DID YOU GET ENOUGH

by

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DEDICATION

My mother.
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INTRODUCTION

My work has always been autobiographical; a vehicle for expressing ideas, events, and feelings that are intangible through language. I came into the graduate program painting small scale masked portraits of my students who were struggling with feeling other and not seen within our rural conservative community. During my first semester of graduate school, I desired to leave behind the body of work related to my former students. Thus, I began research into contemporary still-lives and started drawing and painting food splayed out on my mother’s doilies (Fig. 1). These works were the start of my exploration of Southern domestic and emotional labor. By the end of January of my first year, however, a family tragedy occurred which propelled me in a focused direction that would lead to my thesis work. Over the last three years, through intense reflection and catharsis, I realized that my relationship with my mother and her past and present life experiences are the driving force behind my studio practice. Drawing upon representations of the collective experience of American women, specifically Southern women, my work confronts issues of gender inequality. The following paper is divided into five sections that examine the nature of my practice through the lens of gender roles, trauma, and material investigation.

Fig. 1. Dainty Morsels. 2017, Colored pencil on black paper, 11 x 14 in.
INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA

Growing up in South Carolina, I struggled with watching the conservative women in my family serve the men, who were considered the heads of their households, to the point of exhaustion. I rebelled against it by refusing to learn to cook the family recipes or sew knowing that from a young age gender role conformity was wrong. By serving, I mean that every meal was prepared and served to the men. Overall, they did not lift a finger inside the household. My grandparents on my mom’s side had clearly defined gender roles but respected each other. My mother remembers that at twelve she was no longer allowed to be a tomboy, driving four-wheelers and working on cars at my grandfather's shop. She was sent inside the household to learn the ways of women’s work.

My mother had a string of abusive relationships that made this domestic environment even more dangerous. My mother’s husband controlled every aspect of her life and mine as well. I want to be clear that I am not male bashing here, nor am I claiming that all past and current homemakers did not and do not have fulfilling lives. I am merely speaking from my own experience and observations. I am being candid in this paper about these details because there are fragments of my mother’s story that would never be told otherwise. I question what her life would have been like if she had not experienced sexual abuse in her childhood. Would she have accomplished her dream of owning a bakery? Would she have valued and discovered herself?

As with all forms of abuse and neglect, there was a gradual escalation up to the incident involving my mother in January of 2018. This unspeakable and unimaginable event changed my life and work. My mother was found in her bedroom in a diabetic coma after days of having no food or drink. She was ninety-two pounds and according to the doctor was approximately twenty minutes away from expiring. One of the most tragic parts was that her loved ones were in the household and not only ignored her suffering but lied to me about her improvement.

Upon entering the hospital room, I was in shock, no one could have prepared me for encountering my young mother as a corpse. The weeks and months after were filled with uncertain-
ty as she had to overcome many damages to her body including learning to walk again. During this time, I tried to protect and persuade her to not return to her old lifestyle. However, in the end, her familiar routine was like an addiction that beckoned her home.

I love and respect these strong-willed, stubborn Southern women who have contributed to my identity. I am empathetic to the circumstances of their lives but also enraged by their complicity. While the behavior of groups of people should never be generalized, I do see similar patterns regarding gender in the South but more specifically within rural areas of South Carolina. Many women, as represented in my work, have a “cover story” that they present to the world, thus ignoring an inner reality that eats away at their “sense of self, identity, and purpose”.¹

As a child, I spent numerous afternoons delving into my grandmother’s family scrapbooks, mother’s yearbooks, and Super 8 home movies. The scrapbook photographs were adhered to black construction paper with glue and tape. I handled the fragile paper and photographs with care as they were deteriorating from the use of non-archival adhesives. This tactile experience feeds my use of portraits primarily from the 1950s to 1960s.

