

Innocent and Guilty

A cultural reflection on living within the archetypes of the Virgin and the Whore.

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Dedications

This work is dedicated to the little girls that I sang to when I worked as a Disney princess.

Dream bigger than Cinderella, please, and be loud in the meantime.

Acknowledgements

A huge thank you to my mother, my father, and my sister, who taught me the importance of speaking my mind and sharing my experiences to empower others. Thank you to my wonderful advisor, Liz Elcessor, who supported me in this strange work. Thank you to the UVA department of Media Studies, to my cohort of Drew Lovett and Rebecca Jarrett, and to the UVA Art department.

Abstract

What is it like to live within the Freudian archetypes of womanhood in a modern, western context? What power do these archetypes have over women's views of self and others? Ideological control in the lives of women is something of a liminal space, with clear political and social ramifications, but muddy causes. This project aims to create sculptural examples of the archetypes of the virgin and the whore, as they have exerted power in my life. This work provides an opportunity to display some of the nuanced ways ideological control plays into daily, individual life. In this artist statement, a mixed autoethnographic and cultural studies methodology are applied to provide theoretical background to the sculptures. Theories of gender, such as the controlling images of Patricia Hill Collins, and the melding of cyborg identity by Donna J. Haraway, are employed to inform this project. The results are a pair of sculptures representing some of my own sexualized and gendered experiences. This work aims to implicate early socialization and mediated life in creating some of the painful, joyful, and strange effects of growing up within a harshly gendered society.

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Introduction

What is it like to be a woman? Is every experience of womanhood unique or are there significant similarities across cultures that constitute a larger feminine experience? The three archetypes of the mother, the virgin, and the whore function as a long-standing typology through which to conceptualize femininity in western culture. This simplification of complex women into stereotyped categories serves as a method to control women's sexual identities. In the traditional European psychoanalytic framework, this control begins by Freud theorizing the western family structure as dependent on a feminine mother, whose female children begin their lives in the virgin archetype, but inevitably become examples of the whore. This construction of female identity is repetitive and results in the systemic reconstruction of familiar archetypes. One of the most influential scholars to conceptualize the ideological control of gendered sexual transformation was Patricia Hill Collins, a Black feminist theorist, who coined the term "controlling images" and focused on troupes situated in historical marginalization. Importantly, feminine identity cannot be understood outside of intersectionality, thus, race, disability, sexuality, culture, and class play a crucial role in the imagining of womanhood. Additionally, sex and gender are two very different ideas. There is no necessary causation between one's sex (assigned female at birth) and one identifying with the gender identity of 'woman.' In this paper, when I refer to women, I extend this concept to all those who identify with a "feminine" gender expression or use 'she' and 'her' pronouns.

Research Questions - What is it like to live within the Freudian archetypes of womanhood in a modern, western context? What power do these archetypes have over women's views of self and others?

It has always felt concerning to me that identity seems to be constructed majorly through familiar relationships that are steeped in gendered assumptions. Like a latent fog of pressure and control, questions of what it is to be a woman and who is defining womanhood as such, float in the air of formation of self. This invisible, but relevant, dynamic has inspired my work. I have constructed a creative project that uses various methods and tools to realize the modern pains and promises of the feminine archetypes in two cement sculptures. The two sculptures represent the virgin and the whore, which illustrate the role of ideological control in my own life. In this artist statement, I utilize autoethnographic methods to explain what it is to live within these archetypes, in my own experience. This artist statement will lay out methodology, the gender and cultural theories that motivate this work, as well as the artistic inspirations and components that I apply in my sculptural work. It also tells some of the stories relevant to the construction of my sculptures.

Methods - Autoethnography

Why is it important and interesting to study cultures, as small and specific as they may be? There is a long tradition in anthropological research called folklore which informs my research. Folklore is used to “designate either the body of such cultural materials, or the discipline dedicated to their documentation” (Barfield 193). Folklore values the study of cultural products that are distilled from shared beliefs and are “often poetic, imaginative, or spiritual in content, generally communicated face-to-face by community members” (Barfield 193). The field performs cultural advocacy by seeing and sharing the power of individual stories, art pieces, clothing items, utensils, and various other material aids. Folklore attempts to save cultures from corrosion.

I have selected autoethnography as a primary research method for my work, building off the background of folklore's cultural studies. Autoethnography "seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)" (Ellis, 273). It is an offshoot of the research method, ethnography, which seeks to explain the lived experiences of different cultural groups by describing the qualities that define their specific worldly identities. Anthropologically identifying and sharing information about what it is like to exist within groups can help readers to understand the perspectives of others. But, unfortunately, ethnography has a long history of colonization as researchers would (and do) succumb to "impulses of authoritatively entering a culture, exploiting cultural members, and then recklessly leaving to write about the culture for monetary and/or professional gain, while disregarding relational ties to cultural members" (Ellis, 274). I seek to push back on this academic pattern of entering cultures and disrupting them, by representing myself, in an attempt to acknowledge "research as a political, socially-just and socially conscious act" (Ellis 274). Additionally, I am doing autoethnographic work rather than ethnographic work because of the specificity of the lived experience which I am detailing. I am not speaking towards the lived experiences of a large group, but rather of myself, an individual. Just as art challenges the bounds of viewers' imagination, autoethnography "challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others" by utilizing one's own positionality as an affordance to the research (Ellis 273). By employing the subjectivity of my own view as a tool in the formation of my work, I seek to normalize the acceptance and assumption of relevant bias in research and highlight the validity of studying affective personal experience.

