

Master of Fine Arts Thesis

Embodying Simultaneity  
Presenting the Body as a Whole

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## **Abstract**

This paper serves as a dissection of my work and studio practice, discussing process, materials, concepts, ideas, and significance.

My sculptural practice embodies personal psychological and physical experiences, bridging the connections between the interior and exterior body, public and private space, and vulnerability. The essences of events and moments, emotions and physical responses are materialized through clay, relying on memory and intuition.

The simultaneity of internal and external exposures of the body is presented as a whole. Body is all-encompassing, referring to both the physical and mental attributes of the individual. Abstraction allows elements of the physical and mental body to coexist visually. Emotional turmoil is rooted in dualities, contradictions, conflicting ideas, and anxiety—caught in a state of ambivalence, represented through ambiguous expression in abstracted sculptures, residing within the grotesque.

Working in the realm of body, flesh and blood is a way of claiming power and humanizing one's own body. Material choices, aesthetics, ambivalence and its significance align within feminist ideologies and lay within the canon of contemporary artists.

keywords: anxiety, ambivalence, ambiguous, abstract, emotional turmoil, internal and external body, deterioration, death, life, beautiful, grotesque, female artist

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Trauma alley is an eerie place with awful smells, visuals, textures and sounds. All are present in a somewhat sterile environment contrary to the ill, wounded and distressed who fill the place. It is a narrow hallway lined with six large trauma rooms, each side of the room identical to one another, equipped to help two patients at a time. On a bad night, three patients will be squeezed into one room — not ideal but necessary. Patients share rooms, each with their own urgent needs. Traumas happen simultaneously, often requiring me to jump from one scenario to another, adjusting to each individual situation. This is a place in constant movement. A sense of urgency, yet still a calmness pervades within a continuously changing environment. A clean and sterile room is quickly destroyed. The floor is littered with dropped supplies, wrappers, dirty gloves and gowns. Blood spatter is spread onto the surrounding carts and by the shoes of medical staff.

I made sure the equipment was working and sterile. I was ready to assist in a trauma code when needed. It was an important job done in the shadows of the critical life-saving actions, like a stagehand behind the curtain of a play ready for sporadic set changes and climactic scenes. In this position, I saw bodies in extreme distress and trauma. Some bodies were prepped and cared for in order to start the healing process, and others abruptly lifeless. I didn't love the job, but I stayed, not realizing the impact it would continue to have in the studio years later. I often relate my emotional responses to visual memories of working in the emergency room. This experience directly informs my imagery of the body and structures used within the work. It bridges the connections between the interior and exterior body, public and private space, and vulnerability.

Contextualizing this imagery results in the work being categorized as grotesque, a complex genre common to many contemporary female artists.

My sculptural practice embodies personal psychological and physical experiences. I aim to capture the essences of events and moments, emotions and physical responses through materials. Practicing art is a function of my search for understanding and meaning while grappling with the events and consequences within my own existence. My thoughts are often chaotic, perhaps due to my anxious nature, leading to attempts of creating order. What is created in the studio is understood to be extensions of myself, depictions of my reality. The simultaneity of internal and external exposures of the body is presented as a whole, becoming a truer representation of self-portrait or autobiography. The term “body” is all-encompassing, referring to both the physical and mental attributes of the individual. The mind is internal, and includes thoughts, emotions, experiences, memory, and trauma. The physical body is skin, flesh, and bones, both interior and exterior. The mind, however, is not visibly accessible, but is as real as the tangible body. Both are entirely connected. This interest in the internal and external is also present on a level of public and private. The external (public) aspects of our bodies are visible to the outside world, concealing and hiding what is happening beneath the outer surface (private). In the work, both simultaneously coexist. The pain I cannot see is the most haunting, impactful and intriguing. What would this look like visually?

A constant combination of making and stepping back to analyze is a therapeutic engagement, creating a space which is vulnerable, allowing for self-reflection and

understanding. This vulnerability makes the studio an outlet for release from exhaustion, anxiety and tension. Privacy allows the walls of my public personality to fall and myself to be exposed. To really be able to let go and create moments of self-reflection, I need to be honest and unguarded. I cannot always plan what I will make because as this may cause the approach to lose some of its crucial honesty.

The search for order and understanding is achieved through the rendering of the materials. Above all else, the making process is most important. Exploring and experimenting with materials (clay & mixed media) results in a collection of decisions, thoughts, and steps taken to create work, often leading to self-reflection and gaining understanding. I am hopeful that the material and process will reveal something unexpected. These are the most exciting moments, the moments in which an answer is provided. It is a feeling of “right”. Even if I’m not sure why, I trust there is a reason. Sometimes the reason may be “right” aesthetically or may be “right” because it evokes an emotional and/or physical response within myself.

Using different approaches, I work on multiple pieces simultaneously. Constantly switching things up or changing the order through which work materializes gives me a sense of freshness or newness. I often begin two-dimensionally, creating multiple mixed media drawings, and working quickly in order to avoid overthinking. I continue until there is a plentiful selection of exciting images. These seed small clay maquettes that are closely modeled from the drawing. The rapid manner in which the drawings are made results in many gestural marks, abstracted forms, textures, and sometimes challenging

compositions that are reimagined into clay and mixed media. Transforming a drawing in-the-round generates new challenges and possibilities. Sometimes a drawing will serve as a starting point for several different iterations of models and sculptures, each transforming into something of its own.

