

MEL CARTER

MFA PROPOSAL

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OVERVIEW OF PROPOSAL

Working title

Pending Approval

Brief Description

Variety puppet show exploring the question of how we can ethically pursue our desires within the context of the patriarchy.

My Role

Writer, director, puppet builder, set builder, lighting designer, costume designer, (potentially) sound designer, performer, and producer.

Support I'll be requesting from UConn

I'll need a high level of commitment from two students: one puppeteer, and either one musician or one stage manager who can attend every rehearsal and performance. I'll need a low level of commitment from puppet arts students who are willing to help me fabricate and various students/faculty who are willing to occasionally sit in on rehearsals and give feedback. I would also appreciate assistance finding a venue that is appropriate for my show.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Variety puppet show exploring the question of how we can ethically pursue our desires within the context of the patriarchy.

Context

For decades, women weren't permitted to enter the workforce, making them financially dependent upon men. This meant that women's desires for stability, safety, and success became tied up in men's desires. As women have entered the workforce, a narrative has developed in support of cutthroat women, pursuing their goals no matter what. This movement has been branded girlboss feminism. However, critics have pointed out that this isn't truly a change in the status quo, it is simply women reenacting the existing patriarchal structure. Some have reacted to this swing of the pendulum by moving backwards. A subset of women, called tradwives, use social media to promote the return to a subservient existence.

I believe that an ethical society must exist somewhere between or beyond these two extremes. This society, however, can be difficult to picture because, as Gerda Lerner says in *The Creation of Patriarchy*,

"to step outside of patriarchal thought means being skeptical toward every known system of thought; being critical of all assumptions, ordering values, and definitions... in stepping out of patriarchal thought [we face] existential nothingness."

I'm undertaking this project to explore girlbosses, tradwives, and the existential abyss.

Structure

This piece will be made up of a collection of short stories. This format will allow me to explore the concept through multiple angles. It is also thematically important to me that, in a piece about the gendered pursuit of desire, I don't create a linear story structure that parallels the male orgasm. I'd rather my piece parallel the female orgasm and contain multiple climaxes.

Short Story Narratives

Full Descriptions Available in Appendix

SOME SLIGHT PRESSURE

Satirical piece about the pain of having an IUD inserted. A woman goes to her gynecologist to get a new type of IUD. When the gyno inserts the IUD, we see them doing increasingly ridiculous things to the patient's uterus in shadow.

R3AL EYES SEE PAST UR PASTEURLIES

Satirical piece, using unpasteurized milk as a metaphor for the unsafe practices #tradwives advise us to consume. Tradwife speaks directly to the audience, advocating for the tradwife movement and the benefits of unpasteurized milk. She then offers audience members the opportunity to try unpasteurized milk "straight from the teat" and

reveals burlap breasts with baby bottles for nipples. She also offers the audience chocolate chip cookies made from scratch. She goes to wash down her bite of cookie with a sip of milk and finds that she can't stop chugging it. It is revealed that she is being controlled by a shadow man. She continued to chug and gag on the milk, while saying how much she loves it, until she dies.

PUNCH AND JUDY

Punch takes to the sea to kill the albino crocodile that ate his leg. Judy and the baby are his crew and he's bossing them about, smacking Judy around. Judy decides she's fed up with being treated this way, and summons Mephistopheles. She makes a deal with the devil to get rid of Punch once and for all. Crocodile eats Punch and, in the scuffle, also eats Judy's leg. Judy decides to take her revenge on the crocodile, takes over the ship and is bossing the baby about, smacking it around. They find the crocodile and in the ensuing fight, Judy also gets eaten. Punch and Judy keep fighting within Crocodile's belly as baby sails off into the sunset.

FAIRYTALE

Once upon a time there was a queen who was very worried about her subjects. This queen had a nervous habit of pulling out her hair and eating it. One day she pulled out a strand of hair and found a crying baby head attached to the end. The baby started making demands of the queen and she felt compelled to obey even though she knew the demands would hurt the kingdom. This went on until her daughter, the princess, figured out that they could lift the curse if the queen slowly ate the baby. The princess snuck a bit of baby into the queen's breakfast and suddenly the queen felt it was possible to say no to the creature's demands. And so, for the rest of her days, the queen had a bit of baby with her breakfast. And they lived happily ever after.

SHRILL O METER

A businesswoman is laying out what she believes would be the best course of action for the next quarter. A strange person enters the meeting while she's talking and sets up a Shrill o Meter.

The woman says, "Excuse me, hi, can I help you?"

The strange person replies, "Oh no, don't mind me!"

So, the woman keeps going with her presentation but every time she tries to speak the Shrill o Meter goes up, the strange person's eyes get wide, and they start moaning.

Eventually the woman gets so frustrated with this person interrupting her presentation that she tells them off which breaks the Shrill o Meter and makes the strange person's head explode. The woman is fired and arrested for manslaughter.

JELLYFISH & SHARK

We're underwater. Legs kick into view, gently treading water. Then a jellyfish floats into the frame. We watch the jellyfish float closer, almost hit the legs and miss, almost hit the legs and miss, almost hit the legs and then a shark swims through and tears the legs off, leaving nothing but blood in their wake.

SHRIMPIES!!

Shrimp family has a lovely domestic scene. Suddenly a large high heel stomps into view. A woman's voice can be heard complaining about eating "horrible" sushi over a phone. The shoes come toward the shrimp. One shrimp throws its body in front of the other, to protect it. The shrimp is smashed under the shoe. The woman says "oh my god gross! There's something on my shoe!" & then cries until the person on the other end of the call agrees to buy her new shoes. She leaves. The shrimp mourn their fallen loved one.

SUPER HERO

Nonbinary tween gets superpowers from a radioactive tampon. They're nervous to use their powers because they might save someone, but they also might hurt someone. People die as a result of their inaction.

CAN I BE FRANK?

Support group for hot dog buns that are tired of sausages being shoved in them without their consent.

WOMAN TRIES TO HAVE ORGASM

Woman pursues orgasm in the style of an R-rated high school comedy.

Connecting Scenes

APOLOGETIC HOST

A man who didn't think he'd be hosting this show tonight. Really doesn't think it's the right fit considering the feminist themes. Is very apologetic about the space he's taking up but also very knowledgeable about feminism and the themes represented in the show.

OYSTERS

I'm referencing Moby Dick in my Punch and Judy adaptation. My favorite quote from Moby Dick is

"Methinks that in looking at things spiritual, we are too much like oysters observing the sun through the water, and thinking that thick water the thinnest of air."

