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A New American Dream

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School
of Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts
Visual Arts

by
Allison Rae Johnson
December 2019

Accepted by:
Todd Anderson, Committee Co-Chair
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ABSTRACT

A New American Dream traverses' the hierarchical systems of power within the United States of America (USA). Survival and 'success' in the USA almost always requires assimilation into white culture, valuing patriarchy, capitalism and white supremacy (*PCWS*). Articulated through fine art prints, video and commercially produced postcards, my Master of Fine Arts Thesis artwork serves as multimedia instigation, compassing the viewer to reflect upon injustices of today and to reimagine a society of equality for tomorrow. Holding a queer liberatory politick with an artistic platform, my puissance lies within disrupting our ability to lucidly categorize and separate issues. The artwork challenges the acceptance of patriarchy, capitalism and white supremacy by reacquainting the viewer with pervasive cultural objects and ideals which all work to uphold an insidious operation of oppressive ideology. The artwork *does not* ask for equality within the dominating state of the United States of America because bona fide equality would reflect a non-hierarchical society, thus a society free of patriarchy, capitalism and white supremacy. My MFA Thesis artwork intends to help viewers reflect and locate themselves within the larger network of power called the United States of America. Utilizing a queer liberatory politick, the artwork asks us to reflect upon the past and reconsider the present in order to reshape the future.

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FOREWORD: *positionality*

Embracing a *queer¹ liberatory politick²*, my attitude towards the United States of America (USA) is extreme. To be frank, I do not want to live in a society that passively and actively reflects the hierarchy of a white capitalist patriarchy. I want to live in a queer world—a world of radical equality and freedom to create communities that can develop in more genuine ways. This is what motivates my artwork and life. As a *womxn³* who has experienced harassment, gender bias, exclusion, violence, and rape, I work from a personal space because it is political. While working to comprehend my own privilege I create artworks through a queer liberatory politick that critiques the *key matrix⁴* of the USA. My *whiteness⁵* allows me to work within the norms of the dominant culture in order to change it. As an artist, I feel it is my moral responsibility to use my visual platform to agitate and liberate. The artworks are political. If we are not intentionally disrupting the status quo, then we are maintaining it. This is my bias and charges.

***The footnotes are not universal definitions; rather they are key explanations of terms I use throughout my Thesis for the reader to consider.*

¹ **Queer:** being queer means that I do not fall within gender, sexual or social binaries. Instead, I try to act and feel in ways that are true to myself. Maybe, because I am queer, I can imagine a society and people that overcome the detrimental norms of the current reality. Being queer situates my moral compass in opposition to dominant norms of hierarchy.

² **Queer Liberatory politick:** a transformational politics against the assimilation into existing dominant institutes and normative social relationships (PCSW). It seeks to change values, definitions and laws which make institutions and relationships oppressive. Queer politics pushes against the existing norm in order to transform it. A “single oppression framework” inhibits queer politics; At the core of queer liberatory politics is dismantling the layers of oppressive power distribution, thus dismantling hierarchy in order to form equality. (Cohens 1997)

³ **Womxn:** anyone who does not conform to the (historical→ contemporary) system of white patriarchal hierarchy. A Womxn is anyone who supports other Womxn’s (peoples) equality and rights— this means a Womxn’s pronouns do not need to be her or she. Womxn are historically marginalized and they use their womxnhood as a form of resistance and inclusivity.

⁴ **Key Matrix:** a printmaking term referring to the block, plate, or stone that carries the major information in a print. Support matrices are generated from this key image. I use this term throughout my thesis as a metaphor for the foundation of our societal norms, bias, and legacy that perpetuate a nation which represents *Patriarchy, Capitalism, and White Supremacy*.

⁵ **White:** I have privilege. This means that I do not understand the hardships of people without this privilege. This does not mean I should be ignorant of my privilege; it means the opposite.

“We may have heard that the era of modern slavery is finished, is ‘history,’ that the genocide against tribal people and the expropriation of land held in trust by them are over and done with along with the last wagon-trains. But these claims are likeliest to come from those still benefiting from both. Such institutions and policies do not really die. they mutate. and we are living them still: they are the taproots of the economic order that has taken “democracy” as its alias. Our past is seeded in our present and is trying to become our future.”

—Adrienne Rich, *Arts of the Possible*, 2001

INTRODUCTION

“No unit of the social body can disentangle itself from existing conditions. Each is affected by all its influences. Some are more, some less, some are so much a part that they are not conscious. These last also suffer, but without knowing why. Vital education would show them.” (Anny Mali Hicks, VITAL ART.)

It is 2019, and *we*⁶ all need to *wake up*⁷. We are dominating ourselves in the process of dominating the earth and each other. (Bookchin, 1971) But how do we start to see differently? —How do we start to see critically? For society to change in vital ways we must imagine another reality that operates outside of the current dominator-dominated⁸ hierarchy/system. However, to imagine ourselves (and society) beyond hierarchy, we must first be aware of our reality within it (Ward 1973) — artwork can assist with this actualization. My MFA Thesis Artwork, consisting of a suite of prints, video, and postcards, communicates different ways to locate layers of hierarchy which ultimately enables individual and intersubjective contemplation about the world we create. The artwork is my shared introspection and examination of society and self, and it intends to help viewers reflect and locate themselves within the larger network of power called the United States of America (USA).

⁶**We:** My use of *we* is not a gesture to erase the diversity, individuality or intersectionality of anyone or any group of peoples. Rather, when I refer to, *we*, I am speaking along the lines of a critical and collective *we*. A *we* that stands for equality not within the current state of white culture, but a *we* that strives for equality through creating a new system that fosters morality, creativity, community and meaning.

⁷ **Wake Up:** White people need to *wake up*, while black culture has been practicing the term “*woke*” since the day their ancestors were enslaved into this country and culture. The term *woke* is often mis-appropriated by white culture.

⁸ **Dominator/dominated hierarchy:** a centralized system of mediation through hierarchy and authority. This system moves us away from the condition of a flourishing and meaningful life. Domination of nature stems from humans dominating humans. (Ward 1973) The state does not respect us → we do not respect ourselves → we do not respect the earth or our relationships. For example, Capitalism is only one of many forms of domination: the structure of capitalism partakes in a dominated/dominator relationship, with society divided between capitalists(dominators) and workers/environment (dominated), as just one example of a larger structure of hierarchy and appropriation. The dominator is plural—it exists in a variety of places: exploitation, white-other, man-womxn, strait-lgbtq+, Christian-other, rich-poor and so on. Unlike the Marxist singular issue of exploitation, domination is plastic. (Kropotkin 1892) That is, it does not reside in a singular place, rather it exists in a variety of arenas where authority occurs. Usually if one has this type of authority, they will corrupt it and use it to oppress others. Dismantling all these institutions power would be to decentralize and return power to the people. To evolve past this oppressive state, we must know each other as equal and capable of constructing meaningful lives. (Bookchin 1971)

The concepts within the artworks are beliefs entwined with my life. The written Thesis: *A New American Dream* will first explore the artwork's theoretical picture; second critique the USA's key matrix; and third peel back the layers of the artwork.