These drawings live on the studio walls or in piles nearby, readily accessible for repeated reference and alteration. They are the beginning of discoveries. It is not always true that I fully understand what the work is about, but it will evoke a response within myself that may reveal its meaning at a later time. This meaning may also change as my experience changes my perspectives. Returning to old drawings, I sometimes understand them in new ways, and continue to generate new ideas and works.



Untitled  
Mixed media drawing  
2018



Untitled, small model  
Glazed ceramic and iron slag  
2019



Untitled, work in progress  
Raw clay and steel structure  
2020

When beginning with a drawing and/or models, it is not uncommon to create 2-3 works at a time, thus by the third or fourth work, the sculpture is far removed from the starting point, evolving and emerging from immediate reactions to materials. This often leads to the second method of working: immediately starting with clay, relying on memory and intuition, during which I recall personal experiences and emotions, both past and present. I look at research material without keeping direct references, but rather work from memory of imagery allowing the work to evolve more freely and abstractly. Attention is paid to what is happening with the clay and my response to it, rather than referencing an established sketches or models. There is negotiation between who has the authority, the maker or the material. Once I have a feel for what is becoming, more conscious choices are made. Suggestive areas and representation create an entry point for the viewer, providing connection to something familiar, followed by questioning the ambiguous abstraction.

Abstraction mainly comes into play when working in the realm of the body, allowing elements of the physical and mental body to coexist visually. The work is largely abstracted to different degrees. On a scale, the work flows between ambiguous expressive abstraction, gestural markings, and obscured forms, to areas that become more suggestive of something recognizable, to even more meticulously rendered areas of representation.

In my sculpture, there are moments gripped together and confined, revealing tension and stress with other areas that are unraveled and falling apart. It may appear to be heavy; yet elevated by structures. It may be stagnant in its position, but reflect movement in its



composition, forms, and surface. Some key words and ideas thread through my sculptures: tension, stress, anxiety, heaviness, internal and external body, collapse, resilient, death (grief and loss), beautiful and lively, deterioration, chaos, visceral and grotesque.

*Internal Portrait* and *Internal Mirror* are two works that reflect the exploration of exposing inner reality from two different approaches. *Internal Portrait* is an abstraction of emotional stress and anxieties, reimagining the physical tension felt throughout the body. It begins with a wheel-thrown base in the form of a generalized classical portrait bust, with a deteriorating form emerging upward. The twisting movement pulls the form away from the bone and square-bar structures, exposing its inner support system. It is fighting itself, breaking through the visible cages of social and political confinement, fragments of



*Internal Portrait*, 2019  
Glazed ceramics, concrete, glass frit, metal  
3 x 2 x 2 ft.

weathered metal fencing piercing through its sides, hanging on only with tension. The top portion is glaze-fired in colors similar to my skin tone. Concrete is layered upon the surface and inside the form, relating to the emotional weight of anxiety and stress. The bust base is fired with a pink crystalline glaze. The color was chosen for its stereotypical association with women and the baggage of social expectations based on gender. Sharp, pink glass crystal frit matching the crystalline glaze is adhered to the surface creating a beautiful but dangerous transition into the concrete and ceramic forms. The seductive beauty of the crystalline glaze is overpowered by the grotesque.

*Internal Mirror* is rendered more tightly, and is representative of disease-forming, irregular growth in the body, highlighting the physical effects of excessive stress and anxiety. It is exaggerated and blown up significantly in scale, creating imagery that may appear to be fruitful and vine-like, when in fact it represents tumors and vascular systems. The work is confined in an oval composition, hung on a wall at a similar height of a mirror. It serves as a reflection or a portal into the inner body.



*Internal Mirror*, 2019  
Glazed ceramics  
3ft. x 2ft. x 6in.

Working in the emergency room, orthopedic supplies were the most fascinating equipment to handle. Some of it closely resembled tools and hardware used within the studio, but these tools are inserted into the body or used to support the body in specific positions in order to heal properly. The concept of combining the organic body with fabricated structure in preparation for healing is complex and visually intriguing. I apply combinations of mechanical, geometrical, and organic forms in similar ways. Ceramic bone-bars or metal square stock tubing could be understood as externally constructed scaffolding or an internal structure. Both provide support. The source of support, however, varies. Interior structure could be understood as skeletal or an abstraction of one's inner strength to prevail over hardship. Resilience can literally be understood as mental and emotional structure. Despite the turmoil, something is holding the work up.

Featuring structures in the work serves many purposes. In addition to referencing medical equipment assisting distressed bodies in the ER, and serving as literal support for the abstracted elements, structures become metaphorical representations. Not all human-made structures serve us well. Questions about social, political, and personal structures arise in relation to the impact or role they play on the body. Social constructs categorize and establish expectations which are harmful and impact one's life. *Girls, Girls, Girls* fashion magazine publisher, Claire Rothstein, released a fashion film in which actor Cynthia Nixon recites a poem by Camille Rainville titled "Be a Lady They Said".<sup>1</sup> This poem addresses the ridiculous standards projected onto women. How do we both function within and rebel against these pre-conceived social norms?

