2018

Will You Accept This Rose?

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Virginia Commonwealth University

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Will You Accept This Rose?

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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April 2018
Acknowledgements

Thank you Rob Mertens and James Madison University without whose generosity this project would not have been possible.

Thank you to my graduate committee, Aaron McIntosh, Jack Wax, Margaret Meehan, and Sonya Clark for continually pushing my work forward.

Thank you Sarah for helping this work make it onto the walls.

Thank you Marie and Grace for sharing their spaces with me.

Thank you Katherine, Turner, and Sara for being there from the beginning.

Thank you Will for every coffee break.

Thank you to my family for their support and confidence and for letting me fill up our DVR with every episode of The Bachelor.

Thank you.
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Abstract

WILL YOU ACCEPT THIS ROSE?

By Sasha Baskin

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

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2018

Director: Aaron McIntosh, Assistant Professor, Craft/Material Studies Department

Using figures from the popular culture program *The Bachelor* in a large-scale tapestry-style weaving, I address the drive to create idealized simulations in order to better understand one’s own reality and identity. Natural dye and traditional weaving processes in combination with digital weaving technology allow me to literally integrate the juxtaposition of analog and digital elements which defines a woven image.

Dye work and pattern allow for large gestural drawing marks while individual threads overlap to create literal pixelized imagery. I examine the act of weaving as the creation of screens through which one can see, hide, or obscure. I similarly question the role of the observer of a false reality and examine the choice to participate in, construct, or re-create a simulation.
Introduction

Someday society will study *The Bachelor* the way we study the Stanford prison experiments. Reality television is psychological torture. It is a fascinating exercise in human observation and human emotion. It is a simulation of the real that winds up more real than the original. It is hyperreal.

I am fascinated by the simulation. The re-creation. What is the human drive to re-create? Do we hope that the thousandth time we make something we might finally understand it?

I received my formal art training as a portrait artist. There are no shortages of portraits in the world, so why do we keep making them? What are we trying to find? Every art school freshman has to do a myriad of self-portraits; with every charcoal sketch are we hoping that we might find some new angle that allows us to understand ourselves? What are we looking for or trying to say?

I don’t have that answer but I can study the repetition.

We tell stories over and over again. I trace the origins to mythologies and religions. The stories are similar because the questions we are trying to answer are perennial. Where do we come from? Why are we here? What are we doing? What is the nature of human connection? How do
we fall in love? We can’t explain these things, so we tell stories over and over again until we feel as if we have captured it. We treat these unanswerable questions like creatures we can’t quite tame. We encircle them and create new kinds of ways to look at them and understand them but we seem to never quite reach the core of the issue.

Reality television functions as a new kind of mythology, a new kind of repetitive storytelling, and the creation of new gods and goddesses.

Rodin claimed “no good sculptor can model a human figure without dwelling on the mystery of life: this individual and that in fleeting variations only reminds him of the immanent type; he is led perpetually from the creature to the creator.”1 Religion claims that god creates man in his own image. Ultimately, however, man is the one telling these stories. We can only create gods in our own image. We can only re-create that which we know. Even when we try to raise something above us, simplify the story to better understand it, we are left with our own human flaws and realities.

What is The Bachelor but another attempt to represent human interaction? To study beauty, love, drama, and competition. To entertain and distract through drama? It is the Iliad and the Odyssey in cocktail dresses and hair extensions. The roses become symbols of acceptance and validation; the repetitive structure of each episode become trials and chapters of the hero’s journey.

Weaving functions as both a mythological symbol and a mythological system. It is itself a repetitive process. It takes small disparate parts and pulls them together into something comprehensible and utilitarian. A thousand tiny overlapping threads become a pliable plane of cloth.

Woven veils come up time and time again across cultures and mythologies. In *The Odyssey*, Penelope wove and unwove her funeral veil as a symbol of her fidelity to her husband Odysseus during his ten-year journey back from the Trojan War. Her veil was both a source of strength and creativity (with her strategic unweaving she never finished the cloth and was never forced to choose a new husband and betray Odysseus) but also a symbol of her relationship to a patriarchal system.

Veils are similarly used throughout the world to protect, empower and limit women. They can function both as a source of personal power and of oppression. As a female weaver I can both create and wear my own veils. A weaving can be a screen and a veil: a projected image and a way to see through to something beyond.
With the knowledge of weaving as a creation of a veil, a disguise, and an act of mimicry, I examine how by weaving a portrait, I can create, wear, and control the perspective and narrative. Mildred Constantine and Laurel Reuter describe this power in *Whole Cloth*: “Cloth transmutes light and it blocks light. Cloth extends space further with greater ease than any other material.”

