

Master of Fine Arts Thesis

Not Another Muse

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Understanding Me, Understanding Why

I didn't grow up in a religious household. My parents are Atheists yet believed their children should form their own opinions about God and religion. They took us to a Unitarian church where we learned about several religions, not just one. Religion forms community through cultural likeness, yet a lack of religion in my upbringing meant I experienced few of the social constructions of identity which forms Us and Them. After the September 11th attacks, my mother abruptly pulled over to the liquor store owned by the Muslim family we had previously lived next door to but moved away from. She was hosting Thanksgiving at our house that year and wanted to invite them. It was a moment in which she disregarded any possible criticism to show support to a family whose community was being ostracized. It was an act of solidarity. It is these moments of my upbringing that I didn't appreciate as a child, but as an adult I realize the impact they had on how I form perceptions of people. As an adult, I also understand the political implications Christianity has on American culture.

I am a middle child, raised in the middle of Missouri, in the middle of the United States. Being in the middle can be an isolating experience. The college town environment was not a thriving cultural setting found in a city, but it was a diverse bubble. I fell in sync with the patterns associated with normalcy, at least what was normal in the middle. I chose to integrate myself into mainstream society. When I left home, my character was assumed by my peers based on appearance alone, including the assumption I had a pious relationship with God and Christianity. I found this surprising as I had never considered physical attributes to indicate someone's religious affiliations, unless prescribed by that denomination. I began questioning how I was conditioned to expectations in regard to

my decisions about life, including my outlook and judgement of others. I became a sheep in a herd and I was grazing, not because my parents were sheep, but through uncertainty of self, I chose to become a member of the flock.

These experiences influenced my making. I became interested in the constructed predispositions we form through cultural associations. We form icons as symbols of class, taste, or affiliations to subcultures. These thoughts preoccupied my making as an undergraduate student, with the ceramic figure becoming a way to explore these ideas. The environments surrounding the figure began to gain a presence that overshadowed the figure itself. Beginning graduate school, I knew I would no longer literally sculpt the figure, unless as a fragment representative of historical ruins or as an icon.

The environment of the sculpture became my focus with the figurative presence being assumed by the vessel as they inherited the characteristics of the body. I began questioning the extension of identity through environments, more specifically the domestically designated woman's environment. These ideas were effected by a newfound consciousness of the social commodification of the female body. This shift resulted from my recognition of how people view me, and men look at me. There is a look of objectification, of longing, of using, of lust. When confronted with this look, I retreat. I am not another muse for the viewing pleasure of anyone and everyone.

I create spaces out of a feeling of lack of place. My intention is to confuse, overwhelm, and seduce by the construction of spaces referencing the abundantly excessive domestic interior. Patterns blend and merge as vessels take on the ornamental role of women, negating the ornamental presence of the woman. It is in the forming of visually

distracting environments that the gaze shifts away from women, away from me. That I am no longer the muse, that women are no longer the muse. It is my personal freeing of women from the domestic and reclaiming the feminine space.



A Monument to Eve

I made a grotto: not intentionally but named that by others. There was a place for an object and so they asked "What goes here?".

What was I commemorating?

It was then that I decided that I had killed Eve.

A Monument to Eve is a marker of Eve's death and I am her accidental murderer. I have killed Eve but I didn't intend to kill her. I have not killed her body but rather her representation. I have killed the Western construction of Eve as the temptress, and with

her, the condemnation of all women as representations of seduction, sin, and indulgence. I have removed the glove which is the evidence of her touch, and with that removed the sin placed onto her body as a declaration of her guilt in *The Desire To Know*.

Understanding How, Understanding What: I

The surfaces challenge the form of the objects. The faux finishes highlight and extend the theatricality of the work beyond associations already present in the scale and construction of the work. It becomes about believability, to suspend doubt, and ask whether the expectation or the reality is more important. Preconceptions are formed yet expectations shift with proximity. The facades become realized the closer in proximity the work can be physically viewed. This is similar to how I perceive and understand people and my surroundings. The closer I/They become, the more the facade becomes evident for what it is: a facade.

I embrace materials and processes associated with craft but I shift the expected uses and perceptions of these materials. My interest in highlighting the faux is a reflection of my desire to destabilize power relationships in regard to material hierarchies. I consider projected meanings regarding women's relationship to craft materials: ceramics, sewing, decoupage, collage, and paper for example.

