

The Performance Never Ends: Tools of Necessity

By:

Sarah Bouchard

B.A. Coastal Carolina University, 2021

A Report Submitted to the Lamar Dodd School of Art of the University of Georgia in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2025

The Performance Never Ends: Tools of Necessity

By:

Sarah Bouchard

Approved:

Demitra Thomloudis, Major Professor

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Thomloudis', with a stylized, flowing script.

Date: 4-29-25

Acknowledgements

The development of this work would not have been possible without the support and guidance of my surrounding community. Thank you to my committee members Demi Thomloudis, Mary Pearse, Dr. Nell Andrew, Dr. Isabelle Wallace, and Kim Lyle. Your dedication to teaching has been an invaluable part of my transformation as an artist. Thank you for continuously pushing me to be better and leaving me with questions that will linger for years to come. Thank you to my studio mates Hannah Toussaint, Larissa McPherson, Jeanne Marie Martineau, and Ashley Wingo. My graduate experience has been truly wonderful because of you all. From talking through conceptual ideas to providing emotional support through difficulties to yapping nonsense, I appreciated every second of it more than you will ever know. Thank you to my graduate cohort and faculty members who attributed to the formation of this work with your feedback. And lastly, thank you to my partner, Courtney Bazzarre, for being so supportive throughout the entirety of this process, despite how difficult it was. Thank you for being so understanding and compassionate as I learned more about myself, my practice, and my position in the surrounding world. I love you dearly.

Introduction

I find creating to be the most authentic form of expression and throughout the evolution of my practice, self and identity have remained consistent themes. In earlier bodies of work, I was dismantling my military identity, sifting through past documents and memories to better understand my complicated relationship to this former self. Looking back, I can recognize the control I was imposing on the objects I created, like what was done to me as a military service member. Desire for liberation in the work was never granted due to the restrictive process that I maintained.

In previous works, I researched not only items that related to my own experiences of military service, but the familial traditions I was raised with by my grandfather, Brigadier General Phillipe Bouchard. In a way, this practice was an attempt to commemorate the connection I had shared with him, even though our military paths had never crossed. As it evolved, the project felt too archival; the categorization of parts kept everything separate, stagnant, and frozen in the past. It became difficult to maintain, as if I became stuck in a loop of reliving grief and loss. However, in my current body of work, I have widened the scope of my research allowing more than just one facet of identity to exist, including veteran status, sexual orientation, gender, craft, queer culture, and so on. Because of this, I have been able to generate work that is fully inclusive to the whole of identity (or at least as I know it thus far).

Once I settled on an interest in tools and domestic objects, the individual parts before me began to vibrate with potential. Physical movement and hybridity quickly

became crucial elements to the work. Rather than keeping things in their place, I began piecing them together into forms that embrace the past but allow for activation towards an ever-evolving future. The tools serve both as artifacts and active participants. The hybridization of elements blends the real and the imaginary, enabling an authenticity that is both tangible and fabricated. If my previous work was meant to be held or worn, it wasn't until it was made with the intention to be activated, to perform, that it mobilized the past into something abundant and motivating.

By integrating queerness, gender, domesticity, and absurdity into my previously established framework, ideas of identity expanded and exploded outward, leaving nothing but countless fragments to be assembled into something entirely new. Many of these fragments or parts have been around since the beginning, sitting atop my tables, waiting to be transformed. It was not until I could recognize the ever-unfolding and fluid-like layers of identity that things began to take a more realistic shape, a realization that manifested through making. Meticulous craftsmanship requires extensive amounts of time and an acute attention to detail; design problems arise and must be addressed; failure ensues. These practical applications act as metaphors for the evolution of self, as well as a means for physically moving through and with one's body—a ritual for processing.

This work is not only about sifting through my own conception of identity, but also about how that identity is reflected in and responds to the surrounding world—it is about being in and navigating through spaces, whether comforting or hostile. It is a performance. The tools function as queered and hybridized renditions of somewhat recognizable household objects; obscuring them, I allow them to travel beyond the imaginable domestic

space while still maintaining their tether. They slip between a space that is both inside and outside; private and public; foreign and domestic. I am interested in the tension between the oppression and liberation of these spaces and identities.

