

FRAGILE:
HANDLE WITH CARE

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Memory has always been dearly held in my family, and easily lost. I watched as my loved ones surrounded themselves with objects that acted as physical anchors to the full lives they had lived, the places they had been, and the things that were important to them. This experience heightened my desire to document, to create a catalogue of my own that will allow me to capture my life in this moment. *Fragile: Handle with Care* is a body of work consisting of jewelry and sculptures that explore significant issues such as mortality, religion, and gender. Creating layered, detailed pieces allows me to find balance in the chaotic, to attempt to exert control over the uncontrollable aspects of my life and in the world at large.

Petra Ahde-Deal asserts that jewelry is not only for adornment, but that it at times can be used to ease moments of change. In her words, “transitional jewelry can function as healing devices in reconstructing the self after personal crises.” (91) My work combines traditional metalsmithing techniques such as enameling and casting with newer technologies like digital manipulation to create intricate pieces that serve as a platform to explore this recreation of identity. My experiences are not universal, but I hope to inspire an atmosphere of dialogue with my work to show that sometimes moments of pain and tragedy can offer us the greatest opportunities for beauty and transformation.

FRAGILE:
HANDLE WITH CARE

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By
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April 2017

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DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to my grandmother, Valois Jean Gilbert, for instilling her passion for making in me at such a young age. To my grandfather, Dean Elliot Gilbert, for inspiring in me a love for adventure and the thrill of a new experience. To my father, Stephen Dean Gilbert, for showing me that the quest for knowledge is a lifelong undertaking. And to my mother, Kathleen Ann Gilbert, for teaching me that God is in the details.

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INTRODUCTION

I grew up in Southern California, raised by Fundamentalist Pentecostal Christians who helped found one of the largest collection of churches in the world today. Because their obligations kept them very busy, my father's parents often looked after me.

For my grandparents, there was no better place to be than out in nature. We filled our weekends and summers by camping and working in the garden, and our evenings exploring the local wetlands. The days spent with them were some of the warmest memories from my childhood. This caused me to turn to nature in my work as a comforting symbol when faced with difficult situations.

Nature is something that has always been closely linked with life and death. Vanitas paintings popularized by the 17th century Protestant Reformation used flowers, bones, insects, and timepieces as symbols of man's mortality in order to prompt the viewer to focus on the afterlife. Life was seen as a hollow deception, something to be resisted or rejected, because it was fleeting. I have always thought that was the wrong way to look at it. Life is beautiful because it is transient, because it does not last forever. It teaches us to savor every moment to the fullest.

In their youth my grandparents spent many years in Papua New Guinea, where they helped build churches and schools. Their house was filled with mementos from their time there and every wall was decorated with paintings my grandmother made of their travels. When she developed Alzheimer's, my grandfather turned to these objects as physical symbols of their life together, using them to remind her of the places she had been and the people she met along the way. Watching this daily ritual inspired me to memorialize my own life, to use my work as a way to capture specific moments in time and as a platform to discuss constructs of identity such as gender, religion, and mortality.

CHAPTER 1: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

“The idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else; it is a mainspring of human activity—activity designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way that it is the final destiny for man.”

Ernest Becker, 1973

“Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.”

Derived from Ecclesiastes 8:15, Isaiah 22:13

Death is such a small word but it carries a tremendous amount of individual and cultural significance. The idea of death and what comes after has consumed mankind regardless of time or place and the beliefs regarding this have changed dramatically throughout history.



Figure 1: Age 5, rehearsing for my funeral. “Here lies Hossanna”

As a child I was taught not to fear death, but to welcome it. The leader of our church had been prophesying the end of the world since the mid-seventies and with every passing year the congregation became more emphatic that we were living in the end times (Smith 21). My mother would often tell me, always with a glow of religious fervor, “This isn’t our true life. Our true life comes after we die.” With Judgment Day perpetually looming in the background, being the perfect Christian became a constant necessity. This incessant discussion of death filled me with existential dread from such a young age that it

drove me as an adult to seek out why something that was so reassuring to my mother could be so terrifying for me.

