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# Greetings from...

Casey Mae Schachner

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*Greetings from...*

By

CASEY MAE SCHACHNER

Bachelor of Fine Arts, Baylor University, Waco, Texas, 2010

Thesis

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts  
The University of Montana  
Missoula, MT  
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Approved by:

Scott Whittenburg, Dean of The Graduate School

Graduate School

Professor Cathryn Mallory, Chair  
*Fine Art*

Associate Professor Trey Hill  
*Fine Art*

Professor Valerie Hedquist  
*Art History and Criticism*

Professor Alessia Carpoca  
*Theatre, Head of Design & Technology*

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***Greetings from...***

Chairperson: Cathryn Mallory

***Greetings from...*** is a reflection of my roots in the tropical vacationland of Florida, a place for which I feel both nostalgic and conflicted. Growing up in southern tourist destinations, I was confronted daily with the extreme contrasts of living in paradise. In my artwork, I am translating the cacophony of Florida through the lens of materiality. By re-configuring commodified objects of the tourism industry, the sculptural works in this show exhibit my consideration for the paradoxical relationships that exist between materials and place. Much like the avant-garde Surrealist Object, or the assemblage of found materials in provocative combinations that challenged reason, I am interested in drawing parallels between the irrational juxtaposition of objects and ideas. My research is relevant within the context of contemporary artists like Elizabeth Turk, Maurizio Cattelan, and Tara Donovan who are creating politically and socially engaged art, critically exploring concepts of materiality, and reinterpreting traditional craft techniques and processes. ***Greetings from...*** explores the realities and misperceptions we all associate with the Sunshine State, and in doing so, has allowed me to dig deeper into my personal history with a place.

This exhibition is dedicated in memory of my father Steven Wright

*“It’s their world, we’re just living in it.”*

## **Acknowledgments**

Several people played an important role in the accomplishment of this body of work, thesis paper and my collective experience at the University of Montana School of Art. I would like to thank my thesis committee chair Cathryn Mallory, for her guidance, positivity, and vision in the studio, gallery space, and as a friend. Many thanks to my committee members for their steady guidance through this past year both personally and professionally. Thank you to Trey Hill for his clear perspective and level head in helping me work through my ambitious ideas and specific details from start to finish. Thank you to Valerie Hedquist who generously guided me while I was figuring out where my artwork resided conceptually. Thank you to Alessia Carpoca for her critical feedback on installation layout and design. Most importantly, thank you for nurturing and appreciating my sense of humor that led to the creation of this exhibition.

I greatly appreciate the support over the past three years from my fellow MFA candidates and School of Art faculty. Additional thanks to the students and grads who assisted in the creation of *Wish You Were Here*, the installation which required long hours of gluing thousands of cocktail umbrellas together.

I would not be here today without the constant support of my immediate family. They were there for the first sculpture and have never swayed in their support of my artistic career. Finally, thank you to my husband Kurt Schachner for loving my creative spirit since day one. From being my ‘human forklift’ to showing up to every exhibition opening, public lecture, and install site, his unparalleled support has guided me through the past three years in graduate school and is a continual motivation in my creative pursuits.

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“Complimentary contradictions creating a strange new world where one might enjoy the natural warmth and sunshine, but the real focus remained on the artificial, the inauthentic.”

—Tracey J. Revels

*Sunshine Paradise: A History of Florida Tourism*

“Off the Florida Keys, there's a place called Kokomo  
That's where you want to go to get away from it all  
Bodies in the sand, tropical drink melting in your hand”

—The Beach Boys

*Kokomo song lyrics*

## Introduction

*Welcome to the Sunshine State.*

“The state of Florida does incite people. It gives them big ideas. They don’t exactly drift here: They come on purpose—maybe to start a new life, because Florida seems like a fresh start, or to reward themselves for having had a hardworking life, because Florida seems plush and bountiful, or because they have some new notions and plans, and Florida seems like the kind of place where you can try anything, the kind of place that for centuries has made entrepreneurs’ mouths water. It is moldable, reinventable. It has been added to, subtracted from, drained, ditched, paved, dredged, irrigated, cultivated, wrested from the wild, restored to the wild, flooded, platted, set on fire. Things are always being taken out of Florida or smuggled in. The flow in and out is so constant that exactly what the state consists of is different from day to day. It is a collision of things you would never expect to find together in one place [...] Sometimes I think I’ve figured out some order in the universe, but then I find myself in Florida, swamped by incongruity and paradox, and I have to start all over again.”<sup>1</sup>

