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## Happy Trails

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Happy Trails

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
In partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts  
In  
Fine Arts

By

Elizabeth Agnes Derby

B.A. College of Charleston, 2010

May, 2016

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## **ABSTRACT**

My work uses hair as both a subject depicted in drawings, paintings, and prints; as well as a medium for sculpture, installation, and video created with synthetic hair pieces and wigs. I am interested in deconstructing gendered codes of appearance, and visions of the ideal woman and man as objects. I remove all identifiable traits from my characters, apart from their hair which appears to be consuming or erasing them. In doing so, I force the people viewing my work to rely on cultural stereotypes associated with hair to identify my characters. My work is heavily influenced by Drag culture and Camp, for their ability to mock identity, gender, and cultural stereotypes and portray them as something fluid that can be constructed and changed on a daily basis, instead of a biological trait forced upon them at birth. I view my artwork as my own form of Drag.

### **KEYWORDS:**

hair, identity, gender, drag, camp, cultural stereotypes, synthetic, consume, erase, objectify, transformation, abject

## INTRODUCTION: IDENTITY CAN BE SUCH A DRAG

In RuPaul's book Workin' it! RuPaul's Guide to Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Style, she introduces the saying "you're born naked and the rest is drag'...Drag isn't just a man wearing false eyelashes and a pussycat wig. Drag isn't just a woman with a pair of glued-on sideburns and an Elvis jumpsuit. Drag is everything. Whatever you put on after you get out of the shower is your drag...The truth of who you really are is not defined by your clothes."<sup>1</sup> She elaborates on this in an interview she did recently with *Vulture*, when asked how the function of drag has changed: "The function hasn't changed. It's been the same -since the beginning of time when shamans, witch doctors, or court jesters were the drags- which is to remind culture to not take itself seriously. To remind You that You are not your shirt or your religious affiliation but that You are an extension of the power that created the whole universe. You are God in drag. You are dressed up in this outfit of a body, which is temporary. You are eternal. You are forever. You are unchanged. And this is a dream you're having. So don't get too attached to it. Make love. Love people. Be sweet. Have corn dogs. Dance. Live. Love. Fuck shit up. But it's all good. You can't fuck it up because you're eternal."<sup>2</sup>

Jacques Lacan believes that the moment a human is able to recognize its image in a mirror, not as a reflection but as "I", there is an immediate transformation that leads the individual to both a representational view of himself and an ideal person to which he strives.<sup>3</sup> This ideal vision is created in relation to the fictional development of the ego, where our lives become stories and we develop a vision of ourselves as the protagonist of our story. This links the subject's psyche to the world outside, the groundwork for our cultural formation of identity. Our aims and desires are shaped by the desires of others, in interpersonal terms and in terms of social expectations and prohibitions. Our knowledge of the world comes to us by way of other people; the language we learn to speak pre-exists us, and to a great degree our thoughts conform to pre-established concepts and linguistic structures. As we assimilate to these social conventions, the pressures of our instinctual drives--sexuality, for example--

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<sup>1</sup> RuPaul, *Workin' It!: RuPaul's Guide to Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Style* (2010), ix.

<sup>2</sup> E. Alex Jung, "Real Talk with RuPaul," *Vulture*, last modified March 23, 2016, <http://www.vulture.com/2016/03/ruPaul-drag-race-interview.html>.

<sup>3</sup> John Zuern, "Lacan: The Mirror Stage," Department of English, University of Hawaii at Mānoa | University of Hawaii Department of English, last modified March 1988, <http://www.english.hawaii.edu/criticalink/lacan/guide2.html>.



appear to us as threats, as "dangers."<sup>4</sup> The pre-established concepts and linguistic structure that Lacan refers to is the heteronormative binary view of gender and sexuality created by our masculine-dominated society. Anything that does not fit into this view of society becomes a danger. Thus drag becomes a danger, because it blurs the lines of masculinity and femininity that fit with our cultural expectations of identity. By putting on the exaggerated costume of a stereotypical woman, drag queens are corrupting the illusion of gender as a binary code of aesthetics. Essentially mocking identity.

Marcel Duchamp's approach to the aesthetic codes of the art world through his readymade sculptures is similar to how drag approaches gender. Duchamp took an ordinary



Figure 3 Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*. 1917

object, a urinal no less, put it in a gallery, signed it, and called it art. He was essentially giving it a costume that conformed to the art world's rules of aesthetics, and the cultural concept of art. Duchamp explained "I thought to discourage aesthetics... I threw the bottle rack and the urinal in their faces and now they admire them for their aesthetic beauty."<sup>5</sup> Duchamp's ready-mades forever changed the way the world would view art by ushering in an era where the function and form of art was no longer dictated by the aesthetic codes of the art world, but by the artist. Duchamp's *Fountain* (fig. 1) has become one

of the most important pieces in the history of art, and holds a specific place of reverence in our mainstream society. *Fountain* was able to find its place in the mainstream, because unlike drag it was not challenging the sensitive subject of identity, particularly masculine identity-the superior gender.

I view my art as my drag. Instead of viewing my work as paintings or sculptures or prints or any other defined form of art, I view each work as a figural representation of a character. These characters allow me to question the way our society uses physical appearance as a semiotic language communicating identity. Formally, my body of work consists of a series of sculptures, installations, prints, drawings, paintings, and video investigating the way hair functions as a semiotic language. Each of my pieces depicts a character who has either been

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<sup>4</sup> Zuern, "Lacan."

<sup>5</sup> Robert Motherwell, *The Dada Painters and Poets; An Anthology* (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1951), xiii.

consumed or erased by their hair. By removing any other identifiable characteristics that communicate identity, I force viewers to create their own assumptions about the identity of my characters based solely on their hair. I do this to expose the problematic nature of determining identity through aesthetics. When my characters are consumed by their hair, it shows how painful and destructive this method of identification can be.

My work aims to reclaim these stereotyped cultural objects and transform them into something strange and beautiful. The abject use of hair as a detached body part forces the viewer to make a slew of visceral personal opinions in regard to my characters: Attractive/repulsive, beautiful/ugly, art/not art. My work thrives in that little slash. I'm not giving you any more information than length, color, and cut. It is you who gets to decide what side of the slash you choose to put my work on. What one person finds disgusting, another will find incredibly beautiful. What one person finds offensive, another will find amusing. What one person considers art, another will refuse. In her essay, "Notes on Camp," Susan Sontag reveals this in her discussion of the "dandy", "The old-style dandy hated vulgarity. The new style dandy, the lover of Camp, appreciates vulgarity. Where the dandy would be continually offended or bored, the connoisseur of Camp is continually amused, delighted. The dandy held a perfumed handkerchief to his nostrils and was liable to swoon; the Connoisseur of Camp sniffs the stink and prides himself on his nerves."<sup>6</sup> My work lives in a world where the identity that you are born with and all of the judgments and stereotypes that come along with it are circumstantial. In my little campy world of hair you are free to throw away this inbred identity and completely transform yourself or your identity into whatever you want it to be. The old style dandy will view my work with disdain and my characters will be consumed by their hair. The new style dandy will sniff the stink and my characters will be freed from consumption and transform into something beyond their hair.

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<sup>6</sup> Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp," in *Against Interpretation, and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966), 11.

## **BRUNETTE. BLONDE. LAVENDER.**

My first works in graduate school were inspired by the way that changing my hair color elicited a profound change in my daily life. After hearing my mother tell me for many years that I should just wait to dye my hair because I was going to be gray by thirty, I decided to dye my hair from brunette to blonde. The change was palpable. People treat you differently when you're blonde; they smile more, they're more willing to engage in conversation. This sociological phenomenon has been investigated by Dr. Lisa Slattery Walker, who believes that hair color absolutely has an effect on how people are treated, noting that blondes are given higher salaries, blonde waitresses make more in tips, and people tend to be nicer, and are more likely to help out someone who is blonde.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, blonde came with a slew of negative connotations as well. Catcalls became a daily occurrence; my intelligence was constantly questioned. I was no longer able to perform simple tasks like lifting something heavy, or carrying bags to my car without a constant stream of offers for help. I also found that the way that I was approached in conversation and flirtation by the opposite sex was formatted completely differently than how I was spoken to as a brunette. There was an expectation to the way they formatted their questions, as though because I was blonde I was more likely to go home with them.

After almost three years of being blonde, I decided to dye my hair lavender. While the transition to blonde was palpable, adjusting to lavender verged on overwhelming. Simple tasks like getting gas or going to Walgreens became a silent battle with the gaze. I was constantly being blatantly stared at. I had unwittingly removed myself from the cultural formation of feminine beauty in our society; I was not ugly; I was not beautiful; I was undefinable. This made me an outsider: something strange, something to be stared at, and in some cases something to be feared. The moment that this circumstance slapped me in the face is one I will never forget. I was in the grocery store having a heated internal debate between olive oil and rosemary Triscuits or just plain original Triscuits because goddamn they are salty and delicious. My concentration was broken when a mother and her two daughters turned down the aisle, the daughters giggling and the mother preoccupied with her phone. I turned my head

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<sup>7</sup> WCNC Staff, "Blonde Vs. Brunette: Does It Determine How You Get Treated?," WCNC, accessed April 4, 2016, <http://legacy.wcnc.com/story/news/local/2014/06/30/10934510/>.

to look at the girls, smiling as their eyes lit up, ogling all the new colorful boxes and packaging. I then watched as the mother put down her phone, looked at the girls, the boxes, then me; I saw her mouth drop and eyes widen in horror as she grabbed her daughters' arms and backed hastily out of the aisle.

This experience illuminated the massive implications that hair can have on perceived identity. I was perplexed at how two rounds of bleach and a slight change in the tone of my hair seemed to erase everything else about my identity. Non-traditional hair colors have a historical association with outsider subculture. The highly stylized aesthetic of the 80's punk scene included a rainbow array of gelled spikes and Mohawks. This influenced the aesthetic identity of the subcultures like grunge, and the rave scene that would follow in its footsteps. Around 2010 pastel hair colors began to appear in the high fashion industry, and the runways of the avant-garde. By 2012 pastel hair had made its way into the realm of the celebrity mainstream through Kelly Osbourne and Nicole Richie, but was still relatively uncommon in the lives of the masses. As social media has given an outlet of celebrity to the masses through the "Instagram Celebrity," self proclaimed fashionistas and trendsetters have driven "fashion hair color" out of the realm of the social outsider into the fashionable mainstream.