In making these sculptures and writing about them, I share details about growing up as a White, upper-middle class, able-bodied, cisgendered, queer girl and woman on the East coast of

the United States, in a digital, late-stage capitalist environment. This is a distinctly privileged location to be writing from, but there is still value in discussing control in my own young-womanhood. My cultural work highlights themes of nostalgia and inauthenticity, while sharing my own anger, bewonderment, angst, and appreciation for the world I grew up within. I have chosen to share about my experience not because it is special or unique (which it is not) but because it is the one I know most intimately. I can use this knowledge to communicate specific meaning in my work, and to hopefully strike a cord of resonance with other young women who have felt the pressure and politics of subtle sexual control in their own lives.

I have chosen to make the sculptures of the virgin and the whore because I have access to this a priori knowledge. I do not have this same information about living within the archetype of the mother, and thus I have chosen not to create a sculpture of this archetype. To me, that would be disingenuous, just as it would be disingenuous to claim to represent experiences of intersectionalities that are not my own. There is room for other artistic scholars to make concept work of living within the archetype of the mother, in the future.

Methods - Artistic Practices

Why might one engage with art as a method for scholarly work? What are some of the kinds of creating that will best afford my theoretical purposes, and what qualifies me to engage with such methods? Below, I will seek to explain the relevant artistic theories and influences to my project, and include a description of my background in art-making to justify my work in this area.

Artwork is made to be seen, whether by the artist or spectators, so it can be valuable to begin with a theory of seeing. John Berger wrote an influential text titled *Ways of Seeing* which detailed the relevant points of viewing artwork and seeing in a mass media society. Berger opens

his first chapter with an epigraph: “Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak” (7). He is invoking the idea that seeing is more innate to the human body than even communication. We witness other people and we learn how to be like them, we witness the world and we derive the sciences from it, we witness ourselves and our identity forms from it. Visual artwork affords us the opportunity to see, and from seeing, to understand larger concepts. Through production of visual artwork, I can get up close to core human experiences that can be harder to access through evocative language alone.

Berger asserts that women, much like artwork, are valued primarily according to their ability to be seen: “*men act and women appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at” (Berger 47). This theoretical similarity between women and artwork was very notable in the growing popularity of female nudes during the advent of Renaissance Europe. Female nudes have been around and popular since the early days of Ancient Greece (and before then in sculptural forms), but the modern 17th century nude in Europe had new ties to modern subjectification of women. With new found resolve it was confirmed to the viewer that women were made to be beautiful and nothing more.

Much of modern, western feminist artwork fights against these ideas, showing the powerful thoughts and pains of female existence. For example, the painting below, by Alia El Bermani, takes on the challenges of body dysmorphia that have plagued feminine body image and been considered a major disorder since 1987 (American Family Physician). In the painting by El Bermani, an exceptionally thin, young, white woman (the epitome of the American beauty standard) is seen pinching the fat on her stomach and making a disappointed face. This artwork is manifestly feminist because the subject matter is directly tied to the prominent women’s issue

of eating disorder culture. While my art is not about body image, I definitely acknowledge some of the related pains in my work.

Similar themes are found in the image of plastic surgery work by Su Yang. Body and face modification is becoming an increasingly popular way of fitting female beauty standards, especially in many Asian countries. Yang's work approaches this topic head on, with a series of paintings about the mutilation of female bodies, and the commodified contempt for the female form. As the painting brings the pain of plastic surgery to the forefront of the viewer's mind, underlying themes of feminism can be perceived because the woman's face is displayed as mutilated rather than healed and pretty as it has been shown in art of the past.

These two pieces (and others) inspire me to make direct and unapologetic claims about modern women's issues. With the understanding that the personal is inherently political, I am emboldened to attempt to elicit feelings in my viewers about such topics.



Image 1. El-Bermani, Alia. Boston.

Image 2. Yang, Su. *Pre Cosmetic Surgery*. 2016.

Some art works are not explicitly feminist, but can be interpreted through a feminist lens to take on new meaning. The piece below by Simon Leclerc pictures two young girls moving up a hill of flowers at night, all while being watched by an omnipresent yellow eye. The piece has a tone of fear and angst that is palpable to the viewer. While the piece is not obvious in its feminism, all art with female subject matters can be interpreted as examples of larger feminine identity. I read this painting as a lens into the surveillance of women, with the watchful eye of the media critiquing female form, opinion, and leadership. It is difficult to take a role on the mainstage of politics, economics, or academic thought, without the invocation of the gender roles of women. I will be incorporating some elements of the surveillance state into my own feminist art work.



Image 3. Leclerc, Simon. Concept Art for *Hunters*. 5, 19, 2020.

Some instances of art depicting women inspire me in a different way than the pieces above do. For example, *The Balcony at the Party* by Eleanore Abott is an example of artwork that displays female joy. There are so many lovely, meaningful, poignant parts of life as a woman that are worth protecting and advocating for. This activist spirit compels me to celebrate the

things I have loved about my experience of growing up as a woman, and makes me want to share these feelings with others. I include some elements of female joy in my artwork.

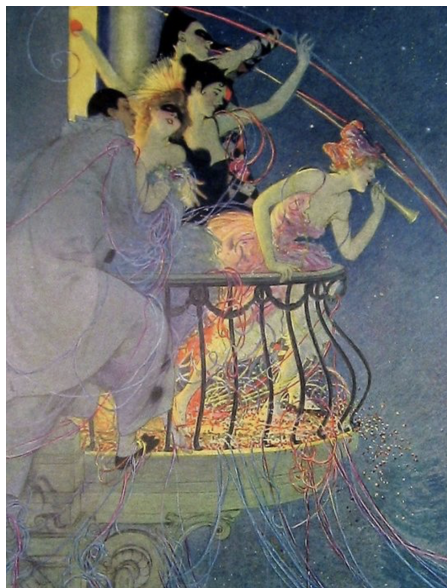


Image 4. Abbott, Elenore. *Carnival Celebration*. 1923.

