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Lessons

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

by

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Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, VA
April 2018

Acknowledgments

Jack, thank you for your criticality, and your patience. Your true dedication to education and the importance of meaningful making is inspiring and impactful.

Blair, Bo, and Margaret, thank you for insisting I be insistent, and guiding me back to my voice.

Susie, thank you for pushing me when I start to get too comfortable....and reminding me to eat my vegetables.

Erin, Maya, Grace, none of this would exist without your selfless dedication and generosity. You are all forces to be reckoned with.

Crafty Witches, I couldn't have done this without you. The tattoos are proof.

Meg, words can't express what you've meant to me, how you've helped me the last two years. Our friendship has been fueled by frozen pizza and many nights laughing until we cry and I wouldn't have it any other way.

Grandma, your support and love means more than you'll know.

Mom, Dad, Sammy thank you for always being there, even half the world away.

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Abstract

LESSONS

By Kathryn Kirk Murphy, MFA

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Virginia Commonwealth University, 2018.

Major Director: Jack Wax, Professor, Craft and Material Studies, Glass

I am learning through these lessons.

The following document includes my convoluted musings about my work, making process, and body leading up to my thesis exhibition, *Avoidance Kitchen*. My struggle with my reflected image comes from my struggle with my self-perceived physical image.

What does it mean for a piece to disappear, only to find the reflection of someone else's work or body in its place? Is my craft rendered obsolete if all you want to do is take a funny selfie? Is my work unacknowledged if all you see is the sculpture across the room, in reverse? What happens when an object or installation is elevated and ignored within the same space?

LESSONS

Alchemy Residency, August 2017
A lesson in self reflection

“I longed then for a place I could go and stand and voice my fear and release my anxiety and make some kind of peace with the powers residing in the earth.”¹

- James Houston

Our bodies, all different shapes and sizes, are nourished on vegetables picked from Jamie Kennedy’s garden and carbs made by our hands. The meals, with wine and cheese purchased from local growers, are going literally from hand to mouth. The vegetables are dug with our own hands (dirt remains beneath all of our fingernails). The pastas and breads kneaded and nurtured over several hours or days. The wine and cheese are made by our neighbors- who are all fascinated by this large group of women taking over their small town for ten days.

My understanding of my place, body, and experience has shifted since coming here. I thanked my legs for having the strength to push me up the hill so that my eyes could see the corn fields, and my ears could feel the relief of the wind gushing past me as I came down from the peak. I did not shame myself for eating those extra pieces of homemade fudge, or that ice cream, or that third piece of bread.

I am perhaps understanding more of what I am supposed to be doing in my practice. Graduate School had shifted me so far away from the person I thought I was. I wouldn’t, I couldn’t recognize her on the street. I was tired, stressed, scared, and overwhelmed in my studio. I now feel like my body is breathing for the first time in over a year. I’m exhaling.

¹ James Houston, *A Writer’s Sense of Place, The True Subject*, 97

I'm exhaling the city and inhaling the farm. I am exhaling all of the perceived negativity and inhaling the nurturing mothers with whom I share my meals here. I am the age of their children. They take care of me, unconsciously. I worry for them as a child would. We share wine, lots of wine, and stories, lots of stories. I learn about Peggy's bicycling accident. I hear about Lynn's daughter's wedding...the loss of her father, too.

I learn that I can make in a studio that is less than ideal. My studio is an eight-foot long table at the end of the kitchen. I create while bread is kneaded behind me; while euchre games are played late at night. I turn my chair around and make citrus foam. My process shifts from the objects on my table to the act of making in the kitchen with the turn of a chair. This is ideal. This is the literal embodiment of my perfect practice. How can I make this practice exist within my studio when I get home? Do I make a kitchen in my studio? Do I practice without glass? Who am I as an artist without glass in my hand? In my work?

I spend time making monoprints with the dyes made by Deborah. She shares with me the process of collecting goldenrod, tickseed, sumac berries, chamomile, and carrot tops. She shares with me yogurt containers full of these dyes. I dip my papers into these dyes, spoon the muted colors onto paper and let the pools dry. This process feels free to me in a way working hasn't felt in a while. I'm collecting broken glass found in one of the artist studio barns and making tracings with them. I'm still using glass. I am still a glass artist. I am still a glass artist. I am still a glass artist. The glass is dictating how I make my prints now. I am a glass artist. I am a glass artist. I am a glass artist. I am printing with glass. I am a printmaker. I am a printmaker?



Figure 1: chamomile and tickseed monoprints

I have never been the most talented or the smartest, but I have always persisted. Duration is my strong suit. My work is the longest performance ever. Performing for my peers and mentors, pretending I belong here. Being put on probation after candidacy was a crack into my worst fears. My faculty saw that I didn't belong. They saw my performance as an artist and questioned it. Who am I if I am not a glassmaker? Who am I if I am not an artist?

