Art and its Creation: A culmination of three years

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Thesis Abstract:

This thesis looks at the history of my artistic training and the process of creating the works of art that I submitted and showed for the senior art show. It discusses the theory behind the concepts, the artist that were used as a frame of reference, the technical process that went into each piece, the finished results, my personal reflections, and reflections on critique with professors from the art department. This thesis includes biographical information, detailed reminiscing regarding projects, and stories about what can go wrong with projects that makes them closer to perfection than you ever imagined.
Preface:

Throughout the evolution of this thesis there has been a lot of self-discovery. I fought with what I wanted to share in this thesis. I would love to share all the happy, joyous times only, but it would be unrealistic. It’s my hope that anyone who is interested in furthering their knowledge about art, or wanting to see what goes into pieces as they are created, will read this and realize that it’s worth going through all of the crap in the long run. There will be classes that disappoint you and people that aren’t the same as they were when you started out on your four-year journey. College is a time to grow and experience new things. With some things, medium and people alike, you’ll grow together while the growth has the potential to take you down different paths. It’s my hope that people will be able to benefit from the experiences, stories, and processes that I share within the next few pages. As with all things in life, learning things can come at you in a multitude of ways, some of them soft, but the ones that stick are usually the slaps in the face.

Take everything with a grain of salt and taking twice the time to think through something is better than using that same amount of time to clean up a mess. Take care and I hope that you enjoy my humble ramblings.

-Katy
Artistic Biography

Having started working with art at a young age, you could find me drawing in a corner next to a stack of movies. It was my fascination with animation and the sense of humanity that a few carefully placed lines could create that fostered my interest in art. These interests lead to hours of drawing and recreating these characters, remembering the stories that I had seen for each of the characters. While growing up, my sisters and I would spend hours at the library looking for books before carting 20 home each. During these trips to the library I would come across drawing books, with focuses on both realism and cartooning. Though I would always have the drive to draw as true to life as I could, which has only recently started to subside in favor of the abstract world, it was cartooning that drew me in.

The idea that you could use fewer lines, less shading, and seemingly random shapes to create a character, and then a story, was mind-boggling. Even though I would still draw from photographs, storybooks, and movie covers, I found the freedom of drawing the images in my head to be far more rewarding than I expected. Some of these images were characters that were human-like, while others became fairies, elves, dragons, or weirdly cute creatures formed from letters of the alphabet. It would be years before I started focusing on the use of concepts in any of my works of art. I continued to draw from my personal experiences for the artwork that I created, but was apprehensive about moving from 2-dimensional work into 3-dimensional mediums – partly from lack of knowledge, mostly from lack of funding.

Since I was home-schooled, my art courses were mostly self-taught while being supplemented by a grand total of four ten-week classes over the course of my entire childhood. These classes included two drawing courses, a pottery/hand-building class, and a sewing course. The first drawing class that I took was interesting and bizarre. Looking back
it was formatted similarly to a college course, but it didn't allow for creativity, or at least in my opinion, it could have been a more constraining if I had allowed it to be. Aside from being given projects to draw – I remember one being a portrait – we would have doodling sessions. These were literally 15 plus minutes of drawing squiggles. There were actually times where I got yelled at for making doodles into recognizable objects. The next drawing course that I took was far more interesting. It took design principles that my last teacher left out and formed projects around them. We not only had to create pieces around these principles, but also had to draw from older works and recreate them in conjunction with the assigned principle from the project.

The pottery class\textsuperscript{1} that I took was very basic hand-building skills. We worked on projects that could be used as gifts and given to parents or grandparents. With these projects it just required knowing how to mold clay and how to slip and score\textsuperscript{2}, basic coil building\textsuperscript{3}, with a small introduction to slab building. There wasn't much information given about what happened between the building of a project and the finishing techniques were left to be a mystery. We would be given under-glazes and glazes that would be the same color when you fired them. Classes like this allowed me to understand basic terms, but it was more of a foundation to build off of in the future. The last class that I took outside of college was a hand-sewing class. During this class I learned basic hand sewing and embroidery techniques. I was thirteen at the time and apparently excelled enough in the course to be offered a job

\textsuperscript{1} I'm fuzzy on whether or not I've taken more than just one class – this will be explained.
\textsuperscript{2} This is done by applying watered down clay to the edges of the clay followed by scratching the clay that has just been "moistened." The final step is pressing the scored edges together to form a seal.
\textsuperscript{3} This is where you make clay "snakes" that are rested on top of each other or set next to each other to add height or width to a form.
with the park district that was offering the course. I accepted the job and started the week that I turned fourteen.

This extended the areas that I was able to learn about, since there were a variety of locations that were available for me to work in while there. I worked at Blackberry Historical Farm in Aurora, starting out as a part-time volunteer and paid employee in Huntoon House giving sewing demonstrations and lecture about life during the 1880's in the Midwestern United States. Christine Greene, who ran the weaver's cabin, had also been an attendee in the class sewing class that I had taken, so she offered me hours under her supervision. This gave me the opportunity to learn how to take wool from a sheep, both raw and after it had been cleaned and combed, and spin it into yarn. From that point I learned to take the yarn that I had spun, as well as scraps of fabric, and weave anything from fabric to rag rugs that we sold at the Historical Farm. After starting to work in the weaver's cabin I had more offers from the supervisors in the other areas of the park. This extended my experiences from giving lectures and demonstrations to include teaching penmanship and basic lessons as a schoolteacher in the schoolhouse. My second year allowed me the opportunity to work under the head blacksmith, giving me the opportunity to learn how to do basic metalworking. Another thing that I had to my advantage was that I grew up in a family that was involved in the construction industry -- my late grandfather was a general contractor. So, even though I didn’t have a traditional art education as I would have attending school, I was more familiar with power tools, woodworking, and dry walling\(^4\) than any of the other students that I was in classes with.

\(^4\) I started using drywall to patch holes in walls in homes that my family and I remodeled. After several projects of using the drywall compound for its traditional use, I started
I'll digress slightly to warn any art students who read this – even if you feel really compelled to be of service to fellow students in class, DO NOT ASSIST THEM. They have to learn to do these things themselves. I warn against this, because I wasn’t smart enough to not help – this results in doing the grunt work for other people’s projects before getting a slap in the face when they tell the class how they made the piece. If it weren’t important for every artist to know, then it wouldn’t be a part of the lesson plan. So, when it comes to any type of artwork, it is better for the individual next to you to struggle, rather than finding yourself with half the time to focus on your own projects and careers. If they aren’t going to take the time to learn and grow on their own, that is the artist’s decision not to progress in that area. Granted, this is still up to you to decide and sometimes it takes learning it the hard way, but just be careful. Though these last sentiments may seem irrelevant to the discussion of my training, it has a lot to do with the remainder of my topics. This is because aside from the technical experience that is needed, at least in my eyes, there is a need to have either knowledge or experiences to draw from to develop concepts that are strong enough to lead to finished artwork. It’s these concepts that make it from the drawing table to pedestal.

