

A Thesis Presented to  
The Faculty of Alfred University

Grass-Fed

by  
Sally Johnston

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Chair: Kathy Vajda, Clinical Assistant Professor of Printmaking

Committee Members:

Joseph Scheer, Professor of Printmaking

Dr. Karen Porter, Professor of Sociology

Growing up I was known in my family to have an affinity towards meat. Whenever we barbequed it was understood that I may need an extra burger or two, and when we were having a brisket for Jewish holidays I prepared myself to eat until I was sick. I never thought much about what meat was or where it came from, only that I absolutely adored the taste of it. The first negative experience I had with meat was when my best friend Danielle told me she was going to go vegan our junior year of high school. I am still unsure as to why, but immediately when she told me I was annoyed. I did not really understand the point, and it upset me that she was now going to be avoiding some of the things I loved most. Her turn to veganism led us to our first big fight in our almost ten years of friendship. She would tell me how meat was actually a bad thing to eat not only for our health but for the health of the planet. I brushed her off and told her she was wrong which led us to not speak for almost a week. Eventually we got over this spat and even a few months later she left behind her vegan ways and we were eating meat together again. It always bothered me though that we had these disagreements about something that I loved. I thought any conflict about meat in my mind was over and I could leave that type of thinking in the past, but I was wrong.

Fast forward to when I came to college, I was developing a belief in myself as an environmentalist. I was fresh off of a year long class on environmental science my senior year of high school, and I felt I knew so much about the topic. One thing the class brought up again in my mind was the effect that meat had on our environment. I thought after my spat with Danielle I would never encounter negative news about meat again, but here I was. In the class I learned all about the output of methane into our atmosphere because of the meat industry and the amount of land we dedicate to raising and feeding our meat bound animals. These harsh realities stuck with me as I moved on to start my freshman year as an art student at Alfred. I continued to grapple

with how something I loved and felt connected to could be such a detriment to our environment. I had started to eat less meat and was highly critical of what the meat industry was doing to our planet, but I did not expect over my four years at Alfred to have my opinion of meat change and grow so much over time.

The number one question I have gotten during my art critiques is, do you eat meat? The core of my answer has always remained the same, yes. I have wavered over the years about my comfort level in eating meat but I almost always have concluded that I love it and would find a way to feel comfortable in my decision to continue to eat it. In my research into meat as a food and how to find a way to discuss its impact I have realized what I believe to be my main point in my thesis show: meat does not seem to be the problem, but the way that we produce meat is the critical issue. Meat plays such a significant part in cultures all across the world. Food is important to people, and almost any holiday or cultural event holds food as an important part of tradition. I believe that a major issue in the fight against the over consumption of meat is the ignorance to this part of society. I do not believe that if we want attention put on the issues of the over consumption and overproduction of meat that forcing people to give up the traditions and minimizing the importance of meat within society is the answer. Acknowledging that the problem is not the common person consuming meat, trying to feed their family, and continuing traditions that have been passed down to them but instead lies with the corporations and corruption that allows this mass consumption and pollution of the planet to continue.

This leads me to my point of where my focus has shifted this year in relation to meat and its negative impact and the challenges that poses in relation to our society, politics, economics, and environment. As I went into creating a body of work for my BFA thesis show I realized that my viewpoint on meat had shifted. What at the start of my college career had been a concern

about the basic consumption of meat and how meat affected the climate shifted into a critique on capitalism and the way in which we produce our meat. I believe that there is a way that meat can be produced and consumed ethically but the way that we are handling it, specifically in America, is what is causing such a negative impact to our society and environment. There are cultures who have been ethically and sustainably sourcing meat for a long time such as Native Americans. If we follow an approach where we give care and respect to the food that we are consuming, I believe we can start to approach a more sustainable way to consume meat.

The way we consume meat currently in America is ruled by capitalistic greed and profit without concern for the effects that it has. Meat products are pushed out at an enormous rate for people to consume every day, and so much is wasted. Americans eat more meat than we should and we are made to be so disconnected from the food we consume. We are sold perfectly plastic wrapped meat in sterile aisles which separates us from the reality of what the animals go through during their processing before they get to us. Animals are slaughtered by the millions, by real people put through horrific conditions, in order to end up on our tables. One way that corporations separate us from our food is through advertisements and packaging. The intent of my artwork is to break down the perceptions of meat and show the reality of what actually occurs in order for us to get our food. By showing my work in a repetitive nature I hope to mimic the mass quantities and greed that go into our food production. If I can show people the realities of meat production my hope would be not to necessarily make people not consume meat but think about the ways in which we receive our food and the problems within the system created to get it from a living animal to a meal on our table.