You always know when “Season” starts because you begin seeing the car shipments arriving. They come by the hundreds and thousands, tourists arriving from across the country to enjoy the balmy, tropical temperatures of south Florida winters. Some come to their second homes while others arrive just for a quick retreat in the salty air. I have lived across the Sunshine State for most of my life, born in central Florida, raised in south Florida, and even owned a business in northeast Florida. I’ve also moved quite a bit, from Texas to Vermont to Italy and most recently Montana. While nostalgia for my home state is strong, I often wrestle with the dichotomy of Florida’s identity. I find myself comparing each new place to Florida, no place quite as uniquely beautiful nor as bizarre.

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Orlean. *The Orchid Thief*. Ballantine Publishing Group, New York, 1998



The history of Florida is quite an interesting one. It is one of the only states in which the most important crop that sustains the state itself is not a fruit or vegetable grown, but rather the tourism. Growing up in this leisure paradise, I observed certain social hierarchies and always found it interesting that tourism had a way of leveling the playing field. From the elite Palm Beach vacationer to the Disney World tourist, visitors' expectations of their visit fit within a certain stereotype unique to Florida. Alligators in the swamps, bringing home a shell as a souvenir, airboat rides in the Everglades, catching a sunset at happy hour. Each image as iconic as the next yet shallow interpretations of the reality of Florida living.

### **Background (personal)**

Growing up, my family had a very intimate relationship with tourism as my father was a golf course superintendent in a number of coastal tourist communities in Florida and South Carolina. As a greenskeeper, the grass is always greener, faster, smoother, more beautiful than the other golf courses. Or at least that's the goal. Appearance of the course and health of the grass is of utmost importance.



(fig. 1) My father Steven Wright working on the golf course

Working in the tourism industry, you never

take trips from November to April because that's the busy season for tourists. You do not often visit or play the golf courses your family member works at, except occasionally in the evenings after the final player is off the course. However, a sunset on a quiet golf course is a luxury not many experience or appreciate in their lifetimes.

These experiences are hyper-specific to my childhood but are an interesting gateway into the lens of tourism, both as visitor and as visited. Florida locals, and really locals anywhere, have unique windows into a place. How much of it are they willing to share with the outside world, the tourists who sustain them, whom they love and yet love to hate? My dad always used to say,



(fig. 2) Tourist Season in South Florida  
(photo: I-Love-Delray-Beach.com)

“It’s their world, we’re just living in it”, referring to the droves of tourists his profession catered to every season. It’s a bittersweet reality to be both servant to the industry yet aware that the industry itself is what sustains your passion. The dichotomy of this relationship is what interests me most in the culture surrounding tourism.

There are countless stories of this exact reality, some more extreme than the next and yet each incredibly interconnected and depend on the annual return of tourists.

### **Background (Artistic)**

I have chosen to focus the majority of my artistic efforts on labor intensive processes—like stone carving and glass casting—mediums that somewhat humorously go against the grain of our fast-paced culture. I am a sculptor. I think through materials. I experience the world through objects. Living in a time where this year’s technology is already an antique, I find relief in systematic, time-consuming processes like these whose sensuous appeal continues no matter what generation of iPhone we are on. Materiality and our interaction with it is what pushes my

work forward and helps me in terms of finding my place in the context of contemporary art practices.

I value labor and process in my work because at the simplest level, the time and effort reinforces my dedication and attentiveness to the labor of creating. The hours spent with a timeless, ancient material like marble, or with casting a woven, fragile glass piece, connects the relationship between intellectual and physical labor. The repetitive, rhythmic processes of stone carving and glass casting that have been employed historically; align me to a history of elite craftsmen and the greater context of art history.