Earthenware pretending to be porcelain

Paper pretending to be painting

Wood pretending to be marble

Sewn canvas pretending to be a pear/salmon

I started a love affair with vessels. It is an affair because I am not a potter, I am a sculptor. I did not take the traditional route of falling in love with clay. I began working with the material because I saw it as a vehicle of expression. I could make anything with a material that possesses an endless amount of potential. I never had an intention or interest in making vessels. I fell in love with vessels through my introduction to the histories of ceramics in architecture and utility. I realized I needed another muse. I view the vessel less as an object and more as a subject. It is a vehicle for me to expressively decorate, to meditatively and gesturally ornament.

A Pitcher That Was Meant To Be A Vase

This was a vase that became a pitcher the day Betty Woodman died. I watched a video of her making a pillow pitcher and I realized a spout would extend the movement of the form of my intended vase. It is not an ordinary pitcher, but it is ordinarily domestic. Its anatomy is pregnant with purposelessness but advocates its use for pouring. Its profile suggests it should have a handle, but it is too substantial to be held by one. The embrace of a body, a carefully positioned cradle, could better give it the utility that its



form proposes. Its four legs do not appear to be equally capable of supporting its large frame; some are teetering on the brink of collapse. Blanketed in alternating flowers and leaves, its ornamental patterning corresponds at times with the alternating colors of its palette. It wears an afghan rather than a veil, as it is neither modest nor submissive. Its body is not delicately disguised but instead is discernible through the interwoven colors, knitted together, both revealing and enveloping.

Understanding How, Understanding What: II

I began painting sheets of drawing paper with watered down tempera paint when I felt I needed a mental escape from working in clay. I found the process of haphazardly mixing a color, painting as many sheets as I could with the amount mixed, mixing another color, and repeating this process to be refreshingly mindless. From here, I amassed a range of painted sheets of paper in a variety of colors that I then began cutting and gluing as I collaged together representations of recognizable objects. I accumulated images I made of pots, a flamingo, some leaves, a love-seat, a Picasso inspired bust, a woven basket, a hand, a rug, a hedge. The individual components were mounted to form a mural that lacks any formal construction of interior space via perspective. This created an image that is overwhelming and potentially infinite. The visual space created is recognizable to the point that it is not foreign or abstract but it is enough of a distraction to enter my world. Hung away from the wall, the light from behind reveals the layers of construction now void of color and visually muted. The image becomes abstracted and the space is open for the viewer to weave within it.

In order to create the environment that looked like the domestic interior but was not, I needed to take materials from a real domestic space. I was imagining middle / lower class suburban America. I found vintage tablecloths and fringe, choosing ones I found ugly or unoriginal. If I had chosen things I liked too much I was afraid I would not want to alter them. I made them beautiful, to reclaim that space as mine, to make something more beautiful or highlight what was there to question beauty, or the lack of beauty.

I am often questioning beauty through my work and in my life:

The standards of beauty

The facade of beauty

The male construction of beauty

The obligation to conform to beauty

The excessiveness of decorative beauty

The repression of female beauty

The artificiality of beauty

Drapery

Lace

Ruffles

Fringe

Embroidery

Pearls

Beads

Bows

Braids

Florals

and Ribbons

Why are these things used to decorate both women *and* the domestic interior? The historical use of these decorative motifs is so long lasting, can we determine why? I love decoration and celebrate it in my work, while at the same time I question it. Do these motifs further the objectification of women, where they become just another domestic object in the space? Is my liking of these things a cultural construction? A projection of the feminine onto my character?



Not Another Muse

The hanging paper murals paired with the dimensional objects shifts the construction of the still life as it becomes spatially architectural and monumental in scale. The scale of the image in relation to the body allows access and entrance. However, when seen from afar the composition as a whole can be a comprehensive image. As the space is entered the nature of the communication changes, presenting objects that one moment form an image but with the shift in proximity forms a different kind of relationship. How does the nature of communication change when confronted with objects vs. images? The lack of a hierarchical composition is reminiscent of palatial, architectural wall frescoes via the lack of formal perspective and scale. The simplification of decorative conventions makes the image contemporary.

