

UNATTACHED

MFA Thesis Exhibition 2015

Carly Connelly

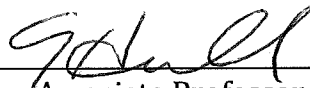
Submitted to the faculty of the University Graduate School  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Fine Arts in Visual Art and Public Life  
in the Herron School of Art and Design  
Indiana University

May 2015

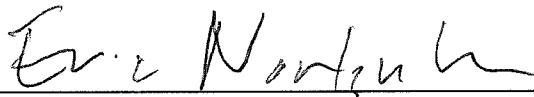
UNATTACHED

By  
Carly Connelly  
Master of Fine Arts

Herron School of Art and Design  
IUPUI  
Indiana University



Associate Professor, Greg Hull  
Advisor

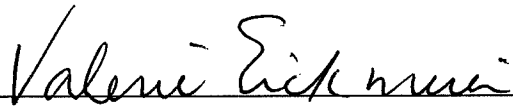


Associate Professor, Eric Nordgulen  
Committee Member

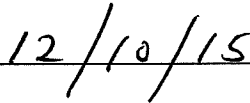


Associate Professor, Danielle Riede  
Committee Member

Accepted: May 2015



Professor Valerie Eickmeier  
Dean of Herron School of Art and Design



Date

There is a prism of experience and complexity of life and death within the work. The work imitates my subconscious fears, passion, desires, rejections, sufferings and relationship with a world that offers me both defeating pain and nutritious pleasure. I am acting out my memories, cognition, intuition and senses. This is a body mind problem that relates to my personal relationship and understanding of self and identity. The simplified biomorphic figures are symbolic of matter that has taken physical shape as an abstract representation of pain. The tangible physical presence of sculpture allows me to free my emotional psyche from the weight of undesired experiences. The figurative works are uneasy, imbalanced, damaged as well as ethereal and life giving. The depths of memory and the sensation of the void are imbedded in the work and the past is making itself known in the present formations.

Many ideas in the work correlate with my inability to cope with death and my curious engagement with the pleasurable in life. Death claims everything in life; pleasure is a fleeting reaction that causes momentary happiness. The work is a reflection of my individual psyche; an attempt to tap into my own being. I want to free myself from the impeding memories, nostalgia and damaging associations. I value the spontaneity of intuition and the freedom of rapid expression. The imagery remains abstract for the most part, allowing for reconstructed versions of real objects and images. I am anxiously aware of human vulnerability and express this through the gestures offered in the work.

The sculptures I generate explore the body as a vessel through form. They are containers of memory and are permeated with the physical marks of deterioration, stress, and regrowth. They are bent, twisted and fragmented from the states of suffering they have experienced. In this way, my forms are abstract, acting as ambiguous substitutes of the human body. They serve as vessels to contain and perform as the shared human physiology of flesh, bone, muscle, and blood. The general shapes of my sculptures are bulbous swollen forms that reference organs, chest cavities, appendages, and the bends and curves found on the body. I do not wish to replicate the human form but to subtly disassemble and reassemble it. The structures can be both phallic and yonic simultaneously. I blend attributes from both binary sexes to keep them in a state of mutability and relatable to females as well as males.

The human body is the receiver of pain and pleasure and thus the subject of my work. The body receives the pain or pleasure, leaving it either relieved or effete. The lived body is experienced as our “self” in our individual bodies. It is our liveliness and manifestation in the world. Our body is experienced as a duality; one that objectively can touch and subjectively can be touched. As WJT Mitchell described the human body when discussing Antony Gormley’s work “The human body is the most highly charged place in our experience. It is at once an inescapable prison and the portal to every conceivable flight of fantasy. Like sculpture itself, it is ancient, intractable, and conservative, yet capable of being refashioned, altered, and sculpted” (250). I often feel my work is a self-portrait. It reflects the damage I have witnessed physically, mentally or emotionally. The work is a projection for lived emotional chaos.



## **The Madness and the Magic**

I layer my pieces in materials and tones of color. These layers not only create visual depth but also suggest the body's physical ability to regrow from damage and reform itself. When I am working on my art, I am constantly working between several pieces. They may seem disparate to one another but they connect together to form a relational environment. Even past work gets retouched and reworked to reach a more complete state. My materials range from found objects, casted or blown glass pieces, from life size abstract structures to large un-stretched atmospheric paintings on canvas. I utilize canvas, paper, paint, plaster, wax, latex, ceramics, and glass, which are mutually united to form mixed media installations. The materials I use for the base structure of the individual forms are either comprised of dense plaster or thick ceramic components. The strength and density of the main structural form withstand the weight of the additional parts. These smaller parts give life to the structure and animate it. Together the pieces act as a full composition that is intentional and active. These fragmented parts are removable and interchangeable between each other. Currently working in the mode of installation, I feel that all of these parts are not constants; they are components depending on space and the compositional and formal quality I am conveying with the work.

