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## Pebbles Is a Girl That Doesn't Know Anything

Grace A. Kubilius  
*Virginia Commonwealth University*

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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## **Abstract**

### **Pebbles Is a Girl That Doesn't Know Anything**

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

By

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Virginia Commonwealth University,

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I am not quite sure how to be a woman. It's complicated, contradictory and highly surveilled. I make videos, sculptures and wearable objects that attempt to rationalize my female identity. The body is a sustained fixture in my work: as an armature, as an absent actor for constructed environments, as fragment and as the literal inclusion of my image. It is through these various modes of dis/embodiment that I negotiate the complexities of gendered existence. Crumbling ceramic and paper objects, pieced fabric forms, videos, beauty products, and delicate flowers reference splintered narratives and unwieldy terrains. I consider the idea of pink, not exclusively as color but as a

framework for the perpetual performance of the body and the negotiation of contradictions within constructed identity.

## Chapter 1

### **Pebbles Is a Girl That Doesn't Know Anything**

Little Pebbles, she wears a bone in her hair. Pebble's has two eyelashes, long like spider legs. She wears a dress the shape of a triangle, a floating triangle. Gravity does not affect Pebbles' dress. Oh Pebbles, her little ass is always popping out underneath her dress. Pebbles, she doesn't notice. She's just having fun. She's climbing on things and crawling all around and around. Pebbles and her plump little body. Pebble's hasn't been fucked yet. Pebbles doesn't know what fucking is. Little Pebbles, she doesn't know.

Little Grace, she wears a bone in her hair. Am I a girl?



Figure 1: Google search illustrations of "Pebbles" from ABC's "The Flintstones" television series

## CHAPTER 2

### Clothing That Doesn't Fit

Clothing doesn't need to be pretty, *my* clothing doesn't need to be pretty. I need to be pretty (skinny) in my (ugly) clothes. That's what matters.

Right?



As a girl, I dressed myself like a little wild thing: swimsuits on top of denim shorts, layers of frills, and a bone in my blonde ponytail. I liked choosing what to put on my twig of a body. Entering adulthood, I studied fashion. Fashion appeared to me as a place of eccentricity and deviance from routine; it seemed to embrace abnormality (not really). Fashion forces consideration of the way clothing fits the body, what flatters the body. What flatters the body is dependent on an existing set of standards for the body. Learning to construct garments meant to constantly return to the body- most often my own. Instead of evaluating how the clothes fit the body, my focus remained on how the body fit the clothes. Even as the maker of garments, the garments made the standards for my body to follow. Maybe I'm weak.

To be female is, according to that distinction, a facticity which has no meaning, but to be a woman is to have. For example, the casual being generated in the confrontation between the subject/object of say, a young female- susceptible to power in relations to an image, or more succinctly, an imago, generated by the highly effective media that results in abjection (the shame in an acknowledgement of the self's difference from an ideal and thus disgust of the perceived imperfections of the bodily self) and the 'not 'I'' of Christian metaphor.<sup>1</sup>

- Frenchy Lunning, *Object Oriented Feminism*

In efforts to move away from the constant confrontation of my (flawed) body, I began to investigate anti-fashion- garments that serve to reject notions of my perceived/ learned ideas of femininity and deny the body any articulated (female/

gendered) shape. The body as armature. *Junk Bones*, a collection of thirteen garments and performance, considers the garment as artifact or ghost- holding memories and personal histories. I cover the faces of the wearers- all women, denying their female/individual identity. I constructed an oppressive environment: droning music, a rigid, angular steel and wood structure, flickering florescent light. Some of the garments restrict the body- crunching paint covered fabrics, sweaty plastics, thick layers of wool- the wearer suffers the weight of the garment, making it difficult to move. The models/performers trudge through the space without stopping- they follow their path (they don't care about letting you look at them, they say fuck it!).



Figure 2: *Junk Bones*, 2013

*Oh How I Love You* reckons with the garment in a different way. Instead of discounting beauty standards, I approach beauty from an indulgent, unrefined, unself-conscious position. Influenced by children's writing – "You give me such great kisses and hugs. I Love you so much. My stomach is filled with bugs". I ask, "What is pretty?" Using severed Barbie heads, colorful threads, text with phrases like "Oh how I love you" or "I'm pretty," I attempt to access a body (a woman, a me) that does not hate itself. An unrestrained body, one that wants to touch materials, exist within a mess, and move with excitement and haphazardness – one with a bone in its hair.

During the performance of *Oh How I Love You*, the performers stood on a concrete and wood platform in the center of a small gallery room for two minutes each. In contrast to the constant motion of the performers in *Junk Bones*, *Oh how I Love You* relished in the act of being on display and forced the audience into a position of voyeurism where *Junk Bones* denied it. What does it mean to want to be pretty but not to be looked at or stared at? What does pretty look like, then? How can a female body exist in a public sphere without being sexualized? (it can't) I wanted to understand my own contaminated ideas of beauty by taking on a child's idea of pretty (Pebbles, the birth). Children (are sometimes sexualized)

but are still unaware or yet unable to see themselves through an/the other. They do not feel eyes on them.



