

Speech

Hello, thank you so much for coming, everyone! Before I begin, I would like to give a quick content warning. My presentation will discuss heavy themes and include explicit photos, such as medical specimens, and talk about illness, death, and exploitation. If you wish to leave the presentation at any time, please do.

This semester, I spent a little over 3 months experimenting with a ton of materials, some new, some I've used before, some potentially dangerous chemicals, and some found objects to create this installation that I stand next to right now.

My installation, unofficially titled "Apothecary" or "Dead Last," is a series of multimedia sculptures and props curated for a physical set of a roadside cannibal shop.

Additionally, I created a fictional story and character for this shop to live in. This character is inspired by my own medical experiences throughout the past 3 years. The story and art pieces of "Dead Last" aim to show one of many different ways people choose to cope with life-changing medical trauma. Through this installation, I bring a new perspective on what cancer survivorship art looks like.

I will now read you the synopsis of my story to get a better picture of the world this installation lives in. This story takes place on Earth, sometime far into the future. Life as we know it in today in 2026 does not exist here and has not existed for hundreds of years. Some time ago, a highly intelligent group of intergalactic humanoids came down to earth and became friendly with the ultra-rich members of our society. Eventually, A business proposition was made that the wealthy and powerful creatures on earth and in space would offer and trade residents of their own planets to go live on other settlements throughout the universe. A large group of these people and extraterrestrials were traded and taken to labs to be medically experimented on in what was the largest-scale kidnapping the universe had ever seen. It wasn't for hundreds of years in the future that some of those who were being held in testing labs on Earth were able to escape through the efforts of a brave group of activists who were strongly against the intergalactic trade and inhumane experimentation happening on their planet. This group

of brave heroes moved away from their ultra-high-tech cities in exchange for their freedom. They created small settlements in the large pockets of earth that had been abandoned after being stripped of every precious resource. Throughout many years of raids, by these people, on government facilities resulting in mass casualties, mainly on their side, there grew a small but substantial and powerful group of anti-fascist humanoids who created small societies throughout the deserted world that functioned on trade with other small groups (resource for resource).

As a result of intergalactic settlers on Earth and the experimentation done to both humans and non-humans alike, these small societies were home to one of the most diverse groups of progressive coexisting life in the universe. Species **intermingling**, although originally impossible, became possible among certain new species of humanoids who were offspring of those who had been forcefully experimented on. One of those offspring is the owner of this Roadside Apothecary.

5318008, or 8008, is a sexless humanoid, rescued as a teen by anarchist raiders from one of the many government experiment sites. As a part of her experimentation, she is able to reproduce asexually. This, however, is not under her control and grows tumour-like life forms from time to time all over her body. Through practice, 8008 is able to master the art of surgically removing her growing tumors. Although these growths are alive when they first appear, sometimes adorning teeth or eyeballs, they do not have the capacity to stay alive after being severed from the host body. With 8008's body essentially being an infinite meat-producing machine, she uses these extra organisms to sell and trade as food to her community.

She also creates various tinctures from the organic matter her body produces and sells them as cures for ailments and seasonings for foods. Though grotesque, it is the freshest and fastest production of protein the town has. Using herself daily as a deli ham, she feeds her community of humanoids who are different but in a way just like her. 8008's past and her career inspire her to learn more about why she has this ability. She has secretly dreamt of creating a friend group out of her growths, but the only self-sustaining and intelligent life form she was able to grow ran away from her. 8008 has now sent a hit out for her "evil clone", urging people to bring the clone back alive.

While 8008 constantly talks to her customers about how annoying this clone of hers is and how she wants to turn them into deli meat, once she gets them back, she secretly misses them dearly and wants to get them back to apologize for neglecting them.

In this booth, you can see the current self-sustaining organisms she is attempting to grow, and the large brain she was able to extract from her own head that, for unknown reasons, keeps growing. These are her two latest experiments. As a hobby, she collects the teeth and bones that she finds or that people bring to her. Her most prized possession is the large tooth of a giant she acquired while trading with someone from a faraway settlement.

The booth stands alone in the middle of the desert, because she enjoys the silence, but it is no more than a 10-minute walk away from the settlement she grew up in.

8008 is a self-proclaimed evil scientist with uncontrollable health issues, survivor's guilt, and mental issues that affect not only her but the people she cares most about. She is my blatantly obvious self-insert

In 2023, I was diagnosed with two types of ovarian cancer, one of which grew into roughly the size of a small football.