Understanding How / Understanding What: III

My interest in still life painting stems from the characteristic collaging and merging of forms through pattern, color shifts, and abstraction. This creates visual distortions of reality and evokes chaos in the seemingly mundane. I seek to merge objects with forms and patterns in order to confuse and overwhelm as a representation of the chaos experienced in life. This is a method of forming an image that extends beyond an immediate understanding of place. Matisse, Braque, Picasso, and Woodman are all inspirations in the construction of space and object / objects in space.

The Fruit (Still Life #94)

The fruit as a motif came first. Then there was the hand. I began using the fruit as a decorative motif as it is a traditional element of still life painting. The disembodied hand, its gesture depicted as graceful and longingly reaching began to make continual appearances. Through this repetition I realized the obvious but not initially intended connection to Eve. I questioned how the construction of Eve as the cause of the Fall of Man continues to tarnish the reputation of women in Western society. I began searching for the fruit. I no longer wanted it to fall into my periphery. I began searching for it as I studied its inclusion in painting and advertising when paired with women. What I found was an overwhelming inclusion of fruit in paintings of women as: the nude, the temptress, the housewife, the virgin, the sex icon. I concluded that the icons of our culture should be more closely examined. Accepting normalcy is accepting cultural conditioning.



The deep blue of the table is interrupted by matte black. Angular abstractions of shadows form an illusion of shifting perspective. Heightened in its scale and sense of drama, the tabletop is abundant, alluring and garish. Unable to discern what is front or back, right or left, the sum of the image presented is disconcerting as individual profiles give little indication to the features of the face. An apple sinks into a tray, the pink of the platter consuming its skin. An egg cup in faux woodgrain, half in brown and again in blue, is adjacent to the cut-out of a teapot with a hole. But the hole is not in the spout. The painted leaves of the potted plant run in, out and down, as the pot doesn't hold the plant. The leaves engulf the pot and the pot too becomes the plant. There are images of two vases on a vessel: but which is the vessel and which is the vase? The candelabras drip, evoking candles that once were but never there. The fruit in the bowl is enlarged,

ripe and bursting, yet still contained. The fruit bowl is only a fruit bowl on one side. The opposing side is a flattened silhouette. The potted plant is now drained of color as the once-painted leaves fade, leaving black outlines that define their shape. Boundaries are constructed, as the plant is now a plant and the pot is just a pot. Woodgrains, florals, and leaves blend and diverge as surfaces escape the forms that define their character. The patterns become objects and objects become lines.

Conclusion: Understanding Everything

I question my understanding of everything.

My primal zodiac is a catfish. I feel this combination of Western and Eastern astrology makes the most sense in

I am interested in Cubist still life painting; the distorted depictions reflect a deconstruction and observation in surroundings that surpasses assumption.

defining predispositions of character.

I am interested in the Pattern and Decoration Movement in its rebellion against male dominated Modernism and because it is rise of a Feminist art movement.

In 1994 Portia Munson displayed an accumulation of discarded pink objects forming a 14 sq ft collection of objects marketed to girls and women, representing the pleasures of excess, gendered notions of color, and the social projection of a color as feminine.

Multiple sclerosis is physically debilitating and can be genetically inherited.

Sirens, half fish half women, tempted men into the depths of the ocean.

Wealthy women in the 20th century when confronted with a loss of wealth, were often forced into

prostitution due to their lack of knowledge of skilled work and social pressures. However, china painting porcelain wares was seen as an acceptable occupation.

I like the sound of rain on a metal roof but I'm unsure if I like it or if I like it because it reminds me of my dad.

Earthenware vessels were coil built by women in between completing their domestic tasks. The coil building allowed for the form of the vessel to set in between their other tasks.

The Greeks created animal human hybrid creatures to

represent their fears, the other, and the unknown.

My parents found my name in the obituaries.

Celadon glazes were formulated for the emperor to emulate jade.

I have a strong sense of memory connected to smell.

I am interested in Post Modernism in the collaging of historical and contemporary motifs.

Those under the primal zodiac sign of the Catfish have two very

different sides of their personalities: masculine and feminine, aggressive yet sweet, and active yet lazy.

It is known that the Great Sphinx of Giza was carved in one piece because the striations in the earth match the walls surrounding it.

I've never eaten an oyster.