I began to think about how hair can function as a semiotic system of cultural identity. Ferdinand de Saussure introduced his theory of Semiotics in *Course in General Linguistics*.<sup>8</sup> Saussure believed that language was an arbitrary construction because there is no objective relationship between the letters "d-o-g" and the actual four-legged creature it refers to. Instead language uses signs to communicate, and signs are made up of two parts, the signifier and the signified. Thus the sign "dog" is a signifier for the image of the four-legged creature, and the signified is the cultural concept of a dog. I wanted to discover how hair functions as a semiotic language, and how things like cut, curl, color, and length all have a signified cultural meaning. In Japan, hair had a very specific meaning in the Geisha culture, where specific hairstyles and hair decorations are used in addition to distinct specifications in clothing, jewelry, and makeup that indicate what stage they have reached in their apprenticeship:

After about a year, when the girl is about 16 years old, she experiences her misedashi or debut into the next level of apprenticeship. The girl's hair is styled into a warensinobu, an elaborate style that is commonly worn during this special event. It is adorned by kanzashi or hair ornaments which are determined by season and month of the year. After the ceremony, the maiko needs to

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<sup>8</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959).

see a hair dresser weekly to have her hair washed and styled. She is required to sleep on a wooden box with a small pillow, called an omaku, to preserve the hairstyle even while sleeping... When an apprentice gets her first danna or patron, she changes her hairstyle to an ofuku. In the past, this hairstyle signified that a girl has lost her virginity and was often a source of embarrassment but today, geisha wear this to signify a coming of age and the completion of 3 years of training.<sup>9</sup>



Figure 2 Warensinobu Hairstyle

Hair was equally important for Japanese men, particularly for Samurai who were identified by their top knot, a symbol of wealth and strength. A farmer or a shop owner would not have very much money and would probably be stabbed if they were caught wearing a top knot. On the opposite end of the scale from Samurai are Buddhist monks, who give up all worldly belongings in service of the temple, including their hair. This use of



Figure 4 Sakko Hairstyle

hair as an indicator of wealth, marital status, or occupation has been practiced by cultures all over the world, all the way back to ancient Egypt.

These historical uses of hair as a sign have developed into our own present day cultural code of hair. Instead of being used deliberately as a tool for communication, it has



Figure 4 Lorna Simpson, *Wigs*, 1994.

simply become a secondary sign reflecting our cultural preferences for beauty. Lorna Simpson and Ellen Gallagher have both made work exploring hair's connection to identity in the black community and the cultural stereotyping that influences the formation of that identity. A lot of this discussion is created by whether women choose to display their natural hair or whether they are going to get it relaxed and straightened, sew in a weave, or get it

braided to the head or put in rows. Simpson explores the ways black women are identified, classified, and judged based on their physical attributes; "For me, the specter of race looms so

<sup>9</sup> Spike, "Geisha Hair Styles | Geisha Culture," Geisha Culture | Understanding the Controversial World of Geisha, last modified June 18, 2014, <http://www.mcisf.com/2014/geisha-hair-styles/>.

large because this is a culture where using the black figure takes on very particular meanings, even stereotypes. But, if I were a white artist using Caucasian models, then the work would be read as completely universalist. It would be construed differently. I try to get viewers to realize ... that it is all a matter of surfaces and façades.”<sup>10</sup> Simpson’s work delves into the stigma against black hairstyles, hairpieces in black culture, and reclaiming natural hair as a sign of black empowerment, as well as the variety of social and political implications caused by hair.<sup>11</sup> In her piece *Wigs* (fig. 4) Simpson displays twenty-one lithographs of wigs and hair pieces targeted towards black women. She removes any trace of figure, inviting the viewer to create their own narrative of the person they think would be using these pieces.

In her *De-Luxe* portfolio (fig. 5), Ellen Gallagher used advertisements from magazines directed at African American audiences, like *Ebony* and *Sepia*, that promote a range of beauty products aimed at women and men, particularly hair products, wigs, and pomades. Gallagher printed these images, and then used the addition of 3-D elements such as googly eyes and molded plasticine to cover the faces of the original models; “With interventions such as covering up models’ faces and whitening out or cutting out eyes,



Figure 5 Ellen Gallagher, *DeLuxe* (Detail), 2004-5.

Gallagher emphasizes the complexities surrounding the construction of identity, specifically in relation to race and gender. The artist’s use of collage to unite different parts of a range of models’ pictures and the addition of extravagant new hairstyles onto female heads advertising wigs produces unsettling juxtapositions. These transformations parody the ‘improvements’ offered by the advertisements and underscore in particular the role of hair as a signifier of difference.”<sup>12</sup>

At the time I dyed my hair lavender, it had just barely begun to move into the realm of the celebrity mainstream, and thus was still closely identified with outsider subculture. The

<sup>10</sup> Barbara Pollack. 2002. "Turning Down the Stereotypes - Lorna Simpson Plays on Nostalgia and Cinematic Contrast to Illuminate Issues of Race, Style, and the Unreliability of Memory." *ARTnews* 101 (8), 2002: 136 .

<sup>11</sup> "MoMA | Lorna Simpson. *Wigs*. 1994," MoMA | Museum of Modern Art, accessed March 1, 2016, [http://www.moma.org/learn/moma\\_learning/lorna-simpson-wigs-1994](http://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/lorna-simpson-wigs-1994).

<sup>12</sup> Alice Sanger, "'DeLuxe', Ellen Gallagher: Summary |," Tate, last modified January 2010, <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/gallagher-deluxe-t12301/text-summary>.

way that my own changes in hair color, particularly lavender, had drastically altered the cultural perception of my identity elicited a slightly manic preoccupation with hair and its connection to identity. I spent hours looking through pastel hair colors on Pinterest and Tumblr, searching for subjects to examine in portraiture. I found a selection of different hair colors and chose to remove any trace of the body and depict the hair as ghostly silhouettes floating in a black or white void. These *Hair Paintings* (fig. 6) were attempting to use Saussure's theory of Semiotics to determine the cultural significance associated with pastel and non-traditional hair colors. By isolating the hair from the body and removing any other signs of cultural identity, the viewer is forced to determine the identity of these subjects solely by their hair.

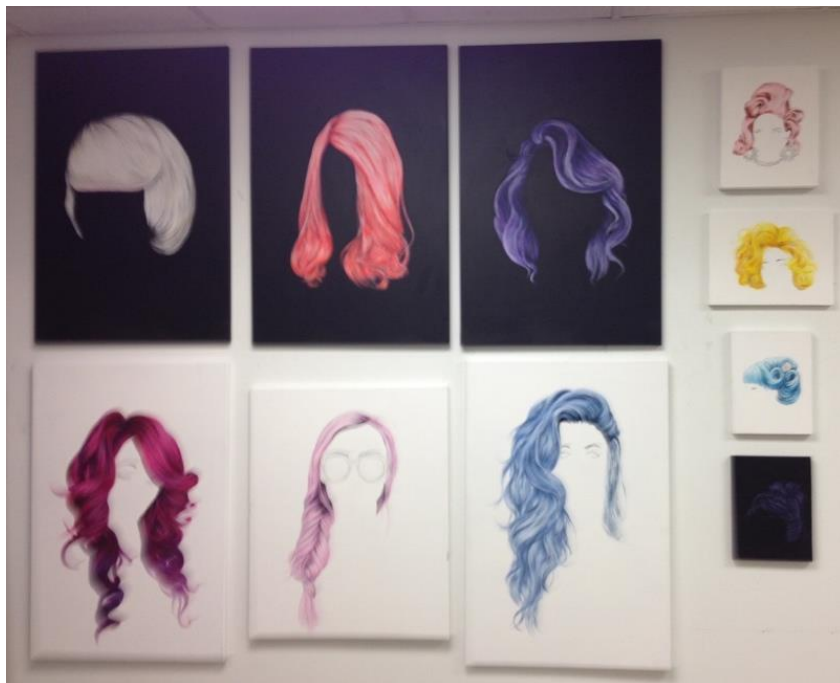


Figure 6 *Hair Paintings*, Fall 2013



## OPRAH DREAMS

Before I could continue to make work exploring the relationship between hair and identity, I had to first re-assess my identity as an artist. I had always been a painter. I understood paint. I could control paint. I had a visceral reverence for the viscosity of paint, the way that it escaped from its cage of a metal tube onto a palette, transforming as it mixed with its brethren. I felt at home with the feeling of brush on canvas, the familiar challenge presented by transforming a stark white void into an image.

There is also a pride that comes with being a painter, gradually mastering the technical ability to create detailed replications of whatever subject matter you choose to depict. Despite this reverence, I was slowly realizing that although I possessed the technical ability to produce an image in paint, the images that I was producing were unable to transcend their life as images. They were not communicating the thoughts and concerns that initiated their production.



Figure 7 Kiki Smith, *Tail*, 1992.

As I was struggling with my ability to paint images that reflected my conceptual concerns, I was experiencing a very conflicting but incredibly visceral reaction to Abject Art;



Figure 8 Robert Gober, *Untitled (Torso)*, 1990.

particularly to the works of Kiki Smith, Robert Gober, and Cindy Sherman. The first time I saw Smith's work, in particular *Pee Body* and *Tail* (fig. 7) I was absolutely horrified; the images of ripped, torn, and defecating bodies made my skin crawl. Gober took a more playful approach to the abject, combining household objects and detached body parts to communicate feelings of attachment. I was particularly taken with *Untitled (Torso)* (fig. 8), in which Gober cast a bag of flour, and covered it in skin-colored beeswax

depicting a sagging torso given half male and half female characteristics of the chest. I enjoyed this playful abjection of the body.

Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* (fig. 9) are a series of black and white photographs where Sherman poses as different stereotypical female roles. This body of work



views gender as a social construction rather than a biological construction, and the characters she depicts reflect the way the Gaze turns woman into object. In the 80's Sherman began to use



Figure 9 Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #14*, 1978.

bright colors to depict subjects that have fallen victim to society's visual standards of beauty and are suffering from eating disorders and insanity.<sup>13</sup> After this she turned to the grotesque in her fairy-tale and disaster imagery where her subjects are being turned inside out. Hal Foster discusses Sherman's work in his essay "Obscene, Abject, Traumatic," saying that Sherman's "impulse to erode the subject and to tear at the screen has driven Sherman from the early work, where the subject is caught in the gaze, through the middle work, where it is invaded by the gaze, to the recent work, where it is obliterated by the gaze."<sup>14</sup> Sherman

uses the abject form of the body throughout her work to show the destructive potential of the gaze. Despite my initial repulsion to some abject art, I began to realize the abject nature of hair when it is removed from the body. While a full head of long, luscious, blonde hair is a sign of attraction and beauty, a single blonde hair in your food or a clump of moldy blonde hair pulled from a bathtub drain is repulsive.

An impromptu trip to Oprah Beauty Supply deep in the heart of Kenner illuminated the potential of hair as an artistic medium. It was like walking into an art supply store. The walls of braiding hair in a rainbow array of colors were begging me to use them like paint. Hairspray became workable fixative. Bobby pins became nails. I went back the next day and stocked up on as many different hairpieces in as many different colors as I could afford. I dug out the wig



Figure 10 Wig Taxidermy, Spring 2014.

heads that I had used for a previous installation, and used modeling clay to sculpt strange waxy faces onto the Styrofoam forms. I teased packs of kanekelon braiding hair into tufts and

<sup>13</sup> Marion Arnold, Simone Matthews, and Outi Remes, "Cindy Sherman's Untitled Film Stills," Webexhibits, accessed March 1, 2016, <http://www.webexhibits.org/colorart/sherman.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Hal Foster, "Obscene, Abject, and Traumatic", *Law and the Image / Ed. by Costas Douzinas and Lynda Nead*. 1999 (40-256), 113.

attached them to the heads, building these strange lumpy hair monstrosities. With each new head, the hair piles began to consume more and more of their faces. I covered the last face completely with an iridescent veil. I wanted to present the heads mounted on the wall like taxidermy. I was presenting my women as objects, trophies stuck up on the wall being consumed by this monstrous hair mass of florets, tufts, teases, and braids, just as they were being consumed by the viewer, by the gaze, and by the pressures of our societal beauty standards.

In one piece I left the face behind entirely, covering the head in giant teased up balls of blonde and white, tufts of a horrific limey green sticking out from in between. The tufts were made from braiding hair. It is very coarse and when teased back you can create a lot of volume



Figure 11 *Hair Monster Consumption, Spring 2014.*

that you can then smooth out with more braiding hair. I was also working with these incredibly silky pieces of blue and pink hair that are meant to be sewn into one's natural hair. I tried tirelessly to make this hair cover some of the blonde and white tufts smoothly. Instead, they became increasingly disobedient, pooling together in sections and almost strangling the hair beneath them. The piece was messy and erratic, and as I continually tried to force the hair pieces to bend to my will, it began to look mildly tortured. I realized that this was really a more proper reflection of what I was trying to communicate with the

work. It was this strangely beautiful hair monstrosity that I named, *Hair Monster Consumption (fig. 11)*. I was responding strongly to the way this piece had completely consumed the figure, and I wanted to make another hair monster but I was almost out of hair and it was the night before critiques- I realized the only option was to scour my own personal collection of wigs. This was a difficult sacrifice to make; my wigs were precious to me. Each of them held in their fake plastic strands the memory of a character that I had created, toiled over and for one night, maybe more, embodied. It was like destroying a past life.

I found a teal cosplay wig consisting of a short bob accompanied by two pigtails that clipped onto the wig and went down to my calves, the only appropriate hair piece for the bubble-gun wielding futuristic space bandit that I had fondly named Orbit. I had a blonde wig

that was similar but had only one long ponytail, and a massive bubblegum pink afro wig that I



Figure 12 *Hair Monster Expulsion*,  
Spring 2014.

had never worn. I threw them all in a bag and decided that if I had time I would try and put something together. It was an hour before critique and everything else was set up, so I decided to go for it. I screwed the foam head into the wall and slipped the giant pink wig over it. It consumed the head and the surrounding 14 inches of the wall. I clipped all the long ponytails together, adding in a pink hair piece for length, and tied a red bow to cover the clip and then attached them to the center of the pink afro wig. It looked like the pink wig was vomiting out this long strand of hair that was pooling on the ground below. I pulled together some leftover tufts and scattered them in the negative space of the bubblegum afro and ran a blonde braid along the

front of the piece like a scar. I named this *Hair Monster Expulsion* (fig. 12). These works freed me from my attachments to paint and my artistic identity as a painter, and allowed me to explore hair in new ways.

## MUPPET MINIMALISM

I wanted to explore the formal qualities synthetic hair possesses if treated in a similar manner as paint. I was learning about conceptual art at the time, and I wanted to explore hair



Figure 13 Robert Rauschenberg *White Painting (Three Panel)*, 1951.

as paint in the same purist manner as the minimalists. I bought a mass produced white gallery style canvas and covered it in pure white tracks of synthetic hair in the style of the monochromatic White Paintings of Robert Rauschenberg and Robert Ryman and named it *Rauschenberg*. Rauschenberg has said about his monochromatic white paintings that, “an empty canvas is full.” My canvas certainly was not empty; it had about 20 weave tracks unceremoniously stapled and sewn onto it and weighed about 12 pounds. I offset *Rauschenberg* with an all black painting of the same size and style, my hairy cousin It replica of Kazmir Malevich’s *Black Square* and Ad Reinhardt’s *Black Paintings* (fig. 14), and titled *Reinhardt*.

I have never really been able to surpass my feelings of contempt for Minimalism and the egocentric manner in which these artists spoke about their work. Reinhardt has referred to his work as “the ultimate paintings”<sup>15</sup> believing that he had reached the pinnacle of abstract painting and that he was creating the last abstract paintings that anyone could paint. A press release for a 2013 show at Pace Gallery of Robert Ryman’s works titled *Recent Paintings*,<sup>16</sup> quotes Ryman stating that his approach

to his paintings is “to figure out how it works, the different possibilities that can happen...it’s just my sensibility, I like to know how it works and I like to know how things go together. It’s a visual experience... I have to see how it’s developing; what can come from it.”<sup>17</sup> Having come



Figure 15 Ad Reinhardt, *Black Paintings*, 1960s, at the David Zwirner Gallery.

<sup>15</sup> Holland Cotter, "An Abstraction Shaped by Wounded Ideas," *The New York Times*, last modified November 21, 2013, [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/22/arts/design/ad-reinhardt-at-the-david-zwirner-gallery.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/22/arts/design/ad-reinhardt-at-the-david-zwirner-gallery.html?_r=0).

<sup>16</sup> Pace Gallery, ""Recent Paintings" - Robert Ryman," Pace Gallery, last modified September 10, 2013, <http://www.pacegallery.com/newyork/exhibitions/12599/recent-paintings>.

<sup>17</sup> Pace Gallery, "Recent Paintings".

into the program as a painter, the way that these men were discussing their work was painful to me. It felt like the epitome of the male art ego, something only a white male artist in the 1960's would be able to get away with.

Despite my frustration with these men and these works, I was exploring hair in the same manner as Ryman was exploring paint, "trying to figure out how things work...what can

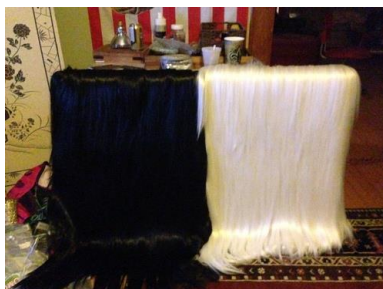


Figure 16 Rauschenberg and Reinhardt, Spring 2014, Synthetic hair on canvas.

come from it...creating a visual experience." On the canvas the hair had a natural ability to to catch light and cast shadows that changed if the hair was brushed or messy. What I loved most about these paintings is that they mocked the pompous seriousness that bothered me so much about the artists listed above. It was like two muppets had snuck into an art gallery and hung themselves on the wall. They had combed their hair and

made sure to look stern and serious, but they were snickering silently to each other as the gallery patrons stared at them in deep discussion about how important and meaningful they were. They were my first art drags. They had put on an exaggerated costume of minimalism and were challenging the constructs that gave Rauschenberg and Reinhardt's paintings their validity, saying if that can be art, then we are definitely art right now. We have all the forms of a painting; we're on a canvas, we're hung on wall, we're an exploration of color and material and lack of symbolic imagery. They were my Muppet Minimalism.

I wanted to create a more feminine version of these two very serious masculine Minimalist paintings. I bought a slightly taller and skinnier gallery style canvas and covered it



Figure 16 sassy red headed stepsister, Spring 2014.

with bright fuchsia hair, the most blatantly feminine color possible. I pulled her hair into pigtails and hung her next to *Rauschenberg* and *Reinhardt*. She was the epitome of Muppet Minimalism in that she was not Minimalist at all. She was Minimalism's sassy red headed step sister (fig. 16), the one you don't want to invite to your classy party because you know she's going to drop a full glass of red wine and laugh too loud. Then when she starts telling embarrassing stories from your childhood everyone is going to find out that you're related and your whole pompous fake façade will come crashing to the ground when everyone realizes that you're really just an imposter, or in this case a muppet.



