


6-2019

Overstimulated - An Immersive, Multimedia Art Installation

Quinn Devlin

Union College - Schenectady, NY

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Running Title: Over-Stimulated Statement

An Artist's Statement on *Over-Stimulated*

-An Immersive, Multimedia Installation

By

Quinn Devlin

Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for

Honors in the Department of Bachelor of the Arts

UNION COLLEGE

June, 2019

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ABSTRACT

DEVLIN, QUINN *Over-Stimulated: An Installation* addressing the dangers of sexually-objectifying media. Department of Visual Arts, June, 2019.

ADVISOR: ORELLANA, FERNANDO

This thesis provides the explanation, inspiration, research and progression of an immersive, multimedia art installation that emulates the idea of a “sexual dystopia.” It explores how our dichotomy of inadequate sex education and hypersexual, gender-based media is resulting in a dystopian sexual reality for women in particular. The work portrays a future world in which sexual and fertility technology is so advanced and accessible that real men and women no longer interact. As a result, women and objects become one in the same.

Female literary icons are oversexualized to suggest that porn-culture is a by-product of a historical framework that views women as commodities to be obtained. The dull, clinical approaches to sex education are juxtaposed against the exploitative content kids are exposed to at an increasingly young age. The steps, decisions and challenges to approaching a large-scale art installation are discussed.

PREFACE

We live in a world numb to the regular objectification, monetization and overmedicalization of the female body. We are constantly surrounded by sexually suggestive material: naked models in perfume ads, political arguments over birth control and abortion, headlines about “me too,” softcore pornography that has leaked into mainstream media and tv, and hardcore pornography that is unlimited and accessible to all via the internet. Yet, most institutions retain social norms that keep a closed dialogue about sex. I suspect that our cultural taboos reminiscent of religious shame and guilt are preventing scientifically accurate education and effective communication about sex issues, leaving everyone vulnerable.

My concern is that this dichotomy of inadequate sex education and the over-sexualized media is resulting in a dystopian sexual reality for women in particular. While men are encouraged to discuss female sexuality, women are taught to conceal it. By refusing to discuss female sexuality in a way that transcends surface-level conversations, we cheapen it and make it something to be ashamed of. By telling women that they should be ashamed or embarrassed to talk about sex, we avoid a variety of progressive discussions. The result is women who are too discouraged to come forward in cases of sexual abuse as well as a lack of adequate education regarding women’s reproductive health.

Our culture is grooming girls to be passive sexual objects rather than active sexual beings. This idea of the female sex object is not something we are biologically born with nor is it simply a product of modern media and advertising. This fixation on the female body is a social norm

that has been developed and reinforced over millennia as a result of the extreme power imbalance between men and women.

While we have made huge strides in women's rights over the last century, I believe that we have still only scratched the surface when it comes to truly deconstructing our deeply rooted gender-based stereotypes. The election of President Obama may have signaled the beginning of a turning point in our nation's power dynamics, but the election of Donald Trump was a disturbing indicator of serious backlash. As we continue to make strides towards true diversity among our political leaders, I worry about the intensifying levels of backlash we might see. I fear that as more women attain power in political and economic spheres of society, tension between the sexes might continue to rise.

For my senior thesis I have created an installation that illustrates what I mean by sexual dystopia, further exaggerating and abstracting this idea of the female sex object. I hope to illustrate how our disturbing double-standards about sexuality are cultivating a culture where sex often isn't healthy and consensual, but calculated, voyeuristic, artificial, predatory and coercive. My inspiration for this installation is a world where shifting gender-power dynamics ignite hostility between men and women. This animosity leads men and women to start self-segregating. Our masculine and feminine roles become so overemphasized that men and women entirely lose the ability to communicate with each other. In this world, sexual and fertility technology is so advanced and accessible that interactions between real men and women become obsolete, so women and objects become one in the same.

I have explored this concept by transforming Arts Lobby outside of the Crowell and West Galleries into a fully immersive, multimedia art installation that embodies the idea of a world

where women and objects are interchangeable. I assembled cardboard pyramids and mounted them against the wall to projection map my digitally created video content onto. I have also covered the remaining parts of the walls with synthetic fabric to suggest that this sexually-objectifying media culture is imposing, intoxicating and inescapable.

A SEXUAL DYSTOPIA

In any book or film that is set in some form of dystopian society, the characters are usually adapted to their world. They maybe aren't thrilled about their living conditions, but it's what they know. It is the audience who finds the world foreign and unusual. For a gay person living in modern-day New York City, life in Iran (where homosexual acts are punishable by death) sounds unfathomable. In early hunter-gatherer societies, there were no husbands or wives, people would have sex with whoever they wanted in the tribe, then care for all the children as their own, with no consideration for who the parents were. Someone from Elizabethan times would probably consider the polyamorous nature of these early homo sapiens to be barbaric. Likewise, some tinder-swiping millennials of today would probably be more on board with the hunter-gatherer approach to sex. Most humans throughout history would find the concepts of world wars, atomic bombs and genocide to be completely incomprehensible. My point is that it is impossible to decide what is "normal human behavior" without considering the biases of an individual's own society's historical and cultural perspective. It was only less than two hundred years ago that we looked at slavery and decided "stealing people from their native land and forcing them to work against their will is probably unethical."

My goal with this project is to make people understand that women face obstacles and prejudices that cannot be comprehended by a lot of men. First of all, it should be obvious that something is happening at the cultural level when in a group of 25 senators, all of them are male and all of them are white. That is not a coincidence. More importantly, something must be very wrong when, in America, in 2019, these twenty-five men are qualified to decide that a

woman who is impregnated must carry out the pregnancy against her will even if she is a victim of rape or incest.

Something must be wrong when the President of the United States was overheard saying he can “grab women by the pussy” and it didn’t hurt, but probably helped his chances of being elected. Something must be wrong when scandals of prestigious men abusing their power for sexual gratification are relatively commonplace. I am not just referring to the scandals of the me-too movement. Bill Clinton abused his power as the president when he had an affair with a 22-year-old intern. Clarence Thomas abused his power as associate justice of the supreme court when he regularly harassed and pursued Anita Hill. And it without a doubt goes back much further. Abuses of power undeniably took place for thousands of years prior, it just wasn’t as talked about.

What I find even more terrifying is the far more common abuses of power that aren’t newsworthy. There are undoubtedly many more silent abuses of power by unfit parents on children, threatening boyfriends on women, bosses on employees, teachers on students. Yet there is no way to even estimate how many. For these victims, the risks of making accusations usually far outweigh the rewards.

