

A Thesis Presented to
The Faculty of Alfred University

Reclaiming Myself

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the Requirements for
The Alfred University Honors Program

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Under the Supervision of:

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Personal is the first word I would use to describe my work. The other words I would use are brutal, dramatic, visceral, uncomfortable, and questioning. The sculptural works I created were a way for me to come to terms with my past relationships and how they were still affecting me. I noticed that even though I am no longer in those unhealthy relationships, I am still being afflicted by the past. I felt haunted, and was finding it difficult to maintain current healthy relationships. I started writing, and realized that I was still very angry and scared despite the fact that it had been years since I had last even been in contact with those people. I needed a way to no longer be haunted by these people or the events that occurred. When I was first working through these ideas, I wanted to convey the emotional impact through a physical form. This is about my body and what happened in my relationships. I was looking to create an intimate and emotional atmosphere that would prompt questions from the viewers. The body of work I made for my senior art show was meant as a way for me to get through my emotions and reclaim myself. I didn't like how I was struggling to be happy, I despised how I refused to let go. So this is my way of moving on.

The influences and inspirations that I draw from are my own life experiences. I examined previous text messages, memories of my past relationships, my own writings and poems I've read to understand myself. Coming to terms with the abuse and manipulation that I had endured over the years was difficult. It's hard to admit to yourself that all these things happened and worse yet, feeling like I had allowed these things to happen to me. I thought of myself as a victim; a casualty in their unnecessary war against me. No more would I be lost to them. I began by writing. There was a lot of anger; anger at them, anger at myself. Everything that I needed to

say I took to paper because I could not hold those heavy words anymore. These writings were my jumping off point. They helped to guide my choices in materials and processes.

The process of writing out these emotions was only the first step, and after that I was looking for materials to match. Latex, iron, glass, wax, dyes, wire, paper, and fabric were the materials that resonated the most meaning. The chosen materials had importance for what they already were and what they could portray. Each material became very symbolic in my work as metaphors for fragility, weight, and injury.

Latex acted as flesh, the flesh that I wanted to remove from myself, flesh that I was using to piece myself back together, flesh that I was retrieving. I used latex in *Relief*, where I attempted to remove the layer of skin that had been touched as if I were shedding the trauma. In my piece *Exhumed*, a heart made from latex, I explored the revolting properties of the material. Latex's uneasy resemblance to human flesh is disturbing and surreal. In *Not the Same, But That's Okay* latex twine appeared as twisted flesh holding together the waxy remains of a pair of legs. It's the material that is the most metaphorical for me because it's the flesh that I can't remove from myself.

Iron has a literal weight to the material that can change the meaning of recognizable objects. *With and Without* was a wearable corset that weighed roughly 70 pounds, a weight that was uncomfortable for me as the performer and for the audience who could see how much damage this weight was causing to my body. I made a normally lightweight clothing item into an object of immense burden.

Glass is viewed as fragile, dangerous, sharp, and with potential to harm. The project *What You Almost Took From Me*, that incorporates glass showed a scene of chaos and destruction, the

wreckage of what had been and what remained. The glass was a perfect material to replicate violence, because it was a violent act that had created all the broken pieces.

Paraffin wax is a very strange material to me. Its ghostly white color and brittleness make it seem so much older, as if it were bones left to bleach in the sun for several years. In two works; *What You Almost Took From Me* the paraffin wax served as the remainder of a candle that hadn't been snuffed out and a pair of stitched together legs. The moldable quality allowed me to shape bodily imagery in *Not the Same, But That's Okay* and the fragility of the wax added to the fragility of the body.

Dyes, wire, paper, and fabric were used as smaller details. These details helped to tie aspects of the works together or link the works to each other. The dyes were the handprints to mark my body, but also the blood that leaked from the heart. The wire that strung the glass together was the same wire that laced together the corset. The fabric was underwear that I wore every time I tore off a layer of skin. The paper was what fed the fire of the candle that hadn't been snuffed out. These materials were just as important to the overall meaning because they provided subtle information.