THE THEORETICAL PICTURE:

(P)atriarchy, (C)apitalism and (W)hite (S)upremacy

(P)atriarchy: /'pātrē, ārkē/ **noun.** a system of society or government in which men hold the power and women are largely excluded from it. (Oxford Dictionary)

(C)apitalism: “*Capitalism and democracy follow different logics: unequally distributed property rights on the one hand, equal civic and political rights on the other; profit oriented trade within capitalism in contrast to the search for the common good within democracy; debate, compromise and majority decision-making within democratic politics versus hierarchical decision-making by managers and capital owners. Capitalism is not democratic, democracy not capitalist. . . If these challenges are not met with democratic and economic reforms, democracy may slowly transform into an oligarchy, formally legitimized by general elections.*” (Wolfgang Merkel) Demonstrated by Figure 1. “*Value\$\$\$*”

(W)hite (S)upremacy: the belief that white people are superior to those of all other races, especially the black race, and should therefore dominate society. (Oxford Dictionary) Demonstrated by Figure 2. “*Whitewashing*”

It is vital for me to move my artwork beyond gender. I am queer — so is the artwork. Addressing the artwork through the specific lens of patriarchy permits the viewer to keep their blinders on. The artwork asks the viewer to take off their blinders and to use their peripherals to look around and *see* the larger picture. The larger picture illustrates the layers of hierarchy that fuse Patriarchy, Capitalism and White Supremacy (*PCWS*). Albeit, for some viewers gender might be the most straightforward entrance point and the most palatable layer of the artwork. Nonetheless, if we only focus on gender our minds might stop in a relatively comfortable position. The basic facts of inequality and power in the United States of America cannot be addressed in gender terms only, though we might want to do this, vis a vis Adrienne Rich. (Rich, 2001)

In reality, the birth, development, and life of the artwork comes from queer liberatory politick, a politick that resists the assimilation embedded in *PCWS* by “not simply opposition but an expression of the impulse to create the new, an expanding sense of what's ‘humanly possible.’”(Rich, 2001) This politick challenges hierarchy and authority in order to create space for liberation and equality, similar to communal anarchism⁹. Additionally, Cathy Cohens, professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago, writes: “At the intersection of oppression and resistance lie the radical potential of queerness to challenge and bring together all those deemed marginal and all those committed to liberators politics.”(Cohens, 1997) Holding a queer liberatory politick with an artistic platform, my puissance lies within disrupting our ability to lucidly categorize and separate issues as either *this or that . . . but not that*.

I am asking the viewer to move past their anticipated and accessible critiques and accept the artwork as queer. Consequently, more *meaningful* questions might arise. Asking questions leaves us with agency to address and move history; we create the future in what we do or what we fail to do. (Bookchin, 1973) These are my personal and artistic charges constituting my Master of Fine Arts Thesis Exhibition: *A New American Dream*. Through a queer liberatory politick the artworks make the viewers contemplate the pervasive and dominating *legacy*¹⁰ of *white ‘American’ culture*¹¹.

⁹ **Anarchism:** “contrary to authority” believing the problem of society is that power is concentrated into the legacy of the state, religion and capitalism which perpetuates injustice. It is a way of life that works towards radical equality, which means everyone must understand everyone as capable of conceiving and constructing a meaningful life. From a space of radical equality and meaningful relationships, anarchism works to liberate everyone from the many dominant forces by nourishing the well-being of all. This realm of anarchism should NOT be mistaken with individualism.

¹⁰ **Legacy:** “*Legacy/Vainity*” (figure 6) inherited thought that hierarchical relationships are normal and healthy. We take up our position within these hierarchies, enforce them and pass them on. The legacy of our system exists because people with authority do not want to give it up and they pass that authority to their kin whether this be through whiteness, maleness, or money. Oppressive hierarchy exists because we do not see other ways of relating to each other. (Ward 1973)

¹¹ **White “American” Culture:** “*We may have heard that the era of modern slavery is finished, is ‘history,’ that the genocide against tribal people and the expropriation of land held in trust by them are over and done with along with the last wagon-trains. But these claims are likeliest to come from those still benefiting from both. Such institutions and policies do not really die. they mutate. and we are living them still: they are the taproots of the economic order that has taken “democracy” as its alias. Our past is seeded in our present and is trying to become our future.*” —Adrienne Rich, *Arts of the Possible*

THE KEY-MATRIX

*** I use the term **key-matrix** as a metaphor to “substrate” —that we exist like prints pulled from the Patriarchal, Capitalist, and White-Supremacist matrix that forms us, yet it does not have to determine us. This metaphor is optimistic because we have the ability to create a new key-matrix.*

It is imperative to look carefully at the ideal image engraved into the matrix of the USA and ask who created “the print” because the past is seeded in the present. Within the artwork’s breadth there is depth that unites and depicts the living legacy of *PCWS*. From that deliberation, the artwork starts to gain agency, thus interrogating the key-matrix that does not represent the peoples. Instead, the current key-matrix serves rich-white-male centric *America*¹²; the key-matrix metaphor suggests the dominating cultural attitudes towards ‘success’ and ‘values’ cannot simply shift but must fundamentally change.

Stating that the key-matrix of the USA must change promotes re-creation rather than reform. It means we must work to dismantle hierarchical legacy which is both internalized and reinforced. Legacy is the *bon à tirer*¹³, so to speak, the USA continues to *edition*¹⁴. The edition is a multi-layered *composite print*¹⁵ forming a perfect picture of *PCWS*. To be considered valuable a ‘successful’ print/person will assimilate and depict the ideals engraved¹⁶ into the key-matrix. Unfortunately, the current socio-economical key-matrix does not represent genuine values, morals, or care.

Luckily, artwork can help viewers gain agency because it has the potential to serve as a vital tool for reflection, education and re-imagination— the “vital education” Anny Mali Hicks (introduction quote) finds necessary to understand how all social bodies are affected by and suffer from existing conditions of society.

¹²*America* is emphasized because we refer to the USA as America-- a product of our cultural narcissism and ignorance. In reality, America encompasses Mexico, Canada, the USA and all of South America.

¹³*Bon à tirer*: (French, “good to pull”) The printed proof that serves as the visual standard for the rest of the edition.

¹⁴*Edition*: The total number of identical prints pulled, signed, and numbered by the artist.

¹⁵*Composite print*: multiple individual plates combining different techniques or images in the same print.

¹⁶*Engraving*: (1) Intaglio or relief process that incises lines with burins or gravers into metal or end-grain blocks. (2) The print made from such a plate or block.

Via prints, videos, and postcards the artwork exhibits nine *objects*¹⁷ representative of *PCWS* ideals and culture. I manifest a spectacle of these objects/ideals because, at times, the culture in question should be present in order to critique it. I have come to the realization that white ‘American’ culture needs to be confronted with, and held accountable for, its disturbing past and oppressive present because its current trajectory will destroy the future. The represented objects embody cultural conventions/values/legacies, or a key-matrix, I want to disrupt. Therefore, the artwork is about creating a space for dialogue, whether it be introspective or intersubjective, that could instigate contemplation about the key-matrix we either re-create or continue to edition. *A New American Dream* asks how we can achieve genuine and radical equality by confronting the viewer with the reality of inequality. The artwork wants us to ask: in what ways will we create a new key-matrix?

¹⁷*9 objects*: a twenty-dollar bill, a steak, boots, a “skin-toned” band-aid, pink/blue razors, pink/blue pacifiers, a vanity stool, an *American* flag swimsuit, and the declaration of independence

THE ARTWORK

"THE future will endeavor to extend its power through its own ideas of facts and appearances, however unfamiliar these may seem, rather than to be influenced by a past and submerged civilization with a spirit far removed from its own."--Henriette Fuerth

A New American Dream includes a suite of hand-pulled prints, videos, and postcards. These three modes of communication allow the body of artwork to ask questions within the intersecting space of *PCWS*. At first glance, the artworks seem to celebrate common ubiquitous objects and symbols. However, time spent with the artworks results in a shift from celebration to thoughtful examination, and onward to critique. The print pronouncing a "*New Declaration of Independence*" (figure 8) and the video, "*The Old American Dream*" (figure 10-13) are the most accessible entrance points for the viewer to engage in the necessary reflection accessing a concentric critique of hierarchy.

Each artwork presses the viewer to take time and contemplate the depth and layers of meaning associated with each object; they ask us to dig deeper and pick beyond the surface level. The many layers materialize the depth of care and research put into the artwork. The layers creating the nine prints and video serve as a visual clue to look and think *more* about the ideals embedded in each object/white culture. By surrounding each object in a blank purgatory of vacuous space, I hope to facilitate focused feeling and thought.

Borrowing from *trompe l'oeil*, the prints endeavor to make the subject matter come alive and crawl off the paper into the viewer's personal reflection. Utilizing fragmentation and repetition, the video prances into the viewers life. And adopting a populist attitude, the postcards are consumed as a bite-sized, articulate treat. That is, the audience can view, relate to and digest the artworks in a myriad of ways. The prints may reside inside a home and thus operate as a daily reminder of a larger topic. The video, when not viewed in a venue, exists on the world wide web asserting comedic flavor for critical reflection. The postcards, which are given out freely, pair visual and written languages to provoke re-thinking. In many ways the postcards act as an index card-sized cheat sheet about the larger body of

work. My research and experience with various forms of artistic communication (fine art prints, video, postcards) suggest that each has its own strengths.