It’s not one element in our culture that makes so many men feel like they’re entitled to women’s bodies. It is the intersection of a million different cultural factors: language, government, media, religion, the economy, etc. With this work, I am saying that there is something wrong with our particular formula (that has been reworked and developed over thousands of years) that has a very sad, real impact on the lives of many women. I choose to dramatize and sensationalize the sexual objectification and abuse in our culture in order to

make them easier for people to digest. The title, *Overstimulated*, obviously refers to the overwhelming nature of the installation. It also refers to stimulated, as in sexually aroused.

ORIGIN OF CONCEPT

I made my Organizing Theme major with the intention of creating my own version of a “Consumer Marketing” education that Union doesn’t traditionally offer, by combining Economics, Psychology and Digital Art. Early on in the year, I toyed with the idea of exploring a thesis topic that would be more directly applicable to the advertising industry, like developing my own brand and designing a logo, brand book, commercial, etc. I knew this kind of commercial project would probably be far more appealing to employers when looking at my portfolio.

Then, over my winter break I had the opportunity to intern at a design agency in New York. The work they were doing at Lloyd & Co was unlike any company I had ever interned for before. They designed packaging, perfume bottles, commercials, and ads for global brands like Gucci, Giorgio Armani and Calvin Klein. I was amazed to learn how much of their work was directly influenced or inspired by contemporary art. It occurred to me that at a certain level the lines between commercial and fine art begin to blur a little bit. This made me want to create something that forced me out of my comfort zone and go beyond marketing. I wanted to make something conceptually abstract that spoke to real issues and would help me explore my mixed feelings about further pursuing this industry.

I first started looking at feminist research, because modern media and advertising receives a lot of criticism for its objectifying portrayals of women. My interest in Women’s issues stemmed from a desire to one day create content, consumable by the masses, that doesn’t further perpetuate sexist tropes, but rather challenges them. Upon further exploration, Gender

& Sexuality seemed like the perfect platform to apply my backgrounds of both Economics and Psychology. The basis of my thesis arose from researching the following concepts:

Sexual Economics: The idea that social norms regarding female sexual behavior, throughout history and across cultures can be predicted by the laws of supply and demand and by women's economic dependence on men. When sex (via marriage usually) is a legitimate economic resource for women they will try to control the "sexual marketplace" by abstaining from sex and ostracizing women who might pose a threat.

- <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00224545.2010.481686>
- <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10508-014-0320-4>

Sociology of Sex Education and Open Sexual Dialogue: Accurate sex-education and open-dialogue about sex issues correlates with higher confidence in women, less sex abuse, happier relationships with healthier sexual communication, and lower-rates of STDs and unwanted pregnancies.

- https://www.jstor.org/stable/3813785?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents
- https://www.jstor.org/stable/41223316?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents

Social Psychology of exaggerated, Sexualized Media: Hyper-masculine/feminine roles and frequently over-sexualized content in media correlates with high levels of female-objectification in viewer attitudes and behaviors (measurable through statistics about rape, domestic violence, etc.).

- <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11199-006-9176-y>
- <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10508-015-0594-1>

ARTISTIC INFLUENCES

- Banksy's *Dismaland*

Dismaland is an entire experiential art exhibit with the intention of making the viewer feel like they're in a dystopian version of Disneyland that sheds light on consumption and social issues like the refugee crisis and SeaWorld's animal cruelty scandals.



This work is what inspired me to express my social critique of gender-based issues in the form of a dystopian art installation. My hope is that a more concentrated, exaggerated approach to these social issues will make them more accessible, particularly to men who might not be as obviously and directly impacted by them.

- Kaari Upson's Installation at The Whitney Biennial 2017

Upson used iridescent paint to make her sculptures of everyday, "comfortable" objects (paper towels and couches) feel more artificial and distant, emphasizing the materiality

and disposability in our consumption of them.



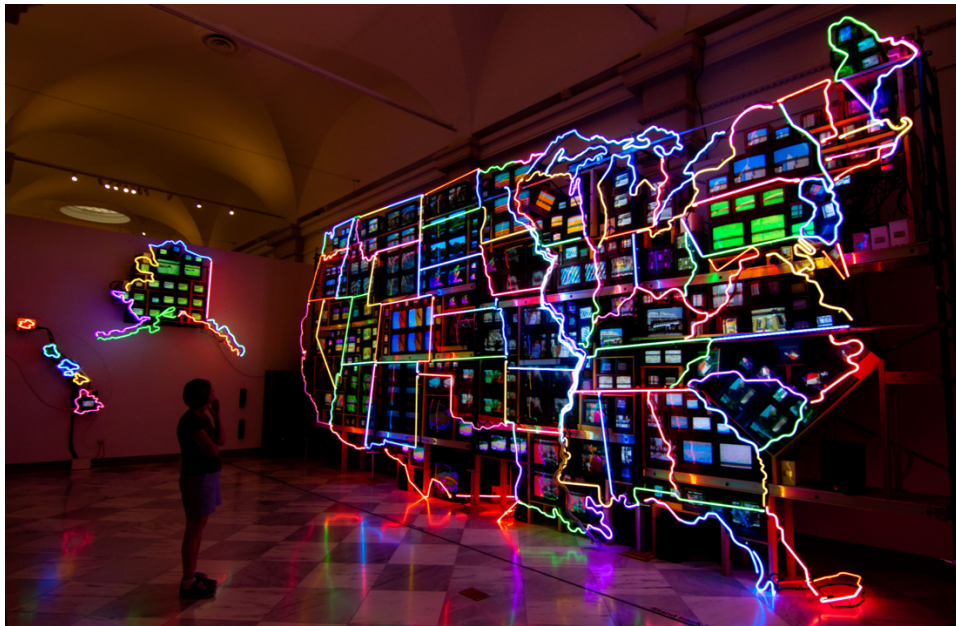
- I have chosen my color palate and material selection for similar reasons: emphasizing the artificiality in our consumption of gender. Sharp, geometric lines and plastic-y, iridescent textures reveal that this world the world demonstrated by my installation is a synthetic one, with no evidence of a recognizable organic environment.
- Kelly Xi's 2017 Senior Thesis Installation

I don't think I would have arrived at the idea of a mixed-media projection installation for my thesis if I hadn't seen Kelly's installation two years ago. Kelly used the same space and transformed it with carpet, soft sculpture and projection on the walls.