In addition to materials, performance is a large component of the work. The performances within the work are meaningful as my own body is involved. Inserting my body into the work is not just important because I am the maker, but because the experience I am speaking to is my own. This is my story. It was always important that it was my body that the objects were formed around, and my body that the skin was peeled from. I didn't want to cause anyone else physical discomfort, it had to be me. This story was about my experiences, and while I hoped that viewers could imagine themselves within the work, I didn't want to force anyone in that position either.

My artworks are not meant to exist without each other. They form a timeline with one another, an order of which the healing occurred. While each piece is capable of telling their own part of the story, together they show a more complete anecdote. The timeline is more imperative in understanding the meaning because it's the steps in how I reconciled with my past. The process didn't occur all at once, and each step led to the next. These works build on each other and expand on the previous ideas.

What You Almost Took From Me is the first in the timeline and healing process. This work is the portrayal of the immediate aftermath of the relationship, when I made the decision to leave the other person and was left with wreckage. There isn't always much left, and the pieces that remain are a damaging reminder as to what happened. This sculpture work was a violent creation; shards everywhere from glass orbs that shattered and a candle that had not been blown out. It was what I had not let them take from me, the last of myself that I saved. This work was meant to show the viewers how much damage another person can cause to you and that making the decision to leave can be painful but is the right choice to make. This was represented by the sharp fragments of glass that could have been harmful to the audience as they examined the piece.

The next work was a metamorphosis of the first. With *Not the Same, but That's Okay* symbolically represents the effort of taking all of the broken pieces and putting them back together. Instead of glass, this time the pieces were a soft and brittle wax who's faded white reminded me of bones. Stitched together with latex flesh, the fragments were made to resemble legs from a human body that I was reassembling. Bit by bit, I would slowly be making myself whole again.

With and Without was a larger step in the healing process and in the artwork timeline. The metal corset was representational of the walls that we build up around ourselves and how these walls are often more harmful than they are helpful. This was the examination of my own behavior and having to make the change for myself. I no longer had to protect myself like I once did because I already was taking myself back and refusing to let the ones who had hurt me continue to have control. I wore the oppressive corset that I had been laced into, and was only freed when viewers cut through the wire lacing to help me out. I had been the one to put up the walls and decided to wear the corset so it had to be my decision to ask for help.

Retrieving what was left behind was the intent behind *Exhumed*. A bloody latex heart portrayed the parts of me that I had given up during these traumatic events. I buried it away and left it behind, only now to come back to it because that was part of my healing. I had to go back and take care of myself and learn how to forgive myself. I couldn't continue to blame myself for all the manipulation and abuse that I had gone through. My body will forgive me if I take care of it, so now I have to make amends with myself. Digging up The heart represented my journey of unearthing feelings I had ignored for so long.

The strongest and final step in the process was *Relief*. Tearing away at the skin that they once violated is one of the strongest desires I have ever felt. I wanted to be free of their control over me. I didn't want to feel like I still belonged to them because their hands had touched me. The latex acted as that skin, with red handprints where their marks were left. I stripped away their touch, what was no longer theirs and reclaimed the body that is mine, mine now and mine forever. Removing the latex flesh was like removing their traces from me, erasing any ownership they once had over me.

I've noticed a trend, a mindset, where people would rather stay in their trauma instead of moving on. Part of the reason I hate this victim trend is because I lived it for so long. I was pathetic and helpless. I couldn't stand living like that anymore and I made the choice to heal. It frustrates me to see other people in this same situation and not helping themselves. They are so much better than their trauma. This is why I had to make this work.

I want to give hope to viewers who have had similar experiences. I want them to feel comforted, to question and have a desire to survive and reclaim themselves. This was for me, but also for anyone else who was struggling with these emotions and wasn't free from their past. After posting images from the performance of *Relief*, I received a message from someone who had been assaulted, and I was told that seeing the images from the performance had given them hope that they would be able to move past this trauma and that their body would be theirs again. My work was impacting other people than myself.