In 1973, Ernest Becker wrote the Pulitzer Prize winning book, the *Denial of Death*, in which he describes the psychological conflict that results from the desire to live and the realization that death is inevitable. Becker postulates that the terror of absolute annihilation creates such a profound anxiety in people that they spend their lives attempting to make sense of it. To manage this fear, societies turn to culture and belief systems to explain the significance of life and death by providing them with meaning, to reward those who exemplify certain characteristics, and punish those who fail to adhere to their cultural worldview (Becker ix–xiv). The way these beliefs manifest themselves varies greatly according to the circumstances and cultural values of each particular time.



Figure 2: *The Triumph of Death*, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, 1562

Coming out of the Middle Ages, Europe was no stranger to the everyday presence of death and violence. The 14th century outbreak of the Black Death decimated roughly 30 to 60 percent of the European population and recurred occasionally up until the 19th century (Alchon 21). It was a period marked by famine, plague, and war, which sparked an obsession with death in many different aspects of society that lasted for hundreds of years.



Figure 3: *Vanitas*, Philippe de Champaigne, c. 1671

The 16th century saw the popularization of *Memento Mori*, meaning “remember that you must die,” a practice that required followers to reflect on their own mortality. The idea was first recorded in 197 A.D. as an aspect of Stoicism and was later strongly associated with Medieval Christianity. In the 1500s, it was adopted by the affluent as a sign of an enlightened thinker, who openly acknowledged that death came to all (Brett 110). It occurred in many artistic forms including painting, literature, music, and jewelry, eventually giving rise to the mourning jewelry of the Victorian Era (Peters).

Vanitas paintings, popularized by the Protestant Reformation in the 17th century, were versions of the Memento Mori theme. The symbols of Vanitas imagery as seen in Figures 3 and 4, such as bones, wilting flowers, and timepieces, were reminders of the mortality of man and meant to prompt the viewer to focus on the afterlife (“Protestant Reformation Art”). The word “vanitas” was derived in part from Ecclesiastes 1:2, “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” While the original Hebrew word “hevel” means a “breath,” or “vapor,” and symbolized fleetingness, later translations substituted the word vanity, which has Latin origins meaning empty, vain, and idle (Cambridge).



Figure 4: *Still Life with Flowers*, Abraham Mignon, 1664

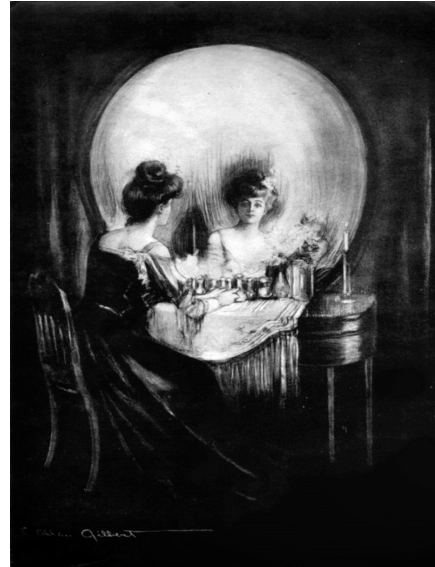


Figure 5: *All is Vanity*, Charles Gilbert, 1892

By the 14th century it also meant self-conceited, and was symbolized by a woman caught up in her own beauty, which Charles Gilbert captured in his iconic illustration seen in Figure 5 (“Vanity”). As an aspect of pride, vanity was considered the original and deadliest of sins. In Medieval Christianity disease was seen as divine punishment and it was common for individuals to examine their moral conduct to determine how they had brought illness upon themselves (“Belief and Medicine”). In some form or another, this belief lives on today.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL AND TECHNICAL INFORMATION

I was never a healthy child. The members of my church saw my constant injuries and illnesses, such as my reconstructive knee surgery, as an indication of a moral failing on my part. This pressure to fear my pain and illness, to feel ashamed of it, drove me to try to find a way to redefine the situation for myself, to reclaim the beauty in the transience of life through my work.