While Melville is clearly talking about religion, I feel like this quote can be applied to any number of phenomena that quietly cloud the air we breathe, including the patriarchy. I would like to establish this idea and then create a chorus of obtuse oysters (foot operated puppets) who comment on the pieces.

COLLAGE CREATURE

A piece of each short story is left behind and at the end they're formed into a strange collage puppet. A metaphor for how we have to take on our history and our trauma and keep moving forward.

PRODUCTION DESIGN/NEEDS

Stage Design

The stage will contain two puppet booths. One booth will be hand-puppet-style, the other will be kamishibai-style. There are two booths both because I am using a variety of puppets, some which will be easier to operate from above and some which will be easier to operate from below, and also because this may help with reducing dead space - something can be set up in one booth while the other booth is finishing a story. There will also be table that I will use for the IUD piece.

Neither booth will offer full coverage of the puppeteers. This is the convention for the kamishibai-style booth and will break convention for the hand-puppet-style booth. I'm choosing to break convention for hand puppet booth because it'd be the only time the puppeteer is hidden and I prefer consistency in the visibility of the puppeteers in productions, unless there's a dramaturgical reason for the inconsistency.

The aesthetic of the stage design is undecided at this point. I know what the individual pieces of this show are going to be, but I'm not yet certain what world they're living within. The aesthetic of the stage design is dependent on me sorting out what that world is. At the moment I'm leaning toward somewhat deconstructed booths with plenty of texture. Booths that feel like they've been used for generations.

Costumes

The costume design is also dependent on me figuring out the world. I know that there will be two performers and that the costumes will have to be easy to move in and adaptable to different scenes. At the moment I'm looking towards queer/drag culture - performers commenting on gender through wearable art - as inspiration. I'm also interested in adding practical elements to the costumes like lights and hoops to hang set pieces from.

Sound

Ideally, I would like a musician/foley artist who could work with us and provide live sound. If I can't find a musician/foley artist, I can also create the sound cues myself and find a stage manager who can board op for me. A sample of my sound design can be found on my website.

Lighting

I want to be able to control the lighting myself. I do not want a full stage wash because I want to be able to control the stage picture/focus. I do not want to depend upon a lighting designer because I want the piece to be able to adapt to different venues. So, I plan on purchasing small lights that will be focused on each puppet booth, then setting up a simple system that will allow performers to bring lights up and down with an onstage fader or power strip. Moments that leave the puppet booths will be lit by handhelds, headlamps, etc.

Projection

I would like to create two versions of this production: one for small/low-tech venues, the other for large/high-tech venues. For large venues I would like to add a camera set in front of each booth and two projection screens. I believe that this would make the puppets easier to see in larger venues and would also add to the visual dynamism of the piece. I would also like to create a version of the piece that does not include live projection because some venues may not benefit from or be able to accommodate this feature. I am not sure that creating two versions will be necessary or possible for my MFA, but it is definitely a long-term goal for this production.

Space/Location

I want to create a piece that is adaptable to nearly any space so I'm happy to perform in nearly any space at UConn. I would prefer a venue that doesn't raise a lot of management or health and safety concerns. I would also love a space that is available for performances over two weekends. Ultimately, I'm happy to go wherever is convenient.

Personnel

Puppeteer, musician or stage manager, assistance with fabrication, rotating set of outside eyes

Schedule

TIME	ACTIVITY
Now - Aug 31	Complete rough draft of script
Sept 1-25	Build prototypes of puppets/workshop individual pieces on my own/edit script. Workshop different versions of what the costumes/set/world can be.
Sept 25-30	Workshop individual pieces with outside eye
Oct 1-7	Make build list/update script with information gathered from workshops
Oct 8-Dec 31	Build final puppets. Work on puppet stages/costumes
Jan 1-Feb 28	Rehearse individual pieces, workshop with outside eye, rebuild/adjust, figure out order of pieces & physical vocabulary of world. Finish building puppet stages/costumes
March 1-26	Rehearse full piece with outside eye
March 27-April 2	Tech final space
April 3-5	Perform
April 6-9	Workshop/rehearse changes
April 10-12	Perform

Budget

NEED	SUPPLIES	COST	NOTES
puppet booths	wood	\$200	Since I don't have a build list yet, all supplies lists are rough estimates but I don't anticipate needing any particularly expensive raw materials
	hardware	\$25	
	fabric	\$100	
	paint	\$50	
costumes	TBD	\$200	
puppet materials	foam boards	\$100	
	fabric	\$100	
	cardstock	\$10	
	metal rods	\$40	
	hardware	\$25	
	foam	\$50	
lights	flashlights	\$20	I will be doing all of my own lighting so I will need to purchase instruments
	headlamps	\$30	
	birdies	\$200	
	String/strip lights	\$50	
projection (TBD)	cameras	\$1,600	May not do projection, depending on what venue I'm performing in
	projectors	\$1,500	
	projector screens	\$100	
	camera stand	\$100	
personnel	outside help	\$2,000	Since this is a feminist piece, I would like to be advised by some female puppeteers so, I will need to hire folks from outside the department
	TOTAL	\$6,500	

GENERAL GOALS

My Role

Writer, director, puppet builder, set builder, lighting designer, costume designer, (potentially) sound designer, performer, and producer.

Artistic Influences/Research Sources

Full List in Appendix

I started thinking about making a piece around this subject five years ago. I was thinking about feminist narratives and quickly realized that most of the books I'd read were written by men, so I started reading classic fiction written by women. I also read nonfiction books and articles about the history of the patriarchy and sexual scripts. In addition, the original concept used the female orgasm as a core metaphor, so I read books and articles about this subject as well.

I don't think that there's a singular artistic reference that this full piece is pulling from, but some of the individual short stories are certainly referencing genres, tropes, and classic cultural texts. For example, the Punch and Judy adaptation is using the characters Punch, Judy, Baby, and Alligator to perform adaptations of the classic stories *Moby Dick* and *Faust*.

Work Experience

See CV in Appendix

I've already begun creating and performing these short stories at puppet slams and cabarets. So far, they've been received very well. I've had audience members approach me after the performance, telling me that I'd expanded their conception of what puppetry is capable of and imploring me to continue performing these pieces because the content is relevant and compelling.