Figure 3: *Oh How I Love You*, 2015

Searching for a more complex conversation around female identity/experience, it was necessary to shift away from working with garments that require activation from a living human body and further distance myself from the continual practice of looking at, dressing, and touching woman's bodies, which had become an avatar for my own. Instead, I made new bodies, addressing a female body that is not an actualized body – a body in parts, a possible body, a body nonexistent.

I collect material/cultural detritus from architectural debris like rotting, paint-stained wood or flowers and twigs reminiscent of childhood play. I engage with dirt/ dirtiness and an exaggerated idea of “pretty”, using beauty products like false nails and eyelashes. I collide these contrasting components in a way that makes sense to me (rationalize them) and frames (my) girlhood and womanhood together- messy and fucked up. I choose material (based on cultural and narrative associations) that has a gendered or bodily potency: rubber is used in sex toys, medical objects, kids' toys. I stack and arrange objects in a way that references the landscapes I made for my dolls to live in as a child. I am interested in readily available material – what objects already exist and how they have shaped my understanding of the world or myself. How can I reshape

objects that already exist in the world as structures already created to shape behavior? What is tainted?



## Chapter 3

### A Body that Doesn't Exist

(void)

But deep inside Maggie is still a good girl. She is a good girl who is trying to upchuck the evil she feels inside of her. Her poisoned soul. That is why Maggie starves herself. That is why Maggie binge-eats and then sticks her finger down her throat and makes gagging noises. Because she is trying to vomit up all the poison, all the poison she has let inside her, everything bad she has let inside her, and if they knew they wouldn't love her anymore.<sup>2</sup>

- Kate Zambreno, *O Fallen Angel*

I'll care for you.

I'll try my best.

Moving away from an existing female body as the activator for my work, I consider the textile as an independent body. It is soft and slumping. It is uncontrollable and controlled. It has the potential to hold memory: it folds, wrinkles, and retains marks, recording its own existence. The textile is malleable (I am nothing but malleable). Unfinished edges and loose threads to call attention to the outline or periphery (de/fences). I comb through textiles as I make them. I pet them, caress them, I care for them (I can't care for myself).

We continually project the body into the world in order that its image might return to us: onto the other, the mirror, the animal, and the machine, and onto the artistic image.<sup>3</sup>  
- Susan Stewart, *On Longing*

In making new textile-bodies, I seek (beg) to understand my own (slumping) body. I construct wood and metal provisional armatures to hang, tether, or prop my textile-bodies. They are rigid but, at times, unstable: loose joints and cracking wood point to fracture and failure in urgency. Everything is urgent (it will all fall apart). Functioning as a skeleton, but without belonging to the textile-bodies, these skeletons are borrowed. They are the structures/standards for a female existence (unstable).

Sometimes I want to be a body that is dictated by other things (I am, we are).

Sometimes I want to be told what to do because I'm confused about what to do.

The armature postures the textile – it holds it up, it tells it how to be.

And as we lie  
arm in arm, neither  
joined nor separate  
(your observations change me  
into a spineless woman in  
a cage of bones, obsolete fort  
pulled inside out),  
our lips moving.<sup>4</sup>  
- Margaret Atwood, *The Circle Game*

I am not weak, but I want to be.

This sort of posturing is a performance that requires strength I do not have anymore. Rolling with the punches and giving as good as we're getting requires that we subsume our pain under a veneer of *I don't give a shit*. This inability to be vulnerable---the unwillingness to be victims, even if we are---doesn't protect us, it just covers up the wreckage.<sup>5</sup>  
- Jessica Valenti, *Sex Object*

I consider how to more directly assign or suggest a gender of these new bodies, outside of structure or body form. Using applied objects/parts of bodies, gender is drawn on with decoration, stylization, and beauty products. In *Tell Me How To Be*, false eyelashes and hair are stitched onto and stuffed into the textile-bodies. Integrated into the design of the textile or placed arbitrarily (that's how it works, right?). Covered in mascara, I am interested in the artifice of these specific materials. I question their believability: do these disembodied fragments signify woman? I struggle to dissect these more pronounced/overt ideas around cultural signifiers of gender. To exist in a body *expected* to participate in beauty rituals like makeup and hair styling, what kind of position do I take if I do not participate? If I do?

To be female is, according to that distinction, a facticity which has no meaning, but to be a woman is to have *become* a woman, to compel the body to conform to a historical idea of 'woman,' to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project.<sup>6</sup>

- Judith Butler, *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution*

In prompting my textiles to take on the construction of woman or female, there is inherent failure. A human, female body is not determined completely by the individual to which that body belongs.

The textile-bodies in *Tell Me How To Be* are less overtly gendered- the isolation of cultural signifiers changes the context for which we read them- they are less sexualized, less glorified. They exist on a body, imperfect (by standards, no body is perfect, all bodies are perfect) pudgy, without breasts, without an ass.





Figure 4: *Tell Me How To Be*, 2016

I do not want all this human.

Handling makeup and decorative (woman) fragments in making textile-bodies urged me to consider/confront my own beauty rituals through video works.