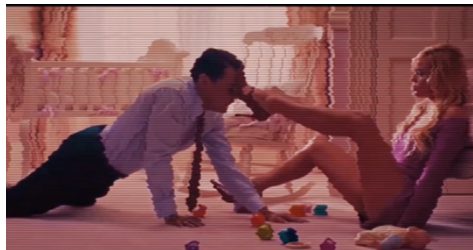
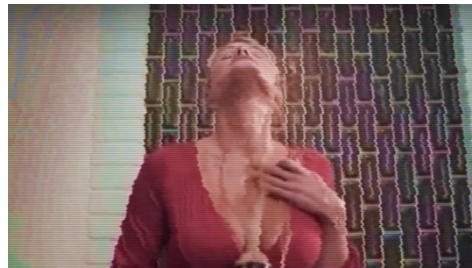
- Naim June Paik

Paik is known as the “Father of Video Art” and was extremely influential in the twentieth century. Paik used TVs to create overwhelming, creative installations that commented on consumption and predicted the influence of technology on American culture. Paik’s immersive and pop-art approach to his installations has without a doubt influenced my work.



ARTIST'S COMMENTARY

While I wanted to create a whole immersive “dystopia,” I didn’t want it to be too abstract. It needed to be rooted in familiar material to make my point. Everyone has a powerful and immediate response to nostalgia. For the opening sequence of my piece I wanted to recreate this familiar feeling of flipping through the channels. I chose iconic videos, shows and movies from a variety of periods and genres that people could immediately pick up on: *Cheers*, *James Bond*, *The Baby One More Time* music video, *Baywatch*, *The Sandlot*, *Alien*, a Pepsi Super Bowl commercial of Cindy Crawford, the “most paused moment in movie history” (Sharon Stone’s leg-crossing scene in *Basic Instinct*) and a few more.

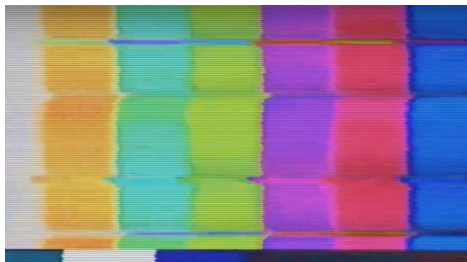


For most people, these clips probably trigger a positive sense of familiarity, maybe even bring you back to whenever you last saw an episode of “Cheers.” Once you’ve watched the sequence for long enough, it occurs to you that it isn’t simply harmless trip down memory lane.

I chose clips from critically-acclaimed movies, beloved sitcoms and iconic music videos that blatantly objectify women, including strong female protagonists, in some way. In *Alien*, for example, even though Ridley Scott is the captain of an important space expedition, the director felt it was necessary to include a scene where she frolics around the cabin in tighty-whities to assure she didn't appear "too masculine."

To stress the idea that this hyper-sexual dystopia is all encompassing and inescapable, I juxtapose these video samples with news clips of some high-profile sex abuse scandals most people are familiar with (Weinstein, R.Kelly, Louis C.K., etc.). This whole reel serves to reveal how desensitized we have become to softcore porn and hearing about sexual assault. After a minute or so of the mundane channel flipping, the "signal cuts out."

The projection goes from channel surfing, to static, to analog sci-fi-esque typing, to a distorted amalgamation of my own footage scored to a slowed-down ambient version of Marvin Gaye's "Let's get it On." My goal here is to propel the viewer out of the ordinary and into an eerie world that resembles nothing they've ever seen. I've chosen *Let's get it On*, because it's religiously used in movies and commercials, often comedically, to tell you a sexy scene is coming up. Everyone in the English-speaking world knows what's happening when they hear Marvin Gaye. I used Audition to add glitching, distort it and mimic the acoustics of an





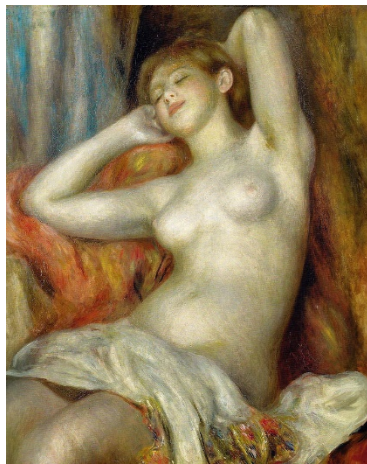
enormous, empty room. The audio gives the viewer a sexual context, but it seems alien, unnerving and being in an academic building, wildly inappropriate.

The visuals are composed of both footage I took myself as well as a montage of distorted stills of a sex robot factory. At the time that I was doing research for my topic I came across an article about a sex robot with artificial intelligence that actually hit the market this year. I immediately thought it sounded like something out of *Ex Machina* or *Westworld* (where female robots quite literally look, behave and feel like real women, but are used mostly for sex). The article included pictures of what these factories look like and it was surreal.



This is quite literally what I meant when I said a future where the line between women and objects becomes blurred. I mean a world where technology gets so close to the real thing that a real woman and a giant, anatomically correct Barbie become interchangeable. I fear that this is a slippery slope and would further encourage men to treat women like things. Right now, I'm sure sex robots with AI is a pretty niche market, especially considering the \$15,000 price tag. That being said, I don't think it's crazy to predict brothels of these when twenty or so years from now the technology is *really* good.

While a great deal of my video content came from clips I had taken and appropriated from pop-culture, it was important to me that I film some of my own material. For my own footage, I wanted female subjects to be over-sexualized, in order to be consistent with my theme and the rest of my content. However, I didn't want to portray the kind of sexualized female art subject, rampant throughout history that is passive, virginal and exists to be "gawked at" like the Renoir below.



I wanted the disposition and posture of my subjects to command the viewer's attention and elicit a sense of discomfort. I was greatly influenced by the style of Egon Schiele's nude women

in my planning. Schiele's work is layered with psychological assessments of human sexuality while challenging the more cliché depictions of masculinity and femininity in art. His subjects are unique, because they are shamelessly aware of their own-sexuality and the intensity of their stares prompts a sense of uneasiness in the viewer.