Challenges

- I'll be challenging myself as an artist by trying things I've never tried before:
 - I've never created a full-length puppet production before, or any full length production without the contributions of a devising ensemble
 - I've never created a hand puppet show before
 - I've never told a full story through shadow before
 - I've never told a full story through flat surface placards before
- I will be attempting to create a feminist piece without falling into white feminist pitfalls or clichés
 - Tactic to navigate: be honest & seek perspective from female intellectuals
- I need to raise money to purchase supplies
 - Tactic to navigate: apply for grants (*list of potential grants available in appendix*)
- I have to navigate directing a piece while acting in a piece
 - Tactic to navigate: invite various artists to act as an outside eye at rehearsals
- I need to maintain my own mental health
 - Tactic to navigate: be flexible about how many of these individual short stories are completed, what tech goals are able to be accomplished, etc

How is the work innovative/experimental

In its form it breaks the convention of a singular, linear narrative. In its content, it is attempting to stage feminist stories that haven't been told (as far as I'm aware) and break beyond the confines of the patriarchal thought structure. In its puppetry, I'm trying things I haven't seen before - so far, using a gyno apron as a shadow screen and having audience members drink from my burlap breasts.

Why am I passionate

(cw: sexual assault)

Artists and activists frequently talk about how achieving equal representation within the existing power structure isn't enough, how we must dismantle the structure entirely. I've seen this argument presented on a macro level many times. What I haven't seen much of, is what this means on a micro level – what this means for people making small, personal decisions. I think that this is worth exploring, both because it's a hard question to answer and because these small decisions can have an enormous impact.

When I was in undergrad I was sexually assaulted by multiple men. Upon reflection, I have realized that a lack of self-care may have contributed to the circumstances that led to these violations. While the men who assaulted me saw their own desire as their top priority, I had trouble regarding my own desires as important as the desires of those around me. I knew that I didn't want to be intimate with these men, I told them I didn't want to be intimate with them, but at the end of the day I felt so compelled to please that I smiled and nodded myself into situations I couldn't get out of. That's not to say that I think it's my fault I was assaulted, it's not, but I think that this is a part of rape culture that isn't widely discussed. People witness women allowing themselves to be used and blame women's lack of self-respect. What they don't talk about is how we've taught women that the best thing they can be *is* useful.

Once I noticed this pattern, I started discussing it with other women and discovered that this story isn't just mine. I realized that this pattern repeats itself across generations and circumstance. When I stepped back and looked at the pattern these stories were creating, I realized I had a portrait of the patriarchy. I decided that this was something worth sharing, but I wasn't sure how. I've been toying with this concept for the past 5 years. Now that I've found the right format, I am passionate about telling this story the best that I can. Hopefully, this dialogue will contribute to a chorus of feminist voices that will one day be strong enough to drown out the patriarchy.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF SHORT STORIES

SOME SLIGHT PRESSURE

PLOT SYNOPSIS

Satirical piece about the pain of having an IUD inserted.

DESIGN

Live actor lays back on table and puts feet up with sheet over legs like a paper apron in a doctor's office. This sheet is used by the gyno to do absurd things to the woman's uterus in shadow.

WHY PUPPETS

Effective way to show scary things happening to a uterus - easier than actually putting a rat in someone's vagina. And even if I could put a real rat into a real vagina onstage, I think that it's more effective through shadow because it's funnier and it allows the audience to focus on the message rather than the shocking image.

ROLE IN SHOW

Demonstration of when women are not only expected to temper their pursuit of pleasure but are also expected to endure pain without complaint. I chose to base this piece around IUD insertion because this is a real and common phenomenon - IUDs are the most effective form of birth control but many women choose not to get them because it can be incredibly painful. This is an unnecessary obstacle - pain reduction measures are available, they're just very rarely offered.

Video available on my website.



Picture of Performance

SCRIPT 9/21/24

Lights up on Patient laying on table. Gynecologist enters.

GYNO: Good afternoon!

PATIENT: Hi

GYNO: I see you've come into the gynecologist today to get the new IUD, the Big Cheddar

PATIENT: Yeah... but I'm kinda nervous – I've heard insertion is very painful

GYNO: Oh, people exaggerate – you'll be completely fine. And the Big Cheddar is an excellent choice – it's proven to be 100% effective at preventing pregnancy in clinical trials

PATIENT: Oh! That's great!

GYNO: Alright so let's get started

Improv as they get patient's legs up in the air and the flashlight on. 'Paper' blanket now acting as a shadow screen. Throughout following, shadow puppets are accompanied by foley sound effects

GYNO: Okay sweetie, you're gonna feel some slight pressure here

Inserts speculum and cranks open.

GYNO: And as long as we're here, I'm going to take a sample

Takes swab

PATIENT: Okay

GYNO: See this isn't so bad, right? Now I'm just having a bit of trouble finding your cervix so you're going to feel a small pinch

Sharpens knife and cuts into vagina. Patient reacts in pain

PATIENT: Ohhh my god that was a big pinch!

GYNO: Don't worry about it – totally routine – but I'm still having some trouble finding your cervix so I'm going to have to make a bit of room

Starts chainsaw and cuts into vagina. Patient reacts in pain.

GYNO: Alright, there we go. Now, let's get this out of the way

Removes organ

PATIENT: Wow I feel lighter

GYNO: Yes, weight loss is a positive side effect. Now then, we're ready to insert the Big Cheddar

Inserts cheese

PATIENT: Oh that's not so bad

GYNO: Nope! just a few more steps

Gyno inserts rat. Patient reacts in pain. Gyno inserts cat. Patient reacts in pain

GYNO: Don't worry, this is totally normal

Inserts dog. Patient reacts in pain

GYNO: Just hold in there sweetie – almost done

Lights match and drops it in. Explosion. Patient screams

GYNO: Alright you're all set!

Removes speculum. Patient pants in shocked silence

GYNO: *(Hands Patient pills)* Now here's two aspirin in case there's any residual pain and *(plops bag with mysterious red substance onto Patient's stomach)* your uterus.

Lights down

R3AL EYES SEE PAST UR PASTURLIES

PLOT SYNOPSIS

Satirical piece, using unpasteurized milk as a metaphor for the unsafe practices #tradwives advise us to consume.

DESIGN

Burlap bodysuit

WHY PUPPETS

Mask is appropriate thematically because tradwives are not showing their true selves. Body suit is practically necessary to have the audience drink from my breasts.

ROLE IN SHOW

Demonstrates the absurdity and violence of subservience. The trad wife phenomenon is a movement of contemporary women promoting the idea of giving up their own power and agency to serve the desires of two other men: God and their husbands.

Video available on my website.



