Life’s a Beach

by

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I Went To Art School And All I Got Was This Stupid Shirt, 2019

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Artist Statement

Garbled Jimmy Buffet’s greatest hits on repeat, a view of the gasoline slicked harbor, screeching seagulls, swarms of families feasting on “fresh” seafood, and palmetto bugs twice the size of a normal cockroach flying at your face. I was just 15 and trying to make enough
money to buy my first vehicle, a 1979 Ford Bronco, bussing tables at a large tourist trap restaurant. It was covered by an enormous tiki thatched roof and the cocaine fueled owner lived on one of the yachts that was moored to the dock behind the establishment.

This setting is how myself, and many of the locals I grew up with, experienced the Redneck Riviera. The Emerald Coast is known for its snow-white beaches and emerald green waters, but the brightly enticing brochures leave out the less glamorous tidbits of local authenticity: the trailer parks, the inevitable seasonal hustle, the stark winter-time boredom, and the abandoned condos. What vacationers get is their dream vacation, and then they depart with their precious trinkets and souvenirs by which to remember these times.

Artists are forever influenced by their upbringing and continuously informed by their surroundings. The Florida coast, where I spent my youth, has done the same for me, and continues to do so; the colors, imagery, seafood, and tourism-based economy still influence my artwork. I seek to bring the coastal kitsch to the contemporary discussion through its placement into a high art context. There is a resurgence in seeking the “authentic” when traveling. I aim to provide a more local, authentic vision of what living in these towns is like. Using the template of the souvenir, I seek to challenge value systems placed upon the tacky nostalgic objects we find on our vacations and how they are situated in contemporary art.

My work varies from large sculptural mini putt landscapes to travel sized playable mini putt courses that have traveled in a backpack between New York City, Los Angeles, and New Orleans. My pieces rely heavily on coastal kitsch icons such as the postcard, airbrush tee shirts, roadside attractions, and the classically quintessential, fridge-worthy Florida kitsch like flamingos, sunsets, dolphins, and palm trees. I use a combination of reclaimed wood, fabric,
and spray paints. These pieces lean into the bright color choices found in coastal tourist havens.

Interactivity is a large part of my art; by creating photo-op worthy roadside attractions and playable mini putt in a gallery setting, I hope to physically engage viewers with my art.

**Life’s a Beach** - This thesis is a collection of stories, projects, research, and theories that I will be sharing with you to shed light on my art practice. Much like my creative process, they bounce from here to there but always feed each other. The sections may seem unrelated, but I have attempted to weave them together in my own fashion. Authenticity is an important aspect of my work and I strive to give you a reading experience that mimics my art and perhaps mirrors a hypothetical conversation between us.

**Loos Fit Tee Collection** - This series of tee-shirts are finished in the quintessential coastal artistic practice of airbrushing. Typical beach scenes adorn the stark white shirts. A set of dolphins leaping out of the water, a horse galloping along the sands of the beach, and an idyllic sunset scene will all be familiar to those who have been to a beach town souvenir shop. The words I chose to embellish them with are, perhaps, not so typical. “No-one can create ornament now who live on our level of culture” is boldly emblazoned on the first shirt from this series, the quote was taken from Adolf Loos’s 19th century essay, *Ornament and Crime*. This essay is seen as a prelude to Modernism in architecture and art.

Loos’s essay is still seen as important literature to understanding the evolution of art. However, it cannot escape criticism. Loos often equates those with tattoos to murderers and craftsmen and artist’s who use ornamentation as uncultured criminals. To push back against this line of thinking I developed the idea of the Loos Fit Tee Collection. Using the stereotypical
Florida practice of airbrushed ornamentation, I set off to make a series of shirts based on Loos and his work *Ornament and Crime*.

One restraint that I set for myself was this: I was not going to allow myself to physically make the shirts themselves. As a maker, it was a very different and foreign approach to creation that somehow felt both wrong and right at the same time. In doing so, removing myself from the physical creation of these objects, I was able to adopt the role of tourist in my own home town. There is one of many airbrush shops set up in the Walmart in Destin, Florida, my childhood home. When I would return home, I would visit this particular shop and order these shirts to be professionally made, as would many souvenir seeking tourists, thus I relied heavily on the hand and craft of the professional airbrush artist. The artist started getting suspicious of my intentions as I continued showing up, eventually ordering 8 separate times and requesting these bizarre quotes. It gave me a chance to explain the project to someone outside of the typical art school setting.

