

TITLE PAGE

EXPECTATIONS

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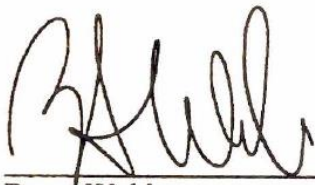
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A thesis submitted to the faculty of Radford University in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in the Department of Art

Thesis Advisor: Brent Webb

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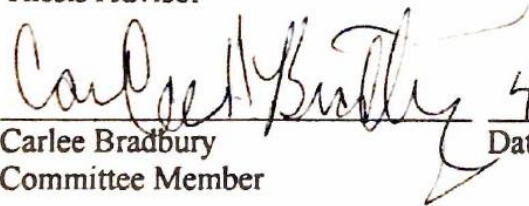
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ABSTRACT

Expectations are personal beliefs about something that may happen in the future and they have the ability to shape our opinions, behaviors, choices, and actions. My work explores this area of psychology as well as human systems of communication via the semiotics of symbolism, signs, metaphor, and storytelling. My thesis body of work challenges perceptions and manipulates expected imagery and anticipated content by juxtaposing them amongst fantastical scenes and nonsensical compositions. By maneuvering between the real and the unreal, they exist as a refusal to accept the predictable manifestations that an expectation may cause. Despite their theatrical and metaphorical nature, the multi-media and imaginative forms collaborate to expose personal, societal, and cultural truths. Through the satire and layered symbolism, they confront expectations and perceived reality as it relates to gender roles, relationships and sexuality, politics and religion, and social constructs. The works utilize visual metaphor and symbols as a means of being directional and stage setting, but not conclusive so that the viewer is invited to bring their context and adaptation to the narrative.

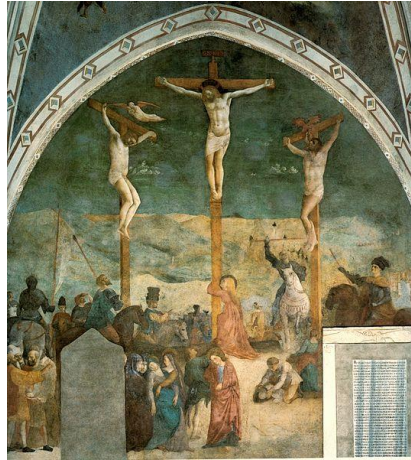
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CHAPTER 1. A WHOLE NEW WORLD

The Psychology of Expectations

Expectations have a lot of power over the human psyche. Each is a unique development of an individual's life experience that can influence his or her choices and actions based on the perceived outcomes of a future situation.¹ An example of this power is demonstrated by the placebo effect, a medical technique where positive expectations for healing determine a patient's successful treatment.² This concept of perceived outcomes is so pervasive amongst living species that even the bonobos animal possesses certain social expectations about how they should be treated and will publicly protest with acoustically distinctive vocal signals if those are violated.³ These expectations can actually lead to brain activities that physically sensitize for the anticipated experience.⁴ Everything from the way information is interpreted or remembered, to the level at which tasks are performed, to the amount of engagement in those tasks, are influenced by how the actual life experiences align with our anticipated ones.⁵ This concept affects all people, regardless of their age or intellectual ability. Children and adults alike are known for participating in forms of wishful thinking and indulging in the notion that if you believe and expect something to happen, then it will happen. John Johnson explains how human beings have a natural tendency to pin their hopes for happiness on expectations, but the problem

¹ James M. Olson, et al, "Expectancies," *Social psychology: Handbook of basic principles*, New York: Guilford Press, (1996): 211.

² Katharina Schwarz & University of Würzburg, "Psychology: The power of expectations on experience of pain," *ScienceDaily* (2016): 1.

³ Zanna Clay, et al, "Bonobos (*Pan paniscus*) vocally protest against violations of social expectations," *Journal of Comparative Psychology*, 130, no.1 (2016): 44.

⁴ Julia Anna Glombiewski and Winfried Rief. "The role of expectations in mental disorders and their treatment." *World Psychiatry* 16, 2 (2017): 210.

⁵ James M. Olson, et al "Expectancies," 211-238.

occurs when we expect something to happen without good reasons for it.⁶ Unspoken or unrealistic expectations in particular can be premeditated resentments. To demonstrate this, he quotes Fritz Perls:

*"I do my thing and you do your thing.
I am not in this world to live up to your expectations,
And you are not in this world to live up to mine.
You are you, and I am I,
and if by chance we find each other, it's beautiful.
If not, it can't be helped."*
—Fritz Perls, "Gestalt Therapy Verbatim," 1969

Fred Martin asserts that it has been the claim of science for many years now that value in science lies in order, in its predictiveness of natural events, and in its resultant ability to control those predicted events. He explains that the perception of order, which is the basis for this predictiveness, is taken as an end value. Such views are also widely held in art and how that art's composition is judged.⁷ The various perceptions of order that persist within our society and the expectations created as a result of that perceived order remain the focus of many of the individual artworks in this thesis. The works are inspired by and raise awareness of the influence of expectations, but they also reject them within the same proverbial brushstroke. The expectations inspire the initial concept of the artworks, but then the services of the communication systems that shape our collective and cultural reality are enlisted. Through the use of metaphor, stories, signs, and symbols, the pieces evolve and begin to create their own alternate reality and visual language. In other words, expectations inspire the concept and imagery within the work, but the systems of communication influence how I manipulate and arrange that subject matter.

⁶ John Johnson, "The Psychology of Expectations: Why unrealistic expectations are premeditated resentments," *Psychology Today* (2018): 1.

⁷ Fred T. Martin, "Aspects of Value in Contemporary Painting," *College Art Journal* 12, no. 4 (1953): 321, 322.

Language

Communication systems like language, visual or verbal, can reshape aspects of the world, create order on which we base predictions, and influence or dictate what we think the world is really like.⁸ Language provides a certain space where insightful interpretation becomes possible.⁹ Sean Hall explains how many of the signs we use to communicate are arbitrary in the sense that they are not immediately transparent to us and must be learned with the convention of the language in which they are embedded before they can be used.¹⁰ Some stories can transcend cultural and language boundaries because of the moral message that they may carry, yet how that message is translated into visuals can vary greatly depending on the culture. The language provides the context for which the sign can be understood, and the sign provides context on which the message can be understood. Stephen Kellert explains how when things in nature are observed, humans almost always simultaneously create a symbolic image and representation of it in their minds.¹¹ Naturally, cultural experiences and the context of the language will influence the form that symbolic images takes. As V.A. Howard put it, “there is no one way that things really look, nor any one way that the world really is; rather the world is as many ways as it can be accurately described” or in a visual artist’s case, rendered.¹² Language is a communication

⁸ Sean Hall, *This Means This, This Means That: A Users Guide to Semiotics*, London: Lawrence King Publishing, (2012): Ch.1 Pg. 1.

⁹ Faiza Zaheer and Kamal ud Din, “Différance, Erasure and Edward Albee’s The American Dream,” *Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences (Pakistan)* 26, no. 1 (2018): 24.

¹⁰ Sean Hall, *This Means This, This Means That: A Users Guide to Semiotics*, Ch. 1 Pg. 6.

¹¹ Stephen R Kellert, “Symbolism,” In *Birthright: People and Nature in the Modern World*, New Haven; London: Yale University Press, (2012): 108.

¹² V.A. Howard, “Symbolism, Art, and Education,” *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, no. 30 (1972): 8.

tool that contains multiple meanings and whose strength and complexity lies in its diversity of interpretations.¹³

Semiotics: Storytelling, Symbolism, and Metaphor

Researching what signs, symbols, and iconography exist, what meanings they hold, and what stories or cultural experiences have influenced those associations, is an integral component to my artistic process. This research enables me to anticipate the expectations that viewers might have when they see a particular image, and therefore it gives me some level of control or influence in the manipulation of that anticipated experience. So again, while expectations lay the conceptual foundation of inspiration for my pieces, the semiotics and language systems can dictate how the message is created and eventually interpreted. Hall creates an example of this using the apple, which has become a signifier for the idea of temptation. He describes how in the bible, while there is mention of fruit, there is no actual mention of an apple specifically; yet due to the “Adam and Eve” scenes being represented in art across the world as using an apple to represent sin, there is now a well-established connection in our minds between the appearance of an apple and the idea of temptation.¹⁴ In other words, an artistic choice has now created the expectation in our minds that when we see an apple being used symbolically, especially in a religious context, there is a big chance that our first guess will be that it represents temptation. This example demonstrated how an artist read a story, created a symbol to signify an idea in that story, and translated that narrative into visual form. This visual form has communicated a message so effectively that the image itself has become the adopted truth and there is little concern or knowledge that it does not distinctly align with the original story. The image created

¹³ Faiza Zaheer and Kamal ud Din, “Différance, Erasure and Edward Albee’s The American Dream,” 17.

¹⁴ Sean Hall, *This Means This, This Means That: A Users Guide to Semiotics*, Ch. 1 Pg. 5.

an alternate reality that in fact became the accepted reality. This association between image and meaning and its ability to blur the lines of truth and reality is an example of the type of connection that I seek out for inspiration and sometimes either reinforce in my work or otherwise alter by injecting my new meanings on to it.

The image of Christ on the cross by Masolino in his *Crucifixion* Fresco 1428-1430 (fig. 1) and Theodore Gericault's *The Raft of Medusa* painting 1819 (fig. 2) are both used by Hall as examples of symbolic images so ingrained in our psyche and assumed reality that many perceive them as historical representations. What is interesting about both of these paintings is that they were inspired by stories of "true" events, yet the artist had a great deal of influence over how that narrative was then perceived by others based on what they chose to include, or not include, in their visual depictions. Gericault specifically went through great lengths to gain knowledge about the true events that inspired his painting, yet there remains some mystery in his visual representation of those true events. Masolino depicted the cross in a way that was influenced by his cultural perception of the cross shape, not that which was true to the Roman cross of that time. In other words, the viewpoint from which a story is presented always influences how it is read, and the viewpoint from how it is read, influences how it is visually represented.¹⁵ Ultimately the artist has a choice to reinforce the known aspects of the story while also subtly injecting his or her own narrative as a means of creating a new reality. This interplay between that which is assumed and expected to be true and that which can be invented is utilized throughout this body of work.