Historically, prints have been the driving force of many movements and are central to aesthetic activism. The concept of the multiple has many roles: 1) it has a message; and 2) it takes art beyond the bourgeois¹⁸ and gives it to the people. Contemporaneously, video has changed the way we absorb culture, understand concepts and create our identity. It is a moving language that fabricates new connections between fields and disciplines. (Stam, 2000) Finally the postcards take inspiration from the populist mail art movement, growing beyond the institution of 'Gallery'. The roles of printmaking, video and postcards are central to the ethos of the work.

The suite of prints places a heavy concentration on technical thoroughness and processing, which most notably takes the form of layering printed papers. This process-minded approach to creating is the foundation on which subject matter and content unite. While each print represents the familiar (household items and patriotic paraphernalia) the robust layers of multiple printmaking processes make it difficult for non-experts to approach the work in a known way. The unification of techniques within the print exist to initiate questions regarding the very nature of the artwork: How did they make this? → Why did they make this? The artwork asks the viewers to contemplate the aesthetic by drawing them in, making them look closer and think deeper.

The prints demonstrate a robust skillset in order to ensue curiosity in the viewer. Regardless of the viewers bias, the prints will hold their attention allowing them to be open to the work. If the viewer contemplates the aesthetic qualities of the work, then the concepts start to leak into the picture. The material hints at the process, the process suggests the depth of care, and the depth of care is shared with

¹⁸ *Beyond the Boujee*: A stroll through art history would show that the bourgeois loves to dabble in art. From the pope to the king and to Sotheby's today, art is often the mark of social status— a diamond hanging on the wall (or locked up in a closet gaining monetary value). Printmaking disrupted the precious singular art object by introducing reproduction. Finally, a form of art for the people. This said, prints often carry a political message to spread.

the viewer by rewarding them for looking. From further study of the prints a general art viewer will likely become more inquisitive because the prints are technically and materially unique. If the viewer starts to interpret a visual language, then they are more likely to reflect upon the conceptual nature of the artwork. Usually when people think there is a moment for re-thinking—spurring potential to bring new thoughts to life.

But for clarity, I wrote it all out and framed it as the “*New Declaration of Independence*” (figure 8) — an ode to Emma Goldman and womxn, while a wake-up call to the USA.

“She was seized by the few, stripped of her freedom, fenced in, a prey to those who were endowed with cunning and unscrupulous shrewdness. They, who had fought for independence from the British yoke, soon became dependent among themselves; dependent on possessions, on wealth, on power. Liberty escaped into the wilderness, and the old battle between the patrician and the plebeian broke out in the new world, with greater bitterness and vehemence.” —Emma Goldman, MOTHER EARTH, volume 1

The Prints

The monumentally scaled 5 foot by 4 foot “*New Declaration of Independence*” sets the quintessence for the rest of the artworks to expand upon. In this work, the language of the Declaration of Independence was rewritten to destroy *PCWS*. By changing the wording of the Declaration of Independence subtly, a new message becomes bold. I replace ‘man’ with Womxn spelt with an X as a form of inclusivity. Womxn is a newer cultural term which represents any oppressed/dominated peoples. Womxn supports livelihood, liberation and equality. This said, womxn can also be mxn. The print gives further transparency to the conceptual and physical layers, allowing the viewers to see the key-matrix of the USA as an opaque authentication of hierarchical ideals. “*The New Declaration of Independence*” bluntly details how asymmetrical power relations of *PCWS* are engraved into the key-matrix of the USA.

By changing who freedom is given to, and who is treated as a human being, from man¹⁹ to womxn²⁰ the artwork affirms its own relevance. If man were to change to womxn, we would have to fundamentally change as a society. This declaration makes clear who the original declaration was written for, who it was not written for, and how we live out the repercussions of that today. If it were rewritten by womxn what would our society look like? Who would have power? How would power look and how would power act? How would power be exercised differently than it is exercised today? The work articulates the reasons why the USA initially broke away from British rule and it directly connects these reasons to our contemporary lives. It makes us understand these issues are real. Overall, this piece primes us to critically digest the other Thesis artworks. It asks us what we are going to do about the key matrix— how should we recreate it?

Similarly, “*All American Swimsuit*” (figure 9) uses scale and craftswomxnship to disrupt the viewers of perception of *America* because she (the artwork) subverts her own stereotype through representing it queerly and monumentally. Nonetheless, the sheer scale, a torso 5 feet tall by 3 feet wide, of her undercuts the avenues of objectifying thought perpetrated by the male gaze; she disrupts the established norms of her given society.

She is naked, not nude. (Berger 1972) She looks down on man; he must avert his gaze and look up to her. She uses her abjection and monstrosity as a tool of empowerment. (Kristiva 1982) She does this because, as Pickens’s writes, “once monsters become monsters, they also have the power to reinforce and define the same social norms they are abjected from by specifying what society is inherently not.” (Picken 2015) She acts to disturb her cultural identity, system and order. She does not respect borders, positions nor rules and this is reinforced by the larger body of artwork.

¹⁹ **Man:** being authoritative hierarchy and dominator. It is our system of anti-black, anti-queer, anti-womxn, anti-earth. Man dominates the livelihood of others as a means to their end. Man does not understand that the means is also an end in itself. Man is immoral. Man can also be a woman if she internalizes this way of life.

²⁰ **Womxn:** being any oppressed/dominated peoples, including those who use their privilege to fight for any other womxn (dominated peoples), including the earth. Womxn supports livelihood. This said, womxn can also be mxn.

She (the print) is self-aware and she asks her viewers to be aware too . . .

To further isolate her subjecthood from her expected objecthood, she exists in isolation on a large sheet of white Somerset-rag paper. She places herself in a vacuous space (context) which encourages us to imagine or perhaps reimagine the culture she exists in. She represents the disruptive idea of monstrous womxn. Upon close inspection of the print one discovers the vastness of her depth and layers. The visual and conceptual details that create her rely heavily on process and materiality, which extend as a metaphor about identity. A more detailed description of the process and materials, which was utilized in all the printed artworks, follows:

“*All-American Swimsuit*” was created through a labor-intensive process involving digital photography and subsequent large-scale pigment printing, hand drawing, painting, photopolymer gravure printing (utilizing *á la popeé*²¹) with selective embossment, monotyping, and centuries old archival (i.e., reversible) *collé* techniques²². This dense process results in the layering of photomechanical and analogue imagery. The final object is, from a technical perspective, a sandwiching of unique visual languages. Conceptually the final object is packed from the surface level inward. I took much inspiration from Hannah Höch and Michalene Thomas while processing the ways to push an image to create new visual languages through fragmentation, collage, performativity and process-oriented art.

The print’s outward layer—the layer of visual information most exposed to the viewer—is hand printed on Gampi Silk Tissue Washi paper. This paper is made from silk and is singularly unique. It is thinner than newsprint, as transparent as wax paper, as strong as heavyweight cardstock, and as expensive as gold leaf. I arrived at the use of this unusual paper through much trial and error as well as

²¹ *á la popeé*: “with a doll” An intaglio inking technique allowing several colors to be put on the plate at once. (Leslie)

²² *Chine collé*: A technique for gluing smaller pieces of paper onto a print while you are printing it. Usually thin papers are attached to a heavier printing paper with this method. Historically used to tone areas in a print. (Leslie)

through testing different paper types including Mulberry and Hosho Washi papers as well as European rag papers. I found that Gampi Silk Tissue was ideally suited for the thesis prints due to the beauty of its surface as well as the perceived value it brought to the viewing experience. In many ways, this approach recalls many Renaissance artists' use of gold leaf or ultramarine blues—both highly prized art materials in their own eras and cultures. I found that, like those materials from days past, Gampi Silk Tissue readily elicits in viewers both a *je ne sais quoi* as well as a perception of economic value in the artworks themselves. The Gampi Silk Tissue is the visual and conceptual skin creating the outermost layers of all the fine art prints comprising of *A New American Dream*.

The thesis exhibition includes nine prints that use the same techniques and materials as stated above. "*All-American Swimsuit*" and "*The New Declaration of Independence*" are two of the nine prints. Placed in proximity to one another, "*but i love my body*" (figure 5) and "*All-American Swimsuit*" begin to engage in abject conversation. The pink and blue razors, titled "*but i love my body*" ask us why we shave and shape ourselves into an ideal image that supports *PCWS*. For some people, assimilation is their only way to secure their own safety, which is telling of a larger narrative. Through the depiction of violence, strength, care, aggression, subversion, abjection and comedy this art piece asks for more than a society of hierarchy and domination, the razors are asking for liberation.