They started baking bread this morning. It is almost 5 pm and it was a good bread day. Ilze, our Latvian bread maker/artist described today with such passion. She spoke of the bread rising in the sun, the heat feeding the starter and yeast. Today was a good bread day.

I think I am beginning to understand myself. I think I am beginning to love myself. I think this may be enough.

Waiting Tables
A lesson in humbleness

“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”.²

- Jessica Valenti

For the better part of the last decade, including my last year of graduate school, I have waited tables. The high energy, high stress job has paid my bills and my tuition. It used to be fun and exciting. I loved working with new people, cultivating my own regulars, and never knowing what to expect when I walked into a shift. Now, I walk into the building and have to shut my brain off to the 2,000 things I would rather be doing. It makes me cry to be too physically exhausted from working to get out of bed to come to the studio. I shut my brain off for the entire shift, and have to forget about grad school and forget about all the trouble-shooting I have to do in my studio, because for the next 6-10 hours, I need to remember to bring table 204 water and a drink menu, take the order for 207, make lattes for two 6 tops, and smile as I spout lies about the delicious menu.

I’m tired of the culture of working my ass off, memorizing all of the ingredients in all of the food and drinks (in case of allergies), and then rage at another bar for the rest of the night. I’m tired of surrounding myself with coworkers who like that lifestyle. That lifestyle of work hard, play hard just isn’t satisfying for me anymore (after all where does this get me? I’m not making any strides

² Jessica Valenti, *Sex Object*, 5

nor making any progress for busting my ass all night). I'm tired of serving food for 6 hours without a chance to pee, drink water, sit, or eat. All I want to do after my shift is go home, eat some dinner at 12 am, and go to sleep. And then it becomes a cycle of doing it over, and over, and over, and over again. Where does my studio practice fit in?

Can I leave this cycle of monotony?

Waiting tables creates a unique and extreme sense of anxiety for me. I constantly mull over things I could have done differently interacting with the guests, this usually creates a nasty cycle of insomnia and irritability. I know I'm a good server, I get compensated very well both verbally and monetarily, yet I think about every little thing I may have done wrong. It's humbling to have people talk to you in such a belittling way, constantly.

I am an introvert. Interacting with that many people each night is completely exhausting.

It is so stressful to deal with other people, serving other people, being made to feel less than other people (because I am a waitress) and then turn this all off and be productive in my studio. There are so many micro-aggressions, little comments and the faces that people make. These all contribute to me devaluing myself. This sounds like a "me" problem, and not a "them" problem, but growing up in a society that devalues my womanhood has made me overanalyze all of these moments.

And yet, I am an excellent waitress. I kick ass and I know it. I know my way around a cocktail, and can explain a special in the most enticing way possible. I get to know my guests intimately- know the right questions to ask, when to laugh, and when to apologize. I know that my quirky awkwardness is not a threat to most women on their dates; surely their man would not be interested in me. This almost always leads to a larger tip. This is also my performance. I am exhausted from being charismatic and quirky. The truth is I am not charismatic. I am painfully shy and awkward, my anxiety bubbles over. I sometimes go outside and squat- resting my butt and thighs on my shins and ankles and experience a panic attack. Being “on” for too long triggers an unstoppable explosion of emotions.

If I am not a glassmaker and I don't want to be a waitress what am I? I am a performer. Someone who attempts to elude detection. I am a fablemaker. I can make myself what you want me to be. I can be an artist. I can be a server. I can be a server that smiles as you spit swine out of your mouth at me. I can be a server that smiles and thanks you as you spit swine out of your mouth at me. I cannot turn that server off completely. That waitress follows me to the studio. The anger at the guest who was mad about her own life and took it out on me was transferred to me when I smiled and said thank you. I can feel it coming out of me. I know in those moments I will transfer my anger to another undeserving person. I will pass along that hate, and once I do, I will release it from my body, release that server from my body, and then perhaps I can begin performing as an artist again. The same goes for my positive feelings. When I interact with an incredible table of guests, and am compensated with generous monetary tips, and verbal tips, I maintain that server, too. I need to go spread that verbal praise to someone else.

Does this mean that I am crazy? I'd like to think I am just a sensitive person.

Eating Bagels
A lesson in hating myself a little less

“let it go
let it leave
let it happen
nothing
in this world
was promised or
belonged to you
anyway”

*all you own is yourself*³
Rupi Kaur

I have never loved my body. I have rarely ever liked it. My hate for my body usually results in some form of self-destructive behavior. When I was 14 I tried to commit suicide. When I was 17, I cut off all my hair. I didn't feel beautiful; I intentionally made myself look ugly. When I was 19, I lost 40 pounds, through a combination of a very restrictive diet and constant exercise.

I looked beautiful but hated my reflection. My size two hips were still too round, I still felt lumpy. As I've aged, I have tried to give myself more leniency. I have stopped dying my hair; my 25 years has begun to produce grey on the top of my head. I stare at them in the mirror every morning.