Figures 6: The first X-ray taken by Wilhelm Rontgen of his wife's hand.

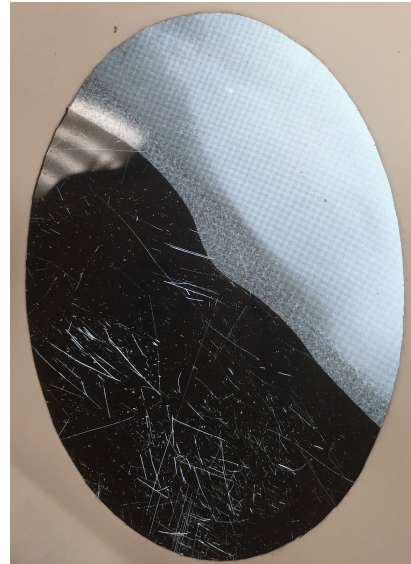
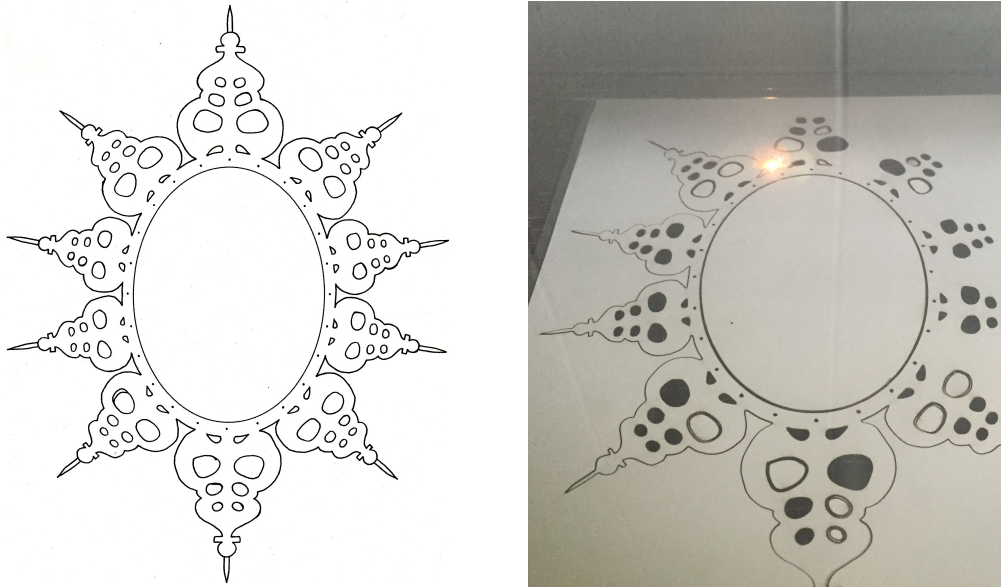


Figure 7: X-rays of problematic joints. Looking for the abstract in the body.

One of my earliest inspirations for this body of work were X-rays, discovered in 1895 by Wilhelm Rontgen. When he took the first X-ray of his wife's hand as seen in Figure 7, she declared, "I have seen my own death." (Markel). The inherent conflict X-rays seem to embody fascinates me. They are at once irrefutable proof of our own mortality as well as a byproduct of the belief that scientific advancement can forestall death. To frame my X-rays included in my jewelry I turned to imagery that has recurred frequently in my work.



Figures 8 and 9: Hand drawn image taken from hipbones, scanned and cut on the laser etcher.