Conceptually, my work has moved from broad, generic notions of identity to more recently a highly specific personal connection, as is the case in my thesis exhibition about the Sunshine State. I have found that stimulating viewers with hyper-specific ideas of identity and place creates a more cohesive dialogue and becomes ultimately more relatable. My personal connection with this exhibition also gives me the platform to speak more politically and socially through my artwork about this unique place of Florida because I know it on such an intimate, personal level.

### **Background (Historical)**

My artwork has been informed by movements and artists that have come before me—enlightening many of my conceptual decisions and choices of material. I consider the Surrealist objects created by artists like Salvador Dalí and Meret Oppenheim, as significant influences in the practice of assemblage and the consideration for how certain objects in combination can challenge the subconscious and reason associated with them. Salvador Dalí's *Lobster Telephone* is a paradigmatic example of a Surrealist object, made from the conjunction of items not

normally associated with each other, resulting in something both playful and menacing.<sup>2</sup> With *Object*, Meret Oppenheim has similarly transformed a domestic teacup and saucer by coating



(left, fig. 3) *Lobster Telephone*, Salvador Dalí, 1936 (photo: Tate)  
(right, fig. 4) *Object*, Meret Oppenheim, 1936 (photo: MoMa)



them in Chinese gazelle fur, creating something of a bizarre visual pun. Can you imagine drinking your morning coffee out of this teacup? As Surrealist artists began re-configuring objects to challenge the reason and purpose behind these mass-produced things, the objects themselves take on new, provocative associations.

American stone carver and 2010 MacArthur fellow, Elizabeth Turk has inspired me in how she challenges the limitations associated with the material of marble within the context of qualifiers like weight, mass, and



(fig. 5) *Ribbon No. 16*, Elizabeth Turk, 2008

history. I connected with her work specifically in some of my earlier experiments with stone carving because I wanted to explore the stereotypical associations with the austere material of

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<sup>2</sup> “Salvador Dalí, Lobster Telephone”, Tate Modern accessed March 22, 2019  
<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/dali-lobster-telephone-t03257>

marble. Turk's dedication to the craft and process of stone carving and the time, labor, and skill that is required to create her delicate carvings enhances the overall conceptual strength of her



(left, fig. 6) *Come Try It On*, Marble, 2017  
(right, fig. 7) detail of viewer in marble hair



sculptural work. My similar interest in labor and process is carried throughout my work beyond stone carving and has launched me into explorations in new medium.

The work of contemporary Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan also resonates with me through his humor and contradictions. In a recent interview, Cattelan said, "Laughter is a Trojan horse to enter into direct contact with the unconscious, strike the imagination and trigger visceral reactions."<sup>3</sup> I relate



(fig. 8) *L.O.V.E.*, Maurizio Cattelan, Marble, 2010  
(photo: Perrotin)

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/elena-cue/post\\_8959\\_b\\_6561968.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/elena-cue/post_8959_b_6561968.html)

to Cattelan's ability to use humor in his work as a gateway into the viewer's subconscious. Cattelan's piece *L.O.V.E*, a carved marble middle finger placed in the very public piazza Affari of Milan, centered directly in front of the Italian Stock Exchange, is just one example of Maurizio's politically-charged, often humorous work. Cattelan works in contradiction or double meaning, making work that points out one perspective, yet simultaneously leads us to reflect upon its opposite. In this regard, he tricks us into experiencing dual roles of our common humanity; judge and accused.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, American artist Tara Donovan has always intrigued me in her use of everyday, mass produced materials to create ephemeral installations. Her work is beautiful, yet feels contradictory in its beauty upon realization that in fact it is composed of things like cups and paper plates—a reflection of our disposable, throw away culture. She stresses the connection between forms, scale, and the use of mass-produced materials—to create stunning works of art.<sup>5</sup> Tara Donovan is successful in combining the notions of materiality, process, and socio-political themes throughout her work in a way that I also aim to do in my work.