When I use public restrooms, I purposely avoid looking at my reflection, so as not to appear vain. I don't want people to think I actually find myself attractive. I'm not attractive. I'm fat, lumpy, and old. I am not the youthful 19 year old who starved herself. I am the slovenly 25 year old, the one who eats too many bagels.

³ Rupi Kaur, *all you own is yourself*, *The Sun and Her Flowers*

I am not announcing these things to you as an act of self-pity, or for the need of acceptance. I am trying to be honest. I distort reflections in my practice because of how distorted my reflection of myself is. I've been told I have an aggressive personality. I wonder if anyone would think to tell me this if I was a man.

I work with glass, a material that is inherently beautiful. Glass's ability to capture, manipulate, and reflect light, sound, and space is awe-inspiring. I will never be awe-inspiring.

My self-deprecation has ruined many relationships. I see the beauty in my friends, partners, and family members. The way that Brad's hands moved along the guitar; that was beautiful. The way that my mother can bring people together with something as seemingly simple as a meal; that is incredible. That is awe-inspiring. What can I do? I can make, in the solitude of my studio, shutting off all the voices in my head telling me I cannot, or should not. My voices tell me I am fat; that my chin is too full, that the bags under my eyes are too pronounced. My voices tell me I am unwanted, that there is no point in trying. My voices tell me I am not a good artist; the review of my candidacy work told that truth to me. I am usually overly critical of myself. The only thing I have always loved about myself has been my eyes. My eyes cannot lie like my mouth can. My eyes are honest, they are raw. They are hard and mean, but soft and vulnerable.

I dress my body modestly. I am not here to be cat-called, or desired, and my all black attire and piercing, blue-eyed glare will remind you of that. My gray hairs will remind you that I am too old to be cat-called anyway.

My mother and father raised my sister and I with no comments on our looks or how we chose to feed ourselves. I realize now that this was a unique upbringing for two young girls of our generation, but yet still we obsess over beauty. We started having play dates, which as we got older meant we sat in front of mirrors with our friends, obsessing over doing our hair, and silently picking out the errors in our bodies and faces.

For part of my candidacy work, I made my first (and only) video piece, *all you do is give (all i do is take)*, in which I recorded myself every time I needed to cry. I needed to release all of my guilty emotions, my family takes such good care of me, and I couldn't care less for myself.

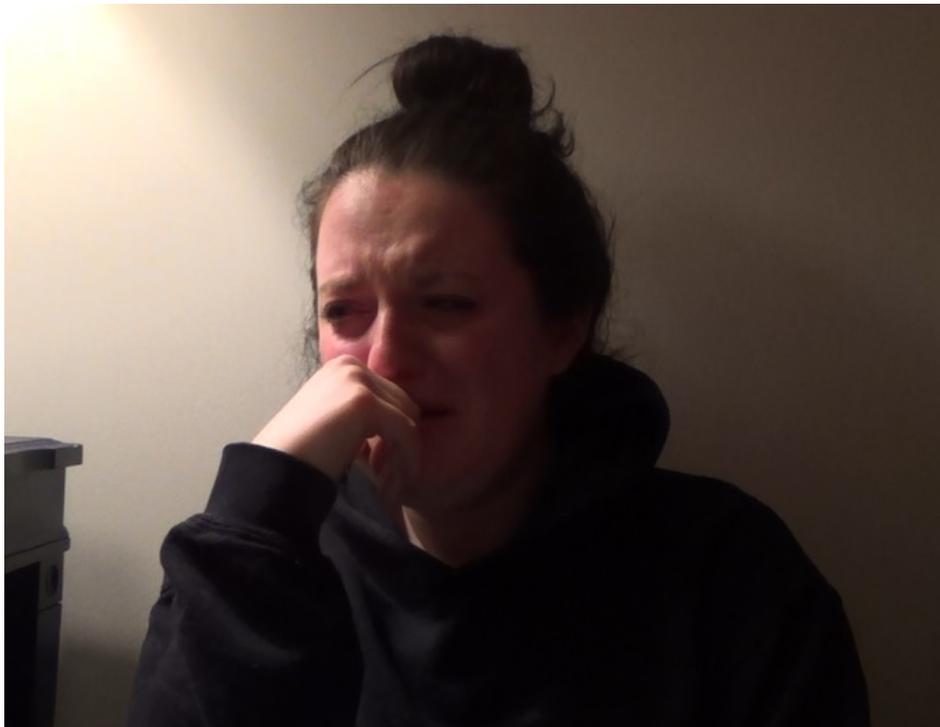


Figure 2: all you do is give (all I do is take), video still

I cringe when I see a fat person eating gluttonously.

I don't think about it when I see a thin person doing so.

That is so fucked up.

People should be able to put whatever the fuck they want into their bodies without the critical gaze of another.

