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***Just Leftovers***

By

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Thesis Paper

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Master of Fine Arts

The University of Montana  
Missoula, MT

May 2014

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And of course, to my parents, Steven and MaryEllen, who always taught me the importance of “knowing the facts.”

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***Just Leftovers***

Chairperson: Trey Hill

***Abstract:***

*Just Leftovers* is intended to offer an understanding of the woman's role within the domestic realm and its evolution over time in American society. My ultimate goal is to create an awareness of women's inequality historically, but also to expose the inequality, biases, and double standards that continue to exist in our contemporary society. I choose to create this awareness through visual art with the manipulation of recognizable objects that the general public, stereotypically speaking, would associate with femininity and domesticity.

I am fascinated by how these "feminine" objects and their historical content [e.g. bread pan] have been socially constructed through rhetoric and material culture. Since these objects have been removed from their original context, I see them as not only symbols of a time period, but also a representation of the women who were striving to express themselves individually, intellectually, and creatively in a society that did not allow them to do so in the public sphere.

## **1. Introduction:**

From Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1974):

*“As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcovers, ate peanut-butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night—she was afraid to even ask even herself the silent question—‘Is this all?’”<sup>1</sup>*

These words are foundational to my current fascination with the domestic realm, but are also the antithesis of how I have come to understand my place in society in terms of gender roles. Like many women of my generation, having an education and an occupation in the public sphere are not uncommon realities. However, although there has been progress in the number of women in the workforce, traditional expectations of women in terms of gender roles are continually perpetuated on a daily basis. Having an awareness of the separation between what is known as “masculine” and “feminine” in our contemporary society is pertinent in order to understand how this binary began historically and how it functions presently.

We live in a culture that values consumerism. From the media to advertising to the Internet, visual communication is an effective tool used to convey messages and sell products because of its accessibility and its intention to be easily understood by the average person. Consumer culture perpetuates societal norms and this is intentional, as these norms are embraced socially, which can lead to financial success and the cycle is able to continue. In terms of consumerism,

Consumer products and brands and the advertising that sells them aim to present an image of things to be desired, people to be envied, and life “as it should be.” Advertisements present an abstract world, often a fantastic one, that is situated not in the present but in an imagined future. Ads make promises—

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<sup>1</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique: With a New Introduction and Epilogue by the Author*, (New York: Dell Publishing, 1974), 1-27.

the promise of a better self-image, a better appearance, more prestige, and fulfillment.<sup>2</sup>

In reference to women specifically, while the end of World War II placed women back into the domestic sphere, many women were still entering the workforce. Contrary to the media's reflection of women portrayed in an idealized role of wife and mother, realistically, women could not live up to these expectations. In terms of the media portrayals of women during this time, June Clever of the television series "Leave It To Beaver," as described by Laura Katz Olson was,

The quintessential American mother and wife of the 1950's. As depicted by her television persona, her fulfillment as a woman accrued from cooking, shopping, attending church meetings, crocheting, making curtains, and most importantly, tending to the needs of her two children. Similarly to other wives on family sitcoms at the time, the kitchen was the center of June's life.<sup>3</sup>

Since "Leave It To Beaver" was a popular television program, women were striving to emulate the feminine role Clever presented. It was an idealized version of the women's role within the home at the time. As mentioned earlier, a growing number of women were entering the workforce, so the portrayal of women in the media was an unrealistic personification of the "perfect" wife and mother because women were expected to fulfill duties within the home but also within the workplace.

With this in mind, it is my intention to use consumer products and visual communication to investigate gendered paradigms. I remove these objects from their original context, changing the location, material, and color. In some cases, the functionality is removed, allowing the viewer to embrace the content of the original object, while becoming less focused on the idea of using it (Fig. 1 & 2). I view the finished

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<sup>2</sup> Lisa Cartwright and Marita Struken, *Practices of Looking*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 265.

<sup>3</sup> Laura Katz Olson, "Whatever Happened to June Clever? The Fifties Mom Turns Eighty," *Race, Gender, & Class*, 10.1 (January 31, 2003): 129. GenderWatch,(Accessed May 10, 2014).



product as a symbol of its time period; a time period perhaps forgotten and romanticized, while its products are seen as “vintage” objects that have become nothing more than consumer novelties. The artistic medium I choose to employ, such as ceramic, fabric, or wax, is able to shift depending on the piece and how the process and material inform the content of the work. In terms of content and process, I see my thesis work as doing two things: recontextualizing the domestic object by changing the setting and material, or a recontextualization of the actual object through altering the original setting and/or adding content through the appropriation of text and found objects.