This project, in all honesty, started off as a “bad art idea”, which I will delve into deeper in this thesis. Instead of sitting on these ideas I decided to use them as guidelines for a new project. *The Loos Fit Tee Collection* originated simply from a play on words after we were required to read the essay in our first seminar class. After that, the rest seemed to just fall into place as far as the idea went. Modernism attempted to reject consumerism but thrived as a result of it and I chose to use the very mechanism it sought to separate itself from. This project was an attempt to bring levity, to undermine, and to question *Ornament and Crime* while providing a template that is familiar to many who have vacationed in Florida. This series was once described as “mall opulence” and this phrase has stuck with me as I continue to make my
Victorian Cubism- Adolf Loos and William Morris have a tenuous relationship. Morris, a major contributor to the Arts and Craft movement in 19th Century England, believed that one should “have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful.” I see these two figures at odds and perhaps at different ends of a spectrum when it comes to ornamentation. Using the two contrarily, I sought a visual mashup of their philosophies in my piece “Victorian Cubism”. The simple shape of the cube harkens to Cubism and the simplistic designs of modernism. However, I use tools from the Arts and Craft movement to create the ornamentation. Using my Grandpa’s black walnut, which he used to construct Grandfather Clocks, I built the clean cube. Having only this distant, but physical means by which to connect with my grandfather, Robert Lowery, I was given an opportunity to forge a relationship to parts of my family that are no longer there and were never, truly, known to me. Through this shared craft of woodworking I am given a generational link, through both touch and making, 35 years after he has been gone. This pristine black walnut cube was then
adorned with gold-leaf in Morris’s grapevine pattern. “Victorian Cubism” creates a tension between simplicity and ornamentation, putting Loos and Morris at odds. The result becoming a modernist Fabergé egg.

Craft- Salt water ruins everything. Many coastal structures are built knowingly temporary until the next hurricane or storm comes to wash them away. Hurricane Michael proved that with the latest destruction of Mexico Beach. My hometown escaped relatively intact, however, the same can’t be said for places an hour east of Destin. Mexico Beach had one
building left standing after this powerful storm moved through. A doctor built his vacation
house with the finest quality material and engineering he could and only his was the only house
left standing. All while the newer structures, mostly cheap timber and stucco, were all blown
down and washed away. My father always followed the logic of the doctor: make it strong and
overbuild it. Perhaps this was his way of responding to his being away much of my childhood,
serving overseas, he wanted things to remain intact while he was away. I inherited this mode of
making. His motto, “Build it to last, not to be pretty.” It was very much a utilitarian approach to
making that I still possess. I view it as another type of craftsmanship. Not a typical woodworking
view of high craft in which there are beautiful dovetail joints connecting fine black walnut but
one that can make plywood storm shutters that last 15 years through 5 hurricanes. Not a
perfectly precise grandfather clock but a series of PVC pipes, cut in half, to act as a gutter
system for condensation dripping off the air conditioning duct work in the bait house.

The high craft of painting was taught to me by my mother. Not the painting that hangs
in museums but the painting that makes enough side money to provide for the family while
waiting on Dad’s combat pay. She would paint furniture for condo owners in bright pastel color
schemes. I learned to make murals by shadowing her on job sites in which wealthy home
owners would pay for a nursery mural or a beach scene mural in their hot tub room. Hand
painted sign techniques became another side hustle that I would watch with enthusiasm. The
written word becomes its own creation. Her highly skilled hand could produce great script fonts
that I seek to replicate. There was also a sense of knowing what the audience wants which I
explore in my murals.
Both these styles of making introduced to me by my parents hold great weight in my work. I am constantly seeking to find the balance between utilitarian and high craft. An analogy of the space between the mask and the face seems to be a useful one. I am in search of the space between the decorated façade of the mask and the realness of the person’s face. The small sliver of gray area between flesh and object. It harkens to the shoddy construction of newer houses being built along the coast. Using cheap materials only to be covered with a nice stucco finish and fresh coat of paint. Only to be washed away during the next storm. Salt water ruins everything.

The Souvenir- The Souvenir has become synonymous with trinket. An inexpensive object that suddenly becomes invaluable once a person has etched their memories onto the item. There is an instantaneous switch between cheap and priceless. Almost as if the souvenir is a blank canvas to imprint upon them our personal nostalgia. Keepsakes that remind us of a time that was pleasurable. Serving as a mental vacation for the possessor, if only for a moment. Once the actual event expires this object is there to keep us looking forward to the next time we can take a break from our normal lives and relax a little.