To design frames for my X-rays I looked at cross sections of medical illustrations of hipbones to create my own interpretation of the positive and negative shapes of the bone. The hand-drawn image was scanned and digitally corrected before it was turned into a vector. A vector graphic is composed of a series of paths that certain machines, such as the laser etching system used in Figure 9, can follow to cut shapes out of materials such as paper, wood, and acrylic. This allowed me to create multiple identical pieces and motivated me to explore paper as a jewelry material.



Figure 10: Layers of laser cut paper included in a single piece.

UPHILL – SHADOW – VOID



Figure 12: *Uphill* Brooch.
Copper, silver, brass, steel, paper, acrylic, X-ray.
2015. 5" x 3.5" x 1.5" (HWD)



Figure 13: *Uphill* Brooch. Side view

As I cut more and more of the paper I became attracted to the burned and smoky quality on the back of pieces that had been cut at a higher power setting. It has a beautifully random pattern, a chaotic contrast to the carefully controlled surface of the etchings. Altering the values of the layers between light and dark gives a sense of different moments in time, of the varied up and down experiences of living with chronic illness.

Shortly after my knee surgery, another medical setback resulted in a period of rapid hair loss. Unable to immediately process this shock, gathering up the drifts of hair to be saved became a daily ritual. Growing up, my mother had a similar ceremony; she kept a bag of braids from every major haircut since my birth in a drawer in the living room. Without thinking I mimicked this behavior as an adult; saving my hair with the subconscious desire to one day memorialize this period of my life. Having grown up in a community with quite a number of ceramic raku artists that used horse hair to create surface designs on

their pots, I decided to experiment with the effects that could be achieved by burning my hair into the surface of enamel. Like some of the previous materials this process became a balance of chaos and control. The final pattern of the hair was almost impossible to predict but could be somewhat manipulated by temperature and placement, and easily burned away for another try. It took multiple experiments and attempts before the desired surface was achieved, something that was both intriguing and repellant. The back of each brooch was used as an opportunity to contrast the front, to show that within every difficult moment there is an opportunity for beauty, and that life is a balance between these two states.



Figure 14: *Shadow Brooch*.
Copper, silver, brass, steel, paper, acrylic, enamel, hair, wood.
2015. 5" x 3.5" x 0.5" (HWD)



Figure 15: *Shadow Brooch*. Back view

Many of the artists who inspire my work investigate similar imagery and themes, mainly mortality, the body, and gender. Melanie Bilenker, an emerging metal artist from New York, was inspired by mourning jewelry to create contemporary hair work that captures scenes of everyday life. Using

herself as a model, Bilenker outlines her images in strands of her own hair to render a still life of the mundane, the domestic, and the ordinary moments of femininity.



Figure 18: Melanie Bilenker, *Pinning brooch series*.
Hair, paper, gold, mineral crystal.
2013. 1.9" x 1.2" x .3" (HWD); Photo: Sienna Patti

Losing my hair had so many implications for me. A woman's hair comes loaded with cultural significance, both within my religion and society as a whole. It is a symbol of health, fertility, and gender, and to not be able to conform to the traditional expectations meant that I was failing to meet my societies' standards on both levels. We live in a culture that goes to great lengths to avoid confronting the idea of death as a natural part of life. We fetishize youth and vitality and disparage or disregard anything that contradicts this. In my experience, when you live with chronic illness you go through periods of physical and emotional erosion. Sometimes this happens slowly over time, sometimes all at once, and in the end you are left with something different than what you started with, something less. But with erosion comes change and the possibility for transformation, to redefine it not as less, but as new.



Figure 16: *Void Brooch*.
Copper, silver, brass, steel, paper, acrylic, enamel, hair, wood.
2015. 5" x 3.5" x 0.5" (HWD)



Figure 17: *Void Brooch*. Back view

PRICK – MOURNERS

Transformation became an inherent part of my work not only in my inspiration but also in the way I approached my materials. Transitioning between digital and traditional fabrications, the materials go through various stages of change. For me as a maker, technology is not seen as an end in itself, but as another tool that can be utilized in my process. *Prick* and *Mourners* reference the technology that resulted from the medical revolution of the Victorian Era such as X-rays and syringes, not only because they were directly tied to my experience with illness, but also because it felt like an appropriate parallel to the use of cutting edge technology in my pieces.