Stories and the perceptions of truth created via representations of those stories are always changing. Despite these shifts, how they are changed, and in what way, can still give us reliable

¹⁵ Ibid., Ch. 8 Pg. 12.

information about the world at a particular time. For example, I may choose to use an apple in my artwork because of the traditional religious associations that will be made with them, but by juxtaposing them amongst new subject matter, I am interjecting a different narrative that is reflective of a thought, language, or issue within the contemporary society in which I exist. Hall refers to stories as the master structures that have the potential to guide and inform our beliefs, desires, thoughts, and interactions.¹⁶ The psychology of expectations, stories, symbols, and signs are all linked in this impact. While my artwork tells stories in non-linear and non-traditional ways, the essential components of a story like mystery, conflict, and turning points are still embedded in the visuals and the process. Hall explains how tension, conflict, and expectation can exist within a narrative when there is stillness somewhere in the action and when something happens with the images in a way that is not entirely resolved.¹⁷ Inspired by this concept, I realize that I can create tension in the composition of the artwork by creating images that conflict with viewers' expectations, that do not provide a conclusion, and that give them an area to rest and focus on this conflict. Furthermore, the exact moment that viewers comes across something that contrasts with their expectations and for that which they do not immediately have an obvious answer provided, I have created a turning point. Turning points create a sense of mystery and invite the viewer or "reader" to speculate possible conclusions and decipher the messages I have sent.

No matter what language is being used to communicate a message, there is always room for misinterpretation and change, so I am not concerned with whether my intended message gets translated through. Language changes and evolves over time, and so does the meaning of

¹⁶ Ibid., Ch. 8 Pg. 3.

¹⁷ Ibid., Ch. 8 Pg. 16,17.

symbols and icons.¹⁸ The ambiguity in the artwork's expression is there as a means of creating that sense of mystery that invites the viewers to wonder, to ask questions, and to finish the story with their own imagination. By intentionally using imagery that has multiple symbolic meanings, I can add depth and length to the viewers' engagement that is reminiscent of a children's Goosebumps book series. The author R.L. Stine wrote his books in non-linear ways so that when prompted, the readers of these books could actually choose amongst curated options which chapter they want to skip to. The readers' choice of where to jump to next in the narrative, therefore, impacted the ending at which they would arrive. With an icon, the degree of resemblance can be high or it can be low, so even if I intend something to be clear, there is no guarantee that the message will translate.¹⁹ This is why I prefer to reflect on the journey that viewers may take and the challenges they face to get to a conclusion instead of what specific conclusion they reach.

Kellert also points out how nature as a symbol is shaped through our imagination and culture into images and metaphors that can be seen in a variety of fairy tales, legends, and myths.²⁰ He goes on to explain how symbolizing nature is often revealed in our metaphors, our myths, and our dreams, and can be disguised in the etymological roots of words, in figures of speech, and in turns of phrase.²¹ Barbara Kruger's work *I Shop Therefore I am* 1987 (fig. 3) serves as a good example of an artist creating layered meanings within a work via speech and turns of phrase while also demonstrating a personal interjection of irony, satire, or societal commentary. As Hall described it, the viewers might first interpret the work to be making

¹⁸ Ibid., Ch. 1 Pg. 20.

¹⁹ Ibid., Ch. 1 Pg. 8.

²⁰ Stephen R Kellert, "Symbolism," 114.

²¹ Stephen R. Kellert, "Symbolism," 109.

commentary on how shopping gives us a sense of who and what we are as human beings; however, if the viewers have a previous knowledge of the phrase “I think, therefore I am,” by Rene Descartes, then they have the potential to see the deeper message fed by the artist’s sarcasm and satire.²² The depth of this piece relies on the ability for a large group of people to make a connection to a phrase and in doing so it demonstrates how powerful metaphorical phrases can be. The more context and knowledge that viewers bring to the piece, the deeper into that message they are able to get. Michael Parsons refers to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson when he tells us that metaphors map sensorimotor and perceptual experience onto emotional and cognitive experience and therefore make an enormous contribution to our understanding of ourselves and of the world.²³ Once again, a parallel is drawn between communication systems and the psychology of expectations. Examples of this methodology of using turns of phrase and wordplay to embed layers of meaning can be found in many pieces throughout this body of work. Pieces like *The Other Side of Green* and *Fishing for a Wishing* do so through the titling of the pieces, while others like *Care-full* and *Act Like a Lady* combine text and image within the composition itself.

Lakoff and Johnson say that metaphorical phrases can partially influence metaphorical concepts that structure our everyday activities.²⁴ These metaphorical orientations have a basis in our physical and cultural experiences, and our values are formed by a coherent system with the metaphorical concepts we live by. These phrases and their interpretations, however, can vary from culture to culture and mean different things to different people, so I am not concerned about

²² Sean Hall, *This Means This, This Means That: A Users Guide to Semiotics*, Ch. 1 Pg. 16,17.

²³ Michael Parsons, “Interpreting Art through Metaphors,” *International Journal of Art & Design Education* 29, no. 3 (2010): 233.

²⁴ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

whether the metaphors in my work, both visual and verbal, are translated equally across cultures and languages. My work uses metaphor as a way of presenting a familiar concept or phrase to spark a connection with viewers and jumpstart their imaginations to whatever preconceived images they may already have. In isolation, an expression may have no meaning at all, but it makes perfect sense in the context in which it is said.²⁵ My work provides that new context and a new experiential basis from which to interpret the metaphor while also challenging the preconceived ones. The interpretation of a metaphor can be an interactive experience. Michael Parson refers to the creation and interpretation of a metaphor to be a matter of creativity and explains that new meanings can be created by choosing which qualities of the secondary subject belong to the domain subject.²⁶ He believes that they are the principal way in which we elaborate meanings and they constitute a fundamental connection between body and mind in a way that is unique to each individual.²⁷ Rene Magritte claims that a painted image does not represent ideas or feelings, but feelings and ideas can represent a painted image.²⁸ This logic is considered in this body of work when thinking about how viewer response and intellectual engagement in a piece is what also dictates its meaning.

By viewing my work as a more interactive experience through engagement of the viewer's imagination, I am able to promote a more collaborative artistic experience. I enjoy the idea that I can present information in a way that promotes interactions with whatever preconceived images the viewer may already have and that each response may be unique. These

²⁵ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*.

²⁶ Michael Parsons, "Interpreting Art through Metaphors," 229.

²⁷ Ibid., 233.

²⁸ Jo Levy, et al., "René Magritte Puts the Image in Focus," In *René Magritte: Selected Writings*, edited by Rooney Kathleen and Plattner Eric, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, (2016): 1.

methodologies are what influenced the creation of my art book *Stick It In*, which invites the viewers to not only read the narrative, but to physically interject their own visuals as well. This book is created to be an “adult” sticker, coloring, fill in the blank, and drawing prompt book all in one. It contains five sheets of custom sticker sheets filled with my own drawings and illustrations. The individual pages have a custom screen-printed design that encourages the “readers” of the book to complete the pages using the stickers and any other art media they wish. In doing so, they will be creating visual metaphors and narratives as a collaboration with the artist, but applying their own meaning and context. In the end, each book will be a completely original stand-alone art book.

Visual metaphors are non-linguistic and don’t need to follow any sense of chronology. Whereas the goal in advertising is to make quick, clear, and emotional connections with the viewer, the message in conceptual or symbolic art can be more suggestive and ambiguous, with several metaphors working in unison without creating confusion. Life doesn’t always make sense, so why should the art that reflects it? Phrases, puns, and metaphors that exist within our society like “Perception is Reality” and “Expect the Unexpected” are reflected in this body of work in the way that the images are composed. J.K. Rowling wrote a line in the last book of the Harry Potter series that says, “Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean it is not real?” A simple phrase like this is of great significance to this body of work when it is considered with connection to the concepts of sign and symbol association, metaphor, and unspoken expectations. There is a world that exists inside our minds that is a reflection of the communication systems that have helped create it. This inner world absorbs these stories, phrases, or signs, and then reshapes that which it learns and perceives from them into the formulation of expectations for the outside world. These expectations serve as a

way of understanding the world, categorizing it, coping with it, and controlling our experience with it. As the artist, I observe these connections and processes within myself and others in order to set the stage for meaning associations and connections to occur within the composition of the work.

The Art: Methods to the Madness

Mixed media and collage is a tactile and tangible way of creating visual art that is reminiscent of a director's role during a performance rehearsal. I direct the physical pieces in their interaction with each other, which creates intentional clues for where the story could lead. While these "actors" are told which set to be on and in what order to appear, any improvisation on their part is embraced and sometimes used in place of the intended script. Maftai Stefan-Sebastian reveals that Dadaist "artworks" were usually conceived as all-in-one theatrical performances, where art happenings that included paintings were thrown together in tight and crowded spaces with limited distance between the spectators and the performers.²⁹ Interestingly enough, a symbol in Greek means "to throw together" and collage integrates this meaning with the nature of semiotics rather cohesively. In semiotics, one thing can be thrown together with another in such a way that a relationship is created whereby the first symbolizes the second.³⁰ Through the "throwing together" of bizarre visual combinations and the embracing of performative misdirection or spontaneity, an environment that promotes curiosity and investigation amongst the viewer is perpetuated within my work.

²⁹ Maftai Stefan-Sebastian, "Between Critique and Propaganda: The Self-Understanding of Art in the Historical Avant-Garde, The Case of Dada," *Journal for the Study of Religion & Ideologies* 9, no. 27 (2010): 222.

³⁰ Sean Hall, *This Means This, This Means That: A Users Guide to Semiotics*, Ch. 1 Pg. 10.

This thesis body of work embodies a style that both physically and conceptually fuses elements of Early Renaissance and Surrealism with Dada and Pop Art. The artistic influences are vast and varied depending on the individual artwork. Collectively, the metaphorical characteristics and duality of Hieronymus Bosch and Pieter Bruegel's work are combined with the social commentary and narrative qualities of Barbara Krueger or Nancy Spero. The imagery and content finds itself oscillating somewhere between Norman Rockwell's America and Kara Walker's depictions of American history and culture. Taryn Simon and Daisy Patton are influencing in bringing forward that which we overlook or forget as part of our collective experiences, while Ryan McGinness and Shepard Fairey inspire the drawing of symbols and appropriating imagery from everyday culture. While some pieces present their layered symbolism amongst abundance and excess, others require a physical investigation of the eye to read between the subtle semi-transparent layers.