## **Exhibition**

My exhibition *Greetings from...* was installed at the Gallery of Visual Arts at the University of Montana from March 14 - April 5, 2019. The title was borrowed from standard postcard greetings often sent back home after a vacation, except it is missing the most important part of this greeting which is its origins. My goal was to create a juxtaposition of lush materials in dialogue with one another to elicit an experience somewhere between artificial and reality. In the words of Lucy Lippard, "nothing is more Surrealist than tourism. Tourist and toured meet in

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.theartstory.org/artist-cattelan-maurizio.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Tara Donovan. ICA Films on Art, 2009, DVD.

unlikely combinations, and they surprise (overtake) each other [...] Tourism similarly juxtaposes and superimposes people coming both literally and figuratively ‘from different places’ to create a reality that is real to neither one.”<sup>6</sup> The exhibition neither promotes nor accepts tourism, but rather it feels like a consideration for what becomes more salient when you leave a place—whether that place is just a vacation or your home.



(top, fig. 9) *Wish You Were Here*, cocktail umbrellas, 2019  
(bottom, fig. 10) *Untitled*, Tara Donovan, styrofoam cups, 2003  
(photo: Alfafastudio.com)

### **Wish You Were Here**

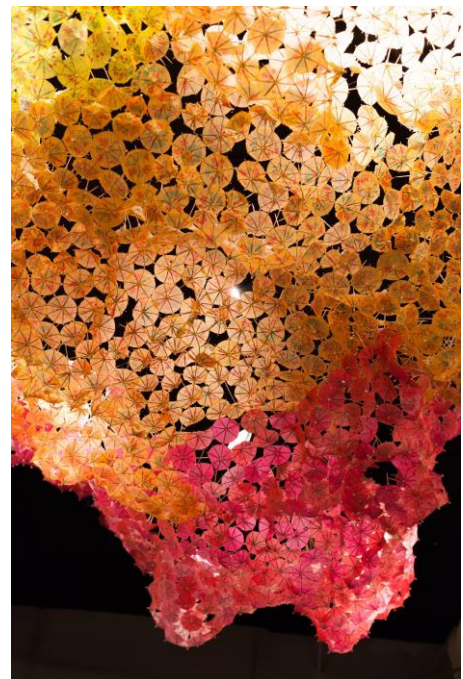
*Wish You Were Here* serves as an introduction to the exhibition, as the viewer enters the main entrance of the Gallery of Visual Arts they encounter a massive growth emerging from the ceiling. The colorful “cloud-like” installation *Wish You Were Here* was created from thousands of cocktail umbrellas strung together into one large form and suspended. The resulting effect is overwhelming. I was inspired by Tara Donovan’s work when creating this installation because of her use of everyday objects and transforming them into a massive installation that overtake a space—this motivated me to create a similar

<sup>6</sup> Lucy Lippard, *On the Beaten Track: Tourism, Art, and Place*. (New York: New Press, 1999), 34.

installation with a tourism-specific object. I chose cocktail umbrellas because they represent the commodification of tourism. The sole purpose of a cocktail umbrella is to decorate a cocktail—it is a paper umbrella devoid of function. Normally we see them in something fruity and often frozen, usually while on vacation or at least pretending to be. It is an item used to recreate and manifest the idea of “luxury vacation.” The cocktail umbrellas also represent the massive accumulation of nonsensical waste that is created on a daily basis in tourism-related industries. The short but sweet life of a cocktail umbrella usually results in brief use and immediate discard.

The title *Wish You Were Here*, refers to the another popular phrase often found on postcards sent from vacation destinations. A stereotypical piña colada and the ever present cocktail umbrella popping out of each drink. *Wish You Were Here*, a phrase on postcards we send back home to the ubiquitous Main Street, USA. The exotic heritage of the cocktail umbrella stems from appropriated island culture, referencing the exotic, tropical colors, drinks, and flavors associated with early tiki bars of Hawaii and the Caribbean.