### **Specific works**

*A Chicken in Every Pot* was the first clear vision of a piece I wanted in my show this year. I wanted to make a commentary about the damage that mass production of meat products causes. I first got the idea after reading the book *Chicken: The Dangerous Transformation* with committee member Dr. Porter in connection with our discussions on meat. In the introduction to the book the author Steve Striffler repeatedly mentions the quote from depression era president Herbert Hoover where he promised voters “A chicken for every pot,” as a promise of prosperity and eventual good fortune in America. This quote immediately struck me. The importance of meat as a symbol in America has been standing for a long time. A chicken was a status that proved that a person was well off and could provide for their family. When I really sat with this quote I thought about what a chicken for every pot would literally mean, millions of chickens slaughtered for a status symbol. The push for this mass consumption of animal products and the importance that having a chicken showed culturally to people. I wanted to literally show what repeatedly slaughtered chickens entering pots would look like. For this piece I created ten silk chickens to hang over ten industrial heavy duty ceramic pots. The chickens being made out of silk was important for me. I did not want these chickens to be gory and bloody as I feel that would be read as more a commentary on the consumption of chicken. I do not have an issue with chickens being consumed, but I wanted the emphasis instead to be on the repetitive nature of our consumption habits. I wanted to show the importance of having a mass amount of animals to consume, that just one chicken being slaughtered wasn't enough in capitalist America. I used silk for the chickens because it was a delicate subtle material and would lend well to making a more approachable piece. Underneath the pots is a quilted picnic blanket. The blanket is meant to facilitate the creation of a domestic space, a call back to a simpler time when you would lay out for a sunny picnic. It is sectioned into meat packaging size rectangles that are filled and

protruding out to mimic styrofoam packages of meat, and the bottom of the blanket is repeatedly printed with meat marbling. This blanket brings together the ideal and the reality, the perfect image of a nostalgic picnic which shows no concern of consuming meat and the problems that our mass consumption and slaughter of these animals are bringing.

My second piece for my BFA thesis exhibition is titled *Buckets*. In the fall of 2021 I visited a butcher shop about two hours away from Alfred in Pennsylvania. An employee in the residence life department at Alfred offered to take me to the butcher shop that her father owned. I spent several hours there with her father, her, and my friend Natalie discussing meat and watching as he and his coworker disassembled half a cow. This was an invaluable experience, and I am so grateful I got to go. I took photos throughout the day and came back to Alfred with so many thoughts on what I wanted to do with them. I ended up working with my advisor and committee member Joe Scheer to create several photopolymer plates with images I had taken from that day. *Buckets* is a large-scale installation of full bleed prints of a photo of a bucket full of meat scraps destined to become ground beef. I found this particular image to be striking because of the many different textures of beef shown within it. I came up with the idea to display these images repeatedly to continue on my path of trying to show the mass quantities of meat produced for our consumption. I wanted the wall full of prints to be something you saw from afar and would wonder what the wall full of red was, something subtle that only once you got close enough to examine, you would realize was a wall full of meat. It is a piece that I wanted to be more visceral and off putting, something that you would question as being a realistic representation of the meat we consume but one that is accurate. You may not be presented with a wall full of red cut up chunks of meat regularly, but it is how our food and ground beef particularity is created. We consume in these mass quantities, and these mass quantities and mass

production are the reality. It is a piece that I hope draws the viewer in and makes them feel overwhelmed and uncomfortable once they realize what they are viewing.

The next body of work presented is a collection of other prints from throughout the year, on paper and on silk. All are photopolymer plate images from the day at the butcher as well. I decided to print on silk because I enjoyed the contrast between the harsh chunky pieces of meat and the flowy, shiny, delicate fabric. I think the two differing materials compliment and contrast each other nicely. Other works on paper represent and show the meat in another light, unable to be looked away from and staring you down. Once again, I use repetition in the formation of these prints to tie together the thoughts of overconsumption and over production.