Creating this body of work was necessary for me. Healing from past trauma was crucial, and through the process of making art I was able to do this. Through the symbolism of the materials I had an outlet to express my emotions in a constructive way. I was building instead of destroying. I was no longer punishing, but releasing myself. This work allowed for me to self reflect and understand my own actions. Fuck being a victim. Battling through these emotions was exhausting and painful. If healing was easy I would have been okay before all this, but it isn't. It was worth every tear.

After everything that I've worked for, I also want to thank my peers, my professors, and advisors. I always felt challenged to do better and push my work further. Thank you to my peers

who gave me feedback, assisted me in the making process, iron pour crews, taught me about video recording and editing, glass blowing partners, and sand mold making. I am grateful to my professors who have taught me so much along the way, whether it's about new materials, techniques, or ways of working. And I am grateful for my advisors who have guided me through this year and helped me to find the topic that I was passionate about and the story I wanted to tell. I couldn't have done this on my own, thank you to all who have been part of this journey.

I still feel their touch, hands that gripped me too tight, lips that didn't ask permission. I hear all the voices, screaming obscenities and whispers of manipulation. Some memories replay like a movie reel on repeat, over and over again I can't make it stop. Fuck this, I'm taking back control of myself, I will never belong to them again. I'm not theirs anymore. I want to reclaim myself, by whatever means necessary. I'm not their casualty.

There's a violence in taking everything back, tearing it all down and rebuilding from the remains. The violence and uneasiness is replicated in my work. I want the materials I use, latex for flesh, iron for weight and personal walls, glass for all the broken pieces, wax for the shell of myself that I'm slowly putting back together, and my own body. The body that all these stories are about, the body that can't forget but needs to move on. The process of building up, taking apart, and putting back together again. Transformation of one material to another. I don't want this to look easy and painless. But if I want to be far away from where I am now, then this is what it's going to take.

I want to talk about how I'm still living in past trauma. With this body of work, I am reconciling through past trauma. I've held onto my pain, clinging to my damaged parts like it's all I have left. I haven't been able to shed it like a skin although I've tried. Or have I really tried? I'm still angry, scared, hurt. I tried to bury it deep down, forget it existed and when it was dredged back up like a corpse I pretended to ignore the decaying flesh, my decaying self, and ran away. I'm still allowing the past to eat away at me, and I've finally had enough. I don't want this anymore, I want to lay it all to rest.

I'm so tired of this victim trend. I'm more than the tragedies that have occurred in my life. But why do I have to focus on the hurt, why is there this refusal to move on from it? It's like I would rather stay in the same place, in the same trauma because at least it's something I can identify. Parade around and hold tightly because what am I if I move on. I've adjusted to it, comfortable in it and don't know how to relate to anyone if I'm not miserable. Fuck that. I can do better, I am better.

