

INTRO:

Welcome everyone, my name is Fae, and I am a GFA major. My works focus on expressing our relationships with ourselves, our bodies, and those around us, including the aspects of ourselves that we struggle with or feel ashamed of. I am a visually impaired artist. It is not something easily fixed with corrective lenses, so if you see me squinting I'm not mean-mugging anyone, I'm just trying to figure out who I'm looking at or what their expression is.

I want to open with a thank you to my thesis mentor Teresa, as well as the panelists who are here tonight. And to all of you who made time in your schedules to come and see my work on a friday night. I also want to extend a

heap of gratitude to the model and collaborator. They have asked not to be referred to by name, and thus I ask any of you here that might recognize them to refer to them as “the model” or “they/them.” Thank you.

For my thesis I have made a series of photographs that I refer to as body landscapes. These body landscapes are meant as a meditation on making connections and forming trust in an isolationist society. Phillip Slater wrote about how puritan ideals are used to drive capitalism by separating us not just from each other but also from our own emotions. Emotions are labeled as “Bad” or “indulgent” so that we suppress and mistrust our own expression. This is then used as a tool to turn around and sell those emotions back to us. To sell us the idea of

bonds that we had already held in the past. Community, friendship, fear, anger are all things packaged and used to make us buy products. To turn the efforts of our labor into value for people we probably don't even know for the promise of feeling the very things we've been told to hide.

Not only are our emotions and sense of community damaged by this, but our ability to rely on members of our neighborhoods is as well. Generalist skills are replaced with hyper-specialized monopolies. Trust in the abilities of ourselves and others is eroded and eaten away in order to raise the perceived value of those specialists.

Individualism tries to tell us that we don't need anyone else, except that when we do it now costs orders of magnitude more.

My thesis project was driven by the desire to create a space of comfort, understanding, connection, and collaboration while working with a model in the studio. I want them to feel comfortable voicing their opinions and feelings on the work we are doing, their insight on how to improve or deepen the work, and their boundaries within the space. To create a space where models, as well as myself, can freely communicate with each other. The open vulnerability of raw honesty and working within the comfort level of all involved is extremely important. My work exposes a lot of the model, and I do not want them to feel like they cannot share that part of themselves not just with me but with the viewers of the piece.

Short formal description of work:

This work is a set of landscapes using the human

body, shot within my personal studio, and made by using lighting techniques meant to outline and sculpt the light around the model's form, while also abstracting it from immediate recognition.

I printed on three different materials, in a few different sizes. I have a set printed on Canon Luster paper, a set printed on Treated Canvas, and a pair printed on Lasal paper. The larger images are printed at a size of 22"x33", with a white border for hanging and eventual matting. The medium sized images are printed exclusively on lasal at a size of 13x19". And the smallest images are printed at an approximate size of 3x6".

My intent with the larger prints is to more fully allow the viewer to immerse themselves in the environment I want to cultivate with my images. I feel that landscapes are best viewed in large format, as it allows you to "step

into” the image and explore all the small details.

Process:

I started out this project wanting to shoot and build relationships with multiple people, but partway through I realized that, as the first model I worked with and I worked together on multiple shoots, we were better able to communicate and discuss thoughts and ideas. This led me to decide to focus my efforts on working with a single model; building trust with them through multiple shooting and discussion sessions. I felt this better fostered a relationship of platonic intimacy and shared vulnerability through the work, the model and I worked collaboratively to create the images, discussing posing, lighting, and body mechanics before and throughout the sessions. Once we

had a strong library of images, we worked together to curate the ones we liked best, and I then chose from those for my final prints.

Working with models in this setting was also new for me. I have some light experience working with models, but that has been in a more client-photographer relationship rather than as a cooperative artist. This project involved constant discussion, planning, talking and checking in as we worked through the poses and lighting. It was a team effort, exemplified by the model even having a right of refusal on images. I got a lot of flak for this decision during my midterm review, but it was important that they had as much curatorial power over the final works as I did. We also had discussions about their comfort level during or within the shoots; how a pose is a little more strenuous and can't be held for long or need rests within the pose,

level of clothedness within the studio, and even favorite types of tea.