Underlying philosophies of the Dadaists or Surrealists often work their way into influencing the media selections and compositional strategies at play. The use of distraction, shock, obscene expressions, varied linguistic refuse, and technical manipulation of material are characteristics of the Dadaist works that could be attributed to pieces within this body of work.³¹ A parallel between my work and performance art can once again be drawn as Stefan-Sebastian reflects on Dadaist Aesthetician Benjamin's commentary about the moment when the audience experiences insight about the nature of its own everyday life experiences through the art. He refers to the quote "The function of film is to train human beings in the apperceptions and reactions needed to deal with a vast apparatus whose role in their lives is expanding almost

³¹ Maftai Stefan-Sebastian, "Between Critique and Propaganda: The Self-Understanding of Art in the Historical Avant-Garde. The Case of Dada," 226, 233.

daily.”³² Martin believes that the more notable contributions of art, in their essential features, have been blood relatives of the real world and the effect of translating life experiences into the materials of art can be mysterious, and may even seem magical.³³ The concept of apperception, which is a person’s ability to make sense of an idea by assimilating it to the body of ideas he or she already possesses, is in direct connection with my artistic aims of manipulating the associations viewers makes via the images they are presented with.

The use of collage material, found elements, and symbolic imagery derived from our historical and contemporary culture is a procedure that enhances this sense of real-world connection in my work. Elleree Erdos describes the works of Ryan McGinness as a dissection of recognizable motifs that transforms them into an ambiguous visual language and entices the viewer by suggesting familiar ideograms.³⁴ A similar dissection and transformation is executed in the creation of this body of work. Additionally, blending handcrafted and highly rendered naturalistic elements with mass-produced ones, a strategy that can be found in *Independence Day* and *Then Comes an Identity Crisis*, exaggerates this oscillation between the real and unreal. Layering media that are not commonly mixed, such as watercolor and silkscreen with transparent papers and found objects, sets the stage for spontaneous forms and symbolic connections to occur.

On the concept of appropriation, Justin Clemens and Dominic Pettman described it well when they said appropriation ruptures with the tradition to make you think again about tradition. It thereby makes the relation of work to others in the tradition evident to reopen the

³² Ibid., 234.

³³ Fred T. Martin, “Aspects of Value in Contemporary Painting,” 328.

³⁴ Elleree Erdos, “Ryan McGinness: Fluorescent Body Parts,” *Art in Print* 4, no. 2 (2014): 32.

question about the very meaning, status, and limits of the tradition itself.³⁵ Pieces in this series like *Welcome to the Neighborhood*, *The American Dream*, and *Act Like a Lady* bring together traditional and contemporary physical components as a way of connecting, comparing, or making metaphorical and satirical references to the theme of the work. John Shown believes that the actual pieces of paper used in a collage should be appreciated from both historical and aesthetic points of view.³⁶ The traditional pieces in these works are selected from their vintage context because of the historical message they carry. These pieces are then relocated to a new invented contemporary world as if they were time traveling to the future. They increase the population of this new world by one, but their presence is not out of place, for there is familiarity that can be found in their new surroundings. This procedure is similar to the storytelling technique of magical realism where factual and magical events are equally perceived by characters as components of the everyday.³⁷ By controlling the magical elements, the author creates a strange but recognizable reality where the issues and themes can come to the foreground.³⁸

Surrealism is a cousin of magical realism, but it is more forthcoming in its elements of shock, horror, and the bizarre. Ironically, the works of Rene Magritte are of some influence despite his condemning of all attempts to understand his rendered objects as definite symbols.³⁹ Klaus Herding believes that Magritte's refusal to interpret himself was only to avoid the possible

³⁵ Justin Clemens and Dominic Pettman, "A Break in Transmission: Art, Appropriation and Accumulation," In *Avoiding the Subject: Media, Culture and the Object*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, (2004): 26.

³⁶ John Shown, "An Approach to Collage," *Leonardo* 8, no. 1 (1975): 55.

³⁷ Nannette Jackowski and Ricardo de Ostos, *Ambiguous Spaces: Naja & deOstos*, New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press, (2008): 40.

³⁸ Nannette Jackowski and Ricardo de Ostos, *Ambiguous Spaces: Naja & deOstos*, 41.

³⁹ Klaus Herding, "Hamburg and Rome. René Magritte and Surrealism," *The Burlington Magazine* 124, no. 952 (1982): 470.

reduction of his objective art to traditional symbols because his interest was not in changing the human condition, but creating a sense of ostensibly familiar initial state caused by the use of generally known motifs as a tool for seduction.⁴⁰ He was aware of the impact language had on image-bearing thought and sought to overcome that through the manipulation of traditional objects and ideas of space and action. His theory of symbols used for seduction and the manipulation of traditional objects are carried into this thesis body of work. The French Surrealist's interest in the subconscious and that which influences the human condition and writings like Kafka's *Metamorphosis* also inspire similar surrealist concepts of manipulating the familiar, using unexpected juxtapositions, and creating of visual metaphor. What can be considered the early beginnings of surrealism and duality in visual form are the works of Hieronymus Bosch and Pieter Brueghel. Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* 1490-1510 (fig. 4) and Pieter Brueghel's *Tower of Babel* oil painting on oak panel, c. 1563 (fig. 5), are of some of the greatest influences to this body of work and their impact will be elaborated on further as it pertains to individual pieces.

⁴⁰ Klaus Herding, "Hamburg and Rome. René Magritte and Surrealism," 471.

CHAPTER 2: ME, AGAINST THE WORLD, AGAINST ME

The psychology of expectations presents itself in different narratives throughout this body of work. This chapter elaborates on the artworks that address expectations of self, personal comparisons to others, expectations of relationship partners, the hopes or desires to achieve love and happiness, and whether reproduction or marriage plays a role in that achievement. The initial inspiration for these works were derived from personal experiences that then assimilated into the research and philosophies presented previously. Therefore, they are a good place to begin in demonstrating how these interests in psychology and semiotics along with the reflection of my personal experiences and insecurities have collectively manifested into a full body of work.

The Other Side of Green

It is difficult to consistently maintain a healthy amount of self-worth in a world where individuals gain knowledge about their abilities and opinions by comparing themselves to others.⁴¹ Despite being fully capable of making self-favoring comparisons and an awareness that the grass is not always greener on the other side, I find myself falling down the rabbit hole of seeking self-worth through social comparison regularly. The age of social media is a regularly visited source of visual inspiration for my artistic process, yet stumbling upon greatness in others is a catch 22 between motivation and unfavorable self-rating. Kaitlyn Burnell and her co-authors tell us that the social comparison theory suggests how in the absence of objective information, people have an innate drive to compare themselves to others, often in an attempt to obtain an accurate self-evaluation, and that social networking sites offer a new platform for this comparative process.⁴² Since people tend to project the image of their better selves on these platforms, there is constant exposure to highly curated perpetuations of a positive self-image that are the cause of my upward social comparisons. This comparison of one's self to those perceived

⁴¹ Jeanne Albright and Lauren Alloy, "Social Comparison by Dysphoric and Nondysphoric College Students: The Grass Isn't Always Greener," *Cognitive Therapy & Research* 17, no. 6 (1993): 486.

⁴² Kaitlyn Burnell, et al., "Passive Social Networking Site Use and Well-Being: The Mediating Roles of Social Comparison and the Fear of Missing Out," *Cyberpsychology* 13, no. 3 (2019): 2.

to be better off can elicit negative feelings such as feelings of depression, envy, or resentment, reduced feelings of belonging, and a fear of missing out.⁴³

My piece *The Other Side of Green* offers a visual play on the phrases we build around self-worth and social comparison such as “the grass is greener on the other side.” This phrase has taken on various forms throughout its history, dating back to a Latin proverb that then influenced Ovid’s “Art of love” poem that refers to another man’s harvest. Regardless of the written form it takes, the message is the same and refers to the idea that someone else’s life appears better than our own. This piece offers the sensibility of a quirky but quaint home’s interior that is by no means a perfect world, but at the same time, it feels pleasant. The walls are coated in a 1950s inspired pink in a pattern reminiscent of a traditional wallpaper motif. On a shelf resides a visual metaphor using a rock and a black cube to express the notion of feeling stuck between a rock and a hard place. The rock represents the longing to experience that which we expect brings others happiness and success, while the cube is the hard place and the truth about whether those expectations align with that reality. The wallpaper motif continues over the shelf as if consuming it and embedding it as an accessory that innately comes with this provincial lifestyle. The window offers a view of the outside world in a similar way that a social networking site viewed through a cellphone screen offers a window into the outside world. It symbolizes the experience of viewing and longing for the experience of others. The viewers, who are now a tenant of this space, are placed in a position where they must perceive and interpret the world through this window. What perceptions and expectations are they forming for the world outside the window? The handle acts as a symbol of invitation, while the glass serves as a protection against

⁴³ Kaitlyn Burnell, et al., “Passive Social Networking Site Use and Well-Being: The Mediating Roles of Social Comparison and the Fear of Missing Out,” 2.

that world. Do we want to open the window or is it better to leave it up to the imagination? Just as social media has pervasively infiltrated our everyday habits, so does this other reality beyond the window, and the air vent in the bottom left corner shows signs that the outside is, in fact, creeping in.

Everything out there seems to have an illumination about it, a fanciful and excitable nature. It is a seductive and inviting world upon first glance. The grass does appear to be greener the farther away it gets from the home. In fact, all of the colors and creatures become more vibrant, flashy, and whimsical the farther they are located from the home. Wild plants, objects, and creatures emerge from these grasslands as symbols and metaphors of what potentially lies beneath and within this vibrant landscape. The snake, for example, has been used throughout the ages as an image with a myth behind it to conjure unwanted and fearsome qualities and tap into our sense of vulnerability.⁴⁴ The plants resemble wildflowers and weeds that have a duality in our culture comprised of both negative associations and ironically positive healing qualities. In this world, the negativity commonly associated with snakes and weeds is exaggerated through the distorted monstrous nature in which they are depicted or perceived. There is something sickly, toxic, and unnatural about this alternate reality as if it was dreamt up from some Cold War Era Grimm fairy tale. Upon closer inspection, we see that the grass does get greener, but when considered amongst the other subject matter, it causes us to wonder if greener is actually better. Green is a color that assumes so many symbolic associations that vary depending on the culture. This piece utilizes dark and olive shades of green closer to the window to allude to the greed, money, and envy that set people on the path to achievement by any means. The greens then evolve in to more unnaturally bright variations of green that coat the entire landscape,

⁴⁴ Stephen R Kellert, "Symbolism," 112.

indicating an inability to escape this toxic environment. Perhaps reality is like radiation; it can be coped with in small doses and with time limits, but if we are in that environment for too long, there is no coming back from the damage that it has inflicted. Security cameras are in place as if waiting to capture a predator or watch a transformation into one. A female desperately reaches towards the unattainable and tempting symbol of happiness that pulled her into this toxic environment in the first place, but it appears as though the environment has already taken its toll. Her attempt to find herself has perhaps only led to a predatory world finding her.