My art making involves constant rethinking, rearranging and re-challenging myself. The "redo" is a very big part of my process. Doing, undoing, and redoing allows me to analyze each action and part made. The work is never finished in my opinion and this is

because I feel each sculpture follows another, continuing the conversation of its predecessor.

In the studio, I employ materials that reflect and directly correlate to the human body. These materials include wax, latex, oil paint, lard, clay, plaster, silicone and human hair. With these materials, I experiment in layering and investigating their reaction with one another. I blend them and overlap them in the way that the body is composed of layers. Surface treatment and appearance are significant qualities in the work to signify the human body. I add and subtract materials until I reach a desired sense of visual depth and transparency of layers. Many of my chosen materials have a limited lifespan and will melt, age, break, crack, discolor and decompose within months or over years.

I have recently found an appreciation in clay and ceramics. Clay offers the ability to form and reform. Its malleability and formlessness allows endless possibilities in structure and appearance. Clay also holds the memory of the artist's hand. Every mark made or tool applied to it changes the internal structure of the clay bonds. It is a time sensitive material that must be carefully and slowly exposed to its environment so it does not crack or break. Ceramics allows me to blend my love for painting and sculpture. Working with bisque fired clay, you can utilize under glazes much like that of watercolor paints. You can then fire these layers on and add glazes, lusters or stains to change the colors of the under glazes or coat the pieces in a high gloss finish. All of this becomes highly experimental and allows for freedom in testing and the pleasure in not knowing the end result. There is much discovery is testing glazes on textured surfaces

depending on elements like heat, type of clay, temperature, and time. Clay allows me to hand build, hollow out and carve away parts until I have reached a desired aesthetic.

Wax becomes the skin on my sculptures. I use it to layer tones, seal edges, and combine other materials. It acts as glue as well as a main component in many of my pieces.

Plaster performs as the foundation. It is a material I am very fond of and know how it reacts throughout its mixed stages. I understand how time sensitive it is and how I can transform it with dyes and pigments to create a marbled effect. I use plaster in almost every part of my art making processes specifically mold making.

My pedestals in my thesis are constructed of dense slabs of dyed plaster covered in resin. My understanding of this material allows me to finesse it to reach a desired finish. Plaster was the first sculptural medium I ever used. It is soft yet hard, easy to carve, it can be added to or subtracted from, and it can easily be transformed by additives. I love the instantaneous quality it allows as the chemical reaction between the plaster and water changes the powder into a dense strong building material. A material I have experimented with and learned to altar over several years, plaster was my first choice for my pedestals. Unlike wood it would supply a density and weight to the light glass pieces I had made. I altered the natural white appearance of the slabs with acrylic paint to add bolder colors as well as epoxy resin to permit reflection on the glossy surfaces. I desired a glass like surface on my pedestals and a matte finish on my glass to even further press my viewers to question all materials used.

Glass has completely transformed and expanded the range of possibilities within my work. Over the past year, I became passionate about casting and blowing glass. It is such a precious material and I seek to strip it of its lustrous quality. I cast glass to transform it and make it appear like it is wax, rubber, etc. I utilize solid casts so that the material becomes unidentifiable and questioned by the viewer. Once I have the casts, I spend several hours cold working the forms, cleaning up any flashing and reworking surfaces, sanding edges, and sandblasting to lose any glossy finish. The finished product is matte and velvet in appearance. The glass looks softer in its final state, no longer like a fragile medium.

I have always considered myself a painter above all things. I have an appreciation for colors, depths and tones I can reach with paint. Painting allows me to make marks quickly and adjust them later. In my thesis, my ink painting on mylar, *How I wish you were here for me*, was created in one afternoon. It was a reaction piece to the space I was installing within. I wanted a piece on the wall to tie all the objects together. The long red oval that took shape on the mylar was the unifier in the show. The red and pink tones that were present in my objects and pedestals were reinforced by the painted oval. The oval itself was the ovum, the phallus, the meats and the landscape all combined. It is the shape I have been obsessed with for some time; I feel it is the most complete, infinite form both linear and circular at the same time. The oval is angled on the mylar. I did not notice this until I hung the painting. It made the show complete to me; it made the connection between the rest of the pieces, which are instable and unattached to any ground plane.