Generally speaking, the idea of “home” is usually associated with comfort and security, which is not always the case. One of my ultimate goals is to generate an awareness of the uneasiness, angst, and struggles of the women who came before me and who had fewer choices, while creating a linear history of the domestic realm in American culture and how it continues to function today. Additionally, while gender roles have evolved over time, my intention is to also expose the inequality, biases, and double standards that women continue to struggle with and succumb to on a regular basis in our contemporary society.



1950's Pyrex (Fig. 1)



*Just Leftovers* (detail), Porcelain,  
Linoleum, Wood, Found Table, 2014.  
(Fig. 2)

## 2. Background:

*“Objects made or modified by humans, consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, reflect the belief patterns of individuals who made, commissioned, purchased, or used them, and, by extension, the belief patterns of the larger society of which they are a part.”<sup>4</sup>*

From a foundational standpoint, I have always had a fascination with the domestic realm, the objects that exist within it, and the history behind these objects. Growing up in rural Ohio, much of my recreational time was spent either outdoors or inside the home. Without cable television or children my age near me, I continuously found myself striving to find my own identity within the places and objects that surrounded me. I was able to entertain myself through teaching myself how to sew,

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Schlereth, “Material Culture Studies” from *Objects and Meaning*, ed. M. Anna Fariello and Paula Owen, (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2005), 3.

carving objects out of wood, looking through old photographs, and investigating the objects that were left inside of our 1960's home.

With that being said, it is of no surprise that I ultimately formed an appreciation for the handmade object. When I began graduate school, my artwork was primarily focused on functional pottery (Fig. 3),



*Cream and Sugar Servers,*  
Porcelain, 2011 (Fig. 3)

as I was interested in the idea that the objects I produced could play a role in someone's daily routine and also exist within one's private and comfortable space. I simply enjoyed making pots and I appreciated the archival nature of these objects and how they could possibly become part of someone's personal history.

While I believe there is something powerful about handmade, functional pottery, I began asking myself, what does this mean? Why am I doing this? What am I trying to say? My ultimate transition in graduate school from pottery to sculptural work was based on my personal need to *say more*. Rather than making objects intended for use, I instead began using domestic objects as symbol, while incorporating text, pattern, material, and process to convey a larger message. One of the first pieces I made with this idea in mind was *Mother's Daughter* (Fig. 5), which I made in March of 2013. This piece was inspired by an investigation of my own personal struggles in conjunction with the setting in which these events took place. This piece was also based on my curiosity of how my location and background have formulated my interest in investigating the social construction of gender and my lack of ability to identify with the stereotypical "feminine role", specifically as wife, mother, and primary caretaker of the home.



Floral Wallpaper, Mirror, and Shower Curtain from Childhood Home (Fig. 4)



*Mother's Daughter* (detail), Porcelain, Glaze, Luster, Wallpaper on Panel, 2013 (Fig. 5)

The objects, colors, and patterns that I chose reflected my mother's decorative aesthetic (Fig. 4). For example, the pattern shift between the wallpaper and the mirrors in *Mother's Daughter* (Fig. 5) was intended to present a narrative of a single domestic space over a period of time. The hand-written text on each mirror was extracted from my personal journals. The excerpts, phrases, or lines suggested ongoing themes or struggles. While some phrases were overt, such as "*Second Best*" speak of specific feelings of insecurity, other passages allowed for ambiguity and interpretation. My interest in the utilization of feminine patterning and materials derived from my desire to reflect on this culture while employing its aesthetic language.

While I believe that reflecting on my own experience is crucial to get at the heart of my interest in commenting on domestic culture, I also feel that looking beyond my own personal experiences and opinions is necessary to understand the history of the separation between the public and private spheres in the United States.

### **3. The Domestic Object as Symbol:**

*“The emphasis on women’s artistic creativity served as an antidote to the failure of the public at large to acknowledge the importance of cleaning, cooking, and housework.”<sup>5</sup>*

Where did it come from and what does it mean? In our modern times, we continuously recreate objects and aesthetics from a time that came before us; however, we rarely consider the historical content of these objects. In terms of my thesis work, one of my ultimate goals was to create an awareness of this history, while employing aesthetic values that elevate the original object, while allowing the content of the object to remain. A functional object, such as a bread pan or Pyrex dish is already loaded with content. We associate these specific objects with the function and a past time period, but how does this content change when taken out of context?

First, in my opinion, it is crucial to understand why these objects were originally produced. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, the idea of “home” was not separate from “occupation.” The home was a singular unit and the term “housewife” did not exist because both males and females contributed equally to the sustainability of the home. With the Industrial Revolution in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, men were leaving the home to go into the workforce, while women stayed at home to care for children and household duties, and thus separate spheres emerged. The objects I have chosen to reference are products of this separation and are intended to represent the women who existed within the “private realm” and their need to express themselves creativity in a society that did not believe women were capable of creative thought. According to Clifford Edward Clark Jr.,

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<sup>5</sup> Clifford Edward Clark Jr., *The American Family Home 1800-1960*, (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 107.