When I started taking college classes for credit full-time, which was roughly 6 years ago, I was still doing pieces that were based on process and technical prowess rather than the focus on concept that I now have. The first college level art class that I took was a beginning ceramics class at Waubonsee Community College. This didn’t help to turn me towards concepts, but it did start to rejuvenate a curiosity and wonderment about working with clay, and it became almost a foe that I felt was challenging me to be its conqueror. It would be three years before I would get back into the fine arts. During those years I would be branching out and using it as an additive medium – similar to clay – and then sanding and carving it down to create better details.
engrossed in the fashion industry, both working and learning about the ins and outs of the field. It was during this time that I started thinking about what a piece of clothing, and thus a piece of artwork, can say, what messages these inanimate objects could share with the people who wore them or saw them being worn. I started showing my designs, working with other students doing theatre costume design, and entering design competitions (though not as many as I should have, looking back at it all). I worked as an intern and then as an assistant designer for the Illinois Ballet Theatre while I was finishing up at the College of DuPage and moving on to attending school at North Central College (NCC).

During my last term at C.O.D., I lived with an artist down in Atlanta while getting art lessons in exchange for being a nanny to her son. Plans changed when I got down there and found out that she and her husband were expecting their second child. Though the art lessons were out of the picture, I continued painting and drawing, but most of my time was filled with teaching and playing with her son while taking care of schoolwork. This experience reinforced my drive to teach, as well as solidified the methods in which I would prefer to educate my students. I had actually planned initially to continue pursuing a career in Fashion Design, but all of the institutions that I toured repeated the coursework that I had already completed at C.O.D., so I decided to start looking into art education schools. Since I was five I had wanted to open up a school, so the switch from fashion design to studying art education wasn’t far from my end goal. I applied to schools all over Illinois, with the last school that I applied to being NCC. My late grandfather’s wife had attended NCC and graduated with a degree in art, and a co-worker at a gym that I taught with attended NCC studying art education. Therefore I was vaguely familiar with the program. Though I was accepted to all of the schools that I had applied to, I decided to accept the offer to attend NCC. When I heard
that I had been accepted to NCC into the art education program, I was excited that I would be able to continue the plan that I had to become an educator in the arts. Classes at NCC started that September. That term I was enrolled Studio Survey and Drawing I, both of which I was tentative about since the standards that I had for art classes thus far had been high. Therefore, oddly enough, it was taking Drawing I and Studio Survey that drove me to use concepts within my pieces. Not because these were challenging courses, or even that there was mention of the incorporations of such methods into artwork. Rather, it was the exclusion of those methods from the coursework, as well as the creation of art for arts sake, or “making pretty things,” that drove me to again focus on creating pieces that had meaning. This was echoed again in the classes that I took the next term. I was starting to doubt the reasons that I started down this road toward this career.

I should talk about one aspect before continuing to discuss the coursework that I took and the reasoning that I have for creating each of these pieces. That would be my plan to graduate from NCC as an art teacher. This is important, since what shapes an artist’s works, however unintentionally, is their life choices, experiences, decisions, and opinions. For me it took my third term at North Central. After two rough terms of courses that I breezed through, my third term was devoid of any art classes. Instead, the classes that boggled my mind were Adolescent Psychology and Education 100. Neither of them I found difficult when it came to studying, but what I found disturbing was that these were courses in which I

5 Prior to leaving College of DuPage, I had taken two courses that would transfer over as 2-Dimensional design. I mention this course, since it had been the only credit courses that I had taken that I could relate to in regards to workload and expectations, since I was told they were higher than design, when it came to the fine arts.

6 By rough I mean filled with unchallenging busy work and a professor that would take the pencils out of your hand and draw on the project that you had been spent the entire class time working on perfecting.
was made to follow the teacher’s beliefs for the psychology course and methodology and pedagogy when it came education. Despite having taught classes and written lesson plan from the age of 14, I was being told that all of the real world experiences that I had, that decisions and opinions that I had formed around my method of teaching, and even some of my behavior, didn’t matter. Once it was known that I had been home-schooled, I started getting asked to share stories during my psychology class – only to discover that the reasoning of the teacher was to share her “expertise” about how my experiences growing up were nearly impossible to happen “in the real world”. This might seem to depart from the story of my artistic career, but it was the drive that these classes strengthened in me to create art that is powerful and meaningful. To have felt like the time I should have been listening to lectures was filled with defending my life experiences made something click in my head. I could share these “nearly impossible” experiences, the opinions that I had formed (which oddly enough were scrutinized during our study of autonomy – oh the irony).

As I continued on with my classes at North Central College, I started focusing more on what I could say with the work that I made. It became a battle to assert myself through my artwork. I could share my opinions and hear people’s reactions while distancing myself. This let me learn more about the people around me and is one of the only ways that I feel comfortable letting people get to know me. My second year at North Central was filled with art projects. I took Ceramics I, II, and III, as well as Painting I, II, and Advanced Painting I, along with 3-Dimensional Design. Outside of those classes I started taking graphic design courses, which supplemented the fine arts classes that I was taking. From what I’ve

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7 Last time I checked I’m just as real as the next person. On a more serious note, I had already worked in the corporate world and the majority of the peers that I spent time with were in their late 30’s and early 40’s while I was in my early teens.
experienced, there is a difference in our minds in graphic arts and fine arts, but the principles behind the two are the same. The way that my brain used to work was that it would separate the arts and sciences. Once I started studying graphic design along with my courses, my brain was switched to full speed.

This switch helped to strengthen the concepts that I would develop. I'm still in the beginning phases of my final approach to conceptual work. At the stage that I'm at right now, the work that I create has to have meaning, the meaning that these pieces fit what I believe, and therefore my work is a reflection of myself. Even if a piece isn't representational, even if it's not something that speaks the same to others, each piece is a story that I choose to share, an opinion. The particular pieces that I am sharing in this thesis and my senior art show, Spring 2008, are ones that share various stories, various views. Each is a suggestion, a train of thought that I'm inviting you to consider boarding.

Fall term, 2007, I spent studying abroad in Sunderland, England at the University of Sunderland. The courses, or modules as they are called in the United Kingdom (UK), included, but were not limited to, figure drawing, 3-D animation, and Glass, both blowing glass and working with a kiln. Though all of the pieces that I created for the senior show were made prior to this experience, the time that I spent abroad has affected my view of art and the approaches and mediums that I want to focus on.
Artist Statements

Make me Pretty is a piece that looks at the effect that body image has on young girls and women alike. The pressure to fit into a mold of the ideal form has led to an increase in the popularity of plastic surgery, including the comfort level of women openly sharing that they’d gone through “under the knife,” from breast augmentations to tummy tucks, the quick fixes that are offered are reflected on television shows and advertisements. The way that this piece looks at this issue is through showing the struggle with image using the treatments on the form to imply that it is a second skin. This helps it to be seen as a piece of armor that can be placed on, rather than being young girls and women being comfortable in their own skin. To hide the pain, the ribbons on the side conceal the deep gashes, the pain that the person feels, both physically and emotionally.
I don’t look at the sanctity of marriage and the change in society’s view on what the idea of commitment truly is. My generation seems to look at marriage as an achievement, a milestone, rather than looking at marriage as having found your soul mate or your best friend. Though there are still people that manage to find that person, it becomes devalued by those who don’t understand it. The true dynamic of relationships is being overlooked and being replaced by the desperate urge to find someone, to make sure that you’re not alone, even if the people feel like they are settling. This piece, though shown in a way that still exhibits the beauty of marriage, takes a closer look to realize that it’s crumbling, and through its muted tones it suggests decay. However, the state of decay is at a point to where it can be cleaned off or rebuilt, that the pieces are in place to be put back together, rather than leaving it to rot. The decision of whether or not it signifies signs of death or rebirth is up to the viewer.
Pieces, which is a hanging sculpture, is another piece of artwork that looks at body image. It examines the growth of a girl into a woman by looking at a side-by-side comparison. Having studied Fashion Design for my Associates degree I learned pattern making and felt that would best represent the human form in a 2-Dimensional state. The drastic difference between the two stages is one that is not only visually awkward, but also physically and emotionally awkward as young women experience it. I wanted to show the differences side by side, so that the juxtaposition would allow for the viewer to see this without hesitation or a second thought.
Research

Any good artist knows that research is something that transpires prior to the creation of the artwork. This is because there will be times in which you have to defend your pieces and the statements that you are making. Another reason to do research, which is more important to me, is actually knowing what you are talking about when you tell a story or are trying to prove a point with the artwork that you are making. Even if you prefer to do work that is simply that and serves no other purpose, it is important to research the history behind the type of work that you are creating and displaying. Supporting articles, interviews, diaries, and notes are highly recommended even after you leave school and one needs to continue to research artists, artistic approaches, new mediums, and the interpretation and acceptance, or indifference, to artwork that is considered up and coming or forward thinking.