Weaving and mythology are inescapably linked. The craft is both the method and the metaphor. Robert Graves identifies myth as the “reduction to narrative shorthand of ritual mime performed on public festivals and in many cases recorded pictorially on temple walls, vases, seals, bowls, mirrors, shields, tapestries, and the like.” Weaving is the reduction to shorthand and it is the form upon which that shorthand is written.

Humans construct stories to explain the unexplainable. A mythology like the Iliad or the Odyssey functions to explain an otherwise incomprehensibly large war. This great war began for seemingly insignificant reasons: interpersonal affairs where a woman was “stolen” by a rival nation (or ran away, depending on one’s feminist interpretation of Homer). How can a culture explain the thousands of deaths, the years of war, the destruction of cities? Gods and their rivalries justify the action. It’s easier to understand the grand scale of war through the irrationality of vengeful deities.

It’s easier to explain a lot of things in a microcosm. Turning to Judeo-Christian mythology, we can understand sin when we consider the simplicity of disobeying an order. Don not eat the

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3 Graves qtd. in Constantine 44
apple. When Eve disobeys and eats the apple, we understand that she has done something wrong and succumbed to a temptation. It is far easier to grapple our own endlessly complex temptations and missteps when faced with a story of simple right and wrong.

I look to Raphael, Michelangelo, and Da Vinci for reference in representing these mythological stories visually. These images represent the grand drama that I am interested in within these myths. In his tapestries (Raphael designed the cartoons and the images were woven in Brussels in the workshop of Pieter Van Aeist), Raphael attempts to dialogue with Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel frescos through a woven image. He creates muscular figures and monumental landscapes. As is the nature of the woven image and of the myth, Raphael’s tapestries serve multiple functions: they literally serve as insulation, they function as screens or dividers within the space, serve a narrative storytelling purpose, and they present a depiction of wealth and scale within the Vatican.

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Figure 1: Raphael, “The Miraculous Draught of Fishes” (Cartoon), 1515-16.
When does mythology become simulation? A mime (a meme)? Weaving represents the intersection of the screen, the veil, and the mythology. By juxtaposing the faces of pop culture figures with renaissance weaving and drawing traditions I work towards the creation of a pantheon of gods of these pop culture figures.

Figure 2: A snapchat story I sent to friends on January 24, 2018 comparing a screenshot from *The Bachelor* to a Raphael Tapestry
I watch reality television both for entertainment and for fascination. I listen to the recap podcasts and send Snapchats to my friends judging the action of each episode. I am someone who has spent a lot of time thinking about how an image is constructed, how my own image is constructed, and I still compare myself to the impossible images I see presented on these screens.

I started weaving this image of a beautiful woman getting eliminated from the Bachelor because I was fascinated with my own relationship with the show’s elimination sequence (“The Rose Ceremony”). I wanted to be this woman; I wanted to look like this woman. But even looking and presenting as perfect as she was, she still wasn’t going to win. She still wasn’t getting the love and validation that she was looking for from this experience.

![Figure 3: Screenshot from The Bachelor, Season 22, Episode 2, 1:22:40](image)

5 “winning” on The Bachelor is considered being the final contestant. The show ends with a proposal and a designer diamond ring.
Why do I idolize this woman? Why do I enjoy watching the drama of these relationships, the pain of someone leaving a superficial reality show? I know it is fake, I know it is superficial. I am participating in creating these simulations and replicas of reality just to watch them crumble around me. Where does the image break down? Where does it let me in?

Over the course of this project, I made three large-scale weavings of this same screenshot (Figure 3). This began as an effort to test the image and weaving process but became an exercise in extreme replication. The weavings became screens all revealing the same image. I was surrounded in my studio by the image of this one woman: Jenny. By saturating my environment with her image she became a mythical figure. She left the show in week two, so I never got to know her as a character on the program. I chose her for the image, for the dramatic departure. She cried as she exited the Bachelor Mansion and refused to hug the bachelor on her way out, a move considered a snub and which forced the bachelor to follow her out and have a conversation. He forces a hug (she does not reciprocate). She claims, “I’m not sad about you. I’m sad about my new friends.”