In 2013, as a high school art teacher, I unearthed a series of scrapbooks from 1952 to 1967 documenting the activities of the Baron Dekalb, South Carolina Chapter of The Future Homemakers of America in an old home economics classroom. They were under mounds of dirty pots and pans and dress pattern books. The scrapbooks, including portrait photographs, were “lost” for approximately thirty years, which correlates conceptually with the loss of identities and erasure regarding the lives of women in my work; specifically, as homemakers.

After I returned to Athens from caring for my mother I delved into the scrapbooks. Suddenly, I realized her plight was related to the future homemakers who were being taught traditional gender roles through the lens of Christianity. The women displayed and performed various acts of gender conformity, ultimately aiming to be the perfect housewife and mother. Apparently, self-preservation was of no importance to home economics.

The evolution of this period of my work began with making analog photographs digital. I scanned the portraits from the scrapbooks and printed them digitally on unprimed canvas. The sensory organs of the women are covered by beeswax casts painted with oil paint and shellac as a means of expressing suppression. Thus, began my Questions of the Household series (Fig.1 and Fig. 2). At first, I refused to use the original analog photographs in my work due to their preciousness and not being able to replicate them as a cultural object. However, I came to consider the use of found photographs as an act of preserving the photographs as evidence of women’s existence. Walter Benjamin called the analog camera the "optical unconscious” stating “…the camera has the capacity to capture something unexperienced, which comes to light only later, when the film is developed.”

Digital photography takes away the discovery of the bad, acciden-

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tal, and unforeseen happenings between the exposure and development process. Moreover, the surface of digital photographs lacks physical intimacy in comparison to analog photographs due to indexical traces.

I find the touch of analog photographs with a variety of film papers and decades of indexical human residue to be seductive. According to Charles Sanders Peirce’s theory of sign systems, analog photography is classified as a “hybrid type of sign- part index, part icon”. The icon resembles or imitates reality while the index signifies the process of existence. Furthermore, traces of handwriting on the front and back of the photographs double this, as in, “the index to convey a sense of past presence.”

I am adding meaning to contemporary culture by repurposing vintage cultural and personal materials. Injecting iconic and indexical analog photographs into a contemporary context creates a “historical intervention”, thus, allowing the viewer to experience them with new interpretations. As an archivist, Rick Prelinger speaks of cultural material as leftovers and evidence of the past that whose uses are justified by use claiming the “past lies ready to be remade.” He asserts that we should look at the past “not as antiquated but predictive of the future”- “if we listen.”

I see my work in a similar vein to Vesna Pavlović’s. Ranging from documentary photography to installation she uses archival images and objects as material, exploring distortion, untruths, loss, and preservation. Her installation *Fabrics of Socialism* represents Yugoslav president Josip Broz Tito’s slide collection. Pavlovic describes these distorted images of propaganda pro-

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3 Margaret Iversen, 7.

4 Ibid., 12.


6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.
jected on a gray “screen” as “a psychological portrait of an era.” Being from Serbia this portrait was not only a national investigation but a personal one. Furthermore, her *Lost Art* series which are digitally enlarged color-coded art history slides held by steel become sculptural in their objecthood. Here, she is playing with the indexical record of the image and what is presently experienced in real-time.

Through selecting, touching, scanning, archiving, and reproducing portraits I feel as if I am ingesting and regurgitating parts of these women from a bygone era. The studio portraits of women are yearbook, graduation, and prom photographs. Dressed and groomed to perfection these images depict hope for the future but are doomed with their limited choices. There is some uniformity in their appearances such as collared shirts and dresses which can be interpreted as uniforms (Fig. 2). For me at this time, the anonymity of the women, opens more possibilities for experimentation and alteration than my own family photographs. The mystery of the women’s unknown stories allow them to be archetypes and surrogates for every woman in our patriarchal culture. I am specifically projecting my mother’s stories onto the portraits as I am haunted by her being in a comatose state, the residual effects of her physical and mental health, and her altered sensations. Due to the respect of identities, I am increasingly incorporating family portraits into my practice in a more subtle and disguised manner.