For the pieces that I chose to display during the senior art show there were a variety of different types of resources that I used to formulate my overall opinion and have support the claims that I was making. This was important since they all dealt with human behavior and despite how strong my convictions were in regards to the social issues I was discussing, that conviction would have little to do with proving the validity of the claims that I was making with each of the pieces. I watched television shows, like “Dr. 90210”, to view the way that society was “interacting” with the idea of cosmetic surgery. How many women were on the show in comparison to men? What were the procedures being done? What were the general age ranges that these women fit into? I made mental notes of all of this. I didn’t allow my research to stop there. Seeing that these “reality” shows showed primarily women getting procedures performed on them wasn’t anything that I hadn’t expected. I was looking
for a lead, a direction, something that I thought was out of the ordinary for the majority of society, as I knew it.

This break came when I was about to shut off another depressing episode, but decided to watch the “pre-cap.” It paid off. This particular episode was about a mother who had bought cosmetic surgery for her daughters as presents. The older of the two daughters had had an eating disorder while she was in high school. She had gained substantial weight since finishing high school, and she mentioned having stopped taking her diet pills; her mother was giving her liposuction and breast augmentation as a present. She wanted to be able to remove some of the fat and help her daughter to look more proportional. She was roughly 20-22 years of age, so this bothered me a lot initially until the show introduced the other sibling that would be seeing the doctor. It was the woman’s daughter who had either recently or was about to turn 16. The gift? Breast augmentation. She was a girl who was slim with average proportions and was potentially still in the process of developing. The girl’s friends surprised me, trying to talk her out of going through with the operation. Sadly though, the girl decided that she wanted to do the surgery as not only a gift for herself, but she was sure that her boyfriend would appreciate it as well. If I were this girl’s mother I would be freaking out, not paying for the operation. I decided to look into journal articles about underage cosmetic surgery. These procedures aren’t as uncommon as I thought they were: approximately 3,800 girls under the age of eighteen underwent breast augmentation in 2003. Within two years,

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8 This is what I call the portion of the show that tries to entice you to stay and watch the entire program by showing you what might be happening within the allotted time frame.
there was a twenty-four percent increase in the number of girls under eighteen who underwent breast surgery.⁹

Prior to completing any more research, I had a fairly good idea from prior knowledge how I wanted to treat the figure for “Make me Pretty.” Because of the historical familiarity with fashion needed, as well as my experience working at a historical park creating period clothing, I knew the majority of the history surrounding corsets. Every aspect of a piece of artwork has the capacity and usually does have some form of symbolism based on a history that is recognized by the general public. The history of the corset is looked upon now as a source of oppression and control when it comes to women’s studies. If you look at the corset within its historical context, it has been seen as a medical necessity, a tool to assist with refinement and elocution,¹⁰ and a garment associated with high fashion.

This started to focus my research on the image that the mass media shows as an example of what a woman should be to young girls. It’s the foundation of both “Make me Pretty” and “Pieces.” Every time I was watching television, I would watch to see how the female characters would interact with the male characters. I wanted to see if there was any variance based on how the different sexes in different age groups interacted with each other. Since my focus was on how young girls were affected, I wanted to make sure that I was watching shows that were aimed towards their demographic. This meant hours of Disney Channel, broken up by breaks to watch Nickelodeon. From what I watched, most of these shows were filled with plot lines that were meant to assist them with problems that they

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might come across in daily life: bullies, the temptation of cheating on tests, the woes and joys of crushes, etc. Granted I felt like the information was “dumbed down,” since I remember dialogue being far more intelligent even on Saturday Morning Cartoons as I was growing up. There was nothing out of the ordinary at first. Everything stayed pretty true to storylines that I had seen in the past. And yet, as there had been with “Dr. 90210,” I found a show that both shocked and appalled me. The details as I remember them had the show focus on the role of women in modern society. At first I was excited about the prospect of what this show could mean for a generation that is otherwise bombarded with images of movie stars, celebutantes, and socialites. It fell short of the expectations that I had for it. The main character, who was a teenage girl, looked at the equality and the stereotypes that were attached to her as a female teenager and her stepbrother as male teenager. It was setting up to be a powerful episode, until the writers had the girl throw a temper tantrum. After the tantrum occurred, it all went down hill. Though she fought against some of the stereotypes, they had her character emulate some of the stereotypes that she was “against” at the beginning of the episodes.

Now even though I could have created a piece solely on the above musings, all I would really have would be my own opinions and reactions, which could differ from anyone or potentially everyone on the face of the planet. I’m not saying that further knowledge is mandatory. What I am saying is that it depends on an artist’s approach, what kind of information they feel is valid, and how much support they feel they need for the concept. My approach tends to be on going and as thorough as possible in regards to research. The beginning of the search included looking through recent articles, since I had heard news that there was a debate surrounding the Bratz dolls. It was speculated that these dolls, this different type of media, were affecting young girl’s view of women in general, as well as the
view of women from various cultures that fall into the spectrum of minorities within the United States. The most poignant statement that Catherine Bennett makes in her Guardian article is as follows: "Having read the APA study, I wonder how much damage the little sluts might have inflicted had they remained at liberty...Barbie, after all, was once held by feminist campaigners to be a lethally effective of the patriarchy."12

Bennett’s article lead me to further focus my topic of body image to the sexualized nature of the ideal figure. If it weren’t bad enough that women were being view as sexual objects, the mass media was starting to show this sexualized image as being acceptable to younger audiences. Sadly, it wasn’t being done in a passive manner. The ideas of flirtation and relationships were being introduced with these dolls geared toward girls as young as eight years old, with a cap on the age demographic falling roughly at thirteen years of age. This image was portrayed through the clothing that the girls wore, and through their proportions. The dolls are supposed to represent the age group that they are being sold to and yet prepubescent figure are nowhere to be found. Instead they have chests and hips befitting a girl in her late teens, early twenties.

This research branched off into psychology journals. I found articles that discussed how other toys and media outlets were affecting the autonomy of young girls, those before puberty and those who were affected while going through the awkwardness of change. It was this interest in autonomy, the experience of young girls trying to discover who they were, that lead me to the idea for “Pieces.” All of the research prior to this had completed the foundation for “Make me Pretty,” the twisted views of what women are expected to be, the

spreading epidemic of plastic surgery. I wanted to look at autonomy in regards to the effects that women in the media have on the psyches of young girls. Having grown up in a house where Barbie dolls were abolished when I was five and cable was revoked not long there after, I kept wondering where girls my age were getting some of these ideas and reasons for who they had to be in life and why it mattered so much what other people thought of them. That sparked a curiosity in me to understand why there was such a prevalence of flimsiness. I’m not saying that the people I was observing weren’t of value, rather it was their lack of self confidence, their quest to please others, and the fact that they sought to have their bodies viewed in a sexual manner before seeking recognition of intelligence or determination.