Then Comes an Identity Crisis and Dirty Thirty

This idea of finding oneself in addition to the expectation of self and what will bring personal happiness, satisfaction, and success are frequent companions to my work. Being a woman in her 30s with no home ownership, children, or marriage to show for it is like existing in a mental space of constant self-doubt and defensiveness. My works *Then Comes an Identity Crisis* and *Dirty Thirty* are reflections of this stage in my personal life and the battle between what I expect of myself and what others expect of me. The pressure to “settle down,” to be married, and to want children did not start for me until I moved below the Mason-Dixon Line for a job opportunity. According to Quoc Trung Bui and Claire Miller, the age that women become mothers varies significantly by geography and education, and first-time mothers tend to be older in big cities and younger in rural areas and the South.⁴⁵ They say that young mothers are more likely to be conservative and religious, to value traditional gender roles over education and career, and tend to live in areas that view family ties as paramount. Here I was a single liberal-

⁴⁵ Quoc Trung Bui and Claire Cain Miller, “The Age That Women Have Babies: How a Gap Divides America,” *The New York Times* (Aug. 4, 2018)

minded Philadelphian transplant with two degrees, who moved there for a job by herself and had no maternal or marital instincts whatsoever. These expectations for women to want marriage and children are changing and shifting with the newer generations; however, the perceptions of social norms are still influencing individuals' beliefs and behaviors about what their partners may want. Even when married men and women value their careers and the desire for children equally, men assume their wives valued their careers less and wanted children more, while women assume their husbands valued their careers more and would want marriage and children less.⁴⁶

Despite it being 10 years later and these norms no longer being as common, the findings of recent studies regarding desire for marriage and children show that folk wisdom of women desiring marriage more than men do is still quite prevalent in American society, whereas in reality, these desires for marriage and children are actually more equal than many perceive.⁴⁷ My works *Then Comes an Identity Crisis* and *Dirty Thirty* address the phrase “first comes love, then comes marriage, then comes baby in a baby carriage” through the lens of my expectations and aspirations. *Then Comes an Identity Crisis* takes on the concept of marriage and how I would feel at the altar if I had succumbed to the expectations of others too soon. Doves have long since been used as symbols for love and peace, which can ease troubles and provide hope. The piece depicts myself as a colorful dove fleeing the altar of marriage carrying with me only the necessities to start over. The paper in the background is that of a wedding dress fabric template, creating a symbolic connection to the concept through the material alone, not the shape that it takes. Material and media selection plays an important role in the narrative depth of my work

⁴⁶ Mindy J. Erchull, et al., “Well . . . She Wants It More: Perceptions of Social Norms about Desires for Marriage and Children and Anticipated Chore Participation,” *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (June 2010): 254, 255.

⁴⁷ Mindy J. Erchull, et al., “Well . . . She Wants It More: Perceptions of Social Norms about Desires for Marriage and Children and Anticipated Chore Participation,” 258.

and the connection to mass culture. The Dadaists also related very strongly to the larger sphere and productions of mass culture and understood how the ideas projected from a familiar object or material caught the attention of the mass media and audience.⁴⁸ This connection to culture, norms, and language is also perpetuated in the piece through manipulated representations of metaphorical phrases like “tying the knot” and the symbol of an engagement ring. The materials and forms present these ideas of marriage in ambiguous and non-traditional ways while giving clues as to what my philosophy on the subject is.

Dirty Thirty takes a similar approach with the selection of found material being curated by the concept of the work; however, this piece takes it a step further as I also layered subtle written notations and highlights on them. These cheeky detail bits serve as my interjection of personal satire and sarcasm. The calendar, the clock, and the lamb all reference this ever-present reminder of my biological clock ticking away now that I am in my thirties. The work depicts a self-portrait of me in a semi-transparent graphite application as if my sense of self is fading away into the background. The face tilts down as a nurturing expression emerges on the face to gaze into what it lovingly holds in its arms. The arms are not human, and instead are the tentacles of an octopus, a symbol of creativity and flexibility, covered in an explosive array of colors from the surrounding areas. It is unclear as to whether they are rebelling from their surroundings or are simply unsure what color form to take as a defensive strategy. The arms tenderly cradle an object that, based on the expression and positioning of the figure, one would expect to be an infant, but instead is a party bowl overflowing with miscellaneous objects. The imagery in this party bowl represents activities and experiences that I prize and value over having a child at this time in my

⁴⁸ Maftai Stefan-Sebastian, “Between Critique and Propaganda: The Self-Understanding of Art in the Historical Avant-Garde. The Case of Dada,” 221.

life. Just like a bowl of Cheetos, I can't have just one. Do I consume them or do they consume me? They are what give me personal satisfaction, yet they are also what prevents me from meeting the needs and expectations of those around me. According to Johnson, it should be easy to think of examples in your own life where you have felt resentful toward people who did not live up to your expectations.⁴⁹ If I don't get married soon and produce the legacy my family is expecting, will they resent me? How much do I need validation from them to be personally happy?

Fishing for a Wishing

Psychologist William James said that possibly the deepest human need is the need to feel appreciated.⁵⁰ Gary Chapman, the writer of *The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love that Lasts*, tells us that one way to express love emotionally and to make others feel loved and appreciated is through communicating words of affirmation like verbal compliments.⁵¹ Some people require more words of affirmation than they do other love languages and will actively seek out these compliments from their partner to feel validated. The problem that often occurs is that we might expect our partner to fulfill our needs in a certain way without good reasons for that expectation and we are therefore setting ourselves up for disappointment.⁵² Our desires for compliments can sometimes turn into demands. According to Chapman, love is a choice and that is what makes it meaningful, but we cannot get love by way of demand. A request creates the

⁴⁹ John Johnson, "The Psychology of Expectations: Why unrealistic expectations are premeditated resentments," 1.

⁵⁰ Gary Chapman, *The 5 Love Languages: the Secret to Love that Lasts*, Chicago, IL: Northfield Publishing, 2010, 38.

⁵¹ Ibid., 37.

⁵² John Johnson, "The Psychology of Expectations: Why unrealistic expectations are premeditated resentments," 1.

possibility for an expression of love, whereas a demand suffocates that possibility.⁵³ My piece *Fishing for a Wishing* reflects on this concept of words of affirmation and is a play on the phrase “fishing for compliments.” It explores what happens when we demand verbal appreciation from others and the risks of seeking complimentary validation through others.

Similar to that seen in *The Other Side of Green*, this piece also has the façade of a pleasant home with pink and white striped interior wallpaper draping the surface of the canvas. The home is the place where the most intimate and private experiences and conversations with our partners take place. It is our safe space and our barrier to the outside world, where things, generally speaking, enter only because we invite them to. Just as we request others to enter our home or lives, we also request that the people in them make us feel a certain way. The fishing rod is an extension of this desire; yet as the fishing line enters the water, this request for affirmation is made in the form of a demand with the use of the words “tell me.” Chapman has explained to us that a request is the proper method to get the words of affirmation we are seeking and a demand has the potential for creating reactions that oppose that intention. In this case, the demand is a result of the starvation for love being felt by people’s expectations of what they thought they would hear from their loved ones not being met. Unfortunately, this starvation has led to desperation, and the desire to seek love in areas that they would normally not consider and explore. The line appears to be tight as if it has caught something in response to the demand, yet the piece does not make it clear as to what has been caught.

Chapman quotes Solomon, author of the ancient Hebrew Wisdom Literature, who wrote, “The tongue has the power of life and death.”⁵⁴ Inspired by this, the tongue in my work is a

⁵³ Gary Chapman, *The 5 Love Languages: the Secret to Love that Lasts*, 46.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

reference to words, and depending on how you build your value system around words, you can go down a positive or negative path. Placing this seductive demanding lure in the deep watering hole is bound to turn up a result, but will it be the result we are looking for? Below the surface of the water lie drawn, printed, or painted images and shapes that are inviting and expected to be found in this environment. However, the deeper one drops the bait in an attempt to get the bigger fish, the more likely that something unexpected comes up that can't be handled properly. At the bottom of this otherworldly underwater reality lies a dark environment where a lithographed self-portrait of an alter ego waits to be invited into the psyche. This face is the product of resentment and hate formed from unmet expectations, a lack of self-love, and a reliance on other's words to feel validated. This person is who we become when we stray too far from the home to seek the love we need instead of dealing with matters on the surface. As the LED lights alternate in color, they literally and metaphorically shed a light on the different sides of this person's character and therefore, incite different emotional responses towards them. Amongst the complimentary imagery within this underwater "otherworld," we also see monsters and predators hiding the keys to love and happiness and locking the doors behind us. Tongues slither out from a variety of places as symbols for the words we seek to follow and find value in, but a potential danger arises in that the source of the tongue is not always visible.

CHAPTER 3: EN-GENDER-ED

The following artworks of this series are related in that they approach gender roles, domestic relationships, romance, and sex from broader societal and cultural perspectives. They address topics such as the perception of women as caretakers, lady-like demeanor/behavior, the ideal man and male roles within a domestic relationship, as well as sexual expectations and female subservience.

Care-full

The work *Care-full* is a reflection of the cultural perception that women are more altruistic and natural caretakers, and therefore tend to assume that role within the home. The irony of this placement is that there is also an assumption that women who don't work are being "taken care of" and therefore we expect them to have less stress, when the opposite is actually true. Women who assume the role of a caretaker are actually of higher health risk than women who work. This is partly because they assimilate into a lifestyle where the needs of others are put in front of their own. Caring for others and relying on the success and achievements of others as a means of personal fulfillment can also cause higher levels of stress. Eric Mayor explains that stress is a huge predetermining factor in the rise of chronic health issues. Differentiated social roles are important factors in the higher morbidity observed in women because of the stress reaction they induce.⁵⁵ Mayor continues to state that generally speaking, women who work, compared to those who do not, face less physical and mental health issues. Additionally, since women are more often caregivers than men, their risk of exposure to the strain of caregiving is higher, and this impacts their health.⁵⁶

The piece *Care-full* essentially takes these assumptions and expectations about the role of a caretaker along with gender assumptions and visually reverses the roles that one might

⁵⁵ Eric Mayor, "Gender Roles and traits in stress and health," *Front Psychology* 6 (2015): 779.

