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For your consumption: Curating and exhibition

Abstract
A reflection on the experience of curating a BFA solo show and the artwork developed through my upper level classes at Eastern.

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FOR YOUR CONSUMPTION: CURATING AN EXHIBITION

By

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From October 22 to November 2, 2018, I exhibited my first BFA solo exhibition in the Intermedia Gallery Group Gallery. The show, *For Your Consumption*, featured an artist statement and works I've developed throughout the last three semesters of my interdisciplinary BFA sculpture program here at Eastern. Through this vigorous planning process, I discovered that many decisions needed to be carefully considered—the art works, the artist statement, the theme and title of the exhibition, the gallery floor plan, and the forms of display—in order to curate and design a cohesive show.

The artwork selection process requires deliberate visual analysis and concise decision making. The sixteen pieces exhibited in *For Your Consumption* were created within the last three semesters, but were chosen based on both visual and conceptual unities and harmonies:

_Noodles_, a four piece series of screen prints, were created in 2017 (Fig. 1) (Fig. 2). It depicts a traditional Chinese blue and white porcelain rice bowl filled with hair strands that mimic noodle strands. Based off of Chinese New Year traditions, where to cut one's hair signified cutting your life short and eating a bowl of noodles signified living a long healthy life, this piece was created to exemplify irony and displacement. However, it was through this piece I began to entertain the idea of mixed media ceramic sculptures involving body samples with utilitarian objects.
Fig. 1. Noodles, red and blue. Screen print. 13”x17.” 2017. Photo by Sasha Guo.

Fig. 2. Noodles, series. Screen print. 52”x17.” 2017. Photo by Sasha Guo.
Cycle was my first attempt at putting to practice the concept of Noodles. It is a piece consisting of six porcelain casted tea bowls perched on top of a shelf. A vial of menstrual blood sits in between the middle two tea bowls (Fig. 3) (Fig. 4). Each porcelain bowl represents a day within my monthly menstrual cycle, while the vial in the middle is the cumulative collection of that specific monthly cycle. Through the creation and display of Cycle, I morph the bathroom from a space where movements can slow down and provide comfort and repetitive familiarity, to a clinical and public one. From this piece, I also became interested in the intervention of day-to-day habits we build into our lives through active sample collecting of naturally-eliminated bodily components.

Drains is a piece consisting of nine slip casted porcelain drain replicas of my original shower drain. Over the course of a month, I showered with these drains, allowing them to catch my hair and other debris (Fig. 5) (Fig. 6). Similar to cycles, it served as a live documentation of cleansing and an examination of material values. Similar to Cycle, it tested my comfort zone and endurance as I adopted these new habits within my lifestyle. The act of collecting fallen hairs and menstrual blood not only meant that I had to regularly make an effort to harvest and label them, but it also entailed carving out special areas within my living environment to keep them. These self-created actions became normalized within my day-to-day routines almost as if they became a ritual.
Fig. 3. *Cycle*. Porcelain, jar, menstrual blood. 35"x8"x4.5." 2017. Photo by Sasha Guo.

Fig. 4. *Cycle*. Porcelain, jar, menstrual blood. 35"x8"x4.5." 2017. Photo by Sasha Guo.
Fig. 5. *Drains*. Porcelain, hair, MDF. 14"x14"x2." 2017. Photo by Sasha Guo.

Fig. 6. *Drains*. Porcelain, hair, MDF. 14"x14"x2." 2017. Photo by Sasha Guo.
So it is, Still, and And then again are a series of three slip dipped porcelain sculptures of undergarments, each collected from specific phases of my childhood, my adolescence, and my adulthood. Old, worn out undergarments are dipped into porcelain clay slip, arranged and dried into volumetric, lively forms, and fired to maturity (Fig. 7) (Fig. 8) (Fig. 9). Similar to both Cycle and Drains, I deal with collection as the subject matter and a fragment of my identity within my works. However, rather than a direct display of worn out, stained undergarments, I actively transform the materiality and forms of these objects into relic-like states as a means of exploring cultural worth and identity.

Within my works, I continually blur the lines between utilitarian ceramics and sculpture. *En masse* is an example of such. It is a porcelain pouring vessel with eight spouts attached to a main teapot body, a piece that attempts to serve eight teacups at the same time and at the same ratio, but can never be completely full itself because of its physical limitations (Fig.10) (Fig. 11). The creation of this piece stemmed from my complications as a slow thinker, learner, and maker in our ever-changing, fast paced society: it has become a criteria to be impossibly precise and skilled at your profession while simultaneously being quick. These demands are physically draining to individuals, but it is something we collectively continue to do because of our perceived sense of our role within the community. To serve the eight cups of tea, it requires a second pour vessel to be poured into the main body and for all the teacups to be directly under the spouts of the main body.
Fig. 7. So it is. Porcelain. 9"x5"x7." 2017. Photo by Sasha Guo.