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9 In 1967, the *Home Economics in Action The Story Of Vocational Home Economics Education in South Carolina* brochure states three options for the future of high school girls. 1. She can marry and have a home and family. 2. She can marry, have a home, family, and pursue a career outside of the home. 3. She can forego marriage and concentrate on a career. Option 2 and 3 were described as lacking self-fulfillment.
Fig. 2. From *Questions of the Household series*. 2019, Beeswax, oil paint, shellac, and inkjet on canvas, 24 x 30 in.

Fig. 3. From *Questions of the Household series*. 2018, Beeswax, oil paint, shellac, and inkjet on canvas, 14 x 17 in.
THE CLEAN, THE PURE, THE CONTROLLED

A code of honor in the South springing from the antebellum years still lingers. Privileged white antebellum ladies and gentlemen kept up appearances and reputations in society, hence, they performed and dueled. Honor was about social control; therefore, patriarchy being established in the South naturally manifested misogyny. Misogyny is a “system that operates within a patriarchal social order to police and enforce women’s subordination and to uphold male dominance.”¹⁰ The Power and Control Wheel created by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project demonstrates eight tactics that men normally use to manipulate and dominate women before they turn to physical and sexual abuse.¹¹ For instance, the tactic of male privilege is associated with treating the woman like a servant and defining men and women's roles themselves.

Kate Manne’s give and take model demonstrates power and control dynamics: feminine-coded goods and services are for the giving and male-coded perks and privileges are for the taking.¹² Thus, the woman is obligated to give feminine-coded goods when the man desires and not take away masculine-coded privileges. In this model, if a woman encroaches on a privileged man’s territory through violating a norm or role she will be reprimanded to various degrees. “Part of male dominance, especially on the part of the most privileged and powerful,” seeks to control the narrative- “and with it, controlling her, enforcing her concurrence.”¹³ Therefore, through the tactic of gaslighting “the woman is bound to agree with him; she may not only believe, but take up and tell, his story.”¹⁴

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¹⁰ Kate Manne, 33.


¹² Kate Manne, 130. feminine coded goods: attention, affection, admiration, sympathy, sex, and children; safe haven, nurture, security, comfort, etc. masculine coded perks: power, prestige, public recognition, rank, reputation, honor, respect, wealth, status from having a high ranking woman’s love, loyalty, etc.

¹³ Ibid., 11.

¹⁴ Ibid., 11.
According to Soraya Chemaly, “Gender-role expectations and the biases baked into them are inseparable from religiosity.”\textsuperscript{15} Biblically women began as a crooked rib, a helper, a companion, and then a temptress - the reason for all of humanity's woes. Nineteenth-century domestic manuals demonstrate this inseparability, for instance, in \textit{The American Woman's Home}, Catherine E. Beecher proposed that a Christian woman’s “greatest mission is self-denial” and to maintain a Christian home she should be a “self-sacrificing servant.”\textsuperscript{16} The idea of women being self-sacrificing and submissive reverberates throughout various forms of literature that quote scripture. Sadly, this ideology continues today.

The iconic portraits in my work are projections of purity. Gelsinger asserts, “Purity culture uses fear to try to stop women from being autonomous over their bodies. At its core, it is about control.”\textsuperscript{17} As a member of an evangelical church as a child, Gelsinger goes on to proclaim that, “We were taught to distrust women — beginning with ourselves”. Being that women are taught to obey and serve God, politicians, and their husbands in purity culture they often deny their own opinions, desires, and needs.”\textsuperscript{18} Silence is not only rewarded by the patriarchy, but it reasserts dominance.