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6 The Bachelor, Season 22, Episode 2, 1:22:40
Figure 4: “Dramatic (Jenny)” Study for “Jenny’s Departure,” Jacquard woven cotton and silk, 2018
In this moment she is both challenging and succumbing to the structure of the program. She is devastated to be kicked off so early, but claims she never really cared about the man she is supposed to be lusting after. The cliché of reality television personas is that you are not “here to make friends” but here is Jenny claiming that is all she wanted to do, and is upset that she has to leave the women she met. (The women she is theoretically competing with to win this man’s heart.) She could have come on this show for a variety of reasons: to gain reality television fame, to fall in love, to win an expensive diamond ring, among others. All of those outcomes rely on the premise that this man needs to continue to choose her, to keep her on the show week after week. Even if she was never in this game for “love” (or whatever version of love this show promotes), she needs to keep up the artifice of “being here for the right reasons” and falling for this arbitrary man. But here in her elimination sequence she is rejecting him while he is rejecting her. She is sad but strong. She made a choice to come on this show and submit to this sexist and structured dating game where women compete for one man, but in her departure is an attempt to rewrite her narrative within the context of this strange universe.
She is simulation on top of simulation, screens on top of screens. Nothing she is saying is true, but in its falsehood it is one of the most real moments on the show. She is one of the only women to acknowledge that she doesn’t care about this man, but cares about what he represents. She wanted to be chosen, and when she was not – the simulation broke down.
I focused this series on the symbol of that choice: the rose. The structure of the Bachelor is such that one has to obtain a rose to stay on the show. With each elimination sequence the man offers a certain number of roses to the group of waiting women. Only the women he picks get the roses and get to stay to continue on for another week. There is an artifice of choice here for the women, one that has its roots in an attempt at feminism and equality. With each rose offered, the man asks, “Will you accept this rose?” and the woman has (theoretically) every right to say no. But she never does.

I like to joke that this is Stockholm syndrome: That these women fall in love with the bachelor because they are essentially (and voluntarily) captive. They cannot leave the mansion except on
dates with the Bachelor. They have no access to outside news or information; they have no phones or internet access and rarely have any reading material. But they are also captive to this hetero-normative dating system. One that places incredible value on “being picked” and suggests that as a woman, once you receive that validation, you should never refuse it.

*The Bachelor* exists as a reality TV show that began as an attempt to capture a falsified concept of romance and project it on Prime Time television. Over 25 seasons of the show (over 16 years), it has become a mirror of societal realities and a microcosm of racial/sexual/gender issues in western culture. It attempts to both magnify the drama while skirting around the difficult issues it brings forward. It isn’t the first. Shows like *The Dating Game, The Newlywed Game,* and *Love Connection* all paved the way for current-day dating television. Reality television as a whole, acts as an opportunity for a culture to examine its own realities from a safe distance.

I follow several former Bachelor contestants on social media. I want the clothes they promote but I will never buy them. I consider their perfect lifestyles. They have done little to nothing to earn this status, but I idolize their constructed image. They are thin and beautiful and wear pretty clothes. They have offered their lives up for examination by the masses. They occasionally offer me discount codes for luxury brands that I will never be able to afford.

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7 The show structure typically permits three total dates a week, two one-on-one dates and one group date where the bachelor does a group activity with the women not selected for individual dates.
I don’t want to be these women. But also I do. I would never last on the Bachelor, let alone be chosen by production to make it to casting. I cut my hair once a year. I have been wearing the same pair of jeans for a week-and-a-half. I cannot walk in heels and still barely understand how to apply basic makeup. I am not the woman they want wearing cocktail dresses and pleading to the camera that I just want this rose; how I feel like I could really be falling for this random man.

But I want to feel chosen.⁹ And I idolize those who were, if only briefly. And I empathize when they are cast aside. I have been cast aside. I feel that.

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⁹ Amy Kaufman describes her similar desire to be on the show to experience the feeling of being “chosen” despite obvious obstacles to her participation in the introduction to Bachelor Nation
The act of capturing and freezing a moment is itself a form of translation through simulation. By translating screenshots into the tactile medium of weaving, I am further obscuring the original. I am taking an exact replica and blurring it. With weaving, I am working to double down on the simulation.

The computer (and the pixelized image) is itself a simulation of weaving. Sadie Plant describes in *Zeroes Ones: Digital Women the New Technoculture*:

> “The computer was always a simulation of weaving: threads of ones and zeroes riding the carpets and simulating silk screens in the perpetual motion of cyberspace.”

A simulation is designed to overlap with reality and take its place. A hyperreality exists in tandem with the reality and presents the inability to distinguish between the real and the simulation. The overlap becomes the blur and the blending of screens of perception. The ultimate paradox lies in the fact that with the overlap and the blur, the simulation cannot exactly mirror reality. The weaving of a digital image becomes a screen that both overlaps and takes the place of reality.

