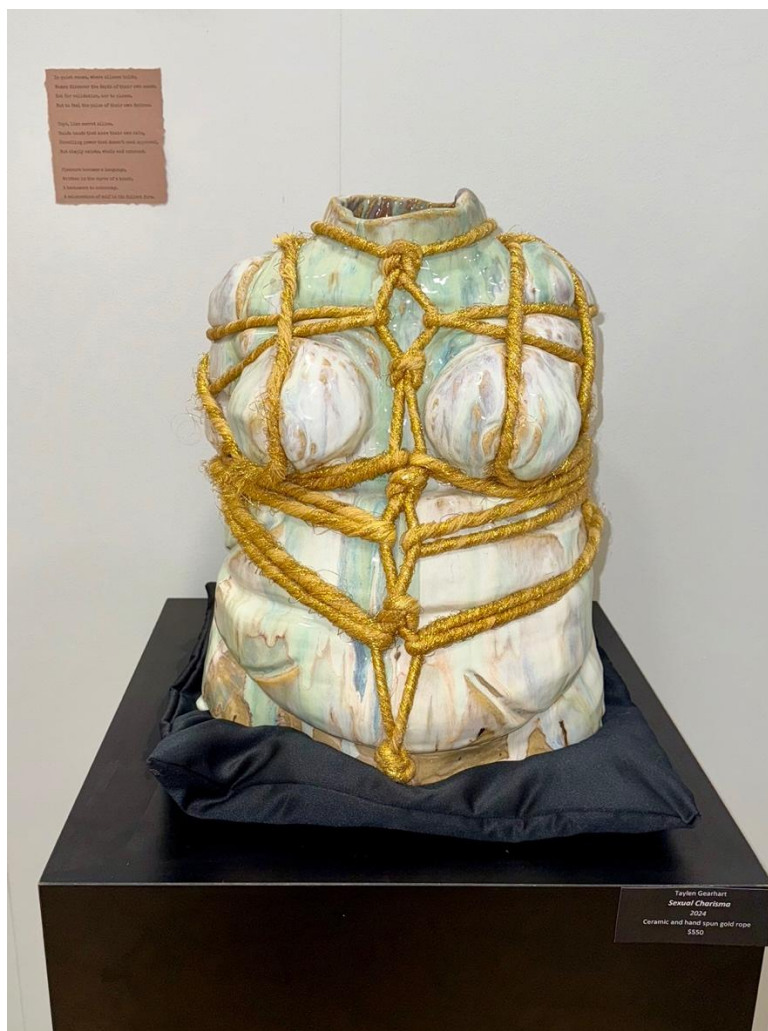


Figure 13.
 Taylen Gearhart
Sexual Charisma
 2024
 17" x 15" x 8"
 Ceramic clay with mid-range glazes and hand spun gold rope



Figure 14.
 Taylen Gearhart
Survival Against all Odds
 2024
 18" x 9" x 12"
 Ceramic clay with mid-range glazes and hand carved engobe images