(left, fig. 11) detail, *Wish You Were Here*  
(right, fig. 12) view from underneath

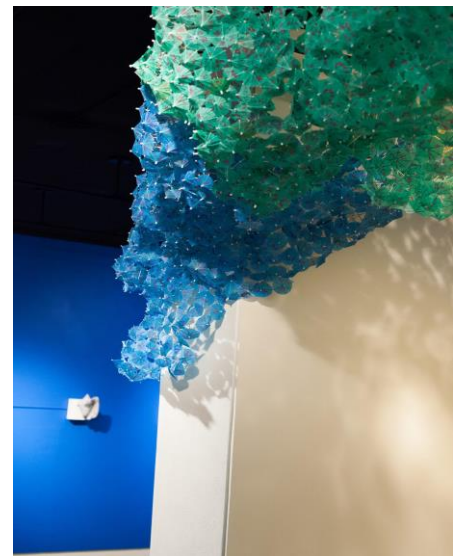




According to tiki drink historian Jeff Berry, “A bartender named Harry Yee at the Hilton Waikiki was the first person to actually put an umbrella in a cocktail.”<sup>7</sup> The umbrella in a cocktail seemed to represent a brief moment of escape, relax, or leisure and a false connection to the desired exotic experience. It is the creation of a fantasy, the transportation of the viewer to somewhere else that is warm, beautiful, exotic, that I wanted to evoke with this installation. The fact that these disposable paper products are umbrellas, strung together, and hung upside down correlates to the overall theme of the exhibition - turning things upside down. The typical purpose of an umbrella, to shade us from the sun, has been negated with their hanging composition. The umbrella’s relation to the sun is reiterated with the filtering of light through the blue, green, orange, yellow, and pink paper casting colorful shadows on the walls surrounding the mass of umbrellas. As the viewer moves through the hallway and witnesses the growth of this piece, the sheer quantity of cocktail umbrellas references the overindulgence of the tourism industry. This overabundant consumer product will help the viewer pause to consider the lasting mark of the production and disposal of decorations made simply to elicit a sense of vacation.

### **I Hear the Ocean**

As you turn the corner to enter the main gallery, you see a bright ‘bay blue’ wall, flanked with a pillar on either side, and mounted with four semi-identical conch shells at ear level. The blue wall correlates to the blue in the cocktail umbrella installation, which at this point has wrapped itself



(fig. 13) detail of *Wish You Were Here* wrapping around the wall into the main gallery space

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.bonappetit.com/drinks/cocktails/article/cocktail-umbrella-history>

around the corner and into this new gallery space. In this gallery, I considered the aesthetics of exhibition design and how my decisions in color, layout, and spatial relationships can enhance the experience of the viewer moving through the space.

As the viewer walks closer to the wall, sound can be heard coming from each shell. Given the height of the shells on the wall, the viewer can actually put their ear right up to each one, as if to hear the ocean, but in reality begin to hear a variety of ambient sounds. This series, called *I Hear the Ocean* is a lot about contradictions. Shells are a popular souvenir from Florida and most beach-themed vacation spots. These shells are made to look austere in a marbled



(left, fig. 14) *I Hear the Ocean Series*, Cast Resin  
(right, fig. 15) detail, *I Hear the Ocean Series*

pattern, but are actually cast resin, a type of liquid plastic that when cured has the effect of polished stone. Here, I am using something fake to represent an authentic experience, a plastic conch shell that I cast and polished to a nonsensical level in order to mimic and suggest a real shell polished by the ocean. The marbleization is also a nod to my stone carving history as this is my first exhibition in graduate school in which I did not include a stone sculpture. The contradiction of the material of the shell and the sound coming out of it becomes a shared joke between myself, the object, and the viewer.

A fifth conch shell mounted on an opposing wall, near the show title, is mounted at the appropriate ADA guideline for wheelchair accessibility. In the last few years I have made a number of pieces that have either been installed in public spaces or were created with the intention to interact with the viewer and their body either through touch or in this case, sound. I wanted to incorporate a conch shell that was ADA accessible (and also could allow children to interact with the piece) because I see myself continuing to work in the public platform and this is a non-negotiable consideration for public access.

Each shell has a unique sound coming out of it, ironically none of the sounds are the ocean. Contrary to this assumption of 'hearing the ocean', the viewer will instead hear the sound of people playing in a pool at a Disney resort, the clatter of dishes and chatter in a noisy, beachfront restaurant, or the voice of a phone scam selling vacation timeshare packages. This series of shells is all about contradictions - the look of a highbrow object when actually it is lowbrow material, the look of a peaceful reminder of a relaxing vacation with the sounds of crashing waves when actually an annoying loop of the sounds one might actually hear while vacationing.