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The Borges Fable represents the futility of simulation in relationship with the human desire to get closer and closer to the exact replica until the simulation eclipses the real:

“. . . In that Empire, the Art of Cartography attained such Perfection that the map of a single Province occupied the entirety of a City, and the map of the Empire, the entirety of a Province. In time, those Unconscionable Maps no longer satisfied, and the Cartographers Guilds struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it. The following Generations, who were not so fond of the Study of Cartography as their Forebears had been, saw that that vast map was Useless, and not without some Pitilessness was it, that they delivered it up to the Inclemencies of Sun and Winters. In the Deserts of the West, still today, there are Tattered Ruins of that Map, inhabited by Animals and Beggars; in all the Land there is no other Relic of the Disciplines of Geography. —Suarez Miranda, Viajes de varones prudentes, Libro IV, Cap. XLV, Lerida, 1658”

Ultimately the people in the Borges fable decide to forgo the simulation and function within the real. Once the “disciplines of geography” become so exact that they are just the realities of the landscape they eliminate the need for the simulation altogether. The simulation is only of value when it is an almost replica. Maps are only useful when they are smaller than the reality, but the larger they become the more detail is available: the greater their use, up to a point.

Jean Baudrillard in his book *Simulacra and Simulation*, suggests the use of the simulation is to promote the illusion of the real. By creating a world of “almosts,” we can know the real for certain. In reference to popular culture, Baudrillard claims, “Disneyland exists in order to hide that it is the “real” country, all of “real” America that is Disneyland (a bit like prisons are there to hide that it is the social in its entirety, in its banal omnipresence, that is carceral). Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real”\(^\text{12}\)

The creation of a simulated world reminds an audience that such an existence is separate from their own. But the strength of the simulation lies in the knowledge that the illusion overlaps with truth. As Baudrillard states, the prison is not the walled off space with barbed wire and barred windows, but society as a whole.

There are three orders of simulacrum: The first order being a direct re-creation of an object, the second where an object is no longer itself, and the third when the object becomes itself again from a new perspective.\(^\text{13}\) Baudrillard identifies these signifiers as the approach towards the hyperreal: “Today abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal.”\(^\text{14}\)

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13 This concept was introduced to me by Semi Ryu through a zen proverb “Mountain is mountain, mountain is no longer mountain, mountain is mountain again”

14 Baudrillard. 1
Realism and reality television function as attempts towards the hyperreal and the creation of a simulation that is more real than the reality: the exaggeration and interrogation of the world around us. The closeness of the simulation allows for a pleasurable ability to experience what one cannot experience in one’s own body with the knowledge that the experience is false.

“The pleasure of an excess of meaning, when the bar of the sign falls below the usual waterline of meaning: the non-signifier is exalted by the camera angle. There one sees what the real never was (but “as if you were there”) without the distance that gives us perspectival space and depth vision (but “more real than nature”). Pleasure in the microscopic simulation that allows the real to pass into the hyperreal. (This is also somewhat the case in porno, which is fascinating more on a metaphysical than on a sexual level.)”

In this place of the hyperreal, one can step outside oneself and have intense experiences without the danger and physicality of reality. Through reality television I can experience a false intimacy. I am safely on my own couch in my own quiet living room watching these women go on elaborate (and constructed) fantasy dates. It is no small wonder that I fell in love with this television show during the year before I began graduate school. I had recently given up my apartment and was living out of my car traveling between residencies and jobs. I was couch surfing and briefly lived in a freshman college dorm on a twin-size loft bed. I was in no situation to be living a fairy-tale romance. I still wanted to experience it. And through hyper-reality I

15 Baudrillard 30
found it, all without the actual risk of a real relationship. At the end of the summer when I moved
to a new city and started a new school there was no relationship to end, no emotional wreckage
to deal with. I was safe from the reality that I claimed to want. I wanted the intimacy without the
danger. Like a rollercoaster at Disneyworld, I wanted to feel the adrenaline and the freedom of
falling without the risk of any real hurt.
Material and Methods

My practice began in drawing and moved to weaving as a new way with which to draw. Weaving line by line, I was embedding the slowness of observation in the very “fabric” of the image. I found a tactile quality of line and tone.

I am at heart a realist. I wanted to represent reality in incredible detail. Drawing allowed me the sharpest pencils and the finest lines. Weaving offered the opportunity to represent both detail and time. Engaging in this process, I could realistically capture the amount of time it took to look and observe and I could better capture the reality I was attempting to represent through the time-consuming process of weaving.