An artist’s research is done through researching journals, artist magazines, and sometimes by doing blanket internet searches for something similar to the project that you are working on. The blanket search is a good way to go, since it also allows you the opportunity to view the various approaches that have already been taken towards a concept or topic of discussion. With any good series of work, there is always the chance of continuation, with ideas and theories expounding upon themselves when you least expect it. This is why as an artist research is never ending. A good artist receives subscriptions to various journals, both art and non-art related. Since my focus tends to be towards human behavior, and my pocket book is stretched thin as it is, I look up articles in anthological and psychological journals. Since most databases of online journals have hundreds of recent, full articles available at your fingertips, this is a lot easier than it might seem, especially if you make a valiant effort of checking in every month, or two at the least, to see what other articles have been published about the topics and issues that are most intriguing to you at the moment.
This method of research keeps you well informed and allows you to gather as much information to work from as possible as you start solidifying the final concepts.
Process

Make me Pretty

This project was one that took roughly a year to get from concept to finished product. It's not that the piece itself was difficult to conceptualize or even to construct. The process itself was one that I had never done before, so it was a learning process. Unlike the majority of my earlier work, this one was done outside of a class assignment. I had been working on pieces for the Rail Symposium, which is a series of Honors Seminars and Student Exhibitions.

When I sketch and work through ideas, I do most of it mentally, but as I work through other aspects of life I'll sketch in the margins of pages, on the palm of my hand, and, during summer I've even done sketches of ideas on my legs, flip-flops, and feet if there was no paper available. The first sketches of the piece, which have since gone the way of the recycling bin, had a chicken wire and barbed wire corset. The idea of drafting the pattern for a corset wasn't a very difficult one, but manipulating wire isn't easy. These were all still ideas that I was mulling over before I even started working on building the body. When I am working on the various projects I like to first go through the stages that I plan to before beginning the production, so that I don’t have to use twice as much materials, or even hit roadblocks along the way. Granted, this doesn’t stop there being issues along the way, but it helps me to feel more confident as I work on projects that I’ve thought through them enough to have supplies or tools on hand in case of an emergency.

As I thought through this idea more, I realized that as much as it could present an interesting visual, it also presented an issue with the materials that I would be working with. I

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13 By aspects of life I mean sitting in lectures, working on notes for class, research that pertains to projects outside of art, and general life outside of art.
knew that I wanted to create the form out of clay, since it would allow for simple modeling of the figure, but my unfamiliarity with wire made me hesitant to include that as part of the project. Even with these hesitations I wanted to challenge myself to see what I would be able to learn through the process of creating the piece.

For this project I knew that I was going to slab build onto a manikin; I was going to roll out thin sheets of clay about ¼” thick and slowly lay them over the shape of a body to give me the basis of the form. It took about 50 lbs of clay, but the process was pretty simple, or at least it seemed like it in my head. As I started to roll slabs, which was made easier by being able to use a slab roller rather than throwing them out by hand (think pizza without as much air time), it was actually going rather smoothly. When you roll out a slab it doesn’t end there. You next have to score or scratch the surface with a thin, serrated metal rib while compressing the clay. Using an un-serrated metal rib to smooth out the scoring and further compress the clay follows up this step. The reason that these two steps are included is due to nature of the material that I was using.

The particles in clay are suspended in water; by compressing the particles closer together, it strengthens the clay. During this stage the clay continues to lose some of its moisture. The clay is run through the slab roller between two layers of canvas. This absorbs some of the water that is in the clay. More of the moisture is absorbed into the canvas that the clay is still resting on while it's being compressed. Since the water is so integrated into the clay body, it doesn’t ooze, or squish, out of the clay. The clay has to be worked on a pliable surface, so that it can easily be removed, and these tend to be porous. Because of their porous nature, some of the water is removed from the clay. The water that is being absorbed during the compression stage is regular water. Chemical water, which varies from the normal H₂O,
only burns off at high temperatures during the fire. After the chemical water has been burned off, and the clay fired, this keeps it from being re-hydrated. Clay can only be recycled if it hasn’t been fired.

After rolling the slabs and compressing them, the next step was to cut to the shape that I was working on. There were various ways that I could have chosen to complete this step of the process, but I decided on using smaller slabs of clay. This was so that I would not have to worry about whether or not I was stretching out the clay that I had just worked hard on compressing. Using shapes and techniques similar to patternmaking in clothing design, I would make darts, or gaps, in the clay where I knew that the form would be indenting. This would allow me to slip and score the sides of the gap, so that the end result is a smooth area of clay formed to the shape of the manikin with as little stress put on the clay as possible. Because of the nature of clay slabs, they are very similar to the fabric, so this similarity worked to my advantage. It allowed me to use the slabs like pieces of heavy weight fabric.

As you can see in the pictures throughout this section, I started the piece from the shoulders and worked my way down. This allowed for the shoulders to support the weight of the clay as I was building it up on the form. The downside to
this was that I didn’t allow the clay to dry on the shoulders, so even though the overall amount of stress was reduced, there was still excess stress placed on the piece. By the time I finished the body, I had already decided that the idea of a wire corset wouldn’t work to illustrate the amount of pain that I felt was associated with this sort of lack of self-esteem. Rather than the pain of something that you could remove, I felt that it would be better to show that the pain is more than just skin deep. This is when I developed the idea of turning the entire piece into a second skin, a shell of what girls feel they have to be, rather than being comfortable with who they are. It was at this point that I added the details on the side of the figure. I “raised the skin” off of the muscles by adding to the thickness of the skin. This left the original level of the skin beneath these “folds” to act as muscles that showed through the wounds along the side. The last thing that I had left to do to the clay form before it started drying was to punch the holes in the sides where the ribbon would overlay the wounds. This part was actually pretty simple, since all I had to do was mark the distance between the bottom and the number of holes that I wanted, and then use a punch tool, which cuts identical holes in the clay where you punch it through.

All of the previous stages paled in comparison to actually removing the clay form from the manikin that I built it on. Since I had pushed the proportions of the figure, the manikin,
which was adjustable, was on its smallest settings. This meant that it wouldn't contract any smaller, so I would have to cut the figure off of the stand, rather than lifting it off once it had dried. Normally, this would have been fine since the bottom of sculptures tend to be straight and level across the bottom. However, because the piece represented a second skin, and I knew that I planned on suspending or hanging piece, the bottom edge of the sculpture wasn't going to be level and straight across. Instead, the plan, and final result, was for the edge to be wavy or jagged. This meant that I had to build a clay stand to place the piece on after I removed it from the manikin. The stand would have to be made so that it was strong enough to hold the drying sculpture, but made in a way that it could be easily removed from the piece after it had been fired for the first time. After the first firing, also called a bisque firing, it would have to withstand going through a glaze firing - which is typically at a higher temperature than the bisque firing. The stand had to be durable (the type of clay plays a greater role in this than the construction, but I still wanted to be careful with the construction as well). I had to go through a lot of different ideas, before I settled rolling more slabs and letting them start to dry out before constructing them into two separate stands, one for the left side, one for the right side. This allowed for me to cut down the center of the figure and then let them dry on the stands (except for the edges, so that I could reassemble the form).