The videos explore the materiality (viscosity) of gender in a way that is physically engaging. I soak my hands in nail polish and smear lipstick over the entirety of face. I feel their slippery wetness, I live in their residue (I need to know). My interactions/performance thrust past a point of normalcy or acceptability but allow me to indulge in what confuses me.

The work fluctuates between a distanced body and the body that I am (I don't know if I believe if we *live in* our bodies or if we *are* our bodies. I don't believe in souls) to rationalize/understand myself inside and outside of myself.

## **Chapter 4**

### **A Body That Does Not Belong to Me**

#### **And I Might Be a Masochist**

I think about exiting silently. Slipping away. I would be a sex worker- pass myself along from dick to dick. Never confronting myself. I can be whatever you want (baby).

You can take your hands and bruise my neck, keep pushing till you feel the soft flesh at the back of my throat-- like it never was with any other man. I have tears rolling down my face. Even when you hear me gagging you don't stop. It's your unconcern that makes me want you to do whatever you want with my body, which can be for you, while yours cannot be for me.<sup>7</sup>

- Sheila Heti, *How Should a Person Be?*

Video has grown to be a fixture within my practice, focusing on the body as a site for the interrogation of a perpetual performance. I question what it means to have a pliable body and how a conscious transformability can establish or assign power. Using my own body and occasionally other performers, I explore actions of touching, pinching, caressing, slapping, groping, kissing as ways of marking the body. These interactions with self and other reiterate the complexity of representation. The hand acts as a directing device, pointing, shifting, controlling the performer, questioning, who, exactly we perform for?

The female body is subject to constant surveillance and scrutiny/criticism- enduring expectations far more rigorous than the male body. A female body is always on display, the point at a woman/girl understands themselves to be viewed as a sexual object or an object of desire punctuates their existence. She is something to be had or possessed. She is never her own.

Femaleness/Woman-ness is not owned by women, but instead, in a patriarchal culture, woman is tangible only by representation:

The notion of femininity, as a privileged condition, a nearness to nature, the body, the side of the maternal, or the unconscious. However, we are cautioned, this femininity, is purely a representation, a positionality within the phallic model of desire and signification; it is not a quality or property of women. Which all amounts to saying that woman, as subject of desire or signification, is unrepresentable: or better, that in the phallic order of

patriarchal culture and its theory, woman is unrepresentable except as representation.<sup>8</sup>

- Teresa De Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender*

To be woman is to be a factor/product of a culture that is dictated by the desires of men.

Through making work about an internal gaze, I consider how self- perception is shaped and infected by the external gaze and cultural structures. In attempting to establish my own female identity, I understand my desire to seek approval through what is known to be wanted of me. Is a position of awareness of external expectations and desire for approval one of power or control?

*The Girlfriend Experience* is a TV show that follows a young female law student, Chelsea, as she becomes involved in sex work. She goes on dates, vacations, and sleeps with high-profile and wealthy older men – developing relationships that are both sexual and social, giving them the “girlfriend” experience. She is intelligent, beautiful, well-read, and a good conversationalist. She knows exactly how to charm each of her clients- giving them what they want while making them believe it is what she wants too. In a 4-minute scene during episode 7, Chelsea is reviewing footage from a security camera she installed in her apartment.

She fast forwards through a good deal of footage until she sees herself sitting on top of her bed, in lingerie. With focus, she watches herself masturbate.<sup>9</sup> She angles her body so her tits are pronounced and perky, her hair glides down her back. Even alone, she is being watched. She filters her gaze through the gaze of her clients. She has no real identity or authenticity, she becomes what she knows others to want her to be (what is there to be otherwise?).

Woman is the ultimate mimic, having the ability to adapt what she knows is needed of her, she is already more than what she imitates:

Woman cannot *be* anything, but she can imitate anything valued by a man: intelligence, autonomy, beauty... indeed, if a woman is anything she is the very possibility of mimesis, the one who weaves her own disguised The veil is her oppression, but 'she may still draw from it what she needs to mark the folds, seams, and dressmaking of her garments and dissimulations' (Irigaray, 1991:116). These mimetic abilities throw woman into a universality unknown and unknowable to the one who knows who he is: she fits any bill, but in so doing, she is already more than that which she imitates. Woman, like the computer, appears at different times as whatever man require of her. She learned how to imitate; she learns simulation. And, like the computer, she become very good at it, so good, in fact, that she too, in principle, can mimic any function. As her inexhaustible aptitude for mimicry- the living foundation for the whole staging of the world.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Sadie Plant, *Weaving Women and Cybernetics*

In BDSM culture, dominant and submissive relationships function effectively when there is a constant negotiation and renegotiation of consent. The



submissive garners the majority of control, as their pleasure and desire is the priority.<sup>11</sup> I consider the idea of submission, implied consent, or unseen consent as a possible source of control. In performing a female identity that is simultaneously desired and (appearing) submissive, what is to be gained? In *The Girlfriend Experience*, Chelsea's power comes from money (a material gain) and from the knowledge that these men need her: she potentially controls their orgasm, she holds their desire (feeling desired is to feel in control), she is in control.