In "Welcome to the Age of Ambivalent Feminism", Elissa Strauss discusses conflicts, contradictions, and confusing feelings about how feminists fit into the movement.<sup>2</sup>

Identifying as a feminist female artist myself, conflicting feelings and personal experiences with sexism, misogyny, and ignorance affect the work, not visually or as accessible to the viewer, but through metaphor and choice of materials. Femininity and masculinity are both social constructs with attributes generally associated with specific genders and also apply to materials and the arts. Concrete, steel, and wood are historically associated with men and male artists. My abilities have been questioned when purchasing and working with these materials by male store workers, customers and

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<sup>1</sup> Camille Rainville. "Be a Lady They Said". See poem in Appendix

<sup>2</sup> Elissa Strauss. "Welcome to the Age of Ambivalent Feminism." *The Week* - All you need to know about everything that matters. *The Week*. Adam Dub (United States edition), August 20, 2014. <https://theweek.com/articles/444436/welcome-age-ambivalent-feminism>.

colleagues. Using these materials, including welding and constructing the work myself, is empowering, embracing what is not expected of me as female, defining for myself what is feminine. This influences my decisions to weld steel structures, a strong, durable material with the ability to hold up a heavy mass, a weight filled with tension, anxiety, and ambivalence. The steel structure will not bend or break, embodying my stubborn and rebellious nature.

My sculptures are often vertically positioned. Beyond the deterioration, collapse or heaviness a sculpture may depict, there is a sense of standing up, standing tall; it is very much alive while depicting struggle, emotional turmoil, anxieties, and ambivalence.

Between the verticality and the supporting structure, the work has a sense of resistance or the ability to prevail. While the work may be grotesque, this resistance is beautiful and optimistic. There is hopefulness, strength, perseverance, and agency. Pushing clay around, giving the work the impression of my body in motion, my hands clawing away, pushing fists deep into the material, or shaping by squeezing with my full body, leaves a residue of life — my life — proof of existence — that must not be taken for granted.

Structures are featured prominently in vertically composed sculptures. In small to medium works, they are often made from clay, allowing manipulation of my hands to be more visible. Transitions occur from square extruded clay bar forms into an organic language, resembling bones. In other cases, a rigid metal structure is welded leaving the ends of the hollow tubes exposed. Later, ceramic components and mixed media are attached to create a seamless transition from metal to ceramics. Transitioning materials

that make it difficult to decipher from one material to another brings great joy and challenge into the studio. Like the structure which could have multiple meanings or represent different ideas, other materials do the same, each offering something different. Seamless transitions unify a piece as one experience, still allowing each material to be seen, but not separate from the whole. In other instances, the structure is not transitioned at all. This occurs in larger works purposely to create a stark contrast between the organic and geometric.

Pursuing large scale sculptures began as a building strategy, a tool to employ risk, challenges, and improvisation, engaging my body throughout the process more drastically than previously.

Large1 (untitled – work in progress) was the first large clay sculpture built at 8' tall with a 4 ½' x 4' footprint. It is composed of six separate forms that stack and interlock, supported by a metal structure that is elevating the sculpture off the ground and supporting it internally.



Untitled (Large1)  
work in progress  
Raw clay and steel structure  
2020

Each section was built from a chicken wire constructed volume covered by clay slabs with cheesecloth embedded. More clay was sculpted on top, overlapping the sections, creating a unified piece. A combination of coil building, additive, and subtractive techniques were used. Gestural marks were left as evidence of my hands clawing away at the material. Grog, sand, concrete, wood shavings, fabric and slips were wedged, thrown, placed, rubbed, brushed, pushed, punched, and poured on the surface, adding various raw textures.

Much of this process was continuously

asking questions and being playful in hopes of discovering possibilities.



Detail, Untitled (Large1),  
work in progress  
Raw clay and steel structure  
2020

Referencing an older drawing for Large 1, I focused on key elements to translate into a 3-dimensional form. These included an upward diagonal structure supporting a heavy mass elevated off the ground, but also grounded to the floor beneath. In the drawing, this mass is suggestive of figurative form — evidence of body was translated in the sculpture. It was unclear what goals or other intentions of this work went beyond the key elements — working from a place of uncertainty but fully entrusting the making process. Questions continually arose. Doubt about permanency repeatedly ran through my mind — is firing

the work necessary? On the other hand, what if it were glazed fired? What could color do? A final decision was made to fire the sculpture. It is worth seeing through the possibilities, especially being the first of its size.

As I built Large1, within a 10' x 10' space of the studio, the work became dominating. An unavoidable presence was created, provoking the viewer to navigate the limited space between the work and the walls. This presence felt like something I was searching for, unknowingly. The idea of public and private space reentered my mind. How could I capture the essence of this feeling experienced within a small studio in an open public space such as a gallery? How do I create private space within public space? With many open-ended questions, I chose to create Large2 (untitled – work in progress). Maybe these pieces could be in close proximity, allowing only enough space to tightly walk between and be caught within the heavy masses. How will the space between these sculptures change if their distance is increased? Will the space still have tension? What other structures could be employed in an open space that alludes to private space?

Unfortunately, the most recent work has come to a halt. Facing a pandemic has called for extreme measures of social distancing, forcing the loss of access to personal studio space and ceramic facilities. In the meantime, I have created a small-scale gallery and sculpture models to potentially find solutions to these questions about installation and space<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix



Although not completed, Large1 is the most recent work in which I fully trusted that the process and materials would reveal some understanding at a later time. Stepping away and revisiting the unfired sculpture weeks later, the heavy mass of raw clay, concrete, sand, and gravel embedded in the surface, the aggressive markings and tedious tangling of coils all began to reveal meaning. I was grappling with death, living with the heavy weight of grief.