The drying process has to be closely watched, so that it doesn't dry out too quickly, since that can weaken the clay. It can take forever to dry, and in some ways that's better, but it just depends on the artist's patience. I left this piece to dry for about a week, checking it several times a day, every day if possible. After the pieces dried well enough, I stood the stands on end and attached the pieces back together where I had separated them to get them off of the manikin. It was a very fine line between being too wet to work with and too dry to
stay together once it gets reassembled. I was pretty close to the right place, but it was just on this side of the too wet state that made it harder in some respects and easier in others to put the two halves of the figure back together again.

Before the bisque firing, I painted several layers of white slip on the surface of the piece. Slip, which is basically colored liquid clay, helps to smooth out marks and is a finishing technique. I chose white, since it lacks personality, which is something that tends to happen when everyone starts to look and act the same. I could have waited to do this stage after the first firing, but slip tends to chip off the clay during the last firing, since the clay is no longer as porous as it was. The first firing went well, without any problems. After taking it out of the kiln, I had to add the finishing details. This just meant that I had to go back in and add glaze to the wounds and the holes that I had punched in next to them. I opted for a green, semi-matte glaze to replicate pus or gangrene. Since clay shrinks as it heats to higher temperatures, I decided to go with a lower fire or lower temperature glaze, so that the figure fired to the same temperature that it had during the bisque firing. This was the safer play\textsuperscript{14} and lucky for me the glaze that I wanted to use would fire properly to that temperature. The second firing went just as smoothly as the first. Everything was falling into place as smoothly as I was hoping that it would.

As the piece was firing, since it takes two days to fire each time, I had been talking with my Uncle about the custom pedestal that I wanted for the piece. Due to my familiarity with woodworking, I knew that I would have been able to make the base. However, because I wanted the figure to be suspended by a copper pipe stand, I knew I would need assistance

\textsuperscript{14} Clay contracts as it fires and loses moisture. Even though it can withstand high heats, it constricts even more when fired to a higher temperature. This was a “safer play,” since by firing at the same temperature would lessen the risk of cracks appearing or growing by firing at the higher temperature.
with that portion. The day before I had to present the sculpture at Rall Symposium, it came out of the kiln for the last time. I was really excited that I was able to see my idea go from concept to sculpture. This one had pushed the boundaries of what I thought I would be able to achieve as an artist. There was one glitch: I still had to remove the stand from inside the figure. As I was tapping the seams and trying to break off the sections, I realized that I should have perforated some of the pieces, so that they would break out easier and small enough to be pulled out though the smaller holes. Unfortunately for me, the stand was stuck together better than the seam that I running through the center of the piece. As I was tapping the stand there were enough shock vibrations to crack the piece right down the center.

I had anticipated that this might happen, so I had epoxy on hand to glue the two sides back together, or at least that's what it seemed like initially. I used props to hold the two halves together while the epoxy was setting. The first time I tried using the epoxy I didn’t use enough, so when I removed the supports the pieces rolled apart again. I turned and walked towards the other side of the studio to grab the epoxy from the other table and heard a noise from the table. As I turned to see where the noise was coming from, I watched in slow motion as the left half of the piece rolled, as if time were irrelevant, and gracefully fell bottom first on to the ground. I can still remember what it looked like, but I was in such shock that it felt like the world feel silent, without even the sound of the shattering clay to reach my ears. This left me with one day before I was expected to move the piece across campus and present it. With it in more pieces than I could carry with both of my hands I didn’t see that happening. This is why the debut of the piece was delayed until roughly 10 months later. My uncle helped with bondo, which is used in automotive repair, to adhere the pieces together and fill in the gaps for the missing pieces. Because of the gaps and cracks, the
entire piece ended up needing to get recoated with some other finish to make it all the same color again. I chose flat white spray paint, since it best replicates the original finish that I had been going for. For the wounds, I used scarlet nail polish, so that it hearkened to fresh wounds. Rather than having had time to become infected, instead they are cursed with being aggravated to the point of constantly remaining fresh.
I don't

I wanted to do a piece that took something that people look at and perceived as being one thing, but that the reality of the piece was the opposite, or far from the viewer's first impression. Initially I had thought about looking at the sanctity of the family by building a house that looked pristine, while the inside suffered from structural damage, with floors and walls collapsing. This idea hit too close to home for me and despite wanting to pull from experience, this was too personal. However, I like the direction of the idea initially. I wanted to look at the idea of marriage, and examine what I feel the image of marriage has become in modern society. Since this was to fill the assignment of a non-traditional project in Ceramics III, I knew that I needed to think outside of the box, to push the concept a little further.

The idea behind the piece was based off of more personal experiences. I had seen quite a few successful marriages, since my peer group was quite a bit older than I was growing up, about 20 years older. They were successful marriages, until I watched them fall to pieces. Not all of them were unsuccessful, but most of the failures took me by surprise. I decided to examine the societal view on relationships. The people that I had to observe were the classmates that surrounded me. The point of reference that I had to base these observations off of were my own ideas of what I feel marriage should be and the example of parents who have been married for 30 years, roughly the same age as my classmates when they had gotten married. Since I'm neither a trained anthropologist or psychologist, these weren't empirical observations, but they were as close as I knew I could get them.

I started listening to conversations with classmates and inquiring about relationship status and points of view when it came to being married. My beliefs place marriage as a sacred institution in which the partners can biologically procreate, so that they can raise their children to know and worship God. I set aside the idea of it being restrained to a marriage
between the opposite sexes, because despite my own personal and religious beliefs, the dynamics of some of the alternative relationships were more conducive to the equal partnerships that I saw in marriage. There were girls in my classes who talked about getting married, but very few of them mentioned aspects of the person of interest's character or personality. The discussion tended to lean more towards which girl was dating a cutie, whether or not he came from money, or even whether they really could stand them and how controlled and trapped they felt, but that they were planning on getting married. My idea of a marriage is that the husband and wife are equal partners; neither of them should have assumed responsibilities within the relationship, nor should they wish upon their significant other more duties, or less respect than they would expect for themselves. The summaries of the observations above and the experiences with the torn marriages leads me to the concept for this piece. In most of these observations, I saw a lack of a firm foundation and open line of communication.

The process started with having to think about something that would signify marriage and be seen as an object of beauty, but also be something that I could work with to signify the decay of the ideals, the collapse of the fundamentals and foundation. The purpose of this project was to share my personal opinion and beliefs. Part of the appeal of the cake was also since the actual object that the ceramic piece was being modeled after was itself biodegradable or susceptible to decay.

Once I had the object, I had to come up with a non-traditional way of handling the material. I liked the idea of doing a press mold, so that the forms of each tier on the cake would look like a real cake. At first I looked through cake pans to find the right sizes, so that each layer got smaller. The pans themselves could have worked, but they would have
required me to press-mold and allow the clay to dry in each mold twice. I didn’t think that time would allow for me to have the drying time required for these pieces, so instead I decided to start looking at plastic containers that are used to store food. The price of the supplies also played a role. So, because of price and heights of the containers, I opted for four plastic storage containers that mirrored that size of each layer. Since they came with lids as well, and since clay isn’t toxic, I knew that I could use them for food or other projects in the future. Once I had the containers, I knew that I could start working. Since the idea of the cake was solid in my mind, I was also able to pick up a glass cake plate – again, with pricing, I figured that if the project fell through or if at some point I would decide to “retire” the piece, I would be able to use the cake plate for, well, cake.