The pink and blue pacifiers "*Freedom, Equality, Conditioning*" (figure 4) extend this conversation through a culturally symbolic suckling of an oppressive hierarchy. The current culture invests itself in an anti-queer mindset while capitalism reinforces it and profits from it. When we are conditioned to perform girl or boy from birth it makes simply being yourself difficult. It is difficult because growing up in a binary represses our ability to imagine a queer self/society outside of binaries. Similarly, we are conditioned from birth to assimilate into the norms of cis-hetero white capitalism because within those norms offer a space of 'freedom', 'equality' and 'security'. The work asks us, if, for centuries, we have been conditioned from birth, then how are we actually free? In what world can we be equal?

The question of freedom and equality within the confines of hierarchy and domination opens up the door for the other works. *“Piece of meat”* (figure 2) symbolizes domination at the crossroads of PCWS. It bluntly uses itself to show how our culture readily dominates other humans, other animals and the environment. A few examples include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. *We refer to and view womxn, or any subordinate group, as a piece of meat which reinforces misogyny, racism, hierarchy. Our culture perpetuates the domination of other human beings.*

2. *We have the audacity to think that the mass consumption of meat is ethical. It is not. Rather, it is horrific on all fronts. Our culture perpetuates the domination of other animals.*

3. *We are, as if we are outside or above it, which we are not, destroying the very earth that gives us and everything else life. Our culture perpetuates the domination of the earth, thus perpetuating the domination of itself.*

We take all these things as the “natural” order and the result is the insidious operation of ideology establishing and maintaining an unjust power matrix. *“Piece of meat”* is conscious of the encompassing dialogue and uses it to further extend the conversation about the interlocking systems of power. In its simplest reading the artwork questions the morality of our culture.

The print that depicts a pair of cowboy boots, titled *“Bootstrap Myth”* (figure 7), directly confronts the immoral ignorance of white culture. The bootstrap myth is the thought that in a “free” society/market one can pull themselves out of poverty by their own bootstraps. This is a myth predicated on a belief that all people have boots: if one works hard enough, assumes personal responsibility and has a strong moral grounding, then the individual can flourish by their own unaided efforts. It is ‘the only thing that is stopping you is you’ mentality and it places value on money. This myth has been central to the “American Dream” ideology and more generally rugged American individualism/neo-liberalism, which has been used in the USA as an excuse for oppression, industrial murder and genocide.

The bootstrap myth stops people from recognizing that the state is fundamentally biased and oppressive. Cathy Cohen, writes, “strategies built upon the possibility of incorporation and assimilation are exposed as simply expanding and making accessible the status quo for more privileged members of marginal groups while the most vulnerable in our communities continue to be stigmatized and oppressed.” (Cohens 1997) The boots represent the myth of equal opportunity and freedom within the hierarchical system of capitalism and legacy gained through assimilation into patriarchal white supremacy. When viewed within the entirety of the *New American Dream*, the print is best described as an emphatic indictment of the bootstrap myth.

All elements the artworks use symbolism found in scale, color, layers and words. When combined, the work alludes to the problematic hierarchy and oppressive aspects of 21st century USA. The artworks give the viewer the tools—both conceptual and formal—to unpack messages, questions and calls to action. For example, the bandage print titled “*Whitewashing*” (figure 3) is a larger than average bandage, which suggests that it is covering a larger than average wound. Wounds this big are usually not just surface level. Additionally, the bandage is “skin-colored” which means white “skin-colored”. This big, white-skinned bandage has visible dimension and has a total of 9 layers literally whitewashing the darkest layer on the surface.

Placed next to Andrew Jackson’s \$20-dollar bill, “*Value\$\$\$*” (figure 1), the dialogue between “*Value\$\$\$*” and “*Whitewashing*” is intentional in that it epitomizes how the history and reality of the USA is an infected wound. This belief is emphasized in the video as opening scene depicts the white bandage slowly peeling away as the camera zooms in to enter the world it covers up. Nonetheless, history is taught through a whitewashed perspective championing *PCWS*.

“The way history is written will depend altogether on whatever purpose the writers have in view, and what they hope to achieve thereby. It will altogether depend upon the sincerity or lack thereof, upon the broad or narrow horizon of the historian. That which passes as history in our schools, or governmentally fabricated books on history, is a forgery, a misrepresentation of events.” —Emma Goldman, *MOTHER EARTH*, volume 1

The Video

Once the white bandage is ripped off, the viewer is given an aerial view of milky glacial water and freshly broken ice from Marjorie Glacier in Glacier Bay National Park, AK (August 2017). Breaking the ice, raw slabs of steak enter the scene and rapidly proliferate. The ice, meat and music all intensify—a reflection of the now (figure 10). The scene directly depicts how beef consumption is contributing massively to global heating. (Poore 2019) The lightheartedness of the music represents the political attitude regarding the health of the earth. Soon after, a white girl wearing the *All-American Swimsuit* splashes alongside the melting glacial meat and laughs innocently yet ignorantly (figure 10). She has internalized her objectification as a piece of meat made for the consumption of *PCWS* because she grew up in this culture. She wants to be desirable. Comprehensively the opening scene is a moving example of one of the many ways our culture readily dominates other humans, non-human animals, and the environment.

As the video jumps, we move to Hanalei Bay, Kauai. There are vacationers/consumers walking along the beach with pacifiers as their heads—a bunch of big babies (figure 11). Nonetheless, each person is reduced to either a pink or blue pacifier based on their swimsuit. The unsettling part of this is that based upon an assignment of pink or blue there exists a hierarchy of domination leading to our subsequent lifelong gender performance, violence and assimilation. (Butler 1990) This scene moves back and forth with an adult and baby dolphin along the coast of Washington and transitions into the pink and blue razors.

The pink and blue razors (figure 11.5) are paired with a plethora of iconic *American* views all overseen by Mount Rushmore²³, aka the white male colonial gaze, who omnisciently and omnipotently

²³*Mount Rushmore*: a depiction of the history of colonization, which is in close proximity to Standing Rock, a contemporary reality of the oppressive colonization of patriarchy, capitalism and white supremacy.

observe the American Bison²⁴, the national mammal (figure 12). This section of the video is meant to show the atrocities committed by *PCWS* to native peoples, wildlife and earth. White man annihilated these bison to annihilate/dominate native peoples²⁵, in turn he promotes a spectacle of oil drilling, patriotic southern pick-up trucks and drunk patriotic upper-class-white-male-business students. But the pink razor interrupts the toxicity when she subverts her assumed role.

The viewer can attach the relevancy of her subversion to a larger picture when they see an aerial shot of deforestation. The hair is integrated into the killed trees and zooms up to bring the viewer back to the hair on the pink razor. This scene is particularly important because it represents the destructive colonization and domination of the earth, humxns and other animals. Both the land and bodies are manicured into the perfect subordinate image to be further dominated by *PCWS*, that is until they are liberated.

As the video transitions to the fempty²⁶ (Hung 2019) *American* flag swimsuit, the girl who was once a piece of meat is absent and free from her once internalized *American* gaze. She has become self-aware, and only a ghost remains. The fempty American flag swimsuit is a sign of change (figure 13). This scene is entwined with an energetic African American street band playing brass instruments on the streets of New Orleans. The combination of the fempty swimsuit and the energetic band ask the viewer to think outside the artwork and ask: Who and What will we be? From what values will we create a new key matrix? How will the suit be shaped and filled? Where do we go from here?

²⁴ **American Bison:** 150 years ago, there were almost 30 million bison roaming this land, but as white man moved west he hunted them almost to extinction.