Picture of Performance

Script 9/21/24

Tradwife in burlap body suit and apron enters and speaks directly to the audience

TRADWIFE: Howdy folks! Welcome to faithful farm wives! I'm Felicity Groundwater. I've come to talk to you today because there's been a lot of discourse recently about the #tradwife movement and I just have to say that it's true, I do consider myself a traditional wife and mother. But that just means that I prioritize caring for my kids and obeying my husband no matter what he commands. I'm just living my life – just because I promote it for financial gain doesn't give anyone the right to criticize me! Especially not Jessica Gross of the New York Times. I think that if we sat down and talked to one another, we'd realize that we have a lot in common. So tonight I'm going to give you a little taste of my life in the form of raw, unpasteurized milk. *(Drinks milk. Tries not to gag)* Now the government will try to tell you that milk needs to be processed but that just gets rid of the best vitamin! Vitamin M *(Drinks milk. Tries not to gag)* mmm that is so good I can't even describe it! And luckily, I don't have to! *(Removes apron, revealing big burlap breasts with baby bottle for nipples)* Tonight anyone who'd like can take a sip of raw milk straight from the teat! Any volunteers? Don't worry, it's all natural! *(Tradwife drinks from nipple. Volunteer comes up)* May I cradle the back of your head in a motherly fashion? *(Instructs volunteer on how to drink milk, feeds)* Nice, right? And you know what goes great with milk? Fresh chocolate chip cookies! *(Gives one to the volunteer and sends them back to their seat)* The other morning my little son, Tumnus, came into my bedroom and said "Mama, can I have some chocolate chip cookies?" and I said "of course, sweetheart!" And I went out to the field and harvested some cocoa beans and dug a ditch and dropped them inside and left them to ferment for 81 days. Then I harvested some wheat and milled it into flour. And I took some sugar cane and smashed it with a bible and declared "You will be grains by god you will be grains!" Then mixed it all together, had it blessed by a priest, and bon appetite! After only 657 hours of labor, fresh chocolate chip cookies! *(Bites cookie)* mmm so good! You'll have to excuse my manners. I want to get every last crumb *(licks fingers)* Just going to wash that down with a bit more milk. *(Sips milk. Then chugs, seemingly against will. Gags on milk but still insists she loves it. Continues to chug. Turns around. We see a shadow man controlling her on her back. She turns around, continuing to chug and gag, until the milk jar is empty, and she begins to die)* Oh lord! Take me! Take me now! *(Dies)*

PUNCH AND JUDY

PLOT SYNOPSIS

Punch takes to the sea to kill the albino crocodile that ate his leg. Judy and the baby are his crew and he's bossing them about, smacking Judy around. Judy decides she's fed up with being treated this way, and summons Mephistopheles. She makes a deal with the devil to get rid of Punch once and for all. Crocodile eats Punch and in the scuffle, also eats Judy's leg. Judy decides to take her revenge on the crocodile, takes over the ship and is bossing the baby about, smacking it around. They find the crocodile and in the ensuing fight, Judy also gets eaten. Punch and Judy keep fighting within Crocodile's belly as baby sails off into the sunset.

DESIGN

Classic hand puppets in booth with crankie in background

WHY PUPPETS

Building off of traditional Punch and Judy shows

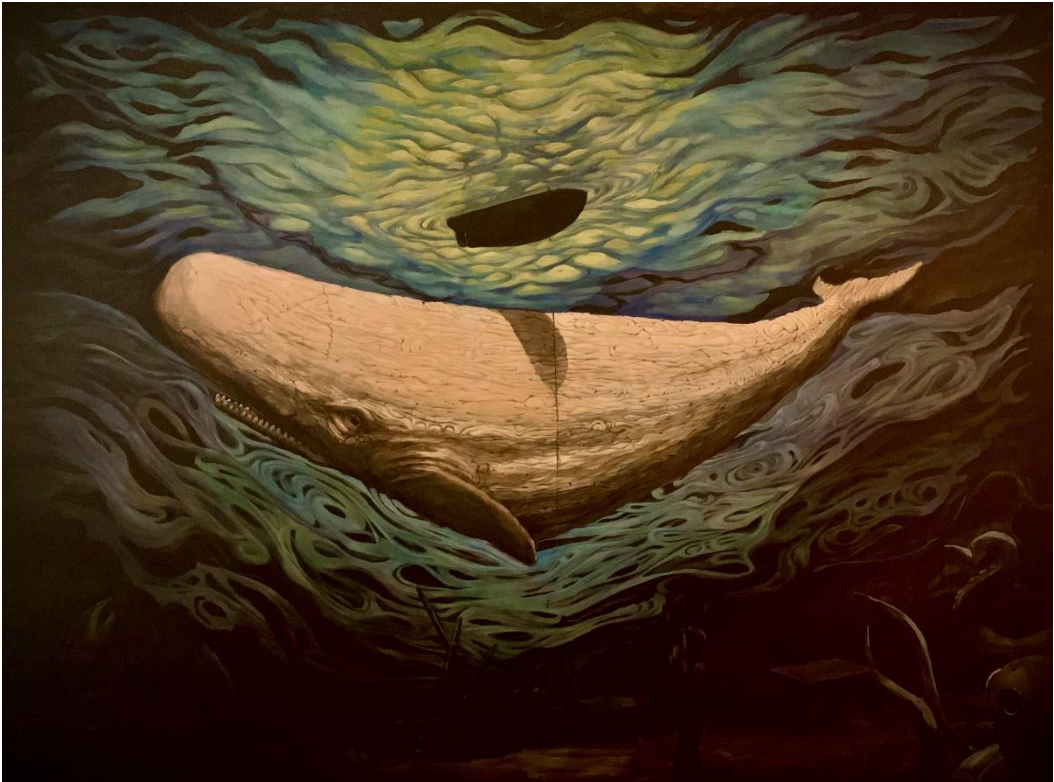
ROLE IN SHOW

Punch represents men pursuing their desires no matter the cost, battering the women in their way. People frequently counter the argument that Punch shows are sexist by pointing out that Judy punches back. While I, personally, enjoy Punch and Judy shows, I don't believe that they're anti-patriarchal because Judy hits Punch too. I believe that this is just a woman reenacting all the actions of the patriarchy with all the same results and trying to tell us it's something different. Here, I combine Punch and Judy with Moby Dick and Faust, two classic cultural texts about men pursuing goals to their own demise, to demonstrate the flawed logic of believing that blindly pursuing your goals is feminist if a girl does it.



Punch head

INSPIRATIONAL IMAGES



FAIRYTALE

PLOT SYNOPSIS

Once upon a time there was a queen who was very worried about her subjects. This queen had a nervous habit of pulling out her hair and eating it. One day she pulled out a strand of hair and found a crying baby head attached to the end. The baby started making demands of the queen and she felt compelled to obey even though she knew the demands would hurt the kingdom. This went on until her daughter, the princess, figured out that they could lift the curse if the queen slowly ate the baby. The princess snuck a bit of baby into the queen's breakfast and suddenly the queen felt it was possible to say no to the creature's demands. And so, for the rest of her days, the queen had a bit of baby with her breakfast. And they lived happily ever after.