⁵⁶ Eric Mayor, "Gender Roles and traits in stress and health," 779.

culturally assume. An engagement ring protrudes from the grassy lawn as if it were a large Claes Oldenburg creation. Where a diamond would normally be situated, lies a siren. This subtle swap of imagery creates a visual metaphor that lays the foundation that there is a deeper cause for concern embedded in the message of the piece. A female figure to the left at first appears to be coming in for landing; yet upon closer inspection, it is revealed that the parachute is actually a hot air balloon whisking her gleefully way. In its place is the shadow of a man assuming the role of a caretaker, desperately reaching out towards that figure in attempt to maintain the status quo of his self-identity. The image of a home is literally flipped upside down while a hand-painted figurine stands in the foreground wearing the stereotypical costume of a nurse as if playing dress up. The true nature of this role is revealed by the ink drawing of an IV unit, which is being fed to the person assuming this caregiving role and beside it the words “luxury is an oxymoron.” This piece in particular demonstrates the combination of styles and oscillation between the real and unreal mentioned in chapter one. There is also a sense of mystery and tension created in not knowing what was handcrafted and what is found. The fact that they are able to co-exist in the same frame alludes to the sense of an alternate reality that the viewers’ are now engaging with as a means of exposing personal truths about the reality in which they live.

Act Like a Lady and What a Mighty Good Man

In Mayor’s assessments of gender roles and health, he also reflects on how expectations influence behaviors. He claims that throughout life, people are taught which behaviors are desirable for men or women in society, which includes phrases like “boys don’t cry” and “girls don’t swear,” and at a later age, such expectations often translate in the approval and disapproval

of conduct.⁵⁷ My pieces *Act Like a Lady* and *What a Mighty Good Man* are inspired by the behaviors and traits created as a result of the expectations for femininity and masculinity and what our society values in men and women. According to Mayor, masculinity refers to the traditional behavioral expectations for men and femininity refers to the traditional behavioral expectations for women. As part of the research process for *Act Like a Lady*, I took an opinion poll on social media to gauge people's response to the phrase "act like a lady, think like a man" and what that phrase meant to them. In a study conducted by Juliana Horowitz and partners, it was discovered that when it comes to what society values most in women, physical attractiveness or beauty, being nurturing and empathetic, and traits like kindness or being helpful, were of the highest mentioned.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, what society values in men was discovered to be honesty and morality, professional and financial success, breadwinning, ambition, leadership or assertiveness, strength or toughness, and a good work ethic.⁵⁹ The responses of my poll along with the further research and investigation inspired much of the visuals that can be found within the fleshy and floral relief sculpture.

This wall-mounted piece takes on the appearance of a rose, crafted out of hand-painted watercolor paper, mylar, and doilies. In between the layers of pedals are an abundance of visuals that reference the concept of femininity and what it means to act like a lady while also addressing male characteristics that are often frowned upon or perceived as odd if acted on by a traditional woman. Together they create a plethora of bizarre visual combinations that draw attention to the absurdity of expecting a woman to be all of these things, yet also be capable of

⁵⁷ Ibid., 779.

⁵⁸ Juliana Horowitz, et al., "2. Americans See Different Expectations For Men And Women," *Pew Research Center: Social And Demographic Trends* (2017): 1.

⁵⁹ Juliana Horowitz, et al., "2. Americans See Different Expectations For Men And Women," 1.

hiding them per society's standards so they do not protrude the essence of being "too much." The center of the piece holds a young girl in a clown costume, juggling these expectations of sweetness, sophistication, and being of wife material that are planted at a young age. Continued references to the tradition of projecting a sweet and kind disposition continue throughout with the presence of sweet and baked treats. Satire is injected through the selection of these treats, like lollipops and popsicles, often being sexualized by male counterparts via print and advertisement media. Feathers, crossed legs, and cuss word alternatives create a sense of the delicate, demur, and mannered. Meanwhile, hands depicting acts of physical aggression and prowess, workman's uniform patches, and muscled men symbolize the male dominate traits assumed and valued in society.

My piece *What a Mighty Good Man* continues this interest in gender roles and traits, but focuses on the male assumptions in society. Horowitz refers to a recent interest in research looking at the messages boys and men get about what it means to be a man and what pressures they face. The study revealed that men feel at least some pressure to be emotionally strong, but also to be interested in sports and willing to throw a punch if provoked.⁶⁰ Victoria Browall discusses how advertisements play a role in developing these perceptions and points out the humor-based approach of depicting husbands with a lack of domestic capabilities.⁶¹ She suggests that children viewing these types of advertisements can internalize the portrayals of husband and wife and apply them in their adult lives.⁶² Additionally, Danielle DelPioire points out that expectations for men as partners can reflect women's beliefs about how likely men are to invest

⁶⁰ Ibid., 1.

⁶¹ Victoria J. Browall, "The Effect of Advertising on Gender Roles within American Marriages," *Perspectives; University of New Hampshire* (2012): 39.

⁶² Victoria J. Browall, "The Effect of Advertising on Gender Roles within American Marriages," 39.

in them as long-term romantic partners, and that low-quality paternal behavior lowers women's expectations for men as partners in adulthood.⁶³ All of these factors play a role in developing our expectations of men. There is a trend emerging in American society today towards increasingly egalitarian marriages and the existence of two income families. With this trend comes a shift in perspective and expectations of what each partner in a marriage should be willing and capable of doing. While the findings of Tamara Sells and Lawrence Ganong suggest that emerging adults perceive egalitarian relationships to be the most satisfying type of gender role relationship, the actual execution of it and what that looks like to each partner may vary.⁶⁴ Thus, *What A Mighty Good Man* visually depicts the expectations placed on men in contemporary relationships and questions if the manner of stacking unrealistic expectations too abundantly can lead to a potential collapse. It also interjects realities from my own partnership and preconceived notions of the male role in a domestic relationship.

This piece depicts an image that combines the celebratory shape of a wedding cake with a derivative of Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *Tower of Babel*. According to Joanne Morra, Bruegel's *The Tower of Babel* is understood as a "means of gathering the contradictions of their age, and a medium for exploring them."⁶⁵ There is irony in the impracticality of Bruegel's tower and the implications that has on both builders and authority figures. The contradictory confectionary and architectural layers in *What a Mighty Good Man* are stacked in a manner that also alludes to impracticality and potential collapse, yet additional elements continue to get sprinkled on; thus

⁶³ Danielle J. DelPriore, et al., "The Effects of Fathers on Daughters' Expectations for Men," *Developmental Psychology* 55, no. 7 (2019): 1534.

⁶⁴ Tamara Sells and Lawrence Ganong, "Emerging Adults' Expectations and Preferences for Gender Role Arrangements in Long-Term Heterosexual Relationships," *Sex Roles* 76, no. 3–4 (2017): 136.

⁶⁵ Joanne Morra, "Utopia Lost: Allegory, Ruins, and Pieter Bruegel's Towers of Babel," *Art History* 30, no. 2 (2007): 202.

there is a display of optimism in this construction. To further this notion of contradictions and irony, it must be pointed out that this piece sympathetically reflects on the male experience through the lens of a female. As Gouma-Peterson and Mathews point out in “The Feminist Critique of Art History,” the cultural record of our experience has been a record of male experience and maleness has become a metaphor for human existence.⁶⁶ They refer to research that indicates how women perceive reality different from men and therefore have different expectations for the human experience than men do. Innately my work may have feminist views and perspectives simply because I am female and personal experiences have influenced the ideology that intuitively comes through in my work. *What a Mighty Good Man* has not only become a platform for me to explore the institutions that have formulated my belief systems about gender, but it has enabled me to explore the contradictory qualities of gender roles and female expectations from a broader perspective.

The work frames views of masculinity through contrasting and humorous depictions of brawn versus brain and sophistication versus primitive instincts. Norman Rockwell explored the limits of masculinity in a similar manner in the public realm in the May 1916 Saturday Evening Post cover illustration *Boy with Baby Carriage* (fig. 6).⁶⁷ Thomas Buechner referred to this approach as the “forced separation of the individual from the group and the assignation of the function of one sex to the other basic human situations which involve all of us vicariously.”⁶⁸ Surrounding the foundation of the structure is a platter of sustenance acquired by male hunters and gatherers while craftsman reinforce the foundation underneath and provide acts of service.

⁶⁶ Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Mathews, “The Feminist Critique of Art History,” *The Art Bulletin* Vol 69, no. 3 (1987): 333.

⁶⁷ Eric J. Segal, “Norman Rockwell and the Fashioning of American Masculinity,” *The Art Bulletin* 78, no. 4 (1996): 633-634.

⁶⁸ Eric J. Segal, “Norman Rockwell and the Fashioning of American Masculinity,” 634.

Resting on this layer are the slender and more feminine Corinthian columns that surround the stacks of laundry, the first reference to a traditionally female household chore that is now expected to be done by men equally. Atop these columns rest men demonstrating displays of romance, offerings, and loving gestures. They stand in front of the third layer, which depicts the passing of knowledge and the planting of seeds from one generation to the next as father and caregiver. Continuing upwards there is a precarious display of glassware and detergent, which suggest commentary on the roles within the kitchen and the agreement that whoever cooks should not have to clean. Above this tier awaits the educated man who has graduated from academic institutions and whose intellectual prowess is known to the outside world. The next section shows an old-fashioned sentiment of romance with the sending of love letters, while also demonstrating an ability to communicate and articulate thoughts and feelings. Resting on this wall's romantic shoulders are the timeless sentiments of protection, order, and duty that a man in uniform or suit can provide via a successful career. Lastly, the structure is then topped with its final display of gift giving, while confetti and jimmies of many shapes and associations are sprinkled and cascading down from above. There appears to still be cause for celebration and hope, but the cracks and instability grow with each addition of a new unrealistic expectation.