Death is weird. It is sudden. In a moment, someone is gone forever. A grave is strange. Dirt piled upon a cadaver, grass laying on top and a stone labeling someone's new forever home. Once in a while decorated with flowers in a plastic vase. It is a placeholder for the no-longer existing.

I make correlations with death in forms of mass and weight, earthy colors, and textures and materials. Combinations of abstracted emotional deterioration, decay, sorrow and grief are paired with my anxieties through meticulous rendering, for example, making a hundred tiny hydrangea flowers seen in the *Leaving* which memorializes a lost loved one. I can embed concrete, rocks, dirt, and earthy pigments into the clay, recalling the dirt-covered patch of his resting place. These external sights and experiences now reside within my memory. Clay allows me to reconstruct conflicting thoughts about death and grateful memories into a tangible object that also exposes my grief and pain. They coexist within and therefore are translated into a visual form. The process allows me to quickly work through different iterations of similar ideas hoping to cope and find acceptance.



*Leaving*, is a portrait of Death. This began with a wheel-thrown generalized portrait bust form that was cut in half and elongated, giving this work a horizontal composition. The base is the decay of the body and the return to the earth. Soft smooth folds like skin, disease-forming lumps, vascular veins, dirt, gravel, and concrete wrap around the form. It is all adorned with bushes of hydrangea flowers. A colorful form emerges, reaching with gestures of hand marks pulling the clay upward, suggesting a soul leaving only to exist in memories.



*Leaving* (work in progress)  
Raw clay  
2020



Detail, *Leaving* (work in progress)  
Raw clay  
2020

It is not my goal for the work to specifically discuss my personal reflection or connection to a piece, but to exude the essence of emotional turmoil. My work conveys many levels of meaning and conflict that can be difficult to express cohesively; but to avoid discussing its complexity is to undermine its significance. Dualism, contradictions, and uncertain feelings drive the work, attempting to understand life, realities, and personal experiences. This emotional turmoil is often caught in a state of ambivalence, represented through ambiguous expression, residing within the grotesque.

Ambivalence relates to having opposing feelings throughout my work; how I understand it, and myself, in different ways. Because answers are not black and white, it leads to moments of uncertainty which result in anxious feelings. Ambivalence is a shared anxiety throughout women's history, seen through the work and lives of artists and within the current feminist movement. It is also a common relationship between female artists and working within the grotesque. Courtney Lee Weida examines the role of ambivalence for contemporary female ceramists:

By definition, the concept of ambivalence characterizes the nuances, contradictions, tensions, and dualisms associated with women's works and women's lives. It applies to shifts and fluctuations in beliefs and actions: where one is torn between opposite, yet coexisting desires.<sup>4</sup>

Weida interviews many artists and determines ambivalence to be a reoccurring thread. She discusses the resulting tension between the "self and other, femininity and masculinity, and appearance and reality in relation to their lives and work".<sup>5</sup> Similar tensions are constant within my studio.

There is a negative connotation to ambivalence due to its association with uncertainty, but I view this as a positive. As a female artist living with anxieties and tensions rooted in this uncertainty, the ability to feel, adapt, accept and understand different perspectives is

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<sup>4</sup> Weida, Courtney Lee. *Artistic Ambivalence in Clay : Portraits of Pottery, Ceramics, and Gender*. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2011. Accessed April 19, 2020. ProQuest Ebook Central. Page 13.

<sup>5</sup> Weida, 183.

progressive. This concept is seen in our current feminist movement. In “Welcome to the Age of Ambivalent Feminism”, Elissa Strauss emphasizes this point:

The success of feminism is seen through the ambivalence and freedom feminists feel to openly talk about conflicting feelings...The beauty of this ambivalent feminism is that it's in no way a disavowal of the struggle for equality. . . ambivalent feminism isn't a sign of resistance so much as reflection of what happens when real women try to live political and social ideals.<sup>6</sup>

Embracing ambivalence is what drives the urge to seek order and understanding of these different perspectives that all simultaneously exist within the self. Ambivalence has become part of my identity and is embraced in the studio. Uncertainty and conflicting thoughts, emotions, feministic ideologies, personal experiences, life and death, physicality and psyche, all influence the making process and material choices, resulting in ambiguous sculptures that fall into the aesthetic category of the grotesque.

Ambivalence is related to the grotesque because of the common attribute of “simultaneity”.<sup>7</sup> While ambivalence involves opposing or contradicting feelings existing simultaneously, grotesque aesthetics similarly involve contrasting ideas presented together. Mircea-Ioan Lupu, author of *Grotesque as Aesthetic Identity: From Medieval Illumination to Contemporary Art*, describes the aesthetic as “giving way to the irrational to assume reality, transcribing the need of simultaneous and irrational perceptions of mundane reality”.<sup>8</sup> Grotesque has many complex characteristics, the simplest definition

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<sup>6</sup> Elissa Strauss. “Welcome to the Age of Ambivalent Feminism.”

<sup>7</sup> Mircea-Ioan Lupu. “Grotesque as Aesthetic Identity: From Medieval Illumination to Contemporary Art.” EIRP Proceedings 8, no. 1 (May 1, 2013), 270.  
<https://doaj.org/article/70588de749654cac9b9aacfab35dc0bb>.