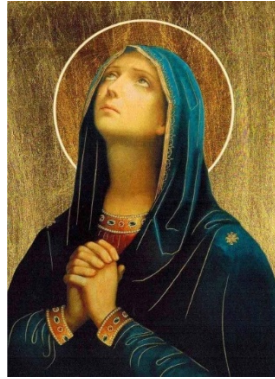


I wanted my subjects to have this commanding, self-awareness we see in Schiele's subjects, but rather than being overtly grotesque, teeter on the edge of the suggestive, objectifying depictions of women we see in pop culture. I also used a combination of projection and colored light filters in my filming to alienate my subjects, rendering them more synthetic and inhuman.

For the footage part of this sequence, I did two different shoots, one inspired by the Virgin Mary and one by Lewis Carroll's Through the Looking Glass.

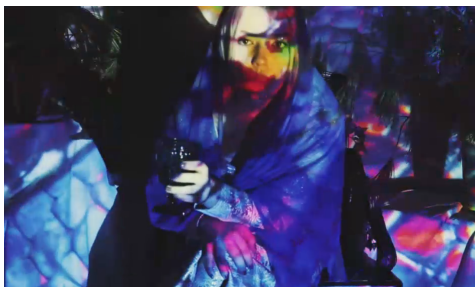


In traditional Christian Art, Mary is usually depicted as virginal, nurturing and gentle.



I have always been bothered by the emphasis on Mary's virginity. When you praise her for being a virgin, you are still framing her in terms of her sexuality while insinuating that women who do have sex are of lesser value. I wanted to portray a Mary that was not defined in terms of her relationships to others (as a virgin or as a mother), but a Mary who just did what she wanted. Many people aren't disturbed by graphic media and violent pornography that exploits women, because we compartmentalize women much more easily than we do men.

In a lot of media women are placed into one of three categories: mothers, virgins/ wife-material, and "promiscuous women". These identifiers don't say much about the women in particular. Yet, many can justify media that is objectifying or violent towards women by saying that the promiscuous women are different from the others and deserve it. This is also why so many are quick to blame the victim for being drunk or dressing provocatively in rape cases. In my Mary shots, I didn't want to appear fragile and virginal, but powerful and commanding by staring at the viewer. My posture is intentionally "masculine" and I appear to be drinking and smoking a cigar, because it is not traditionally lady-like behavior.



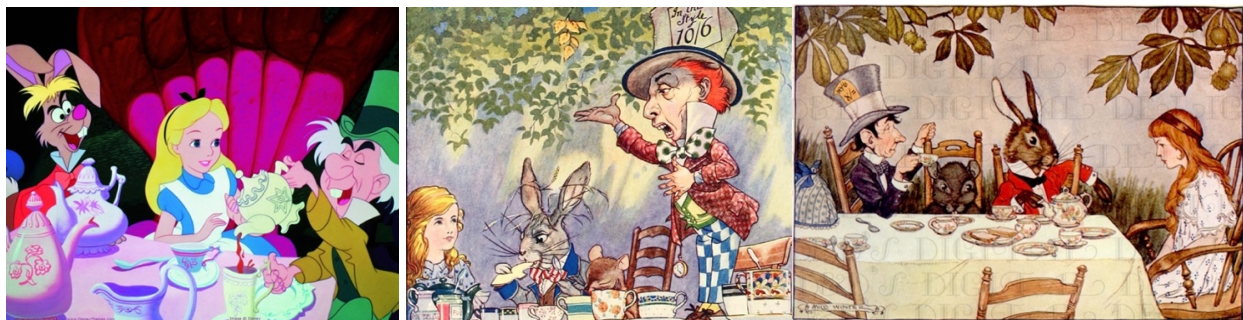
I wanted to retain the iconic Marian symbolism we see in countless works of art. So, I included details like the blue veil, throne and natural surroundings. I made the conscious decision to not include a baby Jesus, because I wanted her to be defined in terms of herself, not in terms of her relationships to others.

I also chose to project video clips on to myself. It's not obvious at first, but the videos are actually close-up animations of snake scales, in reference to the biblical myth of Adam & Eve. Serpents in Christianity, as well as other religions, are associated with evil, deception and sin. I wanted to juxtapose this imagery with the Virgin Mary, because the character of Eve has been oversexualized and vilified as a temptress in modern media. By drawing parallels between these two women I am making the radical claim that Mary is not a virgin and like Eve, has given into temptation before, but that is in no way a poor reflection of her character. Almost all throughout history, the popular ideology has been this black and white attitude towards female

sexuality that virgin = good and nonvirgin = evil, manipulative temptress who deserves to be ridiculed and punished.

By referencing biblical and literary characters, I am suggesting that the misogynist, pornographic state of our media climate isn't necessarily a new phenomenon. This might sound pessimistic, but I don't believe that sexism in America ever fully goes away, at least not for a very long time. It simply evolves. As time goes on, we pass down extraordinary things to the next generations, through language, literature, tradition and culture. That being said, I fear we also pass down potentially harmful sexist attitudes through subtleties in our words and actions that allow these social norms to linger. Yes in 2019 women have it much better in America than they did hundreds of years ago, but sexism isn't gone. It's just sneakier. Prejudice is so nuanced and deeply woven into the fabric of our culture that it can be very difficult to recognize, especially for those who have power and are not affected by it.

For the other footage in this sequence, I looked to Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* for inspiration. The imagery that usually comes to mind when we think of Alice looks something like any of these illustrations.

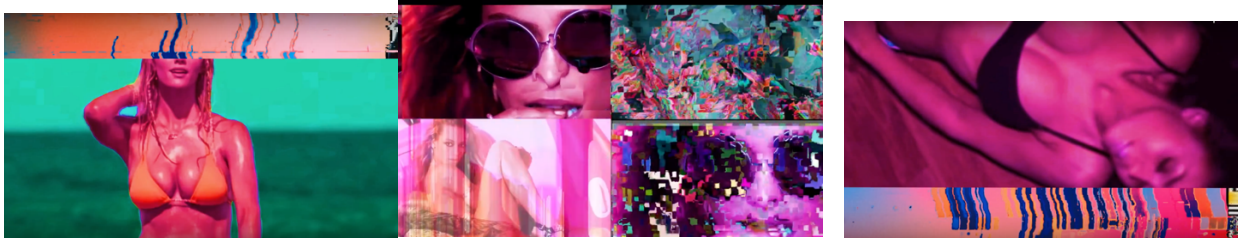


When I think of Alice's character traits, I usually think young, naïve, well-mannered girl who doesn't actually make many decisions for herself. She meets a bunch of crazy (mostly male) characters along the way who tell her what to do after drinking some mysterious,

hallucinogenic potion (kind of creepy). My idea was to recreate this scene, but instead she gets on the table at the tea party and starts knocking everything over and eating food with her hands.