Careful What You Wish For

Another issue that arises within a romantic relationship are the sexual expectations and boundaries. If these are not properly managed, it can lead to intimate partner violence, trauma, and retaliation. Intimate partner violence (IPV) is essentially a violent event or pattern of abusive

behaviors that may cause physical, sexual, or psychological harm.⁶⁹ Parveen Azam Ali and co-authors have researched intimate partner violence in Pakistani marriages. Through this they realized that interviewees described IPV as escalating from conflict between husband and wife over daily life issues and unmet expectations.⁷⁰ My piece *Careful What You Wish For* specifically explores the miscommunication and forcing of expectations in a sexual relationship and its potential consequences. Contributing to unrealistic sexual expectations are a variety of cultural influences, but pornography ranks among them as one of the leading examples. Kaitlyn Goldsmith and co-authors explain how the narrow representations of sexual performance and attractiveness in pornography, specifically visual pornography, can create sexual concerns and expectations in young men and women.⁷¹ Men specifically had higher expectations of their partner's sexual performance.⁷² This, combined with a male tendency to also socially compare sexual prowess with friends, places a woman in a sexual relationship in a position of not only living up to her partner's expectations, but society's expectations as well.

My piece *Careful What You Wish For* depicts a leg kneeling in a re-imagined garden of earthly delights. The foliage is comprised of weeds, wildflowers, and otherworldly carnivorous plants that have a familiar and seductive quality to them. Similar to that is Hieronymus Bosch's

⁶⁹ Parveen Azam Ali, et al., "Not Managing Expectations: A Grounded Theory of Intimate Partner Violence from the Perspective of Pakistani People," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 34, no. 19 (2019): 4086.

⁷⁰ Parveen Azam Ali, et al., "Not Managing Expectations: A Grounded Theory of Intimate Partner Violence From the Perspective of Pakistani People," 4086.

⁷¹ Kaitlyn Goldsmith, et al., "Pornography Consumption and Its Association with Sexual Concerns and Expectations among Young Men and Women...43rd Annual Meeting of the Canadian Sex Research Forum, Quebec City, September 22–24, 2016." *Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality* 26, no. 2 (2017): 151.

⁷² Kaitlyn Goldsmith, et al., "Pornography Consumption and Its Association with Sexual Concerns and Expectations among Young Men and Women...43rd Annual Meeting of the Canadian Sex Research Forum, Quebec City, September 22–24, 2016," 158.

Garden of Earthly Delights. The piece is brimming with symbols of sin and satire with imagery to signify lewdness, lust, and predator or prey.⁷³ Many of these plants are beautiful and alluring on first appearance, but they may have more sinister qualities within, while the pitcher plants and the Venus flytraps are less ambiguous in their carnivorous attempts. Others have a reputation for being invasive, causing their medicinal and beneficial qualities to be overlooked. Collectively, they bring a sense of duality and satire to the otherwise luscious and idyllic landscape. From predator and prey, to love and lust, to heartache and joy, the symbols of miscommunications and mixed messages within romantic relationships are dispersed abundantly throughout the garden. A predator circles and stalks a baby lamb. Imagery of men and women can be found dancing, courting, and engaging in intimate moments. Fleshy, phallic flies can be seen buzzing around the carnivorous plants as the plants patiently await their moment to strike back. The more the flies press their luck and force their presence on the plants, the greater the risk is that the plants will snap down their jaws in retaliation. This composition creates a visual metaphor for what can happen when a woman retaliates against the sexual subservience she has been expected to facilitate and the plants that extend upwards from the garden are in a sense now penis fly traps. One in particular grows from the leg, which then continues down to extend through an arbor. This transition acts as an expression of a person wanting out of the current situation, but is unable to find the method of escape. It acts as both entrance and trap, and with this, both conflict and tension are presented in the narrative.

⁷³ Stanley Meisler, "The world of Bosch," *Smithsonian* 1 (1988): 40.

CHAPTER 4: LET'S GET POLITICAL

*There are cultural, societal, and community centered expectations that continue to be addressed in this body of work. From contraceptive politics to prescription drug use norms, neighborhood etiquette to the ideal American family, our surroundings have the ability to shape our ideas of success, political beliefs, and personal values. As these issues become hot topics, whether locally or nationally, they become points on which we create stances and these personal stances then shape our behaviors or perceptions of others and ourselves. For example, my works *Placebo Platter* and *Independence Day* are each influenced by a microcosm of prescription drug access in America, but while *Placebo Platter* focuses on the intrinsic expectations of prescription drugs and treatment, *Independence Day* reflects on the societal expectations of women to ingest contraceptive drugs. My works *The American Dream* and *Norman Rockwithit* focus on what is considered “ideal” and most valued in American society overall as it pertains to success and family. *The American Dream* focuses on the generally expected path in this game of life, while *Norman Rockwithit* contemplates the perfect “normal” family and what that looks like. Furthermore, pieces like *Welcome to the Neighborhood* explore the violation of boundaries, etiquette, and expectations within a small community and plays in to the idea of what we expect of others within our own neighborhoods. Each of these pieces is influenced by personal experiences within my own society and culture in both local and national applications and are satirical expressions of these perceived events.*

Placebo Platter

My piece *Placebo Platter* was inspired by the placebo effect and its use in the treatment of mood disorders, as well as observations of prescription drug use in the self-diagnosing and self-treating of loved ones. In psychiatry, the placebo effect is utilized in the managing of expectations for treatment in patients. Katharina Schwarz explains how the mere expectation of getting a drug can alleviate symptoms and make a patient feel better in a way that can be measured physiologically.⁷⁴ Pecina and Heffernan conclude that mood is shaped by one's interpretations of reality, which includes expectations, and that placebo responses in depression treatment are examples of this.⁷⁵ A placebo treatment with drugs that, unbeknownst to the

⁷⁴ Katharina Schwarz & University of Würzburg, “Psychology: The power of expectations on experience of pain,” 1.

⁷⁵ Marta Pecina, et al., “Prefrontal expectancy and reinforcement-driven antidepressant placebo effects,” *Translational Psychiatry* 8, 222 (2018): 1.

patients, contain no actual therapeutic ingredient, can cause patient improvements in mood due to the patients' underlying belief and expectancy that the drug was going to work for them. Patients are essentially creating a new reality for themselves where they are improving based on expectancies alone. This may also explain the behavior and decision making behind those who self-diagnose and treat with prescription drugs that they purchase outside of professional medical advice. Adderall, for example, has become common practice for college students and young professionals alike to take this drug without it being prescribed in order to accomplish tasks that they otherwise perceive as unachievable. It is their perception that this drug will enable them to accomplish tasks that they otherwise could not have done because of the drug's upper and hyper focus side effects. After too much unmonitored use, this belief system becomes extremely pervasive and overrides any potential negative side effects or consequences of using the medication in this manner. Thus, my piece *Placebo Platter* reflects on this notion of blissful ignorance, the alternate realities created from drug use expectancies, and implications of a psychological dependency on medications.

Hieronymus Bosch is known for creating deceptive and illusory paradises that are seductive but unsatisfying and warn of the dangers of indulgences.⁷⁶ This piece embodies these characteristics in its use of visual metaphor. Through a mischievous cocktail of misdirection and symbolism, it reflects on the manipulation of expectation and reality within the mind of the pharmaceutical drug user. The main subject of the work is a human head resting on a baroque style serving platter that is being carried off toward what can only be assumed as a dining room table. In the mouth of the head resides a pill bottle shape with the texture and coloration of an

⁷⁶ Margaret A. Sullivan, "The Timely Art of Hieronymus Bosch: The Left Panel of The Garden of Earthly Delights," *Oud-Holland* 127, no. 4 (2014): 174.

apple that alludes to a stuffed pig's head on a plate. The first bit of irony and satire is injected in the fact that the arms carrying the platter are that of the same subject whose head resides on the plate. The expression on the face is also docile, content, and blissfully unconcerned about the figures' present state. The hair drapes lusciously over the platter while an abundance of ingestible and symbolic indulgences weave throughout the curls.

The platter continues to be showered in a celebratory sprinkling from which the source is unclear and therefore outside influence is suggested. Similar to Laurinda Dixon's description of Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*, the experience of looking at this work is somewhat akin to recognizing letters of an unfamiliar alphabet, but lacking the means to form them into words and phrases.⁷⁷ The imagery initially appears excessive and unrelated in nature, yet there is a sense of belonging and appropriateness for this mystery occasion. These mass-produced and handcrafted symbols are woven in and out of hair, flesh, and food becoming one with the figure's false sense of self. It is only in the subject's false sense of reality that these things would co-exist in such a connected way. While Bosch manipulated his grapes to indicate poison-like qualities, *Placebo Platter* shows all of its fruits and treats in their most ideal and sumptuous glory.⁷⁸ This choice in depiction is a metaphor for the paradise-like alternate reality that the patient creates, but while in their mind is caught up in this whimsical world, they are blissfully unaware of the larger threat that they are potentially heading toward a dark future.

⁷⁷ Laurinda A. Dixon, "Bosch's Garden of Delights Triptych: Remnants of a 'Fossil' Science," *Art Bulletin* 63, no. 1 (1981): 96.

⁷⁸ Peter Glum, "Divine Judgement in Bosch's Garden of Earthly Delights," *Art Bulletin* 58, no. 1 (1976): 53.

Independence Day

It is often heard that young adults and teenagers live in their own reality where they perceive themselves as invincible or less likely to experience certain traumatic events. This in itself is demonstration of an unrealistic expectation that guides thoughts and decision making. When it comes to unwanted pregnancies, the perception in our contemporary culture of “it won’t happen to me” permeates among young men in particular and is greeted with a general lack of accountability and concern. While men are aware that they should use condoms for each sexual encounter, in practice they often do not and they even resist condom use when their partners wish to use one.⁷⁹ Just under half of all pregnancies in young adults were described as unwanted or un-intended in a 2014 study published in *Archives of Sexual Behavior*.⁸⁰ Generally speaking, men were more concerned with sexually transmitted diseases than they were with pregnancy, yet many of those who were concerned about pregnancy agreed that there was an expectation for the female to be on birth control as a preventative measure.⁸¹ Charles Nzioka performed a study with adolescent boys in Kenya and discovered that girls were often blamed for unwanted pregnancies. This blame was because of the belief by males that the women are expected to know when they can get pregnant and must refuse sex if they think they could conceive or insist on condom use or just keep away from the boy. It was only in the case of rape that boys agreed that the burden of blame shifted to the boy.⁸² These studies show there is an expectation across cultures that women

⁷⁹ Kelly Davis, et al., “A Qualitative Examination of Men’s Condom Use Attitudes and Resistance: ‘It’s Just Part of the Game,’” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 43, no. 3 (2014): 637.

⁸⁰ Kelly Davis, et al., “A Qualitative Examination of Men’s Condom Use Attitudes and Resistance: ‘It’s Just Part of the Game,’” 631.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 636.