The overall goal of my show is to try to help people realize the harmful ways in which our meat is being produced. My hope is that once people are made more aware of the harm that our current systems are causing that there will be a bigger push for change within them. I don't want to make the mistake of judging and persecuting people for their choice in consuming meat but rather make them understand the undeniable reality of the harm the ways in which we choose to consume causes. We can no longer turn a blind eye to how our food ends up on our table. There is pain, blood, and tears involved for both animals and workers`and the longer we try to ignore that the longer the damage to our environment and society will continue. We have the power to change the way corporations do things, we just need to open our eyes to what is happening.



*Seeing Red*

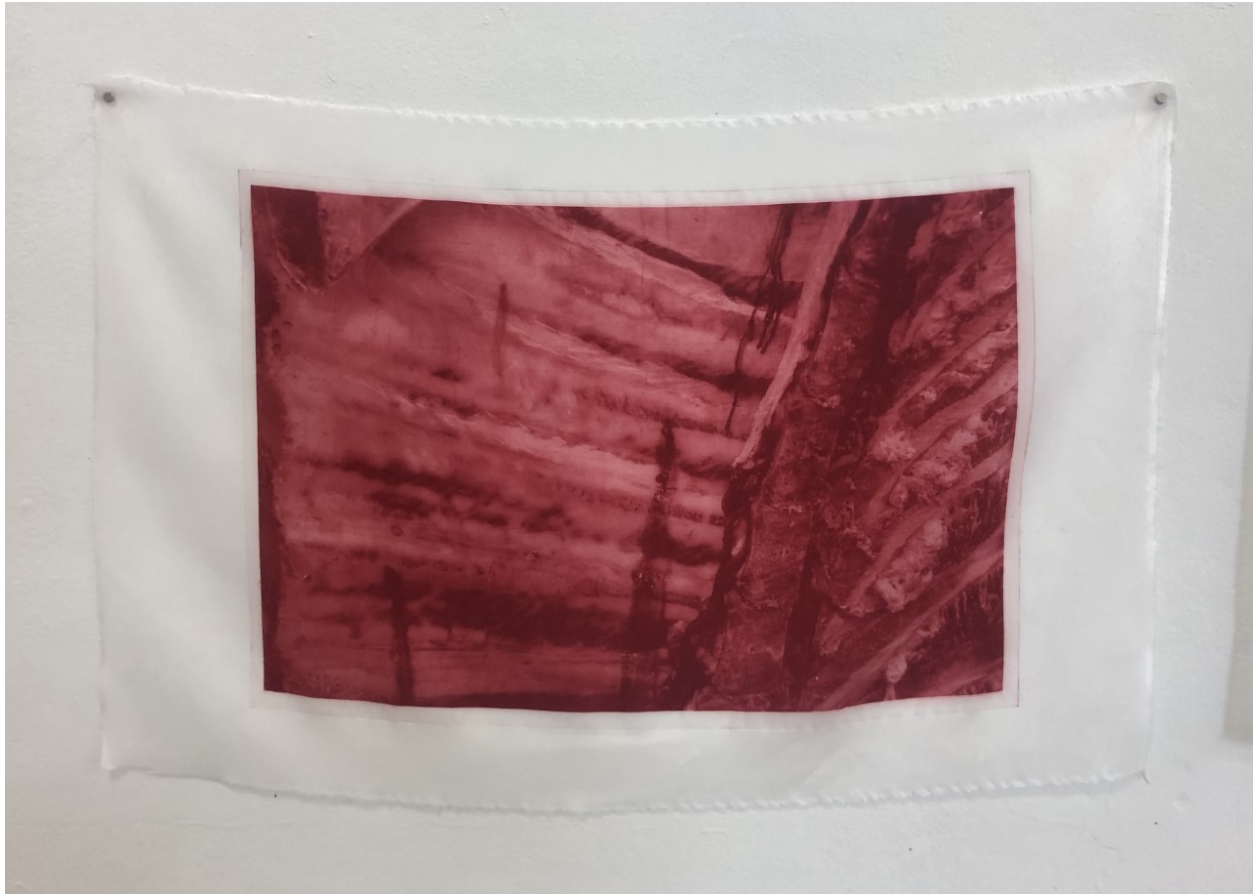
Photopolymer Plate Print on Silk





*Butcher*

Photopolymer Plate Print on Silk



*Ribcage*

Photopolymer Plate Print on Silk



Buckets

Photopolymer Plate Prints on Handmade Paper



*A Chicken for Every Pot*

Ceramic Pots, Silk Chickens, Cotton Quilt