\textsuperscript{17} Carly Gelsinger, “I Know Why Evangelical Women Support Brett Kavanaugh. I Was Raised To Do the Same,” (Huffpost, October 03, 2018), https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/brett-kavanaugh-evangelical-women_us_5bb3a28de4b0ba8bb211985bncid=fcbklnkushpmg00000063&utm_source=main_fb&utm_medium=facebook&utm_campaign=hp_fb_pages.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
THE SOUTHERN STEREOTYPE

In my home county of Kershaw, SC, women often form tight bonds with their families, and it is rare for them to move away. My grandmother, for instance, lives in a neighborhood with all her female relatives and their offspring. People in Southern towns can differ from one city to the next dramatically and our accents follow suit. Southerners typically recoil from change and the South has not recovered from the slave system. Southern women like those in my mother’s favorite magazine, Southern Living, are both good at having a polished surface and projecting the unattainable ideal. Southern Living, founded in 1966 a year after the ostensible end of the Jim Crow era, is known as the homemaker’s Bible and shot to popularity when the white Southern way of life was perceived to be in jeopardy. In Southern Living, you will find timeless style, southern hospitality, recipes worth keeping, etc.- all stemming from the plantation style of living.

There is a stereotype of Southern women characteristically being polite, hospitable, conservative, strong-willed, hardworking, but repressed or suppressed. Of course, this is limiting, and I can only speak to the women I know but there is a “stay in your place and do not ask questions” mentality. Growing up, I was never asked nor was I allowed to voice my opinions. Ronda Rich, a self-proclaimed well-bred from good stock Georgian spews dangerous shameful rhetoric encouraging women to make themselves indispensable to the household, endure sexual harassment in the workplace, camouflage their true selves, and conform with a smile. Many of the women in my community bear a similarity to the women that Rich speaks of as the Southern woman all should aspire to embody.


COMEDY AFTER TRAGEDY

When looking at the brain in trauma, specifically the Broca’s area which is in charge of language production, one can see that it shuts down and executive decision making is deactivated. This indicates scientifically why so many victims of various forms of abuse stay silent, feel numb, and can not find the words to express what has occurred. For instance, the average age of reporting childhood abuse is 52. On the national scale, it is clear through the testimonies of Anita Hill and Christine Blasey Ford why women would not want to come forward, as they are met with distrust, blame, hate, and misogyny.

In contrast, humor activates the Broca’s area. I use humor as a defense mechanism in my work to cope with life’s difficulties and injustices. As Donald Kuspit states, “…humor creates a self strong enough to deal with the world without denying it or backing down from it.” Like the replaying of an old film reel humor in my work is often repetitive (Fig. 4, 5). At times, it can be viewed as slapstick humor, for example, a pie in the face. Kuspit goes on to state, “The self that experiences life as comic…is not traumatized by the world. Comedy is a way of rolling with the world’s shocks rather than meeting them head-on.” As Greek tragedies were followed by lewd and funny satyr plays, humor in my work is a way to return to social normalcy after tragedy.

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22 Ibid., 181.
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The underlying fundamentalist principle of female servitude and the projection of perfect moral, physical, and sexual cleanliness are engrained in American culture. Moreover, Domestic Science, “the academic arm of capitalism” aimed to mold American women into a homogenous type of homemaker which caused conflicted relationships with the preparation and consumption of food. Women were taught to distrust their own instincts in regard to nutrition and food preparation. They were taught that ethnic food and other family traditions were primitive, and Domestic Science promoted assimilation to the prescribed bland recipes of American cuisine, creating “the perfect backdrop” for feelings of inadequacy and eating disorders.

The food miniatures in my Fed Up series emerged from considering the toxic relationship my mother has with food and how that trickled down to my own psychological and behavioral dysfunction with overeating (Fig. 3). The trompe l’oeil food miniatures create a push and pull duality between pleasure and disgust, comfort and discomfort. The term comfort food traditionally signifies nostalgic home cooking and desserts during stressful times. However, studies indicate comfort food frequently elicits negative responses after indulgence.

The specific foods I choose to sculpt range from nostalgic foods of the 1950s and 1960s, Southern cuisine, family recipes, and meals that I eat. All the while, I am considering my mother’s bodily struggle with diabetes and the processed and “unhealthy” food that she can no longer eat or make. I see these food sculptures as a mask, a weight, or a barrier (a societal or personal barrier that I hope these women choose to reject, to push through). The food objects can also symbolize a protective shield or a cover story.

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24 Ibid, 55.