DESIGN

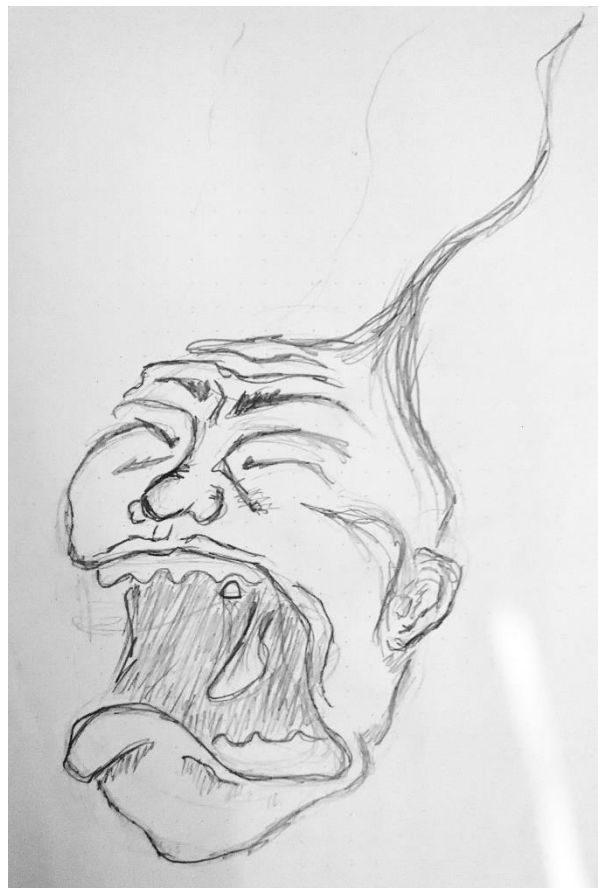
Shadow show with enchanted and haunting silhouettes

WHY PUPPETS

Style fits storybook, fairytale genre. Easier to represent babies emerging from heads through puppetry than through live action.

ROLE IN SHOW

Demonstration of potential way to navigate this question - pursuing desires in small quantities while taking into account other people's needs



Sketch

FULL PLOT DESCRIPTION

Once upon a time, in a land far, far away there lived a queen who ruled over a vast kingdom. This queen was constantly worried about war and famine, the wellbeing of her subjects, and the queen had developed a certain habit. When she was worried, she would pull out strands of her hair and eat them. She did this constantly – alone in her room, eating dinner, in meetings with her advisors. The only person who ever critiqued her on this habit was her daughter who called it a revolting practice and meditated on the hair ball that was surly growing in her mother's stomach. One evening, as the queen sat in her bedroom, worrying over her kingdom's wheat shortage, she pulled on a piece of hair that refused to come out. She tugged again but it refused to budge. She wrapped it around her finger and pulled with all her might and finally it started to emerge, but it was bringing something with it. Out popped a baby's head with one long strand of hair growing from the top. The baby was howling, tears running down its face, and the queen immediately felt the insatiable urge to soothe it. She cradled it and cooed but it wouldn't stop crying. "What do you want?" she asked and to her surprise the baby replied "HUNGRY" So she sent for some milk from the kitchen but the baby wanted more "BREAD" the baby hollered. So the queen sent for bread but one loaf wasn't enough and neither was two or three. The queen sent for loaf after loaf, ignoring her daughter's concerns. The baby wasn't satiated until it had eaten all the bread in the kingdom. Once the last crumb was gone the baby let out a great burp and sat silent. The creature had grown through all this eating and was now the size of the great hall. After a moment, the baby inhaled and hollered "SPACE!" "What?" the queen asked, exhausted. "I NEED MORE SPACE" So the queen ordered her advisors to gather and began making plans to go to war with the kingdom to the North. Her daughter, seeing this development, felt desperate. She disguised herself in a cloak and went down into the town to find the local fortune teller. She asked the fortune teller how this baby can be stopped. The fortune teller peered into her crystal ball and said "it must be gradually consumed by she who did produce it" The daughter returned to her mother and told her of this prophecy but the queen did not listen. Everything inside of her compelled her to get the baby what he wanted, even if that meant the rest of the kingdom must be destroyed in the process. So the daughter came up with a plan. In the middle of the night she snuck in to the great hall and cut off a chunk of the baby's flesh from the back of its head and gave it to the cook to be roasted and served on toast to the queen in the morning. The daughter's plan worked, and after the queen had eaten a single bite of the baby's head, she started to question their planned siege to the north. She called her advisors to her and cancelled the attack. She ordered the baby to be brought to a field where it could scream all it liked and each day she rode out and cut off a single fillet from its face.

INSPIRATIONAL IMAGES



SHRILL O METER

PLOT SYNOPSIS

A businesswoman is laying out what she believes would be the best course of action for the next quarter. A strange person enters the meeting while she's talking and sets up a Shrill o Meter.

The woman says, "Excuse me, hi, can I help you?"

The strange person replies, "Oh no, don't mind me!"

So, the woman keeps going with her presentation but every time she tries to speak the Shrill o Meter goes up, the strange person's eyes get wide, and they start moaning.

Eventually the woman gets so frustrated with this person interrupting her presentation that she tells them off which breaks the Shrill o Meter and makes the strange person's head explode. The woman is fired and arrested for manslaughter.

DESIGN

Flat surface puppets in kamishibai style frame

WHY PUPPETS

The person with the Shrill o Meter should have a comically exaggerated reaction with their mouth open wide enough that their jaw becomes unhinged and their eyes open wide enough that their eyes pop out of their sockets and, in the end, their head exploding.

ROLE IN THE SHOW

Address the way women are sometimes punished for directly pursuing goals in the workplace.



Inspirational image

JELLYFISH & SHARK

PLOT SYNOPSIS

We're underwater. Legs kick into view – someone gently treading water. Then a jellyfish floats into view. We watch the jellyfish float closer, almost hit the legs and miss, almost hit the legs and miss, almost hit the legs and then a shark swims through and tears the legs off, leaving nothing but blood in their wake.

DESIGN

Rod puppets operated from above.

WHY PUPPETS

Two of the characters are sea creatures. The human's legs get ripped off.

ROLE IN THE SHOW

Metaphor for how it's potentially dangerous to be either a jellyfish with no personal sense of propulsion or a shark voraciously pursuing its prey



Sketch

SHRIMPIES!!