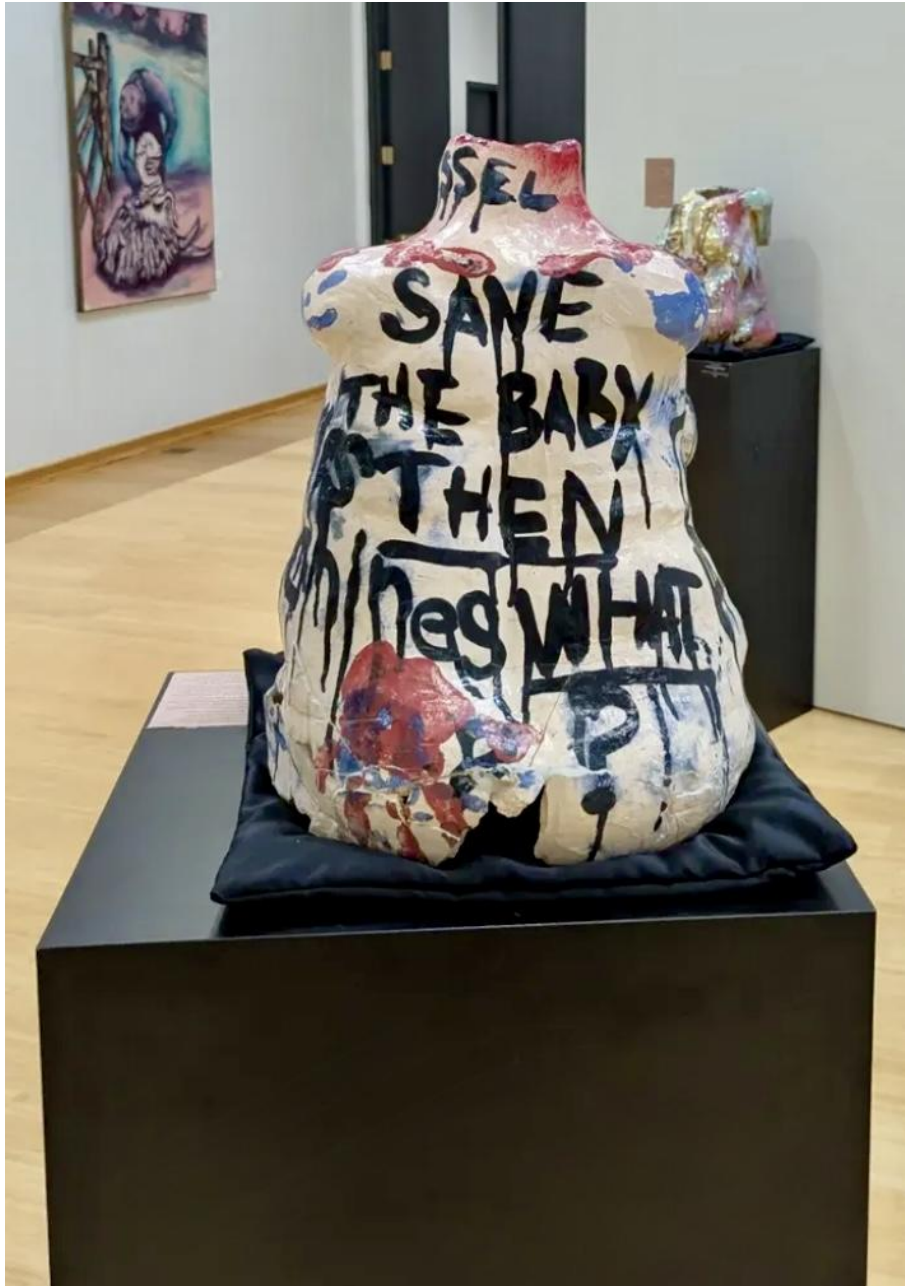


Figure 15.
 Taylen Gearhart
Together: A Riot has Begun
 2024
 22" x 17" x 19"
 Ceramic clay with cobalt oxide, various underglazes and spray paint



Figure 16.
 Taylen Gearhart
Liquid Gold
 2024
 20" x 12" x 10"
 Ceramic clay with mid-range glazes and 24k gold luster



Figure 17.
 Taylen Gearhart
Restrictive Liberation
 2024
 20"x16"x18"
 Ceramics clay with various mid-range glazes, wire, and fabric corset



Figure 18.
Taylen Gearhart
Unbound and Unapologetic
2025
22" x 12" x 20"
Ceramics clay with various mid-range glazes and fabric harness