Reclaiming Myself: Senior Artist Show and Honors Thesis

Sarah “Luci” Busch

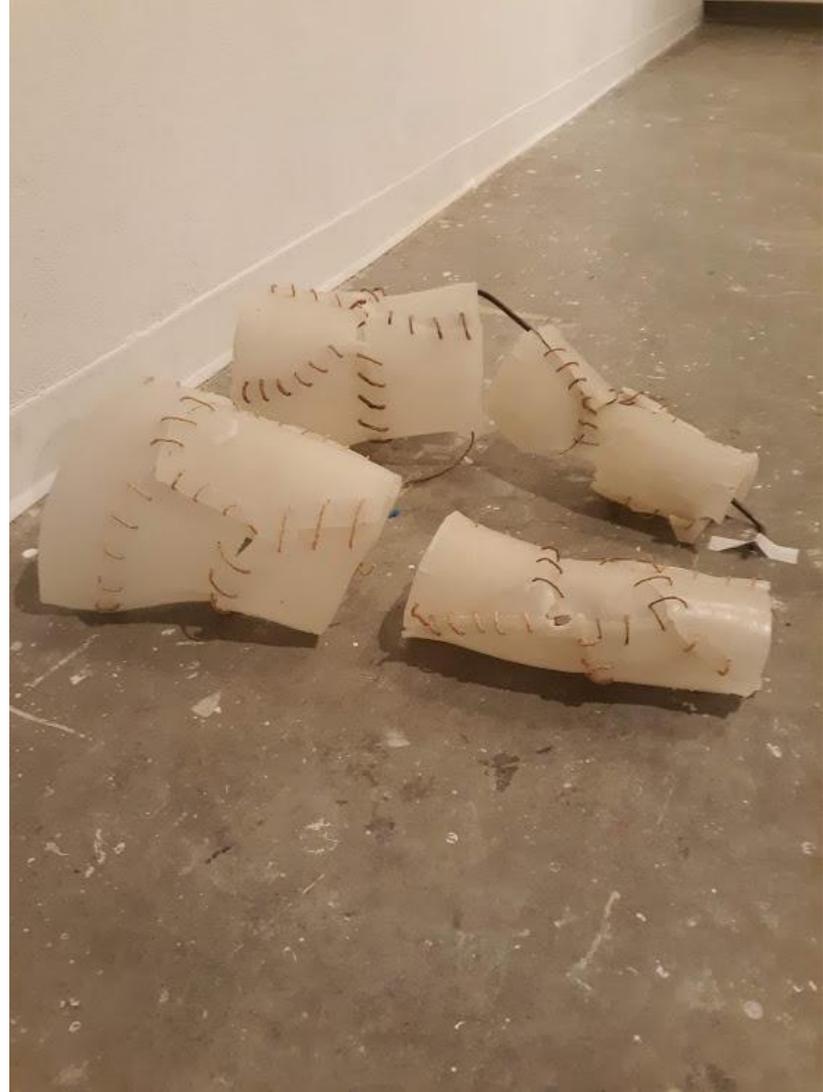




What You Almost Took From Me

Installation, blown and cold worked glass, paraffin wax, wire, paper, fire

February 2020

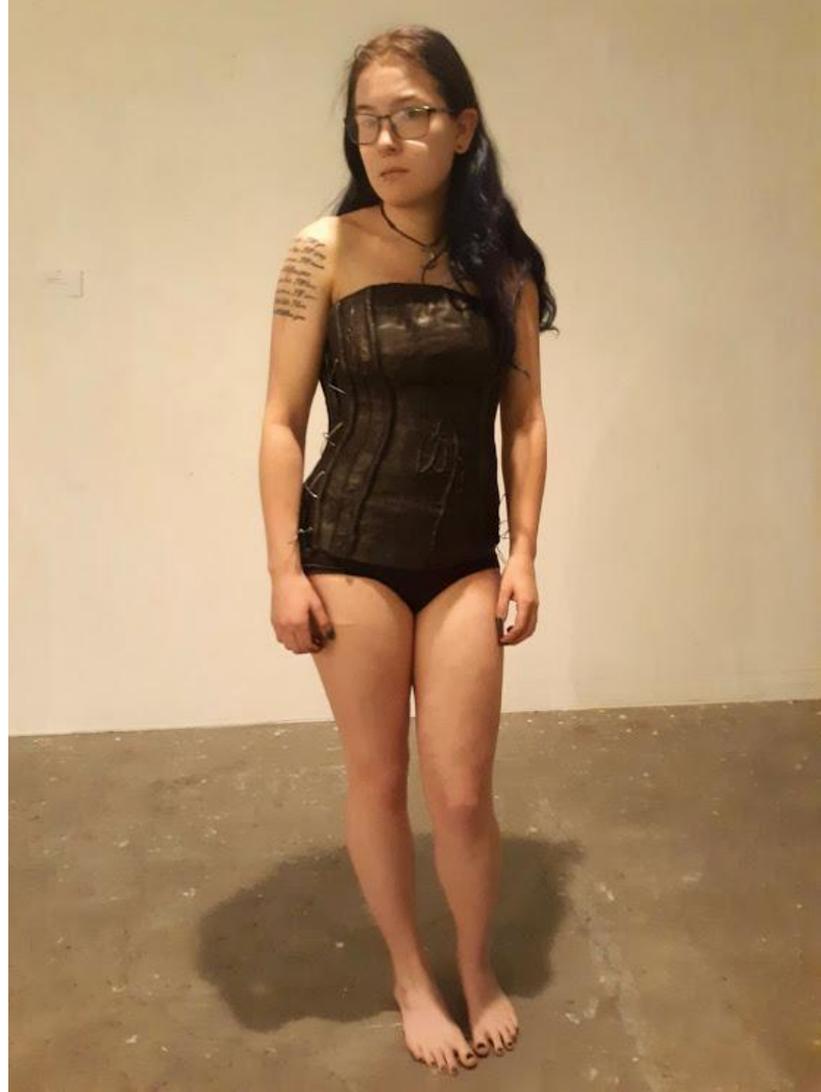


Not the Same, But That's Okay

Installation, paraffin wax, latex, dye, steel

March 2020









With and Without

Wearable performance, cast iron, wire, patina, human body

March 2020







Exhumed

Photos, cast latex, dye, human body

April 2020











Relief

Video, latex, dye, human body

November 2019

Website Images

Luci Busch is a practicing artist who works in sculpture and technical theater as a caster, carpenter and props builder. Luci Busch has a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Art & Design from Alfred University with honors and a minor in Performance Design & Technology. Her specialities include glass and metal sculpture, and soft sculpture. She has worked at Chester Theater Company and Miller Performing Arts Center.





Theater Production and Design



Sculpture Works

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Sculpture Works

Working in a variety of materials such as glass, cast iron, found objects, latex, and the body to create three dimensional sculptures, installation, and performance.

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“With and Without” March 2020

cast iron, metal wire, patina, human body

Sometimes the things we build to protect us are more harmful than they are good. We think we're protecting ourselves by building these hard exteriors, we parade them around, so proud of how hardened we are and this armor we've built around ourselves when in reality it's breaking us down. It's weighing on us so heavily that we can't breathe, we can't exist the way we should. We're exhausting