In my decision to make work with just one model, I also decided that instead of making the work specifically about that one person, I wanted to work on abstracting the body. I did this through a number of formal choices: I used close in, cropped framing and dramatic lighting. This sectioning of the body led to images that are eerily familiar without being immediately identifiable. One can look at them and perhaps recognize a body part or the shape of a muscle, but thanks to the deeper coloring and the odd orientations, it is harder to identify what position the model is in, or exactly what body part one might be viewing.

The model was a major contributor in the decision making process, as a part of this project was the focus of collaboration and building a body of work together rather

than on my own. We discussed and went over all of the final images, working together to select a set that we both thought were the strongest. I then narrowed down from this larger group for the final prints. Our goals were to get strong images that “removed” the body while keeping it somewhat recognizable, with the intense, warm lighting that shaped in interesting and exciting ways around their form.

For this project, I set up and shot in my own studio, where I could control the environment in the way I wanted. My studio is a 150 sqft room. I stapled white sheets to $\frac{3}{4}$ of the walls and laid them out on the floor to get rid of some green glow from the paint. After some test shooting in the space, I decided I did not like the white sheets, and swapped them for black sheets instead. I then used layers

of pillows along with more sheets to create a voluminous void to place the model within.

For lighting I used two LED panel lights set to 4200K to achieve a bright, orange glow. I set the lights slightly behind the model to achieve the intense, sculpting rim-lighting while hiding most of the form in darkness. I shot with a Nikon 5Z II Mirrorless Camera using Nikkor 24-200mm and 50mm lenses at medium shutter speeds and ISOs. These combined to achieve a mix of more zoomed out full-body, as well as zoomed in shots. I have found mirrorless cameras to be preferable for my work in large part because of how they work. Where a DSLR offers an approximation of the image, a mirrorless shows you the image as it will be saved on the camera. Due to my visual impairments, this was massively helpful in aiding my shooting, as I could get the exact image I was taking

within the range of my near-sightedness through the viewfinder. With DSLRs I still get a bit of the “fuzz” and double vision that I get looking at things generally.

Through this thesis project, I had the chance to really focus in on a way of shooting that felt most successful in achieving the goals and questions I sought to explore. I learned a lot about how to control light, and developed a vision for what I wanted my images to look like. I found an adoration for the mystique of intense, non-revealing light with large swathes of darker shadow. A void to explore, with only streaks and pops of warm color to provide islands of safety within. A welcoming landscape despite its moody nature.

My prints were on a variety of materials, largely because I loved things about each of the materials without

a print on it, and wanted to see what my visions were like projected upon them. However, Canvas and Lasal remain my favorites. I enjoy the soft, slightly fuzzy texture that the Lasal paper gives the darker areas in the image, while appreciating the deep black that the Luster paper achieves. The wonderful texture that canvas gives is so unique, and it also lends a lovely warmth and softness to the images that is less pronounced in the other two materials. I found the Lasal to give a blend of the best parts of both materials, with a soft, warm tone, as well as an interesting and more fuzzy texture alongside a darker black than I could achieve with the canvas. I feel the textures of canvas and lasal, and the slight hazy quality they add to images helps to better bring what I personally experience to the images.

I printed them large, because as landscapes, I want my viewer to be able to almost step into them. To get close and see the rolling hills and towering peaks. The flowing branches. The twisting vines. To let themselves get lost within the nature of the images and wilderness they invoke.

I used each shoot to explore different strategies, starting with achieving the rim lighting effect, then building on that by adding color and warmth to them. Lastly, I combined these effects to work towards my final images. I also experimented with different backgrounds, though it's obvious to see what I liked most. The deep, dark backgrounds provided a form of isolation around the model, and also produced an almost velvety quality in some of the prints which I really enjoyed.