While my feminist inclinations and beliefs may be somewhat obvious, my artistic background can be less so. I began making art when I was a child, in the messy ways that kids do. I painted and drew, and quickly it became one of my favorite hobbies. I began entering drawing competitions at ten and began to train with contemporary impressionist painter, Christine Lashley, at age twelve. Soon after beginning my years of training under her, I began to enter Plein Air paint competitions and won a few local categories. At age 15, I became interested in mixed media sculpture and had two pieces featured in a local art gallery in 2017 and 2018, one sculpture was primarily made of glass and one made out of individual sewn pillows to form a large human head. Since coming to college, I have run a private business of clothing and shoe modification, for which I have had dozens of clients. Most recently, I have fulfilled a grant from UVA to make my own line of sustainable clothing. While my artistic background is eccentric and varied, I hope it is clear that I have loved making art since I was a child and have been committed to creating throughout my life.

Theory of Gender

In order to communicate in the modern U.S., people must categorize themselves and others. Linguistic tools, like pronouns, are regularly used in American English to establish people's gender and sexual identities. These words also come with a number of assumptions regarding cultural meanings of womanhood and manhood, as well as an implicit reliance on heterosexuality as a framework governing interrelationship of genders. These same tools of categorization are applied outside of gender and sexuality, and also dominate racial and socioeconomic discourses.

Our definitions of people are often unspecific to individuals, and rely on assumptions about larger groups. These groups can be unwieldy and contain many different kinds of people within their bounds. For example, contemporary American politics relies heavily on a singular "women's experience," which makes women a "collective object" without space for diversion from this political norm within different communities and kinds of women (Haraway 6). This political woman is assumed by modern media to be a thin, White, middle-class, somewhat educated, lady, who will instill her two children with Christian values. While the term 'woman' may sound inclusive of a myriad of races, sexualities, abilities, and presentations, this woman is, in actuality, a very exclusive and strategic category. Without recognition of gender, race, and class differences, the assumed woman becomes highly essentialized in politics (Haraway 16).

This assumed woman can be broken down into smaller categories to emphasize relevant identity tropes. These categories can be termed in a number of different ways, the two ways I deal with in this artist statement are archetypes and controlling images, which are similar but possess relevant differences.

The framework of archetypes was introduced by psychologist Carl Jung as “primordial forms in the collective unconscious expressed through myth and fairytale” (Macey 50). Because these forms are factitious frameworks rather than specific examples, they represent patterns of behavior that are present in the formation of societal relations. The modern myths and fairytales are media and technology, which spread our human stories between groups and generations. Media and technology influence audiences by dissolving their masked assumptions into the background of people’s lives. For example, “in television, archetypes manifest as the broad blueprint of the recombinant characters” (Macey 50). With the rise of mass media, ideas became increasingly powerful because there was a newfound “widespread common articulation of the beliefs, aspirations, antagonisms, and doubts of the huge populations of modern societies” (Tudor 14). These shared ideas become common understandings and norms of cultures, serving as backbones of belief, religion, and law. Such are the archetypes of womanhood as they “are imbued with meanings that are often unconsciously assumed and rarely interrogated” (Macey 50). Archetypes can thus be understood as elements of collective consciousness that inform media portrayal and individual perspectives.

The two archetypes I deal with in my work are that of the virgin and the whore. The Madonna/Whore complex was first coined by Sigmund Freud in the early twentieth century. In Freud’s work, he theorized that women fall into three major categories in the minds of western, socialized peoples: the mother, the virgin, and the whore. His theory focused on the importance of the socialization of girls and boys to fit their “appropriate sex roles,” and turn them into properly civilized individuals (Rosenfeld and England 132). Societal norms are the method for teaching people how to organize these sexual feelings in appropriate ways, and these norms are first taught to children in the nuclear family, primarily by the child’s mother (Rosenfeld and

England 132). The primary norms communicated to women are the Madonna (henceforth referred to as the virgin) and whore. The archetype of the virgin “carries traditional values, harking back to a simpler time” which can “reduce women to little girls” (Macey 58). The virgin is often portrayed in a positive, and at times naive, light, but her optimism can seem “ridiculous in adult women” thus, she “is dismissed and disparaged even when her discourse is important” (Macey 58). The archetype of the whore “has little substance beyond sex” but she can still be powerful as “sexuality has historically been a source of constraint and vulnerability” for women (Macey 57).

Objectification of peoples often stems from internalized archetypal definitions, but it is their application through hegemonic power structures that result in the creation of controlling images. To oppress peoples thoroughly over time, controlling images can serve as internal justifications for the treatment of different kinds of peoples and “are designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life” (Hill Collins 77). Controlling images loom in people’s minds as categorical explanations for the behavior of these typed individuals as they “exert a powerful impact on how we can act and how we construct relationships” (Miller 112). Controlling images are specific to different intersectionalities, as Black women encounter different controlling images than disabled women, than transwomen. Patricia Hill Collins theorized controlling images of Black women in 2000 and, in her words, “African-American women, by not belonging, emphasize the significance of belonging” (77). These images, first of Black women and now understood as affecting all marginalized groups differently, inform political and cultural decisions regarding the relative value of the stereotyped parties. While archetypes are latent and

subtle ideologies, controlling images create real constriction and limitation in the lives of minorities and oppressed majorities (like women) (Miller 112).

In my work, I am engaging primarily with Freud's archetypes because they resonate with how I feel I have been perceived in contemporary North American society. I have felt forced into the role of the virgin and the whore, so I have chosen to engage with Freud's explanation of how these identities came about. But the power these images have enacted is real and more akin to controlling images in the type of effect it has had on my life (and, I postulate the lives of other women, though they are not my academic focus at this moment). While archetypes can be subtle and presumably even positive, when speaking of the negative effects of these specific archetypes, it is important to engage Hill Collin's framework of controlling images.