<sup>8</sup> Lupu, 264

being “reflecting realities, contrary to the sublime, in fantastic, bizarre, monstrous shapes” or, “comical, repulsively ugly or distorted”.<sup>9</sup> Beginning the making process rooted in the rational, present, measurable reality, intuition often takes over, constantly moving back and forth from certainty to uncertainty. Describing her philosophy, Berlinde De Bruyckere, a female artist working within the grotesque, said “it is not because you never see a head [in my work] that it looks like it has been cut off, rather, that I think the head is no longer necessary. The figure as a whole is a mental state”.<sup>10</sup> The grotesque becomes the abstraction of my mental state and process, depicting the internal and external simultaneously to create a whole.

Grotesque is commonly associated with the body and is “inherently associated with the feminine”.<sup>11</sup> Working in the realm of body, flesh and blood is a way of claiming power and humanizing one’s own body. It challenges how the female body is viewed and has historically been depicted or described. Tess Thackara, author of *Why Contemporary Women Artists Are Obsessed with the Grotesque* describes the motivation as “hunger to explore and break down the boundaries of human experience, however anxious or unsettling—to deconstruct and reinvent the body”.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Tess Thackara. “Why Contemporary Women Artists Are Obsessed with the Grotesque.” Artsy, January 18, 2019. <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-contemporary-women-artists-obsessed-grotesque>.

<sup>10</sup> Hauser & Wirth. “Berlinde De Bruyckere.” Artists <http://www.hauserwirth.com/artists/2782-berlinde-de-bruyckere>.

<sup>11</sup> Thackara.

<sup>12</sup> Thackara

Artists I often admire fall into this aesthetic category, namely De Bruyckere, Eva Hesse, Louise Bourgeois, Doreen Garner, Jala Wahid, and male artist, Francis Bacon.

De Bruyckere's grotesque aesthetic results from similar abstractions of the body to those previously described within my sculptures. Universal themes in her works are often centered around dichotomies, such as: "love and suffering, danger and protection, life and death and the human need for understanding".<sup>13</sup> An optimistic view of life is present; even as the body is shown decaying or falling apart, still there is beauty. Life is beautiful and hopeful even when there is struggle, death, anxiety, and pain. "I want to show how helpless a body can be", De Bruyckere has said, "which is nothing you have to be afraid of – it can be something beautiful".<sup>14</sup> Finding beauty in this imagery reflects the common sentiment of the ambivalent feminist. Work results from difficult experiences, but there is acknowledgement of universal positive qualities of both the physical and emotional self.

While the grotesque may be characterized by the "bizarre", "monstrous", and "distorted" nature of visual references, I find that this inherent optimism of depicting the body with moments of beauty in its vulnerability is the most important effect of the aesthetic.

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<sup>13</sup> Hauser & Wirth. "Berlinde De Bruyckere."

<sup>14</sup> Hauser & Wirth. "Berlinde De Bruyckere."

Including structures and trauma evoking memories of the ER poses the question: what is optimistic about a place where people go with severe, life-changing injuries and illnesses, and often to die? The answer lies in the role of the supporting structures to heal the body, and in the case of death, in the solace loved ones find in consoling each other, appreciating the lives of those who have been lost, and the universal hope of overcoming the inevitable. When I do get the opportunity to return to the studio, the events that have pulled me away will present more problems, unexpected solutions, and struggles with new tensions and dualities. Whatever the result, the constant is body — vulnerable, uncertain, unpredictable, surrounded by ambiguity, but remaining ever upright, beautiful, and optimistic.

## Technical Statement

### Clay body:

For the size and scale of my ceramic sculpture I use a sculptural clay body that allows me to work quickly, roughly, and easily as I build, with a lot of fiber for drying strength and little cracking. I chose to use Matt Wedel's paper clay recipe, adding extra toilet paper, grog and nylon fibers. This clay body is plastic and easy to work with as well as very strong while in the green state which allows for easy transportations to kilns. Different toilet paper brands may break down better in longer fibers, but I have had great success with cheap brands bought in bulk. Sometimes I will wheel-throw parts for a large sculpture. This clay does not throw well, but can be thrown in small amounts if needed, although it is rough on the hands due to the amount of grog. I fired in a range from cone 06 to cone 6. This clay body will go to cone 10.

### Recipe:

#### Large-Sculpture Paper Clay (Matt Wedel) ^04-10

Hawthorn Bond-30  
Neph Sye-20  
Om4-10  
EPK-5  
Bentonite-2  
Talc-2

#### Add:

20 Mesh Grog-25  
35 Mesh Grog-25  
Nylon Fibers - small hand full for every 100lb batch

#### Add:

5-6 Rolls of toilet paper pulp per batch. Paper is blunged well in water to keep fibers loose and separate. Add pulp water to batch of dry mixed materials.

### Building and Transporting Methods:

Work is built in a few different ways. If starting a sculpture from the ground up and build without an armature, I begin building on furniture carts for easy transport from my studio to the kiln. On the cart I will layer sand, a wooden board, sand, drywall, sand and new paper in that order, to begin building on top. The sand and newspaper make sure the clay does not stick to the drywall and allows the work to shrink without cracking at the base.

Sculpture
newsspaper
Sand
sheetrock
sand
Wooden board
sand
furniture cart

The work is kept on the drywall even when fired, avoiding moving the work as much as possible. The sand acts as ball bearings making it easy to slide into the kiln, the drywall that will burn away during firing. The sand between the drywall and wooden board makes it easier to push the work onto shelves in the kiln.