In a society where individual identity was increasingly tied to occupation and men were thought of in terms of the work they did, be it law, carpentry, sales, or medicine, women were caught between the middle-class image that stressed the gentility of being a housewife, a term that is itself revealing, and their desire to be given more credit for the work that they actually did at home.<sup>6</sup>

With the thought of women striving to form their own identity in mind, my intention for part of thesis work was to use objects, specifically bread pans (Fig. 6 & 7), which symbolized the desire that women had to express themselves creatively within the home. A major technological change in the nineteenth century that greatly affected the domestic realm was the invention of the stove. The cast-iron stove was affordable for most American households during this time, and allowed for multi-tasking, which contributed to a more varied menu.<sup>7</sup> Prior to the invention of the stove, most households made one-pot meals, such as stew with meat and vegetables. The stove led to the extinction of these kinds of meals and also to the production of cookbooks and the activity of baking.<sup>8</sup> There is reason to believe that baking was the nineteenth century housewife's particular pride. There were several reasons for this phenomenon. First, the housewife might reserve baking for time with herself, as opposed to meals that were prepared for her family. Second, bakery required more skill than other types of cooking, and could be seen as a source of self-esteem for women.<sup>9</sup>

For the piece in my thesis exhibition *Something To Aspire To* (Fig 6 & 7), my intention was to elevate the domestic object through the use of material, color, and quantity. I consciously chose porcelain as my medium because historically it is associated with wealth, and has connotations of preciousness and purity. My color

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<sup>6</sup> Clark, 107.

<sup>7</sup> Glenna Matthews, *Just A Housewife: The Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 12-14.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

choice, or lack thereof, was also a conscious decision, as white is a symbol of purity both historically and contemporarily speaking within our culture (e.g. wedding dress).

While historically the color white was associated with purity in terms of religious belief systems, interestingly, it did not necessarily refer to *women specifically*, until Queen Victoria's wedding in 1840.<sup>10</sup>

It was hard to keep clean, and cleanliness was becoming more valued as a sign of privilege...The queen herself, and the era she lived in, values the ideal of female sexual purity and associated this trait with the color white. In Western culture, there were only two kinds of women, good ones (mothers or virgins) and evil ones (whores)... At her wedding, the pure woman wore a white veil and gown to signify her virginity.<sup>11</sup>

While knowing the origin of how the color white began to symbolize femininity is disturbing in my opinion, it is nevertheless a symbol that still resonates within our culture today. With porcelain as the primary material in conjunction with the color white, it is my hope that the viewer is able to reflect upon these formal decisions, while applying them to their own experiences or knowledge of the subject matter.

My choice of mass-producing the bread pans and baking dishes speaks to the influence that consumption and consumerism has on our society as a whole. The original objects were, at one point, mass-produced and I wanted to highlight this aspect. Women were also the target audience for selling domestic objects because they were advertised as tools that could potentially make domestic tasks easier for the average "housewife". Historians have suggested that the substitution of manufactured goods for homemade goods eased the burden of women's work. In other words, it was easier to purchase materials rather than having to make them by hand. Industrialization made

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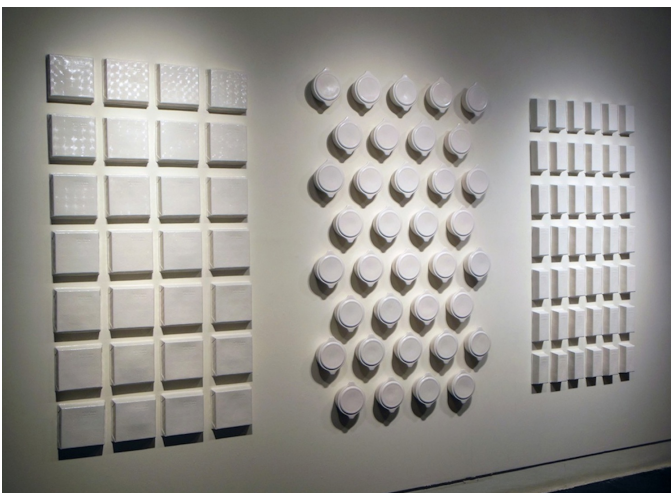
<sup>10</sup> Chrys Ingraham, *White Weddings: Romancing Heterosexuality in Popular Culture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2008), 59-60.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.



some facets of women's lives easier. She did not have to physically exhaust herself as much to maintain an adequate home for her family.<sup>12</sup>

From my standpoint, the bread pans had an industrial feel to them; originally made from metal with hard edges. These qualities can stereotypically be associated with masculinity, in comparison to soft, rounded edges. I found this to be ironic since they were made for women, but probably designed and manufactured by men. While I was making the piece, *Something To Aspire To* (Fig. 6 & 7), I almost felt like I was emulating the masculine role by recreating these objects using the slip-casting method, which is commonly associated with mass-production rather than the handmade object.