Ironically enough, the conch shells shape resembles that of an ear, which creates an interesting ear-to-ear experience when each viewer comes in contact. In addition to my material choices, the sound is also creating an effective juxtaposition in this piece. The calming sounds of the ocean are no longer the reality of the memory of our beach vacation. In fact, the reality of time spent at the ocean more closely aligns with these ambient sounds than the actual crashing of ocean waves. The final irony of this piece is that although this souvenir of a beach vacation is so often associated with shells, it is illegal to take these type of shells, conch shells, from the coasts

of Florida anymore because they are an endangered species facing extinction if trade and overconsumption of the queen conch is not controlled.

### The Grass is Always Greener



(fig. 16) *The Grass is Always Greener*, Patio Carpet

My concept for *The Grass is Always Greener* is a play on the phrase which often refers to a notion of the others' situation seemingly more desirable than one's own. The work consists of eighteen feet of laser-cut patio carpet that folds and falls from the ceiling down to the floor. As the green carpet undulates down the wall, the laser-cut text becomes less and less legible until it eventually falls into a pile on the floor. The legible text can be found in three categories often associated with Florida— environmental, tourism, and commodity. Examples of some words used in this piece are climate change, rising sea levels, hurricanes, snowbirds, dolphins, tourism, vacation, sold, condominiums. The list of contradictory word associations trickles down the wall ending with the words “Sunburnt” and “Happy Hour”.

The draped plastic hangs approximately one foot out from the wall, allowing the shadows of each word to have a dramatic duplicit effect on the wall behind the piece. The cast shadow is in a sense ominous, as it is reinforcing the ugly words that are so beautifully manufactured up front. The mechanics of the laser-cutting process results in this piece being once removed from human interaction and the hand of the artist, an out of the box way of working for me. The “manufactured-ness” of this piece contributes to its overall conversation about artificiality and the fine line between what is real and what is fake.

I was inspired to create this piece from recent news articles pertaining to rising sea levels and climate change issues in Florida and legislation just passed in February 2019 to drill for oil in the Everglades National Park, home to a number of endangered species and Florida’s precious aquifer systems.<sup>8</sup> Similarly inspiring is Florida’s senator Rick Scott ordering Florida Department of Environmental Protection officials to “not use the term ‘climate change’ or ‘global warming’ in any official communications, emails, or reports.”<sup>9</sup> Just like the Sunshine State and the news surrounding it, the text in this installation appears to jumble, mix up, and become disoriented, and ultimately spirals out of control falling to the ground.



(fig. 17) detail, *The Grass is Always Greener*

The artificiality of the green patio carpet has natural associations with vacationing and a tactile quality that enhances the fakeness of this version of fake grass. From miniature golf courses to RV campers, it has a connection to leisurely activities. The superficial in unison with the mass-produced quality of the lasercut text and non-descript font removes any personality from the piece. It feels stark, manufactured, fake — yet the words it displays are very much real. The idiom *The Grass is Always Greener*, encompasses the human condition to want something