By isolating small portions of the X-rays the association with death is removed or at least forestalled to create more abstract moments within the body. The scratched and damaged surface of the prints creates an attractive feeling of age, damage, and history; of the way we carry our wounds with us, and how it is those experiences that can give us a rich and varied character if we learn to frame them in a certain way.



Figure 19: *Prick* Necklace.
Copper, silver, brass, bronze, acrylic, X-ray, rubber.
2016. 20" x 3" x 0.5" (HWD)



Figure 20: *Mourners* Necklace.
Steel, brass, silver, acrylic, X-ray, rubber.
2016. 20" x 3" x 0.5" (HWD)

With its small, intimate scale and intricate detail, my work is meant to draw the viewer closer, seducing them in, simultaneously holding them at bay. They do not know how to approach it, how to handle it, and it sometimes feels as if the gentlest touch is crushing. At just a palmful they are meant to be cradled close, to be sheltered, to be held against the body.

This series has become a metaphor for living and dealing with constant pain and illness. Pain is something carried around; it can close you off from others and leave you fragile and exposed. You build walls around it, layers of protection, to keep it safe and contained.

Even when the piece is worn out in the open, a part of it is always hidden, always kept back. The only way to know it fully is to have been there, to have made it, or to be invited in. There must be an act from the viewer to investigate and the maker to participate, to share, in some degrees, levels of intimacy.

WE CAME TOGETHER AND WE CAME APART



Figure 21: *We Came Together and We Came Apart*.
Cast silver and bronze, acrylic, X-ray.
2016. 2" x 1.5" x 1.5" (HWD)

Jewelry is one of the most intimate forms of art. For many women it becomes a vehicle to preserve and bring back memory, navigating both a private and public space. As Petra Ahde-Deal explains, “There are many things women communicate to others via their jewelry but, at the same time, there is the hidden side – all the stories, secrets and memories that are only for the woman herself. When it comes to the latter, she is the only one who decides which hidden parts are available to others.” (13)

The wedding ring is perhaps one of the most personal pieces a woman owns, intrinsically tied to the ideas of love, family, and in some cases religion. Russell states “the symbolism of the ring finger appears to stem from belief prevalent at least through Greco-Roman times in an artery or nerve running from that finger to the heart.” (24) When the schemas of romance and belief are stripped away, marriage is at its core a legal and social contract that has ramifications on how constructs like gender are

performed.

In *We Came Together and We Came Apart*, the X-rays suspended in the middle of the rings are of the bones of my ring finger. These pieces were made while going through the process of ending my marriage, a convention that was often physically bound with myrtle pods in Hebrew culture as they represented masculine force and the bridegroom in particular. The ancient Greeks attributed the shrub to Aphrodite as a symbol of femininity and to Demeter, who resides over life and death. As a symbol it occupies both the masculine and feminine realm, exposing the social construct and ideology that is gender. To include the myrtle pods used in the ring, they first had to be encased in plaster that was then fired in a kiln. Once the organic matter has been burned out the empty space can be filled with molten metal, transforming something impermanent and fragile into a permanent relic.

As a symbol and a material the myrtle pods vacillate between masculine and feminine, permanent and impermanent, organic and inorganic, life and death. These two pieces explore the boundaries between these binaries to expose the frailty of social constructions based on essential juxtapositions.

IN THE SHADOW OF YOUR POISON TREE



Figure 22: *In the Shadow of your Poison Tree* Necklace.
Steel, silver, copper, brass, bronze, laser etched enamel, tulle, acrylic, cigarette butts, rubber.
2017. 18" x 6" x 2" (HWD)

The necklace *In the Shadow of your Poison Tree* continues to explore and expound on the themes introduced in *We Came Together and We Came Apart*, such as the contrast between masculine and

feminine, permanent and impermanent, organic and inorganic, life and death. The piece is a balance of hard and delicate, with the glass focal point nestled in a ring of steel flowers and gossamer layers of tulle taken from my wedding veil captured by sheets of graphic steel foliage.