ourselves with this ridiculous protection that actually isn't protecting us. I don't want to be weighed down, I don't want this. I've created it, but now I have to learn to get rid of it. No good is coming from this, I'm not in any less pain. This isn't making me feel any better unless you count the paranoia that's masquerading as successful healing. Not everyone is going to hurt you, there isn't a need for this heavy weight that is keeping you from enjoying time with other people. Healing takes time, I'm still learning how to heal from the past and understand that everyone isn't looking to break me down at every chance they get. I understand that ironically building up this so called protection against everyone else actually makes the wounds inflicted much worse because I can't care for myself properly. I'm learning to get myself out of this mess I've created, because that's the only way things are going to get better.



“Not the Same, But That’s Okay” February 2020

paraffin wax, latex, dye, steel

You get to a point where there's nothing left to do but pick up the pieces, your pieces. You have a choice to stay in the mess that they left you in, but why should you. Why take the chance of losing parts of yourself? Even if I'm just a shell I'll put myself back together, piece by fucking piece because I refuse to stay in the broken chaos.



“Relief” November 2019

latex, dye, fabric, human body

Earlier works

My beginning sculpture work focused a lot more on experimentation, seeing what I could do and working in a variety of scales and materials. Metal working was new to me at this point but I was instantly drawn to it, the process and final form quickly had grabbed my attention. I also was discovering that installations were important to my work, and I continued to explore this in creating site specific installations.





