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## Bitter Sweet

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# Bitter Sweet

Hanna Kesty

Thesis submitted  
to the College of Creative Arts  
at West Virginia University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts in Printmaking

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School of Art and Design

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Abstract

*Bitter Sweet*

Hanna Kesty

This written document is the accompanying thesis for my Master of Fine Arts Exhibition, *Bitter Sweet*. The exhibition featured traditional framed prints with sculptural accents that reveal brutally honest negative personal experiences, interactions, and emotions, paired with delicately cute aesthetics. My work embodies the necessity of personal artistic expression to process years of emotional repression. The prints and sculptures in the exhibition focus around a collection of insults and harsh comments coupled with feelings of loneliness and isolation. I allow personal vulnerability to show, to reinforce that these moments have molded and shaped who I am and will continue to do so. My aim is to illustrate the reality of a contradictory and bitter sweet existence, and give the viewer the time and space to feel or experience similar emotions.

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## Introduction

“Discomfort equals boundaries being crossed...”<sup>1</sup>

Growing up in a family dynamic where emotions were automatically seen as bad, I was never given the permission or the tools to safely, and openly, feel or express emotion. This emotional neglect led me to develop an acute sensitivity and an interest in art. Art making provides me with a safe and productive way to process emotions, and reclaim experiences where emotional boundaries were crossed or dismissed. Creating prints and sculpture in response to specific situations and emotions provides the time and space to process and better understand them.

Art making for me is similar to therapy, specifically psychotherapy, in that, by making, I am communicating through visual imagery. Instead of talking, I speak through illustrating common, everyday objects. These unsuspecting objects act as archetypal roles for individuals, and vessels for content. The print matrices in which I draw on act as the therapist. Blank lithography stones, mylar, paper, and digital canvases encourage me to be honest with what I am thinking, feeling, and experiencing. My work exists without judgment and validates my experiences and emotions.

Similar to my physical appearance, my work, despite appearing simple and easily dismissible, has complex conceptual layers. My work collectively plays with the contradictions of the buildup of expectation only to be followed by disappointment, and the micro-aggressive qualities of double-sided comments. My intention is to overwhelm the viewer with negative comments and statements, potentially forcing a consideration of their own personal experiences and emotions.

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<sup>1</sup> Morgan Price, “Morgan Price” (Virtual Lecture, West Virginia University School of Art and Design Printmaking Program, West Virginia University, November, 2, 2021).

## I. Art Making

### A. Personal History & Vulnerability

“It takes courage to recognize feelings.”<sup>2</sup>

It is not easy to be vulnerable in any situation. It is especially difficult to be vulnerable after years of emotional repression and living with a fear of being reprimanded for expressing any type of emotion, positive or negative. In the decision to make autobiographical work, allowing myself to be emotionally and psychologically vulnerable was difficult, but necessary. It took a long time for me to come to terms with this reality. To successfully make the work that I was naturally progressing towards, I needed to be as honest as possible with colleagues, faculty, friends, and most importantly, myself. Art provided me the safety and freedom that nothing else and no one else had provided.

I come from a military family. My dad has been active duty for almost twenty-eight years; essentially, I grew up without a dad. Even when he was home, he was still doing work and was never emotionally available. I could not fully grasp the demands my father had for work, or why he was gone for months at a time, missing birthdays, school functions, holidays, and so on. Additionally, my mom was also emotionally unavailable. This could be due to the amount of stress she was undergoing when my dad was deployed, on top of the way she was raised. Any emotion, good or bad, was usually smothered with statements like: “You need to calm down”, “Just move on”, and “Get over it.” Because of this, I often repressed my feelings both good and bad, out of fear of being reprimanded or dismissed. The fact that my opinions did not fit in with the rest of my family created more tension. Over time, I became a highly sensitive individual, easily prone to emotional distress, with nowhere to release or process it.

Growing up, I was continuously looking for an outlet where I was allowed to feel something, especially during times when I was bullied or having negative experiences with friends or classmates. At first, watching movies, listening to music, and reading books provided me an opportunity to process my feelings in an indirect way and in a

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<sup>2</sup> Nemitz, Barbara, Hideto Fuse, and Museumberg Flensburg--Städtische Sammlungen. *Pink: The Exposed Color in Contemporary Art and Culture*. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2006), 41.

way my parents could not relate to. Later, making art provided a chance for me to be much more direct with my emotions and experiences. I could process my sadness, loneliness, and emotional manipulation through drawing and painting. Through art, I was giving myself permission to feel.

At first, I would illustrate my emotions and experiences through objects and symbols. I would talk in generalities and focus on the fact that other people were experiencing these emotions. This indirect way of processing my feelings meant I didn't have to completely reveal my experiences to the viewer. This was partly intentional, but partly because I didn't know how to specifically talk about my feelings. The art faculty at Murray State could sense this and were frustrated with my indirectness. They pushed me to be more open and I eventually made work that was more emotionally driven and honest. Eventually, I realized that revealing my emotions and experiences in an honest way was what I was longing for.

Ironically, creating work that is emotionally honest and autobiographically driven raises new questions. How much do I say? Do I illustrate every detail of what I am going through? What should I leave out? Am I ready to expose certain experiences and topics? Each circumstance dictates the answers. My work is a direct reflection of my current psychological and emotional state, processed through the lens of lived experiences, combined with the emotional baggage from the past. If an experience bothers me enough, I will eventually process that experience through the creation of images, symbols, or words. I live with my work in a very intense way. My studio practice has turned into a support system and a friend.

## B. Process and Meaning

“*Catharsis*...means ‘cleansing’ or ‘purging; in therapy it refers to the expression and discharge of strong emotions for relief.’”<sup>3</sup>

For me, the process of making work is just as important as figuring out its content. Putting a concept together and watching it come to life is one of the most significant and exciting parts of my artistic practice. I spend a significant amount of time writing about and sketching out concepts and images. My content is sourced from my emotional and physical tension and images may form as the experience happens. Other times I must process an experience over time for an image to emerge. I use my sketchbook to deconstruct an interaction to understand the basic components of tension and illustrate it through an object. I often write about the symbols and icons that best describe a specific situation, experience, or emotion. Multiple sketches are made, images morph and grow, eventually leading to new associations and more imagery. I have recently added digital collage to my practice, which allows me to bring an idea together more efficiently. Another crucial part of my practice is working intuitively. I allow my emotions to lead; I let images form instinctively and the content to dictate format and materials. This process gives me the time and space to think through a situation, to understand my emotions and how they are physically expressed. This is an opportunity for safe honest self-reflection and self-awareness.

The physical manifestation of my content is minimal, quiet, and subtle. Each concept is illustrated in isolated and open negative space. Mixed media artist Toba Khedoori makes use of a similar approach but at a much larger scale. She is one of the first artists I admired and considered as an “influence”. During the 1990s, Khedoori created immense, yet minimal, mixed media drawings and paintings of conventional objects devoid of any environment or human presence.<sup>4</sup> In spite of lacking any representations of the figure, Khedoori’s work implies a human presence. “Khedoori

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<sup>3</sup> Cathy A. Malchiodi, *The Art Therapy Sourcebook* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 14.

<sup>4</sup> “Toba Khedoori: Biography,” David Zwirner, David Zwirner - All Rights Reserved 2022, March 19, 2022, <https://www.davidzwirner.com/artists/toba-khedoori/biography>.

calls attention to the everyday world and our movements within it.”<sup>5</sup> An implication of human interaction can be seen in work like *Untitled (doors)* (1999) (fig. 1). Two doors are pushed ajar, each at different intervals with a suggestion of the corner between them. The simplicity of this image creates many questions for the viewer. Are the doors meant to act as people? Did someone just walk through both doors going in different directions? How many people walk through both doors? Khedoori “posits open-ended questions about perception and meaning.”<sup>6</sup> This is the same response I want in my work. I aim to leave imagery open-ended enough so individuals can create meaning based on their own perceptions, meanings, and associations of each object, coupled with their own experiences.