The Victorian era saw the rise of floral symbolism in society and art, a practice that was featured heavily in Protestant Reformation Vanitas artwork and, in part, inspired this piece. The flowers represented (poppies, lily of the valley, narcissus, and hellebores) are all poisonous, and some feature specific religious ties. Hellebore, or the Lenten Rose, is one of the four classic poisons including nightshade, hemlock, and aconite and specifically symbolizes the birth of Christ (Perry). Lily of the Valley is highly poisonous as well and like the myrtle pod it possesses separate masculine and feminine interpretations. In Christian mythology they are said to represent either the tears of Mary at the crucifixion or the tears of Eve as she was driven out of Eden. At the same time, they symbolize the second coming of Christ and the ability of men to envision a better world (“The Language of Flowers”). By combining floral imagery with traditionally masculine materials like steel I hope to draw attention to the way we codify our environment and the subtle ways constructs like gender are reinforced. The image etched into the surface of the enamel centerpiece is of myself on my wedding day. My eyes are obscured, partially erasing identity, and my partner is reduced to a pair of arms linked around my throat, a portent of future troubles.

Outside of artwork the Protestant Reformation had a significant impact on gender by making connections between “women, domesticity, nature, and morality [where] floral designs were widely viewed in the dominant ideology as symbols of women’s greater piety and morality due to their closeness to nature and God in a domestic sphere.” (Claney 84) Furthermore, the ideal woman of the time “incorporated the virtues of ‘piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity.’” (Claney 80) This conceptual understanding of performing gender and marriage persists today, and conflict can arise when there are differences in how these social constructs are defined.

HEVEL



Figure 23: *Hevel* Brooch.
Steel, silver, copper, brass, enamel, china paints.
2017. 6" x 3.5" x 1" (HWD)

The title of this piece, *Hevel*, is taken from the original Hebrew translation of Ecclesiastes 1:2, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." While *hevel* means a "breath," or "vapor," and symbolized fleetingness,

later translations substituted the word vanity, which has Latin origins meaning empty, vain, and idle and was symbolized by a woman caught up in her own beauty (Cambridge, “vanity”).

Combining the traditional Vanitas imagery of a woman staring into a mirror with the essence of hevel in the condensation on the glass, permanently capturing a fleeting moment portrayed both these aspects. The presence of the condensation counters the idea of vanity, erasing features of age, identity, and appearance, bringing aspects of personhood into question. The flowers are modeled after lilies of the valley that, as discussed in the previous piece, are not only highly poisonous but also symbols of female suffering and masculine potential. By modeling organic and traditionally feminine objects such as flowers in sharp graphic steel, I hope to create juxtaposition between masculinity and femininity.

Contemporary metalsmith Jessica Calderwood investigates similar imagery and themes, using her work as a way to explore the production of gender and identity. Many of the heads of the female figures in her jewelry are obscured by large plumes of flowers, erasing most indicators of identity and adding a surreal theme to her work. Calderwood’s large-scale sculptures have a sense of the female body as well, represented by a pair of high-heeled legs topped by balls of floral imagery and other objects.



Figure 24: Jessica Calderwood, *11 Hair Curlers*. Enamel, copper, 18gold bimetal, sterling silver.



Figure 25: Jessica Calderwood, *Reluctant Sexpot*. Wool, china paint, enamel, copper, fiberglass.