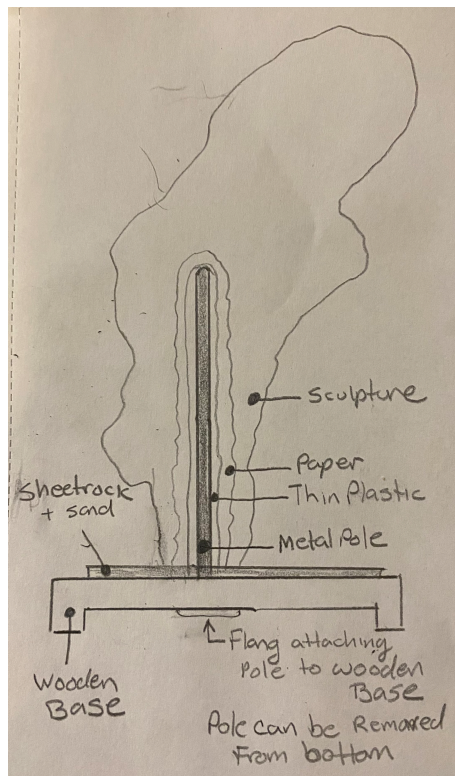
If the furniture structure is a pallet with wheels, it can be rolled to the kiln, then easily lifted by using the Presto Lift, raising the sculpture to the level of the kiln shelves, and with sand layered between, it can then be pushed from the sheetrock, sliding directly onto the shelf. The kiln shelf is also covered with sand to allow the work to slide in smoothly. If the work spans more than more shelf, wadding is coiled and pressed in the crack where two shelves meet to prevent sand falling into the bricks below the shelve. For smaller works, building on top of a wooden board is helpful to transfer work on to a pump cart and into the kiln. Because this is not as direct as using the Presto, the wooden board supplies durability under the sculpture. In some cases, if work is fragile, a thick piece of



foam is placed under this wooden board to absorb the vibrations of passing over uneven, cracked or bumpy hallways, helping to prevent cracks or damage to green work.

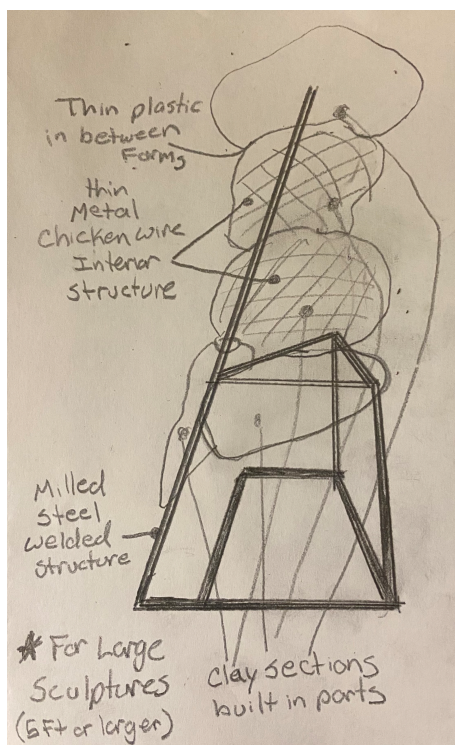
For other works, more often than not, it can be much trickier as I often use metal armatures or build some kind of supportive contraption within the studio that requires more than just wheeling and sliding work around and into kilns. Transporting work isn't always as simple as the above descriptions, and problems must be considered and worked out before beginning the building process. Poor planning in the beginning may create more complications later. When using metal armatures, it is important to account for clay shrinkage. For small works, built vertically, I use a wooden board with feet and a whole

in the middle large enough to slide a 1 inch metal pole that is attached to a flange, drilled in the bottom of the board. A loose layer of plastic is wrapped around the metal structure, which allows the pole to easily slide out and remove work from the armature. If it too risky to lift work above the pole to remove it, the wooden base is spanned across two level tables so I can remove the flange and pole by the bottom of the work. Several layers of paper are bunched up over the plastic creating a larger gap between pole and clay that allows the work to shrink inwards without causing big cracks.



I often begin sculptures by using clay slabs. These slabs are layered with a thin piece of loose-net cheesecloth and are used to begin sculpting over the layered paper armature. The cheesecloth in the middle of the clay slabs provides extra durability in the making and drying process. If cracks do occur, the cheesecloth netting will hold sections together. After removing the form from the armature, I can go back and repair cracks if needed. The paper clay body is easily repaired. This has work with small, medium and large works.

For large scale sculptures, the work is often built in smaller sections that are more manageable to handle such as removing it from an armature, transporting, and assembling after firing. If the work is large and has its own frame constructed, the structure is no



longer just for support, but rather is integrated into the design of the work. Each clay section begins but creating a form from chicken wire to create a base form to build on top of and provides interior support while working. The chicken wire remains inside the work even through firing. However, it become very brittle and provides no support when fired, this work best for low fired works. Clay may collapse or warp in higher temperatures. Thin plastic sheets are placed between each section making sure it will separate later.