As a woman growing up in the late 90's and early 00's, images of beautiful people were everywhere. In magazines, on MySpace, embodied in the teens my age who were petite, and considered proper, and right. I had a friend in high school who told me that I wasn't fat, I was just big-boned. She held her wrist up to mine and said, "See? Your wrist is twice as big as mine."

That didn't make me feel very beautiful.

Family as Art
A lesson in homesickness

“my
mother
was
my first country.
the first place i ever lived.”
--lands⁴
Nayyirah Waheed

As the daughter of a chef, food has always been central to my familial language. Every time I visit my parents' home, I leave with at least one container of homemade red sauce to put in my freezer.

I miss my family....always.

Deeply felt nostalgia is not unique for someone who has moved to a new place, and entered into a new community, but it is true, and it hurts. It has been hard to swallow that life goes on at home, while I'm here.

My little sister moved to Albania for two years to join the Peace Corps. I won't see her again anytime soon.

⁴ Nayyirah Waheed, *lands, salt*.

Researching and cooking food have been a way I tie myself back to home. In my first year of graduate school, I obsessively watched movies and television series about cooking. Moments of beauty shown through and certain movies, like *Babette's Feast* and *Big Night* stuck with me. *Babette's Feast*, about a refugee from Paris who moves to Denmark to cook for a family, shows the true passion evoked from a cared-for meal. *Big Night*, similarly, focuses on one meal, created by two brothers giving their all to the last meal in their failing restaurant. I feel a deep connection to these movies, to these people giving everything they have to a meal, to give to others.



Figure 3: still from Babette's Feast, 1987



Figure 4: still from Big Night, 1996

In *spezzare il pane con mamma*, I made an enameled blown vessel which I used as a bread cozie. I baked bread, made from my mother's 30 year old bread starter. The bread was cooked in the kiln, a space meant to allow glass to be safely annealed, a touchable object. By baking my bread and cooling my glass within the same place, I paid homage to the kiln's kindness to my work. The bread, and hand churned butter, were given to my community of grad students while a recording of my mother getting drunk and talking to me about her twenties played softly in the background. Maybe what I want is to learn how to give like my mother does?



Figure 5: spezzare il pane con mamma

I then made the *Don't you want to come to dinner (remnants of a meal)* series, an aftermath of three live performances. During each performance, the room was closed to all but those I had invited to share the meal with me: my friends, my studio assistants, and my family. While overall I felt these unseen performances were not successful, I had hoped to gain an understanding of the intimate moments of a shared family meal around a table. This was something I was missing and longing for after my move to Virginia. I created spreads of food, taken from my mother's recipes, and served everything on blown, cold worked, and kiln formed glass tableware. I wanted to thank the important people in my life, acknowledging and attempting to exchange their love with my labor.



Figure 6: don't you want to come to dinner? (remnants of a meal with family)

Most recently, in *my hands smell like my mother's hands*, I made pasta in a durational performance. I occasionally shared an uncomfortable stare with the audience—does my lack of caring of this dough, and towards you, make you uneasy? Are you concerned that this table will collapse? I am.