## LITTLE GAY DEER

After *red headed step sister*, I wanted to explore Femininity more in my work and began looking at the feminist art movement of the 1970s. I had just read Linda Nochlin's 1971



Figure 17 Susan Frazier, Vicki Hodgetts, Robin Weltsch. *Nurturant Kitchen*, Mixed media site installation at *Womanhouse*, 1972.

essay "*Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?*" and I was completely enamored with the feminist art of Valie Export, Lynda Benglis, and Carolee Schneeman. I was obsessed with the *Womanhouse*; I couldn't get the image of the kitchen covered in boobs out of my mind (fig. 17). These women were calling out the blatant imbalance in the art world between male and female artists. Frustrated with the favoritism towards men in both the art world and in society, they were proudly exploring the biology of the female body and fighting against common stereotypes associated with women. By celebrating the female body, using it as a source for imagery and performance, they were taking it out of the closet of shame it had been put into, and redefining it as something to celebrate womanhood instead of being the coveted property of men. They were defiantly posing as goddess figures, reclaiming another realm of female imagery that had long been the coveted subject matter of men as they used it to construct their idealistic view of woman as the ultimate object of desire. They were also reclaiming craft-based works that were associated with women, making high art out of media such as embroidery and pattern-making, and other stereotypical "women's work."<sup>18</sup> I was inspired by these women, I felt that it was my duty as a woman and an artist to follow in their footsteps and create work that challenged the patriarchal image of women in some way.

I was in a thrift shop in the French Quarter one day that had a wall full of taxidermy animals: massive buffaloes, majestic ten point bucks, bearded mountain goats, obscure beasts of unknown origins. Among these beasts, there was one little deer that stuck out to me in particular. He was small and he barely had 4 point antlers. He had been mounted with his two

<sup>18</sup> Tate Modern, "Feminist Art," Tate, accessed April 4, 2016, <http://www.tate.org.uk/learn/online-resources/glossary/f/feminist-art>.

front hooves each bent at a 90-degree angle and attached below him to be used as coat hooks or a gun rack. Someone had knocked into one of the hooves and it was hanging upside down, resembling a popularized hand gesture usually used to refer to effeminate men. He just looked so strange and out of place among the rest of these beasts, this fabulous little gay deer pleading with me to get him the hell out of this place.

I've always had a strange fascination with taxidermy, probably due to my childhood summers spent at our family's farm, hanging out with my cousins in a hunting lodge crowded with almost 100 years worth of stuffed animals. I enjoyed playing with the animals as a little girl, sitting on the massive three foot ridged shell of a snapping turtle, petting the fur of the softer animals. There was a duck that I named Gloria that I like to carry around. Looking at it now, my girlish naïveté in treating these creatures like toys and stuffed animals was completely bastardizing the function of taxidermy as a trophic testament to man as the hunter and provider. My view of the societal function of taxidermy is to show that men are the top of the food chain, that they have conquered ferocious beasts, and that they are the epitome of strength and the ultimate protector and provider. My personal feelings are that taxidermy is a representation of the insecurity and ego of man by needing to engage in the hunt for sport and wasting the precious meat, skin and bones that hunting was intended to provide in favor of a fur-coated trophy.

Little gay thrift store deer was the embodiment of the absurd, decorative, ego massaging that taxidermy really is. Not only was he relatively small and unimpressive by hunting standards, but he was up for sale in a thrift store, lost on a wall of forgotten trophies looking for a new home. I wanted to transform this discarded totem of masculinity into something overtly decorative and feminine. Taking inspiration from the Pattern and Decoration movement, I picked a vintage pink and turquoise floral wallpaper pattern to paint his fur. I bought some dainty yellow lace to cover the plaque and stick-on pearls and rhinestones to accent the wallpaper and decorate his antlers. I wanted to emasculate this ritualized performance used to exalt the male ego and transform *Little Gay Deer* into something as precious and beautiful as he deserved to be.

## CHEST HAIR AND HAPPY TRAILS

Despite the antagonism for masculinity that *Little Gay Deer* depicted, I have long had an obsession with male body hair as a somewhat debatable cultural symbol of manliness. Body



Figure 18 Cristiano Ronaldo for Giorgio Armani, Spring 2010

hair lives in the realm of the slash between attraction and repulsion and masculinity and femininity. While I have a fetishized view of body hair and consider chest hair the ultimate symbol of Masculinity, there are a far greater amount of women who find it repulsive and would not be attracted to an un-groomed man. This is reflected in the commoditized images of the ideal male and female used in advertising campaigns. The hairless sculpted man in this underwear campaign (*fig. 18*) is the epitome of man as object. He bears a strong resemblance to the

classical image of man depicted in marble sculptures of the time; lean, sculpted muscles, and hairless. The female image object (*fig. 19*) is similarly lean and hairless, her ideal weight fluctuating to reflect the current standards of beauty, from the full-bodied women depicted in classical paintings to the



Figure 19 Mikael Jansson for Calvin Klein, Fall 2015.

emaciated models of the 70's. There is nothing natural about these images at all, particularly in the case of the hairless object male. This is why I have such a fascination with men's body hair as a symbol of masculinity, particularly when you look at the role of body hair in gay culture.

The stereotypical traits associated with the gay male identity are largely negative traits associated with the stereotypical female; both women and gay men are considered to be weak, dependent, vain, and overemotional. This same reversal of traits applies to the butch lesbian who displays the masculine traits of toughness, self-reliance, and aggression.<sup>19</sup> The way that our society has constructed these stereotypes is based on the heteronormative binary of gender created throughout the history of our masculine-dominated society. Since these men

<sup>19</sup> Linda Brannon, *Gender: Psychological Perspectives* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1996), 162.



view homosexuality as an affront to their masculine identity, they have turned it into a perversion, a crime against nature. By imposing feminine traits onto the stereotypical gay male, they separate them from their own straight masculine identity. The gay community, who could care less about these heteronormative perceptions of manliness, choose instead to celebrate their gender and the wonders of a natural man's body, hair and all. And from that celebration a vast array of gay subcultures have developed based solely on the body: "Bears", "otters", "wolves", "cubs", "pups," etc.

My first works investigating body hair in relation to masculine identity were created in my first semester alongside my *Hair Paintings*. While I chose to focus on fashion hair color in



Figure 20 Body Hair Drawings, Fall 2013.

the identity of my female characters, I wanted to explore body hair in the identity of my male characters. Instead of looking to Pinterest for source imagery for the men, I reached out through Facebook asking my male friends to send me pictures of their hair, body hair, and facial hair. Some people were excited about my project and jumped at the chance, other people were affronted by the personal

nature of the request, and other people just thought the whole thing was far too strange. As with the *Hair Portraits*, I removed the figure from the drawings and depicted only the hair in the images that I received.

I returned to this imagery when I began a minor in printmaking. A friend of mine had sent me an image of his freshly pierced nipples after a night of debauchery. Those sweet little bruised nipples were sitting in the most gorgeous nest of chest hair and I knew that this was the image that I wanted to re-produce in my first dry-point. The seriousness of the medium and the amount of depth and value that I was able to achieve with dry-point, gave a luxurious texture to the quality of the images. The printmaking process lent itself to the painstaking task of hair portraiture, and I wanted to try out etching with my next set of prints. I wanted to create a triptych of large scale prints of chest hair. The figureless body hair imagery seemed to

have a stronger impact the closer it was to life size, initiating an abject response where the viewer is inclined to replace the absent form with their own body. Given the painstaking



Figure 21 Bear, Bear Cub, Otter, Spring 2014.

process of etching, I wanted these prints to display chest hair with the amount of majesty and reverence that I held for it personally. Since my fetishistic level of appreciation for body hair is only matched by gay men, it seemed only fitting to create a holy trinity of gay chest hair, and I

depicted a “bear”, a “cub”, and an “otter” (fig. 21). In an article called “Gay Men: Are you a Jock, Otter, Bear, or Wolf”, blog author John Hollywood provides detailed descriptions of several of these subcultures:

Characteristically, a bear is a large, possibly heavy gay man that could also be muscular. A fairly large protruding belly is a defining characteristic of a bear. Masculinity is also a key feature of bears, and some bears are so caught up in projecting a masculine image that they shun other would-be bears who appear to be too effeminate. That said, many bears consider themselves to be harmless and even playful...For gay men, the term cub is used to describe a younger (or younger-looking) male that is usually husky or heavier in body type and is almost always hairy. While many cubs have a beard, it is not a requirement to fit this category since body hair and huskiness are the dominant features for this gay descriptor. Cubs are sometimes partnered with bears in passive relationships or with other cubs and they can sometimes be considered an apprentice to a bear...In the gay world, an otter is considered a thin gay male that is hairy and may or may not use a trimmer to shorten body hair. Some otters have beards, and some do not. Otters usually have smaller frames when compared to the heavier cub or bear and look a lot like what you would see in a picture of an otter . . . hairy. This might surprise some people who typically think of otters as smooth. Athletic but not super built, a person can be an otter regardless of age and they are considered to be part of the larger bear community..<sup>20</sup>

I wanted my next prints to engage the cultural standards of female body hair, and the general view that all natural body hair that does not grow from the head should be removed. There is an internet-fueled movement right now where women are trying to deconstruct our society’s stigmatization of female body hair by growing out their natural leg, armpit, and pubic hair, and displaying it proudly. Instead of conforming to the same heteronormative views of hair in relation to gender that advertise hairless men as sex objects and encourage women to have the same amount of pubic hair as a juvenile, these women are fighting for the natural and

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<sup>20</sup> John Hollywood, "Gay Men: Are You a Jock, Otter, Bear or Wolf?," HubPages, last modified August 20, 2015, <http://hubpages.com/relationships/Gay-Men-Are-you-a-Jock-Otter-Bear-or-Wolf>.

celebrating their bodies. Much like the first wave feminists were reclaiming the vagina, women



Figure 22 #hairymen #furrymuff, Spring 2015.

today are trying to reclaim the furry muff. I chose to do two large, almost life-size prints in dry point, one displaying a woman with natural body hair, and the other mirroring the body position of the woman with a man with body hair. The pieces were titled for the hashtags that I used to find their imagery on tumblr, so the image of the woman is titled #furrymuff, and the male #hairymen (fig. 22).