PLOT SYNOPSIS

Shrimp family has a lovely domestic scene. Suddenly a large high heel stomps into view. A woman's voice can be heard complaining about eating horrible sushi over a phone. The shoes come toward the shrimp. One shrimp throws its body in front of the other, to protect it. The shrimp is smashed under the shoe. The woman says "oh my god gross! There's something on my shoe!" & then cries until the person on the other end of the call agrees to buy her new shoes. She leaves. The shrimp mourn their fallen loved one.

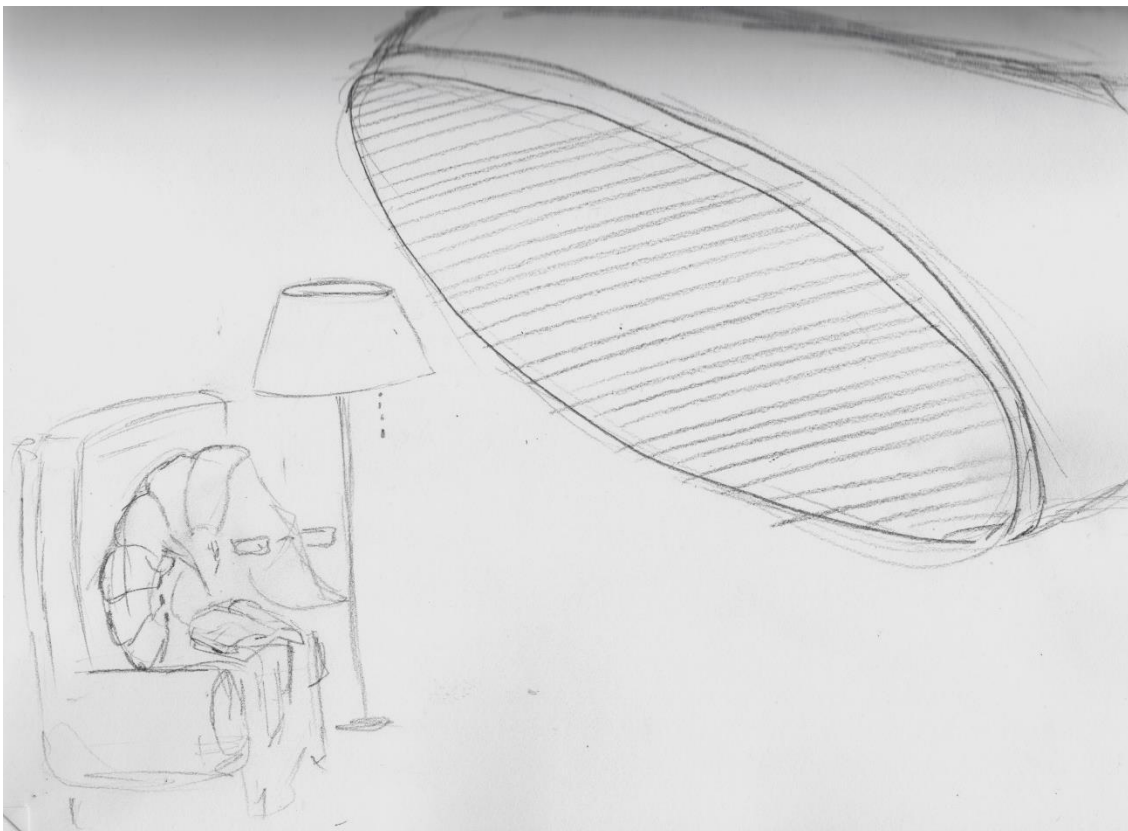
DESIGN: TBD

WHY PUPPETS

Some of the characters are shrimp and they need to be smashed with a giant shoe.

ROLE IN SHOW

In certain circumstances, the tears of white women have the power to move mountains, and some white women use this power to trample on those below them and cry about their minor issues.



Sketch

SUPER HERO

PLOT SYNOPSIS

Nonbinary tween gets superpowers from a radioactive tampon. They're nervous to use their powers because they might save someone but they also might hurt someone. People die as a result of their inaction.

DESIGN

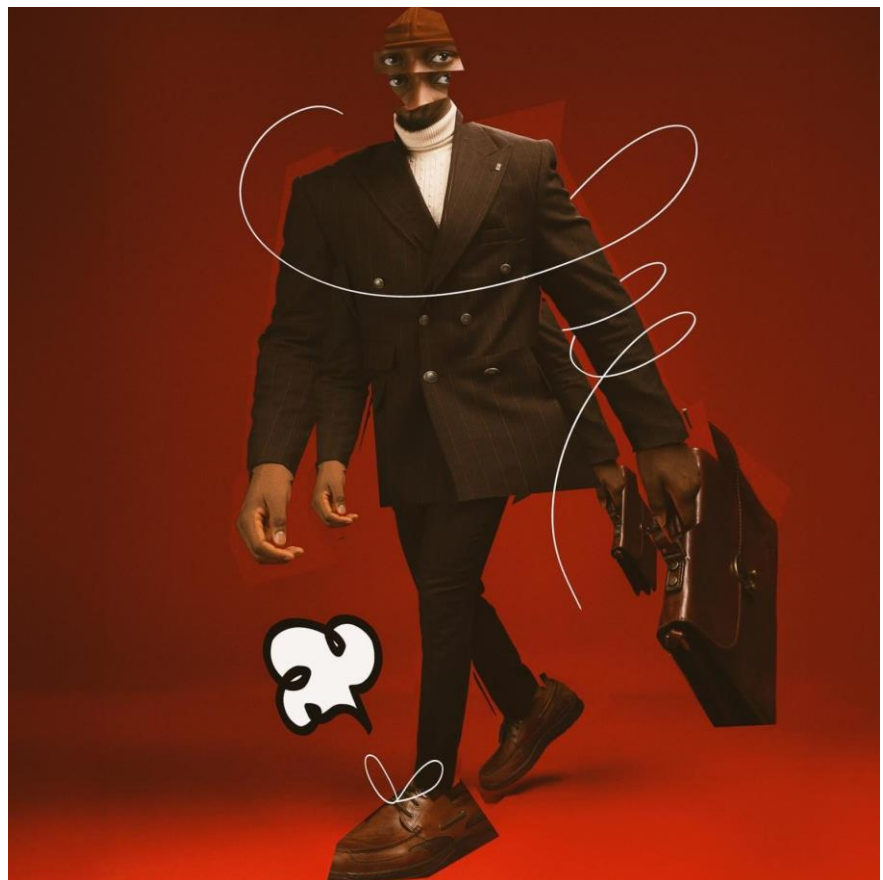
Told through flat-surface puppets/kamishibai-style placards. Somewhat distorted, collage-style images.