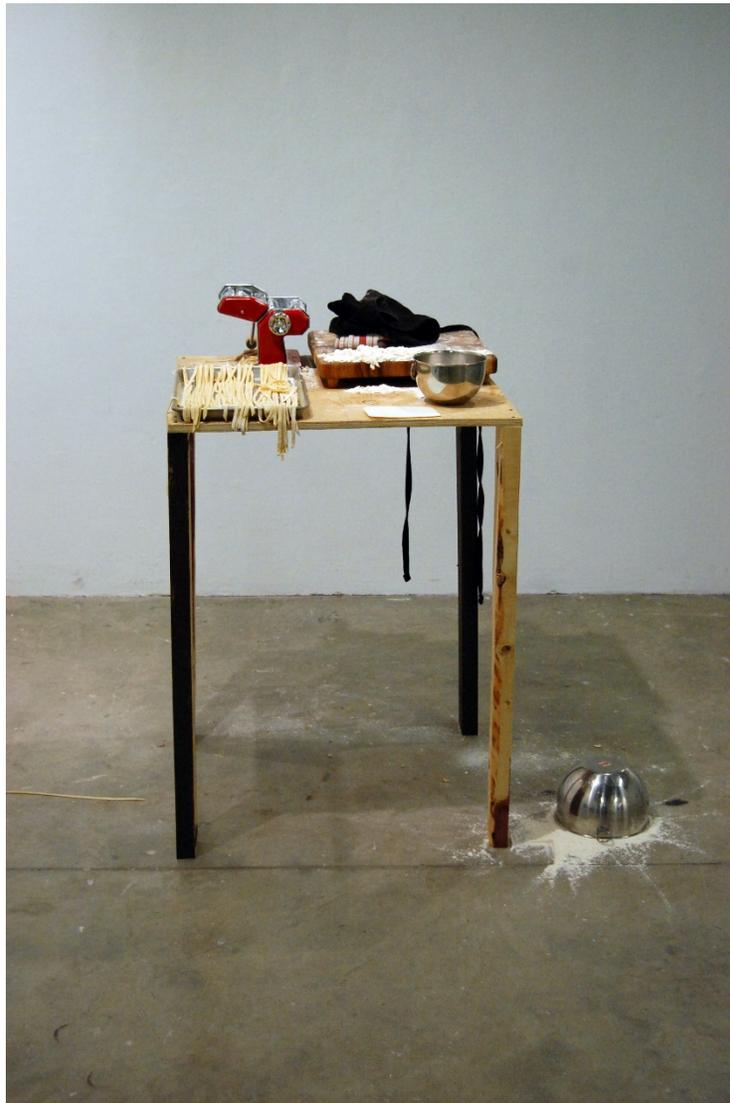


Figure 7: my hands smell like my mother's hands, pasta performance

My mom worked long hours when my sister and I were growing up. She would come home from working in a kitchen all day and give us a hug, her chef coat still on. God, I hated how her hands

smelled. They smelled like twelve hours of labor, they smelled like she had earned every penny of her paycheck, by fileting fish, or cutting down portions of meats and vegetables. They smelled like some form of decay.

Now, my mother doesn't cook professionally. Her hands now smell of cigarettes and red wine. I miss the way she used to smell.

turning and
turning and turning and turning and turning and turning and turning and turning and turning and
don't stop turning

the voices will come back.

The Sequel (try again)
A lesson in failure

This summer I created a new body of work, in an attempt to gain my footing again. This work was wholly and completely necessary for my hands to make, and developing this series allowed me to get back to center. The following passage describes this work in a more technical, sterile way than the rest of my thesis. I created this series from a distance, I was in an emotionally strange place, and focusing on the technical aspects allowed me to get back to me.

I felt like I was collapsing into myself, so I went back to my place of reasoning, the hot glass studio. *Collapse into Me* consists of five blown vessels in varying pretty pastel shades, created by blowing a tight amphora form, and then collapsing the top of the piece rather than opening it. I let the heat take control, while keeping the base stable and sturdy. It holds the ground steady for these unbalanced tops.



Figure 8: Collapse into Me

Also in the hot shop, I created *i can make you beautiful, too*, a grouping of four blown objects balancing on a sandblasted mirror hung by fishing line. The mirror is sandblasted with thousands of little clear dots, breaking up the reflection. These blobjects are blown and hot worked with a hand torch, a torch that uses a blend of oxygen and propane to create a very hot, very small and precise flame. I torched a spot on the bubble, and had my assistant blow very gently. This created a bump of the surface of the glass. We repeated this again and again. After all pieces are annealed, I cold worked the bottoms to create a flat place for each object to rest. I then sat with the object and created patterns of thousands of dots, using a low fire enamel. I spent so much time with these four small objects, my hands touching each curve intimately. I began to understand them.



Figure 9: i can make you beautiful, too

In a similar process of making, *glitter bomb (self-portrait)* was made. Ten pounds of black glitter fill this form. This lumpy blobject sits here, staring back at you with its thousands of shimmery, beady eyes, tempting you to get a little closer. The glass is a lense, a manipulator for how we see beauty.



Figure 10: glitter bomb (self-portrait)

I then started focusing on manipulating the viewer's perspective. In *Stomach Feels*, the fire-polished black frit forms gather on the mirror at the height of my stomach, showing a manifestation of my uncomfortable stomach knots. The base, a solid concrete form is sturdy, but holds the precariously placed mirror by a single, daggered edge.

I wanted something softer to balance with this work, and had just learned a new method of working with glass, using a silk screen to sift powders onto flat glass and firing it. I assisted Stacy Lynn Smith in teaching her class at the Chrysler Museum of Art Glass Studio on silk screening glass powders, which is where I created this piece. I grew up in the Philadelphia area, but spent quite a bit of time at my grandmother's house down the shore in New Jersey. We would always pick and eat fresh tomatoes from her garden. *Jersey Girl*, made from layers of silk screened and fired glass powders, has a top layer of text, which says words such as "juicy," "plump," "delicious," "thick," "luscious," and "round." I googled words that describe tomatoes, but could also reference the female form, for a play on words. Because the text is laid over the image of tomatoes, the image itself begins to distort, and you can't quite tell what you're looking at/for.



Figure 11: Jersey Girl

The final, and arguably most successful piece in this series is a two part mirror, *i can feel me judging me*. This mirror brought me back to working with reflective surfaces fully, and became a main part of my series, *Avoidance Objects*, which I discuss more in the next chapter. *i can feel me judging me* is a two part mirror, each side distorting reflection in different ways—one piece is carved away on the lathe, in a loose battuto method and then laminated with hxtal, an archival glue, to create a polished surface. The other half is covered in tiny blobs made from frit fire-

polished in the kiln. The two parts create a conversation, both distorting the viewer's reflection in unique ways.