Fig. 8. Still. Porcelain. 5"x7"x7.5." 2017. Photo by Sasha Guo.
Fig. 9. *And then again.* Porcelain. 8"x6"x5." 2017. Photo by Sasha Guo.

Fig. 10. *En masse.* Porcelain, lasercut acrylic. 10.5" x 11" x 11." 2018. Photo by Sasha Guo.
In relation to *Drains* and the undergarment series, I continued thinking about collection and repurposing as a main point of interest within my works, while also contemplating my cultural duality through tradition and technology. *Me to you* (Calligraphy Stand with Brush) is an exploration of such, combining traditional Chinese calligraphy brush making techniques with digital processes to create a digital artifact (Fig. 12) (Fig. 13) (Fig. 14). Gathering fallen hair strands from my bedroom floor and extracting hairs from my pubic region, I salvage these hairs to make the bristles of the brush. While the fallen hair strands from my head are straighter and longer, these produce narrower, bold, continuous strokes while the pubic hairs gathered create wide, wispy, airy strokes. The handles of the brush are designed through 3D CAD program Fusion 360 and 3D printed with PLA plastic, or polylactic acid, a type of biodegradable plastic made from renewable resources. As for the calligraphy stand, the stand was designed on Adobe Illustrator using vectors, and then laser cut onto plywood and assembled. Throughout the stand, there are cutouts of the upside down symbolic Chinese character, 福 (福), literally meaning *fortune or good luck* in its upright orientation, and in its upside down orientation, appears as the Chinese character 道 (到) literally meaning *arrival*. The use of this word references the traditional Chinese ideograph commonly found on neighborhood doors during Chinese New Year, and by default, the home I was raised in. The use of this character throughout *Me to you* is an effort to rekindle the connection between the past, all while trying to live in the present.
Fig. 11. *En masse*. Porcelain, lasercut acrylic. 10.5" x 11" x 11." 2018. Photo by Sasha Guo.
Fig. 12. Me to you (Calligraphy Stand with Brush). 3D print PLA, laser cut plywood, hair. 10½”x7”x3.” 2018. Photo by Sasha Guo.

Fig. 13. Me to you (Calligraphy Stand with Brush). 3D print PLA, laser cut plywood, hair. 10½”x7”x3.” 2018. Photo by Sasha Guo.

Fig. 14. Me to you (Calligraphy Stand with Brush). 3D print PLA, laser cut plywood, hair. 10½”x7”x3.” 2018. Photo by Sasha Guo.
As I began to experiment in different mediums aside from ceramics, \textit{Amulet} was another result of such experimentation. This piece consists of sterling silver, brass, copper, cherry wood, and polymer clay (Fig. 15). The intention of \textit{Amulet} was to create an object to protect the wearer from touching chewed gum from under a table, a common occurrence that isn’t particularly harmful, yet is unwanted and frustrating when it happens. As I was making \textit{Amulet}, my fascination with the physicality and repulsion of chewed gum heightened, and as a result, I began to create more studies of its visual form, its purpose, and its transient value. Through these studies prompted \textit{Silver Gum Wad}, a gum wad casted in sterling silver to transform the value and permanence of gum from something undesirable into a precious object (Fig. 16) and \textit{Another kind of fossil}, a 3D printed version a gum wad scaled up by fifty percent (Fig. 17).

The studies of gum also encouraged me to apply past practices of repurposing singular objects into utilitarian objects. \textit{Gum wad tea bowl with stand from road} is a functional vessel intended for drinking, constructed by porcelain gum wads that bear the impressions of my teeth and mouth (Fig. 18). It is made from silicone molds of chewed wads of gum, which porcelain are then pressed into and assembled to create a drinking vessel. The vessel stands upon a loose piece of asphalt debris from a weathered road, which acts as a tea bowl stand. An object that confronts the user with both familiarity and discomfort, the piece consists of objects and materials which exist out of convenience in retrospect to the fast paced, modern lifestyle I live in, yet are often overlooked in my busy day-to-day life. All of these objects undergo a specific transformative process in
which they exist to serve a specific purpose and are disposed of when they are no
longer of use.

Fig. 15. Amulet. Sterling Silver, brass, copper, cherry wood, polymer clay. 1.5"x1.25"x
.5." 2017. Photo by Sasha Guo.