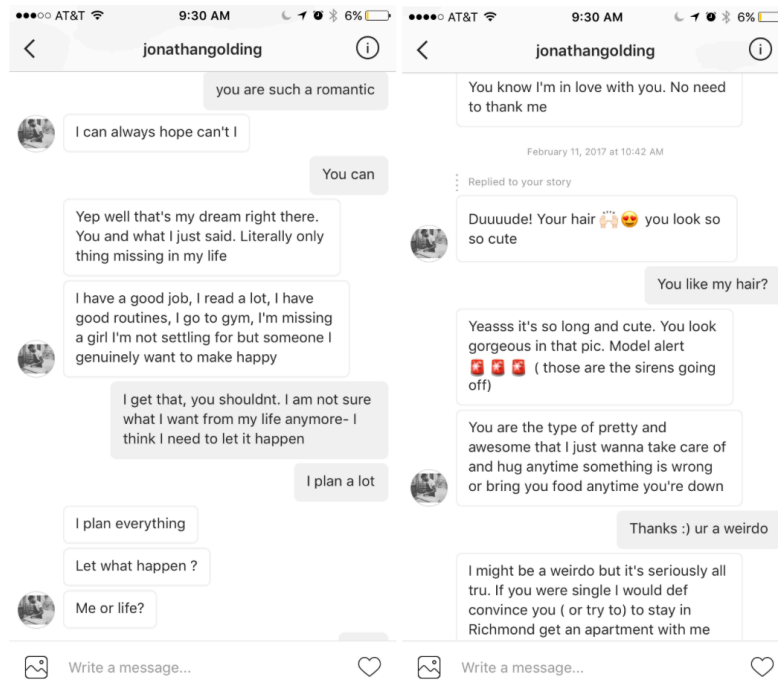


Figure 5: Screen shot of text exchange with Jonathan, 2016

Jonathan texts me almost every week. We went on a date two years ago when I first moved to Richmond. I have zero interest in him. I don't tell him not to text me. He knows I have a boyfriend. I know I have a boyfriend. I just like compliments. I like knowing he wants me. I know he likes the idea of me more than me, but I don't care. I want to hear that I am pretty and that I am a babe (I hate myself for this).

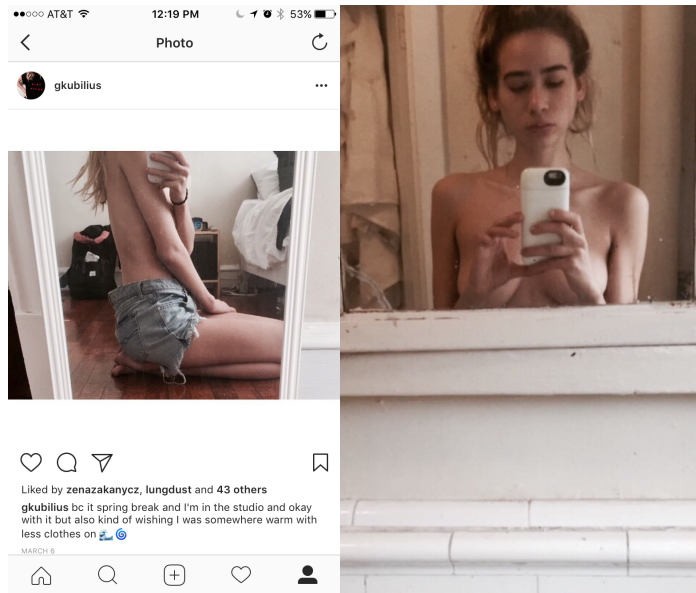


Figure 6: Screen shot of a post from personal Instagram account @gkubilius, 2017

Figure 7: Photo taken of myself (intended for Instagram “story”) in my bathroom, 2017

I post pictures of myself without a shirt on Instagram. They are never very explicit. It makes me feel good to do this. I think it's because I am (in a sense) in control of my own sexualization. I am making and choosing (my own image) the image I present.

I know it is not my image. It's a product of everything except/outside of me.

If holding someone's desire is power or control, the need for this power is to be without power. Desiring to be desired is also powerlessness. Yearning to be wanted, even as a performance/mimic/representation is to be in state a of desperation. Desire is conflated – do we (I) desire to be the other (a man), to *be* the/your/my performative self, or to have the/your/my performance? Self-identification and desire are not mutually exclusive – wanting to be someone and wanting to have someone can happen at once.

Some psychoanalytic theory tends to construe identification and desire as two mutually exclusive relations to love objects that have been lost through prohibition/separation. Any intense emotional attachment this divides into either wanting to have someone or wanting to be that someone, but never both at once. It is important to consider that identification and desire can coexist, that their formulation in terms of mutually exclusive oppositions serves a heterosexual matrix.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Judith Butler, *Imitation and Gender Insubordination*

Using specific pronouns and language around possession, I attempt to address the formation identity through the eyes of another and the desire to be and have in *Be Mine (Sweet Potato Baby)*. SHE IS SO BEAUTIFUL WHY CAN'T SHE BE MINE/ HE IS SO BEAUTIFUL WHY CAN'T HE BE MINE.