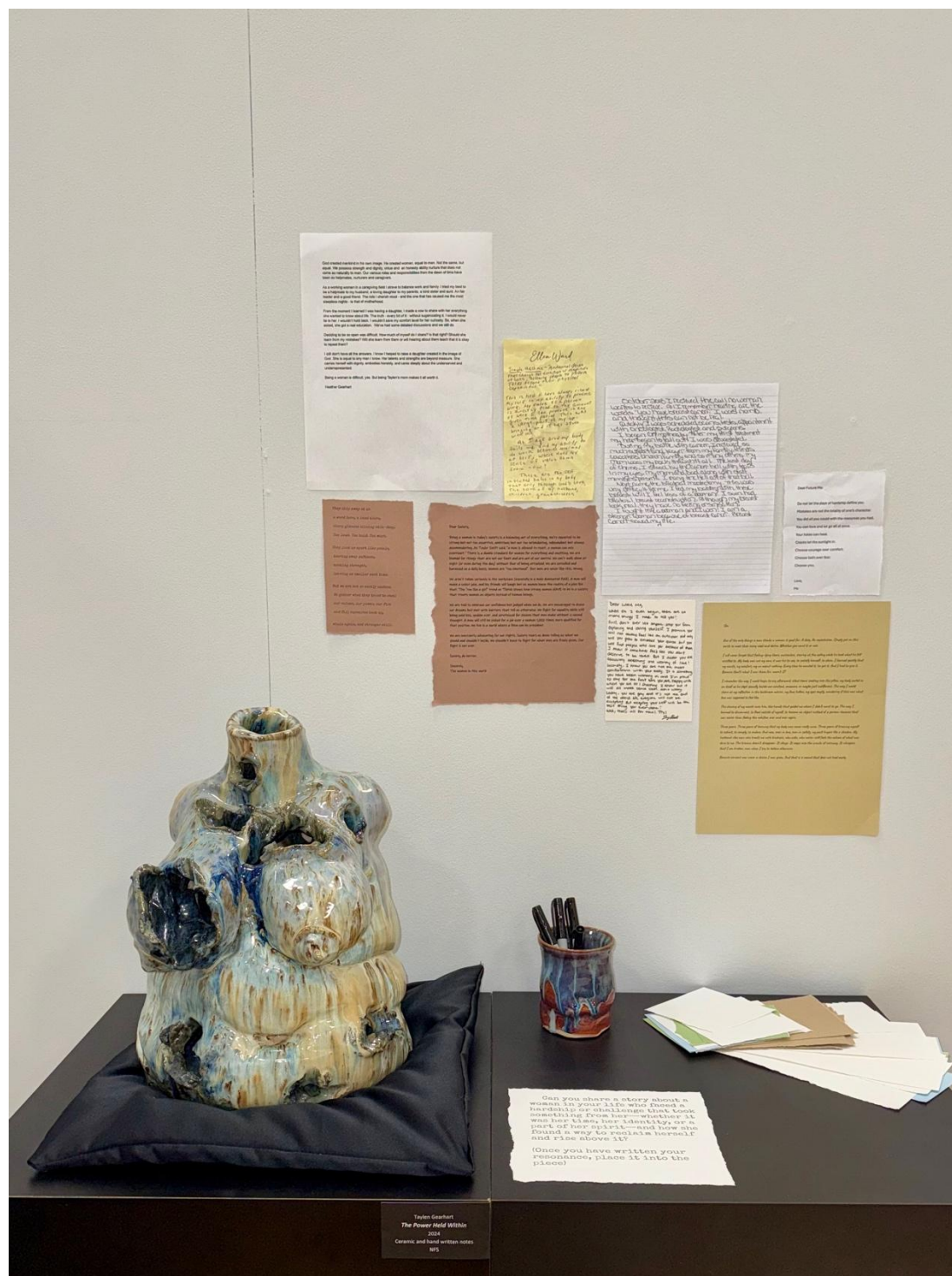


Figure 18.
Taylen Gearhart
The Power Held Within
2024
15" x 12" x 11"

Ceramic clay with various mid-range glazes and handwritten notes



Figure 19.
 Taylen Gearhart
Pulsing Boundaries
 2025
 19" x 14" x 13"
 Ceramic clay with mid-range glazes



Figure 20.
 Taylen Gearhart
Landscapes of the body
 2025
 31" x 14" x 16"
 Ceramic clay with various mid-range glazes, and fabric lingerie



Figure 21.
Taylen Gearhart
Spine of Submission
2025
60" x 6"

Ceramic clay with various mid-range glazes, rebar, and a found object base

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