Like Khedoori, I too utilize large areas of negative space in most of my work. I use negative space to represent how I constantly feel emotionally alone. Isolating these simplified objects with an overabundance of negative space also creates visual emphasis, there is literally nothing else for the viewer to look at. No one ever took the time to truly listen to the discomfort that I was expressing or experiencing. By constructing imagery in a way in which an image must be looked at, due to the isolation of an image, I am pressuring the viewer to give attention to my content, imagery, and baggage. This minimal approach requires some work from the viewer to consider the object presented; the usual associations with it, the text that is paired with it, and the title. The negative space of each image is an integral part of the overall piece. Visually, my prints do not seem complex but each piece presents a significant amount of personal emotional baggage.

The way I formally construct an image and my approach to content are equally important. I make use of and transform experiences, trauma, hardships, and sad stories into content for work. I use humor and irony, and sometimes comedic timing and punch lines to turn pain into power. Viewing Sarah Ellis’s prints was my first glimpse into this way of working. While her prints and drawings can make the viewer laugh, her work can

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<sup>5</sup> “Toba Khedoori,” Artnet, 2022 Artnet Worldwide Corporation, accessed March 19, 2022, <http://www.artnet.com/artists/toba-khedoori/>.

<sup>6</sup> See note 5 above.

create an emotional punch in the gut as well. Ellis's work is compositionally minimal, simple, and uses text as a way of being direct but also coy. *Curds* (2018) (fig. 2) plays with two easily recognizable items: gummy worms and the word "crud". Though this piece is minimal and simple, the punch comes from the use of gummy worms as the format for the text. Gummy worms can be seen as carefree and silly. Crud, by definition, relates to something that is disgusting, unpleasant or dirty.<sup>7</sup> Combined, these variables are contradictory because of her use of a candy treat to spell out the word; this print could also be read with a tone of sarcasm. I had the extraordinary privilege of working and learning with Sarah in my final year of undergraduate school at Murray State University. She was an inspiration inside the studio and out. I latched on to her contradictory and confusing pairing of objects with text, and how she used both as a visual representation of perfect timing of a loaded but hilarious punchline. Ellis speaks of the humor in her work as a way to connect to the viewer:<sup>8</sup>

The second principle we crave is one of the most powerful human emotions: humor. Laughing is a total release of inhibition. It allows you to feel joy, break tension, or recognize the complete malarky of a situation. Creating funny work is something of which I am distinctly proud.

Even though humor isn't a main feature in all my work, I still see it as an opportunity to connect and relate to a wider audience. Creating humorous work can remind the viewer of our humanity and promote empathy. Similar to Ellis, I try to also create a clever playfulness and irony in my work through how I pair harsh text with seemingly sweet objects.

"'Print' exists as trace, identity, evidence, and reproduction simultaneously."<sup>9</sup> Printmaking is a sensitive artistic process, which makes it the ideal medium for my content. Many printmaking processes require a large amount of time and dedication. Lithography, specifically, is an extremely sensitive process centered around the

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<sup>7</sup> "Crud," Merriam-Webster, 2022 Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, accessed March 21, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/crud>.

<sup>8</sup> "Artist's Statement," Sarah Ellis Art, Sarah Ellis, accessed March 22, <http://www.sarahellisart.com/statement>.

<sup>9</sup> Kathryn Reeves, "The Re-vision of Printmaking," in *Perspectives on Contemporary Printmaking* (Manchester : Manchester University Press, 2018), 73.

interaction of two conflicting substances, oil and water. Conceptually, this parallels my overall content of emotional tension (water) due to boundaries being crossed (oil-based drawing material). The limestone used for stone lithography reacts to both the environment and the materials used to make the print. Like people, no two stones are the same and each reacts to these variables differently. Also, like people, litho stones are extremely reactive whether visually apparent or not, as mostly everything is happening on a microscopic level, and even at times beneath the surface.

Lithography and screen printing have a way of holding on to the history of images. Print processes, like relief and intaglio require a new matrix at the start of a new edition. Screen printing reuses the same mesh stretched on metal frames. The repeated application of photosensitive emulsion, exposure to light to burn in the image, and printing with ink stains the mesh, which act as a record of previous imagery and content. This is similar to stone lithography. Once an image is printed and the edition is complete, the image is eventually grained off with carborundum grit. Even after a thorough graining of the stone surface, hints and traces of a previous image can still be visible. A ghost of previous images exists, sometimes only visible when the stone is wet. Both materials have a history, similar to how trauma can resurface when a person is triggered or pushed to a breaking point, which is an appropriate physical metaphor to illustrate my trauma and emotional baggage.

I have a continuous dialogue with these processes. They are reactive, sometimes resistive, but in the end, we respond to one another. This ebb and flow of action and reaction feels like a conversation, helping me work through what I am struggling with emotionally and psychologically at the time.

## II. Iconography and Semiotics

“Painful memories, charged with high levels of emotion, are stored in visual form in the right brain and are expressed in symbolic form...Once on paper, they then become accessible to the logical left brain. Talking about the drawing allows an internal process to take place which enables the child to know that an experience is in the past and to file it away safely or even forget it.”<sup>10</sup>

As stated earlier, my experiences of feeling dismissed led me to hide my emotions, thoughts and opinions in life and in my early artmaking practice. I was hesitant and timid to discuss the specifics of my work’s content. Over time, I wanted my work to be more emotionally expressive. I drew everyday objects that served as placeholders for myself and for other people in my life. This strategy is also used by visual artist Felix Gonzales-Torres, who utilizes a conceptual and minimal approach in his practice as well. *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)* (1991) (fig. 3) was one of the first conceptually heavy artworks that moved me as a student and continues to motivate my artistic practice today. Made between 1987-1990, this piece is a set of synchronized, battery-powered wall clocks that represent the artist and his partner. Eventually the batteries will lose power and the clocks will no longer be in sync, paralleling the physical decline and eventual death of Gonzalez-Torres’ partner’s death due to complications with AIDS. An article on the Public Delivery website entitled “The meaning of Felix Gonzalez-Torres’ Clocks / Perfect Lovers” featuring *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)* beautifully summarizes the poetically tragic piece:<sup>11</sup>

With *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)*, Gonzalez-Torres brings our attention to another painfully simple metaphor of love and partnership. The two clocks standing side by side reflect a connection between them. They seem to support each other, to be united, to move together as one peacefully. The stillness of the two timepieces, alongside the minimalism of the design and muted solid shades of white, black, and light blue, induce a sense of peace.

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<sup>10</sup> “Drawing and Talking helps teachers tackle children’s mental health issues,” Primary Times, 2022 Primary Times Ltd, accessed March 27, 2022, <https://www.primarytimes.co.uk/news/2016/09/drawing-and-talking-helps-teachers-tackle-children-s-mental-health-issues>.

<sup>11</sup> “The meaning of Felix Gonzalez-Torres’ Clocks / Perfect Lovers,” Public Delivery, Public Delivery, revised October 18, 2021, <https://publicdelivery.org/felix-gonzalez-torres-clocks/>.



Most inspiring about Felix Gonzalez-Torres' work is that it is a metaphor for life, sometimes simple yet surprisingly complex. When used by Gonzalez-Torres, common objects become metaphors for complicated ideas and experiences. The use of simple and recognizable everyday materials also creates a potentially active relationship with the viewer. While the driving force behind the work's content is the artist's personal and very specific experience, the work can still be appreciated and interpreted by many in various ways. Gonzalez-Torres' minimalistic approach to displaying and presentation is another inspiration for me. He often will present the object(s) with nothing more. This minimalistic approach forces the viewers to consider the object, its known meaning, and the reason behind using such objects as artistic symbols and metaphors.