Figure 12: i can feel me judging me

Avoidance Objects

A lesson in why I'm here

“...*men act* and *women appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an objects—and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.”⁶

- John Berger

So now that you know all of these things—why the fuck am I here? What am I making? Has this introduction given you any insight into what my hands can do; what my artistic voice desires and attempts to say...to articulate?

My thesis, *Avoidance Kitchen*, is an amalgamation of the series of pieces that I created in graduate school. I began school working with mirrors, cutting and carving them into little triangles, which would later become the piece, *Tell Me I'm Pretty*. This work, part of my *Avoidance Objects* series, is a grouping of four objects made of hundreds of mirrors which distort the viewer's reflection. Because I actively avoid my own gaze in reflections, I created objects which would force the viewer to really search to find any semblance of their own reflection. Instead, the other parts of the room were reflected back. *Tell Me I'm Pretty* was the catalyst for a series of mirror works investigating distorted and altered reflections. This was my first piece of graduate school. My fear of rejection with these mirror works meant I made a ton of experimental failures in the time between this and now, some of which have been described in previous chapters.

⁶ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 47



Figure 13: Tell Me I'm Pretty

My struggle with my reflected image comes from my struggle with my self-perceived physical image. I work within this body, which has gained and lost significant amounts of fat and muscle in its twenty five years. The moments when I was thinnest, I was always told how beautiful I was. I don't hear that anymore. So now I make beautiful work. Beauty is important and anyone who says differently is lying. If I can't bring beauty to the world with my substandard body, I will bring it to the world with my strong hands and arms, with my thoughtful brain. I will make this world so beautiful with my beautiful artwork that it will make you sick. You will say that it

is traditional or formal and you will critique its beauty because we are taught that beauty is not good enough.

In *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution*, Judith Butler notes that, “to be female is...a facticity which has no meaning, but to be a woman is to have *become* a woman, to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of ‘woman.’”⁷ To be a woman becomes a full time job. By choosing to present as woman, you take on the burden of all women, to “become a cultural sign,” as Butler states. The gaze, the act of looking upon, only emphasizes the burden of being a woman; gazes such as the gaze of other women (a desire to be), the gaze of men (a desire to have), and the gaze of oneself (a critique of unattainable desire). The gaze not only requires looking, but judgment, desire, repulsion, and a multitude of other factions. While I could place my focus on the gaze of other women, or a masculine gaze of desire upon me, my focus is on looking upon oneself. Butler acknowledges the embodiment of being a woman, in three general ways --“to do, to dramatize, and to reproduce.”⁸ Using this idea to interpret the act of looking upon oneself as a woman, we can read “to do” as performing or completing a task, like dressing as a woman, passing as a woman, and being gazed upon as a woman. “To dramatize” is-- exaggerating the doing, such as over-performing womanness, while “to reproduce”-- is copying or replicating Western perception of ideal womanness in order to be perceived as more womanly. These three things are all internal decisions about exterior physical appearance, determined by a set of patriarchal standards on how a woman should present herself. While a woman is

⁷ Judith Butler, *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution*, 522

⁸ Butler, *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution*, 521-2

analyzing her body- in mirrors, in photographs, in comparison to others- she is following a historically biased oppression of male patriarchal decisions.

Is there a way to reify these changes, and implement them within a new perspective on gender?

Although I am not suggesting changes to complex cultural behaviors, through my work, I question them. In addition to including mirrors in my practice, being a studio artist means that I always perform a task for an intended result. I work with mirrors, I am the mirror, and I am the woman for which the gaze is held. While I perform my work, my guilt in an incomplete task is my own self-critique, similarly to performing my gender in front of the mirror; I become my own worst critic. Mirrors show a flawed reflection- as do our distorted perceptions of our own bodies. Through my work, I question why this critique has become so extreme, and thus make *Avoidance Objects*.

Does the critique of the gaze alter the perception of the public? I still find myself glancing in a mirror or store window when I walk past, wanting to verify that my appearance is appropriate. I still exaggerate and over- or under-perform my gender in certain social situations. I have a hard time analyzing my body or my face for an extended period, because for twenty-five years, I have been told that what I have is not desirable, and what I want is unattainable.

Through the creation of *Avoidance Objects*, I am hoping to understand why the reflective surface has played such an important role in my development as an artist and a woman, and create a thoughtful critique on the importance of ideal.

Another piece in the *Avoidance Objects* series, *Routines*, was created last year by crushing and grinding the glass of a once-whole mirror. I invite the viewer to gaze at the object with a new perspective by removing the usual self-criticism inherent with seeing a reflection in the mirror. The viewer can enjoy the object as a whole without distraction or judgment normally incorporated into mirror gazing; I free the viewer from looking at him or herself.