Despite my work with Freud, this should not be read as an endorsement of him. His work on child development and early sexuality all assume a heteronormative relationship with cis-gendered parents rearing their own biological children. This is not necessarily the case in modern relationships and families, which often have unusual family structures and non-normative identities present that may alter the dynamics from those Freud described. Additionally, Freud exhibited "notorious sexism" and "was condemned for holding misogynist beliefs" by first wave feminists (Rosenfeld and England 131).

It is also important to note that Freud was writing in Germany at a time when most of his community was White, and his work assumes a background of Whiteness. His work cannot speak to the racially complex nature of modern society in the United States. Freud's work invokes an image of family that is not represented in assumptions about non-traditional families. However, some second wave feminists of the 1970's made an effort to "appropriate the psychoanalytic framework, reinterpreting its major insights to shed light on the origins of gender

inequality” (Rosenfeld and England 131). His work was, and still is, in the process of being reapplied by feminists to elucidate the “links between gender identity and male domination” (Rosenfeld and England 131). My sculptural and analytic work aims to be a part of this reinterpretation of Freud.

Theory of Culture

While archetypes and controlling images are present and powerful, these terms and categories are not the only parts of identity that are relevant to my work. In Donna Haraway’s seminal text, *A Cyborg Manifesto*, Haraway advocates for an embrace of the “confusion of boundaries and for *responsibility* in their construction” (Haraway 7). She argues for a new system of identification that understands the importance of muddling relationships between class, race, and gender in modern America (Haraway 28). Her system blurs nature, culture, and technology, to create a new vision for personhood, called the cyborg. Haraway compels us to see identity as a layered object, one where the mishmash of stories and facts of our existence come together to make our persons. In our technological age, we are constructed of our object relations, our familiar love, our licenses, our natural elements, and our mechanical pieces to make the cyborg. This cyborg, who Haraway advocates for, is not the militant and masculine capitalist robot that many imagine (Haraway 9). A cyborg is a creature that is a “hybrid of machine and organism” who is made up of recapitulated identities and pasts to imagine more dynamic and diverse futures (Haraway 5). The cyborg is bricolaged, an idea I will get into more in the coming sections. Modern people in their attachments to new technologies, regular use of western medicine, chemical manipulation, and continuing similarity to animal bodies, are not examples of the simple archetypes and controlling images that media and culture might have us believe, and instead, individuals would benefit from seeing themselves as more fluid than their

categorical humanhood currently allows. We are not the simple and divine natural beings that we like to believe ourselves to be, we are constantly under revision and subject to reinterpretation, so often changing that archetypes do not begin to explain our full worldly experience.

Through Haraway, the Freudian woman, who is given a singular ideological identity, is broken into pieces a million times over and cannot begin to explain the “partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity” which can be found at every angle of modern womanhood (Haraway 9). To see a person, a woman, through a singular lens is a huge injustice to the “many-headed monsters” that we are (Haraway15). No one way of seeing a human will accurately describe who they are, because they are in essence, multifaceted. I utilize Haraway’s theories as a means of blending scholarship and my collaged, layered art works. I construct an image of myself in my artwork, which is complex, intricate, and specific. This creative work is an attempt at seeing myself as the cyborg that I am, one who has muddy boundaries and ideals, a complicated future and a relevant past. Through artwork of this kind, I attempt to visualize Haraway’s theory of a cyborg self.

The archetypes and controlling images that pervade the American history of womanhood will most likely, for worse, be a part of feminine identities for many years to come. Racist and sexist definitions of women as sexual objects and inherently insufficient beings are assumed in texts, media, politics, and social relationships. Women internalize these views and use this information to construct their own understandings of who they are, pairing down their unique qualities and stories into a two-dimensional mold. Archetypes and images, while cruel and demeaning, have successfully diffused themselves into the worlds of individuals, infiltrating reality by the power of their theoretical existence. No woman is wrong for being impacted by controlling images and archetypes, the truths of ideological control are irreversibly built into the

identities of millions of women, but feminists must be galvanized around reducing the prevalence of these harmful ideologies in the future.

Haraway offers a few ways that feminists can defend against politics and social norms that enforce controlling images and archetypes as identity molds. The first method is imagining. It is up to activists to imagine the future they want to see which, in this case, is one that is not governed by harmful images of women. If we cannot imagine a world without these archetypes, we will not be able to move towards one that exists in reality. Imagining is difficult, but Haraway encourages us to try by posing curious questions to ourselves: What would political institutions that aid and protect cyborg women look like? What does it mean to acknowledge our own cyborg pasts and futures? How can we aid in the creation of communities that foster reconciliation of cyborg truths?

As we begin to answer these questions for ourselves, we must be conscious of the language we use to define our cyborg existences. Haraway talks about the importance of language in domination and reclamation of personal and political power. If cyborg feminists can be skeptical of traditional vocabulary and language systems, there is the opportunity to create new texts, “seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other” (Haraway 55). No one written text is ever going to define the cyborg world completely, so it is imperative that cyborg writers make “noise and advocate pollution,” allowing space for multiple discourses to more fully capture our complicated world (Haraway 57). New and many texts can help to reshape the western ideas that have resulted in egregious power dynamics over our history. Haraway promises her reader that...

There are also great riches for feminists in explicitly embracing the possibilities inherent in the breakdown of clean distinctions between organism and machine and similar

distinctions structuring the western self. It is the simultaneity of breakdowns that cracks the matrices of domination and opens geometric possibilities (53).