Souvenirs act as a type of word-of-mouth marketing for locations as well. Before the age of the computer these objects would, ideally, spark conversations of travel. If you see enough shot glasses, shirts, and hats with “Cancun” on them then you would start thinking it was time for a visit.

The airbrush tee shirt represents both potential and disappointment. The power for potential is represented in the idyllic and scenic imagery on the tee shirt. It is optimistic to try
and capture the feelings one hopes to keep from a beach time vacation. The palm trees, the sunset, and the dolphins are framed within a fading circle. This airbrush portal is an opportunity to insert ourselves into a scene that doesn’t actually exist, but it is a longing for us to remember our time at the beach this way: a physical reminder of a time so inherently fleeting as a vacation. An idyllic landscape of saturated pink, turquoise, and iconic beach imagery that can be worn, saying to others, “Look at where I went on vacation.” This wearable souvenir also represents disappointment. The disappointment of how short these vacations seem to be, the feeling of remorse that our entire life can’t be spent soaking up the rays and sipping on margaritas, and the ever-fading memories of these excursions. The airbrush tee shirt can only be worn several times before the washing process fades the colors much like a sun-bleached billboard. In this way, the airbrush tee-shirt, and souvenirs, operate within capitalism but be a critique of the structure we are captured in. It is a foregone conclusion that you must get a good job so you can afford to go on vacation to buy these memento’s only to return to life and long for your day at the beach.

A story that always resonated with me was that of the fisherman and business man. As it was told to me, a recently retired business man is finally able to retire near the beach after working for decades. One morning he walks out to go fishing and sees a peaceful scruffy individual fishing on the beach, so he approaches him. Talking to the scruffy man he asks what he does for a living. The Fisherman replies that he “fishes in the morning, takes his catch home, spends time cooking dinner with his family, and wanders down to the town to listen to music and sip beer in the evening.” The business man starts inquiring why he doesn’t expand his operation, get more boats, and hire people. The peaceful fisherman simply asks “Why?”, to
which the business man explains that if he gets big enough after 10-15 years he could retire with a lot of money and spend the rest of his days sipping beer and fishing on the beach. To this the fisherman replies “What do you think I’m doing now?” This story always reminds me of the brevity of life and what should be prioritized.

In some ways the vacation and the relic of the vacation are a reminder that there is a simpler life to be attained. The problem is the thought that it can only happen through the system of capitalism that we exist in now. The very profit driven bottom line of the Businessman has brought industries local to my childhood home, most notably fishing, almost to the brink of collapse. Working summers at a net-fishing operation until the government stepped in and placed a controversial “net ban” in the region, I saw first-hand the effects of man upon his environment. While this hurt the local economy, it has been a success, proponents say it has revived the local sports fisheries and reestablished my home town as the “World’s luckiest fishing village”. With so much news about the Earth being on the brink of destruction from pollution and global warming it sometimes seems as if stepping away to a simpler life may be the answer.

**Souvenir in the digital age**- The digital age has shifted the meaning and context of everything. The souvenir isn’t safe from this shift. Social media and smart phones have taken over as the main form of memory making. Now every place and every situation has become a “photo booth” of sorts. For artists, there is now the nagging thought of, “How do I make this look good on Instagram?”. For this I look no further than the phenomenal success of Yayoi Kusama’s *Infinity Mirrors*. Instagram feeds for days were filled with pictures from this exhibit. Ticket prices were astronomical, wait times were long, and the viewer was ushered in and out
with just enough time to snap a photo. Kusama’s power relied on the selfie-worthy social media allure that her installations both created and exploited. I believe this is shaping how artists see their art and how they now develop their concepts. In a very blatant attempt to exploit this way of making myself, I have adopted the “photo-booth” and roadside attraction style of making. Creating an experience worth taking a digital souvenir of.

Roadside attractions became a special slice of Americana with the development of the highway system and the invention of the camera. These serve as props for photographic souvenirs. Now, documentation from these attractions live as selfies on social media. In my 3-dimenional postcard “Redneck Riviera”, I capitalize on this human compulsion to take photos in
front of roadside attractions. I combine it with the event photobooth in the hopes of creating an “Instagram worthy” photo.