I shot just over 1300 images over four shoots, with the

last two shoots alone accounting for 748 of them. From those, I chose the images I printed with a series of criteria: Firstly; they must be images that both the model and myself thought were strong within the series. Second: they had to invite exploration. I wanted there to be small details that weren't immediately obvious upon just looking at the images. From the slight dips and valleys of the model's ribs, to the swells of their shoulder blades. Every image selected had to have at least one detail that coaxes one to look closer at the image in its entirety.

I found my inspiration in the works of artists like John Coplans and Nobuyoshi Araki. John's way of doing detailed explorations of how the flesh molds to motion and pressure, and the bright, intense lighting he used to

capture so much detail made me think about how body mechanics and lighting can affect abstract photography. Araki's painful, raw imagery spoke of nostalgia and grief in a way that I connect with deeply. Araki also served as a large inspiration in how I treat the models I work with. I strove to make sure that they were treated with empathy and respect. That they were comfortable with the work we were doing, and while we were doing it. Not treated poorly or with the sense of entitlement Araki treats the models he works with with. I wanted to be proud of the work I made with my collaborators, and I want them to feel proud of it as well.

I also began thinking of the body as a landscape. In the past most of my photography has been landscapes and nature, and I found a connection between that and the body in Anna Laza's works. Her series "Metaphysical Body

Landscapes” served as a fantastic example of ways to abstract and frame the body. This was an inspiration for my work and helped guide me towards my early test photos’ lighting. I also love how she turned the human body into plains of pure white, making it hard to tell what was what in her images, while still giving them form to focus on. I went to the opposite angle for this; where her images were bright, overexposed and slightly burned, I worked towards making my images dark, underexposed and vibrant.

Another key influence for me in my artistic practice is music. I spend far too much time with my headphones on, either just to have background noise, or to give me something to focus on when the world gets too hard. I am especially attached to bands like Puscifer, Sleep Token, and Bloodywood. Puscifer’s frontman Maynard James

Keenan writes incredibly powerful songs that deal with many of the harsh truths I've been exposed to through life. Addiction, grief, and even the metaphysical all serve as references in his music; but despite the intense subject matter, he doesn't let that stop him from being silly and expressing himself. Sleep Token's music serves as a haunting memoir of toxic relationships, abuse, and how hard it can be to get away from the mindset of obsession. Their lyrics also explore a way of connecting to the metaphysical nature of ourselves and the way that our own desires can crush us under their weight. Bloodywood serves as an antithesis to this. They uphold a message of empowerment, strength, and the will to fight back against abuse and injustice. Messages of freedom, escape, and spiritual power are also common within their works.

I was mindful of these aspects as I built my practical work throughout the last year. I let them stack and compound, exploring parts of myself and my past that I'm not even totally comfortable diving into yet. A childhood where I tried so hard just to feel normal and was met with both verbal and physical admonishment when I just... couldn't. This work helped to soothe that wound on my soul, and I am so deeply appreciative of it for that....

Dysphoria is also something I became more mindful of through this work. It has been something I've struggled with since high school, and this project brought it to the front of my mind in ways I did not expect. I had read recently about how watching and helping a close friend or loved one work through trauma can help you to process your own traumas. I found that working on this project,

helping the model spot and discuss the parts of themselves that they have worked on and are proud of helped me to better see and be mindful of the things I've been working on and how much I've improved.

Overall I loved working on this project. It had its hard times both physically and emotionally, but the experience was one that I will hold onto for the rest of my life as an artist. It taught me the value of communicating well with the model. How fabulous the performance I can get out of my co-artist by being open to feedback. How a little bit of understanding and empathy can empower all parties within a project. I want to continue advancing my collaborative practice, and exploring the power of working together with other artists.

I am going to continue my line of questioning. Examining the themes of comfort, safety and vulnerability,

as well as the ways that we interact with our bodies, the bodies of others, and the relationships that causes when we communicate. As my practice advances I will continue to incorporate these concepts into my work. I intend to meld bodies and photography, most urgently by using alternative photography progresses in the creation of clothing. This furthers the ideas of our interactions with our bodies, how we view them, and encourages mindfulness of the self.