Calderwood’s work “represent[s] the feminine and the masculine in unexpected ways, not only challenging expectations but also raising questions about, in her words, ‘our culture’s need to codify objects according to gender.’ Her interest in investigating cultural symbols as they relate to the feminine

and the masculine has led he to create artwork that may encourage a rational dialogue about [...] the broader issues of aggression, peace, and social responsibility.” (Vigna)

BARRIER – WITNESS – OPENING



Figure 26: *Barrier* Brooch.
Enamel, china paints, copper, brass,
steel, silver.
2017. 5.5" x 3.5" x 0.5" (HWD)



Figure 27: *Witness* Brooch.
Enamel, china paints, copper, brass,
steel, silver.
2017. 5.5" x 3.5" x 2" (HWD)



Figure 28: *Opening* Brooch.
Enamel, china paints, copper, brass,
steel, silver.
2017. 5.5" x 3.5" x 0.5" (HWD)

This series, titled *Boundaries*, is an attempt to call attention to a very real issue for many women; abuse or assault in the public and private space. In all these vignettes, there is an observer, a male presence either seen or implied, a looming threat. This is a fear that many women live with every day, that in our moments of vulnerability we face the possibility of an unpredictable danger. The female body is either absent or only partially seen, an anonymity that allows for the viewers to place themselves more fully in the scene.

The brooches are surrounded by rings of two and three-dimensional screws, an object imbued with masculine qualities that serves as a physical barrier itself between the wearer and the outside world. According to the sociologist Georg Simmel, a man's first property is weapons, while a woman's is jewelry. He postulates "all sexual difference flows from the original division of property.... Men first use weapons to impose their will by force on others, above all on women: women use their first form of property, ornamental jewelry, to seduce, to charm, and to please others with their beauty, chiefly men but also other women." (Russell 2) In this way a woman's power is seen as a bestowed power, one that is inherently tied to beauty and fertility and as such can be revoked as it is based on a fleeting characteristic.

This power can also be seen as a passive power, one that is being offered up for the consuming pleasure of others.



Figure 29: *Opening Brooch*.
Enamel, china paints, copper, brass, steel, silver.
2017. 5.5" x 3.5" x 0.5" (HWD)

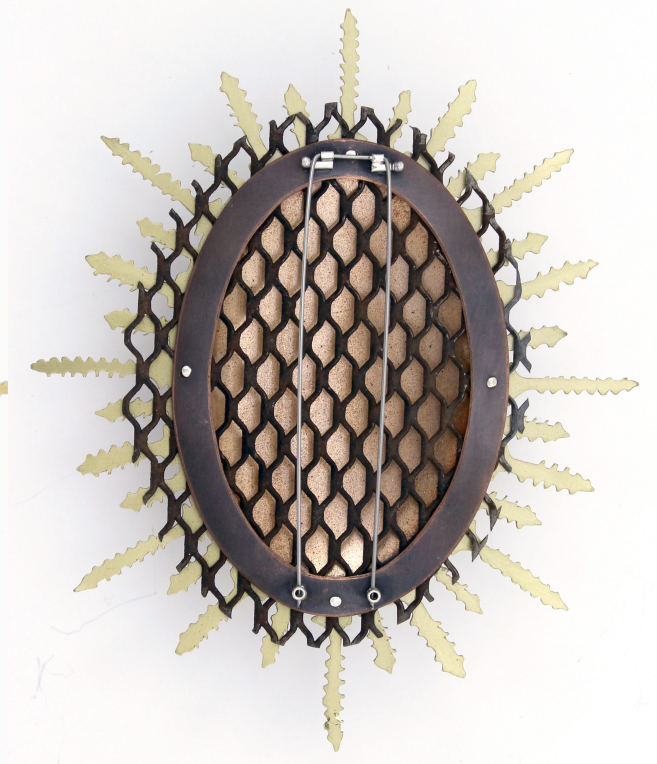


Figure 30: *Opening Brooch*. Back view.