Chapter 1: Tools

“What is a tool?” Initially, my thoughts turn to traditional tools associated with masculinity, such as hammers, screwdrivers, and wrenches. However, upon further reflection, another question emerges: “How broad or limited is the definition of a tool?” When does an object transition from being a clearly defined tool to something that embodies the essence of tool-ness? We recognize tools as extensions of the body, affording us something that we could not otherwise do on our own or enabling an easier way to accomplish the task at hand. This body of work explores the concept of tools and their ability to empower, obstruct, or attract the user, influenced by their innate function, decoration, or design.

German philosopher Martin Heidegger probed the uses of technology (i.e. tools), more specifically how the essence of technology encompasses everything into a technological realm—we can only view the world through a technological lens where everything is a means to an unachievable end. In his famous essay, “The Question Concerning Technology,” Heidegger establishes technology as a potential mode of revealing.¹ Revealing, through its many translations, distills to the idea of truth. Truth involves a “bringing-forth,” an un-concealment, or presenting of itself, however mysterious the revelation may be.² At the same time Heidegger argues that through technology, we

¹ Heidegger, Martin. “The Question Concerning Technology,” in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*. Edited by David Farrell Krell. New York: Harper & Row, 1977. p. 295

² The notion of bringing-forth appears both in Heidegger’s text as a term synonymous with revealing truth, as well as in Sarah Ahmed’s conception of a queer phenomenology which reframes our orientations towards background or peripheral objects.

look to categorize the world into that which is orderable, what he calls the “standing-reserve,” or more accurately, an “exchangeable piece,” which will ultimately result in the absorption of man into becoming nothing more than a part of such ordering.³ This method of acquiring truth has the unintentional effect of each observer becoming just as much a piece of technology as the apparatuses’ they use. As we create more tools for understanding and categorizing the world, we become increasingly detached from what it is like to be in it. To clarify, this is not an attempt to promote a purely empirical way of thought, but rather a recognition that contrasting modes of explaining the world can exist simultaneously.

Though Heidegger is referencing the technologies of modern physics, I find that the tools I have created attempt to reestablish a connection with truths that cannot be seen or measured—those which can only be experienced, performed, or fabricated. This work deliberately provokes and perverts our perceived understanding of the world, driving toward the ambiguity of what can and cannot be known. In Heidegger’s closing argument he states, “Because the essence of technology is nothing technological, essential reflection upon technology and decisive confrontation with it must happen in a realm that is, on one hand, akin to the essence of technology and, on the other, fundamentally different from it. Such a realm is art.”⁴ Art, according to this account, is the only system with the agency to infiltrate and question technology, as it can mimic and criticize simultaneously.

³ Blitz, Mark. “Understanding Heidegger on Technology.” *The New Atlantis*, Winter 2014, No. 41. p. 72

⁴ Heidegger, p. 317

What binds these ambiguities of truth, performance, and tool-ness, and allows for them to slip beyond the definitive is the very thingness of these tools. The unintelligibility of use, combined with exuberant decoration allow them to “hover over the threshold between the nameable and unnameable, the figurable and unfigurable, the identifiable and unidentifiable.”⁵ Again, these tools exist outside of a technological framing, while also simultaneously within it, forcing the viewer to face ambiguity, insofar as the object has the agency to orient itself toward the viewer, rather than the other way around. The subject becomes the object and vice versa, disrupting and disorienting both the phenomenological experience and the performativity of the user. One is both used and the user, generating an oscillating slippage in the attempt to grasp what the thing is.