26 Ibid, 3-16.
Food functions in many complex ways in the lives of women. It can symbolize the conflicts women experience or in a positive way food can represent nurturance, love, community, and pleasure. Food being “a barometer for women’s emotional lives” Manton claims that many victims of child sexual abuse develop eating issues or disorders due to the loss of control over one’s body. The loss of control can lead to a detachment between mind and body. For my mother, food preparation and service occupied self-worth, pleasure, identity, nurturance, labor, escapism, and approval.

Fig. 3. *Fed Up*, 2019. Polymer clay, pewter, acrylic, and pastel on found photographs.

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28 Ibid, 5.
FORMATION: PLAYING WITH MY FOOD

In my studio, I write lists of food-related ideas for objects that are mainly derived from memory. Moreover, I am inspired by reference images of food from old cookbooks, the internet, and meals I have eaten. I talk to my mother daily about her grocery lists and the meals she prepares. I no longer make preliminary sketches. I start a piece by modeling polymer clay. The modeling of the clay is analogue to the way behaviors and the perfect image are modeled to women by their grandmothers, mothers, and society. Simulating the act of drawing and mark-making, I then use needle tools, dotting tools, and toothpicks to texture and carve into the surface of the polymer clay to represent reality. My process invokes cooking as I prepare separate components or ingredients to then transform the materials into a finished piece. Pastels, acrylic gels, and paint are applied before and after baking. I varnish pieces with both matte and high gloss finish.

I found myself questioning material hierarchies during this process. I was conflicted with the use of polymer clay because I had viewed it as a craft material. However, I have grown to be confident in that I am elevating a hobbyist material to fine art. I had never used polymer clay before graduate school and the skills required to manipulate it came through trial and error. This process has proven to satisfy my love for painting, drawing, and sculpting. After the food sculptures are complete, I go through my archive of photographs placing the sculpture over different images to see how they interact. I take into consideration every element of the photograph itself such as the stains, paper texture, photographic type, scale, handwriting, and color. I also consider the individualistic appearance of the woman such as the design and pattern of her attire, her posture, facial expression, and hairstyle. Aesthetic reasoning and intuition both play a part in the selection and combination of portrait and sculpture. Thus, the tone of a piece can go from humorous to haunting based on the combination and placement of portrait versus sculpture.

In addition, casting is integral to my process. I began creating molds of my mother’s doilies in silicone during my Questions of the Household series which proceeded my Fed Up series. I used white and natural beeswax to create casts that I then painted with shellac and oil
paint. Casting evolved in my process when I began to create silicone molds of polymer clay sculptures, such as TV dinners, pots, and pans. I then cast these in pewter and add patina, stain, or wax. Clay and wax as materials lack resistance and are submissive by nature. Their physicality relates conceptually to the expectation of submission by the women represented in my work. Furthermore, casting fills a void and is closely connected with the anticipation of loss and absence. Thus, casting is an act of preservation.

The miniature scale trompe l’oeil food sculptures in my work are primarily based on memories from my mother and grandmother’s kitchen. Some are based upon nostalgic food and icons of American consumer culture. I am not interested in using real food that is temporal because I desire the women and sculptures to be acknowledged; seen as tangible and permanent. Moreover, the miniature scale sculptures evoke the toy kitchen sets and Easy-Bake ovens that are prescribed as girl toys, thus conditioning girls to gender role expectations early. The miniature scale allows me to focus intently on minute details. I have limited control over the situation with my mother. Therefore, the scale creates a sense of security in my life as it is a morsel I can control.

Regarding presentation, the finished clay pieces are framed in simple black wooden gallery frames. The photographs are adhered deep within the frame to appear like a shadow box or a keepsake. The glass is left off the front of the frame as to not contain the women even more, and to not aesthetically hinder color and texture. The lack of glass also draws the viewer in close allowing them to inspect the work. Overall, the framed works are displayed in a grid format that is symmetrical and tightly structured to signify staying in one’s place.
SCREENING THE SELF

Screenprinting was incorporated into my work after the *Fed Up* series. This piece, *Heavy Laden*, (Fig. 4, 5) is taken from a varied edition of prints and was inspired by a piece from my *Fed Up* series which is a small sculpture of pancakes on an analog found photograph. The text in the print is from a hymn titled “To the Work” which explores toiling daily for the master. The incorporation of the text was my response to my mother’s daily descriptions to me of the domestic and emotional labor, she carries out.