Figure 14: Routines

Even before modern mirrors existed, the importance of the mirror to a woman's psyche and the warping of self-perception by the use of reflective surfaces was a topic of discussion. In 1835 Germany, Justin von Liebig invented the silver and nickel-plated mirrors we are familiar with today, but historical documents and artifacts prove that mirror-like objects have been around for over 8,000 years.⁹ However, this history does not address the obsession with how a woman looks and presents herself. This is clearly not a new idea, as it has been highlighted, dissected, and interpreted by countless authors, artists, and researchers; artists such as Joan Jonas who works with mirrors through performance, warping the viewers' perception of reality.

Jenijoy La Belle states that, "the mirror [as] a historical focus of female identity...questions dichotomies between self and reflected image...These are the very oppositions basic to representations of masculine selfhood which underlie a great deal of Western thought."¹⁰ La Belle hypothesizes that the mirror does much more than allow a person to see their reflection. Furthermore, the mirror as an object conflicts with a Western perception of masculinity, and in a binary gender system, the mirror must be associated with a female/feminine identity.

Thinking about all of the associations of the feminine with mirrors, I began to work on my thesis piece, *Avoidance Kitchen*. In American history, kitchens have often been associated with the feminine, and my own history of food and familial ties in my work made mirroring a kitchen seem like a logical next step. As I've been working with and researching food art for the last year, I am well aware that artistic referencing or replicating kitchens is not new or revolutionary.

⁹ Jacob Castro, *Who Invented the Mirror?*

¹⁰ Jenijoy La Belle, *Herself Beheld*, 2

But, as Aiden O'Connor and Juliet Kinchin state in, *Counter Space: Design and the Modern Kitchen*,

“As spaces we occupy and animate daily and that are constantly reflected back to us in popular media, kitchens have since the 1960s become an increasingly rich subject for artistic expression... Feminists condemned designs, including the Frankfurt Kitchen that they felt reinforced the physical and psychological isolation of women in the home. They exposed mythologies that disguised and devalued women’s domestic work with the veils of ‘labor-saving’ and ‘leisure’.”¹¹

This rich history of confronting issues with kitchens, particularly issues with women’s domestic work, can continue to be interpreted through fresh eyes. How would I see myself and my body in an entirely reflective kitchen?

Avoidance Kitchen is beautiful, because mirrors are beautiful. Glass is awe-inspiring in any physical form, but reflective glass...ahhh now you’ve really got me hooked. *Avoidance Kitchen* reflects the space back in which it exists; constantly changing as you move through the work. What does it mean for a piece to disappear, only to find the reflection of someone else’s work or body in its place? Is my craft rendered obsolete if all you want to do is take a funny selfie? Is my work unacknowledged if all you see is the painting across the room, in reverse? What happens when an object or installation is elevated and ignored within the same space?

¹¹ Aidan O'Connor and Juliet Kinchin, *Counter Space: Design and the Modern Kitchen*, 67



Figure 15: Avoidance Kitchen

As you entered the MFA exhibition, Avoidance Kitchen was the first piece you saw. Visitors had to walk across the mylar floor in order to experience the other works in the show, confronted immediately with their distorted image. Interestingly, at the opening, I would stop by the kitchen and see people opening cabinets and drawers, leaning on the counters, and taking photos of themselves constantly. The work became the backdrop for a space of socialization, similarly to my experiences in kitchens growing up, but it also became a vehicle for self-indulgent tendencies. What remains of this work are documented selfies.

What does it mean to cover these functional kitchen appliances and counters in materials of impermanence? Plastic mylar, spray glues, and metallic tape coat the exteriors of this kitchen; it will decay soon.

This is all temporary.

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Vita

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EDUCATION

- 2018 **Virginia Commonwealth University**, Master of Fine Arts Candidate,
Richmond, VA
- 2014 **Tyler School of Art, Temple University**, Bachelor of Fine Arts in Glass,
Philadelphia, PA

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- 2017 **Virginia Commonwealth University**, Adjunct Instructor, Intermediate Kiln/Cold
Fab., Richmond, VA
Chrysler Museum Glass Studio, Teaching Assistant to Stacy Smith, Screen
Printing Glass, Norfolk, VA
- 2016 **Virginia Commonwealth University**, Teaching Assistant to Jack Wax,
Richmond, VA
Salem Community College, Adjunct Instructor, Cold Construction, Salem, NJ
Tyler School of Art, Work Exchange, Teaching Assistant to Emma Salamon,
Philadelphia, PA
- 2015 **Tyler School of Art, Work Exchange**, Teaching Assistant to Nate Ricciuto,
Philadelphia, PA
Chrysler Museum Glass Studio, One-Day Workshops Teaching Assistant,
Norfolk, VA
Virginia Wesleyan College, Teaching Assistant, Julia Rogers, Norfolk, VA
- 2014 **Tyler School of Art, Work Exchange**, Teaching Assistant to Penelope Rakov,
Philadelphia, PA
- 2013 **Tyler School of Art, Introduction to Glass**, Teaching Assistant, Robyn
Weatherly, Philadelphia, PA
- 2012 **Tyler School of Art, Introduction to Glass**, Teaching Assistant, Megan Biddle,
Philadelphia, PA