Looking at the sculpture from a distance it appears to be a vintage postcard mural, but upon further inspection it reveals itself to be a room that one can enter and become part of the scenery. This piece draws on the face-in-hole wooden cutouts found at tourist trap restaurants or parks. The sculpture relies on the psychological aspect of wanting to insert oneself into the miniature. By making it larger than life the viewer can now do physically just that. It is the physical manifestation of the desire to insert yourself into one a scene on a postcard. Roadside attractions are made strictly with the viewer in mind. Social media makes us curate with the viewer in mind. There are very few artists who can honestly say that they don’t make work with an audience in consideration and this piece is an attempt to embrace that aspect and tailor it not only for the viewer who visits in person but for the life it lives in the digital.

**The Florida Man Phenomenon**- In recent years there has been an internet phenomenon dubbed The FloridaMan. These ludicrous stories revolve around one thing, The FloridaMan doing something so absurd it would be impossible to make it up. My favorite headline being “Florida Man charged with throwing 3-foot alligator through Wendy’s drive-through window.” These stories exhibit a ratio of sadness and comedy, often so absurd and so jarring, that is hard to fabricate. Florida has developed a reputation for being an otherworldly, crazy place. Swamps, gators, snakes, guns, and the FloridaMan all inhabit the southernmost peninsula of the United States. Not until I left the state did I fully realize the preconceived notions and the myths that were perpetuated throughout the country about Floridians; some true and some untrue. At first, I fought the stereotypes and sought to separate myself from this place, then I
began to embrace the fact that I grew up playing in a swamp with my brothers and other neighborhood kids.

_Swamp Daddy’s Airbrush Emporium is a performance piece based on what I imagine people think of a FloridaMan. Wearing cut-off denim shorts, drinking a Miller Lite, topped with two French braided pigtails, I became Swamp Daddy, offering amateur airbrush tee shirts at events. This gave me a chance to embrace the stereotypes instead of fighting them, it gave me a chance to engage with the public and let them become part of the creative process; using humor and levity to indulge in the craft of airbrushing._

_Swamp Daddy’s Airbrush Emporium, 2018_

It’s my belief that people now travel in search of the “authentic”. The authentic cuisine of a region or the authentic local experience. While inhabiting this character I try to give them
the authentic Florida version of myself. Authenticity is important in my work and being able to perform gives the audience a chance to become part of this experience. The process of searching through my past to reconnect with the region, my home, that has so ingrained itself in my soul and in my work.

Happy Customers, 2018

The Postcard- Greetings from the Sunshine State is a 3-D mural modeled after an iconic vintage Florida postcard. It marked an attempt to visually show my “real” Florida. While, in the eyes of most, it appears absurdly happy and fun, there are, in fact, personal stories portrayed in
each letter that capture the lives and deaths of people I have grown up with. One of the letters contains many names of close friends I’ve lost along the way that all helped shape who I am, while keeping me rooted in the Florida of yesteryear. The names surround the logo that my mother painted for Dewey Destin’s Seafood, the restaurant that most everyone in my community is employed by. Each name has many memories and experiences attached to them and I can feel their presence every time I return to the coast. My father’s military logo, the Spectre of Death, from the AC-130 Gunship, is depicted within the mural. The panhandle of Florida has one of the largest military bases in the United States and growing up with a career Special Forces dad has deeply shaped my love for graphics and symbols of protection and power. Mosquitos and palmetto bugs occupy a couple letters. This imagery represents the way I see the juxtaposing experiences of the Emerald Coast. It is a place where many tourists find their ideal beach vacation, but many locals experience a completely different side of life, one that occupies the gray space between the face and the mask that I mentioned earlier: by living their mundane reality, their everyday life, suspended in a place that is, to others, the definition of paradise.
**World’s Largest Hushpuppy**- After graduating with my BFA, I moved back to Florida to work at the seafood restaurant where I spent over a decade cooking. The owner of this restaurant is the same family that I used to help on their bait boats until the net ban put them out of business. Adapting to the economic hardships, Dewey opened a restaurant on the dock that used to serve as the loading and unloading zone for his boats. This little ramshackle restaurant has, at some point, employed every member of my immediate family throughout the past 15 years. It informs much of my work. It also got me interested in community and spectacle. During the summer of the oil spill, much of the typical tourism died off which resulted in devastating economic loss for many businesses. To bring some levity and attention to the area I decided to attempt to achieve a world record; I set out to create the world’s
largest hushpuppy. This event brought out around 100 people from the local community and news media. I ended up creating a 31-pound hushpuppy. As I learned, the Guinness Book of World Records chose not to recognize this feat because, in their words, “a hushpuppy is too closely related to cornbread”. However, I still claim the record. Unbeknownst to me at the time, I was delving into something that would reappear in my work as I continued my art practice at the University of Georgia.