I am also continually inspired by the prints of lithographer Kathryn Polk. Polk creates exquisite autobiographical lithographs pertaining to her childhood, the roles of women in Western society, and her family dynamic. Even though Polk visually calls attention to the female figure, she also presents an extensive yet recurring collection of symbolic objects. A print like *Tyger, Tyger Burning Bright* (2011) (fig. 4), uses everyday objects like purses (on fire) and chairs as metaphors and symbols of personal experiences. As one becomes more familiar with Polk's work, they will see repeated imagery used in various compositions, emphasizing their importance both visually and symbolically. While the repeated use and combination of recognizable imagery will imply meaning, Polk's intention is to not fully divulge the true meaning of the use of her objects or symbols. "...[A] lot of my symbols have a special meaning for me. And I think someone asked me in an interview what they meant...'It's a secret. I'm not gonna tell you."<sup>12</sup> This strategy of using recognizable imagery in an allusive way provides the viewer with room to relate to the work with their own experiences and create their own interpretations.

Featured on the printmaking podcast *Hello, Print Friend* (previously *Pine, Copper, Lime*), Polk states, "I can put it in my work. And I prefer to have people see it and have it mean something to them on their own terms than for me to tell them how to see it. You know, they see what they see." Making work in this way is an interesting and

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<sup>12</sup> Miranda K. Metcalf, "Episode 28 | Kathryn Polk," *Hello, Print Friend*, Squarespace, November 27, 2019, <https://helloprintfriend.com/episode-twentyeight-kathryn-polk>.

challenging game. To try to piece together the right combination of symbols, presented within a specific composition to help get the viewer as close as possible to the meaning of the work without being overly descriptive. Polk describes such an admirable perspective of wanting individuals to find their own meaning within her work:<sup>13</sup>

“And so if I put it there and it's subliminal, or it's not as (to) hit them over the head with a hammer with what I'm talking about, I like that. Because it might mean more to someone who needs it to mean something else... than what I had intended for it to be... I want my work to have that sort of depth of freedom of, let's say, interpretation.”

I want my work to have that same depth and freedom. I create art not only for myself but for those who can identify with the imagery, the content, or both, even if it is just a small amount. If I can reach someone emotionally for just a second, I have achieved my goal.

Like Polk and Gonzalez-Torres, the imagery and personal icons I use for each piece are determined by its content. I often work intuitively and consider the basic associations of an image. Utilizing recognizable objects helps to make my tension-filled content be more relatable and can alleviate my discomfort in discussing the content. Adam Alter, author of *Drunk Tank Pink* (2013), states, “...symbols and other meaningful images have the capacity to quickly inspire extreme reactions, ranging from anger and fear to joy and celebration.”<sup>14</sup> This method of working with and giving new meaning to recognizable objects or symbols is referred to as semiotics. Semiotics is the study of symbols, how their meanings are created, and how they are used.<sup>15</sup> Semiotics makes use of two components, the signifier and the signified to create a sign. Clive Bryant provides an effective diagram on his blog to visually explain the inner workings of semiotics:<sup>16</sup>

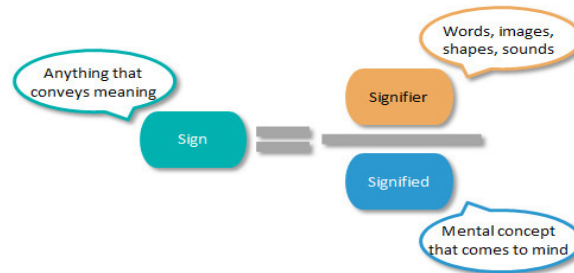
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<sup>13</sup> Miranda K. Metcalf, “Episode 28 | Kathryn Polk,” Hello, Print Friend, Squarespace, November 27, 2019, <https://helloprintfriend.com/episode-twentyeight-kathryn-polk>.

<sup>14</sup> Adam Alter, *Drunk Tank Pink* (New York, N.Y. : Penguin Books, 2014), 53.

<sup>15</sup> “Semiotics,” Cambridge Dictionary, Cambridge University Press 2022, accessed April 5, 2022, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/semiotics>.

<sup>16</sup> Clive Bryant, “Symbolism and Semiotics,” *Clive Bryant Fine Art* (blog), August 30, 2021, <https://www.clivebryant.com/blog/171556/symbolism-and-semiotics>.



The signifier is something which can be seen, like the color pink, a hare, a balloon, or a birthday party. The signified are the ideas associated with the thing, a sensitive color, an animal of prey, happiness or fragility, expectations and disappointments.<sup>17</sup> My work includes visual illustrations of signifiers (objects) coupled with the signified (interpretations of viewers, along with my own), to bring about a loaded and emotionally tense sign (final print).

#### A. The Hare

The most prominent image that routinely pops up in my work is the hare. For much of my life, I have related to does and rabbits, two animals that cautiously exist. During undergraduate school, I used the rabbit as a personal symbol. I focused on the associations rabbits had with being feeble, simple, rugged, and cute; but strayed from the other associations with fertility and reproduction. Which led me to use the hare instead. A hare is similar to a rabbit, but also exceedingly different. “A hare is not a rabbit”<sup>18</sup>, states John Lewis-Stempel in his book *The Private Life of the Hare*. While still cute, the hare is more lankier, with lengthy ears and legs, causing it to look more awkward in comparison to the rabbit. Body image has always been an area of agitation for me. I consistently have a difficult time with clothes not fitting right due being both petite and lanky. Like the hare, I often feel awkward.

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<sup>17</sup> “The Relationship Between Signifier And Signified,” KMUW, 2022 KMU, accessed April 1, 2022, <https://www.kmuw.org/new-american-songbook/2017-07-03/the-relationship-between-signifier-and-signified>.

<sup>18</sup> John Lewis Stempel, *The Private Life of the Hare* (London: Doubleday, 2019), 9.

On the food chain, the hare is at the bottom. They are prey, vulnerable, defenseless, and hyper aware. They are also more solitary than rabbits. In a social context, I see myself being at the “bottom of the food chain.” I have always been socially awkward, and I have a difficult time making friends. Physically and sometimes emotionally, I feel defenseless, which was the inspiration for *Defensive, Yet Defenseless* (2021) (fig.5). My physical stature along with my social anxiety causes me to be hyper-aware of my surroundings when in public. “Hares are in danger from the first day of their existence.”<sup>19</sup> These same associations can also be broadly applied to Western expectations of women. Using the hare suggests innocence and cuteness, therein when paired with the harsh content, the overall image becomes difficult to digest; why would you hurt a hare? *In my Face* (2021) (fig.6) demonstrates the hare in the aftermath of chaos. The image of the hare is in the center of the composition, comprised of a splattered pie as if the pie was thrown at the hare and it moved away. *Self-Gaslighting* (2022) (fig.7) presents a hare that has harmed itself. This image displays a slumped hare with pink candles protruding out of its forehead and its ears as candles themselves. The title enforces the theme of self-harm. Self-gaslighting, however, is the continued internal abuse brought on by an abuser,<sup>20</sup> an internal continuation of the gaslighting that the abuser is causing. I chose to include the birthday candles as a play on words, specifically with the lighting part. Turning a seemingly harmless, celebratory, and lighthearted object into something that is causing harm, distress, and discomfort causes a shift in the perspective of a celebration.

## B. The Chair

Chairs are furniture that assume stability and structure. At times, though, stability can be uncomfortable, restrictive, and suffocating. In my work I depict the wooden chairs I grew up with. These chairs have a design that alludes to simplicity and

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<sup>19</sup> John Lewis Stempel, *The Private Life of the Hare* (London: Doubleday, 2019), 19.