Perhaps what separates the tools that I have made from others is their agency. Each tool has its own personality and ability to activate the surrounding space, as well as any curious participants. The devices created are meant to entice, to seduce, with simple affordances or mechanical structures that imply bodily activation. The encounter reverses the subject/object relationship, objectifying the viewer and personifying the tool. The user becomes more of a tool than the object itself, directly responding to the unease of Heidegger’s proposal on technology. This deliberate reversal subverts the function of the tool in every way, turning the purpose and design of the tool on its head, queering any clear understanding of it. By distorting the definition of the tool, one is brought to question what is this thing? Or more importantly, who am I in relation to it? Questioning the ontology of

⁵ Brown, Bill. “Thing Theory.” *Critical Inquiry*, Autumn, 2001, Vol. 28. No. 1. p. 5

the “unidentifiable” tool puts the viewer in a position to continue scratching and attempting to uncover the layers embedded within, constantly aware of their relation to the tool itself.

In *Feather Duster Rotisserie Candelabra* (image 1), multiple household tools are combined to create an object that transcends its use value and, instead, blurs the lines of decoration, function, and mechanization. It is reminiscent of a highly decorative 19th century patent prototype with its hand crank mechanism and overly complex design; it is a cleaning device created for efficient and high-speed dusting; it is a sex toy seducing the user (or receiver rather) with its black lace and vibrant, sensual purple feathers; it is bodily ornament, enhancing the outward expression of the participant; it is hand crafted, which can be seen in the hammer marks, solder seams, and imperfect edges; it is a reflection of something mass produced, aligning itself with household tools that every housewife must have to keep her home orderly. The list of possibilities for what it is and what it does goes on, and intentionally so. *Feather Duster Rotisserie Candelabra* attempts to sashay outside of the Heideggerian technological view, drenched in lace and feathers. It does nothing to enrich our scientific understanding of the world, yet it questions the conditions and consequences of such narrow understandings. In a way, it is a tool that enables the user to experience the multiplicities of the surrounding world, rather than flattening them.

Chapter 2: Material and Labor

Louise Mazanti, an author and former professor of contemporary craft and design, defines a super object as one that “exists parallel to the object category of the design commodity, at the same time as it contains (super-)layers of meaning that relate to visual art.”⁶ The super object materializes multiple layers of meaning (function, social/cultural, value, etc.) into a singular, yet loaded entity. In other words, in using certain materials and techniques, an object can transcend its superficial commodified exterior to become something that is not bound by simple value exchange, yet participates within it, and exhibits more conceptual depth in its relation to the viewer. I would argue that only the craft object contains these “(super-)layers of meaning” distinct in the definition of the super object—I would even assert that these terms are interchangeable. This transforms the idea that craft is categorized as something rooted in material, tradition, or skill, and instead, mobilizes it into a mode of being. The craft object, or super object, is activated not only by the maker, but continues to perform its identity through its use, as well as its position in space.

In this body of work, material is dictated by a personal fixation, but more importantly, the specific crafting of the material into an object addresses a multitude of issues and compacts them into one complex thing, a “super object.” This collection of objects situates well within the rather flexible definition of craft, a definition that feels

⁶ Mazanti, Louise. “Super-Objects: CRAFT AS AN AESTHETIC POSITION.” In *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*, edited by Maria Elena Buszek, 59–82. Duke University Press, 2011. p. 62

inherently queer due to its lack of clear distinction and refusal to fit within a single framework (more on this later).

The objects that I have created rest on a multiplicity of ideas, each embodying the present contradictions and slippery layers. They simultaneously participate in and resist consumerism, industrialization, social constructs, labor, and the complications of art and craft. For example, *Exploded Compact* (image 2) complicates and exaggerates a readily accessible, historical feminine commodity. Transforming the idea of a makeup compact into a hand-cranked mechanical device mounted atop a jewelry armoire introduces the user to a complex interplay of conflicting concepts.

Exploded Compact completely removes the portability of the otherwise pocket-sized object. The brush applicator is bolted into the wooden top of the armoire and the compact sized mirror is strategically mounted to a damask-patterned wall about eight feet away. Performing under the guise of its highly decorative surroundings, the object functions in such a way that seems counterintuitive. As a super object, the mass-produced and widely disseminated tool, the compact, is denied its commercial qualities yet retains the formal and advertised appeal of its commoditization: to make-up the beholder.