The first step was to roll out slabs of clay. For this project I decided to use Terra Cotta, which is a low fire earthenware clay. Since most of the other students were using stoneware – the “traditional” college student clay – and because I prefer the smoothness of the Terra Cotta, I decided to go with that as the medium. After rolling out the slabs of clay, I cut out circles that were the size of the bottoms of the different containers. I pressed this down into each of the container. After I was content with how well the slab was pressed into the container, I used a ruler to measure the radius to determine the circumference of the container. This allowed me to know how long I should cut the next slab. The depth of the container that I would be putting it in determined the height of the slabs. Since I was working in a way that made each tier of the cake hollow, I used less clay than using any other method – I used roughly 10 to 15 lbs for this project, which is equal to roughly half a bag of clay. Once these longer slabs were attached to the circles that were placed into the containers, they were pressed into the sides of the containers to make sure that every edge of the slabs were
level with the edges of the containers. I decided to place the cake made in the smallest container on top of the second smallest cake, so that the cake retained the height that I was looking for, while lessening the potential for structural instability by having to factor in another tier of columns.

One of the pitfalls of using a plastic container is that the inside dried out faster than the edges that were firmly pressed against the container. Actually, because the plastic held the moisture in, it wasn’t until after I removed each of the cakes that the outside edges started to dry. Even though it made it harder to take each of the pieces out of the containers, because it was still wet, it made it easier for me to use slip, which for this use was thicker than normal to be able to simulate the appearance of frosting. I was also able to smooth out imperfections and make sure that the pieces were structurally sound, since I had to look at each piece from several different angles – this is because I chose to hold the piece in my hand as I was working on it, rather than resting it on a turntable. Once each of the cakes was “frosted,” I set them aside to dry. After they dried, I painted a few thin layers of brown slip. However, since Terra Cotta was a low fire clay and the slip was formulated for firing at a higher temperature, the results weren’t what I expected when they came out of the kiln. As with the previous piece, I set this part of the project aside for the time being.

With all projects, there is down time in between the steps of each of the sections to work on other aspects of the pieces. During the down time with the cakes, I was experimenting with the type of decorations that I would want to place on the cake. I toyed around with the idea of mimicking piping by using casting slip – but since I had never had very good luck piping a real cake with real frosting, I opted against it. The other decoration idea was roses. I knew from making a cake for a friend that as long as a substance could be
rolled thin and was similar to candy dough or fondant that it would work. From working with clay the past few months, I knew that clay itself wouldn’t be stable enough or durable enough to be the roses. Paper clay, on the other hand, would work. I had heard about it and had to make a batch earlier in the year to fix a crack in a piece, so I felt comfortable working with it as a featured medium.

Even though you can buy paper clay, I opted to make my own. This is done by mixing 50% clay with 50% paper – as for the kind of paper, I prefer extremely cheap toilet paper, since it dissolves into a pulp really quickly and evenly. I mixed up a large batch of paper clay. I wanted to play with different colors and glazes with the flowers, so I knew that I would have to use stoneware clay, since it was the clay that was closest to white that would still be strong enough and I would be comfortable enough to use for something as delicate as flowers. I could have used porcelain, but it has more of a plastic feel and is a texture that I don’t like to work with. The experimenting with color made me start to think that maybe I should try to add colorants directly into the clay and then add another color with a transparent glaze of a similar or slightly richer color on top. This went well in the sample phase, leaving me with rich, crimson paper clay. The official batch of clay that I ended up with turned out to be a lighter shade of pink, since I didn’t write down the exact ratio of colorant to clay while making the sample. This was because I couldn’t go off of
the weights,\textsuperscript{15} since the clay had the possibility of being slightly heavier or lighter based on how much water it was retaining. In the end it didn’t end up being a problem, but this was also because the glazing of the cakes changed as well.

After setting them aside from the first firing, I decided to try using an Iron Rutile wash to see if it would add more depth to the frosting. Typically this is true with a wash, since it allows the liquid to settle in dips and creases resulting in richer deep versions of the overall color. It did end up working to give me a brown, but it was still not as rich as I was expecting. This ended up being ok though, since the purple glaze that I formulated was more muted than the test sample. I’ve found over the years of working that sometimes the piece runs in the direction that it wants to go. After making about 100 roses (roughly, I lost count after 60), and the two days of firing (this took less time, since I fired them in a test kiln which cools down faster), it was time to compile all of the pieces together into the final project. This included cutting round acrylic circles that were slightly larger than the circumference of each of the cakes. My preferred adhesive is E6000 Industrial adhesive, especially after the debacle with the epoxy and the figure in “Make me Pretty,” which is something that I started using while I was working for the Illinois Ballet Theatre. It was the adhesive that we would use to attach the crystals onto the costumes, so it was something I knew how to use. After this last step, the project was complete. This took roughly two solid weeks of work.

\textsuperscript{15} When formulating glazes you have to measure the weights of various chemicals based on the ratios of the glaze recipe that you have. Since the colorants are typically added after the glaze recipe is formulated it makes the ratio 10 parts to the number of parts for the colorant. Since those are all dry weights, it’s easier to calculate, however, since the colorant was the dry weight and the paper clays weight included fluctuating amounts of water, and thus fluctuating weight. Because of the fluctuating weight of the clay, I couldn’t keep the ratio exact; I simply had to eye ball it.
Pieces

Pieces is the only project whose original concept, materials, and technique stayed pretty true to what it was meant to be from the beginning. The idea was to have a side-by-side comparison and be able to "look at all of the pieces of the puzzle." I also wanted to incorporate the skills that I had learned while attending College of DuPage. This project was much simpler in concept too. However, the steps that went into making the project were more than I expected in the beginning.

Since my classmates and I were working with slip casting, I thought it would be interesting to work with tile pieces. Slip casting means I had to do multiples of whatever pieces that I determined to make. The start of the project required me to actually make the final piece out of stoneware clay to make a mold. To make each of these pieces, I knew that they would have to have to fit together without any problem. I toyed with several different types of shapes that would fit together. I know that they would have to work when laid out, as well as make sure that their surface size was larger enough that the images and related textures would fit on them and remain recognizable. I made the pattern pieces using Adobe Photoshop for the initial shape and then based the edge pieces off of those before transferring all of the images into a word document, so that I could print them all off on the same page. So that the paper puzzle pieces wouldn’t wear out with use, I glued them to a piece of oak tag, which is very similar to what is used to make file folders.

Each of the tiles were cut out of the ¼ inch slabs of clay and laid out next to each other. As they were laid out next to each other I was able to move on to the next step of the project. This is where I would use the portion of the project that drew from my experience with fashion design, particularly patternmaking. Since it is regular practice to learn how to draft both full sized patterns and miniature versions, so that you can use fewer materials
while testing a design, I knew that I could make an accurate version that would fit within the boundaries of the tile pattern that I had laid out on the table in front of me. For the pattern sizes, I chose to use the smallest woman's size available, so that the waist would be trim. I then made adjustment to the bust line of the pattern, so that the cup size would be as large as possible. For the skirt pattern that rests below, I kept the measurements of the waist the same, as you would when patternmaking, and kept the hips slim. These approaches to making the pattern would make the finished garments sized for the figure of a porn star, or an unrealistic idealized woman. The other pattern that I wanted to draft was a one of the young girl who would be looking up to the ideal woman. For this pattern, I based it off of the average measurements of a thirteen-year-old girl, since this tends to be the age at which most girls are either just about to or have just started experiencing the changes related to puberty. I left this one unaltered, as natural and normal as possible.