<sup>20</sup> Ingrid Clayton, “What Is Self-Gaslighting?,” *Psychology Today*, Sussex Publishers, LLC, September 10, 2021, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/emotional-sobriety/202109/what-is-self-gaslighting>.

domesticity. When I use these chairs as symbols, they can represent myself, other people, or the absence of an individual. My exhibition includes two prints that contain chairs, *22 Years* (2020) (fig. 8) and *Swept Off My Feet* (2022) (fig. 9). The chair illustrated in *22 Years* is from my parents first table set. They received the table chairs as a wedding gift and continue to use it. *22 Years* illustrates a wooden chair with foil letter balloons trapped underneath. The chair is a representation of my mother, and the balloons spell out my name. The title is a reference to the twenty-two years I felt restricted by her until I moved out to pursue a graduate degree. The chair used in *Swept Off My Feet* represents the desk chair I had growing up that I still use to this day. This chair is me, being pulled back by conversation heart foil balloons displaying the statement “Ur A Lttle 2 Much”. This was said to me at the end of a breakup. As someone who is emotionally sensitive and feels everything to great extremes, this sentiment represents one of my biggest worries and hearing it literally knocked me off my feet.

### C. The Push Pin

The push pin is considerably the most jarring and most personal symbol I use. I use push pins as symbols for emotional pain and discomfort, they are also a direct reference to the object that I used to self-harm three years ago. “Self-harm and self-injury are any forms of hurting oneself...(people) self-harm as a way to release painful emotions.”<sup>21</sup> Of the various objects I used to self-harm, the push pin was unfortunately the most successful in inducing harm that has left permanent scars. These very functional, mundane, and seemingly innocent objects serve the specific purpose of hanging pictures and documents up and keeping them in place. Push pins are obviously not your typical self-harm objects.

In my prints and sculptures, push pins represent my experiences with self-harm. In *Next Time* (2022) (figures 10-11) the National Suicide Prevention Line (800-273-8255) is cut into a string of pink glitter push pin silhouettes, formatted as a birthday banner. Each number of the hotline was cut out of an individual, pink glitter

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<sup>21</sup> “How to Deal with Self-Harm,” Crisis Text Line, Crisis Text Line 2013-2022, accessed April 15, 2022, <https://www.crisistextline.org/topics/self-harm/#what-is-self-harm-.1>.

pushpin. Fun and celebratory glitter paper, pink silk bows, and celebratory banners are juxtaposed with the tension of a trigger topic. The small scale of each individual push pin, smaller than five inches, is also juxtaposed with this heavy topic. These decisions are intended to reflect on how self-harm and suicide are still very taboo and easily dismissed. When I attempted to confide in a close friend about my repeated self-harming, I was told “the next time you do it just call a hotline.” While the hotline is a resource, and a great one at that, it was not the help that I was looking for at that moment. I needed empathy, sympathy, concern, and instead I was treated as a nuisance bothering someone with something trivial.

The second piece in the exhibition dealing with self-harm is, *21st* (2022) (figures 12-13). A lemon poppyseed Bundt cake with lemon glaze and clear push pins baked into it at the end of the gallery. This sculpture is a reflection on my twenty-first birthday, the lemon poppyseed Bundt cake my mom baked for me and the thoughts of self-harm and suicide that coincided with this time. For this piece I wanted to activate the viewer’s senses. The smell and implied experience of eating the Bundt cake yet biting down on something hard and sharp, like a push pin, is extremely jarring and uncomfortable. The purpose of this piece is to bring light to both the physical and emotional trauma that I inflicted upon myself, while also commenting on the irony between a moment when life is supposed to be celebrated yet feeling the impulse to inflict harm on myself and no longer wanting to exist. An article featured in *Hyperallergic* examines how forms of artistic self-harm, and self-harm overall, articulates the potential backlash of this topic or practice:<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps unsurprisingly, artists working with self-harm risk being labeled as damaged people working through trauma publicly in lieu of therapy, or shock-jocks incapable of creating aesthetic experiences other than horror and disgust. They are sometimes treated like moody teenagers with a sudden penchant for black clothing — just let them be and eventually they’ll grow out of it.

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<sup>22</sup> Chris Dupuis, “From Marina Abramović to Carlos Martiel, a Tradition of Self-Harm in Performance Art,” *Hyperallergic*, 2022 *Hyperallergic*, April 5, 2019, <https://hyperallergic.com/493380/from-marina-abramovic-to-carlos-martiel-a-tradition-of-self-harm-in-performance-art/>.

The backlash that comes with self-harm is the assumed notion that those who do self-harm are doing it for attention and that those individuals are over dramatic, over emotional, and attention seeking. I can say from my experience, attention was not the purpose for partaking in a traumatic event. My depression was at an all-time low, I did not have an outlet for my emotions, and I needed help. This sculpture brings attention to visceral and physical sensations through combining what objects can and cannot be eaten, evoking pleasure and happiness, inviting viewers closer, then causing discomfort with the imagined pain if ingested.

#### D. Gift Bags

More recently I started using gift bags as representations of emotional baggage. As people, we present our external self, or the outside of the bag, and our internal self, what is held inside. A gift bag can also represent the buildup of expectations followed by disappointments that come with gift giving and gift receiving, which parallels many expectations and experiences throughout life. *Unconditional Love* (2021) (fig.14) comments on expectations and disappointments but on a parent to child relationship. A single, isolated gift bag is rendered with the phrase “I love you, but...” in pink on the front. This was one of the responses my mother had after I had attempted to come out. “But” is a condition. As a child, you expect your parents and especially your mother to love you unconditionally. This is an expected gift they should give you, but in this situation, there was a condition: me being gay. With gift bags there is the expectation of something great or exciting hidden inside, but there are the disappointing gifts. The front of extravagant gift bags typically have text on the front exclaiming positive, celebratory, and loving phrases. This format is a natural placeholder for text. This print presents the expectation (title) and the disappointment (gift bag).

*Invalidated* (2022) (fig.15) follows a similar format in the concept of expectations and disappointments. Two gift bags are stand-ins for a close friend and partner at one point in time, along with myself. They are arranged with a birthday banner with the phrase “THAT NEVER REALLY HAPPENED” strung between them. Since we read left to right, the bag on the left (friend/partner) is positioned turning away from the bag on the right (myself), which is presented forward facing the viewer. In portraiture, facing the

viewer is seen as confrontational, while a profile view is seen more as avoidant. There are multiple tints and shades of pink in this print, since in this dynamic and situation there were a wide range of emotions. I was attempting to approach my friend/partner about our romantic relationship at one point and was told that it never really happened from their point of view. This was my first serious relationship. When it ended I experienced an immense emotional upheaval; to be told that none of it was real was incredibly invalidating and humiliating, hence the title *Invalidated*.

*Intercommunication* (2021) (fig.16), is one of the few prints that illustrates the exterior and interior contents of a bag. There's always anticipation when receiving a gift; this can parallel the anticipation when getting to know someone or when someone is being vulnerable and opening up. Each bag in *Intercommunication* is knocked over and has a birthday banner spilling out, but the text of each banner is not meant to be readable. The focus is to be on the spillage, representing the idea of overwhelming emotions and thoughts. When trying to keep emotions suppressed and at bay, eventually emotional spillage happens, where all the emotions come out at once. My partner and I were having a difficult time with our own individual situations, and when we confided in each other about what each of us was going through, we were comforting each other while divulging intense emotions. There were a lot of heavy emotions happening all at once with both of us. In response to there being so many emotions during that situation, this is reflected through the various tints and shades of pink of both of the banners.

When applicable, I occasionally combine multiple objects together. *Get Over It* (2021) (fig.17) incorporates the defenselessness of the hare and the expectations of the gift bag. The hare has a gift bag adorned with the word "Smile" covering its head, surrounded by balled up tissue paper. The pose of the hare is as if it was caught off guard. In a moment of attempting to verbalize my emotional discomfort, which was also causing physical discomfort, I was told to "smile, and get over it". Complete disregard for what I was feeling. With that being said, it can be inferred that in the print, the gift bag was forced onto the hare's head, diminishing and silencing it. Pink is placed with the gift bag and the crumpled tissue paper, indicating the areas of tension. With this



piece, I make use of the entire statement that I was told; “smile” is rendered within the print itself while “get over it” is used as the title. The text within the piece and title play off of each other, prompting comedic timing which creates more of a conceptual impact.