**Firing:** Large car kilns are best suited for the large-scale work. A car kiln also makes it easier to use the Presto lift if needed or slide work in from a pump-cart. Depending on the piece, sometimes it is best to have help from a few people to lift the work directly onto a kiln shelf. Often the work is loaded into the kiln when it is leather hard, this is when it is at its strongest, helping transport work more safely. The kiln will sit at about 200 degrees F for at least 24-32 hours before firing it up. If I know the work is going to be glazed I will bisque to cone 06 and glaze fire in a range from cone 04 to cone 06. Usually I like to cold finish my sculptures and work mixed media onto the surfaces. If this is the case, I will glaze fire to cone 04 at the hottest, leaving some areas bare; this lower fire leaves the clay porous, which is better for painting, adding concrete, or epoxying other materials onto the surface.

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## Appendix

### *Be A Lady They Said*

By Camille Rainville

Be a lady they said. Your skirt is too short. Your shirt is too low. Your pants are too tight. Don't show so much skin. Don't show your thighs. Don't show your breasts. Don't show your midriff. Don't show your cleavage. Don't show your underwear. Don't show your shoulders. Cover up. Leave something to the imagination. Dress modestly. Don't be a temptress. Men can't control themselves. Men have needs. You look frumpy. Loosen up. Show some skin. Look sexy. Look hot. Don't be so provocative. You're asking for it. Wear black. Wear heels. You're too dressed up. You're too dressed down. Don't wear those sweatpants; you look like you've let yourself go.

Be a lady they said. Don't be too fat. Don't be too thin. Don't be too large. Don't be too small. Eat up. Slim down. Stop eating so much. Don't eat too fast. Order a salad. Don't eat carbs. Skip dessert. You need to lose weight. Fit into that dress. Go on a diet. Watch what you eat. Eat celery. Chew gum. Drink lots of water. You have to fit into those jeans. God, you look like a skeleton. Why don't you just eat? You look emaciated. You look sick. Eat a burger. Men like women with some meat on their bones. Be small. Be light. Be little. Be petite. Be feminine. Be a size zero. Be a double zero. Be nothing. Be less than nothing.

Be a lady they said. Remove your body hair. Shave your legs. Shave your armpits. Shave your bikini line. Wax your face. Wax your arms. Wax your eyebrows. Get rid of your

mustache. Bleach this. Bleach that. Lighten your skin. Tan your skin. Eradicate your scars. Cover your stretch marks. Tighten your abs. Plump your lips. Botox your wrinkles. Lift your face. Tuck your tummy. Thin your thighs. Tone your calves. Perk up your boobs. Look natural. Be yourself. Be genuine. Be confident. You're trying too hard. You look overdone. Men don't like girls who try too hard.

Be a lady they said. Wear makeup. Prime your face. Conceal your blemishes. Contour your nose. Highlight your cheekbones. Line your lids. Fill in your brows. Lengthen your lashes. Color your lips. Powder, blush, bronze, highlight. Your hair is too short. Your hair is too long. Your ends are split. Highlight your hair. Your roots are showing. Dye your hair. Not blue, that looks unnatural. You're going grey. You look so old. Look young. Look youthful. Look ageless. Don't get old. Women don't get old. Old is ugly. Men don't like ugly.

Be a lady they said. Save yourself. Be pure. Be virginal. Don't talk about sex. Don't flirt. Don't be a skank. Don't be a whore. Don't sleep around. Don't lose your dignity. Don't have sex with too many men. Don't give yourself away. Men don't like sluts. Don't be a prude. Don't be so up tight. Have a little fun. Smile more. Pleasure men. Be experienced. Be sexual. Be innocent. Be dirty. Be virginal. Be sexy. Be the cool girl. Don't be like the other girls.

Be a lady they said. Don't talk too loud. Don't talk too much. Don't take up space. Don't sit like that. Don't stand like that. Don't be intimidating. Why are you so miserable? Don't be a bitch. Don't be so bossy. Don't be assertive. Don't overact. Don't be so emotional. Don't cry. Don't yell. Don't swear. Be passive. Be obedient. Endure the pain.

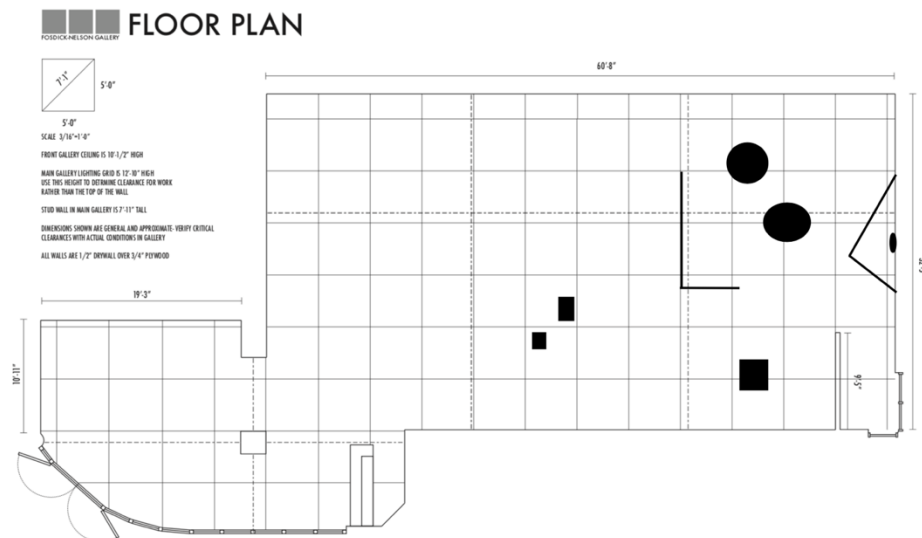
Be pleasing. Don't complain. Let him down easy. Boost his ego. Make him fall for you. Men want what they can't have. Don't give yourself away. Make him work for it. Men love the chase. Fold his clothes. Cook his dinner. Keep him happy. That's a woman's job. You'll make a good wife some day. Take his last name. You hyphenated your name? Crazy feminist. Give him children. You don't want children? You will some day. You'll change your mind.