*Something To Aspire To*, Porcelain and Glaze, 2014 (Fig. 6)



*Something To Aspire To*, detail (Fig. 7)

In terms of visual artists, Miriam Shapiro, who is an American artist known for her paintings, prints, and sculpture during the Feminist Art Movement in the early to late 1970's, heavily influenced my interest in recontextualizing domestic objects. Specifically, Shapiro's collaborative pieces, *Anonymous Was a Woman* (Fig. 8 & 9), appealed to not

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<sup>12</sup> Ruth Schwartz-Cowen, *More Work For Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1983), 42-43.

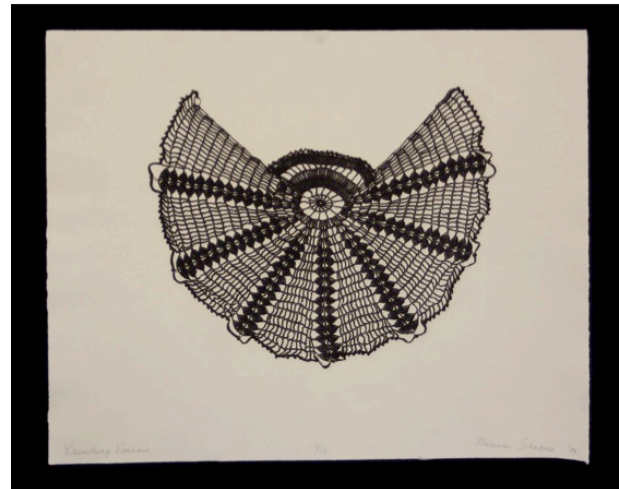


only my fascination with paradigms associated with the domestic realm, but also to my interest in the idea that “women’s work” could be seen and transformed into a conceptual art object. Like much of Shapiro’s work, her aim was to facilitate a dialogue about the art of women past and present.<sup>13</sup>

*Anonymous Was a Woman* was a collaborative art project that was a suite of etchings that she produced with a group of nine women art majors at the University of Oregon. Each print in the suite is an impression made from an untransformed doily that was placed in soft ground on a zinc plate, then etched and printed. Shapiro washed out the original doilies and preserved them for her collection of women’s needlework. The prints can therefore be seen as double collaborations, with both the women art students and with the anonymous women who made the doilies.<sup>14</sup>



Miriam Shapiro, *Anonymous Was a Woman II: Oval*, Etching, 1977 (Fig. 8)



Miriam Shapiro, *Anonymous Was a Woman III: Launching Earhart*, Etching, 1977 (Fig. 9)

While I do not view my thesis work as a collaborative effort between myself and the women who came before me, I do see *Something To Aspire To* (Fig 6 & 7) as transcending the original meaning of “bread pan” or “baking dish” by creating a symbol of the women who used them. Another piece that I believe employs a similar aesthetic

<sup>13</sup> Thalia Gouma-Peterson, *Miriam Shapiro: Shaping The Fragments of Art and Life*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1999), 83.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*



In terms of visual art, the subtlety of visual communication and the use of the everyday object as metaphor has the potential to be more powerful than an overt message. In my opinion, it allows the viewers to spend more time with the work and to contemplate their own everyday experiences and relate them to our dominant culture in conjunction with the inequality and biases that exist within it.

#### **4. The Domestic Illusion:**

From Heloise's *Tips For the Working Woman* (1966):

*“While your little ones don’t care a bit whether you’re held together by a safety pin or by new stitches, and hubby thinks your worn-out handbag is a good way to save money, your boss will wonder whether a gal who can’t keep herself in good shape can’t keep his office in order!”<sup>16</sup>*

Throughout the 1950's and 1960's, with the height of consumerism and the golden age of advertising, the domestic realm, in my opinion, was romanticized and women became the primary audience for certain products from stoves to aesthetically pleasing Pyrex dishes to flowery aprons. Conversely, this was also a time when more women were entering the workforce and they were expected to hold a job and to also be responsible for housework and childcare. In reference to this time period, during an interview conducted by Ruth Rosen, Carol Groneman, Professor of History at John Jay College of criminal justice, City University of New York stated,

Just beneath the surface, many real Americans, unlike their media counterparts, experienced anxiety and confusion. While the media painted a roseate portrait of suburban motherhood and the happy nuclear family, growing numbers of women actually entered the workforce, lesbians and gays cracked open the closet door as they created underground organizations, leftist activists brought progressive agenda into mainstream organizations, domestic discontent simmered, urban