This outside-in perspective on their own sexuality leads to the confusion that is at the heart of the myth. Women come to confuse sexual looking with being looked at sexually; many confuse sexually feeling with being sexually felt; many confuse desiring with being desirable....Women tell me they're jealous of the men who get so much pleasure out of the female

body; that they imagine being inside the male body that is inside their own so that they can vicariously experience desire.<sup>13</sup>

- Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used against Women*



Figure 8: *Be Mine (sweet potato baby)*, 2015

I wish I had a dick too: a love story. <sup>14</sup>  
-Melissa Broder, *So Sad Today*

In *Pink (kiss)*, I continuously apply lipstick and kiss myself- all the parts that I can reach. Leaving bruise like marks across my body, coloring myself pink. It is tender and at times ravenous- I love myself and consume myself. I cover and stain. I am constructed from/ consumed by/ filtered through male desires; how do I understand my own (desires)?





Figure 9: *Pink (kiss)*, 2016

Online platforms for image exchange, like Instagram©, necessitate a constant recontextualization of identity and further complicate ownership or authenticity of image and the female body. Self-representation in digital image making acknowledges and re-establishes a female body on display. Social media and “selfie” culture allows for a (perhaps) false sense of empowerment or control over one’s image. The screen functions as a constant mirror for the production or curation of our representative selves. The power is not fully in the hands of the image-taker, as their performance is undoubtedly conflated/flawed with the structures and expectations in place culturally. I will never be truly authentic or truly myself. In *SHE, HER, ME, YOU*, the video is separated into four frames. In each, I apply lipstick non-stop for 20 minutes, looking into the camera as if it were a mirror, attending to the act as performance (it is). The lipstick becomes increasingly thick, turning what is intended to make pretty into something more gruesome, subverting the gaze of the other and (maybe) my own.

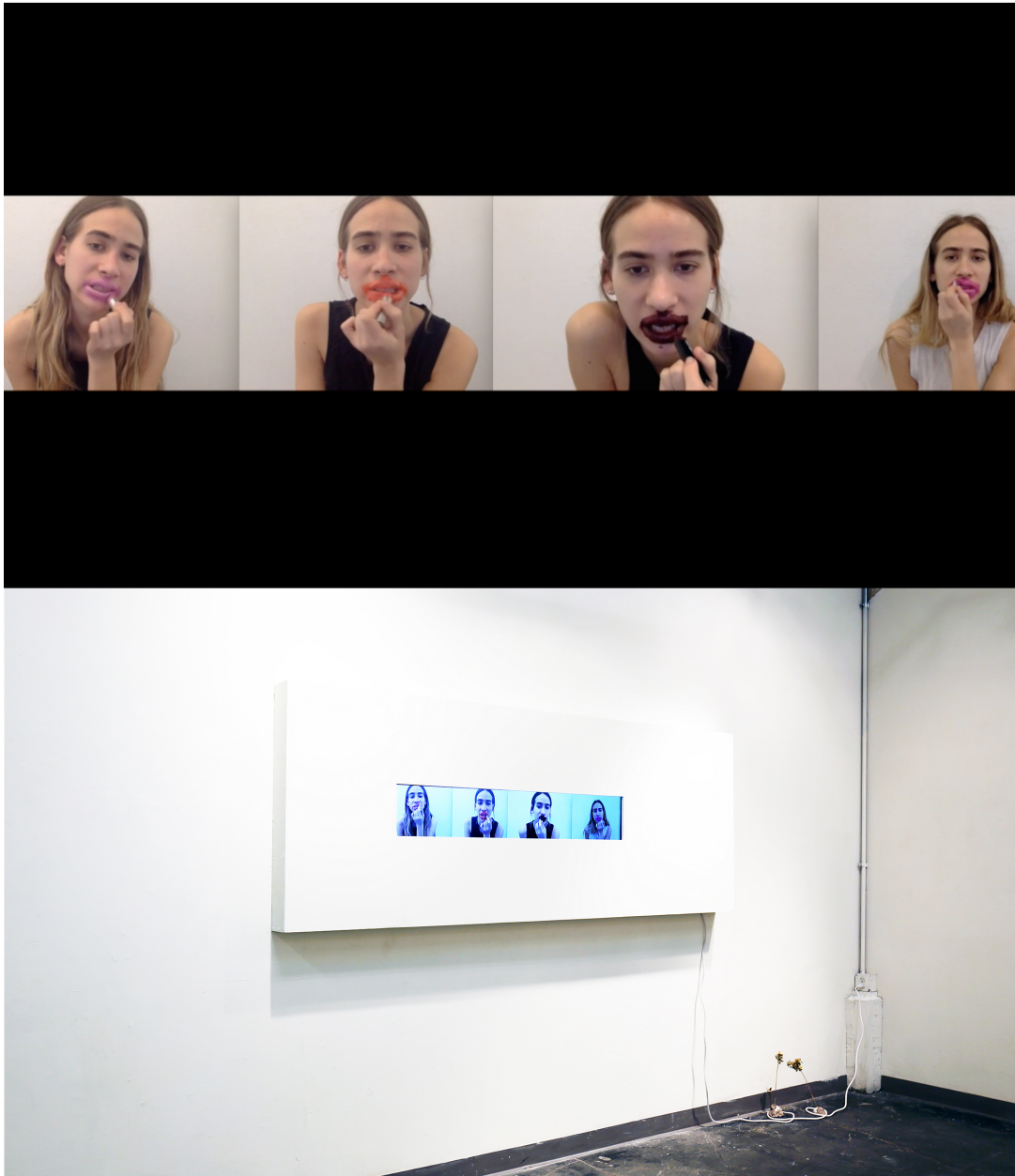


Figure 10: *HER, SHE, ME, YOU*, 2016

This investigation and rejection of the male gaze is exhausting. I question how a conscious performance or a malleable self functions as escapism. Is there power in escapism?