I look to the realist painters and draftsmen such as Jenny Saville and Andrew Salgado whose works represent perspectives of reality and incorporate mythology and narrative into detailed portraiture. Weavers including Lia Cook, Sara Clugage, and Mary Zicafoose all use weaving to discuss image, identity and culture.
Figure 7: Jenny Saville, “Reproduction drawing I (after the Leonardo cartoon)” 2009-2010
Figure 8: Andrew Salgado, “The Dancing Serpent,” 2016
Figure 9: Lia Cook, “Connectome,” 2014
Figure 10: Sara Clugage, “Annunciation,” 2006
Figure 11: Mary Zicafoose, “Blueprint #7,” 2018
I developed a process of hand-controlled damask that allowed me to draw at the loom and control shade and tonality within the weave structure. I didn’t realize it at the time, but I was inadvertently discovering an analog version of the computerized weaving process I would later use for the weavings in “Will You Accept this Rose?”

The “Portraits in Blue” series are an exploration of that analog process, a desire to understand the power of rendering through cloth and slowly capturing images line by line.

Figure 12: “Portrait in Medium Blue,” Hand-woven tencel and silk, natural indigo, 2016

In the development of this process, I discovered that the woven structure allowed for the creation of invisible rendering. From one angle images appeared, from another only blank cloth was
visible. I created invisible weavings in an attempt to undermine the power structure of the female image. As a nude, “Sara” both presented herself to the viewer unashamedly, but also hid behind her own woven veil.

Figure 13: “Sara,” Hand-woven tencel, natural indigo, 2016
Perceptions of women and femininity often tend towards the vulnerable and the nature of cloth closely mirrors those associations with the soft, pliable and unraveling.\textsuperscript{16} From where does the association of women and cloth with instability originate? Whitney Chadwick identifies the quality of fabric as “gauzy, torn or frayed” as one of the “most potent signs that that we are at the threshold of an altered consciousness.”\textsuperscript{17} Plant references Freud’s opinion that the act of weaving to be “woman’s compensation for the absence of the penis, the void, the woman of whom, as he famously insists, there is ‘nothing to be seen.’”\textsuperscript{18} In the act of weaving, Freud argues women “imitate the concealment of the womb: the Greek hysteria; the Latin matrix.”\textsuperscript{19} These interpretations, while on the surface belittling, simultaneously imbue this process with immense power. There is incredible strength in the potential of chaos and the mathematical organization of disparate elements, in cloth’s (and woman’s) ability to conceal, reveal, create, and disguise. I find the veil and the screen similarly situated within this realm of power, both inexorably linked with the strength of cloth and femininity. Fabric is a fundamental human technology; it predates “almost everything invented or created by humans.”\textsuperscript{20} The ability to bring threads together to create a plane of cloth, to control and maintain chaos, is foundational in our evolution.

I examine these overlaps and intersections as a programming exercise: Each thread parallels a command executing a line of code. The weaver programs the loom through a specific threading sequence; each thread has a specific space and a specific path through the machine that can differ

\textsuperscript{16} Constantine 70
\textsuperscript{17} Whitney Chadwick qtd. in Constantine 31
\textsuperscript{18} Plant 46
\textsuperscript{19} Plant 46
\textsuperscript{20} Constantine 14
depending on the desired outcome. These threads can be misaligned. I can place them in an incorrect sequence and depending on how that affects the other threads it can completely break down the system and halt the weaving process. Or the error can still allow the loom and process of weaving to function but the outcome will be different than the desired plan.

The machine can break down, threads can snap, bugs can get caught in between running parts. When something goes wrong, I diagnose a weaving problem and I start with myself- did I input something wrong? Is something malfunctioning with the machine? Where does chaos come into play? Did I program something incorrectly? Interacting with this ancient form of a computer I become a part of the machine; I create physical manifestations of code.

It is with this line of thought that I began my Glitch Series. Beginning with “Molly Under Pattern” I wanted to see how I could literally translate a drawing through math and pattern.

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21 the term “bug” in reference to a computer virus comes directly from an incident of a moth getting caught in an early mechanized loom
Figure 14: “Molly Under Pattern,” Hand-woven tencel, 2016
An overshot weaving pattern requires two different threads. One thread (called the tabby) runs in a basic over/under/over/under pattern (tabby weave). This thread creates the foundation of the cloth; it holds everything together. The pattern thread acts as a supplement. It has no structural necessity. Usually woven with a larger thread than the tabby thread, the pattern floats above the structured fabric. It could be cut out of the cloth and the structure would hold. It exists only as pattern and image.