## E. Color

“Sensitivity is one of the most important emotional qualities we associate with pink”<sup>23</sup>

I don’t think I could have picked a more accurate color to use for my emotionally sensitive work. Prior to graduate school, I used pink in combination with various yellows, oranges, purples, and blues. As my work continued, I intuitively felt that pink was the most appropriate color. It now excessively appears in all my work. In retrospect, this was a color that was forced upon me as a child, like any young girl. For a few years growing up, my bedroom was pink, my comforter was various shades of pink - everything was pink. As a teenager I despised pink and felt uncomfortable when wearing pink due to its overly feminine connotation, which is naturally tied to socially driven associations of weakness. However, unlike Kathryn Polk who actively articulates gender roles and the treatment of women in her work,<sup>24</sup> I am not using pink to emphasize Western gender roles and the expectations of women. Even though I am drawing from my experience combined with my identity being female, gender is not a major part of my artistic practice or expression. I do not create imagery to discuss gender. For me, this highly sensitive color is used to emphasize areas of tension in any given composition.

I highlight areas or objects of tension through the selective use of different tints and shades of pink. I do this to claim and recontextualize this sensitive and loaded color. This compositional approach helps guide the viewers' eyes through the composition, to pinpoint the source of tension. For me, the softer and more pastel pinks

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<sup>23</sup>Nemitz, Barbara, Hideto Fuse, and Museumberg Flensburg--Städtische Sammlungen. *Pink: The Exposed Color in Contemporary Art and Culture*. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2006), 26.

<sup>24</sup> Miranda K. Metcalf, “Episode 28 | Kathryn Polk,” Hello, Print Friend, Squarespace, November 27, 2019, <https://helloprintfriend.com/episode-twentyeight-kathryn-polk>.

also indirectly signify the innocence and vulnerability relating back to childhood. At other times, I use fleshy pinks as a reference to the human body, in most cases my own, and the skin irritation caused by a negative reaction or injury. “The skin, our largest perceptual organ, feels the properties of substances, states, and conditions.”<sup>25</sup> This can also be applied to emotions and sensations dwelling beneath the skin: the unpleasant warmth and pressure of anxiety, the inflammation of suppressed emotions, or the irritation of self-inflicted injuries. *Pink - The Exposed Color In Contemporary Art and Culture* states that our skin can reveal our emotional state, and that what is happening internally is naturally reflected outward.<sup>26</sup> Finally, using pink provides an immediate contradiction and contrast between the visual appearance and negative content of my work. Pink naturally relates to contemporary expectations of gendered birthday party aesthetics. “Pink is revealing. What this means in art is that the color can be used to develop unusual and ambiguous congruences and contradictions.”<sup>27</sup> Regardless of the specificities of my use of pink, overall I use it in ways that defy social expectations of the color.

## F. The Birthday Party

To some, birthday parties become less and less meaningful and exciting as you age. It is also odd that a person’s life and or presence is only celebrated one day out of the year. You are only deemed “special” for one day, and even then, there are expectations and obligations to please and accommodate other people. My birthday was the one day I really wanted to feel special, but the irony of the situation became more evident when thinking about the experience of no longer wanting to be physically present on my birthday, a day that is supposed to celebrate life. Growing up I thought once I got older life would be this amazing, special experience. Sadly, life continues to

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<sup>25</sup> Nemitz, Barbara, Hideto Fuse, and Museumberg Flensburg--Städtische Sammlungen. *Pink: The Exposed Color in Contemporary Art and Culture*. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2006), 41.

<sup>26</sup> See note 25 above.

<sup>27</sup> Nemitz, Barbara, Hideto Fuse, and Museumberg Flensburg--Städtische Sammlungen. *Pink: The Exposed Color in Contemporary Art and Culture*. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2006), 40

contain a wide variety of disappointments. From my experience, and I am sure from other's experiences, the magic that you had as a kid eventually burns out.

I latched on to these contradictions after wanting to subtly celebrate embarking on a year without self-harming. I participated in this celebration alone, silently, and internally. Even then, I questioned if this is something I even should be celebrating? In addition to childhood trauma and experiences, these ironic, isolated, and lonely internal experiences became driving forces for my graduate thesis body of work.

In life, from my perspective, there is a social expectation to be happy. Growing up, birthday parties were always an event of tension and discomfort for me, whether they were my own or someone else's. Forced socialization did not pair well with my social anxiety. I would worry about and be told that no one wanted to come to my parties, I would always feel the opposite of special, and feel like an inconvenience for even wanting a party in the first place. When attending other's birthday parties, I feared that I was only being invited out of obligation, or not being invited at all. I was called a "party pooper" or "kill joy", for not partaking in certain events, and I would be ignored and left out.

### ***III. Bitter Sweet***

To match the contradictory nature of my visual work, the title for my exhibition needed to be pleasantly unsuspecting while at the same time alluding to layers of content that go beyond face value. The phrase "bitter sweet" in and of itself is a contradiction. Regularly, bittersweet is recognized in a baking context, specifically with bittersweet chocolate. As an adjective, bittersweet can be "pleasant but including or marked by elements of suffering or regret."<sup>28</sup> With that being said, I also chose to investigate the separation of "bitter" and "sweet" to see if the pairing of these two words still worked well together. By doing so, the definitions were more so connected to emotions and experiences. Bitter can be "distasteful or distressing to the mind, marked

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<sup>28</sup> "Bittersweet," Merriam-Webster, Merriam-Webster Incorporated, accessed March, 24, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bittersweet#other-words>.

by intensity or severity: accompanied by severe pain or suffering”<sup>29</sup> alongside sweet which is “pleasing to the mind or feelings, marked by gentle good humor or kindness, delicately pleasing to the ear or eye.”<sup>30</sup> I have always enjoyed play on words and words or phrases that have double meanings. My work utilizes double meanings both visually and within the titles of each piece, which made choosing the exhibition title *Bitter Sweet* a natural selection.

I felt that the birthday party aesthetics needed to be applied to the visual format of the title. Everything needed to be handled and done to the same level of completeness and consideration of the prints and banners featured in the exhibition. Because of this, the title was formatted into a handmade banner (figures 18-19). With the title elevated to the level of a finished art piece, it had to stand out more than the other three banners that were featured in the exhibition. The title banner was cut in a pennant shape, often seen for birthday parties or various celebratory events, backed by slightly larger pink confetti cardstock. The confetti paper had a reflective quality that interacted with the lighting. The banner was adorned with pink silk bows to enhance the level of cuteness and sweetness before entering the main gallery.

Minimal artwork like mine can be easily dismissed and overlooked. When considering different options of display, I knew it was important to find a way to grab attention from outside the gallery. Since the Mesaros galleries are divided into a vestibule area followed by a main gallery, using the vestibule as the main attention grabber worked perfectly. I chose to paint the vestibule walls in the Laura Mesaros gallery pink as a fun and inviting way to get people inside the gallery or at the very least look inside the gallery windows on the exterior walls. For the main gallery, I wanted to color coordinate as much as possible, but also not be high contrast or flashy. I picked natural colored wood for the frames of my prints to coordinate with the color of the wooden floor of the gallery to help make the exhibition more subtle and refined (fig. 20)

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<sup>29</sup> “Bitter,” Merriam-Webster, Merriam-Webster Incorporated, accessed March 24, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bitter>.

<sup>30</sup> “Sweet,” Merriam-Webster, Merriam-Webster Incorporated, accessed March 24, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sweet>.