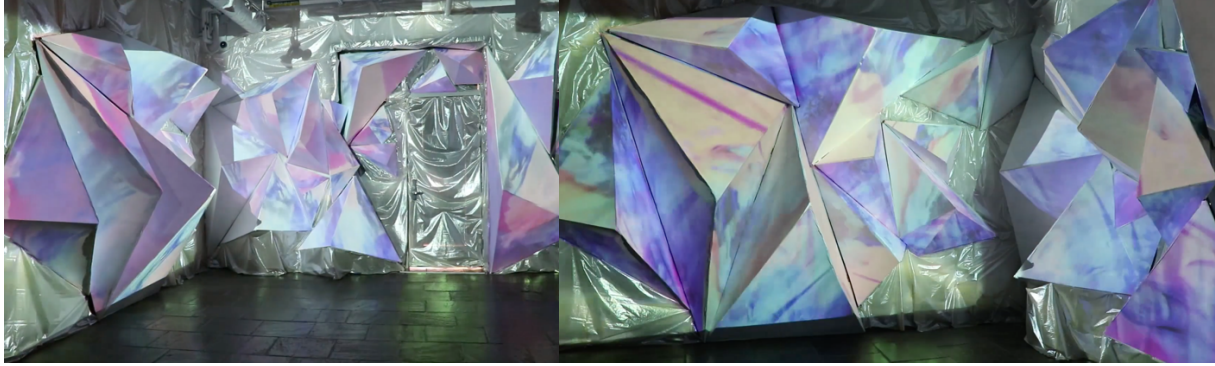


After the music and visuals fade out, *You Sexy Thing* by Hot Chocolate blasts on the speakers. The song decision felt obvious, seeing as the title refers to a woman as a “sexy thing.” The purpose of this sequence was to pull together all the other elements from the piece into something cohesive.



It layers objectifying videos from all different kinds of media with digitally manipulated glitch art (suggesting that technology is the catalyst for the acceleration of porn-culture). The audio includes clips from the Kavanaugh hearings, a kid asking, “how the penis gets to the vagina,” a dull scientific sex ed. video about semen, misogynist banter from the video game “GTA,” and a few other things. This weird amalgamation of audio serves to contrast the awkward, insufficient, clinical approaches to sex education with the exploitative content kids are exposed to at an increasingly young age.

You feel slightly caught off guard when the music switches to a softer, slower version of the song, the visuals completely change and you feel like you’re under water. For this part I was inspired by the character, Ophelia from *Hamlet*.



Sir John Everett Millais's *Ophelia* is possibly one of the most iconic artworks of a literary character.



Shakespeare's description of her death and the opportunity for psychological interpretation have made this scene irresistible for countless other artists who have followed.

“There is a willow grows aslant a brook
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream.
There with fantastic garlands did she come
165 Of crowflowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples,
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
But our cold maids do “dead men’s fingers” call them.
There, on the pendant boughs her coronet weeds
Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke,
170 When down her weedy trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide,
And mermaid-like a while they bore her up,
Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds
As one incapable of her own distress,

175 Or like a creature native and indued
Unto that element. But long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay
To muddy death." (Hamlet.4.7.160-180)



Hamlet is one of the greatest literary works of all time. A gendered analysis of the main female character, Ophelia seemed deeply appropriate to include in my work, especially because masculinity and sexuality are crucial themes.

According to *Hamlet*, female sexuality makes the entire world seem like an "unweeded garden: in other words, it's associated with deception, sin, and chaos. Both Hamlet and Laertes define Ophelia by her sexuality throughout the entirety of the play. In Act I, Laertes (her own brother) advises her on the dangers of pre-marital sex (for women, not men) in a lengthy speech that's designed to provoke a sense of fear in his sister. Few characters pay attention to Ophelia as anything more than a sex object. The combination of her father's death and the possessive behaviors of the men that surround her lead to inevitable madness.

She falls into the river while braiding flower garlands and lets the current drag her along. She knows she is about to drown and does nothing to save herself. She still floats but her clothes, weighed down by the water, will soon lead her to the "muddy death". Her death is somewhat ambiguous. Rather than actively committing suicide, she starts drowning and doesn't bother to

save herself. The weight of the garments is a metaphor for the way Ophelia lives her life: doing what her father and brother—and boyfriend—tell her to do, rather than making decisions for herself. The details “her clothes spread-wide” and “mermaid-like” insinuate that even as she is dying, Ophelia is still sexy.

For my contemporary reinterpretation of this scene, I considered doing it in a bathtub, but the idea of simultaneously drowning while standing up felt more active to me. I filmed it in the shower, draped in yards of wet, sheer white tulle. I wanted to reimagine her death not as a suicide, but more as an active struggle in wet garments that are suffocating and smothering her, as a metaphor for the constant oppression and objectification she faces. For the audio in this piece, I overlaid whispered readings of the lines from this passage. I thought whispering better complemented Ophelia’s character traits than speaking at a normal volume. Whispering feels not only softer and less aggressive but could be interpreted as sexual summoning (like sirens in Greek mythology). It also adds an ethereal, unsettling quality that complements this idea of an ambiguous suicide.

I chose to project water refractions on the remaining parts of the walls, because I wanted the viewer to feel like they were also submerged. When you look at the piece during this scene you feel like you have sunk to the bottom of some body of water, but it feels peaceful, not like violent drowning.



For the “finale,” the music switches back to the regular version of *You Sexy Thing* and the first visual we see is some footage I took in a bathtub filled with Easter eggs.



I was brainstorming things that could represent the physical manifestation of women as a tangible material, particularly in terms of reproduction. I arrived at eggs and milk. Plastic is a material I kept thinking about throughout the whole process. It perfectly captures the essence of something that is a “thing,” not a human. Plastic quite literally is bridging the gap between woman and object in our pornographic society. Plastic sex robots are trying to resemble real women. Real women are pumping their lips, butts and breasts with plastic to look like sex

robots. Plastic is permanent and impenetrable. Once you introduce it, it floods our oceans, showing up in the most remote locations, in the guts of birds, fish, whales and plankton. I think sexism is just like plastic.