WHY PUPPETS

Referencing history of superheroes stories being told through graphic novels/2D images. It is easier to represent superpowers through puppets than through live actors.

ROLE IN SHOW

Demonstrates the potential cost of being too scared to act. Like the passage from *The Bell Jar*, watching all the prunes shrivel on the vine.



Inspirational image

CAN I BE FRANK?

PLOT SYNOPSIS

Support group for hot dog buns that are tired of sausages being shoved in them without their consent.

DESIGN

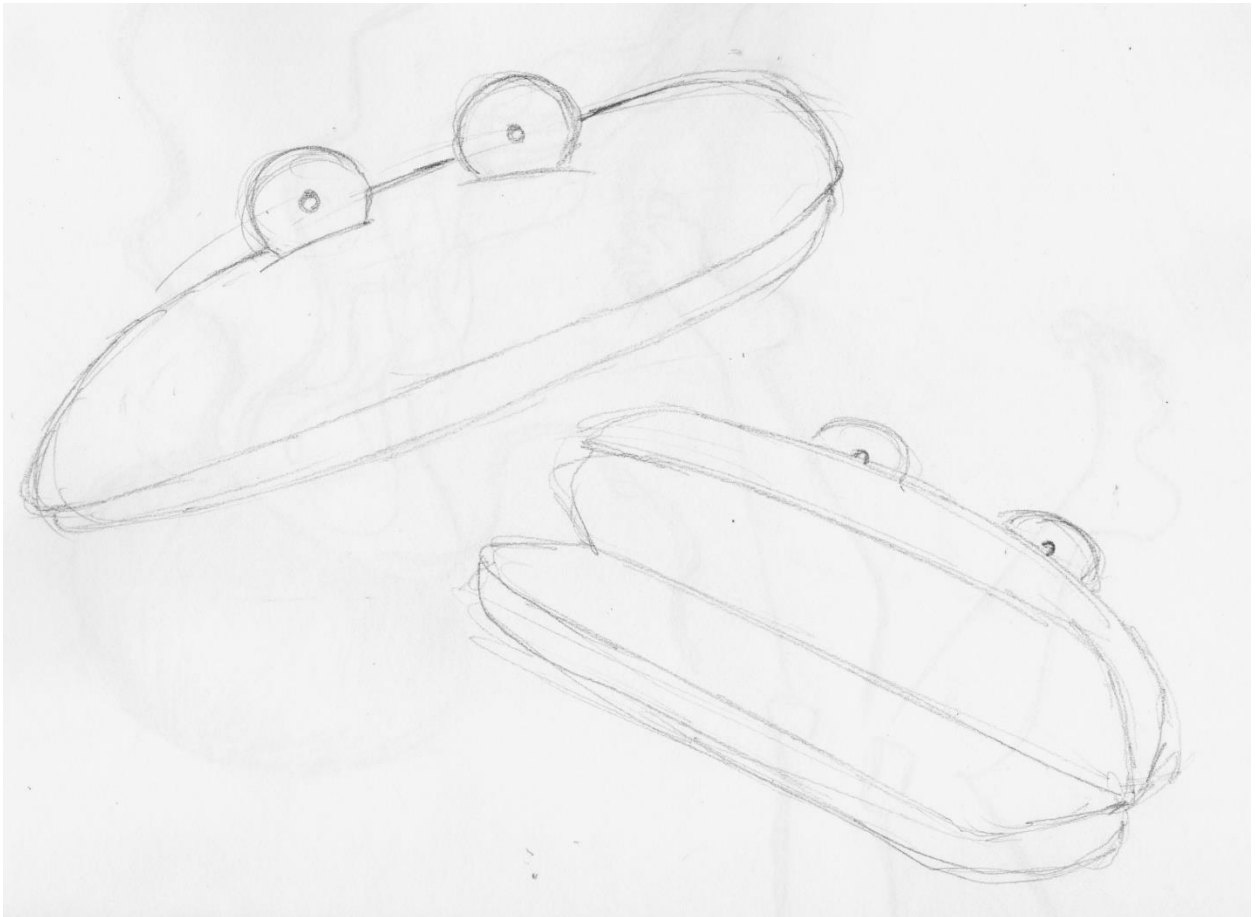
Hand puppets of hot dog buns

WHY PUPPETS

It's a story about talking hot dog buns

ROLE IN SHOW

Address the way that, historically, women have been told to prioritize male pleasure over their own and how this contributes to rape culture.



Inspirational image

WOMAN TRIES TO HAVE ORGASM

PLOT SYNOPSIS

Woman pursues orgasm in the style of an R-rated high school comedy.

DESIGN: TBD

WHY PUPPETS

Create cinematic vibe

ROLE IN SHOW

An orgasm is a very useful metaphor for pleasure. This metaphor was the inspiration for the full show so it feels important to include, even though I can't visualize what it will look like yet. It also feels important to include because I've never seen a story about a woman pursuing an orgasm, even though many women desire and have trouble achieving orgasms. I also want to complicate this discussion because I don't think that orgasms are the end-all-be-all of sex.

ARTISTIC INSPIRATION/RESEARCH SOURCES

Form

- Various works by Natsu Onoda Power
- Road of Useless Splendor by Deborah Hunt
- Bill's 44th by Dorothy James and Andy Manjuck
- Feral by Shoshana Bass
- Dimanche by Chaliwate Company and Focus Company
- Punch and Judy
- Brother's Grimm
- Blair Thomas
- Moby Dick by Herman Melville
- Faust by Goethe
- Muppets
- Hannah Hoch
- Troy Brown
- Understanding Comics by Scott McCloud

Content

- The Writer by Ella Hickson
- Middlemarch by George Eliot
- Feral by Shoshana Bass
- The Bell Jar by Sylvia Plath
- The Creation of Patriarchy by Gerda Lerner
- I May Destroy You by Michaela Coel
- Fleabag by Phoebe Waller-Bridge
- She Comes First by Ian Kerner
- Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte
- Kindred by Octavia Butler
- Moregasm: Babeland's Guide to Mindblowing Sex
- Consent Friendly Flirting by Ahnna Marie
- Mrs Dalloway by Virginia Woolf
- Lumen: Introduction to Psychology, Social Norms and Scripts
- "We Can Write the Scripts Ourselves": Queer Challenges to Heteronormative Courtship Practices by Ellen Lamont
- The Intersection of Dating Scripts and Queer Theory: An Analysis of Dating Experiences of Gay Men in West Texas by Robert B. Layne II, B.A.
- The Mystery of Female Orgasm with Sarah Barmak
- Married Love or Love in Marriage by Marie Carmichael Stopes
- Persepolis by Marjane Satrapi