I have an intense appreciation and admiration of life. I want to evoke the five senses through corporeal textures and surface treatments. Although the work carries with it a sense of death, decay and emotional weight, there is light in it. Many pieces are moody and ominous but much of the work has taken a brighter, more colorful tone. There is relief in the work. Even though I have casted my past and my hardships into the work, the entire installation is surprisingly light, ethereal and beautiful. There is a rich sense of color, which I have avoided for most of my art making. While finalizing my pedestals I kept adding brighter and warmer tones into them to contrast with some of the duller monotonies in the work. This activated the compositions in the work. It animated the work and gave it a bolder composition that is more contemporary.

Process art allows me to visually experience the aging and changing of my work and its direct relation to that of the human body. The impermanence of materials and transience that exists in my work reflect my understanding and coping with the limitations of time, the unavoidability of aging and the permanence of death.

Considering pleasure, my pieces have a very tactile, sensuous quality. I aim to create work that craves the viewer's touch. The fleshy quality in my work is an invitation to my audience to investigate and handle the pieces. This regressive need to touch is very intriguing to me when I see others interact with the work. They are repulsed by the abject quality in the bodily pieces but are curiously attracted to the surface of the work and want to engage with it. This is the line I like my work to live between; it suggests death but is presented in a visually pleasurable and sensuous way that can be

considered beautiful. This abjection and empathetic response is both an undesirable and simultaneously irresistible reaction.

My work lingers in some limbo between what is seen, what is really there, and what it could be. I'd rather my audience linger lost in a limbo of interest and inquiry rather than be provided with a full narrative. Relationships between my paintings, sculptures, and glass pieces seem vast and confusing and even unsettling. This is what I want my audience to feel: absurdity, doubt, curiosity, and questioning.

### **Contemporary Like Mindedness**

David Altmejd's ability to transform materials to alter between reality and fantasy is highly influential to my work. His sculptures are blurred between figure and abstraction. The value he places on surface and structure in his work is intriguing to me and his process and materials are similar to those used in my creative processes. His work embraces growth through decay and makes work to generate its own narrative and meaning. His process is self-discovery, as he works out his ideas and his interest in juxtaposed polarities.

Arlene Shechet's use of clay in abstraction is extremely influential to me. Her work veers from more traditional use of ceramics. Her large amorphous forms in clay have an important relationship to space, form, surface, and composition. She sits these large pieces atop specific pedestals made from reclaimed materials like kiln bricks, wood, etc.

The work is brightly colored and retains depth and attention to surface and formal qualities.

Louise Bourgeois has significant influence in the development of my concepts and forms. Her subjects all draw directly from her subconscious mind and involve coping with her traumatic childhood. Her works relate to the emotional and psychological drama of human nature and the emotional void. According to her, the work of the artist was to free oneself of the burden of one's inner life. She believed in the idea of truth in art, which included recreating past experiences, something lived, the experience of fear. Her ability to cope with her emotions through sculptural form has influenced my art approach. Also, her use of soft formless materials like plaster and latex to develop her concepts has been highly influential in my own work. She exposed the blending of genders through her sculpture specifically the ones carved from marble or plaster covered in latex. The blending of sexes in her work was revolutionary in contemporary feminist art. The body, both in female and male form, is exposed in Bourgeois' work and there is no difference between the two.

Berlinde de Bruyckere's work with the suffering human figure; sexless, faceless wax figures in deformed, twisted, and mangled states, encapsulates the body in its morbid state. She displays these pieces on found items and old furniture to recall the past. The shriveled figures are tangled up in themselves and extremely morbid, dealing with themes of death, decay, and loneliness. They exist between some barrier of life and

death and expose human suffering. I find her sculptures beautiful in their formal qualities and their ability to speak of life's ability to damage.

## **The Horror**

Through my work I hope to provoke introspection for my viewers. I hope that they find a sense of relativity to the work and have shared experiences and consciousness with the emotion states of the forms. I want them to share judgments, emotions and perceptions with the work. This embodied consciousness can recontextualize the work and cause a sensuous reaction. This application of the viewers senses through sight and touch can help them feel connected to the damaged form. The ability to touch the waxes, silicones, and latex allows the viewer a direct understanding to its own body and the inevitability of damage and time. Gilles Deleuze discusses how there is a difference between deformation and transformation, "The transformation of form can be abstract or dynamic. But deformation is always bodily, and it is static, it happens at one place; it subordinates movement to force, but it also subordinates the abstract to the Figure" (50). In this way, I feel I am combining both the transformation and deformation of form. I am giving the viewer the sense that invisible forces are now visible, to render the transformed/deformed body and show the invisible force that life flushes out through sensation. Deleuze also argues, "The Figure is the sensible form related to a sensation; it acts immediately upon the nervous system, which is of the flesh, whereas abstract form is addressed to the head and acts through the intermediary of the brain, which is closer to the bone" (31). I seek to combine the reaction that acts on both the brain and flesh. This involves destroying figuration to get to the figure. The figuration