The work included in this exhibition is predominantly made up of work that was created in my fourth, fifth, and sixth semesters. There are a few pieces included in the exhibition that were made earlier. These decisions were made due to the emotional weight these pieces hold and the content fitting the exhibition. One example was my card series, *Love, Mom* (2020) (figures 21-23). This text-based card series was shown next to my title banner and displays the micro-aggressive relationship I had with my mother centered around the context of my sexuality. Since my experience was anything but celebratory, I use the format of a greeting card to visually communicate the tension between the expectation of a positive celebration with the reality of my negative and degrading experiences. The cards provide the celebratory element, as traditionally cards are celebratory or sympathetic, innocently drawing the viewer in. The interior of the card provides the tension, the aggressive or insulting comments made by a family member. This card series was the first piece I created at the start of my MFA. When considering what work to include in the exhibition, I realized that the format of these cards set the tone for the rest of my thesis work and should be the first work the viewer sees. These cards represent a perfect culmination of the tension between unsuspecting sweetness with the disappointingly jarring content, and were a good reminder of the experience of continuous invalidation, continuous dismissal, continuous reminders that follow me every day, continuous reasons for why I despise myself, but continuous opportunities to reclaim.

Every piece featured in *Bitter Sweet* is my response to uncomfortable interactions I have had with individuals (general and specific) over the years. Over time, I realized my artistic process is about reclaiming the phrases other people have said to me, along with reclaiming control over situations in which I had none. An example of this is *Defensive But Defenseless* (fig. 5). This print is an illustration of how I physically felt in a moment of extreme anxiety and stress, coupled with adrenaline. In this moment I wanted to verbally defend myself, but I knew I was not allowed to. At moments like this, when I am overstimulated, I feel prickly all over. This physical response to an emotional experience is represented through an image of a hare with cactus spines extruding from its body. There is text, although it is difficult to read, that states “KNOW YOUR PLACE”, a phrase I was indirectly told during this heated moment. The environment of this event

was supposed to be celebratory and enjoyable but ended up being the opposite. The quoted text is presented as typical birthday banner letters to reference the expected happiness and celebration; however, it is arranged in such a way that it seems like the banner was tossed onto the hare in a moment of emotional upheaval. Completely disregarding what I was experiencing and feeling in this tension filled moment.

My work is also an opportunity to recontextualize universal, redundant phrases. I enjoy the irony of presenting commonly heard phrases juxtaposed with objects or formats they typically don't exist in. In doing so, I am prompting viewers to observe these statements in a different context, with the intention of having a greater emotional impact. Framing the main gallery are two scalloped, doily-like banners, *Wouldn't You?* (2022) (fig. 24-25) and *I Thought I Already Had One* (2022) (fig. 26-27). The right corner is decorated with "Why Are You Crying?" and the left with "Grow A Backbone!". As someone who is emotionally sensitive, these are some of the most harshly dismissive responses someone can say in moments of great emotional distress and upheaval. Both phrases would not typically be seen in a celebratory setting or format, giving more emotional weight and discomfort to the physical banners themselves and to the exhibition as a whole. As mentioned above, there were accents of sculptural elements integrated within the exhibition. Despite the sculptural pieces being secondary to the traditional prints, conceptually, they still hold a substantial amount of presence and meaning. These moments were meant to act as supporting components to reinforce the prints in addition to accentuate the overall bittersweet tone of the exhibition.

Walking down the ramp into the main gallery, *Untitled (Party Pooper)* (2020) (fig. 28-29) slumped on the right, hanging from the corner. This piece is an arrangement of bleached rose gold foil letter balloons spelling out the phrase "Party Pooper". It is adorned with one pink, silk bow at the top while pink balloons and confetti elevate the appearance of the wood floor the balloons are draped on. In my youth, I heard the phrase "party pooper" within various groups of friends and especially at birthday parties. The repetition of this childish comment quickly became a core memory that impacts every single social interaction and event I encounter. Typically, foil letter balloons spell out something celebratory and positive; to emphasize the tension of my experiences

being called that, I felt that the juxtaposition between format and content would provide a physical recontextualization of a commonly heard phrase that is heard rather than seen. These balloons were assembled in my second semester and have since been bleached due to exposure to the sun. Oddly enough, this desaturation parallels nicely with the perception of the phrase “party pooper” losing its harshness year after year. There are elements of time and chance happening with this piece, the natural bleaching of the rose gold coloring in addition to the balloons naturally deflating over time. *Untitled (Party Pooper)* has an aspect of plurality, in that it changes every time it is installed due to the nature of the new space that it occupies.

Entering the main gallery and following the natural direction of the space, is a pedestal piece titled *Empty Wishes* (2021) (fig. 30). On top of the pedestal is a cluster of various styles of used birthday candles. This sculptural piece is an ongoing project of continuously collecting burnt birthday candles. The candles are less about a specific experience, but rather about emotions of disappointment and the redundancy of a ritual that, to me, no longer has meaning. From my point of view, I think we all stop believing and putting hope in the wishes we make; or stop making wishes all together, due to the consistent disappointment of our wishes not coming true. For me, this same concept applies when blowing out candles before eating the birthday dessert of choice. After so many years of hoping for my wishes to come true, simple wishes even of just wanting to be happy, I stopped making wishes when it came time to blow out the candles. I would still go through the motion, literally, of pretending to make a wish and then proceed in blowing out my candles. Hence the title “Empty Wishes”, because after a while that is what wishes became.

## Conclusion

*Bitter Sweet* was created with the intention to prompt discomfort coupled with empathy. My work is for anyone who can empathize with my content and imagery. Empathy is the greatest gift that we can give each other. We all want to be heard, understood, and validated. This collective experience encourages the acknowledgement and validation of emotions. I can only hope that my work brings forth emotions in others, along with validation for certain experiences and emotions. By viewing my work, I aspire for people to consider the interactions they have had with other people, especially those that they are close to. For myself, this experience has been validating and alleviating, like a sigh of relief. Through processing my emotions through creating art, I now feel that I can let go and begin anew.



## Figures



Figure 1. Toba Khedoori, *Untitled (doors)*, Oil and Wax on Paper, 138 x 191 ½", 1999.



Figure 2. Sarah Ellis, *Curds*, Stone Lithograph, 11x15 inches, 2019.



Figure 3. Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)*, Clocks, Paint on Wall, 14 x 28 x 2", 1991.



Figure 4. Kathryn Polk, *Tyger, Tyger Burning Bright*, Lithograph, 18x20", 2011.

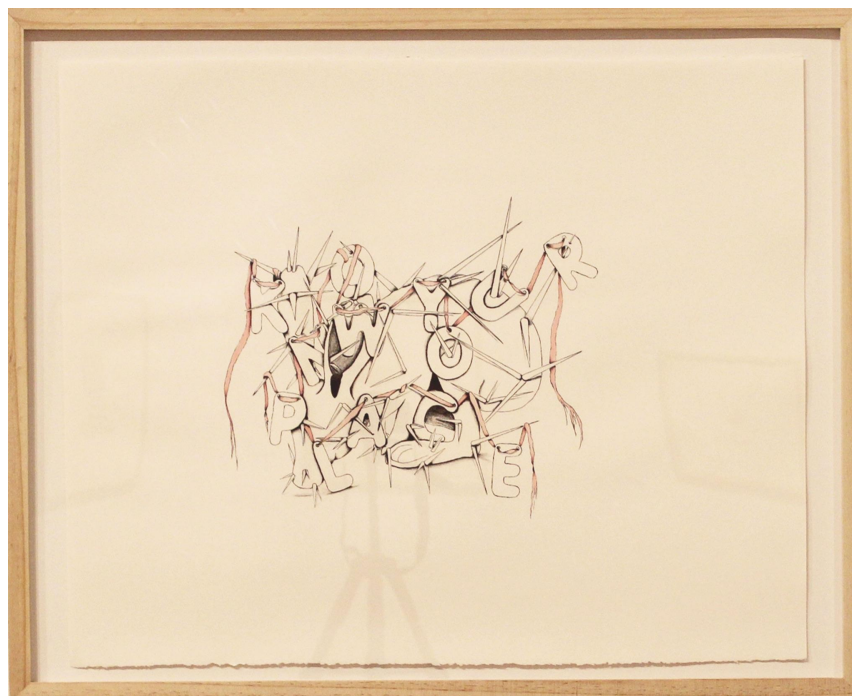


Figure 5. Hanna Kesty, *Defensive, Yet Defenseless*, Lithograph and Screenprint, 22x28", 2021.