I first became interested in Netherlandish still life painting when I began studying the symbolic representation of objects of and food. These traditions developed during the Protestant Revolution.

I wonder how color is seen differently by all people. I wonder what it would be like to view the world through someone else's eyes.

Betty Woodman and

I am terrified of ticks. I like opossums because an adult will eat an average of 5,000 of them.

Henri Matisse greatly influenced my work in graduate school in their

The Greeks developed stylized patterns of the organic, like hair or fabric, when depicting the figure as they strived towards naturalism.

The odds of finding a four leaf clover are 1 in 10,000. I have found hundreds.

expression of and depiction of environments and objects through color, gesture and pattern.

I have found that Tuesday's have coincided

with moments of life and of death.

I lived most my life thinking my mother was in remission from multiple sclerosis. It wasn't until recently it was revealed to be a misdiagnosis.

Half a sewn and stuffed salmon in relation to my body looks like a mermaid's tail.

Hannah Wilke once said people would rather look at women than art made by women. She made seductive art for this reason.

The Mona Lisa is smaller than a lot of people expect.

Grayson Perry said "We all have emotional baggage and associations when we look at pots."

These are some of the things that I know that I don't know I know.

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TECHNICAL REPORT

I view my individual works as inventory. I often do not know the final outcome of the groupings of sculptures or composition of a mural until I have made most of the parts. I create the components and then assemble the pieces when I am asked to finalize the work when faced with deadlines. The installations are not pre-planned but individual objects influence the building of the next as I accumulate the parts. The installations represent a collaging and merging of multiple ideas or investigations.

I work almost exclusively with red earthenware, sculpture clay and low-fire glazes. Most of my works are coil and slab built, with the occasional solid built elements being added if a piece requires more modeling.

JR Tile Red (with a little extra strength)

15.5	Red Art
32	Newman Red Sub
12.5	Gold Art
12.5	Hawthron 50
12.5	OM4
15	Talc
12	Fine Grog
16	Medium Grog
1	Barium Carb
1	Handful of Nylon Fibers per Muller load (275 dry)

I find that layering glazes gives low fire glazes the depth and movement that is more often achieved in high fire. I have experimented adding stains or oxides to most of them to achieve variations in color. A fifteen minute hold at temperature increases the opportunity for the glazes to run and move a bit while not ruining shelves.

Liz Quackenbush Majolica Base

68.8 Frit 3124
9.8 Frit 3110
6.9 Ball Clay
14.7 Silica
10 Zircopax
.5 Bentonite

Linda Arbuckle Overglaze Colorant Recipe

1 part Mason Stain
1 part Bentonite
3 parts Frit 3124

Alkaline Earth (Dirk Staschke) : semi-opaque, matte

30 F4 Feldspar
16 Barium Carb
10 Lithium Carb
10 Frit 3110
7 Whiting
15 EPK
12 Silica

Kelly's Lo Fire Shino

29 Lithium Carb
70 Neph Sy
11 EPK
6 Rutile
.5 Manganese Carb

Sinisa Sexy White - less fatty than a majolica, slightly translucent, accepts stain well

90 Frit 3124
9 EPK
1 Wollastonite
14 Zircopax

Halifax White Slip, works on bisqueware if not applied thickly (spray) but fire on before glaze application

50 OM4
20 Talc
10 Neph Sy
15 EPK
5 Frit 3124

Watershed Base

75 Frit 3134
15 OM4
10 Zircopax
2 Bentonite

add:

2 Copper Carb + .5 Chrome (Green)
.25 Cobalt Carb (Blue)

Deb's Honey

30 Frit 3134
45 Frit 3195
25 EPK
2 Bentonite
7 Burnt Umber

Lisa Orr Sprite Bottle Crack

67 Frit 3110
16 Soda Ash
8 Silica
5 EPK
10 Gerstley Borate
2 Bentonite
add:
4 Manganese Diox + .8 Cobalt Carb

Lisa Orr Cow Bell Aventurine

78 Frit 3269
10 Silica
8 Lithium Carb
4 EPK
2 Bentonite
15 Red Iron Oxide

Materials Needed for a cheap Paper Mural:

Jazz Tempera Paint
Canson Sketch Pad 18" x 24"
Small plastic cups to mix paint
Brushes
Scissors
Xacto Knife
Elmers Glue