⁸² Charles Nzioka, “Perspectives of Adolescent Boys on the Risks of Unwanted Pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Infections: Kenya,” *Reproductive Health Matters* 9, no. 17 (2001): 112.

are responsible for pregnancy prevention and less blame and accountability is placed on men when unwanted pregnancies take place. To complicate this issue further, access to birth control is not universal and is often used as a political bargaining chip in male-dominated political structures.

My piece *Independence Day* is a satirical commentary of the expected responsibility placed on women to deal with pregnancy prevention. It depicts a celebration and imagines what a gift of chivalry it would be if the world shifted this blame and accountability equally to men. A watercolor bundle of foliage creates the base for this celebratory bouquet. Atop the leaves, male genitalia protrude from a “landmarks of America” record cover. A collaged woman engages in a wishful thinking prayer for all men who don’t want children to have vasectomies and save all women from future blame. A satirical firework display of ejaculations soars around the bouquet with teddy bears symbolizing the abandoned sperm that men scatter across the female landscape. This behavior is not condemned, but celebrated in our contemporary culture, all while more brick walls and political barriers are built around women’s access to birth control. The title is indicative of the independence that women would feel if they were no longer subject and victim to the male-dominated American political culture.

The American Dream

American culture has long since been interpreted through the lens of the phrase “The American Dream.” According to Bernadette Hanlon, this phrase most accurately manifests itself in the American suburb, which has evolved to become that imagined land of opportunity, the place where life is better, and even those from the humblest of origins can achieve social

eminence.⁸³ Hanlon declares that this dream took on the form of a suburban house, automobile, and private yard.⁸⁴ Chapman refers to this concept from a romantic perspective in his discussion of love languages and the conversations heard many times by couples in various counseling sessions. He describes couples who had an exciting courtship, got married, and pursued the American dream.⁸⁵ However, with all dreams, also comes the complement of nightmares. Chapman explains how in due time, couples come down off the emotional high of the in-love experience and learn they do not speak each other's love language sufficiently. Faiza Zaheer and Kamal ud Din describe this notion as "a dream which illuminated and enlightened the American people of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries but in twentieth century it has been turned into flabby and slack interpretations of decaying American thought and spirit."⁸⁶ Hanlon tells of the minority groups that were excluded from participation in the suburban dream via ethnically and racially segregated neighborhoods as well as the scary realities of upside-down mortgages.⁸⁷ Again, according to Zaheer and ud Din, the American Dream has become a cliché and lost its coherence as well as rationality.⁸⁸ This comparison of dream to nightmare is similar to that of expectation versus reality. People grow up idolizing the idea of the American Dream and formulate these perceptions of what success would look like based off that idea. What happens when expectations of success and the achievement of the stereotypical American Dream turn out to be different and less desirable than imagined?

⁸³ Bernadette Hanlon, "Once the American Dream," In *Once the American Dream: Inner-Ring Suburbs of the Metropolitan United States*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press (2010): 1.

⁸⁴ Bernadette Hanlon, "Once the American Dream," 2.

⁸⁵ Gary Chapman, *The 5 Love Languages: the Secret to Love that Lasts*, 134.

⁸⁶ Faiza Zaheer and Kamal ud Din, "Différance, Erasure and Edward Albee's The American Dream," 21.

⁸⁷ Bernadette Hanlon, "Once the American Dream," 3.

⁸⁸ Faiza Zaheer and Kamal ud Din, "Différance, Erasure and Edward Albee's The American Dream," 27.

My piece *The American Dream* is a three-dimensional depiction of the culturally accepted and valued path to success. It takes on the form of a massive “in the round” trophy with suggestive imagery to discover from all angles. The base shows the humble beginnings of childhood where learning, games, and journeys are valued. As the sculpture progresses upwards, the next stage in life is depicted within the second tier. This stage of life is about college education and career advancement. It depicts moving up the proverbial ladder and the accumulation of financial independence. The third tier idolizes the love and marriage expectation where couples commit their lives and assets to each other. The fourth tier continues this narrative and is inspired by the rhyme “first comes love, then comes marriage, then comes baby in the baby carriage.” Lastly, the top and final tier is about reflection and judgement of one’s life and achievements as the end of this path grows nearer. Were the expectations of a successful life fulfilled or are there regrets and missed opportunities? As mentioned before, with dreams come nightmares and with expectations comes reality. While each tier depicts that which is commonly experienced and desired during these phases of achievement in this “game of life,” it also shows the darker nature of this type of existence. The subtle interjection of satire and dark humor can be discovered at each level, drawing attention to the idea that things are always as they seem and that there are dangers in following society’s version of success opposed to one’s individual desires for fulfillment. The piece is intentionally executed with a sense of overabundance to draw parallels to the American desire to always want it all, take more than is needed, and believe that bigger is better. There is nothing minimal about this piece, just as there is nothing minimal about the greed, corruption, and social comparison in our society.

Norman Rockwithit

The book work *Norman Rockwithit* is a more specific detachment of the American Dream that focuses on what the “ideal” family is thought to be. Since the mid-twentieth century, there has been a perception that ideal and normal family should consist of a heterosexual mother and father with one boy and one girl for children. The father was expected to be the breadwinner while the mother the caretaker of the children. Thanks to the 1970s feminist and civil rights movements and now the twenty-first century gains in acceptance and tolerance, this perspective of what the “normal” American family looks like is shifting. The socially accepted image is in the process of being reworked and redefined. *Norman Rockwithit* uses this transitional phase as source of inspiration and a medium in which to inject the unexpected happenings that take place behind closed suburban doors. This piece is an interactive, screen printed and collaged accordion book with a book holder in the form of a staircase. The background of the pages is printed to emulate a traditional Victorian wallpaper with an oval cut out in the shape of a family portrait picture frame that would hang on a wall. When closed, the portrait cutout reveals the silhouette of a family portrait, yet the pattern of the wallpaper flows over them, camouflaging their specific identities. This illusion is intended to invite the viewers’ imagination into the “reading” of the piece and entice them to create expectations for what they might see. As the book is opened, information about each family member is revealed via the compositional placement of symbolic imagery on that page. This imagery suggests that there are less conventional characteristics of this seemingly normal family than one might have initially assumed. With the closing of the book, there is an implication that these “true” identities are still hidden from the outside world as a means of keeping up with a certain image. However, since the viewer and owner of this book

have the choice in how to display it, they have a say in whether these identities should and can be revealed.

Welcome to the Neighborhood

This idea of how one presents him or herself to others is a concept that is played in to my piece *Welcome to the Neighborhood*. Neighborhoods have become extended representations of one's status and projection to the outside world while the interactions of neighbors can range anywhere from casual waves to HOA battlegrounds. Richard Bushman and James Morris tell us in "The Rise and Fall of Civility in America" of the promoted view in the nineteenth century by writers who worried about class divisions that while one might not be able to live in the same neighborhood as an Astor or a Biddle, it was nevertheless possible through diligent effort to lay claim to an equal place in "respectable" society through gentility and manners. The social dynamics between neighbors can be a difficult experience to navigate. Bushman and Morris refer to social life as a performance in which we pay heed to appearance and people expend endless effort on manicured lawns, exotic goods, and rooms where guests can be entertained and where the good china and silver can be put on display.⁸⁹ This notion of gentility is one that conjures concern with pleasantries and appearances reminiscent of the phrase "keeping up with the Jones's." Survival in the social webs of neighborhood relations relies heavily on perceptions of neighborliness amongst the residents.⁹⁰ Amy Alkon brings up the term "reciprocal altruism" in her discussion on neighborly generosity and recommends being nice not only to be nice, but because it is in fact in your self-interest to be.⁹¹ Little gifts of cookies or Jell-O salads can make

⁸⁹ Richard L. Bushman and James A. Morris, "The Rise and Fall of Civility in America," *The Wilson Quarterly*, no. 4 (1996): 13.

⁹⁰ Amy Alkon, "Hell-Oh Neighbor!" *Psychology Today* 47, no. 3 (May 2014): 83.

⁹¹ Amy Alkon, "Hell-Oh Neighbor!," 85.

people feel welcome, while also pro-actively avoiding future battles over extended branches, fallen trash cans, construction projects, and parked cars in the cul-de-sac.

Welcome to the Neighborhood is a sculpture of a decorative Jell-O salad centerpiece. Accompanying this centerpiece is an installation comprised of a series of miniature Jell-O molds on fine serving china atop a custom-built traditional style 1950s pink console table. The centerpiece consists of large multicolored Jell-O salad cast out of resin and filled with a variety of handcrafted and found objects. Surrounding the mold are hand drawn and painted imagery alongside cutouts of vintage magazines and plastic foliage. In the center rests a piglet figurine with a browned nose riding a cork bottle atop a bed of more foliage. A pleasant mix of sprinkles, confetti, and broken glass top the upper rim of the mold. This centerpiece exudes “too much-ness” and absurdity as a reflection of the lengths some neighbors go to project a particular social image. The sculpture looks inviting, enticing, and seductive; yet no matter how much it is dressed up, it remains an inedible object covered in unnecessary and flashy accoutrement. Despite the illusion of beauty and gentility, the piece is littered with contradicting and satirical imagery that shows the true nature of what awaits past the perfectly manicured lawns. The smaller serving size molds on china that surround the centerpiece are individually inspired by real life neighborhood quarrels. On the left are the tall stemmed glasses that serve up an excess of cigarette butts, overgrown and fallen branches, and tire popping construction site screws and nails. On the right, small serving plates provide your friendly neighborhood prescription pill trades, rambunctious and loud late-night shenanigans, and broken glass bottles. Similar to the allure of a real estate brochure, each piece appears deliciously appetizing and ready for the taking. However, buyer beware, there is a risk that those who indulge in this frivolity may bite off more than they can chew.

CHAPTER 5: IT'S YOUR WORLD, I'M JUST COLLAGING IN IT

Similar to the pattern and design artists, my work is a product of the gorging on inspirations of all kinds, all at once, and throughout history, with an embracing of craft, color, and cultural content.⁹² My approach to multiple uses of media follows a trend in contemporary art to move towards more immersive and hybrid combinations of digital, symbolic, mechanical, and analogue forms.⁹³ I agree with Catherine Gander and Sarah Garland's approach to mixed media that embraces and unites the sensual and symbolic, perception and affect, which allows for a set of correspondences between verbal and visual elements.⁹⁴ This chapter elaborates on my artistic process as it pertains to media, form, and technique, and the artistic influences or methodologies behind them.