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<sup>16</sup> Heloise, *Heloise's Tips For the Working Woman*, (London: Prentice Hall, 1966), 83.

poverty and racial segregation increased as whites began their flight to the suburbs, and the young quietly began crossing over an unbridgeable generational divide.<sup>17</sup>

These words speak to the significant influence the media has in shaping our social norms, social constructs, and familial ideologies. During the 1950's, "millions of people believed in ideals that poorly described their own experience."<sup>18</sup> In terms of visual culture, 1950's advertising predominantly portrayed women in the home, specifically the kitchen. These advertisements perpetuated the gender stereotype that women belong in the private sphere, cooking, cleaning, and taking care of children. As mentioned earlier, this is contrary to how life actually was, since more women were in the workforce at this time. Women were essentially expected to "do it all."

With this idea in mind, one of my goals for my thesis work was to create a piece that symbolized the domestic pressures women faced at that time while also having to work to help sustain her family financially. For the piece, *Just Leftovers* (Fig. 2 & 12), I chose to employ formal qualities that referenced the 1950's kitchen aesthetic (Fig 11). To avoid the use of trompe l'oeil, or simply recreating an exact replica of a domestic space, I intentionally chose specific objects, color, and materials to create what I see as an altered fragment of a kitchen from the past. The porcelain pieces were made using a mold that was taken from original 1950's and 1960's glass Pyrex containers (Fig. 1), which were used to store leftover food for reheating. Since women were coming home from their jobs and then expected to have a "hot meal" on the table, I see the left over Pyrex containers as a symbol of her struggle to maintain her traditional feminine role as wife and mother while simultaneously juggling her other life in the public sphere. The

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<sup>17</sup> Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How The Modern Woman's Movement Changed America*, (New York: Penguin Group, 2006), 8.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

title, *Just Leftovers* is intended to be ironic, as to the working woman, the reheated dinner was not only part of her struggle to multi-task, but also an attempt to sustain the societal expectation that a woman's identity was primarily placed on her abilities as a wife and mother.



1950's Kitchen (Fig. 11)



*Just Leftovers*, Porcelain, Wood, Linoleum, Found Table, 2014 (Fig 12)

Although this juggling act was a physical struggle, it was an internal one as well. The discontent women felt within the home applied to both the working woman and the “housewife.” One of the most predominate pieces of literature that articulated this internal struggle was Betty Friedan's, *The Feminine Mystique*.<sup>19</sup> Betty Friedan was a “housewife and former labor union journalist who published the results of interviews she had conducted with other women who had been educated at Smith College.”<sup>20</sup> With that being said, it is crucial to acknowledge that the experiences Friedan was describing specifically spoke to the white, educated, middle-class women's experience. Thus, her

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<sup>19</sup> Friedan, 1-27.

<sup>20</sup> Rosen, 4.

writing should not be viewed as a blanket interpretation of *all women* because it did not acknowledge multi-cultural women's experiences, or the experiences of women of lower socio-economic status.

Friedan described the middle-class housewife's internal struggle as "The Problem That Has No Name."<sup>21</sup> Friedan stated, "The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American woman. It was a strange sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone."<sup>22</sup> Throughout the piece, Friedan used individual examples of women who were struggling with their feminine role and their lack of having a personal identity within this role. One woman stated, "I begin to feel I have no personality. I'm a server of food and putter-on of pants and a bedmaker, somebody who can be called on when you want something. But who am I?"<sup>23</sup>

I am fascinated by the phenomenon that women were striving to find their own identity within the domestic realm, and their struggle to identify with the feminine role. Although in my personal experience I have not had to deal with these issues up to this point in my life, I wanted to pay reverence to the women who have, while potentially informing the viewer of the issues women have faced in dealing with constructed gender roles. Since I could not personally speak to this experience, I chose to use Sylvia Plath's poetry in conjunction with materials and processes stereotypically associated with femininity and "women's work," such as fabric and embroidery. While I have not had the experience of being a wife and mother, I have had issues with the societal

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<sup>21</sup> Friedan, 11.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Friedan, 17.

expectations that women face today. Contemporarily speaking, I would argue that women are still expected to want marriage and children, and if they are not interested in that, they may be seen as unfulfilled from an outsider perspective. I believe this has played into my desire to visually articulate the angst within the domestic realm that women have felt in the past, and how it still resonates today.