Figure 6. Hanna Kesty, *In My Face*, Lithograph, Screenprint, Colored Pencil, 8x10", 2021.



Figure 7. Hanna Kesty, *Self-Gaslighting*, Lithograph and Screenprint, 11x14", 2022.



Figure 8. Hanna Kesty, *22 Years*, Lithograph and Screenprint, 15x20", 2020.



Figure 9. Hanna Kesty, *Swept Off My Feet*, Lithograph and Screenprint, 15x20", 2022.



Figure 10. Hanna Kesty, *Next Time*, Cut Paper, Ribbon, & Bows, 50x5", 2022.



Figure 11. Hanna Kesty, *Next Time (Detail)*, Cut Paper, Ribbon, & Bows, 50x5", 2022.



Figure 12. Hanna Kesty, *21st (3rd edition)*, Lemon Poppyseed Bundt Cake, Push Pins, & Doilies, 10", 2022.



Figure 13. Hanna Kesty, *21st (3rd edition)* (Detail), Lemon Poppyseed Cake, Clear Push Pins, & Doilies, 10", 2022.



Figure 14. Hanna Kesty, *Unconditional Love*, Lithograph & Screenprint, 22x28", 2021.



Figure 15. Hanna Kesty, *Invalidated*, Lithograph & Screenprint, 28x22", 2022.



Figure 16. Hanna Kesty, *Intercommunication*, Lithograph and Screenprint, 28x22", 2021.





Figure 17. Hanna Kesty, *Get Over It*, Lithograph and Screenprint, 15x20", 2021.



Figure 18. Hanna Kesty, Exhibition Title Banner (Installation View), Cut Paper, Ribbon, & Bows, 2022.



Figure 19. Hanna Kesty, Exhibition Title Banner (Detail), Cut Paper, Ribbon, & Bows, 2022.



Figure 20. Hanna Kesty, *Bitter Sweet* (Gallery View), Laura Mesaros Gallery, 2022.



Figure 21. Hanna Kesty, *Love, Mom*, Mixed Media, Individual 5x7" Cards, 2020.



Figure 22. Hanna Kesty, *Love, Mom* (Detail), Mixed Media, Individual 5x7" Cards, 2020.



Figure 23. Hanna Kesty, *Love, Mom* (Detail, Abbi holding card 6), Mixed Media, Individual 5x7" Cards, 2020. Image courtesy of Jamie Mulac.

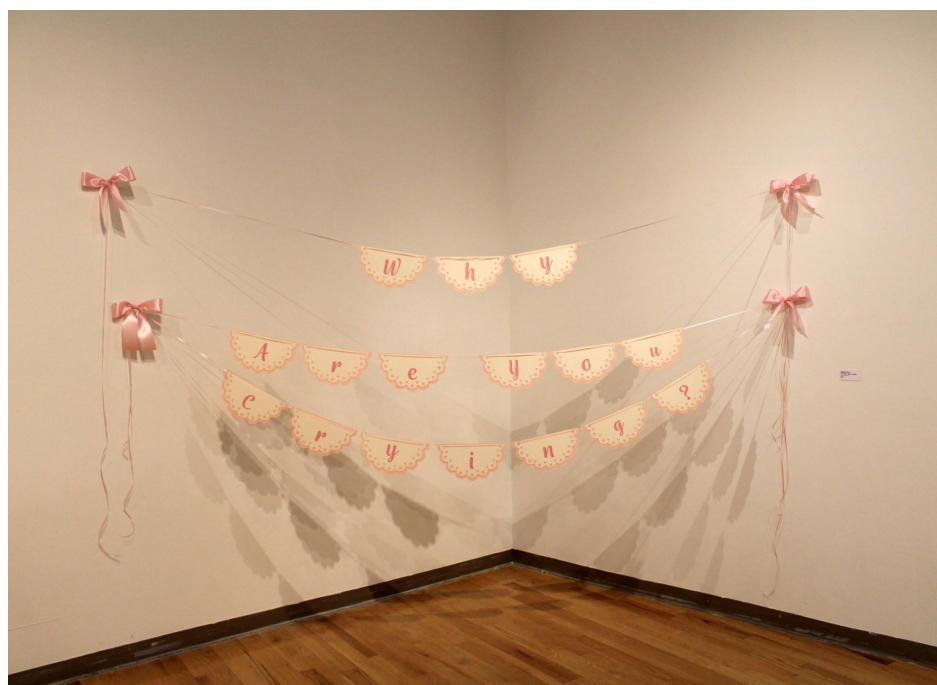


Figure 24. Hanna Kesty, *Wouldn't You?*, Cut Paper, Ribbon, and Bows, 120x76 1/2", 2022.



Figure 25 . Hanna Kesty, *Wouldn't You?* (Detail), Cut Paper, Ribbon, and Bows, 120x76 ½" 2022.



Figure 26. Hanna Kesty, *I Thought I Already Had One?*, Cut Paper, Ribbon, and Bows, 120x76 ½", 2022.



Figure 27. Hanna Kesty, *I Thought I Already Had One?* (Detail), Cut Paper, Ribbon, and Bows, 120x76 1/2", 2022.

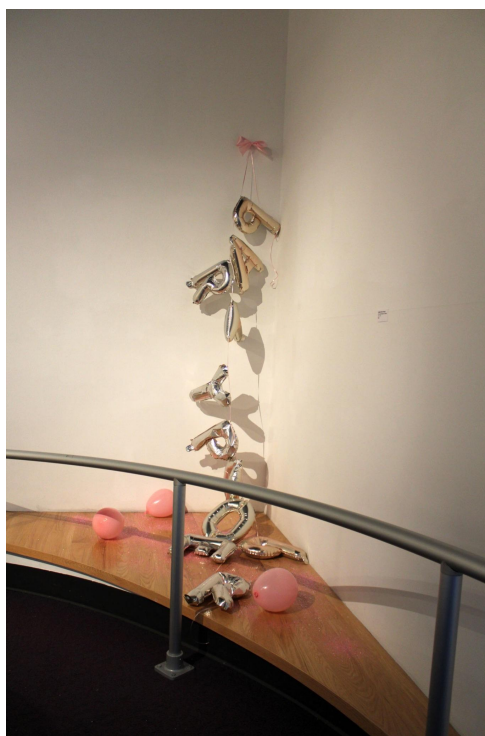


Figure 28. Hanna Kesty, *Untitled (Party Pooper)*, Foil Letter Balloons, Balloons, and Confetti, 120x12", 2020.



Figure 29. Hanna Kesty, *Untitled (Party Pooper)* (Detail), Foil Letter Balloons, Balloons, and Confetti, 120x12", 2020.



Figure 30. Hanna Kesty, *Empty Wishes*, Burnt Candles, Overall Dimensions Vary, 2021.

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## Hanna M. Kesty

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## Education

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2022 **Master of Fine Arts Candidate (Pending)**, Printmaking, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV.  
(Expected Graduation: May 2022).

**Graduate Certificate (Pending)**, Therapeutic Art, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV.  
**Frogman's Print Workshop**, Omaha, NE.

2021 **Frogman's Print Workshop**, Omaha, NE. (Cancelled due to COVID19).

2020 **Frogman's Print Workshop**, Omaha, NE. (Cancelled due to COVID19).

2019 **Bachelor of Fine Arts**, Studio Art, Drawing and Printmaking, Murray State University, Murray, KY.