According to psychologist Antonio Damasio “our sense of self and the sensory life of our bodies” is divided by a “screen.” He states, “One of the things the screen hides…is the body, our own body, by which I mean the ins of it, the interiors.” Moreover, the analogy of the mystic writing pad according to Sigmund Freud parallels the process of screenprinting. The wax backing of the drawing pad is like the unconscious mind and these imprints or traces of trauma left in the wax are buried in our mind and distorted through time and accumulation. There is a similar action in lifting the plastic on the drawing pad and the screen from the paper. I find the screenprinting process to be cathartic, exciting, and painterly. From the exposure on the film to the screen, to the color choices, layering capabilities, and the pressure applied while pulling or wiping the screen, it has satisfying elements of both chance and choice.

Fig. 4 (left) and Fig. 5 (right). From *Heavy Laden* series. 2019, screenprint and matboard on paper, 24 x 30 in.

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29 Bessel A. Van der Kolk, 95.

30 Bessel A. Van der Kolk, 95.

31 Margaret Iversen, 11. For example, the plastic drawing pads with a plastic pen that you could find in the grocery stores in the late 80s early 90s.
INFLUENCES: DON’T BE SO DARK

I am drawn to the vulnerable, grotesque, 90s lifetime movies, true crime mysteries, Southern Gothic fiction, and psychological thrillers. I am normally drawn to diverse visual artist’s works for inspiration but over the last couple of years, my influences have been more literature and film-based. The first novel I read upon returning from caring for my mother was Marguerite Duras’s The Malady of Death. I was told maybe I should not be reading the novel at this time and maybe don’t be so dark. I connected my mother’s story with this nameless anonymous female character. The anonymous female character is in a drowsy state, in and out of consciousness, lying on a bed “abandoned in her own darkness” while the male character observes and takes advantage of her body. He cannot see or love her and, in the end, only sees the shape left behind on the sheets after her disappearance. The setting is a room with an open window near the Black Sea. The Black Sea becomes a metaphor for the Malady of Death. There is a powerful psychological tension between the male and female characters.

A major film influence of mine is The Beguiled by Sophia Coppola. The film is about a group of Southern women during the Civil War who take in an outsider, an injured Union soldier, and the power struggles that erupt. Cinematically, I am influenced by the low light dinner scenes and the physical struggles in the dark. Content-wise I am interested in the myth of Southern Hospitality. Coppola explains. “I think women especially communicate through gestures and glances, so I thought that to try to convey what’s under the surface, and what they’re not actually saying, is interesting. And especially that the story is so repressed and claustrophobic; hopefully [you] can feel what they’re not able to say.” What is being hidden and covered is a constant inspiration for my work regardless of the medium.

Moreover, as a child, I would go to my neighbor’s log cabin, she made furniture for dollhouses and would let me play with the dollhouses in her basement. These play sessions included listening to her ghost stories, very Poltergeist-esque, based on the Native American burial

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mounds located behind our houses. There is potentially a buried influence of this dollhouse play on my miniatures. This realization made me consider the crime scene dioramas the *Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death* by Francis Glessner Lee ultimately, tying together my interest in murder mysteries and miniatures.