Now when I wake in the mornings, I look out the window in the hopes that a policeman on a horse will pass by. When it doesn't happen, I untangle myself from the sheets and get up and go to the mirror to start my day. I produce a haughty, superior expression to intimidate myself into thinking I'm cool, cooler than I am. I make my eyes as world-weary as possible, like a fashion model's, then I think. You're a charlatan. You love everything you were ever given. I want more than to appear sufficiently cool in my own eyes---though this would be admitting that all my vanity and primping has been a waste. Every glance into the mirror and the expressions I've contrived to intimidate myself fatuous. It is perhaps better to continue along the path toward beauty I have not started on, and to hope that, if I am rigorous enough in following this path, it will lead me somewhere great. Then, if I do succeed in turning myself into an idol, it will not have been for nothing. I am not thinking of the one that said into order to gain life, you have to lose it. If I lose it, I will be like the earth spinning off its axis into infinity, and who knows, without being something I can gaze and admire, if I will ever find my way back. <sup>15</sup>

- Sheila Heti, *How Should a Person Be*

I like being the mimic – I can escape the falseness of myself for an even more inflated falseness. At least I know how false that one is. Not much is truly fulfilling anyway.

There is power in escapism, I've decided.

## Chapter 5

### Making Pink and Vomit Stains

17. But what goes on in you when you talk about color as if it were a cure, when you have not yet stated your disease. <sup>16</sup>  
-Maggie Nelson, *Bluets*

Looking outside of the realm of performance – that which we can control, lies the implicit qualities of femaleness/a female experience. The experiences of womanhood that are biological/physiological: menstruation, breasts. Women are taught to cover, contain, and conceal their bodies. Restrictive undergarments hold our breasts and bellies in place. Should they move, it is not a woman's flesh that its unrestrained, but it is her entire being that is uncontrollable. Evidence of fluids suggests that we are unclean, unfit, and unable to take care of ourselves:

The obsessive concern over deployments of purity and cleanliness signified the cultures intense abjection of the contamination of foreign and feminine body/objects. These associations with bodily fluids and excrement rendered a cultural fetishizing of vestments that provided not only protection for the body from outside contamination objects but, in terms of the notes of the feminine, a way to constrain, manipulate, and label female bodies.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Frenchy Lunning, *Object-Oriented Feminism*

I apply dye by spraying, rubbing, dipping, pouring it directly on the textile, physically engaging the work in a way that echoes its inherent qualities. These actions, both tender and violent, leave evidence of a transgression or occurrence.



That which is inflicted by another. That which is forced. Stain becomes then, both an enactment and vestige of degradation, violence and coercion. Stigma perpetuates the idea of self-stain, directing the blame at the survivor and not the perpetrator. Let it be noted that in botany, the word stigma is used to describe the part of the pistil which is the receptacle for pollen in impregnation; that is, the female region of the plant. Stigma is continually socialised as a female condition. <sup>18</sup>

~ Jenni Sorkin, *The Textile Reader*

Stain belongs to the person who carries it, marked by it. A female body takes on (in) what is projected onto it. That to be born into a female body is to be born marked. A stain penetrates, infects, seeps (woman is penetrated, infected). There is no way to rid oneself of stain (it is part of oneself).

In my video works, I pursue stain as relative to the performance of my own body. I explore ways of staining or marking my body pink through actions like makeup application, slapping, pinching, kissing, and spitting pink liquid. While some of these actions are performed by me upon myself, some utilize the hands of other performers. All contact is done with (my) intention. I explore the color pink as a framework/construction for a kind of female identity/femininity that is unachievable or uncomfortable (for me).

Makeup holds the ability to cover and conceal, to exaggerate, to morph the face. It can empower or act as a mask to express personality, but also implies the *need* to cover, conceal, exaggerate, to empower to fit a set of standards. To be more *something* (my face is not enough as it is).

Makeup is a semiotic code for erotics – indicating sexual availability with a pouty red lip or flushed pink cheeks. A marker of availability.

The skin is necessary of course. You need the skin. Without one of the ticks in the bag it all falls apart. It is a house of cards, your new identity. The makeup artist miraculously reappears to finish the sale. Look at how lovely you look. Your skin looks so young so dewy so glowing. You are reborn. You are luminous. You are lit from within. You flitter under the flattery, docile, obedient.

I'll take it. You say. I'll take it. I'll take the eyes, I'll take the lips, I'll take the skin. I'll take it all.

Wrap up my new face and throw it in a bag.

They give you a face to take home, an actual proper face with colored in instructions. These masks like memento mori.