²⁵ “many people at the time also wanted to eradicate bison as a way to take away the livelihood and well- being of Native Americans. Native American tribes depended on the bison’s meat and hides, and many still today believe the animal has special spiritual and healing powers, making it an important part of their culture. The construction of the railroads across the plains further hastened the depletion of bison populations. Hunting from train windows was advertised widely and passengers shot them as the bison raced beside the trains. By 1883 both the northern and the southern herds had been destroyed. Less than 300 wild animals remained in the U.S. and Canada by the turn of the century out of the millions that once lived there” (FWS.GOV 2010)

²⁶ **Fempty:** understanding gender as performative, the empty swimsuit is liberated from her role as dominated feminine. She is fempty. (Hung 2019)

All the objects come together for a cocktail party, they get a little buzzed, start to share more about their personal lives by ‘talking shit’ about the *PCWS* (figure 14). The video encourages us to locate ourselves within the state of hierarchy and domination through frank yet comedic symbolism. Like a dream, the video works with layers of connectivity to comprehend the cacophony of cultural chaos, and from this we can start to process its significance. Working within a dream-like quality to dismantle the illusions of reality recalls Surrealist and Dadaist films, as well as contemporary video artists such as, Hannah Black (*my body*), Piploiti Rist, and Carolee Schneeman. The video operates to examine, extend and subvert ideas of *The Old American Dream* (figures 10-14).

The Postcards

While the layered images of packed content could be lost or unseen, the postcards implement images and textual provocation that are straightforward and populist. Artists who have influenced my decision to unambiguously direct the viewer's interaction with the artwork include Barabara Kruger, Hannah Wilke, the Guerrilla Girls, and Adrian Piper. With their bold approach, they take control of their art and push people to think. I take a similar approach by offering free postcards as a cheat sheet for the viewer to directly connect an image to its intended meaning.

The postcards serve to circulate the meaning of the fine art prints through the form of synopsis. The postcards were created with the belief that viewers will take what is free, especially if reproductions of the printed artworks can be found on one side and respective concepts are explicitly written on the other side. The postcard clarifies any questions for individual viewers and can be particularly helpful for those whom the concepts of the prints and/or videos do not become apparent. As the artworks’ author, this gives me comfort that the artworks message is maximized. Furthermore, the postcards are necessary inasmuch as I do not want to perpetuate and affirm the culture that the artwork frames. The

postcards extend the platform of the artwork, and they help ensure the artwork's conceptual points of reflection. Nonetheless, the postcards are literally the takeaway, physically and intellectually.

All Together

All the artworks suggest their relationship to a body, helping the viewer look at them in relation to their actions. By framing these packed objects and putting them on the wall it asks the viewer to look at them thoughtfully. Why would somebody take the time to render these and give them so much depth? Why are they situated in a context outside of their objecthood? The closer you look the more they give, visually and conceptually. We approach them with questions about how they are made, what they mean, and why we should give them attention in this setting. By representing these common objects that symbolize meaning much larger than themselves, we can move the same ideas beyond the gallery.

Collectively, the artworks unveil the many layers of hierarchy through a peripheral lens in order to allow the viewer to step back and see a larger picture of ideals supporting *PCWS*. Creating the body of artwork that constitutes *A New American Dream* gave me the necessary reflection to further comprehend the underlying power matrix equipping me to start to see the larger picture. I try to share that set of reflections with the viewer.

CONCLUSION

“IT is often more difficult to destroy than to build. Socially, especially, does this hold true. Building the New upon the Old is ephemeral, confusing and often corrupting. The only true process of new building is through the destruction of the old. A most difficult task. It is comparatively easy to graft new ideas and opinions upon the surface of the existing—easy and as futile. But the true revaluation of dominant values necessitates the complete destruction of the latter: the total eradication of hoary tradition, prejudice and indolent acceptance that hold the average mind in the bondage of philistine satisfaction and apathy.

To destroy, to root up must be the main work of every pathfinder. To blaze the way into untrodden paths is (our) mission. Such destruction is in the truest sense the most constructive effort—and this is the work that has ever inspired MOTHER EARTH and those connected with it.

—Emma Goldman, TO OUR EIGHTH BIRTHDAY

A New American Dream asks viewers to reflect upon *PCWS* in order to reimagine a new dream liberated from hierarchy while inviting viewers to help recreate the key-matrix of the USA in the image of radical equality. By contemplating an anti-*PCWS*²⁷ *position* the artwork aims for viewers to consider societal and personal passivity and activity that perpetuate the legacy of *PCWS*. The body of artwork gives us the ability to reflect and charges us with a responsibility to act and create.

My audience is broad because I have social goals for the artwork to instigate. The artworks occupy a variety of arenas including: Lee Gallery (the traditional gallery space), venues in New York City²⁸ and Minneapolis²⁹, and beyond (the postcards are given out randomly and they are casually mailed). Additionally, a dedicated website has been created for the thesis artworks: www.bigbabyusa.com.

Over the past two and a half years my studio practice has evolved to balance conceptual relevance with an advanced level of craft. While every artist approaches their studio work in ways unique to themselves, my personality and sensibilities require me to engage in art making as a moral action. It is

²⁷ **Anti-PCWS:** is used in direct relation to being an anti-racist (Kendi, 2019). It is not enough to be “not a racist” or “not a misogynist” or “not an exploiter”. We need to actively be against *PCWS* in order to move towards equality.

²⁸ My best friend performs burlesque and choreographed a subversive act to the video which is performed in multiple venues in Brooklyn, NY.

²⁹ The video is shown as a visual for music sets based in Minneapolis/St.Paul. The rappers, sound artists, and DJ’s who I have collaborated with all use their platform to actively engage in the good fight.

my hope that the artworks outlive me (or really out); the artworks strive to be long-lasting objects that trace parts of the history of power.

A New American Dream holds potential to transform with time into a historical archive of *PCWS* in the USA. The artworks may, in their own small way, help others learn about the history of power and resistance. Contemporaneously, it functions as a catalyst— however big or small. The artwork points us in contemplative directions— epistemically, emotively, and physically. What we do with our reflection and agency is for us to continually create or assimilate. The artwork asks how we can achieve genuine and radical equality by deliberately showing simple yet complex modes of inequality because, at times, the culture in question needs to be present in order to critique it. Therefore, the artwork is about creating a space for dialogue and reflection. Our lives without reflection and intention assimilate into a hierarchical system which dominates people and the earth.

I want to live in a world stripped of binaries and hierarchy, which would allow us to move towards radical equality. I created the artwork asking questions without answers—questions about the *interlocking systems*³⁰ of power with the underlying assumption that dominant ideologies and structures are the source of oppression. (Neville 2001) I do not have answers, but I do have a lot more questions.

³⁰***Interlocking systems***: referenced from *The Cycle of Socialization* by Bobbie Harro lays out the many intersectional relationships to these systems of power through domination and subordination.

“It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.”

—Audre Lorde, 1983



Figure 1: "Value\$\$\$" 2019 (16 ½" x 12 ½")

Photopolymer photogravure on Gampi Silk Tissue Washi paper colléd onto pigment printed drawing on Awagami Kozo paper and Somerset Velvet rag paper, lightfast/archival colored pencils.