With the clothing pattern pieces completed, I laid them over the clay tile pieces that had started drying while I had been drafting the pattern. I traced the outline of the pattern pieces onto the tiles that were laid out. From there, the outlines were enough to show what the shapes were, but I needed something more to make these shapes solid and important to the viewers as well as to show the difference between the two of them. When thinking about the way that I could differentiate between the two, I knew that textures would solidify the shapes, while allowing me to use two different textures to show that the objects resting next to each other were different. Because of the difference between the two, I wanted to make sure that the textures were bold enough and precise in their details to be distinctive. I then ran into the issue of having made front pattern pieces and back pattern pieces. The size of the darts distinguished for me which pattern piece was which. I realized that once each of the
shapes had texture that their shapes would be able to be seen as separate pieces, so the only thing that I had left to worry about was how to show the relationship between the front pieces of the woman’s and girl’s pattern and the backs of the same patterns.

For the textures that I created, I used the two different ones for the front pattern pieces and the back pattern pieces. Since the back pattern pieces were further apart from each other, I knew that they would be able to support a heavier texture while allowing the composition to remain balanced. Making the texture for the back pieces was the tip of a fettling knife.\textsuperscript{16} For the front pattern pieces, I wanted to use a lighter texture. Since it’s harder to create a regular pattern with finer lines, I started looking through my tools and the textures that I had available. I needed to make sure that I could carefully fill the space evenly and precisely the first time through. When you are working on a project for classes you tend to run into deadline, so the sense of urgency tends to spark the need for practicality. My weapon of choice then for creating the lighter texture was the serrated rib that is used to slip and score, as well as to compress clay, as was mentioned in the process of “Make me Pretty.” Once the textures were applied, this completed the final version of what I wanted the tile mural to look like.

After I finished this step, I used the steel or wood retaining walls that are in the studio to enclose the tiles that I had made. I had to break them up into groupings, since the final pieces was going to be roughly twenty-two inches square when placed together would be too big to place within one set of retaining walls. Each of the molds ended up containing roughly five to six tiles in each of the molds. The end result was a total of 5 or 6 molds, each weighing about 20-25 lbs each. To actually make the molds takes more than just setting up

\textsuperscript{16} A fettling knife is a slightly sharp tool that is used to cut into clay. It has a rounded tip that is \(\frac{3}{16}\) at the tip and roughly \(\frac{3}{8}\) at the handle.
the supports and pouring plaster over top of them. Once the restraining walls have been set up, the edges that are resting on the tables are sealed using clay coils that are pressed into the walls and tables. The next area that is sealed in the joints where the restraining walls are clamped together. This takes care of making sure that the plaster, once poured, stays within the bound of the restraining walls. A good measure, though, is to have dry plaster on hand just in case there is a leak. When sprinkled on the oozing plaster, it will absorb the moisture and help that area of plaster set faster to clog the source of the problem. Once the walls are sealed, the next step is to apply mold soap to any porous surfaces, since plaster will stick firmly to those surfaces unless they are treated beforehand. If making a cast from an object that is not made out of clay, it’s required that you carefully paint several thin coats of mold soap on the object as well. If this is done to clay that is on the drier side, it assists in removing it from the mold during the cleaning process.

With the walls now sealed and the mold soap applied, the last step in making the mold is mixing and pouring the plaster. There are several different ways that you can go about this. First things first, it’s good to know how much plaster you are going to need to be able to properly cover the object that you are casting and make sure that there is enough distance from the object to the outer wall that you’ll be left with a sturdy reusable mold. This can be done by eye-ball ing the volume of the area and then guessing roughly how much water and plaster you need, or if you aren’t afraid of a few numbers, then measurements of the inner area of the restraining walls can be taken and used to calculate the volume that is needed of both water and plaster. The measurements that are needed for this are the width and length of the area as well as the height. The width and length are rather obvious, since those are the measurement of the inner edge of the restraining wall; it’s the height that has to
be more precise. Since I was working with tiles that were relatively thin, the majority of the thickness of the mold was going to be made up of solid plaster. It’s best to have between two and three inches of extra plaster around the object, though an inch and a half to two inches would suffice if you were low on plaster. Once you have the measurement, they are multiplied together and then divided by 80, leaving you with the liquid volume of the area.

To know how much plaster to use, this can either been done by feel (which I’ve begun to grow fond of), or by looking at the chart that most studio spaces, like the one at NCC, has posted on its sculpture room wall. Curing the mold takes roughly 30-45 minutes, depending on humidity, ventilation, and thickness of the mold. Once the mold has cured, it is clean and left to dry.

The advantage of plaster mold is that it makes it easy to reproduce the same thing 15 to 20 times in a row, but it is a pain to store and move around. After you make the molds, they have to dry for at least two days in front of a fan. This is so that when the casting slip is poured into the mold, the excess water can be absorbed into the mold to evaporates, this results in the clay shrinking, making it easier to remove from the mold. In between these two steps, you have to clean the clay out from inside of the mold. If I had made smooth tiles, this would have been easier, but I since I had put texture on the top of the tiles I had to make sure that I was careful enough cleaning it out that I didn’t chip the plaster that had filled the texture that I had carved into the clay. After the clay has started to dry around the edges you have to remove the excess by turning the mold upside down and letting it drain. After it’s drained, it has to dry briefly (roughly 30 to 45 minutes) so that each tile could be removed without losing shape or details. Once the tiles are removed from their molds, they are left to
air dry until they are bone dry, meaning that is you spray them with water, it dries almost immediately. This makes them ready to fire.

Finishing with washes and glazes was the last step. For that I opted for black stain and cobalt washes, so that the colors would gather in the texture while the clear glaze over it would add a nice gloss finish to the piece. After firing, all that was left was mounting the tiles. I opted for was the E6000 glue to attach the tiles to a piece of MDF (medium density fiberboard) with a border of popular wood left unfinished. This finished the piece and the project.
Reflections after critique with Kelvin Mason

Through learning about art, you really learn about yourself and who you are as an artist, and thus what you hope to achieve through your work. By talking with Professor Mason, I was able to start to better flesh out some of those ideas. I had already begun to layout my purpose, for my overall statement that would pertain to the mission behind all of the pieces that I will ever create (See Appendix I). This is a large area of time, but even before it has a chance to evolve, I have to remember where I am starting. You have to establish a ground zero where you keep your methods, your meanings, your purposes, and your reasons. This gives you a place to return to when everything else floating around in your head starts making less and less sense then it did when you first thought of the idea.

As an artist, particularly when you start preparing to attend graduate school, you need to be aware of the audience that you are directing your piece towards. Without knowing who is going to see what you have created, you have no way of knowing whether or not they are even going to speak the same language with which you created the pieces. So, important things to remember are purpose and voice. Granted that not everyone that fits within a demographic (be it age, class, race, locale) is going to be the same – the way in which they interpret the world around them is going to differ from their peers – but they can serve well in who you want to address with your artwork. The recognition that there are slight differences from person to person exists, but doesn’t warrant obscure art that caters to those small differences – not to say that it’s not inevitable, or a worthy goal – but unless your goal in life is to affect and change ten people out of the entire planet’s population, then these demographics are your friends. A wider, but more focused, audience is better, enabling you
to reach more people in a voice that they’ll be able to understand completely, rather than one in which they have to mentally fill in the blanks with nowhere to go for the answers.