The elongated proximity and restriction of portability distort the user's experience. The tool becomes completely impractical and purely performative, intentionally so, to call into question the artificiality of gender, commodities, and alternative forms of labor. To utilize the tool, the user must position themselves in front of the brush, squinting to line up a very small portion of their face in the mirror. Once adjusted, the hand crank can be

turned to activate the brush which contradictorily slaps the user in the face with delicately soft bristles. It is a humorous alternative to applying makeup, but it is within its impracticality and absurd function that questions arise: How might the user appear after applying makeup in such a fashion? Why is it seemingly much more enjoyable than standard application? How does this mask application differ from the masks applied by mass culture? The use of the tool is awkward and laughable, signaling towards the awkwardness (and endless labor) of upholding societal gender standards.

Objects like *Exploded Compact* ask the viewer to question their relationship to commodities and household objects, as well as how handcrafted objects differ and simultaneously resemble that of the mass produced. The layers imbedded within the super object promote an intimate and bodily experience with both the material and the maker while also upholding an avenue to consider the formal and conceptual qualities of visual art. This work involves countless hours of labor, problem solving, and designing to construct an object that is ultimately useless. Absurdity and humor are imbedded in the fabrication of these tools to subvert our associations with the unseen labor of gender performance, domestic housework, and the labor involved in making craft objects. It is labor that, to the world of mass production, is completely unnecessary; but to the craft artist, it is essential.

Chapter 3: Body

The body maintains an inextricable connection to any handmade object, extending from the moment it is made to carrying out its functional purpose. This connection grants craft a further depth. In her essay, “Fabrication and Encounter,” Paula Owen asserts that content and meaning emerge not only during use of the craft object, but also within the material choices and traditional methods of fabrication linking it to a rich social and cultural history.⁷ This body of work not only employs this idea but adds an element of activation and participation which continues to engage not only the body of the maker, but the body of the viewer as well, allowing the tools themselves to function both as artifact and participant.

Each tool in this collection is fabricated by hand, compulsively and necessarily, to “subvert our assumptions about class, time, and value” by utilizing a process that “accentuates the distance between the complexity of the real and the ease of representation.”⁸ Elements of this work could likely be done with a machine, saving hours of time; however, I have chosen to do them with hand tools rather than a laser-cutter or other modern technology to reinforce the presence of the body.

This important and intentional decision, present in the hand pierced lace pattern of *Feather Duster Rotisserie Candelabra* (image 3), enables me to engage with the history of women's work, particularly unpaid domestic labor, but also requires extended periods of

⁷ Owen, Paula. “Fabrication and Encounter: WHEN CONTENT IS A VERB.” In *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*, edited by Maria Elena Buszek, 83–96. Duke University Press, 2011. p. 90-92

⁸ Ibid, p. 92

bodily presence and heightened self-awareness. To complete this portion of the work, I would come to the studio for roughly eight hours each day and pierce the lace pattern with a jeweler's saw, as if I was clocking in and out for shift work. This monotonous and repetitious labor caused joint pain and eye fatigue but reinforced the physicality of being in one's body, which can be seen within the pattern's rough-cut edges.

Tasks such as cleaning, cooking, caretaking, and fashion are hardly recognized as legitimate forms of labor, yet they demand just as much (and often more) mental and physical energy as conventional "work." These tools call onto all forms of labor that go unseen, unrecognized, and underappreciated, but inevitably demand so much from the body. Both *Feather Duster Rotisserie Candelabra* and *Exploded Compact* address these issues by asking the viewer to participate in this performance of masking and absurd labor. The body is reinforced by these tools through cranks and handles, requiring activation to become fully alive, involving the body of the viewer just as much as the involvement of the maker.