Fig. 16. Silver Gum Wad. Sterling Silver. 1"x0.75"x0.5." 2017. Photo by Sasha Guo.
Fig. 17. Another kind of fossil. 3D print PLA. 5"x2.5"x3." 2018. Photo by Sasha Guo.

Fig. 18. Gum wad tea bowl with stand from road. Porcelain, pothole asphalt remnant. 5"x8"x6." 2018. Photo by Sasha Guo.
The artist statement is a written description of an artist’s work. Although there are many differing opinions as to what makes a good artist statement, the main objective of these are to explain why and how an artist makes the work they make. My current artist statement is as such:

I explore the perceived worth of objects within the fast paced-environment I find myself immersed in. Many of my works explores themes of time, such as the old and the new, as well as the permanent and the temporary. These interests stem directly from my day-to-day navigations as an Asian woman living in America.

The process in which I base my works on are heavily reliant on transformative processes from one material to another, scale, and repetition to draw attention to how these changes alter the functionality or value of these objects. These materials mainly consist of ceramics, plastics, and found materials in reference to traditional and digital processes that speak to social constructions built for human necessity and convenience.

As my body of work continues to expand, I found myself continually amending my statement in order to encompass all aspects of my work. However, within my works, what had maintained consistent was my gravitation towards the three dimensional disciplines. Materiality, textures, volume, and space are integral parts of art that enhance the creation process, discussions, and overall shared experiences of the viewer and maker.

The theme is the unifying idea or motif of an exhibition. This, along with a title, signifies to viewers the content of the show. Perhaps the most difficult task within
For your consumption: curating an exhibition

Curating a show is coming up with an appropriate title. Unlike the artist statement, which can be explained with multiple sentences, or the actual work, which can speak for itself visually, the title of a show must embody the theme of the show in few words. Depending also on the content of work within a show, there are specific words that should or shouldn’t be used to avoid misinterpretation. Key words like unravel, capture, or dirt could imply specific media shows, such as a fibers show, a photography show, or a ceramics show respectively. Contrarily, a mixed media show can prove to be more challenging to title because it requires other unifying traits aside from the material as the binding factor, such as color, scale, concept, or context. To come up with my show title, I made a note of similar themes I noticed in each piece. Then, I came up with words that described these themes. The show title, For Your Consumption came to be because I was intrigued by the multi-faceted uses of consume. It can refer to the literal definition of eating and drinking, but it can also be used as synonyms for the following words: devour, destroy, decompose, absorb, and obsession. The theme of repetition within my works, such as the use of multiple duplicates of a tea bowl, hand-gathered hair strands, or the repetitive chewing of the gum, are forms of sample collection and obsessions I adopted as I went about creating these works. As I was preparing to exhibit these personal, bodily involved works I created in public, I also wanted the title to include the viewers in a way that seemed like an offering whoever visited. It was a space where people could look at these personal creations of labor and the physical impressions of my body, but still have the choice to accept or reject it. Hence, the addition of For Your to the working title.

Mapping out the floor plan proved to be another challenge. For one, the floor space of the gallery is small and rectangular with an obtrusive backdoor entry at the far
end of the gallery, which limited the options that these works could be viewed. Depending on the spacing and placement of the works, it could greatly alter the viewer’s experience, especially if a show has more three-dimensional works. To resolve this, a digital map was drawn on Adobe and the walls of the gallery were measured (Fig. 19). The shortest wall was designated for the four screen prints, while the other three remaining walls were portioned off for shelves. Next, display items, such as gallery pedestals, shelves, and frames needed to be determined. All of the three dimensional works in the space were under a foot, which meant most of them required a pedestal or a shelf appropriate to their foot print, or the size in which the base of the objects contacts a surface. Although IGG provided a few standard gallery pedestals, some pieces that I had created, such as *Amulet, silver gum wad*, and *Another kind of fossil*, had specific size requirements and orientations that entailed custom making their own display cases.

The process of curating and designing my own exhibition to showcase my upper level works is an opportunity I’m extremely grateful to have experienced. In addition to equipping me with skills beyond technical art making and an academic setting, it gave me a chance to learn how to install and de-install shows, promote myself as an artist, and foster insightful conversations with my professors, faculty, peers, family, friends, and visitors about my work outside of a class context. Through this experience, I feel more prepared and confident navigating within the art world post-academia.
Usable floor space: approx. 250 square feet
Usable wall space: approx. 86 feet

Fig. 19. Gallery Floor Plan. 2018. Photo by Sasha Guo.