By recognizing the control and influence archetypes have exerted in my life, I can imagine a future of change. The making of these sculptures was a part of that process for me. In the coming sections, I seek to apply Haraway's cultural framework of blurred identity boundaries to tell stories of my own experiences of growing up within the archetypes. While the ideological control behind the virgin and the whore are parts of my life, I, and every woman, am much more complex than the archetypes express. Understanding the value of creating messy and unusual texts which combine implicit understandings of self and culture, and imagine better and bolder futures, inspire my art making. The mix of autoethnographic methods, gender and culture theory, and collaged sculpture-making aim to invoke some of the complexity of individual life.

Themes of the Artwork

In my artwork, I engage with a couple major themes, more specifically images of technology and nature. I incorporate these themes to show how femininity is a complicated idea with ties to the natural and the technological.

Nature is commonly associated with flow, organic shapes and colors found in the outside world. Nature is often sexed female; its quiet pureness is romanticized as similar to an idealized womanhood. I include a few celebrations of naturalness in my art through object incorporation, for which I will include some examples. On the virgin, I place crystal formations growing out of Barbie shoes which represent how nature has continued to push through the poor circumstances created by a developed capitalist world. On an enshrined painting of Venus coming out of the clam shell, I place a dried flower near her hands. I picked this flower from the grass outside of my parents' home, layed it by Venus as you might at the grave of someone who has passed. This

is intended as an homage to the woman I hoped I would be when I was younger, and an honorific homage at that. A third reference to nature on the virgin sculpture is the messily poured resin which looks like scattered drops of fallen rain. The resin allows some areas of the sculpture to look permanently wet, providing textural relief to the dryness of the cement sculpture. I included this 'rain' to inspire some of the fresh, playfulness of youth, which for me is very akin to the feeling of standing in early spring humidity. On the whore sculpture, I also have some references to nature. The crystals in Barbie shoes on the virgin sculpture have grown into whole crystalline areas, symbolizing how nature grows and expands overtime. Additionally, I mimicked a similar flowing and spilling technique, as I did with resin rain on the Virgin sculpture, but this time in wax. Wax is a thicker, more viscous substance than resin. The thickness of the wax allowed it to seize up on the sculpture, creating bumps and mounds that look like skin tags on flesh. With age, the virgin has grown into a woman, and the natural blemishes of age have begun to show on this sculpture.

In contrast to the theme of nature, technology is commonly associated with rigidity, crisp lines, and metallic shine. Technology is often sexed male, as its lack of emotion is associated with being more reasonable. Reason, strength, and harshness are all characteristics associated both with men and technology. I include a few technological objects in my sculptures. On the virgin, I have attached my childhood ipod, which I broke into pieces with a hammer, to reveal its naked insides. The inclusion of this ipod is in reference to some of my first experiences with mediated images of women through music. In addition to its personal meanings, the ipod allows an association between feminine existence and technology, the wired object invoking the cyborg self that Haraway manifested. I also displaced some of the wires from within the ipod, allowing them to lie in their shiny state like boundary lines to emphasize the end of one idea and

the beginning of another. There is also a film reel from a toy camera I had as a child attached to the sculpture. This film reel is an example of an innocent introduction to technology that I, and other children, received in the early days of our lives. Play and technology are deeply intertwined as young children log-in to gaming sites and become more and more attached to mobile devices. On the whole, I broke a cd into pieces and placed the pieces in a collaged 'sunburst' shape. The shine of the mirrored side of the cd reflects light that hits the sculpture, creating additional dimension. Further, I placed unwound cassette tapes where the nipples would be in the cemented bra, as an ironic and silly reference to the cyborg female body. The unwound tape on the cassette spools are looped and mangled to add a knotted effect, creating complication and pattern in the connected section between the two cassette nipples.

By invoking nature and technology, the complexity of womanhood is better illustrated in my artwork. These sculptures show both the modernity of our digital world and the ancient history of the natural world. The cyborg woman is equal parts past, present, and future, and introducing the themes of nature and technology is a way of displaying the compounded and creative cyborg feminine identity.

Autoethnography - Virgin

"To be made of flesh was humiliation." - Alice Munro

My childhood home is being sold and my parents are aggressively downsizing. Distilling each room into a few objects that will survive the move. My bedroom should have a sign on its door that says "fire sale, everything must go." I walk in looking for remnants I want to save from the donation box. I come up with a few books to take to my Charlottesville apartment, a journal of paper doll sketches, and a collection of saved birthday notes from over the years. In an oversized plastic tub, there is a froth of costumes; tulle and sequins and feathers fluff its edges. I

find an old ballet dress I remember wearing, black faux velvet with a tutu skirt, tiny fabric petals floating in its layers. When I was five, this was the most beautiful dress I had ever seen. I felt like a graceful dancer in Swan Lake when I put it on.

Looking at the dress, a few memories flutter to the surface of my mind; my father zipping it up for me over my t-shirt, hiding from my syrupy sweet teacher in ballet class, playing princess in the summer grass. When I was five, I thought I would be more graceful than I am by this point. I thought perfection of self not only existed, but was attainable. Now, I work at a bar, go on dates with women, and get angry at the morning news. I am certainly not what my younger self was expecting me to be, for better or worse. I pack the dress into my pile of things to save.

Once back in Charlottesville, the dress in my hands, I take a deep breath before dunking it into a wet tub of cement. I have already treated the mixture with some pink pigment, a very literal homage to girlhood. The cold cement seeps through my fingers into the folds of the dress, and I slosh it around to encase each layer in the paste. I feel a little sad to be ruining this dress. For a minute, I wish I could take it back. Hug the dry and small dress once again, attempt to pull it over my overgrown limbs. But I let it rest there, in the cement, for a few minutes, before hanging it on a clothing rack to melt the excess away. Two days later, I checked back to see that the dress had solidified into a dry crust. The elegant black color of the original was hidden by the taupe cement, darted with streaks of the pink. In its new statue form, the dress looked scary, like a volcanic fossil from an old life. Degas' "Little Dancer of Fourteen" had been cast in a low-budget, psychological thriller.