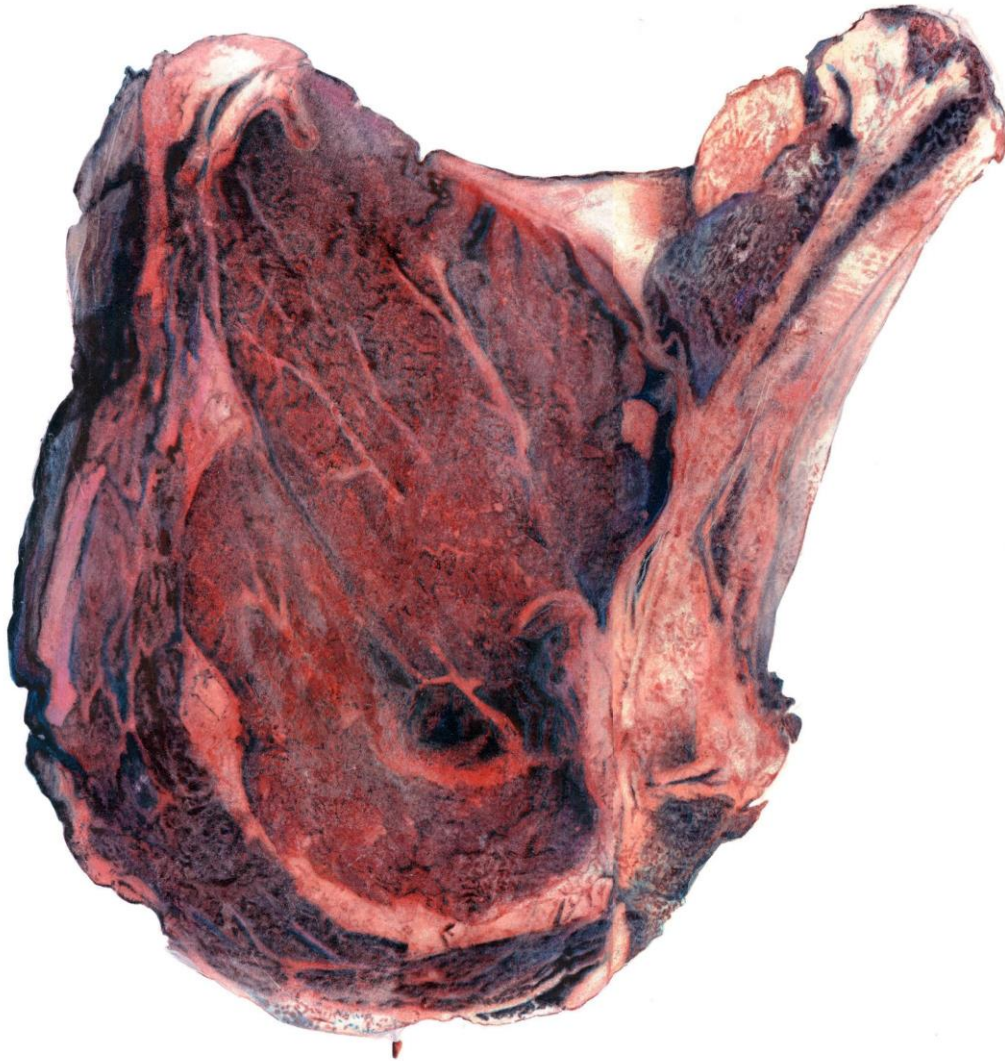


Figure 2: *“piece of meat”* 2019 (24½” x 26 ½”)

Photopolymer photogravure on Gampi Silk Tissue Washi paper colléd onto pigment printed drawing on Awagami Kozo paper and Somerset Velvet rag paper, lightfast/archival colored pencils.

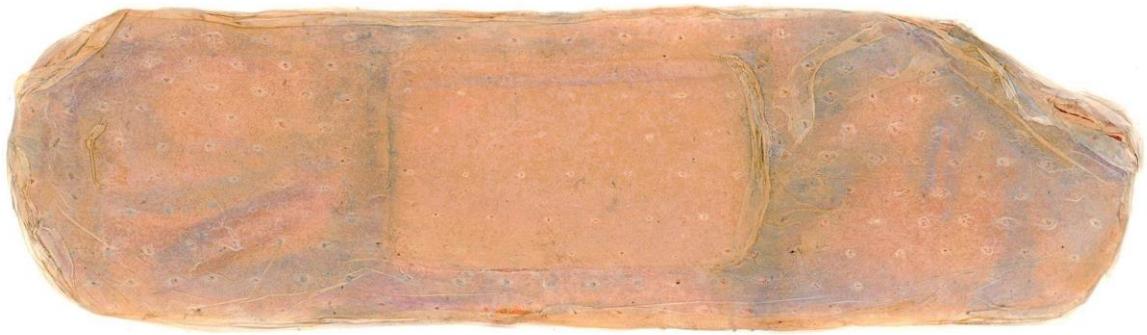


Figure 3: “*Whitewashing*” 2019 (16 ½” x 12 ½”)

Photopolymer photogravure on Gampi Silk Tissue Washi paper colléd onto pigment printed drawing on Awagami Kozo paper and Somerset Velvet rag paper, lightfast/archival colored pencils.



Figure 4: “Freedom, Equality, Conditioning” 2019 (20”x 14”)

Photopolymer photogravure on Gampi Silk Tissue Washi paper colléd onto pigment printed drawing on Awagami Kozo paper and Somerset Velvet rag paper, lightfast/archival colored pencils.



Figure 5: *“but i love my body”* 2019 (19” x 13 ½”)

Photopolymer photogravure on Gampi Silk Tissue Washi paper colléd onto pigment printed drawing on Awagami Kozo paper and Somerset Velvet rag paper, lightfast/archival colored pencils.



Figure 6: *“Legacy/Vainity”* 2019 (24” x 21”)

Photopolymer photogravure on Gampi Silk Tissue Washi paper colléd onto pigment printed drawing on Awagami Kozo paper and Somerset Velvet rag paper, lightfast/archival colored pencils.



Figure 7: *“Bootstrap Myth”* 2019 (25 ½” x 27”)

Photopolymer photogravure on Gampi Silk Tissue Washi paper colléd onto pigment printed drawing on Awagami Kozo paper and Somerset Velvet rag paper, lightfast/archival colored pencils.

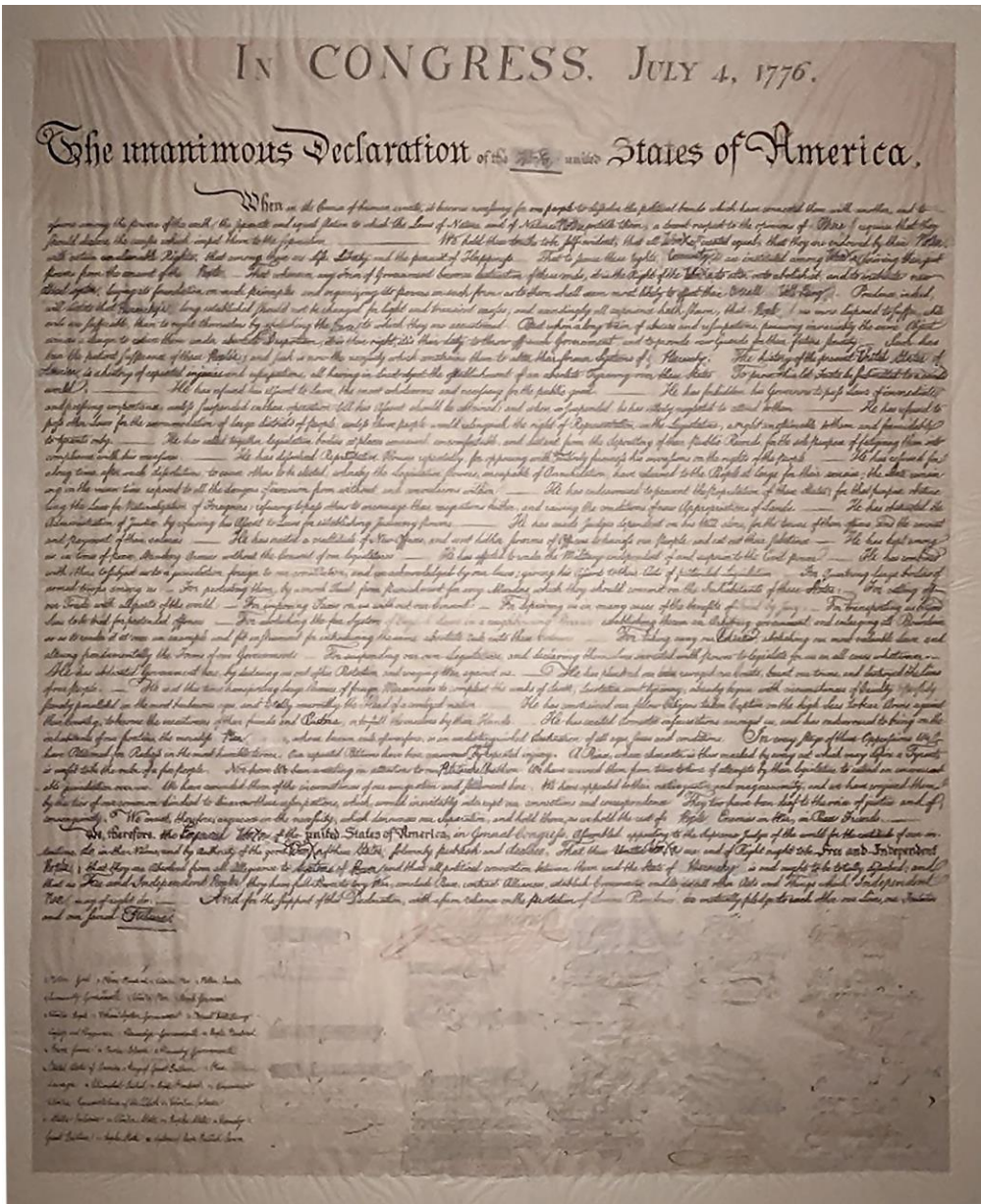


Figure 8: "A New Declaration of Independence" 2019 (47" x 40")

India ink on Gampi Silk Tissue Washi paper colléd onto pigment printed drawing on Awagami Kozo paper and Somerset Velvet rag paper

free people. Nor have We been wanting
We have reminded them of the circumstances
kindred to disavow these usurpations, we
must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, we
the Empowered WOMEN of the united S
and by authority of the good WOMEN of these
Absolved from all Allegiance to Systems of
dependent Peoples, they have full Power to

Figure 8: Continued, detail to scale

“A New Declaration of Independence”



Figure 9: “All American Swimsuit” 2019 (65” x 37”)

Photopolymer photogravure on Gampi Silk Tissue Washi paper colléd onto pigment printed drawing on Awagami Kozo paper and Somerset Velvet rag paper, lightfast/archival colored pencils.