Be a lady they said. Don't get raped. Protect yourself. Don't drink too much. Don't walk alone. Don't go out too late. Don't dress like that. Don't show too much. Don't get drunk. Don't leave your drink. Have a buddy. Walk where it is well lit. Stay in the safe neighborhoods. Tell someone where you're going. Bring pepper spray. Buy a rape whistle. Hold your keys like a weapon. Take a self-defense course. Check your trunk. Lock your doors. Don't go out alone. Don't make eye contact. Don't bat your eyelashes. Don't look easy. Don't attract attention. Don't work late. Don't crack dirty jokes. Don't smile at strangers. Don't go out at night. Don't trust anyone. Don't say yes. Don't say no. Just "be a lady" they said.

## Gallery and Sculpture Models:

Due to COVID-19, extreme measures of social distancing forced the loss of access to personal studio space and ceramic facilities. Thesis exhibitions were canceled. Small-scale gallery and sculpture models were created to illustrate the intentions and possibilities for a thesis exhibition. These images provide a rough idea for potentially installation and completed work intended for a final show.

### Install -Plan 1





## Install – Plan 1

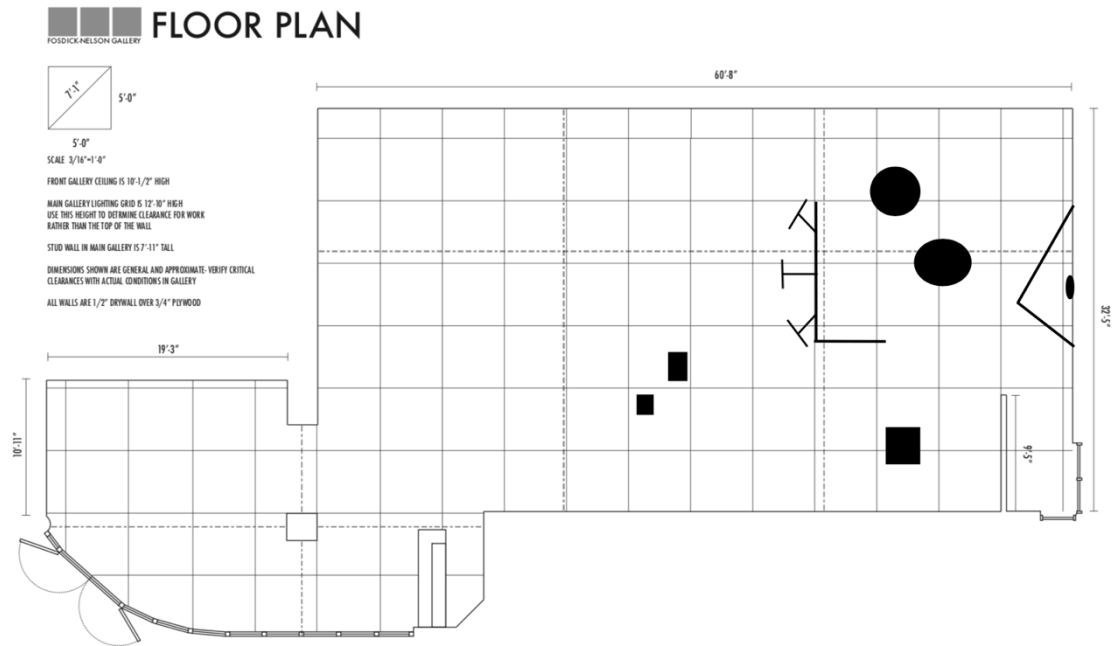


Large 1(Untitled-work in progress)  
and Large 2 (Untitled-work in  
progress) models

Actual sizes about 8'-9' tall with  
roughly a 5'x'5 footprint



## Install – Plan 2



Install – Plan 2



## Artist Statement

My sculptural practice embodies personal psychological and physical experiences, bridging the connections between the interior and exterior body, public and private space, and vulnerability. The essences of events or moments, emotions and physical responses, are materialized through clay and mixed media sculptures and drawings, relying on memory and recalling personal experiences.

The simultaneity of internal and external exposures of the body is presented as a whole. The term “body” is all-encompassing, referring to both the physical and mental attributes of the individual. The psyche is intangible — but is as real as the physical body.

Abstraction allows elements of the physical and mental body to coexist visually. I translate my emotional turmoil and experiences through actions recorded in clay — giving the work the impression of my body, such as my hands clawing away, pushing fists deep into the material, or shaping by squeezing with a full body embrace, leaving a residue of my life— proof of existence. Emotional turmoil is rooted in dualities, contradictions, conflicting ideas, and anxiety — caught in a state of ambivalence, represented through ambiguous expression, residing within the grotesque.

I find beauty in the grotesque. Beyond the deterioration, tension, collapse or heaviness a sculpture may depict, there is a sense of standing up, standing tall; a resistance or the ability to prevail. While the work may depict emotional turmoil or struggle, this resistance is beautiful and optimistic. There is hopefulness, strength, and perseverance.