

A Thesis Presented to
The Faculty of Alfred University

Clandestine

by

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My senior exhibition for my Bachelor of Fine Arts degree is also my thesis for the honors program and capstone project for my Women's and Gender Studies minor. This introduction will begin with my artist statement and extended statement of practice, and will conclude with an explanation of the process that led me to create the works in my show.

My artist statement for my exhibition, *Clandestine*, is as follows:

The primary theme of my work is how the interaction between gender identity and expression can be seamless or contradictory. Bodily variations can make someone appear feminine, masculine, or neither, creating an infinite spectrum of possibilities for expression.

I explore craft, design, identity, and the body through my work in clay. There are particular assumptions about dishware that keep it a functional object in the domestic sphere. By creating vessels that subvert those expectations, I bring awareness to our gendered categorization of objects. My work is attractive and seductive. It begs for touch and exploration but does not fulfill the desires it induces. In this way, the work subverts expectations of dishware and the role it plays in relation to our bodies and spaces.

The following is my extended statement of practice for *Clandestine*:

The way I live is particular. Unlike my peers, I clean, organize, exercise, and plan; all activities rooted in a desire for control of my body, time, and surrounding spaces. Continuously challenging my technical skills by attempting new techniques is essential for sustaining a fulfilled and controlled practice. As a result, design and craft are fundamental to my work and development as an artist. I challenge myself to design complex forms that will, in turn, challenge my craft.

I work in a calculated way that lends itself well to pottery making. My studio practice typically begins with sketching out ideas. This can be specific drawing to plan a design into reality, or writing about the content of my next piece. My cake stands were planned from the start, whereas the specifications of each cup were decided after throwing and trimming were completed. Glaze decisions are almost always reactive to what the form tells me after bisque, excluding a few carefully planned pieces. For this show, I have looked to other contemporary potters, food blogs, and runway fashion for inspiration. I am

interested in pottery, food, and fashion beyond the studio, so these sources are natural to me and seamlessly integrate into my studio practice.

I want my cake stand sets and cups to seduce the viewer into a state of desire. After the bright colors catch the viewer's attention, I anticipate them to be prompted by desire for touch, texture, and cake. The work is seductive through its decadence. However, touching the work does not necessarily fulfill the anticipated desire in the viewer. The work requires grasping, insertion, interlacing, or clandestine touch. There are textures, bulges, and curves to be explored. The reality of touching the work can be awkward or uncomfortable and not as desirable as the way it looks. The work is colored in a loudly gendered palate. The pinks and blues indicate a relationship within the work that contradicts itself. The colors speak to the roles cake, cake stands, and cups play as typically domestic items.

This work relies on the cultural conventions that exist in western culture surrounding cake etiquette and handling of dishware. In the context of this exhibition, this culture is familiar and comfortable for the viewer. The forms of the work begin to upset that state of comfort. The pieces ask for more touch from its user than a typical dish. By disturbing the comfortable cultural norms, the viewer becomes aware of their bodies, surroundings, and entire understanding of the societal structure that dictates how we interact with dishware. The brightness of the forms and bold decoration contradicts the functional categories my work falls into. The stylization of the forms subverts expectations of categories like "cake stand", "plate", or "cup". The work is attractive and seductive. It begs for touch and exploration but may not fulfill the desires it induces. By subverting cultural expectations of dishware I expand the role it can play in relation to our bodies and spaces. I want my work to ask how to be an individual with unique expression in a society based on conformity and cultural constraints.

Discomfort leads to consciousness. Because interacting with the work is uncomfortable, the viewer is prompted to realize things about their physical selves they may not usually consider. Perhaps their hand, wrist, or arm becomes uncomfortable from holding a plate for an extended period of time. Or maybe they slide their fingers into a slot on a cup and suddenly realize another person is watching them perform this erotic action. Discomfort prompts the viewer to see what is typically overlooked. The sexually charged

performative actions the work requests bring a sense of awareness of the self in the context of our structured society.

A defining component of western culture is providing space for secular development. Organized religion often tells its followers how they should identify as members of a particular society. Religion provides a relatively simple way to identify the self that does not require individual exploration. Through building a societal structure based in secularism, space for identity exploration and individuality expand. People are not guided towards any particular identity, and thus are left to build their own understanding of themselves. This culture that encourages individual identity exploration is what enables my work to exist. The advancement of understanding of human identity is a privilege embedded in this work. Each individual cup is part of the larger community of cups, but expresses a possibility for individuality.

I began this year considering how my work could control its user. Pottery has a particular place of power in contrast to other art mediums because functional pots enter the every day life of the viewer and influence small aspects of seemingly mundane activities. For example, the existence or placement of a handle controls how the user holds a cup. Texture on a bowl or plate may influence how it is handled. I wanted to explore the extent of the control I have over the viewer as the maker in the context of a gendered experience.

I have always loved baking, so creating a cake stand with a set of plates to serve on came naturally to me. I wanted to create an immersive cake-eating experience that was oozing with color, smell, flavor, and, most importantly, desire. My first cake-serving sets were focused on gender as a construct that is seemingly inescapable in our society. These sets were a representation of my experience identifying with femininity, but disagreeing with how narrowly it is understood.

After reviews with professors I was able to clearly see the successful and unsuccessful elements of each set and I moved on to make more cake-serving sets focused on the physical interaction with the viewer. I designed tall stands that were intended to look drastically different from the standard cake stand aesthetic, although still function as a cake stand. I made small plates with a focus on creating forms that would request different

kinds of touch. Making these sets encouraged me to consider all the ways a hand might touch a plate beyond the double-walled forms I'd made previously.

After making three more sets, the cake idea felt exhausted for the moment. I intend to make more sets in the future, but I knew it was time for something new. I wanted to apply the things I'd learned from making the cake sets to a new object and cups were the answer.

Cups are comfortable to me because they are familiar, but have space for exploration. They can be a big project through multiples, but are not intimidating because of the individual scale. I wanted to inject my conceptual thinking about structure and the interactive qualities of my cake sets into a collection of cups. I looked to fashion designers such as Dior, Alexander McQueen, Comme Des Garcons, and Gucci for decorative inspiration. I made sixty-one cups with frills, lumps, spikes, and pink.

Clandestine is located in Turner Gallery in Harder Hall. On one side there are three cake stands with their corresponding plates, two with real cakes and one with a paper mache cake. Each cake stand sits on a custom table designed and created by me. On the other side there are thirty-three cups on a tall semicircle table. The work is on view May 5-12, 2018.





