Once it is introduced to a society, it will stealthily infiltrate all cultural elements of life, on both the macro and micro level for generations. This is why I refer to such a wide breadth of content throughout the piece: Shakespeare, a Robin Thicke music video, *Charlie's Angels*, the Bible, a Kim Kardashian commercial for Carl's Jr, etc. Finding a common denominator between this material sounds impossible. But, alas, like plastic, the sexual objectification of women is everywhere. Showing a woman being swallowed by thousands of brightly-colored plastic Easter eggs seemed to appropriately sum up my concept (it was also extremely convenient that I had 5,000 Easter eggs thanks to my family's very large annual egg hunt).

I wrapped it up with a clip of Donald Trump denying allegations of sexual assault and harassment, immediately followed up by his infamous overheard "locker-room talk" with Billy Bush. That clip is what sparked fury in women all over the country and likely ignited the "me-too" movement. It's also probably how I landed on this topic. The color palate I picked here was intended to make the installation somewhat resemble an angry, messy American flag.



PROCESS AND CHALLENGES

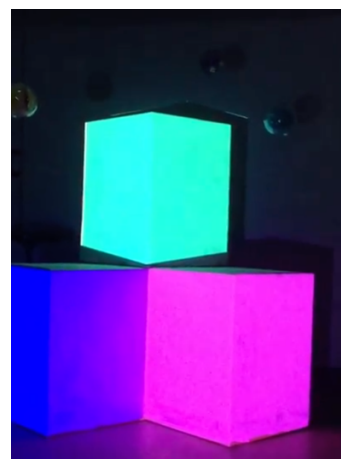
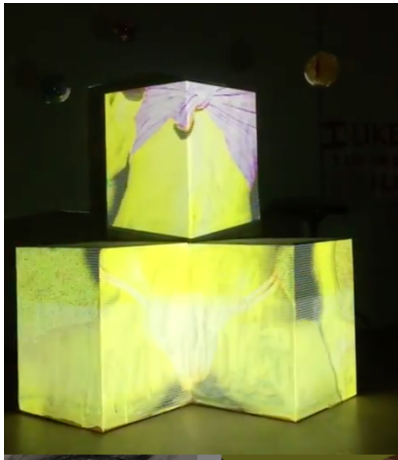
While the scale of this project was far out of my comfort zone, it was important to me that it be massive in size. I wanted it to be able to make a football player feel small. In art, men traditionally tend to make more of the larger works, especially as they gain success. It's rooted in the same reason that women tend to talk faster and physically take up less space with their bodies than men do. From a young age, it is engrained that when you are female, what you say and do somehow has less value, so you shouldn't waste people's time or space. This is a deeply toxic mindset that plagues a lot of women. It's why I wanted to make something huge, provocative, obnoxious and have what one might refer to in more colloquial terms as "big dick energy". I wanted to force people to stop in their tracks and take a minute out of their day to look at it.

* Urban dictionary defines *BDE* as "the loud and boisterous energy emitted by someone with a colossal appendage."

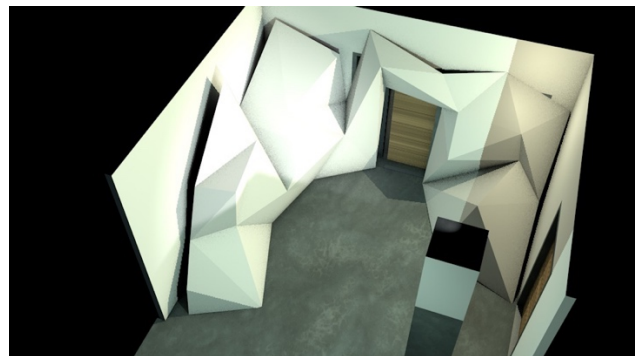
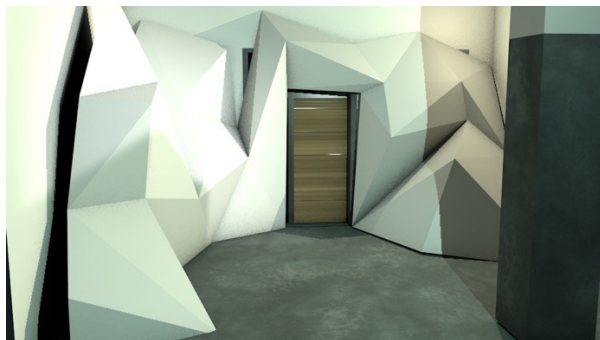
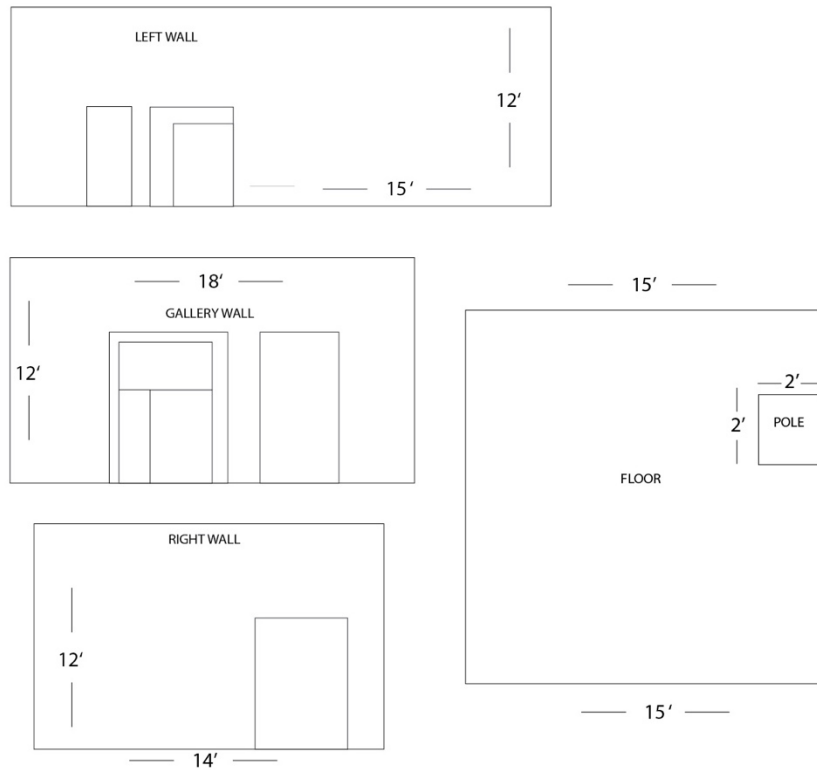
I knew I wanted to make something huge and multimedia. In addition to a wall mounted, projection-mapped sculpture, the first idea I started with was taking female body parts associated with sexual pleasure in adulthood (vaginas) or comfort and nourishment in infancy (breasts) and reducing them to cold, hard, synthetic objects. I was going to make ornaments resembling abstractions of these body parts, hang them from the ceiling, and projection map them. As I got further in to my project, the ornaments didn't quite fit the color palate I was going for and would have obstructed the projectors. I also decided they were a little too literal and explicit, so I nixed them.