I wanted to investigate the origins of the stigma against body hair, and realized that female body hair has been absent from images depicted of women for the majority of the history of art. Jill Burke, lecturer in Italian renaissance art history at the University of



Figure 23 Sandro Botticelli, *The Birth of Venus*, 1486.

Edinburgh, investigates this historical portrayal of women in a blog post titled "Did Renaissance women remove their body hair?" She links the presence of body hair to the idea of masculinity all the way back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. She even lists a recipe for body hair removal from 1532: "Boil together a solution of one pint of arsenic and eighth of a pint of quicklime. Go to a baths or

a hot room and smear medicine over the area to be depilated. When the skin feels hot, wash quickly with hot water so the flesh doesn't come off."<sup>21</sup> I wanted to comment on the absence of body hair throughout art history, which has proliferated the association between body hair and masculinity and helped create the hairless ideal image of woman. Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (fig. 23) depicts Venus just after her birth. She is naked and standing in a shell as she is blown to shore. Her long red hair billows around her in the wind and she uses it to cover herself. I am very impressed that Venus managed to rid herself of all body hair between birth and being blown ashore. I wanted to question this traditional red haired, body hair free depiction of the Goddess. I found a bunch of knee length cosplay wigs and got one in blonde, black, and dark purple. I filmed each one on the green screen, mimicking the iconic Venus pose.

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<sup>21</sup> Jill Burke, "Did Renaissance Women Remove Their Body Hair?," Renresearch, last modified December 9, 2012, <https://renresearch.wordpress.com/2012/12/09/did-renaissance-women-remove-their-body-hair/>.

When I filmed the long purple hair, I put my actor in a green screen suit that had a massive curly purple bush that she covered and then slowly exposed. The first time I showed the video, I only included the blonde haired goddess. The second time, I layered all three goddesses on top of each other, coming in and out of the frame. The response showed an overwhelming preference for the blonde goddess figure.



*Figure 24 Venus on the Half-Shell, video still, Fall 2015.*

## MAYBE SHE'S BORN WITH IT, MAYBE SHE'S A MAN

I began to think about the image of the ideal woman as this goddess figure who exudes natural beauty, and how there has been an entire consumer industry created to achieve this illusion. This idea of selling products to make you look like you aren't wearing them is blatantly apparent in the sing-song slogan "Maybe she's born with it, maybe it's Maybelline." For a long time, I viewed this slogan very negatively, it felt like the company was taking credit



Figure 25 Maybelline New York, Lash Stylist Mascara Print Ad, 2000.

For a woman's beauty and saying that women could not be beautiful unless they were using these products. Then you look at their advertisements, and they are using this slogan, but the model looks like she's made out of plastic (fig. 25). I wanted to deconstruct this notion that makeup should be used to feign natural beauty. It enforced the view of woman as a standardized object for the pleasure of men. I wanted to create work using makeup as a material, responding to the way it is used to create an image on the blank canvas of a woman's face. I coated two 4' x 6' rolls of paper with old foundation that I was no longer using, and used natural tones of blush, eye shadow, and bronzer to spell out "Maybe She's Born with it, Maybe it's Maybelline" on the first one. On the second piece of paper I used unnatural eye shadow and blush and spelled out, "I don't think anyone believes I was born with cat eyes and red lips." This was my blatant refusal to Maybelline that my makeup had to be any sort of mistakable birth right, and it was my right as a woman to use it to create whatever kind of image I wanted, be it natural or unnatural.

It was at this time that I had begun to think about the transformative abilities of makeup and wigs, and the way that this had been elevated to an art form in drag culture. What better way to show how makeup can transform your façade into the best woman you can be, than to turn a man into the best woman he can be. The term for applying makeup in drag is "beating a face," so when you hear someone say, "Her face is beat for the Gods!" it means that the perfect amount of makeup has been applied and the resulting look is flawless. The term



beat refers to the motion of constantly dabbing a makeup sponge on one's face .<sup>22</sup> In drag, beating your face is just one step of the transformation process, and for some queens the application process can take several hours, depending on the illusion they are creating. There are many different types of Drag: pageant queens, comedy queens, fishy queens, camp queens, and my personal favorite the bearded queen. Fishy queens and pageant queens are attempting to create the illusion of a real biological woman. While fishy queens try to embody the natural goddess beauty sold to women in makeup ads, pageant queens mimic the stylized dresses, hair, and makeup used in female beauty pageants, in their own pageants, like Miss Gay America. Comedy queens and camp queens still exist in the realm of female impersonation and female illusion, but use a highly stylized costume form of makeup to create comedic depictions of female characters. For instance, Trixie Mattel created her drag persona with the intention of impersonating a life-size plastic doll. She even constructed her name to include the Mattel company, most famous for creating the Barbie Doll. The bearded queens, on the other hand, transcend female illusion in the form of Genderfuck, displaying both masculine and female characteristics in order to destroy the traditional binary of gender by deliberately mocking and exaggerating gender roles through costume and performance. This art form originated in the communes of San Francisco during the late 60's, where the lines of sexual distinction became



Figure 26 Cockette Wally, 1972.

blurred by freedom of expression and drug use. This led to a formation of a psychedelic gay liberation theatre collective known as the The Cockettes, a group of like-minded people brought together by a full-bearded, long-haired man who renamed himself Hibiscus. They enjoyed dropping acid and getting dressed

up in extravagant makeup, glitter, and costumes free from any gender binary, and putting on performances. This idea of genderfuck has continued since then in movies like *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* and even moved into the mainstream with Conchita Wurst.

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<sup>22</sup> Logo, "RuPaul's Drag Race Dictionary," RuPaul's Drag Race Wiki, accessed March 12, 2016, [http://logosrupaulsdragrace.wikia.com/wiki/RuPaul's\\_Drag\\_Race\\_Dictionary](http://logosrupaulsdragrace.wikia.com/wiki/RuPaul's_Drag_Race_Dictionary).

I wanted to tear down the function of makeup in the heteronormative gender binary as a tool to enhance natural female beauty, and celebrate its transformative powers evidenced in drag, by genderfucking the Maybelline campaign. I went to Youtube and searched through old Maybelline commercials, eventually finding one from the 90's for their Great Lash Mascara. I asked my mustached drag muse, Taylor Marrs to star in in the video. Since the commercial was for Mascara, I was able to contain the early shots in the video to his eyes, just as the original commercial had. The video starts out with a black screen with white writing that says some women have alright lashes (fig. 27) as they show a woman in black and white who has



Figure 27 Maybelline Great Lash Mascara Commercial, 1991.



Figure 28 Maybe She's Born With it, Maybe She's a Man, video still, Fall 2015.

average lashes, the screen fades to black again with the words, some women have... amazing lashes! Wealthier, healthier looking lashes, Are they born lucky? "oh sure". At this point I panned out from his face and his blue mustache was revealed in all of its genderfuck glory (fig. 28). I had also used genderfuck secretly in my video working with the *Birth of Venus*. The actors wearing the wigs and the green screen suits had both been gay men.

## CAMP

The early feminists of the 60's and 70's fought an incredibly hard battle to force the institutional structure of gender inequality into the light. The problem is that when you take a closer look at early feminism and early lesbian feminism, they were only fighting for a very specific image of women created by the straight white middle class. In her essay, "Towards the Butch Femme Aesthetic," Sue Ellen Case introduces us to the Daughters of Bilitis, the first lesbian civil and political rights organization, founded in 1955. Their goal, as Case describes it, was to "erase butch -femme behavior, its dress codes, and lifestyle from the lesbian community and to change lesbians into lesbian feminists."<sup>23</sup> Case tells the sad story of a butch lesbian named Toni who goes to the DOB for help, "at our insistence, and as a result of the group's example, its unspoken pressure, she toned down her dress. She was still very butch, but she wore women's slacks and blouses...one of the DOB's goals was to teach the lesbian a mode of behavior and dress acceptable to society."<sup>24</sup> The DOB go on to portray Toni "similarly to the inappropriately dressed savage whom the missionary clothes and saves." We then discover that through the DOB, Toni became fast friends with a gay man who over the months helped her to feel comfortable with herself as a woman. Case explains, "Here, in lesbian narrative, the missionary position is finally given over to a man (even if gay) who helps the butch to feel like a woman. The contemporary lesbian-identified reader can only marvel at the conflagration of gender identification in the terms of dominant, heterosexual culture with the adopted gender role playing with the lesbian subculture. If the butches are savages...the femmes are lost heterosexuals who damage birthright lesbians by forcing them to play the butch roles."<sup>25</sup>

As a result of the early lesbian feminist desperation to conform to the straight feminist image of woman, "the lesbian butch-femme tradition went into the feminist closet...-The closet has given us camp....Camp both articulates the lives of homosexuals through the obtuse tone of irony and inscribes their oppression with the same device. Likewise, it

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<sup>23</sup> Sue Ellen Case, "Towards the Butch-Femme Aesthetic" in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* by Amelia Jones, (London: Routledge, 2003), 404.

<sup>24</sup> Case, "Butch-Femme", 404.

<sup>25</sup> Case, "Butch-Femme", 405.



eradicated the ruling powers of hetero-sexist realist modes.”<sup>26</sup> In my second year of graduate school I was introduced to Susan Sontag’s “Notes on Camp.” She states; “Indeed, the essence of Camp is its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration...a sensibility that, among other things, converts the serious into the frivolous...the way of Camp is not in terms of beauty, but in terms of the degree of artifice, of stylization....Not only is there a Camp vision, a Camp way of looking at things. Camp is as well a quality discoverable in objects and the behavior of persons...the Camp eye has the power to transform experience. But not everything can be seen as Camp.”<sup>27</sup> Reading this essay was like reading an almost biblical set of rules for everything that I held dear: artifice, exaggeration, stylization, making the serious into the frivolous. Camp was created by the gay community as a secret language, to mock the heteronormative gender binary, and to survive the harsh homophobia of the time. Given its origins in queer culture, it really comes as no surprise to me that I have a deep-rooted personal reverence for camp sensibility as it would seem that we have a touch of a gay gene in the family. I grew up with two gay uncles, my Uncle Frank and his partner Uncle David. My Uncle Frank also had a gay uncle, as well as a gay cousin, and my own cousin came out of the closet a few years ago. I have always felt far more attached to the gay men in my life than anyone else, and I identify with the Gay world far more than I do with the straight world that my biological identity binds me to.