The girl I was when I wore the dress inspires this sculpture. I wish I could meet her. Methodology in artwork is important because it helps to tell the story of unique pieces, and allows the artist to meditate on a topic and what they would like to convey. Methodology is the

practice of artwork, which is the meeting place between an author's intent and a work's impact on the viewer. Some of these techniques include layering, sculpting, text, and clothing manipulation. Selecting a dress as the base of my sculpture has a larger ideological context. Dresses have long been a type of object associated with the female body. The ways that dresses, and clothes in general, are used as a means of identification, create in-groups, and prepare people for their lives, make fashion one of the most common kinds of identity expression (Sontag 166). Clothing is often explained as an extension of oneself (Sontag 166).

When I was five, the same age as I was when I was given this dress, my family went to the beach. I had trouble expressing to my mother that I wanted to own my first bikini like the older girls I had seen on Disney channel, so I wore my skirted one-piece swimsuit instead. Smelling thickly of sunscreen, I was well cared for, by my mother and father alike. I ran towards the ocean in the soft twilight of late afternoon, letting the cool water of a tidal pool welcome my limbs before I even got to the sea. I gleefully sank down into the large puddle, running my hands along the brink of water and sky, then pushing my pudgy fingers deep down into the sand below. It was a joy to be me there, to feel the water and be beneath the clouds and to melt under the hot day. I hear footsteps swashing through the sand, it is my mother approaching. At this age, she is still the most important thing in my life and the most beautiful woman in the world: she is tall, slender, and graceful in her fluttering white swim cover, a large floppy hat and dark sunglasses cover her face, only the edge of her curled and cropped blonde hair peeks out from under the brim. The sun shines behind her shadowing her figure, I look up and see her smile. "I love you" she says. I wrap my arms around myself in the warm water of the tidal pool, snuggle into my own embrace. I feel this love.

There is a photo of this moment, of my little self knowing she is loved. I cry when I look at it. I miss that little girl a lot. She is not gone, but the ways that she has been eroded are heavy to me.

Now, I sit down with the cemented dress on my bedroom floor dumping out a bag of bits and bobs I've collected to varnish it, including Barbie shoes, sparkly beads, glass marbles and hardened pieces of clay. I use my trusty hot glue gun, arranging these glitzy elements to encrust the folds of the dress and highlight a lifetime of compulsory femininity. I apply temporary tattoos to the form of the sculpture, their plastic outside appearing like a glint in the light. I paint the little girl who wore these tattoos on the bust of the dress, her face, her gangly limbs, her spring clothing. I draw her as I remember her: buoyant but uncertain, all potential but no kinetic energy. The dress on its own looks grim, but with adornment, there are clear pockets of joy. Such is the life of the virgin; determined for her in structure but with real flourishing within the confines of her mold.



Image 5. Flash Photo of Virgin sculpture, hanging on closet door. Caroline Weis. 2023



Image 6. Close up of the top of the virgin sculpture. Flash photo. Caroline Weis 2023.

There are politics involved in referring to my younger self, and my sculpture, as “the virgin.” I use this title to point out the deep discomfort of perceiving a young person as sexual, and the pain that that name can cause many children in their upbringing. I started to be perceived sexually right around the age of ten, with comments about my body from other children and adults alike. With time, I developed a sense that my physicality was one of the most important things about me, something to be cultivated. The strained and rushed transition in many girls’ lives from being a free child, to a commodified woman is a wrought experience, a multifaceted story that has been told by scholars like Nancy Chowdrow and Judith Butler, poets like Sylvia Plath, artists like Frida Kahlo, and activists across time and space. This sculpture tells of my experiences growing up in this mediated image, with taught aspirations of beauty and sexuality.

In psychoanalytic theory, the female child is born into the archetypal role of the virgin, in part because of how she is raised. Freud and his successors relied on a popular conception of the household, where the mother is the main caregiver to the child and the father provides for the family by working. These theorists held that “the infant first develops a sense of his/her own selfhood in a close, one-on-one relationship with the mother” and in these early stages of childhood, the mother becomes the child’s world (Rosenfeld and England 133). After this very early socialization, the child begins to learn of gender and the differences between men and women. Female children remain close with their early feminine nature, taught to them by their mother. In this stage of their life, where their youthful innocence is paramount, they have successfully internalized the femininity of their mothers, and they have yet to engage with their adult sexuality. Thus, women fall into the category of the virgin at this time. This ideologue of womanhood is defined predominantly by her lack of contamination by sexual partners and her

not yet having children. These Virgins are, in many ways, the most societally celebrated version of women, because they most clearly possess “four cardinal virtues: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity” (Hill Collins 79). In this way, the ‘truest women’ are the most like children: the most manageable, the weakest, and the most innocent.



Image 7. Flash Photo of shrine on virgin sculpture. Caroline Weis. 2023.