### Exhibitions (\*Indicates Solo Exhibition)

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2022 **Bitter Sweet**, Laura Mesaros Gallery, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV.\*

**Trifecta: WVU Ceramics, Printmaking and Sculpture Showcase**, Love Hope Center for the Arts, Fayetteville, WV.

**Smorgasbord: Vol. 3**, West Virginia University Advanced Printmaking, Artists Image Resource, Pittsburgh, PA.

2021 **School of Art & Design Juried Student Exhibition**, Laura Mesaros Gallery, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV.

Juror: Maritza Mosquera

**Smorgasbord: Vol. 2**, West Virginia University Advanced Printmaking, Artists Image Resource, Pittsburgh, PA.

**INK IT: Contemporary Print Practices**, Virtual Exhibition, BlackRock Center for the Arts, Germantown, MD.

Juror: Susan J. Goldman

2020 **School of Art & Design Juried Student Exhibition**, Laura Mesaros Gallery, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV.

**Smorgasbord**, West Virginia University Advanced Printmaking, Artists Image Resource, Pittsburgh, PA.

**Salt City Dozen**, Sarah A. Coyne Gallery, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY. (Cancelled due to COVID19).

**Intercollegiate Sketchbook Project**, Slippery Rock University, University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington, TX.

2019 **admitting**, Curris Center Gallery, Murray State University, Murray, KY.\*

**Années Folles**, Clara M. Eagle Gallery, Murray State University, Murray, KY.

Juror: Hannah March Sanders, Assistant Professor, SouthEast Missouri University, Cape Girardeau, MO.

2018 **Professional Blend V**, Curris Center Gallery, Murray State University, Murray, KY.

**Who We Are: Portraits & Stories of Our Community**, Murray Art Guild, Murray, KY.

**University Open**, ArtsPlace, Lexington, KY.

Juror: Robert Morgan

**Relics of the Universe**, Clara M. Eagle Gallery, Murray State University, Murray, KY.

Jurors: Tanya Gadbow-Neitzke, Adjunct Instructor, Paducah School of Art & Design, Paducah, KY.

John Hasegawa Assistant Professor, Paducah School of Art & Design, Paducah, KY.

2017 **Art Or Something Like It (Murray State Advanced Drawing)**, Mary Ed Mecoy Hall Gallery, Murray, KY and

Maiden Alley Cinema, Paducah, KY.

2016 **Foundations**, Clara M. Eagle Upper Gallery, Murray State University, Murray, KY.

## Portfolio Exchanges

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- 2022**     *Rebirth*, Dead Matter Press, Portland, OR.  
**9INHAND 7th Annual International Print Exchange**, 9INHAND, New Hope, PA.  
*Our Shared Future*, Southern Graphics Council International Members Portfolio Exchange.
- 2021**     *Magic*, Green Pea Press, Huntsville, AL.  
*The Natural Environment*, West Virginia University, Edinboro University, Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico and University of Puerto Rico Mayaguez.  
 Curated by Jamie Mulac.  
*Pain That Brings Pleasure*, West Virginia University Printmaking, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV.  
 Printed by Josh Dannin, Directangle Press, Bethlehem, NH.
- 2020**     *Salt City Dozen*, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY.  
 Juried by Kathryn Polk.  
*Certum Tempus*, Southern Graphics Council International Portfolio Exchange.  
 Co-Curated by Stephanie Alaniz and Edie Skeard.

## Awards, Scholarships, Assistantships

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- 2022**     **College of Creative Arts Student Professional Development Grant**, School of Art & Design, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV.  
**Mesaros Foundation Graduate Thesis Research Award**, School of Art & Design, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV.
- 2021-22**   **Graduate Teaching Assistant**, Visual Foundations 1 & 2, School of Art & Design, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV.  
**Assistant To The Foundations Coordinator**, School of Art & Design, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV.
- 2020-21**   **Best In Show**, School of Art & Design Juried Student Exhibition, Laura Mesaros Gallery, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV.  
**Graduate Teaching Assistant**, Visual Foundations 1, School of Art & Design, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV.  
**Gallery Assistant**, Mesaros Gallery, School of Art & Design, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV.
- 2019-20**   **Graduate Assistant**, Visual Resource Library, School of Art & Design, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV.  
**College of Creative Arts Student Travel Grant**, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV.  
 SGC International Conference, San Juan, Puerto Rico.  
**Art & Design Outstanding Senior**, Murray State University, Murray, KY.  
**3rd Place**, *Années Folles*, Clara M. Eagle Gallery, Murray State University, Murray, KY.

2018 **Patricia L. Summerville Award of Excellence in Printmaking**, Murray State University, Murray, KY.

### Related Work Experience, Volunteer Experience

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- 2022 **Southern Graphics Council International Volunteer**, *Is Printmaking Queer?* Panel, Southern Graphics Council International Conference, Madison, WI.  
**Southern Graphics Council International Volunteer**, Registration, Southern Graphics Council International Conference, Madison, WI.  
**Southern Graphics Council International Open Portfolio**, Madison, WI.
- 2021-22 **Graduate Teaching Assistant**, Visual Foundations 1 & 2, School of Art & Design, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV.  
**Assistant To The Foundations Coordinator**, School of Art & Design, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV.  
**Printing Assistant**, Visiting Artist, Emmy Lingscheit, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV.  
**Summer Internship**, Embroidery, Direct Results, Waynesburg, PA.  
**Visiting Artist Panelist (Virtual)**, Patricia L. Summerville Printmaking Lecture Series, Murray State University, Murray, KY.
- 2020-21 **Graduate Teaching Assistant**, Visual Foundations 1, School of Art & Design, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV.  
**Gallery Assistant**, Mesaros Galleries, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV.  
**Shop Assistant**, Zaccagnini Morgantown Florist, Morgantown, WV.
- 2019-20 **Graduate Assistant**, Visual Resource Library, School of Art & Design, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV.  
**Printing Assistant**, Visiting Artists, Nicole Hand and Jay Ryan, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV.  
**Summer Art Workshop (SAW) Volunteer**, Printmaking, Murray State University, Murray, KY.  
**Southern Graphics Council International Open Portfolio**, Dallas, TX.  
**Southern Graphics Council International Printmaking Bus Trivia Mobile Event**, Dallas, TX.  
**Printing Assistant**, Visiting Artist, Sean Morrissey, Murray State University, Murray, KY.
- 2018-19 **Shop Assistant**, Printmaking Department, Murray State University, Murray, KY.  
**Printing Assistant**, Visiting Artists, Althea Murphy-Price and Matt Hopson-Walker, Murray State University, Murray, KY.  
**Print-O-Rama**, Bill Fick and Carlos Hernandez Printmaking Workshop, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN.  
**Live Drawing Volunteer**, Taste of the Arts, Murray State University, Murray, KY.

### Clubs and Memberships

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- 2019-22 **SGC International**, Member.  
**West Virginia University Printmaking Club**, Member, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV.
- 2018-19 **Murray State University Printmaking Club**, Member, Murray State University, Murray, KY.

## Technical Skills

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### Printmaking

Silkscreen, Lithography, Relief

### Adobe

Photoshop, Illustrator

### Laser Cutter/Engraver

Rayjet 50, CO2 Laser

## References

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**Joseph Lupo**, Professor of Art, Coordinator of Graduate Studies, Printmaking Program Coordinator,  
West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV 26506.  
Email: Joseph.Lupo@mail.wvu.edu

**Jason Lee**, Associate Professor of Sculpture, Foundations Coordinator, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV 26506.  
Email: Jason.Lee@mail.wvu.edu

**Nicole Hand-Bryant**, Assistant to the Dean and Professor of Art, Murray State University, Murray, KY 42071.  
Email: nhandbryant@murraystate.edu

**Sarah Ellis**, Assistant Professor of Printmaking, Jacksonville State University, Jacksonville, AL 36265.  
Email: scellis@jsu.edu.