Luckily, both of these cancers were successfully removed from my abdomen via a vertical laparotomy. However, this left me with a gnarly long scar and a permanent gap between my ab muscles.

After the removal of the cancer, I went through three rounds of intense chemotherapy over the course of three months. It left me both very weak and very bald.

The aftermath of the chemotherapy not only left me with one half of my reproductive system (and the various health issues that come with that), but also left me with a colorful array of different emotions to deal with. While completing chemo and going into

remission had me feeling forever grateful for my beautiful life, I was also left with questions about my proximity to death and my privilege as a survivor.

These questions came up and flooded my brain with anxiety whenever I had even small moments of alone time. I started creating art in these moments, which allowed me to have conversations with myself to try to figure out what I was experiencing. Although it had been 2 years at the time since being in remission, it was a no-brainer for me that my senior thesis would be about the mental and physical effects of my cancer journey.

Last semester, I focused on the thoughts and feelings I had surrounding the topic of the medical field. I read about old methods of medicine and surgery, and the exploitation of sick people's bodies in this field, **and even in** other fields like entertainment.

During my research, I visited the Skeleton Key museum in downtown Portland, whose oddity collection exhibited similar topics I was researching, such as old travelling circus shows, and working women dying poisoned by radiation. Visiting this curated museum of strange and sometimes messed-up history, I was inspired to create something similar.

In January of this year, I made a plan to visit two well-revered medical history museums on the East Coast. With the help of my amazing partner and their lovely family, I was able to make this trip happen. Although the journey wasn't easy, due to the January winter storms, I made it to both museums:

the National Museum of Health and Medicine in Silver Spring, Maryland, and the Mutter museum in Philadelphia. Both of these museums had a gorgeous and jaw-dropping collection of medical artifacts. Including wet specimen tanks of people's body parts, old tools used by doctors in the Civil War, and even the bullet that killed Abram Lincoln. While at the Mutter, I met a woman by the name of Carol Orzel, who was born with a rare bone disorder called fibrodysplasia ossificans progressiva or FOP. FOP caused her to have two skeletons, aka an overgrowth of bones in her body,

She was encased in a glass display in the middle of the room. Next to her was a beautiful collection of her jewelry. The placard next to her told the story of her life of health issues and her life of activism for FOP. Before she passed, she allowed for the institute to use her skeleton for scientific display once she had **passed, under the** condition that her jewelry and accessories, which she adored collecting, were placed beside her display.

I sat with her and all the other people in the room, some alive and some deceased. I became emotional.

While I am still trying to find the perfect words to describe what it was I was experiencing, I am forever grateful I got the privilege of meeting her and hearing her story.

I, once very frightened about death, felt a sense of calm seeing that Carol's earrings and brooches were still with her. Today, I feel a bit safer with the knowledge that, like her, I am so lucky to have amazing people in my life who would also put my favorite trinkets next to me in a museum if I asked them to (if they wanted me in the museum)

Coming back from the trip, sitting with all the visual knowledge I had gained, I started to create a fictional story in my head about what my own medical museum would look like. Still going with my last semester's idea of pieces based on my own body, I slightly reworked my installation plan. I illustrated this portrait of my booth idea, and have been referencing this image as I put my whole project together.

While making my pieces, I was consistently checking my super-organized thesis Pinterest board for visual inspiration. I was also watching evil scientist movies to stay in the mindset and headspace of body horror and weird science.

The most impactful and memorable films I watched this semester were David Cronenberg's "The Fly" and Guillermo del Toro's "Frankenstein". The makeup artistry in these movies is so unique to their era and mesmerizing to look at that it really inspired me to keep pushing throughout the semester, even when I was feeling burnt out.

Here you can see me sculpting the brain I would later make a mold and cast of. The silicone process started slowly and with lots of failure. Having only used liquid latex and clay to make sculptures in the past, my journey with two-part silicone was a completely new world for me. No matter how many YouTube videos or blog posts I read about how to properly create a 2-part silicone mold, my stubbornness and confidence that I can do anything, even when I was missing materials, inevitably ended up with many failures. Cardboard becomes mush, and hot glue turns into “nothing goop” when meeting with liquid silicone. It took several tries, with different mold-making materials, to finally end up with half-latex and half-plaster molds of two different-sized brains. Additionally, silicone does not fully cure when put on top of latex, or when the temperature in the room is too cold. Due to this, my brain didn’t come out perfectly, but there were no air bubbles, so I consider that a success. As for the sculpting of the brain, it took a long time and lots of rolling out coils of clay.