**Spectacle** - The “success” of many art openings is judged partly from audience turn out. In that way the art and artists are operating on creating a spectacle. Crowds turned out to see the World’s Largest Hushpuppy because of the absurd spectacle I chose to create, they wanted to see something that they hadn’t seen before, they wanted to be a part of history, absurd or not. These events gave the audience a chance to be adventurous – to be a community in another sense of the word - and take part in something that they can talk about later, but it was also something that served as a much needed distraction at the time. The experience was, itself, a performative souvenir, a fleeting chance - an excuse - to form a community at a time when our local world was turned completely upside down in the wake of the BP oil disaster.

**Community** - There is a communal aspect of life and art that all humans inherently long for, something they seek. Belonging, interaction, diversity, conversation, and common ground are all aspects that I search for in my Doofy Golf sculptures. These traveling mini-putt courses can be set up anywhere and played by anyone. Much like the mini-putt courses of yesteryear, my sculptures act as both recreational activities and conversation pieces, I used the tools of conversation and the act of play to engage the viewers. My first large scale installation of this series was figuring out how to subvert the gallery stigma, by aiming to attract people not likely
to visit white spaces. This original question of subversion quickly became less and less important after my early large installation courses. It became more of a statement of bringing art to people and circumnavigating the gallery system all together, thus travel size Doofy Golf.

_Doofy Golf, 2017_

New York City, Los Angeles, Mobile, Athens, and New Orleans were all presented as opportunities for me to publicly display Doofy Golf. My fascination with street art and graffiti
has always been that it was a particularly democratic and rebellious artform. It is art for anyone and everyone in the context of the public space, not only to be confined to a gallery. With this same spirit in mind, I originally hoped these mini-putt sculptures would act as an unexpected visual oddity as I brought the travel-size holes to the steps of the Met, city sidewalks, or public parks. While occupying space a playground in Manhattan, I discovered that these were more powerful than just a visual sculpture. Doofy Golf required willing participants and they came in the form of a child’s birthday party that day. I had inadvertently brought mini-putt to a community that had never played before. The parents and children alike played, conversed, and interacted for over an hour. An unexpected outcome that made me realize the inclusive power that such a simple game could have.

*Travel Size Doofy Golf, New York City, 2018*
Military- Growing up in a Special Forces family, I was constantly immersed in powerful iconography. The generic patriotic American flag did not hold as much weight as the more nuanced niche badges and plane mascots. I recall tales of the Spectre of Death, the Jolly Greens, Spooky, Three Dog Night, the Warthog. These and other various graphics were assigned to divisions, units, and planes. These graphics had to fit onto small badges or plane noses and had to be easily readable and recognizable. Like religious icons, they held a protective power over the men and women associated with each image. Worn as a shield and seen as something symbolic to cling to while on the receiving end of enemy gunshots. The simplicity, line work, and general badassery of these military symbols have always glommed onto my creative practice. Using gold leaf I applied the graphic line work of William Morris’s grapevine pattern to a deer skull to create “Relics of Artemis”. Relying on Greek mythos and symbols of death much like the Spectre of Death from the Gunship.
**Bad Art Ideas**-The rogue creative idea that hits you in the middle of the night, walking with music pumped into your ears, and the random drunken musings of stressed out artists are all valid and occupy a rightful place on this list. I started keeping a list when these would speak to me. This was a way to let an idea marinate to see if it was valid or perhaps just a terrible idea, like reading your poetry from when you were 14. The grad school experience has allowed me to explore these ideas and bring them to fruition. When feeling the blank canvas syndrome there is always something to make. Just pop open the bad art idea list and you’ll find “skull covered in candy in an ant farm, rainbow camo, cinder block wind-up toys, chili-cheese corndog, and the gloryhole guillotine.” Most of these won’t get made but it’s a great way to document where your mind wanders throughout the years. The Loos Fit Tee Collection and my 10XL Airbrush Tee that states “I Went To Art School And All I Got Was This Stupid Shirt” all lived in my Bad Art Idea List. There comes a tipping point in which you say to yourself, “This idea is valid even if it’s stupid. Let’s see what happens.”, and the result is often something you end up being immensely satisfied with.