Lastly, news and true crime stories relating to food inform my work. Many stories are so absurd that they seem false. For instance, my neighbor is a national meme, he has been arrested more than once for assaulting his mother with a pork chop. While people, including myself, have giggled at the meme it is ultimately tragic. What also fuels my work is conversations with women, articles, and Facebook posts. My hairdresser said last week how lucky she was because at least her husband does the laundry. A friend said recently she thought about my work because she knows a woman who makes her daughter take her husband’s work boots off when he comes home (she also has two sons). Lastly, I came across a letter an anonymous wife wrote to her “Dear Husband”. The letter states how she is struggling due to invisible labor and the many roles she carries. She only wants him to listen and not to worry as there is nothing he can do to help or fix her or her problems. With 6,600 likes and loves, 3,900 shares, and 507 comments on Facebook the disturbing reality is how many women relate to her situation.

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34 *Poltergeist II: The Other Side* is a 1986 horror film where a suburban family is haunted by supernatural spirits emerging from an Indian Burial Ground. However, this was a trope and the cemetery in the film had headstones not burial mounds.


36 Ibid.
THESIS WORK: DID YOU GET ENOUGH?

I spent a significant amount of my childhood at my grandmother’s house. Behind the couch where I always sat was a photograph from my aunt’s wedding in the 1970s, my mother, age 12 was her bridesmaid (Fig. 9). Growing up, I was curious as to why my mother appeared distraught during her sister’s wedding. Years later, I learned that she was standing next to her abuser; her sister was making him a permanent part of our family. My mother’s story is not different from so many other stories of child sexual abuse. But the silence and cover-up of this early loss of power led to a pattern of traumatic events in her life. Shame, rage, and low self-worth followed her into adulthood. I believe this buried secret left an emotional and psychological void which was “filled” through cooking, eating, and serving others. Overeating and overfeeding others became a way to feel temporarily full. After my mother served a full Southern meal, she frequently asked, “Did You Get Enough”? In retrospect, I see this question as an approval-seeking statement.

While her story is not evident in my thesis work just upon looking at the piece, it is buried under the surface, conceptually. Trauma, whether it is experienced in the past, reexperienced through PTSD, or presently experienced, alters people’s perceptions and imaginations causing “…a loss of mental flexibility.\(^{37}\) Therefore, “without imagination, there is no hope, no chance to envision a better future, no place to go, no goal to reach.”\(^{38}\) The photograph in the center of the installation is my mother on her wedding day to my father at eighteen years of age (Fig. 10). The other works in the installation directionally point to the central photograph to evoke a sense of self-sacrifice. Being that Christianity fundamentally promotes self-sacrifice, martyrdom, and suffering the display of the 7.5’ x 12’ installation recalls an altarpiece. Furthermore, the installation is an expression of grief and loss thus it is a memorial for my mother. The crown of lamb (Fig. 14) can be interpreted as a crown of thorns or a homecoming queen being crowned. While the rack of lamb (Fig. 19) can be interpreted as being caged or trapped. Other food sculptures range from American eatable icons (Fig. 11, 12, 13, 17, 18) to my mother’s lasagna (Fig. 7) to dirty dishes (Fig. 16).

\(^{37}\) Bessel A. Van der Kolk, 17.

\(^{38}\) Ibid., 17.
Two large scale inkjet portraits of my mother (Fig. 8) and a Georgia debutante (Fig. 9) frame the installation. The images are both captured in time and stunted in development. The Georgia debutante image scanned from a film negative, has yet to be technically developed while the portrait of my mother as a pre-adolescent is psychologically stunted from trauma. Their future is still unknown. Printed on pellon, the material connects not only to women’s work but symbolizes in this piece a veiling. Pellon appears fragile in nature but in actuality it is a stabilizing interface for garments. Thus, the texture, transparency, and desaturation of the inkjet portraits on pellon add nostalgia and a sense of loss to the installation.

The women in Did You Get Enough? are all connected by the pressures of everyday life and the gender role expectations that were even more culturally visible than in the contemporary. A study in 2019 by Oklahoma State University investigating the distribution of invisible household labor among spouses indicates ramifications on women’s well-being. In this study, 393 upper-middle class American women were asked to respond to specific categories of questions and statements such as, “Do you feel “seen” and loved for the person you are, at your inner core?” and “The ‘self’ I show to others – my “outer self” – is very much the same as my “inner self.” Results showed that many women “reported that they alone assumed responsibility for household routines…maintaining order in the home” leaving them feeling empty, overwhelmed, and dissatisfied with their life and spouse.