Faces, other faces, I can take mine off and breath. <sup>19</sup>

-Kate Zambreno, *Green Girl*

As stain imbues memory into flesh or cloth, objects hold memory in the function of artifact or souvenir. Objects that exist in the world and have been taken from their functional context and relocated and assigned a new function or non-function, offer a new vantage point from which they are viewed. Object/material displacement becomes the birth of a new narrative:

The substituting power of the souvenir operates within the following analogy: as experience is to an imagined point of authenticity, so narrative is to the souvenir. The souvenir displaces the point of authenticity as it itself becomes the point of origin for narrative. Such a narrative cannot be generalized to encompass the experience of anyone it pertains one to the processor of the object. It is a narrative which seeks to reconcile the disparity between interiority and exteriority, subject and object, signifier and signified.<sup>20</sup>

~ Susan Stewart, *On Longing*

*Bend* articulates a new landscape through object arrangement within the installation. Lumpy bone-like branches are held up, placed over or next to sweet potatoes, small rocks, broken ceramics, glass containers, makeup powder, false eyelashes. Makeup becomes hyperplastic/unnatural next to a sweet potato, but also takes on the role of dirt in its loose, granular, uncontained form. Each with their own individual meanings, (re)arranging these objects together, allows me to create a vocabulary unique to my practice. This vocabulary becomes a support or point of juncture for my videos, textiles, and sculptures.



Figure 11: *Bend*, 2016

## Chapter 6

### Existing Inside and Outside of Myself

I want to be a whole person but also really thin.

Maggie want to be FREE but she also wants to be LOVED and these are polar instincts.<sup>21</sup>

-Kate Zambreno, *O Fallen Angel*

Pebbles is a girl that doesn't know anything. She has not experienced herself outside of herself, yet (that's not true). She has not *seen* herself yet. Pebbles lives outside of herself because she is not trapped by her own body. She is *in* her body (not *watching* it). She touches things, she plays, moves with fluidity. She experiences the material world one- to-one (her and it).

Pebbles is: picking flowers, playing-not planning, living in dirt, unaware of her body, sweetness, decorating things (indulging herself).



Figure 12: *Pebbles Is a Girl That Doesn't Know Anything*, 2017





Figure 13: *Pebbles Is a Girl That Doesn't Know Anything*, 2017

My ex-boyfriend used to make me sweet potato fries every time we were together. I love sweet potatoes. I felt conflicted in our relationship. I always wanted to be loved more, cared for more. I thought I was asking too much (I always am). I wanted to be wanted and I hated myself for it. I felt desperate, like a “bad” woman (I am bad at being a woman).

In the last two years, sweet potatoes have become a recurrent material in my work. Sometimes hiding, sometimes cradled in small nests. This year, several neglected potatoes in my studio began to grow purple stems. This happens when you leave food out, I know. I felt sad for these potatoes (they were asking for my attention). I started to sprout sweet potatoes in water, deciding to nurture them. Some never sprouted, some molded. Some grew hairy roots and green leaves. I wanted to care for them because I cannot care for myself (I am sick).

I became more sick (sick as in gross) in graduate school. I struggled to eat and threw up a lot (vomit stains).

I attempt to see myself outside of myself.





Figure 14: *Pebbles Is a Girl That Doesn't Know Anything*, 2017

I only see myself in fragments; pieced together, pieced apart, never fitting, never reconciling. *Pebbles Is a Girl That Doesn't Know Anything* is a splintered landscape.

A digitally printed floral textile resembling a tarp or curtain hangs from a steel armature. The steel is joined with messy welds and bends. Carpet pieces wrap around the armature like small bandages. Integrated into armature, architectural debris like tile, concrete brick, printed floral textiles, shower handles, print fabric scraps dusted with powdery blush, fleshy rubber chunks, rugs (found and made) allude to a domestic space. Specifically, a bathroom. The bathroom is a both an ultra-feminized and shameful place – where we do things our body cannot control, where we attempt to control our bodies (getting ready). It's a confused space.



Figure 15: *Pebbles Is a Girl That Doesn't Know Anything (Lean Into It)*, 2017





Figure 16: Pebbles Is a Girl That Doesn't Know Anything, 2017

In my videos I exist fully within myself. I place myself in a position to be looked at, I endure pain. I am hyper aware of my body. I watch myself, critique myself but also see myself with empathy and love that I don't have otherwise.

In *Lean Into It*, I am pinched and caressed alternately by two hands: one female, one male. The pinches are hard, pulling at my skin, turning it pink, leaving a couple of bruises (you can have me if you want). The caresses are at times gentle and others rough (please want me). The video runs in a loop, with no clear beginning or end. Each shot is only a few seconds, creating an image that lives in flux between the two gestures (I live in flux between the two gestures). A confused image (I am confused). Like my sculptures, I am touched, manipulated- I am material.

Another video plays on a television placed low to the ground, resting on two bricks. On the screen are two hands, one hand is painting the nails of the other with bright red-orange polish. The movement is slow and mechanical, repetitive. After the nails are covered, the painting continues until each of the fingers are drenched in polish. The monitor is surrounded by sprouting sweet potatoes, floating in dented glass jars, placed on stacked bricks and powdery clay



structures – a terrain of growth and artifice. The objects live together in space constructed through play and instinct.