The image above displays a key part of 'the virgin' sculpture. The cemented dress fills the majority of the image, with layers of the gauzy tulle peeking out from the cement. Sculpture is a uniquely useful means for presentation of artwork because it necessitates the creation of something three dimensional and "real." Viewers can exist in the same plane as these kinds of artworks, creating a relationship between their body and the sculpture. There is the potential for artists to make something in a sculpture that feels relatable to the viewer in the way that a two dimensional image (like a painting) cannot be. The multidimensional nature may allow the viewer to see the artwork from multiple perspectives, creating a more in depth understanding of the piece in front of them. This section of the sculpture is designed to look like a shrine to the woman I hoped that I would be when I was a child. In the center of the commotion is a rendition of 'Venus' in oil paint on pink saran wrap. I included her as a reference of divine feminine beauty, one of the key hopes of my younger self. She is done in yellow and blue paint and lays on the pink saran wrap to give her a high contrast, pop art feel. Media portrayal strongly formed my view of self when I was young, so transforming the classic image of Venus emerging from her shell into a cartoon version, felt fitting. To the upper right of her head juts out the interior of my first iPod, in an homage to some of the music and technology that fed my childhood predictions of future self. Listening to women like Shakira, Hannah Montana, and Rihanna impacted the way I wanted to be perceived because these women seemed so shiny, and proud, and beautiful. Their words oozed confidence in their own bodies and their smiles seemed to never have known worry. I was so aware of my own childhood imperfections and struggled under the weight of comparison to these phenomenal women. How would anyone ever want me if I did not glisten with talent and poise, as they did?

Working down from the shrine on the sculpture are a series of multi-colored matte balls, which are supposed to reference the pearl from Venus's oyster. There are quite a few Barbie shoes in this area as well, which I have filled with crystalline rocks, as a reference to the femininity and opalescence I wanted to cultivate. Layering in mixed media, feminist art work has long been a means of creating complex artistic expressions. This practice is more prominently known in scholarship as bricolage. Bricolage "is a natural and diverse operational technique designed from binary concepts in human interactions with material/medium, falling together in 'an order for free' activity, from which emerge traces of 'a priori' experiences and/or openings to a biological consciousness" (Mayo 2). Through bricolage, layers of opacity, color, and texture can combine to tell whole stories, nuanced portrayals of an artist's view. I knew this was a tool that I wanted to incorporate into my work, to display the complexity of feeling and thought that lay behind exhaustive portrayals of female archetypes. Bricolage is a practice through which "women and other marginal populations can interpret symbols and images that emerge, through bricolaged surfaces, as an accidental literacy, a personal vocabulary" (Mayo 4). Bricolage presents a beautiful way to unearth layers of meaning by unusually combining materials to elicit feelings in viewers and communicate the specific circumstance of the artist. Through bricolage layering, the story of myself as the virgin comes into view.

In this photo, one can also see my favorite part of the sculpture for its terrible humor: the ken head sticking out from the edge of the skirt of the sculpture. When I was a child, I played with my Barbie and Ken dolls, but with time, the Ken doll became worn down. Eventually, the head fell off. It stayed in the bin with the other Barbies, looking on, previewing the play of the girls. Such is the heavy hand of the patriarchal gaze: omnipresent, watching the women perform

their well-rehearsed roles. Even at a young age, even as a virgin, you never know who is looking up your skirt.

Autoethnography - Whore

“I am old enough to know pretty is a dressed-up way of saying prey.” - Stevie Edwards

The whore sculpture was more difficult for me to make. As uncomfortable as I was thinking of my younger self being perceived as a virgin, I am angry at the alternative. There have been many great whores across time, Mary Magdalene and Marilyn Monroe alike. I find that the only requirement to be a whore is to be a woman of a certain age, an age much younger than I can breathe behind. Once one is sixteen, or fourteen, or twelve, or two, a speedy transition from virgin identity to whorehood can be facilitated by speaking ones' mind, lifting one's eyes, or laughing. To know things and to understand them is to be a whore, the title has very little to do with sex.

Whorehood, however, has everything to do with male desire. This kind of desire is theorized by Freud as coming about because male children do not have the same ease of identification with their mother as female children do. With the presumption that the father is absent (working and providing for his family), young men are forced to define their identity by learning to be like a person who is not around often. Hence, they begin to define themselves as opposing their mother, and emulate masculinity by learning “to devalue and reject whatever is associated with femininity, developing what Freud called ‘the normal male contempt for women’” (Rosenfeld and England 135). While the young child was initially intimately entangled with their mother, the boy child begins to feel “in danger from his [closeness to] his mother, and pushes them away, thus splitting the mother into two halves. One half offers support but not sexuality, while to the other half he can react sexually without being pushed” (Welldon 110).

Such is the process for creating the whore, in the male mind. The rejection of the feminine leads to a distaste for that which, in a heterosexual society, is arousing to men as it is their “erotic attachment to females,” and is now directed towards all women (Rosenfeld and England 133). Sex with women is, hence, the closest boys and men can feel to the feminine safety of the mother whom they pushed away. To maintain the emotional distance these boys/men established to secure themselves in their gender identity, they begin to depersonalize women and regard them as the whore. Further, the sexual relations between men and women “contains a marked component of sadism, either manifest or latent, whose injurious consequences indicate an unconscious masochistic component” in part because of the initial rejection of and hatred for femininity (Welldon 109). To continue to fulfill their male partners, women must take on the role of the whore to “make hate in bed under the illusion that they are making love” (Welldon 33). These sexual behaviors, while temporarily gratifying, are deeply unfulfilling to the woman who has to debase her own full identity to share in this intimacy with her detached male partner, leading to feelings of self consciousness, anger, and powerlessness (Welldon 33).

But sex is irrelevant to my own transition from perceived purity into whorehood. Mine came with a mischievous fairy named puberty, who plucked me on the head when I was ten, and giggled when she flickered away. A kind boy in my fifth grade class took it upon himself to tell me that I had grown a chest. I genuinely did not know until that moment, and to some extent, I was grateful for the information. Not grateful enough, however, to prepare myself for the years of eyes low to mine. The giggles during jumping jacks in gym class. The sliding hands, the knowing winks, the snide remarks from girlfriends who would never believe me. The older women who would pull me aside and tell me to expect eventual sexual assault. The deep voices of people

talking to me who I knew shouldn't be. Almost overnight, I had grown from a cute kid into a whore. There was no undoing it and I, my conscious mind, had not done anything at all.