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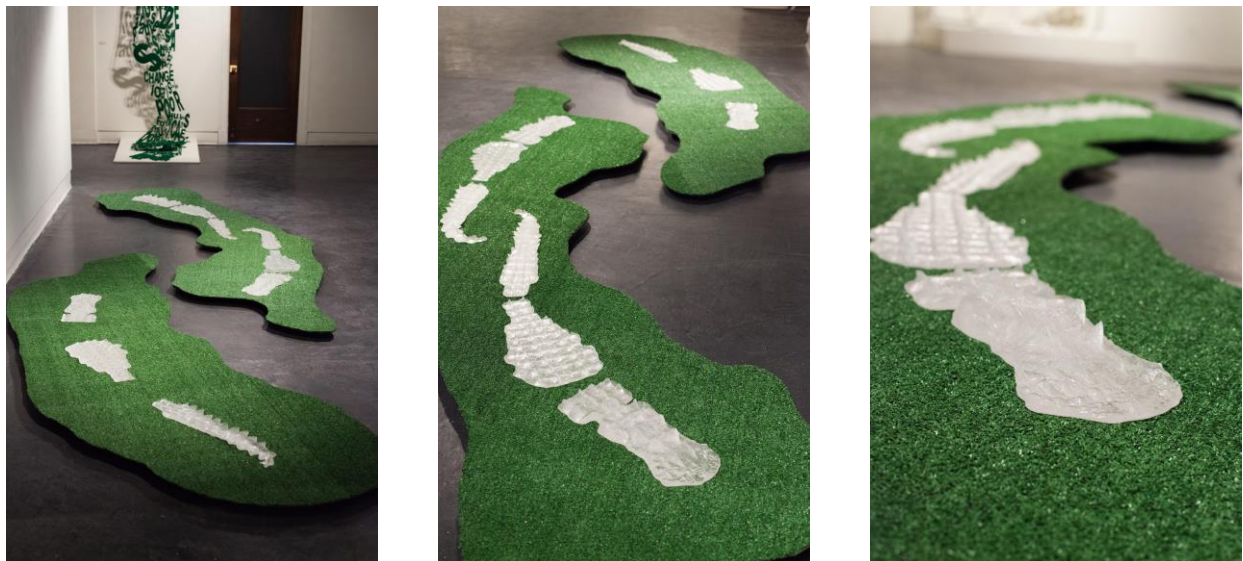
<sup>8</sup> <https://www.citylab.com/environment/2019/02/florida-everglades-oil-drilling-miami-water-supply/583126/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.floridadems.org/news/rick-scott-still-ignoring-realities-of-climate-change>

different than what we have, which appears extremely relevant in regards to issues of tourism and growth in Florida.

### **Par for the Course**

Perhaps the most personal piece I made for this exhibition is *Par for the Course*, an installation consisting of two fairway-shaped Astroturf platforms showcasing the nine individual



(left, fig. 18) *Par for the Course*, cast glass & Astroturf  
(center, fig. 19) detail, *Par for the Course*  
(right, fig. 20) detail, *Par for the Course*

glass castings of alligator skins. The crystal clear glass catches the light from above while its transparency allows you to see the green plastic of the Astroturf underneath. The glass appears to resemble ice, ghostly in color, and creating a sense of the gators actually disappearing.

The head, torso, and tail of each gator were made from a rubber mold of a real gator skin, using the lost wax process and casting into an open face plaster mold. It was trial and error to cast given their thicknesses ranging from 1 ½” - 2 ½”, which affects the annealing rate for each

piece. Casting glass is an art form previously foreign to me, however, my stone carving background lent itself well to the cold-working strategies of handling glass because both use similar diamond-coated tools and often water-powered cooling techniques. The material of glass is both fragile and transparent, thus creating these fragmented gators from a material associated with fragility contributes to the conceptual link of the frailty of the environment and wildlife.

An added layer of *Par for the Course* is its connection to my personal story. As I mentioned earlier, my father was a golf course superintendent. I grew up around and in the golf course industry my entire life and when my dad passed away very unexpectedly this past fall 2018, I knew I wanted to make a piece acknowledging him and his tremendous career. The beauty of this piece is it is incredibly personal to me, yet it is also relatable to viewers, because the image of an alligator sunbathing on a golf course is iconic to the Sunshine State. By placing the glass gators on low platforms, the piece creates the feeling of the viewer looking down on a geographical map. The color and shape of the platforms mimics the color and shape of nearby *The Grass is Always Greener*, both shapes suggestive of the elongated shape of the state of Florida. The aerial view of the gators and fairways almost enhances the text from *The Grass is Always Greener* as if the rising sea levels and climate change mentioned in the laser cut patio carpet are referenced in the fragmented, disappearing gators and shrinking land mass.

### **Leisureville**

The culmination of both this exhibition and my efforts from the past few years is the piece *Leisureville*, named after a retirement community in South Florida, which is two side-by-side lawn chairs made from kiln cast glass. Nearly exact replicas of an ordinary aluminum frame lawn chair made out of glass sit in the corner of the gallery space, glistening and gleaming as the

light casts their colorful shadows onto the platform below. The glass on one chair is a transparent green, transparent blue, and opaque white horizontal shapes. The second chair is nearly the same with a warmer color palette of amber and hunter green, again with similar white stripes woven horizontally through the piece. The glass has been cast into this woven formation through a multi-firing process of fusing and slumping. The woven glass is then placed on the actual refurbished aluminum frame of a lawn chair.