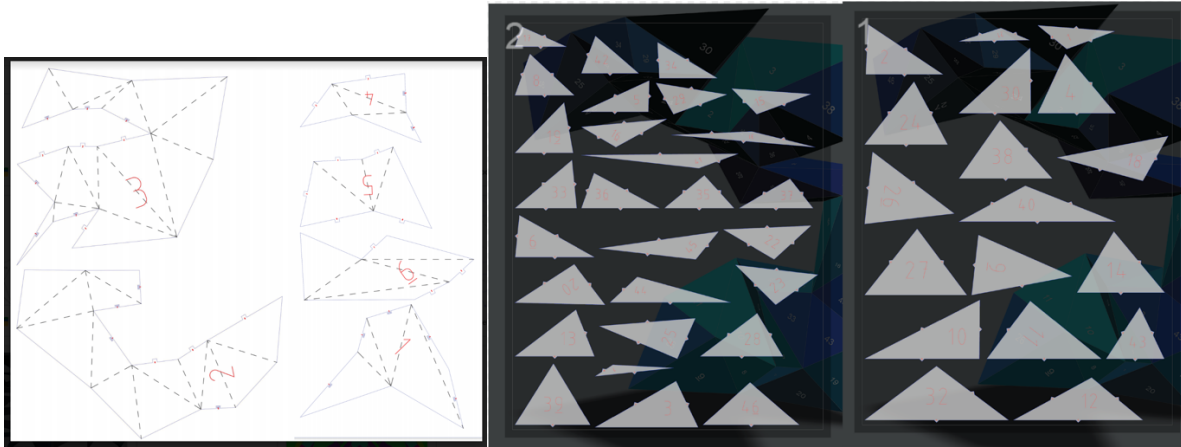
To get my feet wet in 3-dimensional projection mapping I started by painting three boxes and experimenting in MadMapper and AfterEffects.



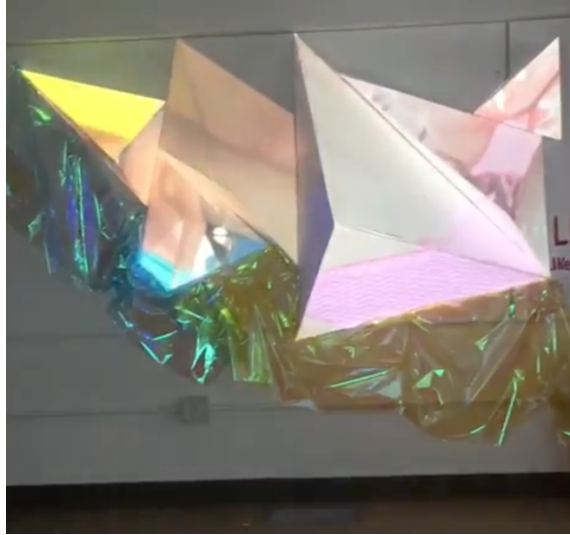
Then I had to develop a design for some sort of structure that wouldn't be too expensive or difficult to build without any sort of experience in construction. I took down the dimensions of the lobby and made a rough guide in Illustrator to account for measurements. I then used Cinema 4D to make a 3D model of space and a potential design to-scale.



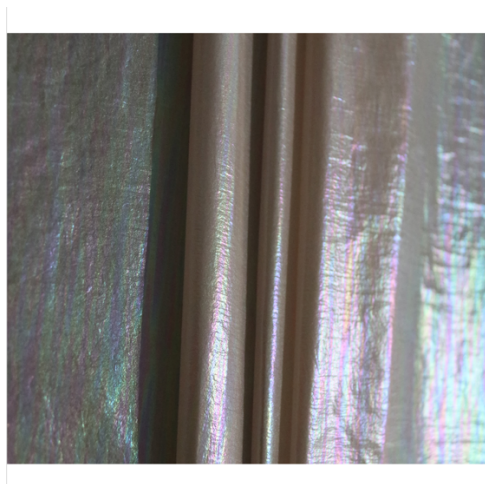
I brought the model into a slicer program that could essentially develop a flat map of this structure.



I tried to recreate a much smaller prototype, cutting these shapes out of cardboard and assembling it with wooden dowels and hot glue. This prototype was very pathetic and sticky and made me want to abandon everything. I realized I would need wooden scaffolding (which I had not budgeted for) making it way too expensive and complicated to build. It would also be extremely annoying for everyone else in the building, because I would be taking up a ton of space in the process. It had to be something I could build in the senior studio, in pieces, then transport to the arts lobby and assemble. I came up with the idea to build lots of individual cardboard pyramids and mount them on the walls, then tested it in the senior studio.



At the same time, I was getting samples of potential fabric and testing out how they looked with the projector. The one I settled on was this plastic-y, opalized taffeta, that looked really good when projected on, but was probably meant for princess costumes. I also appreciated the irony that it was being made into feminist art instead of the princess costumes.

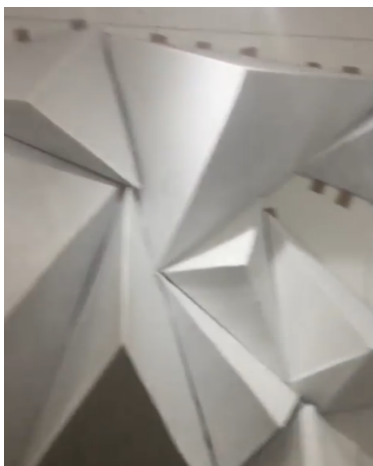


Other costs I couldn't anticipate were those of shipping cardboard and getting fabric from wholesalers in Manhattan (it's impossible to get a sense without being there and I didn't get money to be reimbursed for transportation). I was going off of prices from Joann's Crafts and the assumption that a wholesaler would be less expensive. Turns out it is more expensive, and

they didn't have what I was looking for, but I had a good lunch, so not a total bust. With the intention of covering the walls, I adjusted by ordering more cardboard than I planned on. It was only \$40 for a bundle of ten. It would have to be shipped by freight for \$130, but it stayed at that price regardless of the number of bundles. The extra cardboard would make up for the space I lost with the fabric being more expensive.