It is a sick symptom of modern western culture that needs women to explain their pain for it to be real. It is not my responsibility to explain the dirty details of my own existence. With kindness in my voice, I don't owe you that, reader. What I will tell you is that I had a boyfriend for all of high school whom I cared about, but also offered me a kind of protection. If people were not going to take me seriously, they would take him seriously. What I will tell you is that I had a substantial breast reduction at twenty. I am still a whore, but I can get three words out of my mouth before they lick their chops now. My own stories hurt to tell so instead, I sit with them, on my bedroom floor, with one of my first pretty bras encased in cement. I saved this bra from before the reduction, it was too delicate to give away. I dipped it and hung it the same day that I did my tutu, mixing brownish pigment into the liquid cement for this sculpture's tint. A week later, on the casted lace, I painted whores I admire. I try to own the word 'whore,' reclaim it as my own, but its edge can still cut the inside of my mouth. I was young when I was called a whore, and I was just as young when I believed it. At times, I too implore myself to explain my pain in order to believe it. But if you are relying on me to explain to you why I am not a whore, we have already lost the fight for expansive feminine identity.



Image 8. Whore sculpture hanging on closet door. Caroline Weis. 2023

I am not sad that I became the whore. To be sad would be defeatist, we are too far in for me to lament my own highly privileged experience. Instead, I feel some distance and confusion

towards this identity. I am, at times, genuinely shocked that I am being perceived sexually. My mouth spills onto the floor and I laugh like a deflated squeaky toy, I am stubborn and unruly. What is sexy about full personhood, really? Making this sculpture requires some imagination on my part, some unknowing of the clumsy edges of my personality. I paint in red and black and nudes and white, traditionally whorish colors. I place pieces of mirror, I lay cassette spools where the nipples would be, a campish ode to who I imagine the whore to be. I unwind a length of the cassette and begin to fold and loop it, creating many, many little knots. The loops layer on top of each other and I dot hot glue to connect them, if there is sex in this, I am not sure how.

Controlling images work in this way in that they limit and define forcing one's gaze to see the world in a certain light. The common thread throughout all of these archetypes is the manipulation and control of female sexuality, primarily enforced through an ideal of White, patriarchal supremacy. Neither the mother, the virgin, or the whore have true sexual freedom as they are all, in different ways, contorted by their societal perceptions.

I fought the idea that people might think I was a whore for years. I bent over backwards to communicate purity and watch my mouth and giggle politely. I spent a great deal of time struggling to hide my body and slyly condemning other women for showing theirs. I got involved with my sorority, with staying skinny, with going blonder and blonder. My value became very entangled with desirability, but also with maintaining a virginal reputation. It is a fine line to walk: wanting to be wanted but not wanting to be 'easy.' At some point, the majority of the space in my mind was used cultivating my image. The specificity of my own individual identity had been lost in the mail, I was now a caricature of a woman who I thought others would want, learned of mediated images of Kim Kardashian and Instagram models. This is a common story, many young women feel the grooming pull of a society who think it best for them to be silent and

beautiful. A steady shushing spills into the airwaves, on such a high frequency that it's inaudible to anyone but bitches. I stopped making art and fell low into my mind.



Image 9. Whore sculpture. Caroline Weis. 2023.



Image 10. Whore sculpture. Caroline Weis. 2023

This projection of self went on for years, but it could not go on forever. And one day, when I had grown so small and tired from breaking my own heart trying to fit in, the facade cracked once and for all. It is no exaggeration when I say that I howled. In grief and dismay, I mourned the little girl who lost herself in search of 'pretty', 'demure', and 'worthy'. I ached for the years that I had squandered trying to be Barbie, but failing everyday to be anyone other than myself. That was it, I had failed: failed to smile at the right time, failed to be happy in a long

term relationship, failed to kiss sweetly. There is no room for humanity, for unquantifiable nuance, in single womanhood, or whorehood. There is only the unfleshed out image of a woman to lust after, nothing behind her eyes and no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't stop being a human for the aim of being a woman. I crumpled under the pressure to reduce myself to a singular, perfect identity; at least whores could breathe. To adequately be myself, I had to allow others to think of me as they were always going to. There is no winning as a woman, the white and blonde and skinny just get to delay losing for longer.

Conclusion

“Or was my rage my mother's? Or her mother's? Or hers? An inherited creature?”

- *Letter to My Rage: An Evolution*, by Lidia Yuknavitch

In the U.S., there is a history of “racist, male-dominant capitalism” which is often acclaimed as a “tradition of progress” (Haraway 7). In my creative project, I have attempted to articulate the cultural experience of existing as the Freudian virgin and the whore in a modern western context. I have created two multi-media sculptures out of cement, with a collage of elements on top of the sculptures to represent the intense individual ramifications and observations of my stories. In this artist statement, I have sought to explain my purposes, introduce relevant literature in gender and culture, and detail my artistic methodology. Additionally, I have discussed the relevant differences of archetypes and controlling images. I have explained why both are relevant to my discussion, as well as introduced cyborg citizenship as a theoretical way to mend the two, with a new vision. While the mistreatment of women and other minorities is ingrained in popular American culture, the nation is currently situated in a unique position in its history. This position is categorized by “the extreme mobility of capital [x] intertwined with the emergence of new collectivities, and the weakening of familiar groupings” (Haraway 37). It is at this moment that there is a possibility to capitalize on the uncertainty in

identity divisions and breaking of initial gendered and racial bounds, to confront the insidious ideological control that all too readily justifies social inequality in America. Finally, I have included an autoethnography of my experience growing up, and making the virgin and whore sculptures.

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