These sculptures are instantly recognizable and almost dismissed as normal fabric lawn chairs. Upon closer inspection, the viewer begins to realize these are not normal lawn chairs. In fact, it is not even possible to sit in these lawn chairs. Removing their function and placing them on a pedestal, I have elevated the ordinary object into something much more. There is a sense of immortalization or relic about these sculptures, taking a portable, expendable, cheap item like this chair, ignoring the turmoil time and decay have done to its webbed fabric, and dressing it up in shiny, yet fragile woven glass — old bones new skin.

The pieces are successful in their seriousness and

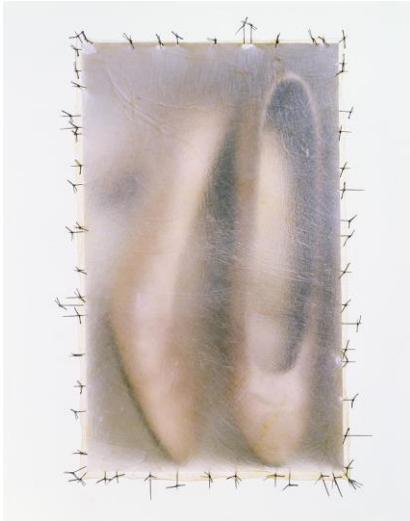


(left, fig. 21) *Leisureville*, Cast glass & Aluminum frame  
(right, fig. 22) detail, *Leisureville*





austerity. The chairs have been transformed from a disposable, impermanent object to a permanent artifact of what the chairs represent — which is the idolization of leisure.



(fig. 23) *Atrabiliarios*, Doris Salcedo, 1992/2004 (photo: MCA Chicago)

Furthermore, this piece examines the dichotomous relationship between absence and presence. The physical emptiness of the lawn chairs is tangible, it is indexical of who may have been sitting in these chairs once before. Inspired by the indexical work of Doris Salcedo's *Atrabiliarios*, in which she honors the thousands of victims of the Colombian civil war by using the actual shoes of these victims as indexical signs for the person now gone. Conceptually, the use of glass in this piece enhances the fragility of the physical presence of a chair but also the fragile notion of loss of someone close to you, absent yet present through a familiar impression in an old lawn chair.

## Conclusion

My artistic practice is measured by my ability to relate to the world through materials. My dedication to technique, craft, and labor in an almost nonsensical way contributes to the importance I place on process in all of my work. The glorious headspace created by a shared joke between artist, object, and viewer is a sign of success in my artwork. "Tourism is about desire— desire for change, but also a more sensuous desire to become intimate with the unfamiliar."<sup>10</sup> I consider Lucy Lippard's words seriously when I reflect on what this exhibition is about. This body of work represents what becomes more salient when you leave a place. No matter how

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<sup>10</sup> Lucy Lippard. *On the Beaten Track*, 50

overconsumed or oversaturated Florida is or may become, it is still home, it is still familiar. It is still a part of me. These works all explore in some way this notion of the unexpected, the element of surprise in something we think we already know. A souvenir shell. An alligator on a golf course. A cocktail umbrella. A lawn chair. Each is an icon of what Florida means to most of us, yet digging deeper into each piece another layer is revealed. Shells made of plastic with sound. Gators made of glass that have been fragmented. Words cut from patio carpet. Thousands of cocktail umbrellas that transform into a radiant, organic growth on the ceiling. Just as the Beach Boys song Kokomo transports the listener to the fictional island somewhere “off the Florida Keys”, the entire experience of the exhibition takes the viewer to a place that is neither concrete nor imaginary.

In the exhibition *Greetings from...* I am questioning if it is possible to separate the inauthentic versus the authentic experience within the context of the paradoxical environment of Florida. Ultimately, does the mimicked reality that a tourist experiences while on vacation actually become the truthful experience of a place? Does the local community experience the same or different reality when they interact with tourists and tourism? I think the answer is all experiences—authentic or otherwise—are genuine in their own right and when done correctly, tourism completely blurs the boundaries between real versus artificial.

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