Throughout the space, there are small gestures like (picked/plucked) wildflowers tied onto extension cords or blonde hairs and tiny dried flowers stuffed into empty spaces within the armatures. These tender interventions allow me (permission) to preserve my own sweetness. I want (permission) to make (something) pretty.

Together, the videos, textiles and sculptures attempt to find a place of realistic female experience. A confused one. One that accesses guilt, power, shame, contradictions, desire, weakness, honesty. One that doesn't know anything but also knows a lot.

Little Pebbles,

Am I girl?

Am I woman?

Am I object?

## Endnotes

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## Vita

### **Education**

2017 Virginia Commonwealth University. Richmond, VA.

MFA Craft and Material Studies

2013 Maryland Institute College of Art. Baltimore, MD.

BFA Fiber Major, Experimental Fashion Concentration.

2011 Parsons Paris. Paris, France.

Paris, France. Semester abroad.

### **Professional Experience**

2016- 2017 Studio Assistant, Sonya Clark, Richmond, VA

2016 Studio Assistant, Leigh Suggs, Richmond, VA.

2015-2016 Virginia Commonwealth University, Teaching Assistant, Richmond, VA.

2015 Craft Alliance Center of Art and Design. Faculty/ Instructor, St. Louis, MO.

2014 Studio Be. Instructor. St. Louis, MO.

2013 Studio Assistant to Artist Piper Shepard, Baltimore MD.

2013 Rooms Gallery, Studio Assistant, Chicago, IL.

### **Residencies**

2017 Quirk Gallery, Richmond, VA.

2016 Acre Residency, Steuben, WI.

2014 Craft Alliance Center of Art + Design, Fiber Artist-in-Residence, St. Louis, MO.

2014 Pyramid Atlantic Art Center, Silver Spring MD.

### **Selected Exhibitions**

2017 Little Berlin, Philadelphia, PA.

2017 Quirk Gallery, Richmond, VA.

2017 Acre, Chicago, IL.

2017 New Waves, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (Second Prize), Virginia Beach, VA.

2016 Practice, Artspace, Richmond VA.

2016 Just Put Your Number in My Phone, Otion Front Studio, Brooklyn, NY.  
 2015-2017 Mindful: Exploring Mental Health through Art. (traveling exhibition)  
     2015 Society For Contemporary Craft, Pittsburgh, PA.  
     2016 Ohio Craft Museum, Columbus, OH,  
     2016 Daura Gallery, Lynchburg College, Lynchburg, VA.  
     2017 Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art, Virginia Beach, VA.  
     Kaddatz Galleries and Lake Region Arts Council, McKnight, Gallery,  
     Fergus Falls, MN.  
     Fuller Craft Museum Brockton, MA.  
 2015 Art 314, Contemporary Art Museum Saint Louis, St. Louis, MO.  
 2015 This Just In, The Depot Gallery Virginia Commonwealth University,  
 Richmond, VA.  
 2015 Artist-in- Residence Exhibition, Craft Alliance Center of Art + Design, St.  
 Louis, MO.  
 2014 My November Valentine, Reese Gallery, St. Louis, MO.  
 2014 FABRIC, St. Louis Fashion Week, Public Media Commons, St. Louis, MO.  
 2013 Manneqart, Howard County, MD.  
 2013 Off the Rack , Benefit Fashion Show for Pyramid Atlantic Art Center,  
 Fillmore Theater, Washington, DC.  
 2013 Slight-Mag, The Bun Shop, Baltimore, MD .  
 2013 R.I.P. V.I.P Experimental Fashion Event, 2640 (St. Johns Church)  
 Baltimore, MD.  
 2012 The Big Day Reopening of the Contemporary Wing, Baltimore Museum of  
 Art, Baltimore, MD.

### **Publications**

2017 Surface Design Association, "Crafting Community: SDA 2016 Inaugural  
 International Exhibition in Print."  
 2016 American Craft Council, "Voices."  
 2016 Huffington Post, "'Mindful: Exploring Mental Health Through Art' Premieres  
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 2015 St. Louis Magazine "Grace Kubilius: Fiber Artist" July Issue.  
 2015 Alive Magazine, "My Style" March Issue.  
 2014 Imagine Magazine, Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth, "Art and  
 Architecture" Vol.21 No.5 May/June 2014, Choosing Art, pg 40.



2013 Slight-Mag, "Out of the Dark" Issue 1, Unravel and Decay, p11-19. Tête-à-Tête, pg 47-51.

**Honors and Awards**

2016 Haystack Summer Conference, awarded by Virginia Commonwealth University Craft and Material Studies Department.

2016 Outstanding Student Award, Surface Design Association.

2015-2017 Graduate Teaching Assistant Award, Richmond, VA.

2013-2009 Deans List, Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, MD.

2010 Returning Student Scholarship, Maryland Institute College of Art , Baltimore, MD.

2009 Merit Scholarship, Maryland Institute College of Art , Baltimore, MD.

2009 Academic Excellence Scholarship, Maryland Institute College of Art , Baltimore, MD.