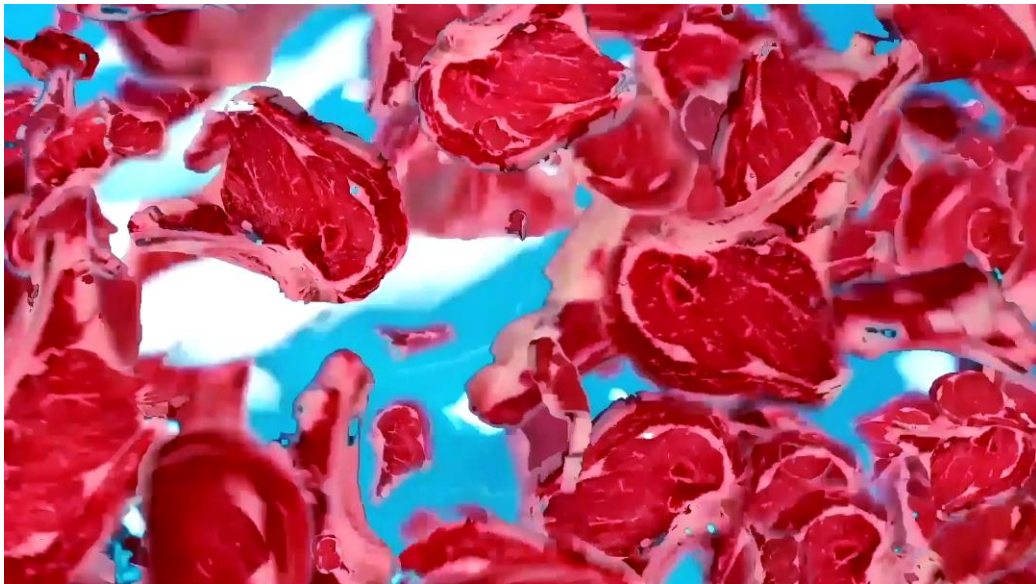
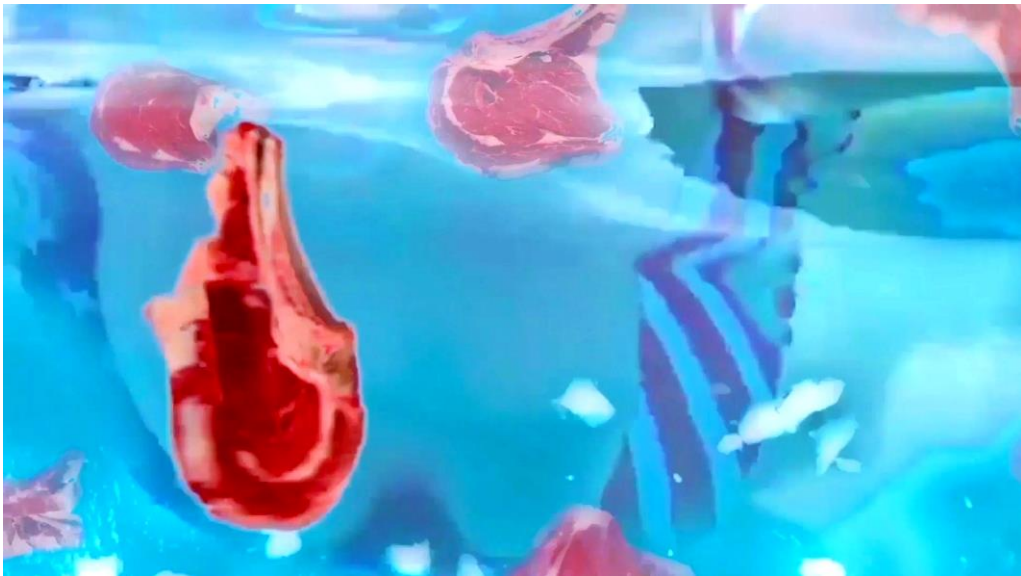


Figure 10 *The American Dream*

Video Stills: 2:30—2:45

Marjorie Glacier: Glacier Bay National Park, Alaska

Swimmer: St. Paul, Minnesota

Meat: Publix



Figure 11 & 11.5

The American Dream

Video Stills: 4:23 & 5:38

Hanaelei Bay and Mahaulepu Heritage Trail: Kauai, Hawaii

Deforestation: Southwest Kauai

Pacifiers: Walmart



Figure 12 *The American Dream* Video Still: 4:23

Mount Rushmore: The Black Hills, South Dakota

Amber Waves of Grain: Southeast Washington

Bison: Yellowstone National Park (northwest), Montana



Figure 13 *The American Dream*

Video Still: 7:15–9:00

Fenty American Swimsuit



Figure 14 *The American Dream*

Video Still: 11:50

Cocktail Party



because she subverts her own stereotype (hypersexualized American flag swimsuit) through representing it forcefully and monumentally. Nonetheless, the sheer scale of her undercuts the avenues of objectifying thought perpetrated by the male gaze; she disrupts the established norms of her given society. She is naked, not nude. She looks down on man, he must avert his gaze and look up to her. She uses her abjectivity and monstrosity as a tool of empowerment. She does this because, as Picken writes, "once monsters become monsters, they also have the power to reinforce and define the same social norms they are abjected from by specifying what society is inherently not." (Picken & Kristeva) She acts to disturb her cultural identity, system and order. She does not respect borders, positions nor rules and this is reinforced by her close proximity to the *New Declaration of Independence* and the pubic hair protruding from but *i love my body*. Additionally, we know she acts to subvert her patriarchal conditioning by her position next to the pink and blue pacifiers. She (the print) is self aware. **she's fempty**

The artworks give the viewer the tools—both conceptual and formal—to unpack messages, questions and calls to action. For example, the band aid print titled "*Whitewashing*" is larger than the average Band-aid, which suggests that it is covering a larger than average wound—maybe a wound that is a little too big for just a band aid. Wounds this big are usually not just surface level. A large, nine-layered "skin-colored" Band-aid further epitomizes how the history and reality of the United States of America is an infected wound. This belief is emphasized in the video as opening scene depicts the white Band-aid slowly peeling away as the camera zooms in to enter the world it covers. Once the bandaid is ripped off, Additionally the Band-aid is "skin-colored" which means white "skin-colored". This big white skinned Band-aid has visible dimension and has a total of 9 layers literally whitewashing the darkest layer on the surface. For those who do not know what whitewashing means a quick Google internet search would indicate that: "To whitewash is a metaphor meaning "to gloss over or cover up vices, crimes or scandals or to exonerate by means of a perfunctory investigation or through biased presentation of data."(Wikipedia.com)An example of whitewashing is how history is taught through a perspective championing *PCWS*. *Beauty standards* are also white-washed.

¹ **binaries:** When we are conditioned to be a girl or boy from birth it makes simply being yourself difficult. It is difficult because growing up in a binary represses our ability to imagine queer a self/society outside of the accepted binaries. The work asks us, if we have been conditioned for centuries, then how are we actually free? In what world can we be equal? we are all a bunch of big babies.

² **big babies:** we are all a bunch of big babies.