A Case for Collage

Collage refers to pasting, sticking, or gluing onto a surface and is closely associated with sharp disjunctions and peculiar juxtapositions.⁹⁵ Roger Copeland cites Max Ernst who referred to collage as “the meeting of two distant realities on a plane foreign to them both” and he talks of the excitement of the paradoxical tensions between meeting and dissecting in the un-relatedness of two objects placed side by side.⁹⁶ Lucero Jorge shares enthusiasm in the radicalness of collage being reliant on the ease of deployment of these unexpected pairings that can rivet and challenge the masses.⁹⁷ To Jorge, this use of collage gesture and collage object in a manner that causes psychological disruption and engenders new meaning is what distinguishes collage as a scholarly

⁹² Glenn Adamson, “Pattern Recognition,” *Art in America* (2019): 41-43.

⁹³ Catherine Gander and Sarah Garland, “The Idea, the Machine and the Art: Word and Image in the Twenty-first Century. Envoi,” In *Mixed Messages: American Correspondences in Visual and Verbal Practices*, Edited by Gander Catherine and Garland Sarah, Manchester: Manchester University Press, (2016): 201.

⁹⁴ Catherine Gander and Sarah Garland, “The Idea, the Machine and the Art: Word and Image in the Twenty-first Century. Envoi,” 200.

⁹⁵ Roger Copeland, “Merce Cunningham and the Aesthetic of Collage,” *TDR* (1988-) 46, no. 1 (2002): 12-13.

⁹⁶ Roger Copeland, “Merce Cunningham and the Aesthetic of Collage,” 14.

⁹⁷ Lucero Jorge, “Mere and Easy Common Threads: Collage as a New Sort of Some Thing,” In *Mere and Easy: Collage as a Critical Practice in Pedagogy*, University of Illinois Press, (2016): 6.

method.⁹⁸ These ideologies built around collage lend themselves with ease to the exploration of expectations in this body of work and my intentional use of material as a means of creating unexpected moments and conflict for the viewer. Kara Walker's work utilizes history and literature for inspiration, but executes such through inventive juxtapositions of unexpected figural elements and gestures. This co-existence of the bizarre, inventive, and seemingly unrelated enables a blurring of boundaries between worlds that incites the new language and dialogue perpetuated in my work. Sources across time and cultures are placed in the same context and a desire or curiosity to discover what links them is fostered.

The Space Between Us

Hiraku Suzuki was quoted describing his drawing practice as being a way of “excavating” things that are hidden in the here and now, which he prefers over “depicting” objects/scenery/ideas in a classical way.⁹⁹ This methodology brings together that which is drawn from the internal memory and the outside world in the same context as if fitting together a puzzle with no picture of what it should look like at the end as a guide. It uses both surroundings and remembered experiences collaboratively in the visual representation of the world and in doing so it actually creates a space that represents a more holistic and complete representation of the human experience than a classic naturalistic depiction ever could. It is a space created for both emotional and didactic consideration. Taryn Simon is also interested in spaces where definitions are continually transforming and mutating in a way that is more akin to human nature.¹⁰⁰ She

⁹⁸ Lucero Jorge, “Mere and Easy Common Threads: Collage as a New Sort of Some Thing,” 6.

⁹⁹ Hiraku Suzuki, “Drawing as Excavating,” *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 34, no. 3 (2012): 84.

¹⁰⁰ Taryn Simon and Roxana Marcoci, “Between the Image and the Word,” *Aperture*, no. 209 (2012): 42.

often uses the space between text, image, and material and creates bodies of work that explore the twists and turns of daily functioning opposed to providing the conclusions and answers.¹⁰¹ Kara Walker's work pulls from its daily surroundings and makes commentaries on race and slavery as it relates to history and her own relationship with race within our contemporary culture, but in the end, the original inspirations are but a small piece to the overall messages of the work. Her works make specific references while also allowing for subjectivity in the viewer's interpretation of the story: a story that doesn't have a clear beginning, middle, or end. As a result, viewers create their own narrative, thus implicating themselves in those conclusions.¹⁰² This methodology is in tune with the viewer engagement, mixed media use, and stylistic strategies embodied in this thesis body of work.

In Chapter 1, it was explained that no matter what language is being used to communicate a message, there is always room for misinterpretation. The meaning of words, symbols, and icons can change over time, so I am not concerned with whether my intended message gets translated through. It is in the ambiguous space in the artwork's expression that creates a sense of mystery that invites the viewers to wonder, to ask questions, and to finish the story with their own imagination. Barbara Kruger also embraces displacements and changes that are invested in questioning rather than the surety of knowledge. She does so in an attempt to possibly re-direct the flow of information and perceptions.¹⁰³ Kruger understands the power of pictures and words and their ability to morph into different contexts and meanings. They seek not to collapse that ambiguity, but to occupy it.¹⁰⁴ Nancy Spero's concept of "simultaneity" fits in to this space as

¹⁰¹ Taryn Simon and Roxana Marcoci, "Between the Image and the Word," 45.

¹⁰² Mary Chou, "Kara Walker," *Grove Art Online*, (2006): 1.

¹⁰³ W. J. T. Mitchell and Barbara Kruger, "An Interview with Barbara Kruger," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 2 (1991): 435.

¹⁰⁴ W. J. T. Mitchell and Barbara Kruger, "An Interview with Barbara Kruger," 438.

well. Spero's re-usable Sheela-na-gig symbol brings forth an image of an American Sheela that crosses time and culture because of the idea and meanings it suggests, which can continue to metamorphose as new meanings are produced to explain it.¹⁰⁵ The human desire to explain, understand, and articulate that which we see is what maintains interest in certain artworks throughout time and across cultures. As meanings and perceptions shift, art can take on new life and new contexts. By creating enough space for curiosity but with enough identifiability to ensure connection, an artwork can continue to feed mind and soul throughout the ages.

Shape Shifting

As this body of work evolved, it is evident that the works grew more three-dimensional and morphed beyond the plexi-covered picture frame. Kara Walker's experimentation in multiple modalities played a role in inspiring this evolution. Walker's 2014 installation, *A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby*, is described as a homage to the unpaid and overworked artisans who have refined our sweet tastes from the cane fields to the kitchens of the new world on the occasion of the demolition of the Domino sugar refining plant.¹⁰⁶ This was a new venture for Walker, as she had never taken on such a large three-dimensional project, yet the narrative of the piece falls nicely within her conceptual repertoire. The three-dimensionality allowed her to layer various meanings and symbolism not just within the shapes and forms, but within the material from which it was created. This concept of material connecting to form and content presented

¹⁰⁵ Josephine Withers, "Nancy Spero's American-Born "Sheela-na-gig," *Feminist Studies* 17, no. 1 (1991): 55.

¹⁰⁶ Amber Jamilla Musser, "Queering Sugar: Kara Walker's Sugar Sphinx and The Intractability Of Black Female Sexuality," *Signs: Journal Of Women In Culture & Society* 42, 1 (2016): 153.

itself significantly in my pieces *The Other Side of Green*, *Act Like a Lady*, *The American Dream*, and *Welcome to the Neighborhood*. There was a realization that using the actual material enacted a tactile familiarity with the viewer and created an increased desire for physical closeness and investigation to the piece. This combination of two-dimensional and three-dimensional elements, alongside the mix of handcrafted and found components, enhanced the physical environment within and around the pieces. Presented in this manner, it is as if the pieces are extending an invitation to the viewer to come closer or join them in this otherworldly environment. The use of multiple media, the unusual juxtapositions of styles and imagery, the cross pollinating of ideas within the same picture plane, and the familiarity of visual and verbal language cues in this body of work all collaborate in the desired achievement of these methodologies.

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APPENDIX

Melissa Schappell*Fishing for a Wishing*

Mixed Media and Assemblage: Latex Paint, Gouache, Silkscreen, Pen and Ink, Graphite

2020

60" x 30"

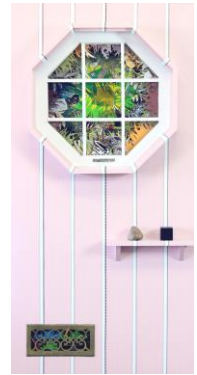
**Melissa Schappell***The Other Side of Green*

Mixed Media and Assemblage: Latex Paint, Pen and Ink, Silkscreen, Colored Pencil

2019

60" x 30"

Sold in Private Collection of Radford University Art Museum

**Melissa Schappell***What A Mighty Good Man*

Mixed Media and Collage: Watercolor, Gouache, Acrylic, Pen and Ink, Silkscreen, Graphite, Charcoal, Various Papers

2019

60" x 30"

**Melissa Schappell***The American Dream*

Mixed Media and Assemblage: Acrylic, Watercolor, Silkscreen, Pen and Ink, Wood, Found Objects, Various Papers

2019

84" x 27" x 27"



Melissa Schappell*Careful What You Wish For*

Mixed Media and Collage: Gouache, Watercolor, Pen and Ink,
Silkscreen, Various Papers

2019

35" x 27"

**Melissa Schappell***Placebo Platter*

Mixed Media and Collage: Watercolor, Acrylic, Pen and Ink, Silver Leaf,
Various Papers

2018

35" x 27"

**Melissa Schappell***Care-Full*

Mixed Media and Collage: Watercolor, Pen and Ink, Charcoal, Various Papers

2018

30" x 22"

35" x 27" framed

**Melissa Schappell***Independence Day*

Mixed Media and Collage: Watercolor, Pen and Ink, Various Papers

2018

30" x 22"

35" x 27" framed

**Melissa Schappell***Then Comes an Identity Crisis*

Mixed Media and Collage: Watercolor, Acrylic, Pen and Ink,
Various Papers

2018

22" x 30"

27" x 35" framed



Melissa Schappell*Welcome to the Neighborhood*

Mixed Media and Assemblage: Resin Cast, Found Objects, Graphite,
Gouache, Watercolor, Silkscreen

2019

7" x 16" x 19" Centerpiece

4ft x 2.5ft x 21in Table

**Melissa Schappell***Act Like a Lady*

Mixed Media and Assemblage: Watercolor, Gouache, Pen and Ink,
Silkscreen, Found Object, Various Papers

2019

33" x 33" x 12"

**Melissa Schappell***Stick It In*

Hand-Pulled Silkscreen and Pen and Ink Interactive Book, editions of 5

2019

12" x 9"

**Melissa Schappell***Norman Rockwithit*

Hand-Pulled Silkscreen and Graphite Accordion Tunnel Books, editions of 7

2019

8" x 4" x 1.5"