It also is important to make sure what you say is being heard as what you mean. I felt compelled that the work that I do in the future should spark conversation amongst the viewers who are seeing it, regardless of whether or not they’ve known each other for ten years or just happened to be at the same exhibit. Not every one has this goal for their work, but I know that, for me, it’s equally important that I hear what my pieces are saying to other people. I know this goes back to the whole “But then is your voice not being heard? Is the concept not strong enough to speak for itself?” scenario – what does it mean? Well, I know that I can’t be perfect; I’m going to search for that universal voice. At the same time, I recognize that this voice might have multiple dialects. By wanting to know how the art that I create speaks to the viewer will help with this. If they hear what I was trying to say, then I did something right. If they hear something entirely different, then I have the opportunity to learn and grow. As long as I take that into consideration, I’ll be able to learn more about the voice that I help give life, the language that I speak.

We also talked about the reason for creating artwork, whether or not artwork should have a concept, and the steps that a person goes through to create a piece of artwork. My methods of concept development varies from piece to piece. With some I mull them over for weeks – sometimes months – on end, playing with dimensions, placing them in various settings. Its hard to explain what goes on in my mind, but my actions are vivid enough that by the time I start building the physical sculpture, it’s already an old friend. I take the project step by step in my mind, sometimes adding clay onto a piece or determining the placement of a chisel or the stroke of a saw blade to remove materials. I close my eyes and visualize the
entire process. I’ve been doing this since I was little. I used to close my eyes to fall asleep and sketch faces in my head, sometimes playing with the idea of closing off the visual in my head to “draw blind,” trying to train myself regarding what I see or don’t see.

As for the meaning behind the pieces that I create there is a motto that I worked on and settled on roughly two years ago. “Art without concept is air you can look at, but are unable to breath.” To me this means that you should be able to digest a piece, allow it to affect you, and share your voice so that you can in turn affect the artist. To hear what other people feel about the artwork, what the voice says to them, is what helps me develop as an artist. Because of this, because of wanting to serve some greater purpose through my artwork, I place a large amount of importance on the concept, the story of a piece. I know that I can have a solid concept, but it’s the relationship from concept to final piece that I worry about. Even if I see it clearly, I want to make sure that others will see it as well.

These were all of the underlying issues that we touched on while looking at the work that was housed in the new art building. Some of these things I had known of through classes and developing past projects, but I found that as time had passed between the present and the last project that I had created, these once basic principles were slipping from my memory. Luckily, this conversation has started me back on the right track, the right train of thought. As I take the year or so off from school, I’ll be able to fully develop the answers to each of the questions that Kelvin asked me today. This time will also let me to better grasp this language we call art, though I consider myself bilingual, I seek to become fluent. I feel like art is my mother tongue that’s been removed from my grasp, that the ability to speak it I have to regain.
Building on top of these topics, Kelvin was able to not only critique my pieces, but because of the way he presented his critique, he allowed me to look at my pieces in a more objective manner. For both pieces, “I don’t” and “Make me Pretty,” he told me that he felt that the medium for both couldn’t have been better. It was nice to hear that he felt that I had a good sense when it came to knowing which mediums seemed to best express and strengthen a concept. He also raised several valid points, giving me a few puzzles to solve. One of the biggest is figuring out how to incorporated aspects into my pieces that encourage conversation amongst the viewers. I strive to create questions, spark conversations between people through my pieces, but looking at them again made me realize that they fall just short of that happening. It’s like I can see the other side of the ravine, but can’t seem to find all the bricks to build the bridge across. This is going to take up a lot of my time, though I have quick fix ideas that I am going to experiment with as I quest to find the best response to this question. Questionnaires for viewers to fill out and submit, something to make anything that I display interactive, perhaps even questions on these quizzes that must be asked to someone else and then compared to their own response.

Along with giving a stronger voice to my pieces and encouraging others to give volume and weight to their own voices, I also have to address the audience. These tasks, through the critique of these projects, will allow me to grow in a way that isn’t affected by technique or craftsmanship. It’s the skeleton of the career that I hope to have. Without each bone in place there would be nothing for the muscles to rest upon. And, of course, unless I have that support that will allow my career to progress, I’d have no way of moving at all, let alone the ability to move forward.

*Notes:* During our discussion we also talked about making sure that as an artist you keep up to date with current artists. Professor Mason recommended looking into the artist Jana Sterbak, since she tends to push the bounds of art while making a statement. I found her approach and the look of her work to be interesting. It would take more intensive research and observation, but I think that she is going to be an artist to follow.
Reflection after Critique with Barry Skurkis

After sitting down with Professor Skurkis today it was interesting to have had the critique with Professor Mason first, mainly because of the generational differences between the two. The concepts that Kelvin grasped and relayed greatly differed from Barry’s responses, even to the point of most of the basics of each pieces not resonating with him. Professor Skurkis felt that the pieces could be strengthened. I find this interesting, and not that I devalue the advice, but most of the suggestions he made I felt pushed the pieces into the realm of the cliché – which is precisely what I was avoiding. This presents an interesting dilemma in my mind. I want my audience to be a younger generation, a more forward thinking and inquisitive grouping of viewers. This rang true, as I recall, with Professor Mason. However, I still need to consider if I want my audience to be that narrow, or if I should back peddle to include those from older generations. As the critique went on, I began to wonder if he had chosen to read the artist’s statement before meeting with me.

Throughout our discussion about the work, Professor Skurkis recommended severe changes to the pieces that I didn’t agree with. A couple standing on top of the cake, additions to the figure in “Make me Pretty.” This is mostly likely due to the fact that my style and approach to art greatly differs from his approach. This is understandable; as there is a high chance that artist will both agree and disagree on different points. The changes that were suggested were far off from what I would do.

Granted my work should be able to stand on its own, but when do portions of a piece go from being part of the concept to crutches and supports? I suppose this is something that I am going to have to decide as I work on each piece, each series, each project, each installation. Barry and I also discussed the idea of working in a series – and apparently I had
a very different idea of what that means. For him he said that it means taking and building off of each piece and playing around with the approaches and techniques. For me, a series is related works, but not so related that it’s just a variation on each of the past items. I can see why he recommends it, but I still have to weigh the pros and cons in my mind based on how I work as an artist. As I mentioned before, I take the object from concept through to completion in my head before even laying pencil to paper, and then from there I allow it to evolve. This results in several pieces that have the same theme, but are looking at it from different angles, aspects, and mediums. The choice of medium is very important and very specific. It speaks as much for the concept of the piece as the dips and surges of the lines or planes do. Or at least that is the approach and mindset that I’ve always had in regards to creating artwork.

This critique was far less inspirational and informative than the first critiques. This is no reflection on Professor Skurkis. I simply felt like my work was being generalized as an artist. It was a good eye opener as a future teacher. I know now that I need to be careful when I start working with students. Even though there will be work to grade and assignments to hand out, it’s best to know who your students are as people and who they are as artists.
References


Appendix I

Untitled I
by Katy Luxion

I have to be the Strong one
The one who bends with the wind, so others can Soar
I walk the path to Clear it for others
the silent helper that no one knows to thank
I choose to live lower than your eye-line

Will anyone know I've been here?
Who knows.
But they'll see what I've done
isn't that all that really matters

I exist with no existence

Many have come before me
Gone without anyone knowing
But the earth turns and the breeze blows
Plants grow and rivers ebb

Breathe in
Breathe out

I am Mother Earth
Her ward
Her keeper

I exist with no existence