Sylvia's Plath's poetry is known for its "confessional" nature, and it appealed to me because of its honesty and autobiographical approach to writing. Since in the past I have used my own journalistic writing as a way to express internal struggles, I could relate to general feelings of angst that Plath revealed in her writing. Interestingly, Plath's writing also reflected the socially constructed feminine role. Marsha Bryant, a Professor of English at the University of Florida, whose research focuses on poetry's relationship to visual culture, suggested, "rhetoric, images, and mythologies of American advertising prove as crucial as psychological contexts in understanding Plath's construction of domesticity"<sup>24</sup> Bryant also argued, "the women in Plath's poems occupy the ambiguous position of housewife-consumer."<sup>25</sup>

For the piece in my thesis exhibition, *Viciousness In The Kitchen* (Fig. 13 & 14), I chose Plath's poem "Lesbos"<sup>26</sup> (full text p. 28) because it personified the angst she felt within the domestic space, specifically the kitchen. In reference to "Lesbos", Martha Bryant suggested,

Plath's most famous volume, *Ariel*, mixes the magical properties and hyperbolic situations of advertising with her own brand of kitchen craziness. From the

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<sup>24</sup> Marsha Bryant, "Plath, Domesticity, and The Art of Advertising", *College Literature*, Vol. 29, No. 3, Literature and the Visual Arts (Summer, 2002), 19. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25112656> (Accessed April 28, 2014).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Sylvia Plath, "Lesbos" (1962), "Poetry Analysis/Discussion", *Sylvia Plath Forum*. <http://www.sylviaplathforum.com/lesbos.html> (Accessed March 2, 2014)

hissing potatoes in “Lesbos” to the mutating thumb in “Cut,” Plath’s volatile domestic scenes were as attuned to American consumer culture as they were to her disintegrating relationship with [husband] Ted Hughes. Like ads, these poems give the sense that the housewife in her kitchen is never really alone.<sup>27</sup>

I am intrigued by Bryant’s idea of Sylvia Plath’s “own brand of kitchen craziness” because it is in line with my opinion that consumer culture shapes our societal norms, but it also suggested that Plath used consumerism and references to domestic imagery to recontextualize the domestic realm. Her poetry did not romanticize her role as a wife, but instead opened the floodgates for a critique of domestic life. As a society, we are so influenced by consumer products that at times, we neglect to realize it. When reading “Lesbos,” my mind almost immediately went to “café curtains,” which were what I ultimately used for the piece, *Viciousness In The Kitchen* (Fig. 13 & 14), because of its association with the stereotypical kitchen. Additionally, I chose to use café curtains because I intended the viewer to perceive them as a metaphor for the ability to keep the negative aspects of domestic life private by keeping the curtains closed to avoid an “outsider looking in.”

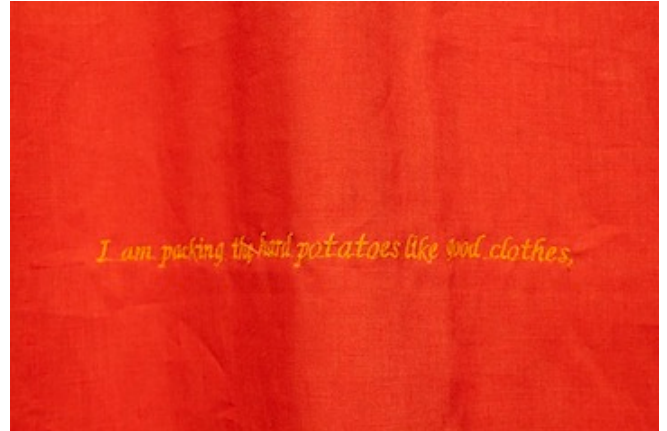
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<sup>27</sup> Bryant, 21.





*Viciousness In The Kitchen* (Panel 1), Cotton, Embroidery, Curtain Rod, 2014 (Fig. 13)



*Viciousness In The Kitchen* (Panel 2, detail), Linen, Embroidery, Curtain Rod, 2014 (Fig.14)

Tracey Emin is a primary example, in terms of contemporary artists, who incorporated techniques associated with “women’s work” in conjunction with feelings of angst and dissatisfaction. With her piece, *I Do Not Expect* (Fig. 15), Emin utilized appliqué with quilting techniques to express the honest portrayal of her life, which is contrary to the feminine ideal. I am attracted to the duality between what is thought of as feminine or women’s work and the blatant contradiction of what is expected from women in society. For example, part of the piece states, “I do not expect to be a mother, but I do expect to die alone.” In our contemporary society, we put great emphasis on getting married and having children. It is the norm and the ideal and Emin challenges this ideal.

Emin’s visual vocabulary—even her habitual use of feminist mediums and tropes—seems to speak a far more private message and vulnerable message. For much of her early career, she created, compiled, and assembled out the detritus of a life falling apart. But through fabric, dance, dirty bed, and the names of everyone she’s ever slept with, Emin fused the personal with the material, the fragile zone of impact between inner and outer, between honest confession and the manipulation of a stylized aesthetic.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Joan Collins, “Tracey Emin”, *Interview*, January 2014, 133.