In many ways, Sontag’s “Notes” led to the destruction and co-optation of the purity of Camp by letting the metaphorical camp cat out of the bag, and serving it up on a platter to the heteronormative masses. Sontag seemed to acknowledge this possibility early on when she states that “to talk about camp is therefore to betray it.” Sontag’s “Notes” are now over fifty years old and the groundwork that she laid out for Camp as a Sensibility has changed. Bruce La Bruce writes about the current state of Camp in our world in *Notes on Camp, Anti-Camp*,

“Camp is now for the masses. It’s a sensibility that has been appropriated, fetishized, commoditized, turned into a commodity fetish, and exploited by a hyper capitalist system...It still has many of the earmarks of ‘classic camp’-an emphasis on artifice and exaggeration and the unnatural, a spirit of extravagance, a kind of grand theatricality. It’s still based on a certain aestheticism and stylization. But what’s lacking is the sophistication, and especially the notion of esotericism, something shared by a group of insiders, or rather, outsiders, a secret code shared among a certain ‘campscenti’. Sadly, most of it falls under the category of “Bad Straight Camp”...What is Bad Straight Camp?... a performative femininity by females filtered through drag queens that has transmogrified into an arguably more “avant-garde” style (Lady Gaga,

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<sup>26</sup> Case, “Butch-Femme”, 406.

<sup>27</sup> Sontag, “Notes”, 1.

Nikki Minaj) characterized by hyper-referentiality, extreme hyperbole, a crudely obvious, unnuanced female sexuality, and even a vaguely pornographic sensibility which, unhappily, is post-feminist to the point of misogyny: a capitulation to the male gaze and classic tropes of objectification to be found only in the worst nightmares of Laura Mulvey... Other examples of Bad Straight Camp might include the genres of extreme gross-out comedy (The Hangover franchise, Melissa McCarthy movies), certain instances of torture porn...and of course, last but not least, Reality TV, including such camp-fests as Mob Wives, The Real Housewife franchise, Toddlers and Tiaras and Jersey Shore, to name only a few. (The fact that all are probably gay-friendly does little to ameliorate their general heteronormative, capitalist and materialist tenor, with the notable exception of Honey Boo-Boo.)<sup>28</sup>

In all honesty it wasn't until after I read "Notes on Camp" that I noticed its presence in my work. My work has always been driven by obsession. I have repeatedly depicted images of my obsessions ever since I first started painting. First it was trees, then birds, then jackalopes, then people, then spirit animals, then hair, which led to obsessively using it as a material. This obsessive nature continued into graduate school. When I was going through a period of



Figure 29 *Our Lady of GaGalupe*, Oil on Canvas, Spring 2014.

obsession with disco balls, nu-disco music, dancing, and the elaborate costumes of early 90's rave culture, I obsessively created a collection of *Disco Hats* as a sort of interactive wearable art that could engage with a larger audience than the typical subjects found in a gallery. I then painted *Our Lady of GaGalupe* (fig. 29), a giant 4x6 foot panel of Lady GaGa painted into the



Figure 30 Image of *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, unknown origin

familiar backdrop of images of Our Lady of Guadalupe. This image combined my obsession with Lady Gaga as a personal muse for aestheticism and artifice and my obsession with saintly mandala and background of Our Lady of Gaudalupe (fig. 30. I was not thinking about Lady Gaga as a part of Camp, or as a camp character, certainly not "Bad Straight Camp", nor was I thinking

<sup>28</sup> Bruce LaBruce, "[Essay] Notes on Camp/Anti-Camp by Bruce LaBruce," Nat. Brut, last modified March 3, 2016, <http://www.natbrut.com/essay-notes-on-campanti-camp-by-bruce-labruce.html>.

about the campiness of the hats; I just happened to fall victim to my sensibilities and the work fell into “Bad Straight Camp.”

Not all of my campier art was bad though. The two campiest works from my graduate school career are undoubtedly *My Pink Hairy Box on a Nice Set of Legs with Matching Drapes*



Figure 31 *My Pink Hairy Box on a Nice Set of Legs with Matching Drapes and a Luxurious Fur Rug*, Installation, Spring 2015.

*and a Luxurious Fur Rug* and *Big Hairy Balls*. The former I made prior to reading Sontag, the latter I made after. Additionally, I would place the former on the side of good camp and the latter on the side of bad camp. *My Pink Hairy Box on a Nice Set of Legs with Matching Drapes and a Luxurious Fur Rug* (fig. 31) was inspired by a segment in “RuPaul’s Drag Race: Untucked,” where during judging the contestants are backstage drinking cocktails and Ru has one of them reach into her pink furry box and draw out a card that instructs them to play a game or answer a trivia question about the other contestants. I enjoyed this playful language and wanted to create my own pink hairy box. I made an 8”x 8” box out of wood

and covered it with the perfect shade of bubblegum pink hair. The hairy box on its own wasn’t enough; it needed to be presented in a manner befitting the glorified object it was impersonating. I found the perfect set of legs in a booth at a flea market in Kenner. It was tucked into a corner supporting an old, incredibly gaudy, gold accented, porcelain statue of a Geisha. The table had these lovely curved legs with filigree detailing. The original marble top had been lost and replaced with a cheap faux-marble ceramic floor tile. The whole scenario of a little old man selling Asian antiques for thousands of dollars in an overwhelmingly cluttered flea market situated between a McDonalds and a Shell gas station on Veterans Blvd was ludicrous. The Geisha statue that had originally been on the table was marked at something like 12,000 dollars. The table was priced at \$120. I bargained on the price and walked out with the table. I placed my pink hairy box on this nice set of legs and the candy pink hair dripped elegantly over the edges. I stared at the two together for a while, but it still wasn’t luxurious enough so I borrowed some pink and gold striped curtains with tassel fringe and completed the picture with a faux sheepskin rug from Costco. The resulting image met the qualifications of Camp as depicted by Sontag on many levels.

My next work was inspired by the phrase “*Big Hairy Balls*”. I envisioned them in this weird Ryan Trecartin-esque video of Drag Goldilocks traipsing through a Yayoi Kusama-like house having to make a grand decision between these three pairs of big hairy balls, and the big hairy bears that went along with them. I made the balls first and showed them as sculptures, but without the video to accompany them, and displayed in a corner lit with colored funhouse lights, I had again fallen into “Bad Straight Camp.” I created an installation next to the balls called *Put your Hands in my Hairy Muff*. I covered a white furry hand muff with an array of warm colors of hair, and hung it from the ceiling with fishing line. The piece hung at waist height so that you could easily slip your hands into it. If you chose to put your hands in the muff, you were positioned to face a 3 panel picture frame filled with pink, magenta, and orange hair, mimicking the colors of the muff. The piece created an interactive experience with the glorified art object. I was also tainting the glorified object and the gallery experience with blatant muff humor. These three are the only characters that I directly identify as Camp art.

Around this same time, a friend of mine had come in town to visit and she was wearing dreadlocks, something she did not have the last time I had seen her only a few months



Figure 32 *Dreaded Chandelier*, Spring 2015.

before. She explained the process to me. She had gotten braiding hair, twisted it and boiled it and then braided it into her own hair, which was not dreaded. I was obsessed; I had to make something with dreadlocks. I decided that I wanted to work them into a chandelier. At first I imagined covering a chandelier with the dreadlocks, but I wasn't really prepared to spend hundreds of dollars on a chandelier so I chose to make the frame myself. I wish I had counted just how many dreadlocks I actually made, but there are easily over 2,000. The chandelier is massive, completely impractical. At first it had no lights in it and then I put some Christmas lights in there to test them out and at this point they may be so tangled that they are a permanent feature. The *Dreaded Chandelier* (fig. 32) has an undeniable association with camp; however, I do not consider it “camp art”. In her Notes Sontag says, “Camp taste has an affinity for certain arts rather than other. Clothes, furniture, all the elements of visual décor, for

instance, make up a large part of Camp. For Camp art is often decorative art, emphasizing texture, sensuous surface, and style at the expense of content.”<sup>29</sup> While I agree with the beginning of this statement, I have a huge problem with her belief that camp style comes at the expense of content. Camp was created as a method of communication. Camp’s whole purpose is to talk about serious issues in a way that can’t be easily detected. This is part of why I do not view the Chandelier as Camp. Though it fits in with the first part of what she is saying about furniture and visual decor, a chandelier is certainly an overtly gaudy piece of visual décor, and texture and sensuous surface are very important here. But I believe that this piece and much of my work has a lot of content, despite its campy nature. Both the chandelier and the dreadlocks are loaded with content that could be read in a number of different ways regarding race, class, wealth, gentrification, and cultural appropriation, or you can simply view it as a beautiful object. I personally choose not to tell anyone how to view this piece, because it will differ depending on your cultural identity. Just as I remove the figure from my hair paintings and prints, the figure is replaced here by a chandelier, and the viewer is at liberty to create their own narrative for the piece.

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<sup>29</sup> Sontag, “Notes”, 3.

## WIGS

In Working it' there is a chapter called "Love is the Hair" where Ru talks about wigs: "I was mesmerized by those hairy marvels of modern man. To me, the whole concept of being able to instantly transform your identity with a mop of synthetic hair represented the totality of advancements made in the industrial age: a cheap, non-biodegradable tool of vanity. It made me feel proud to be an American."<sup>30</sup> This ability wigs have to transform your identity is what fascinates me so much about them. Hair has such a strange function in our society, and in its connection to identity. Some people constantly change their hair and wear wigs or weave in order to change their appearance and their perceived identity. Some people never change their hair, largely because their hair is attached so firmly to their identity that in changing it they would feel lost. This loss of identity also happens when people begin to lose their hair. This most often happens to men who will deal with this loss in a manner of different ways: shave their heads completely, attempt a comb-over, try and grow it back, get it re-plugged, ignore it and let the hair they have grow and sport a bald spot, or don a toupee. The first unintentional change in a woman's hair is that it begins to go gray, and then they either let it happen or fight it by coloring their hair. Women can also lose their hair from alopecia, most famously combatted with a scarf in the movie *Grey Gardens* by Little Edie. The loss of hair is also associated with illness. People with cancer, or other debilitating illnesses, who go through chemotherapy, often lose their hair as a result. All in all, the loss of hair is usually unintentional and can be a painful reminder of illness or loss of identity. Wigs have the power to allow someone dealing with this to transform themselves; they allow people to become whoever they want to be.