Figure 15: “Molly Under Pattern (detail),” Hand-woven tencel, 2016
I laid my weft threads out as loose threads and painted the image of “Molly in Natural Light” with grey, black, and pink ink. I rinsed and dried these threads and wrapped them around bobbins and wove them under pattern as the tabby weft. I made the image the foundation of the cloth and allowed white threads to float above them and interrupt the image.

Figure 16: “Molly in Natural Light,” Graphite on Paper, 2016
While the image stretched and distorted in ways I could not control and was not satisfied with, I creating a new language of image making, a new language of interruption and distortion. I was simultaneously creating a patterned screen over a portrait. I was hiding and exposing the image.

With the unexpected loss of control over image with “Molly Under Pattern,” I found a satisfying freedom in letting go of the recognizable image and allowing pattern to come to the foreground. I moved into abstraction and wanted to find out how much information I could imbed into woven structure. I wanted to find the information overload, the static and sought out the relationship between the woven screen and the digital screen. Working with ikat and natural dye offered a natural counterpart to the technological content.

Exploring the principles of observation, I questioned how I could embed concepts like Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle and the Schrödinger paradox within cloth. With “A Weaving about Quantum Mechanics,” I ikat dyed a portrait by carefully wrapping threads and dying them with logwood and lac, and allowing the image to shift and distort until it disappeared at the loom. These pieces offered another way of invisible weaving, another kind of veil.
In a similar effort of digital simulation I attempted to re-create the RGB color patterns of computer screens with only natural dyes like madder, weld, and logwood. The broken thread is the original glitch, natural dyes are the original color processing. I wanted to create little moments of glitch and interruption through this analog hand-weaving form.
Figure 18: “Portrait of a Glitch I,” Hand-woven tencel and silk, natural dye, 2017

I turned to lace making as another way to explore interruption, distortion, and the creation of veils and separations. Lace creates a permeable barrier. It is there but it is not. Bobbin lace, knitted lace, and machine made lace all contain the mathematical complexity I was interested in, the associations with femininity and domesticity, but also an incredible power. As I taught myself bobbin lace I also found myself watching YouTube videos of wilderness survival
specialists teaching how to make fishing nets and how to catch something with lace structures. Lace is a system of capture, of containment, but it also beautiful and decorative. Within this medium I discovered another mythological power of a fiber process.

I made a small series of lace portrait fragments and I allowed these fragments to distort, shift and change. I dipped them in concrete and rearranged them on the wall. I explored how I can suggest larger space and figure with small moments of detail.

Figure 19: “She Will Add the Sum of Her to Me,” machine sewn lace, concrete, 2017
Using the same glitching processes of ikat and weft-painting, I wove my own image under pattern. I was able to weave my own veil in this sense. I was putting myself on display but also hiding under pattern and process.

![Figure 20: “Self Portrait in Glitch Series,” Hand-woven tencel, wool, and alpaca, 2017](image)

I found jacquard weaving the next natural step in this exploration of the relationship between the woven and the digital. Working with a TC2 jacquard loom at James Madison University, I manipulated digital screenshots in Photoshop and imported them into the TC2 weaving software where each pixel read as a simple binary command: up or down. The loom read the files line by line, in a digital version of my analog hand-controlled damask.
Figure 21: The rosette weaving pattern, as translated through digital manipulation and represented in the TC2 weaving software

Through this process I tested different kinds of patterns and warp and weft floats to find the best image resolution for this weaving. I adapted a rosette weaving pattern – a traditional overshot weaving structure – to overlay within the image. The pattern is traditionally used in American
coverlets and forces the work to acknowledge aspects of Americana within pop-culture imagery. The images are new and digital, the pattern defining them colonial and traditional. I rendered this pattern through the digital technology of the TC2 while acknowledging the analog and traditional roots of hand-woven cloth. *The Bachelor* as a program parallels this juxtaposing of traditionalism with modernity. The concept of reality television is a relatively new phenomenon, but *The Bachelor* functions as one of the longest running reality programs. The show attempts to embrace the concept of a modern relationship but relishes in antiquated traditional gender roles and identities. Throughout the show, contestants are whisked off to exciting dates all over the world, they jet-set, meet celebrities, jump out of airplanes, and are introduced to new and revolutionary experiences, all while the show marches relentlessly towards marriage like a Shakespeare play. If the show ends without a proposal, the women in question are considered failures. The act of being chosen proves much more significant than any individual agency afforded to the women on *The Bachelor*.