Whether women have experienced trauma in their past or not it is evident through my research that gender roles from past eras are present today. Moreover, the coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated the issue of gender inequality. Helen Lewis, a journalist for the Atlantic, asserts that the pandemic is a disaster for feminism and will send women back to the 1950s stating “across the world, women’s independence will be a silent victim of the pandemic.” Even further, the United Nations are citing a global surge in domestic violence cases thus calling on gov-

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40 Ibid.

ernments to consider women’s well-being in their households when decision making.42 The words of Audre Lorde speak to the issues at play in my thesis work and the world, “Your silence will not protect you. For it is not difference that immobilizes us, but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken.”43

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Fig. 6. *Did You Get Enough?*. 2020, Multimedia on found photographs, paper, and pellon, 72 x 144 in. approximately, installation view.

Fig. 7. *Did You Get Enough?*. 2020, Polymer clay, pastel, and acrylic on found photograph, 11 x 14 in. Detail view.
Fig. 8. *Did You Get Enough?*. 2020, Inkjet on pellon, 18 x 40 in approximately. Detail view.

Fig. 9. *Did You Get Enough?*. 2020, Inkjet on pellon, 16 x 42 in approximately. Detail view.
Fig. 10. Did You Get Enough?. 2020, inkjet print on paper, 11.5 x 14.5 in. Detail view.

Fig. 14. Did You Get Enough?. 2020, Polymer clay, pastel, and acrylic on found photograph, 11 x 14 in. Detail view.

Fig. 11, 12, 13. Did You Get Enough?. 2019-2020, Polymer clay, pastel, and acrylic on found photograph, 8 x 10 in. Detail view.
Fig. 15. *Did You Get Enough?*. 2020. Polymer clay, pastel, and acrylic on found photograph, 12 x 16 in. Detail view.

Fig. 16. *Did You Get Enough?*. 2020. Polymer clay, pewter, wood, resin, pastel, and acrylic on found photograph, 12 x 16 in. Detail view.
Fig. 17. *Did You Get Enough?*. 2019, Polymer clay, pastel, pewter, and acrylic on found photograph, 8x10 in. Detail view.

Fig. 18. *Did You Get Enough?*. 2020, Polymer clay, pastel, pewter, and acrylic on found photograph, 8x10 in. Detail view.

Fig. 19. *Did You Get Enough?*. 2020, Polymer clay, pastel, and acrylic on found photograph, 12 x 16 in. Detail view.
CONCLUSION: WHAT’S ON THE TABLE

While I will continue to explore these bodies of work and concepts related to the masking and de-facing of identities beyond completion of my MFA, I desire to explore more experiential works creating a psychological condition and environment based within a room. I see the work moving towards focusing metaphorically on *The Malady of Death* and the setting of the Black Sea. I have collected sea glass from the shores of the Black Sea that I plan to use for fragmented photo transfers. I see the sea glass pieces being incorporated into sculptures and collages, some submerged deep into the work. I also want to experiment with collaging film negatives suspended in acrylic skins. While my work is stronger in additive applications, I hope to become just as strong in reductive applications by cutting through analog photographs and frames to place the sculptures internally, thus, conceptually exploring the hollowness of cast objects in relation to emotional and psychological emptiness.

I learned from my studio practice that incorporating new materials and processes keeps me invigorated, curious, challenged, and pushing forward. Furthermore, I do my best work when I can to limit the noise of the outside world, social media, and family situations. I also learned the cost of trauma and gender inequality not only on a woman’s well-being but also on our society. Lastly, I am thankful for this experience as my MFA work and experience helped me weather the most difficult times of my life.

In closing, I am sure that the coronavirus pandemic will play into my work in regard to isolation, family dynamics, and the changing food culture. I mean, who could have imagined, getting a roll of toilet paper with your to-go order?44

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Bibliography