AWARDS AND ORGANIZATIONS

- 2017 **Graduate Travel Grant**, Virginia Commonwealth University, Hampton, VA
Graduate Merit Scholarship, Virginia Commonwealth University, Fall 2017,
Richmond, VA
ALCHEMY 2017, Residency, Prince Edward County, ON
Glass Art Society, Board Assistant to Tracy Kirchmann, Norfolk, VA
Glass Art Society, attendee of 2017 conference, Norfolk, VA
- 2016 **Graduate Travel Grant**, Virginia Commonwealth University, Omaha, NE

- Graduate Teaching Assistantship**, Virginia Commonwealth University, Fall 2016, Richmond, VA
- American Craft Council**, attendee of 2016 conference, Omaha, NE
- Glass Art Society**, attendee of 2016 conference, Corning, NY
- Nominee, Saxe Emerging Artists Lecture**, GAS Conference 2016, Corning, NY
- 2015 **Half Scholarship** to UrbanGlass: Matt Eschuke, Brooklyn, NY
- Full Scholarship** to Tyler School of Art: Erica Rosenfeld, Philadelphia, PA
- Glass Art Society**, attendee of 2015 conference, San Jose, CA
- 2014 **East Bay Batch and Color Award**, Tyler School of Art, Philadelphia, PA
- Partner Scholarship** to Corning Museum of Glass: Boyd Sugiki and Lisa Zerkowitz, Corning, NY
- Glass Art Society**, attendee of 2014 conference, Chicago, IL
- 2013-17 **Glass Art Society**, Member
- 2012-14 **Glass Guild**, Member, Tyler School of Art, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA
- 2009 **Half Scholarship**, Introduction to Glass Blowing, Josh Cole, The Crefeld School, Chestnut Hill, PA
- 2009 **Rhode Island School of Design**, Summer Pre-College Program: Printmaking, Providence, RI

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS /PERFORMANCES

- 2018 **Anderson Gallery**, Avoidance Kitchen, Solo Exhibition, Richmond, VA
- Virginia Glass Guild**, Annual Member's Exhibition, Norfolk, VA
- 2017 **Virginia Glass Guild**, Annual Juried Exhibition, Hampton, VA
- Hawthorne Gallery, VCU FAB**, Solo Exhibition, Richmond, VA
- National Liberty Museum**, Glass Auction & Gala, Philadelphia, PA
- The Sequel**, Two-Person Show, VCU FAB Gallery, Richmond, VA
- Glass Art Society**, Juried Student Exhibition, Norfolk, VA
- CRITICAL: Craft and Material Studies Department Candidacy Exhibition**, Richmond, VA
- 2016 **TOAST**, Cocktail vessel in collaboration with Derek Salerno of Shagbark, Richmond, VA
- National Liberty Museum**, Group Exhibition: LUXE Jewelry Exhibition, Philadelphia, PA
- 2015 **Piedmont Arts**, Group Exhibition: Fired Up! , Martinsville, VA
- D'Art Center**, Group Exhibition: Cutting Edge, Norfolk, VA
- Chrysler Museum of Art**, Vestibule 102, Solo Exhibition: Artist Unknown, Norfolk, VA
- Chrysler Museum Glass Studio**, Third Thursday: Descending Pitch with Chris Duffy, Norfolk, VA
- Chrysler Museum Glass Studio**, Third Thursday: Glass, Form, and Sound with Angus Powers, Norfolk, VA
- Chrysler Museum Glass Studio**, Third Thursday: Radiant Intensity with Suzanne Peck, Norfolk, VA
- 2014 **Impact Hub**, Solo Exhibition: The Gaze, Philadelphia, PA
- Irvin Borowsky Glass Studio**, Group Exhibition, Philadelphia, PA

- 2013 **Temple Contemporary Gallery**, Collaboration, Couch Intervention: Grass
Couch, Philadelphia, PA
- 2012 **Irvin Borowsky Glass Studio**, Group Exhibition, Philadelphia, PA

PUBLICATIONS

- 2017 **Glass Art Society**, GAS Member Monday, November 27, 2017
Emboss Magazine, Women Artists Issue, page 43, August 2017
National Liberty Museum, Glass Auction & Gala Publication, Philadelphia, PA
- 2015 **Martinsville Bulletin**, 'Fired Up!' over glass art, Holly Kozelsky
- 2013 **GAS News**, Fall 2013- School Profile, Vol. 24, Issue 3