Wigs also possess the ability to become iconic objects of representation. In the art world, Andy Warhol and Yayoi Kusama used wigs to create a commodified image of themselves as artists. These images have become symbolic representations of their art, and are almost as well known as the art itself. Warhol used his wig to create the persona of Warhol, he had hundreds of wigs in his trademark blond silver tones. Warhol dealt with a lot of issues with beauty and identity, "Thus the wig was more than a wig. It symbolized what Warhol

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<sup>30</sup> RuPaul, "Workin' It", 83.



wanted to become as well as what he felt compelled to hide.”<sup>31</sup> Kusama’s trademark fire-engine red bob and her brightly colored wardrobe became a living extension of the bright patterns and trademark polka-dots that she used for her paintings and installations.

Some of my favorite images of Warhol are his *Self Portraits in Drag*. Warhol took tens of thousands of Polaroid’s from 1970 until his death, using them as studies for portraits.



Figure 33 Andy Warhol, *Self Portraits (in Drag)*, 1980-1982.

Among them is a vast collection of pictures of himself in drag. Warhol’s drag is understated. The complex system of face beating that most drag queens use to contour and shape their features into something more feminine is absent. Warhol uses red lipstick, blush, and simple eye makeup to enhance his naturally androgynous features. In some images Warhol wears blatantly feminine wigs, while in others he models the iconic silver blonde wigs used to create Warhol the brand. Warhol’s facial expression remains neutral in most of these images. He rarely changes his posture except to close his eyes or pose in profile. Tedd Man recalls that

“These cross-dressing performances for the camera recall Man Ray’s photographs of Duchamp disguised as his female alter ego, Rose Sélavy. Warhol had a longstanding interest in drag queens, and more broadly, in artifice, role-playing, and the construction of identity. In his numerous self-portraits, he was less interested in revealing himself than in presenting a mask, just as he carefully cultivated a superficial, depthless celebrity persona in life. Nevertheless, in this image, his masculine features are barely disguised behind his wig and make-up, resulting in a poignant testament to vulnerability and exposure.”<sup>32</sup>

Warhol’s *Self Portraits in Drag* made me think about the function of portraiture in society as a fetishized representation of identity. This is turned into an almost ritualistic practice in the form of Yearbook Photography. Yearbook photos are an iconic visual representation of growth and development during a time when identity is determined by the

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<sup>31</sup> Tamsen Ellen, Hair Is For Pulling, last modified October 10, 2011, <http://hairisforpulling.blogspot.com/2011/10/andy-warhols-wig-defining-art-object.html>.

<sup>32</sup> Ted Mann, "Collection Online | Andy Warhol. Self-Portrait in Drag. 1981 - Guggenheim Museum," The Guggenheim Museums and Foundation, accessed March 8, 2016, <http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/collections/collection-online/artwork/15490>.

stereotypical archetypes as they manifest in the high school social structure. The pressure to conform to a certain code of aestheticism during this time is paramount, because it determines your ability to identify with the subcultures associated with these archetypes. The social stigmatization that results from the failure to assimilate into one of the stereotypical cliques, puts an incredible pressure on appearance during this time. The amount of scrutiny placed on cultural identity and one's ability to conform to the codes of appearance and decorum that are associated with these stereotypes is exacerbated by the fact that there is no other time in life when you will be judged so strongly by your appearance. As such the yearbook photo is a painful reminder of the importance that our society places on physical appearance.

I had explored the yearbook photo before graduate school in a series of paintings depicting several images that I had found in an online gallery of terrible yearbook photos. Some of the photos caught the subject off guard or unprepared. Some of them were deemed terrible by the beauty trends of the time, and some of them were simply spot on representations of the stereotypical outsiders of high school; nerds, punks, goths. I began to look at the role that hair played in the physical manifestations of these different stereotypes. The popular girls usually had long brown or blonde hair. The stoners had long unruly hair, maybe even dreadlocks. The prim and proper girls wore bows and headbands. I wanted to explore these stereotypes and their relation to hair in the ritualized practice of the yearbook photo. In my second year of graduate school I found myself the proud owner of two large boxes of free wigs. I had no idea what to do with them, and it was not until after I began to work with video that it became apparent to me. I had moved into a new studio and dug out my *Hair Paintings* from my first semester. Seeing this box of wigs next to these paintings made me realize that I should film them on green screen, and use green bodysuits to achieve the same figureless imagery as in the *Hair Paintings*. I first filmed them dancing; I sewed massively exaggerated versions of chest hair and pubic hair onto some of the suits and filmed them with male and female wigs. And then I began thinking about identities and stereotyping again, trying to decide the identity of each of these wigs as I played with them.



I wanted to place the wigs in the frame of the high school yearbook to see if the hair alone could communicate their stereotyped High School Identity. I decided to film the wigs as

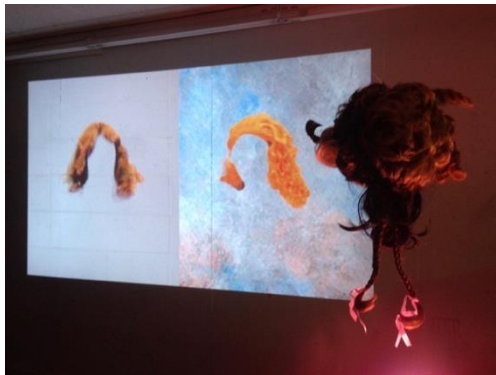


Figure 34 *It's Picture Day*, Installation View, Fall 2015.

though they were walking into a bathroom, fixing their hair, then walking into the photo booth. My actors played up the character of each wig beautifully. The fussy characters primped and teased, the stoners barely noticed they were in a bathroom, and the awkward nerdy characters rushed through as quickly as possible, stressed out by the whole situation. I wanted to see if the characters would come through even though they were

just hair, testing out these ridiculous semiotic systems of judgment and stereotyping, in the most judgmental, stereotype filled arena possible.

Around this time, I had become completely obsessed with Mike Kelley's work. I was entranced by the way he was using stuffed animals and I saw a similar level of obsession in my own obsession with wigs and hair. In his installation *Craft Morphology Flowchart* (fig. 35), Kelley had laid out a bunch of stuffed animals on plain brown vellum fold-out tables. They were accompanied by a framed portrait on the wall that listed



Figure 35 Mike Kelley, *Craft Morphology Flowchart*, 1991.

their dimensions and colors in this weird scientific cataloguing



Figure 36 *Wig Dissection*, Spring 2015.

manner. I wanted to explore wigs and hair pieces in a similar way, almost as though they were this organism that needed to be studied and documented. I found two of my wigs that I wasn't particularly fond of, a ratty green bouffant wig and a short blonde bob wig. I carefully cut along their seams, as though they were being dissected and pinned them to a wall. They had this strange butterfly in a box type of quality to them when they were displayed that way.

I wanted to use this same process of documentation to explore the hair pieces that I had used as a way to shape my own identity. Unlike the complete change in appearance that a

wig allows, hairpieces like weave are used to give the appearance that your natural hair is longer. I gathered all of the weaves that I had ever owned. I bought my first weave when my sister went to get one for her wedding. I still had blonde hair at the time and it gave me this amazing long stripper length hair that I would never have been able to grow myself. There are several different kinds of weaves and hair extensions. My weaves were all clip in weaves. Clip in weaves are a set of about 6 different pieces of track weave that are sewn together and then attached to clips. You section your hair from the bottom and attach the different lengths of weave close to the root of your hair and cover them with your natural hair. You then style your hair so that your natural hair blends with the weave track seamlessly, giving the appearance of much longer hair. I became so obsessed with my blonde weave and the ability to give myself natural-looking long hair whenever I desired that I purchased a new weave every time I changed my hair color.

In many ways, these weaves traced my identity throughout the past few years. Each one was linked to a different person. Just as my identity had changed every time I dyed my hair, so too had my weave had to change to match. I laid each weave out and photographed it and framed the photographs with an index card listing the length, color, and quality of the weave as well as the years that they had been in use. I struggled with including more personal information about my identity at the time I was using these weaves such as my job, weight, occupation, interests, drug of choice, and state of emotional well being. At the time that I made this piece I was dealing with a crippling loss of identity. Though I was pleased with the work that I was making at the time I was in the process of discovering my identity as an artist. I had left painting behind, I had left my aerobics job behind, and I was in a program where my work was being heavily critiqued. I had started graduate school with lavender hair and with each rocky critique, my hair took a step backwards. I first dyed it back to blonde, and chopped off several inches of hair. I then dyed it back to dark brunette and cut it even shorter. It was at this point that, for first time in many years, I found myself weave-less. Because I use my hair as an outward expression of my identity, being brunette and weave-less is rather telling of the inward turmoil that I was experiencing.

## HAIR CREATURES

The *Hair Paintings* and the hair drawings and prints were a way for me to question how hair functioned as a visual indicator of identity. I have spoken of my loss of identity, both as an artist, and as a person. My entire life has been a constant stream of trying on and taking off different stereotypical identities; cheerleader, punk kid, straight edge alternative rocker, sorority girl, hippie, festival enthusiast, aerobics instructor, painter, cat lady, dog owner, cheap wine aficionada, sculptor, printer, fashionista, Potterhead, pothead, drug enthusiast, slut, girlfriend, Buddhist, Atheist, Episcopalian, Feminist, gay advocate, even a self proclaimed grandma. I've been fat, skinny, blonde, brunette, redheaded, lavender headed, emerald headed, long haired, shorthaired, banged, permed, straightened, well dressed, poorly dressed, and everything in between. What I realized through all of this is that what I really want to be is free from identity. I was tired of putting on and taking off costumes to try and communicate how I felt on the inside, only to be placed in a box of some stereotype. When asked in an interview about how he chose to identify, RuPaul responded by referring to one of his most infamous tweets, "Ego loves identity. Drag mocks identity. Ego hates Drag."<sup>33</sup> Laughing she says "you know, I always say, whatever the client wants."