MELISSA CARTER CV

CONTACT INFORMATION

206 355 5267

melissacarter13@gmail.com

www.makemelissacarter.com

EDUCATION

University of Connecticut, MFA in Puppet Arts

Expected Graduation 2026

Materials and Techniques: Matthew Sorenson

Marionette Construction and Performance: Bart Roccoberton

Directing: Matthew Sorenson

Rod Puppetry: Bart Roccoberton

James Madison University, BA in Theatre Performance and Studies

2013-2017

Acting: Drew Hampton, Ingrid DeSanctis, Wolf Sherrill, Ben Lambert

Devising: Dennis Beck

Movement: Robert Smith

Dance: Ryan Corrison

City Academy of London

2016

Advanced Acting and Shakespeare

Portland Experimental Theatre Ensemble Training Intensive, 2015

Viewpoints/Suzuki: Jacob Coleman, Rebecca Lingafelter, Cristi Miles, Amber Whitehall

Young Actor's Institute

2011

Acting: Sarah Harlett; Singing: Marke Rabe; Dancing: Katheryn Reed; Scene study/Audition class: Alban Dennis; Improv: Andrew McMasters; Fight choreography: Geoffrey Alm; Voice: Alyssa Keene

Private Lessons: Guitar lessons Ian Drummond; Voice Rebeqa Rivers; Auditioning Carol Roscoe

PUPPETRY BUILDING

The Old Man and the Old Moon, 2023

Designed and built giant fish puppet and found object, direct manipulation chicken and dog puppets

Middletown Playhouse, 2023

Designed and built large judge and monster puppet for children's circus

War of the Worlds, 2023

Designed flat surface puppets for this production at Connecticut Repertory Theatre

Dear Mapel, 2022

Helped build puppets and a collapsible miniature proscenium for this production at Mosaic Theatre

Pilobolus Dance Company, 2021

Assisted the props master of Pilobolus with the fabrication of a large goat skull.

Lady from the Village of the Falling Flowers, 2019

Built finger puppets for this premiere production at the Provincetown Tennessee Williams Festival

ORIGINAL PUPPET PIECES

How to Kiss, 2023

Short piece satirizing the practice of giving universal romantic advice by asking the advisee to practice kissing with an octopus.

A Brief Lecture, 2023

A simple, tabletop puppet gets up to give a lecture to the audience and finds a pair of underwear. They accuse members of the audience and the puppeteer of leaving their underwear on the stage before finally realizing the underwear is their own.

Boots are Made for Walking, 2024

Remade a Hannah Hoch collage of a shell with legs and boots as a large, flat surface puppet and had it dance to 'These Boots are Made for Walking.'

Some Slight Pressure, 2024

Satirical piece about inserting an IUD. A woman goes to get an IUD inserted and absurd things are done to her uterus in shadow.

R3AL eyes PAST ur pasturLIES, 2024

Satirical piece about the #tradwife movement, using unpasteurized milk as a physical representation of the harmful practices tradwives promote. Tradwife, played by an actor in a grotesque burlap bodysuit, offers the audience a taste of unpasteurized milk through her breasts. She then dies from drinking the unpasteurized milk herself.

ASSITANT DIRECTING PUPPETRY

The Old Man and the Old Moon, 2024

Assistant directing puppet movement for this Connecticut Repertory Production.

I Am the Village, 2023

Puppet pageant about the life of Marc Chagall

PUPPET PERFORMANCE

Thumbelina, Imagination Stage, DC

The Lady from the Village of Falling Flowers, Provincetown Tennessee Williams Festival

Forest Treas, Pointless Theatre Co, DC

Alice in Wonderland, National Players, National Tour

War of the Worlds, Connecticut Repertory Theatre, Connecticut

Midnight Louie's, Lilypad Puppet Theatre, New York

The Infinite Tales, 4615 Theatre Co, DC

Watergate with Puppets, AnyStage Theatre, DC

(An Audio Guide for) Unsung Snails and Heroes, Manhattan Theatre Club Reading, NYC

Bronx Express, Theatre J Reading, DC

THEATRE PERFORMANCE

Emilia, *Othello*, Jason King Jones, National Players, National Tour

Titania, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Prince George Shakespeare, Maryland

Sky God, *Zomo the Rabbit*, Imagination Stage, Maryland

Myrtle Wilson, *The Great Gatsby*, National Players, National Tour

Janie/Old Man/Mom, *Do You Feel Anger?*, Theater Alliance, DC

The Guest, *Separate Rooms*, 4615 Theatre Co, Maryland

Young Hannah, *Hannah Arendt*, Goethe Institut, DC

GRANTS

Color the Curb, 2021

The DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities, in partnership with the District Department of Transportation, funds District-based artists experienced in large-scale exterior murals and community-based projects to design and install ground murals at low visibility intersections in Washington, DC. Selected artists are awarded grant funds to be used for design, materials, fabrication, installation, personnel, and project management.

Art and Humanities Fellowship, 2020

The DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities Fellowship Program supports qualified individual artists and humanities practitioners who significantly contribute to the District of Columbia as a world-class cultural capital

RESIDENCY

Resident artist with the 4615 Theatre Company, 2018-2023

4615 Theatre Company produces a provocative blend of classical and contemporary work, inspiring audiences to explore the echoes and resonances of storytelling passed down through the ages. 4615's Resident Artists are a group of theatre-makers who have made 4615 their artistic home, and whose work 4615 is committed to supporting.

PUBLICATIONS

Cuntry Living, 2020 Autumn Issue

This international feminist collective published two of my pieces in their seasonal zine; a line drawing of tourists taking pictures of the Venus de Milo with the caption 'take your own nudes' and a collage from my 2020 series on cryptic cleanliness titled 'what you will'

Necessary Meditations, self-published 2017

A collection of sketches and poems created in an attempt to gain perspective after being sexually assaulted. Subsequently bound into a zine.

EXHIBITIONS

WXJM Gallery Show, 2017

Displayed a variety of prints and zines

Center on Contemporary Art, 2014

Displayed 'Bleh' a sculptural head sticking its tongue out, created by adhering projection slides to a wire frame

GRANT LIST

Marks Grant

Amount: \$5,000

Due date: April 2025

Zach's Grant

Amount: \$3,000

Due date: April 2025

Princess Grace Award

Amount: \$15,000

Due date: February 2025