I have watched this process play out season after season. On every episode of *The Bachelor*, the women repeat the same longing for validation from the man in question. One by one each woman looks into the camera during her confessional-style monologues and claims that she just wants the bachelor to touch her knee, or the small of her back, to linger a little longer during their cocktail party conversation. They are longing for the symbol of the choice, the slightest indication that they are special to him. In contrast, when the genders are reversed on *The Bachelorette* and 20-30 men compete for one woman, the men fall into their own gender-based roles, and proceed to de-value or reject the woman if she expresses interest in another man. They

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22 Kaufman 195
question her motives if she appears interested in a contestant who they do not respect, or who does not share their same values. Despite the fact that the show uses the same “Rose Ceremony” structure for the men, they are never presented as lusting after the rose. In fact, during *The Bachelorette*, the men are presented with a rose boutonniere, to wear as a decorative element for the rest of the evening, during the Rose Ceremony. The women on *The Bachelor*, in contrast, are presented with a single long stemmed rose that they hold as a bouquet throughout the ceremony and carry to every cocktail party throughout the week. Contestants are often seen collecting a small bouquet of the dried roses from past Rose Ceremonies with their luggage in their living quarters.

Within “Will You Accept This Rose,” roses and rosettes function as symbol and pattern. The patterning highlights the women and camouflages them. These women become both centerpiece and wallpaper. They are simultaneously enveloped and empowered by the symbol of the choice which defines them. In each of “The Rose Ceremony,” “The Rose,” and “The Rosette,” I allowed the pattern to inform the figure differently. With “The Rose Ceremony,” the pattern becomes the flush of the skin; it frames the literal rose held by one of the “chosen” women, and crawls around her collarbones. The rose pattern is both her heart and her armor, covering her chest. It both flattens her and frames her. The pattern objectifies her and highlights her experience of receiving this symbol of validation.
“The Rose” uses pattern as latticework concealing the figure offering the rose while the pattern subtly curls around the hand. Mirroring the act of the crawling roses, even the pattern shrinks in the face of the choice, the ceremony of validation. Through the use of brocade I give the power to the pattern. Here the pattern both controls and shrinks from the gesture of offering validation.

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23 A weaving process where supplementary threads of a different color are introduced and laid over the primary image. In “The Rose Ceremony,” “The Rose,” and “The Rosette,” the brocade structure is the pink threads in pattern on the black and white image.
“The Rosette” allows the pattern to transition from the flush of the cheek to a blemish to a tear. Dropped threads in the black and white image create another kind of tear that falls down her face. The portrait catches her in the moment before the unseen bachelor caresses her face, his thumb about to brush aside another invisible tear. The pattern and the dropped threads create tears both as expression of this woman’s emotion, but also as a literal rending within the fabric of the cloth. The pattern is an interruption, the dropped thread a structural fault.
Figure 24: “The Rosette,” Jacquard woven cotton and silk, 2018

I rendered these images in silk dyed with madder, a natural root dye associated with femininity and menstruation. The rosette and the color of the threads both speak to the rose symbol within the Bachelor program. These women are both highlighted by this symbol of validation and crushed by it. In “Jenny’s Departure” the figures are woven with the same pink silk that defines the pattern. In moments the pattern overlays the figures and their gesture is visible; in others the pattern completely obscures the image through the use of the same tonal value to communicate foreground and background, clarity, and clutter. I create a thread-based glitch within in the image.
I used this same pattern in miniature on the hand-woven borders. Allowing this pattern to glitch and shift at the loom references the digital manipulation that the carefully rendered images went through. In the glitch, the patterns create small phallic and vaginal forms that tease at the gendered dynamics highlighted by the programming.
Conclusion

I purposefully never rendered the man in any of these weavings, nor did I name him in this writing. In “The Rosette,” the bachelor exists in slight profile and his outstretched hand caresses a woman’s face. I wanted the women to have the agency in these weavings. Just as I use weaving to create and wear my own veils, I wanted to afford that same control over their situation to these women. They create and wear their own roses.

In “The Rose,” there is almost no figure, just an outstretched hand, just the symbol of the choice. The rosette pattern dominates half the image, but curves around the figure’s hand. Whereas in previous works I allowed image to form through pattern and forced pattern to obscure and interrupt, in “Will You Accept This Rose?” the pattern acts as symbol and system.

This pattern became fundamental in this series. I wanted this traditional overshot pattern to both highlight the women in “Jenny’s Departure” and obscure them. They are the beautiful women around which The Bachelor is centered (the man, while technically “the lead” of the show becomes almost insignificant as the women progress through the episodes), but are simultaneously nothing but props in the larger simulated reality.
Through this negotiation I can navigate my own place within hyperreality. As a weaver (especially when working with this computerized loom), I frequently questioned my role as the creator of these images. The women, the rose, the pattern: where do I find myself? This parallels the conversation that surrounded me during this project as weaver, weaving, or machine.