The photographic images used in these pieces were taken with a digital SLR camera on a timer in my own environments using myself as a model. The photographs were transferred to an enameled surface using the laser etcher system and were then colorized using china paints. Although the techniques and equipment used to create these pieces are fairly advanced, there is still a strong conceptual tie to the photography of the Victorian era. Tintype photographs were produced on an enameled iron surface and were often embellished with a significant amount of color, to the point that the image no longer resembled that of a photograph (“Victorian Photographic Techniques”).



Figure 31: Andrew Kuebeck, *Osiris Redux*.
Enamel, copper, silver, decal.



Figure 32: Andrew Kuebeck, *Fields Will Grow With No Seed to Show*.
Enamel, copper, silver, decal.

Andrew Kuebeck, like Jessica Calderwood, is an emerging artist in contemporary enameling. His work combines photo decals fused onto enamel and often combined with organic cast elements. The body plays a large role in Kuebeck's work, which primarily features images of nude male models in various settings. Like the female form, alternative depictions of masculinity and sexuality challenge the societal constructs inherent in jewelry.

IMPRESSIONABLE



Figure 33: *Impressionable Bust*.
Plaster, steel, brass.
2017. 20" x 22" x 12" (HWD)

Since the image of the body, mine in particular, had become the subject of much of my recent work it felt like a natural progression to address the physical body itself. Like the small-scale casting that captures a specific stage of an object from nature, the silicone mold of my upper body captured a specific moment in time; my exact appearance on that day – the transient made permanent and reproducible. It bypasses the possibility of vanity; all flaws are purposely laid bare in perfect detail and markers of gender are obscured.

To create the mold, a team of assistants applied layers of body cast silicone to my skin, followed by a rigid plaster outer shell. Once this had hardened the shell was removed and the silicone mold was cut along a thickened seam running up the back. The solid plaster shell works to hold the mold closed and in shape in its hollow state, so that it can be filled with a variety of materials, such as wax and plaster.



Figure 34: *Impressionable* Bust. Side View.
Plaster, steel, brass.
2017. 20" x 22" x 12" (HWD)



Figure 35: *Impressionable* Bust. Side View.
Plaster, steel, brass.
2017. 20" x 22" x 12" (HWD)

Impressionable is the first of three planned *Vanities* sculptures poured into the mold of my upper body, and made out of plaster that has been hollowed out. Once I had the plaster positive, I began to carve in what I felt was the ultimate tribute to Memento Mori, to carve down to the markers of bone and muscle hinted at in the surface of the skin. Once one begins to strip away the markers of gender they can be seen for what they really are, a social construct that is only superficial, a tool meant to give meaning and structure to this life and beyond.

The marks carved into the skin are modeled after my own tattoos, symbols which were designed to represent important aspects of my life that contributed to my understanding of self, as well as scars collected along the way. Our lives are transient and our identity is malleable, picking up impressions of moments and individuals long past and paying testament in our own way to the preservation of memory, our visual history of self.

CONCLUSION

Jewelry is one of the oldest forms of art, an act of adornment intrinsically tied to the body. Benjamin Lignel argues that “jewelry is political, sexual, gendered, and that one of its principal roles in society is to be an instrument or accomplice of power transactions” (11). In the same text, Jillian Moore adds that “contemporary jewelry has so efficiently outgrown every attempt to define it that it now lies sort of amorphously over the surrounding turf of ‘intimacy,’ ‘process,’ and ‘preciousness,’ where the body is content rather than just context” (Lignel 108). This new era of art jewelry presents the body as a site of contention where constructs such as gender, religion, and mortality can be explored and subverted through repurposing traditional jewelry themes.

We live in a fractured age; an age where life is experienced not through one singular lens but through several simultaneously. My body of work explores how we come as individuals to understand our own existence through the self, others, and our experiences, and how these layers of perception work to inform our identity. Life can at times have moments of pain and ugliness, but it is what we do with those moments that shapes who we are as individuals. Creating the intimate and intricate sculptures and jewelry in *Fragile: Handle with Care* allowed me to process these aspects of my life, to pour my energy into transforming moments of tragedy into beautiful objects.

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