**The Seasonal Worker Syndrome**- This theory is newer to me and one which I am still working on, especially as I notice trends in my work process. I’ll be insanely productive for up to a month, almost to the point of insanity. Then I must take a few days or weeks to decompress and process what just happened. Or to not think at all. I’ve just recently made the connection that may be due, in part, to being subjected to the summer work schedule. Throughout my adolescence my entire family would hustle and grind to the point of exhaustion for four months over the summer. This is the busy season. You must make enough money to sustain throughout
the rest of the year. That means multiple jobs, hustles, and overtime galore. Everyone in the city is insanely burnt out by the end of that time and that means vacations, new rims, stereos, and furniture. Everyone treats themselves and figures out how much they can survive on.

Now I’ll admit it’s a rough life. Running a kitchen is a youngster’s game. But I do think there may be some way in which my body responds to work now, especially when making art. Going through spurts of productivity and downtime seem to keep creativity flowing. Saying yes to as many opportunities as possible puts the pressure of a deadline on you, forcing you to work overtime. All the painting, building, sketching, and installing takes a toll on one’s body but you do it for the light at the end of the tunnel. Get it out of your system. Take a rest. Do it all over again. You never know when the next season will be back around so you must capitalize on it now, while the opportunity is present. Recognizing and telling myself that my workflow is valid has been an obstacle. Watching documentary’s and listening to famous artists can make one feel out of place in the art world, leaving you unsure or not what you are doing is the right way, but it has helped me learn this: Whatever system makes you stay creative and productive is the right way.

**Psychology of Social Media Picture**- Instagram art is posted daily. Murals are evolving to become a photo opportunity. From the chalk board “Before I Die” wall to simple angel wings as a backdrop for a person, there is a concerted effort amongst artists and internet savvy entrepreneurs to figure out the next likeable investment. For some, the like, the follow and the hashtag have become important currency in today’s art market. Just like some art-world sellouts there can be social media sellout artists. Validity becomes an important question. If you
have a lot of followers on Instagram but your art is uninspired, does it mean that you are still a good artist?

Figuring out the psychology of what makes a social media worthy photo opportunity has become an important part of my practice. The simple “I love you” script on the side of a small coffee shop in Austin, TX, has become a must-post photo opportunity for fashionistas and Instagram influencers across the globe. It’s a simple, nonconfrontational piece of art. Like a scoop of vanilla ice-cream. I’m trying to discover the next Elmgreen and Dragset “Prada” store in Marfa, Texas. Something immersive and subversive. The unlikely photo opportunity. “Bait House” seeks to act as a beacon for every willing participant with a phone in their pocket, offering a few gratifying likes as a reward. Shucking the typical unwritten gallery rules the audience is beckoned to enter a postcard diorama in which they become part of the piece. Becoming an integral part of the painting or sculpture gives an immediacy to the participant, as if they are the artist, which in turn becomes a synergistic relationship. I make the piece and it can function alone. Without anyone’s participation, but it becomes a fuller, richer experience with human interaction.

“Bait House” also includes non-traditional Florida imagery. The BP oil spill, beachfront exclusion, military presence, and invasive species all make appearances in the vintage style postcard. I am in search of the boundaries in which people will still be willing participants something as trivial as a souvenir roadside attraction photo opportunity that is interlaced with personal and regional issues. The construction of the background pieces was done using the same material as our own personal hurricane shutters while the rest of the structure was done
in much the same vein as net warehouses and bait houses. These structures are made to be replaced by the next big storm but built well enough to endure regular wear-and-tear.

_Bait House, 2019_

**Shout-Out’s-** I’d like to take this section to thank my Thesis Committee members; Martijn van Wagendonk, Mary Pearse, and Courtney McClellan. Finding mentors that had my back and watched out for my well-being as much they did was unexpected. I usually come into new adventures by relying and fighting for myself. Grad school is riddled with imposter syndrome and feelings of being a fish out of water. So, I sincerely thank them for the guidance, patience, and expertise afforded to me by these individuals.
UGA Staff and Faculty, from everyone in the front offices to janitorial staff, we all work as one big dysfunctional family. As I reflect on my years here, I cannot help but be sentimental about moments spent in the halls, classrooms, and buildings of this school.

Lastly my friends, family, and fellow artists. The community aspect of being in grad school together creates a strong community amongst peers. Fighting our way through hard times, together. My families unwavering support in my continued education. I want to acknowledge loved ones lost on the way. My best friend in the world, my 9-year-old Great Dane, Banksy, passed away midway through my second year here. Always happy to see me, through the good times and the bad. I miss you, big guy. Uncle Mike who we lost this year. Greatest carpenter I’ve ever seen and huge loss for our family. Everyone who’s been in my life has helped shape me as an artist and I can’t help but be grateful as I type this. Thank you all. Life’s a beach.