Another curveball was finding out that "Let's Pretend Taffeta Foiled Fabric in Unicorn" had been discontinued (maybe because of the name). This meant there was nothing left at the Joann's nearby and I couldn't order it online. I learned this after already purchasing six of the seventeen yards I needed. I then preceded to call every Joann's within a two-hour radius asking if they had any of this fabric and spent five hours driving around upstate New York to acquire whatever remained of said fabric from three different stores.

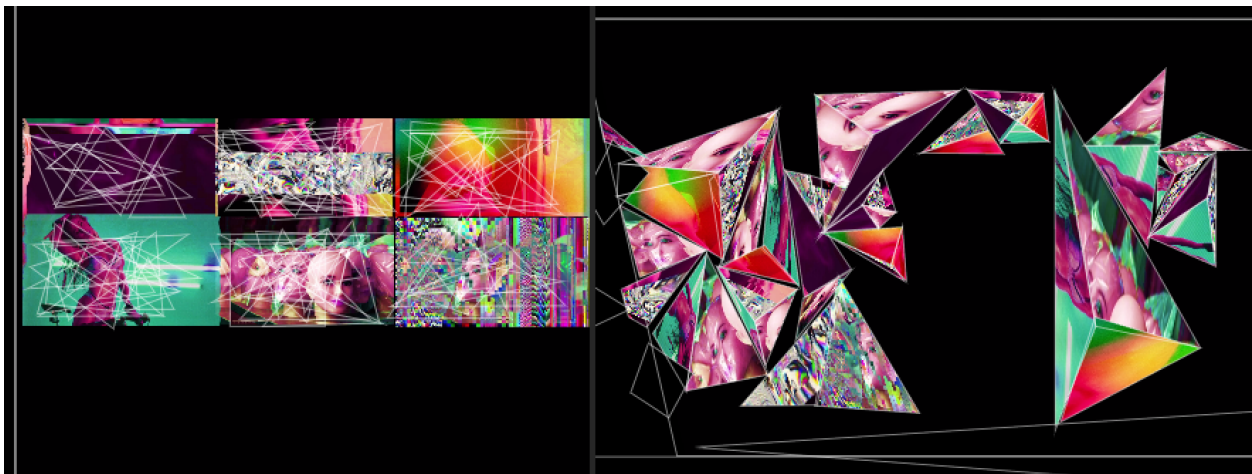
After that, it took about three weeks to assemble the boxes with a box cutter, gaffer's tape and industrial hot glue before painting them. Then it was a week and a half to install everything with Velcro and nails. I used whatever time was left to blackout windows, get two projectors installed, produce content and map it.



For the projection, I took the dimensions of all 75 triangular surfaces. I then would render out one video in AfterEffects composed of six different sequences.



I brought the video into MadMapper and used my measurements to select the inputs (on the left), using the projector to select the outputs (on the right).



One of the biggest challenges, in addition to the unpredictable hiccups, was the politics of building a huge, loud installation in communal public space. There were parts of this project that couldn't be done without wires hanging, loud drilling and getting on ladders in inconvenient places while groups of people are walking around. A few weeks before the show, I was definitely getting some complaints. Overall, I'm happy with how it turned out and all the obstacles just made the process more fun and the finish line more rewarding.

FINAL THOUGHTS

There are no tutorials, rules or even teachers when it comes to immersive installation art. That's what makes it simultaneously so daunting and so exciting; you have endless opportunity for creative exploration. I've grown more in the last six months in terms of creativity and problem-solving than I ever could have imagined. This process isn't something you can meticulously plan every detail of with an idealistic vision of the final product. It is a constant grind of experimenting, failing, problem-solving, and re-adjusting to realistic expectations. Every time one problem was solved, another would arise.

You run out of money and learn that the software cannot handle synchronizing three projectors, so you adjust your vision from three walls to two. You find out the furthest cast distance of a projector still doesn't cover the whole wall, so you design the content in a way that doesn't make it too noticeable. You realize that MadMapper doesn't allow you to keyframe or time video effects, so you learn how to use a program that allows the software to communicate with Aftereffects. You learn you can't mount the sculpture on one wall with nails, because it's concrete, so you do some research and discover industrial Velcro. There isn't a single solution to any problem. Every problem has a different formula that just takes some open-mindedness and perseverance to solve. This project certainly hasn't made an expert on anything. It has made me good at being versatile and flexible.

I realize how rare it is to have such unlimited creative freedom with so much support and guidance all along the way. I am so grateful for this unique opportunity and I hope I can return to this kind of work at some point again.

As for the content, contrary to how I may have sounded the last thirty-five pages, I am not a pessimist and I don't hate men. I have not personally been a victim of any serious assault or abuse. The vast majority of men I know are good people and respectful. It is the culmination of subtle microaggressions, possessive boyfriend behavior (I've seen also in many friends' relationships) and dialogue I've witnessed as a fly on the wall of "bro-time sessions" that reveals a larger sneakier cultural phenomenon suggesting that women are still property. All of this from men who I know have nothing but the best intentions. We have come along way with women's rights, but that is only because brave women fought for it with the help of men who weren't insecure about the threats to fragile masculinity. We will only continue to progress if we continue to talk and people continue to listen and look as sexism rears its ugly head in different disguises.

Most art that addresses these issues is really dark. I don't want people to have to walk through my work every day and be put in a bad mood, even if art needs to do that sometimes. If anything, I just want to start a dialogue about this, so it isn't intense and scary to talk to talk about. If at the end of the day, people don't arrive at some of the more cerebral conclusions, I at least want them to feel transported to another world, if only for a minute.

I have to say this topic was extremely difficult to discuss at times. But, that's exactly why it needs to be discussed. It's one thing to write a provocative thesis paper when it will likely only ever be read in full by your professor and your parents. It's quite another to make a crazy, risqué, 3D video installation a hundred of your peers will walk through every day. You're even more vulnerable when these videos include political statements, mild nudity and forty iterations of your face, some three feet wide. All of this, not at an edgy, forward-thinking art

school, but a pretty traditional preppy private school that is known for engineering, pre-med and pre-law. If there is one thing I've taken away from this, it's that you can't worry about what people think. I know that this work will go over the heads of the vast majority of the people who walk through it, but if the message reaches even a few people than I feel like I have done my job. If I've inspired a future student to some crazy, ballsy installation, like Kelly Xi did for me, then even better.