suggests a scene of violence and chaos. The figures that are left are no longer being subjected to violent forces. As Deleuze puts it when discussing Francis Bacon, “Bacon himself formulates this problem, which concerns the inevitable preservation of a practical figuration at the very moment when the Figure asserts its intention to break away from the figurative... Thus neutralized, the horror is multiplied because it is inferred from the scream, and not the reverse” (34). There is a balance between displaying the horrors of an experience and suggesting the forces that have caused horror. Like Bacon, I want to discuss the figure not the figuration in a complete sense. I intend to bring about curiosity and confusion in my work and I do not desire to replicate the past in full detail but subtly give reference to it.

### **Women qualifying as Meat**

While working in the medium of ceramics, I began to wedge the clay as part of the forming process to remove air from the clay. As the clay sat on the table, I saw the meat in its form. I let the clay become leather hard and I cut it in half and hollowed it out. After putting it back together I carved out the details of the meat. I began thinking about this cliché of women as meat; hunted, preyed upon, and devoured. We are objects that sanction men; lusted after and craved. Another thought while carving ceramic meats, was that of gender roles and expectations. Women are expected to eat salads and men, meat. Being a female who eats meat I began to consider myself an enigma; I am the meat who is craved and craves myself. The title *FatBoys* gives reference to Joseph Beuys and his lard sculptures like *Chair with Fat*. His work with lard was a discussion about the interrelationship between art making and natural creative forces.

The meat is the raw, the fully exposed, the open and yet the satiated. The meat is what fills me, both what I am made of and what I consume. It is what feeds me and is fed upon. It references my gender, sexuality, and my body in relation to all other bodies. As Delueze described Francis Bacon's work, "The body is revealed only when it ceases to be supported by the bones, when the flesh ceases to cover the bones, when the two exist for each other, but each on its own terms: the bone as the material structure of the body, the flesh as the bodily material of the Figure" (20). The meat within our bodies is the true body. It is what we consist of and it is what makes us all the same internally. Delueze continues, "Meat is not dead flesh. It manifests such convulsive pain and vulnerability, but also such delightful invention, color, and acrobatics...Meat is the common zone of man and the beast, their zone of indiscernibility" (21). Meat is alive and a container of feelings. It is the most exposed version of ourselves- it is beautiful and abject simultaneously. In my thesis, I showed fifteen ceramic pieces of meat. They are realistic and abject and symbols of the body.

### **My final thoughts**

My thesis has been a visual capsule of my own personal growth. I have an intense appreciation and admiration of life and have expressed that sentiment through this work. I worked to evoke the five senses through corporeal textures and surface treatments to allow the work to be relatable and sensuous. Although the work carries a sense of deformation or decay, there is light and life in it. Many pieces are moody and ominous but much of the work has taken a brighter, more colorful tone. There is also relief in the work. Even though I feel I have casted my past and my hardships into the

work, the entire installation is surprisingly light, ethereal and beautiful. My thesis is my embracement of life; both in its most beautiful and harshest form as well as the ongoing metamorphosis taking place. The forms I utilized are transformed by my use of materials specifically glass, plaster and ceramics. I feel my formal compositions are complete sculptures that generate meaning through their existence that translate beauty and completion.

## WORKS CITED

Deleuze, Gilles. *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 2003. Print. 20 May 2015

Mitchell, WJT. "What Sculpture Wants: Placing Antony Gormley." In *What Do Pictures Want? The Loves and Loves of Images*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. Web. 20 May 2015.



Detail from Unattached, 2015  
Mixed media  
Dimensions vary



Detail from Unattached, 2015  
Ceramics and latex  
Dimensions vary





Detail from Unattached, 2015  
Plaster, casted glass, and resin  
Dimensions vary



Detail from Unattached, 2015  
Plaster, casted and blown glass, and resin  
Dimensions vary



*Torpor*, 2015  
Glazed ceramic  
32" x 3" x 3"



Detail from Unattached, 2015  
Ceramic, casted glass, plaster and wax  
Dimensions vary





*Fatboys* 2014-2015  
Glazed ceramic and oil paint  
Dimensions vary



Detail of *Fatboys*, 2014-2015  
Glazed ceramic and oil paint  
Dimensions vary



Installation shot of *How I wish you were here for me* and *Fatboys* 2014-2015  
 Ink on mylar, glazed ceramic and oil paint  
 Dimensions vary



Installation shot of Unattached, 2015  
 Mixed media  
 Dimensions vary