The three ladies you see in the tank are my dive back into doll and armature making that I hadn’t done in years. Making miniatures is something I told myself I would have to skip out on because of the large-scale project I was proposing. However, when visiting the Mutter in Philadelphia, I saw a tank of rats tied up by their hands and feet, with their stomach skin pulled open.

It looked like what an illustrator might have used for reference in a scientific diagram, but instead it was just the real thing. This was such a strange sight to me, and I immediately knew I wanted to create a sculpture of something similar. This was my perfect opportunity to create minis for my project, and ended up being the art I had the most fun making for this project.

I made their skeletons from armature wire and two-part epoxy. The bag I used was an actual IV bag that administered saline into me before my chemotherapy infusions. The nurses were super cool and chill, and when I told them I was an artist who wanted to repurpose them in my future work, I was able to get a few of these as keepsakes. This IV bag now holds the blood extracted from the self-sustaining brain and feeds my

humanoids. The idea behind these ladies is that they would be hooked up to each other via tubes, in order to sustain each other while using the limited resources my character 8008 has in the desert. However, if you know about the human centipede movies, I'm sorry to bring it up, but the farther down the centipede a human is, the worse their outcome is. That was my idea with designing these girls. As a result, the middle child is the most emaciated one; however, the third and smallest child is somehow thriving due to their size and their partial isopod DNA.

The tank they are trapped in was created by ordering custom plastic panels and gluing them together with fast-drying glue and waterproof caulking.

Luckily, despite the water inside, the tank and my fold-out table are holding up nicely. (roughly 40 pounds right now)

The jars on the table are a mixture of donated and found objects. I mostly collected the months before January. Most of these jars were in pristine condition, and didn't look like they were old and tattered from time and weather. To achieve a more distressed and crusty looking set up, I intensely sand papered every single jar and vile, following up by painting a light coat of Mod Podge and pan pastel pigment mix on top. Some of these jars I even finished up by painting on a vinegar and rust dye mix in random splotches.

The stuff inside the jars and vials ranges from water and food dye, theater blood, Tajin, and silicone casts of molds I made.

I went through many renditions of what the booth exterior would look like, wanting to make it myself out of wood, then wanting to drape a princess-style canopy over the table,

eventually finding out that tiny dressing room canopies exist.

The material on this tent was smooth, weatherproof fabric, so I distressed it for hours to get it looking rougher and more withered. I used about 9 cans of spray paint to color the entire tent to look damaged by the sun and the elements. I was kinda hoping I would be

able to use this canopy as an actual changing room when I went camping this summer, but it is now actually an environmental hazard, as it rains paint chips when moved.

During this process, I learned what makes things archival and what doesn't. I'm confident that with more practice, I could make quality props and art that lasts. I can't picture this piece in a gallery, and I'm finally coming to terms with myself that I created this as someone who loves practical effects and cosplay. I don't know any filmmakers, and the thought of working in Los Angeles sounds miserable.

But one of my dreams has always been to own a little shop full of things that I make for people to use how they would like. I would love to sell my art at conventions for people who are fans of weird, handmade art. In the next few years, I hope to apply and get accepted for a residency in a different country and do something like this again. I'm very excited for what my new chapter of non-student life will bring me. Hopefully a job!

Before I end my speech, I would like to thank all my lovely friends and my lovely partner for helping me get through these tough thesis times by listening to me when I needed to talk or giving me advice when I needed guidance. Also, a big thank you to all my professors, especially my femme and queer professors, who helped me find my femme queer and weird artistic voice. Making projects, I always try to push myself to do something different, and by doing that, I make a lot of art that I don't necessarily love. These professors gave me the safe space to mess up again and again. It has resulted in being more proud and confident of my work ethic and drive, something I struggle with having confidence in because of my ADHD. Lastly, I want to give the biggest thank you and all the love to my family. In my weakest moments, you all assured me that I was capable of getting over any hurdle I came across. College was a hurdle I could have never pictured getting over; even now, it feels so surreal to be a few weeks away from getting a degree. But through the unconditional support and love that you guys gave me, I was able to achieve this crazy milestone. Special thank you to my Mami, who took

care of me every day while I was sick, and still takes care of me every single day. I love you so much.

Thank you, everyone!