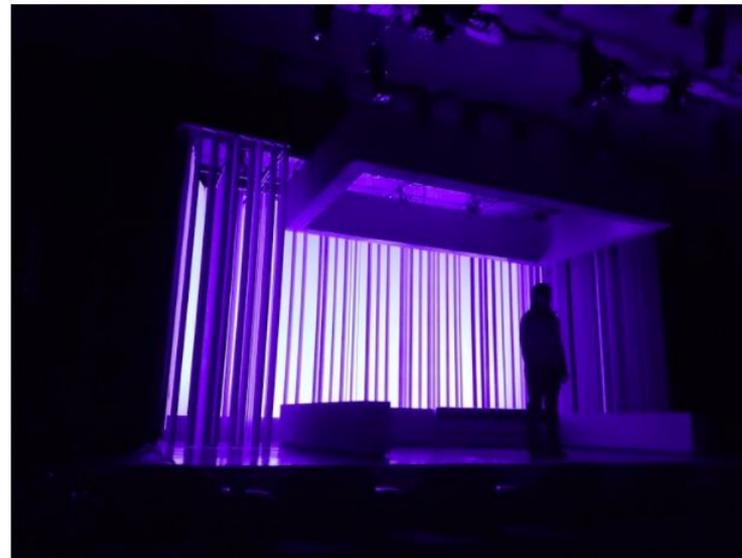
Theater Production & Design

Dance Costume Design, Stage Carpentry, Props Builder

Chester Theatre Company

Scenic Carpenter, Scenic Painter, Stage Hand, and Props Artisan





On The Exhale

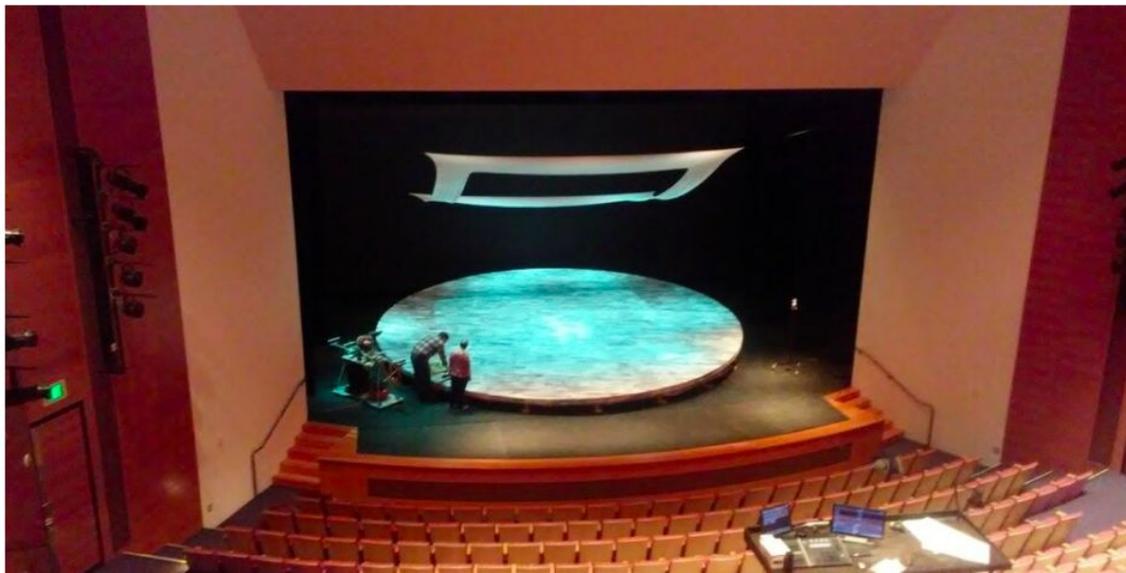
Directed by Colette Roberts

Alfred University Miller Performing Arts Center

Scene Shop Technician: Scenic Carpenter, Scenic Painter, Props Artisan, Asst. Stage Manager, Asst.

Technical Director, Lightboard Operator, and Stage Hand

Dance Theater: Costume Designer, Costume Asst. Manager





The Tempest

Directed by Becky Prophet

Asst. Technical Director was one of the biggest roles I've ever served within theater. This was where I learned how to lead a team, how to communicate effectively and all while running the scene shop while my supervisor was away at a conference. I worked on both the construction build as well as props. The show went up, and it to see it all happen from beginning to end was worth all the hard work.



AU Dance Theater: An Evening of Dance

Guest and student choreographers

I'm not a dancer, but I was still able to be in the dance world as the Asst. Costume Manager and a Costume Designer for two choreographers. I worked closely with the guest choreographer and a student choreographer to design and adjust costumes for the dance show. Communication was my biggest skill during this process, as I had to be in constant communication with our Costume Shop Manager, the other designers, choreographers, dancers, and stage management team. I learned how to best stay organized for this kind of performance, and how to relay information effectively to everyone.