Using the TC2 is itself an exercise in harnessing and working through the power of machines, of the woven image, of technology. When I began working with the TC2, I was so afraid of this beautiful, powerful, expensive machine, but at the end of the day, it is just a loom. It is an incredibly intricate and elaborate machine, but also just a bunch of mechanized parts that I am already intimately familiar with. Donna Jeanne Haraway claims in her writing *The Cyborg Manifesto* that “the machine is not an it to be animated, worshiped and dominated. The machine is us, or processes, an aspect of our embodiment.”[24] Instead, she argues, “modern machinery is an irreverent upstart god, mocking the Father’s ubiquity and spirituality.”[25] Sadie Plant furthers this sentiment with her discussion of the weaver’s relationship to the loom as “integrated into the machinery, bound up with its operation, linked limb by limb to the process.”[26] When a thread breaks, I can repair it. When I need to understand what is happening I can situate my body inside the body of the TC2 the same way I can reach under my floor loom like a mechanic.

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[25] Haraway 65
Am I the machine or the operator of the process? Am I the pattern, the object, or the background? Am I real or simulation? Is my reality one that I have constructed for myself or one that was constructed for me?

To understand something, I weave it. To understand it well, I weave it over and over again. I create repetitive structures out of repetitive structures. I am creating another kind of mythology, another simulation. I am circling around something until I can almost grasp it, re-creating it time and time again. I filled my studio with these images; I observed a reality and constructed the mythology I wove. Am I creating these gods in my own image?

The question “will you accept this rose?” is asked at every juncture in The Bachelor. The opportunity exists to change the pattern and interrupt the repetitive process and say no, but that choice is never taken. The pattern repeats itself.
List of References
List of References


Vita

Education

2018  MFA Craft/Material Studies, Virginia Commonwealth University, anticipated

2014  BFA Drawing, Summa Cum Laude Maryland Institute College of Art

Selected Exhibitions

2018  Emerge, Page Bond Gallery, Richmond, VA (forthcoming)

       MFA Thesis Exhibition, Anderson Gallery, Richmond, VA

       Handcrafted, Key Gallery, Blackrock Center for the Arts, Germantown, MD

2017  Room Before, Visual Arts Center, Austin, TX

       Substrates, Montpellier Art Center, Laurel, MD

       Altered Realities, Maryland Art Place, Baltimore, MD

       Future Tense, MK Gallery, Portland State University, Portland, OR

       Critical, Homan Gallery, Richmond VA

2016  Toast, Depot Gallery, Richmond, VA

       XXChange, Area 405, Baltimore, MD

2015  Portraits and Profiles: Inspirations in My Life, Columbia Art Center, Columbia, MD

       NICHE Awards, Finalist Gallery: American Made Show, Washington DC

       Sasha Baskin, Melanie Millar, and Fari Rahimi, JM Gallery, Dallas, TX
2014  B!ngo, Platform Gallery, Baltimore, MD
           Lotta Art, School 33 Art Center, Baltimore MD
           Material Matters, Union Street Gallery, Chicago Heights, IL
           Modern Icons, Brown Memorial, Baltimore, MD
           Tromp as Writ (Weave as Drawn), Fox 2 Gallery, Baltimore, MD
2013 Body of Work, Brown Center, Baltimore MD
           MICA at SACI, Fox 2 Gallery, Baltimore, MD
2012  14 Degrees of Separation, Jules Maidoff Gallery, Florence, Italy
           Spectrum 2012, The Carriage Barn Arts Center, New Canaan, CT

Awards and Residencies
2018  Artist in Residence Arrowmont School of Crafts
2017  VCUarts Graduate Student Research Grant, Richmond VA
           Craft/Material Studies Graduate Award, Richmond VA
           Outstanding Student Award, Surface Design Association, Las Vegas, NM
           Graduate Assistantship, VCU, Richmond, VA
           Conference Scholarship, Surface Design Association, Las Vegas, NM
           Graduate Travel Grant, VCU, Richmond, VA
2016  Graduate Teaching Assistantship, VCU, Richmond, VA
           Graduate Travel Grant, VCU, Richmond, VA
           Conference Scholarship, American Craft Council, Minneapolis, MN
2015  Cynthia and Edwina Bringle Scholarship, Penland School of Crafts, Penland, NC
Artist Fellowship, Peter’s Valley School of Crafts, Layton, NJ

NICHE Award: Decorate Fiber, NICHE Magazine

2014  Juror’s Choice, Platform Gallery, Baltimore, MD