I wanted to find a way to communicate this view of identity as something that



Figure 37 Yayoi Kusama, *Love is Calling*, 2013.

consumes. Something that instead of allowing a path for recognition and association can actually be a force of destruction. I wanted to work more with sculpture and allow the hair to completely consume my figures. I was particular hung up on an installation by Yayoi Kusama called, *Love is Calling* (fig. 37), a mirrored room filled with polka-

dot covered tentacles rising from the ground and dropping from the ceiling. I was attracted to

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<sup>33</sup> Jung, "Real Talk."

the androgynous sexuality of the tentacles. They were phallic but they also had a certain femininity in their curves.

I decided to replicate this form in place of a figure and cover it with silky track hair in



Figure 38 *Jareth*, installation view, Smoke Signals, Fall 2015.

ombre from white to black. I named him *Jareth* (fig. 38) after the Goblin King in Jim Henson’s *The Labyrinth* played by David Bowie, an impeccable icon of androgyny. My intentions with this piece were also to continue exploring how hair functioned in sculpture, an art form that I would say is generally associated with masculinity. I cut a bunch of varying pieces of wood and screwed them into a central rod connected to a base and then wrapped the form in chicken wire to keep its structure. I then wrapped the wire in caution tape so that I could attach the hair. Everything about the way this creature was built was aggressive, but the end product is this very tall yet dainty creature that needs to be

brushed and groomed before it can be shown. He is also covered from head to toe in hair. His figure has been completely consumed and he thus becomes a “Hair Thing”.

I wanted my second hair creature to be overtly feminine and counteract the phallic appearance of *Jareth*. I wanted her to become a sort of consumed sexual object, first consumed



Figure 39 Edouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863.

by the gaze and then consumed by her hair. I looked to Manet’s *Olympia* (fig. 39), his red-headed figure placed on a bed, staring out at you, believed by many to be a

prostitute. I wanted to mimick her body position in this piece, along with her red hair. I used a combination of natural reds as well as bright fire engine red hair for her figure. I was thinking about women, and red, and sexiness today, and



Figure 40 *Lady In Red*, Installation view, 2015.

my immediate thought was *Baywatch*. I used the bright red hair to create the illusion of a



swimsuit, and covered the rest of her in natural red and brown ombre. I was having a lot of trouble with how I was going to display her. I really wanted to put her on a super gaudy chaise lounge but I was having a hard time getting my hands on one. I finally found one and then it fell through and then I realized that what she really needed was a beach vacation after working so hard so I bought a cheap vinyl fold out beach chair and a beach umbrella, made a pile of sand and put her on the beach. I named her *Lady in Red* (fig. 40) after the song by Chris De Burgh

I still had the wigs that I had used for the yearbook videos and I wanted to create



Figure 41 Barbie Doll Hands, *Lady in Red*, Photograph. Fall 2015.

some type of sculpture with them. I liked the idea of these wigs which are used for transformation, transforming themselves into a sculpture. I had also found a lot of 20 doll wigs on ebay that I sewed together as a study for the larger piece. My initial thoughts for this piece went back to Mike Kelley and his installation of hanging stuffed animal sculptures



Figure 42 Wig Slug, detail, Fall 2015.

*Deodorized Central Mass with Satellites.*

I was obsessed with the colors, how the sculpture was hanging, how the animals looked all



Figure 43 Wig Slug, installation view, Fall 2016.

mashed together. I began my own wig sculpture by simply beginning to sew the edges of all the wigs together in a mass. Eventually I realized that the sculpture would be too heavy to hang from the ceilings at UNO and began to turn the sculpture into a hair creature instead. As it came together I played with how it could stand and also began playing with these hands from a Barbie Loves Beauty styling head that I had been given, except the head piece and hand piece had been

separated. I first put them in *Lady in Red* (fig. 41), in my studio one night, just for fun, and was absolutely delighted at how unbelievably creepy the assemblage looked. So as the wig thing began to come together, I knew that the hands must end up as part of it and it became the *Wig Slug* (fig. 42, 43).

The addition of these Barbie hands to the *Wig Slug* had created something so delectably creepy that I adopted another obsession with doll parts and began scavenging the internet for how available they were, and the internet provided as it usually does when I found that there were thousands upon thousands of them on Ebay for people looking to repair dolls. I found a massive lot of doll parts and wanted to create some new hair creatures, but much smaller, and engaging in some type of innocent childhood activity. I found a seesaw on Craigslist and decided to have two pigtailed hair creatures playing on the seesaw. Originally I envisioned the baby hair creatures to be like *Jareth* and *Lady in Red* and completely covered in hair. I was trying to think of something that would be easier to



Figure 44 *Ice Cream Babies*, mixed media, Installation view, Fall 2015

sculpt onto a small frame than the chicken wire, which was hellish to work with. I bought some cans of Great Stuff expanding foam and began building the creatures directly onto the seesaw seats. As they began to grow and I stuck the doll arms and legs in them. I once again fell in love with a new material. I was obsessed with the way that it created these strange lumps that were almost like a body but not quite. I decided to leave that as the body and attach the pigtails to the foam bodies which looked to me like scoops of ice cream, and named them my *Ice Cream Babies* (fig. 44). I painted them completely so that the doll parts that I had used did not give any inclination of race. I wanted to stay true to removing any trace of identifiable characteristics other than hair. I decided that I wanted one of the babies to have afro puffs and one to have slick straight hair, both in non-traditional hair colors. I was still thinking angrily about an article I had read about an elementary school that was attempting to banish afro-puffs, along with a slew of hairstyles typically used by the black community; such as dreadlocks and braids. This way the semiotics of hair were in play again and the viewer was forced to decide how they wanted to view the piece. They could make their own decisions as to whether or not they wanted to place race on the ice cream babies due to their own ideas of this hair or not.

In my search for doll parts for the ice cream babies, I had also found this full set of gorgeous porcelain parts for a Victorian doll, face included. I had no idea at the time what I



Figure 45 Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *The Swing*, 1767.

wanted to do with them but they were impossible to pass up. As I began working on the *Ice Cream Babies*, these Victorian parts at the back of my thoughts, I found myself in a heated discussion about the Rococo period, one side full of love for the overly detailed and fanciful style and one side deeply opposed to it. I personally love Rococo. I find it beautiful and mildly hilarious. It has all the campy kitschy things that I love about life and art. Fragonard's *Swing* (fig. 45) immediately came to mind, and I knew that I had found the destination for my Victorian doll parts. It was perfectly campy with the high drama of the setting and the clothing. The young man hiding

behind the bush to look up the swinging girl's skirt brought the campiness to a discussion about masculinity and femininity, and the gaze. I wanted to build some massive Victorian monstrosity of a wig to perch on top of her head as though it was consuming her. As the sculpture began to come together I fell in love with the foam even more as I began to manipulate it into the folds of the skirt, and the frills of her sleeves and trim. It was also light so it would be easy to hang, but also strong enough to hold her arms and legs in exactly the right spot, and I could carve it to mimic the flat parts of the dress. I wanted to make a play on the figure of the man looking up her skirt. I decided to include a giant tuft of bright pink pubic hair peeking out from beneath her skirt; corrupting the gaze and the view of woman as object by surprising this man with a characteristically unfeminine trait, and spoiling his view.

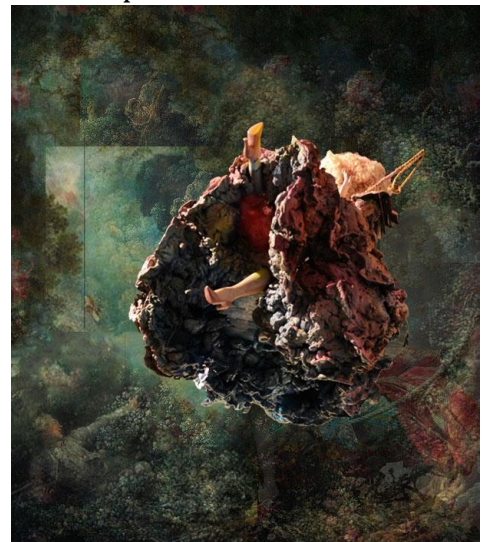


Figure 46 *Swing*, Photoshop image of installation view, mixed media, Spring 2016.



## CONCLUSION

My work throughout graduate school has led me to completely redefine my view of identity. I have realized that what I once tried so hard to construct and define for fear of being ostracized, I really want nothing to do with. My work is a reflection of this. Taking influence from the queer community, Camp, and Drag, I view my art as my Drag. While Drag Queens use their art to transform their own identity to corrupt the social binary, I use my Drag to create characters that question the validity of hair as a semiotic indicator of Cultural Identity. My characters have been erased by their hair, consumed by their hair, and I have dissected and catalogued hair and wigs in an attempt to determine how hair is able to transform a person, or function as an iconic image of identity. What I wish for those viewing my art in the end is that instead of viewing my characters as something that must be defined, they will allow themselves to be freed for a moment from identity, and the cruel function for stereotyping it can play in our society, and allow themselves to enjoy my whimsical world of hair and absurdity.

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## **VITA**

Lizzie Agnes Derby was born in New Orleans, Louisiana in 1988 where she lived until moving to Charleston, South Carolina to pursue a B.A. in Studio Art from the College of Charleston. She received her B.A. in Painting and a Minor in Japanese Studies in 2010. After graduating from CofC she returned to New Orleans where she studied Advanced Painting and Printmaking through the Continuing Studies program at Tulane University, before beginning the M.F.A. program at the University of New Orleans in 2013.