³ **legacy** makes us think that hierarchical relationships are normal and healthy. We take up our position within these hierarchies, enforce them and pass them on. The legacy of our system exists because people with authority do not want to give it up and they pass that authority to their kin whether this be through whiteness, maleness, or money. Oppressive hierarchy exists because we do not see other ways of relating to each other. "Such institutions and policies do not really die. they mutate. and we are living them still: they are the taproots of the economic order that has taken "democracy" as its alias. Our past is seeded in our present and is trying to become our future."--Adrienne Rich

Figure 15 *A New American Dream* Postcards



Based upon an assignment of pink or blue there exists a hierarchy of domination leading to our subsequent lifelong gender performance and assimilation. But when the pink razor subverts her role and liberates herself she interrupts the toxicity of her own internalization. Bodies are manicured into the perfect subordinate image to be further dominated by patriarchy, capitalism and white supremacy.

This art piece asserts that one must look at one's self critically, and within an established hierarchy before such a hierarchy can be effectively understood and, ultimately, acted upon. The womxn stands as dominator the man dies as dominated. Yet, she wants more than a society of hierarchy and domination.



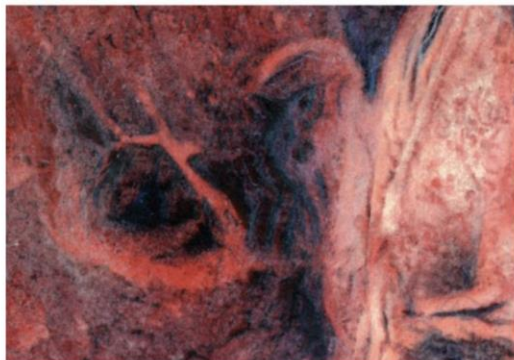
Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society's definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference; those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are black, who are older, know that *survival is not an academic skill*. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those other identified as outside the structures, in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. *For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house*. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only home.

From: Audre Lorde (1983), 'The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House', pp. 94-101, in Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (eds), *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (New York: Kitchen Table Press).



symbolic suckling of an oppressive hierarchy

The pink and blue pacifiers extend this conversation through a culturally symbolic suckling of an oppressive hierarchy. The current culture invests itself in an anti-queer mindset while capitalism reinforces it and profits from it. When we are conditioned to be a girl or boy from birth it makes simply being yourself difficult. It is difficult because growing up in a binary represses our ability to imagine a queer self/society outside of binaries. Similarly, we are conditioned from birth to assimilate into the norms of cis-hetero white capitalism because within those norms offer a space of 'freedom', 'equality' and 'security'. The work asks us, if, for centuries, we have been conditioned from birth, then how are we actually free? In what world can we be equal?



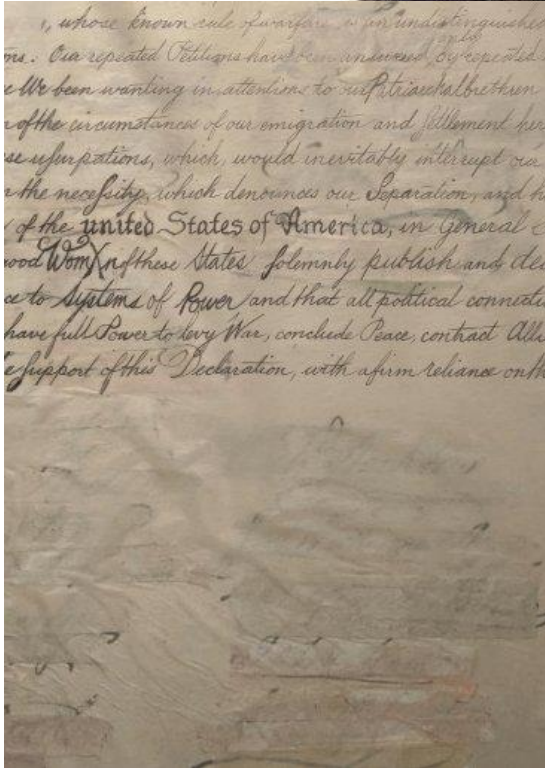
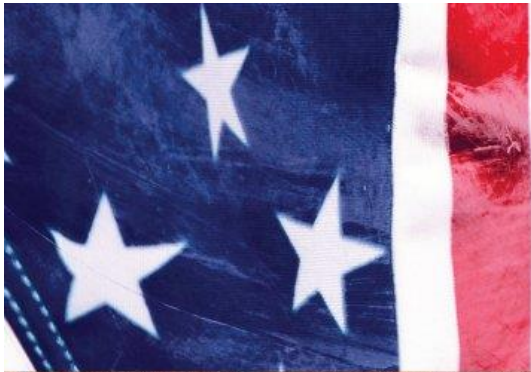
The question of freedom and equality within the confines of hierarchy and domination opens up the door for the other works. "piece of meat" (figure 2) symbolizes domination at the crossroads of *PCWS*. It bluntly uses itself to show how our culture readily dominates other humans, other animals and the environment. A few examples include, but are not limited to, the following: *Our culture refers and views to womxn, or any subordinate group, as a piece of meat which reinforces misogyny, racism, hierarchy. Our culture perpetuates the domination of other human beings.*

Our culture has the audacity to think that the mass consumption of meat is ethical. It is not. Rather, it is horrific on all fronts. Our culture perpetuates the domination of other animals.

Our culture, as if we are outside or above it, which we are not, is destroying the very earth that gives us and everything else life. Our culture perpetuates the domination of the earth, thus perpetuating the domination of itself.

"Piece of meat" (figure 2) is conscious of the encompassing dialogue, mentioned above, and uses it to further extend the conversation about the interlocking systems of power. In its simplest reading the artwork questions the morality of our culture.

Figure 15 *A New American Dream* Postcards (Continued)



Usually when people think there is a moment for re-thinking—spurring potential to bring new thoughts to life.

All American Swimsuit uses scale and craftsmanship to disrupt the viewer's normative perception because she (the artwork) subverts her own stereotype through representing it queerly and monumentally. Nonetheless, the sheer scale, a torso 5 feet tall by 3 feet wide, of her undercuts the avenues of objectifying thought perpetrated by the male gaze; she disrupts the established norms of her given society. She is naked, not nude. (Berger 1972) She uses her monstrosity as a tool of empowerment. She acts to disturb her cultural identity, system and order.

She (the print) is self-aware and she asks us to be aware too.

"Bootstrap Myth", engages the thought that in a "free" society/market one can pull themselves out of poverty by their own bootstraps. This is a myth predicated on a belief that all people have boots: if one works hard enough, assumes personal responsibility and has a strong moral grounding, then the individual can flourish by their own unaided efforts. It is 'the only thing that is stopping you is you' mentality and it places value on money. This myth has been central to the "American Dream" ideology and more generally rugged American individualism (or neo-liberalism), and has been used in the USA as an excuse for oppression, industrial murder and genocide.

The bootstrap myth stops people from recognizing that the state is fundamentally biased and oppressive. Cathy Cohen, writes, "strategies built upon the possibility of incorporation and assimilation are exposed as simply expanding and making accessible the status quo for more privileged members of marginal groups." (Cohen 1997) The boots represent the myth of equal opportunity and freedom by assimilating into the hierarchical oppressive system of Patriarchy, Capitalism and White Supremacy.

A New Declaration of Independence

When in the Course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's Mother entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of others requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all Womxn are created equal, that they are endowed by their Mother with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Community is instituted among Womxn, deriving their just powers from the consent of the people, — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the Womxn to alter or to abolish it, and to institute a new ethical system, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect overall Well-being. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Hierarchy's long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn that people are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable than to right themselves by abolishing the power to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future equality. — Such has been the patient sufferance of these Womxn; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Hierarchy. The history of the present United States of America is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these Womxn. To prove

this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.
He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Masculinity whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions. In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A Prince, whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people. Nor have We been wanting in attentions to our Patriarchal betters. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations, which would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of people, Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.

We, therefore, the Womxn of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Mother of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good Womxn of the states, solemnly publish and declare, That these united Womxn are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent Peoples, that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the System of Power, and that all political connection between them and the State of hierarchy (USA), is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent Peoples, they have full Power to liberation, equality, meaning, well-being, and all other Acts and Things which Equal People may of right do. — And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Liberation, and our sacred Future.

Figure 15 A New American Dream Postcards (Continued)

Figure 16 *The Good (bad) Old American Dream* 2019 Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQkzoyFP5dA>

Website: www.bigbabyusa.com

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