I appreciate Emin's honesty in addition to the formal qualities she chose to employ with *I Do Not Expect* (Fig. 15). The colors and process Emin used are stereotypically feminine and formally pleasing at first glance, however, the content of the text used is surprisingly negative. This element of surprise is a quality that I strive to utilize within some of my own work.



Tracey Emin, *I Do Not Expect*,  
Appliqué, 2002

## 5. Remnants

*“As the little boy said when asked if he wanted to be a lawyer like his mother, ‘Oh no, that’s women’s work.’ Logic has nothing to do with oppression.”<sup>29</sup>*

I originally exhibited the piece, *Remnants* (Fig. 16 & 17), as a solo show at FrontierSpace<sup>30</sup>, an alternative gallery located in downtown Missoula, MT in November of 2013. My original statement for the exhibition stated,

*This presentation is part of an ongoing exploration of constructed gender norms in American society, specifically referring to expectations of beauty and hygiene that women, including myself, participate in on a daily basis. As part of my research, I allowed hair on my face, underarms, and genital area to grow for two weeks. I then had the hair professionally removed with wax.*

*These are the remnants.*

*Although I am rationally aware that as a human being I am biologically engineered to have body hair, I found it interesting that I was so relieved to have the hair removed. This led me to be curious about social norms that women succumb to, even when they are aware of the double standard. I hope this body of work will facilitate a dialogue regarding this issue.*



*Remnants*, Wax, Human Hair, Found Frames, 2013 (Fig. 16)



*Remnants*, detail (Fig. 17)

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<sup>29</sup> Gloria Steinem, “If Men Could Menstruate”, *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions*. NY: NAL, 1986. <http://haverford.edu/psych/ddavis/p109g/steinem.menstruate.html>

<sup>30</sup> FrontierSpace Gallery, Missoula, MT. <http://frontierspacemissoula.weebly.com/>

I view *Remnants* (Fig. 16 & 17) as having a performative aspect to it, however the viewer is only able to see the final product, hence its title. When I originally showed the piece at FrontierSpace, it was successful in that viewers began to talk about gender roles that exist within our contemporary society, not limited to only aspects of gender specific hygiene, but other issues such as norms associated with marriage and overall double standards that continue to exist today. With that being said, the show became more than just the “hair;” with viewer participation, in my opinion, it became a symbol of gender stereotypes and expectations that women experience on a daily basis. As one viewer stated, “after we left, my friend, (anonymous), and I couldn't talk about anything else. We had a little consciousness-raising session/rant!”<sup>31</sup>

In terms of display, the formal and conceptual qualities in the exhibition were conscious choices. The wax pieces were matted, framed, and displayed “salon style” to reference the domestic space in which family portraits are usually hung. The viewer was initially able to make a reference to the display, as some of them recognized it as something they had seen in a family member’s or their own home. Once they realized this, the viewer then saw what the wax pieces were, and were able to formulate their own opinion based on their own experiences or lack thereof.

In terms of contemporary art, Janine Antoni has been a significant influence, conceptually speaking, with this type of work. In her piece, *Butterfly Kisses* (Fig. 18),

Antoni uses Covergirl Thick Lash Mascara on her eyelashes as a means of imitation. To create this piece, Antoni repeatedly painted over her eyelashes with the mascara and fluttered them onto the paper. Both *Loving Care* and *Butterfly Kisses* utilize cosmetic body parts, such as hair and eyelashes, and create expressive and conceptual works of art. Overall, Antoni’s physicality is the strongest technical element. *Loving Care* exhibits her physical ability in terms of

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<sup>31</sup> Anonymous Comment, *Sarah Tancred: A Solo Exhibition*, FrontierSpace Gallery, November 1, 2014.

endurance, posture, and subordination. She performs in a vulnerable position, inferior to her audience, immersing herself in her design, which ultimately embodies her released inhibitions. Similarly, *Butterfly Kisses* attests to Antoni's rigorous nature, and physical intimacy with her creation.<sup>32</sup>

Although Antoni created this piece privately, within the final product, the rigorous process is apparent. The viewer is then able to contemplate the final product while contemplating the process in which the piece was created. For my piece, *Remnants* (Fig 16 & 17), my hope is that the viewer is able to recognize the initial process in conjunction with the context in which the final piece was displayed.



Janine Antoni, *Butterfly Kisses*, Covergirl thick lash mascara on paper. Institute of Contemporary Art, Cambridge, MA, 1996-999 (Fig. 18)

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<sup>32</sup> Jennifer Bernier, "*Prompt*: Further develop a previous exercise by integrating a work or group of works you see at the I.C.A.", *Art: an Inspiration that Contributes to Human Development*, [https://bu.digication.com/art\\_an\\_inspiration\\_that\\_contributes\\_to\\_human\\_development/Technical\\_and\\_Conceptual\\_Elements](https://bu.digication.com/art_an_inspiration_that_contributes_to_human_development/Technical_and_Conceptual_Elements) (Accessed April 28, 2014).

## 6. Conclusion:

*“...we indicate a crossroads where the past and present meet in order to mark out trajectories for future feminist praxis”<sup>33</sup>*

To articulate my stance, I believe that women should have the freedom to have agency over their own lives, whether it is businesswoman, wife, educator, mother, etc. I also believe that she should have the freedom to be aware of her choices, and conscious of the history behind them. Generally speaking, women’s history has been a history voided from textbooks, literature, visual art, etc. It is my ultimate goal to use visual culture to create an awareness of this lost history, while communicating how our society has constructed gender norms throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and how these norms and expectations continue to exist and are perpetuated today. My personal trajectory, in terms of not only visual art but in my personal belief systems, is one that is inclusive, accessible, and has the overall desire to *know the truth*.

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<sup>33</sup> Stacey Gillis, Gillian Howie, and Rebecca Munford, introduction to *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), xxxi.



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Sylvia Plath, "Lesbos" (1962)

Viciousness in the kitchen!  
The potatoes hiss.  
It is all Hollywood, windowless,  
The fluorescent light wincing on and off like a terrible migraine,  
Coy paper strips for doors  
Stage curtains, a widow's frizz.  
And I, love, am a pathological liar,  
And my child look at her, face down on the floor,  
Little unstrung puppet, kicking to disappear  
Why she is schizophrenic,  
Her face is red and white, a panic,  
You have stuck her kittens outside your window  
In a sort of cement well  
Where they crap and puke and cry and she can't hear.  
You say you can't stand her,  
The bastard's a girl.  
You who have blown your tubes like a bad radio  
Clear of voices and history, the staticky  
Noise of the new.  
You say I should drown the kittens. Their smell!  
You say I should drown my girl.  
She'll cut her throat at ten if she's mad at two.  
The baby smiles, fat snail,  
From the polished lozenges of orange linoleum.  
You could eat him. He's a boy.  
You say your husband is just no good to you.  
His Jew-Mama guards his sweet sex like a pearl.  
You have one baby, I have two.  
I should sit on a rock off Cornwall and comb my hair.  
I should wear tiger pants, I should have an affair.  
We should meet in another life, we should meet in air,  
Me and you.

Meanwhile there's a stink of fat and baby crap.  
I'm doped and thick from my last sleeping pill.  
The smog of cooking, the smog of hell  
Floats our heads, two venomous opposites,  
Our bones, our hair.  
I call you Orphan, orphan. You are ill.  
The sun gives you ulcers, the wind gives you T.B.  
Once you were beautiful.  
In New York, in Hollywood, the men said: "Through?  
Gee baby, you are rare."  
You acted, acted for the thrill.  
The impotent husband slumps out for a coffee.  
I try to keep him in,  
An old pole for the lightning,  
The acid baths, the skyfuls off of you.  
He lumps it down the plastic cobbled hill,  
Flogged trolley. The sparks are blue.  
The blue sparks spill,  
Splitting like quartz into a million bits.

O jewel! O valuable!  
That night the moon  
Dragged its blood bag, sick  
Animal  
Up over the harbor lights.  
And then grew normal,  
Hard and apart and white.  
The scale-sheen on the sand scared me to death.  
We kept picking up handfuls, loving it,  
Working it like dough, a mulatto body,  
The silk grits.  
A dog picked up your doggy husband. He went on.

Now I am silent, hate  
Up to my neck,  
Thick, thick.  
I do not speak.  
I am packing the hard potatoes like good clothes,  
I am packing the babies,  
I am packing the sick cats.  
O vase of acid,  
It is love you are full of. You know who you hate.  
He is hugging his ball and chain down by the gate  
That opens to the sea  
Where it drives in, white and black,  
Then spews it back.  
Every day you fill him with soul-stuff, like a pitcher.  
You are so exhausted.  
Your voice my ear-ring,  
Flapping and sucking, blood-loving bat.  
That is that. That is that.  
You peer from the door,  
Sad hag. "Every woman's a whore.  
I can't communicate."

I see your cute decor  
Close on you like the fist of a baby  
Or an anemone, that sea  
Sweetheart, that kleptomaniac.  
I am still raw.  
I say I may be back.  
You know what lies are for.

Even in your Zen heaven we shan't meet.