The physicality of the labor is imbedded within each tool; it is inseparable, allowing for *my* body to be present even in my absence. It is symbolized in the heavily hammered surfaces, hand cut designs, and countless soldered seams. But the work extends past just my body due to its use of material and desire to be used. The material, as with all craft objects, can be found in the everyday and is tied to a rich history of use/function. Though metals such as copper, brass, and nickel are no longer as integrated in the home as they once were due to the rise of cheaper or more appropriate materials, they continue to recall everyday interactions. One might consider brushed nickel faucets, brass fixtures and

copper wire for electrical circuits. This notion is furthered with the addition of materials such as brush fibers and feathers. Regardless of if these materials are found in every home, they signal a desire for bodily use.

Chapter 4: Gender

As discussed in previous chapters, tools, material, and the body inform the tangible components of this body of work. Together, these work to ground the complex and abstract ideas relating to one's experience and identity. These more "concrete" apparatuses enable the user a sense of physical embodiment, or stabilization, which is then destabilized when the function suggests that the action being done, and the object itself, is nothing but a performance. These actions, a theme common in the entirety of this work, function to question and critique the pre-established definitions of gender and domesticity, queering not only the action itself, but also the object, the user, and dominant socially constructed conventions. Through this multifaceted queering and performance, this body of work dismantles the assumption that gender "serves a social policy of gender regulation and control."⁹

In her essay, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," Judith Butler, an American feminist philosopher and gender studies scholar, utilizes a fusion of philosophical approaches to develop a destabilizing conception of gender that, in my opinion and in the defense of the objects I have made, seems to be the most accurate depiction. First, addressing the phenomenological arguments of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Butler extracts the assertion that the body is "understood to be an active process of embodying certain cultural and

⁹ Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" in *Theatre Journal*, Dec., 1988, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Dec., 1988). The Johns Hopkins University Press. p. 528

historical possibilities” rather than one of a “natural species.”¹⁰ This notion, that the body is a historical idea, is also repeated in Simone de Beauvoir’s “Second Sex” as a backing for her claim that “One is not born a woman but rather becomes one.”¹¹

By using a phenomenological approach to examine gender, one that examines *what it is like* to be in one’s body rather than reducing experience to the bare matter that makes it, Butler reflects on the shared experience of having a body without severing it into traditional binary sexual categorization. Rather, she is concerned with how that body acts out its gender, repetitiously, over time. This mode of thinking, one in which the body is not immediately gendered, but becomes its gender through its actions in relation to what is socially accepted, allows for fluidity. This upheaval and subversion of the acceptable is blatant in this body of work. Each piece, in some capacity, exhibits tools for gender conformity and unmask the absurdity of such compliance through performance.

Within Butler’s assertion that gender is performative and something that is becoming of a body, we can gather that “[gender] is real only to the extent that it is performed.”¹² Agency belongs to the “actor,” whether that includes conforming to the social construct or suffering the consequences of being othered by it. The overly gendered, or hyperfeminine and hypermasculine, versions of tools are made to exaggerate this gender performance to the point that it becomes queer. Examples such as bodybuilding, wrestling, reality tv, and soap opera come to mind as extreme versions of gender, which

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 521

¹¹ Beauvoir, Simone de, 1908-1986. *The Second Sex*. London :Jonathan Cape, 2009.

¹² Butler, p. 527

inherently feel queer and influence the direction of my work. I would argue that when one over performs their gender, it tips the binary balance a little too far, perverting traditional conceptions of what it is to be “man” or “woman.” Butler even refers to the body, in the phenomenological sense, as “dramatic” in that it is a “continual and incessant materializing of possibilities.”¹³

In examples such as bodybuilding or wrestling, the hypermasculinity of the “sport” is stretched so far that it becomes homoerotic and Camp. Wrestlers overperform for the sake of drama, dressed in drag and alternate personas, while bodybuilders step on stage almost entirely nude to pose for each other and the crowd, flaunting and peacocking their unnatural, oiled up bodies. The spectacle of each sport is supposedly the pinnacle of masculinity, yet in many cases, there is a refusal to recognize just how performative it is. Even behind the scenes, where the training to compete takes place, gender identity becomes opaque.

In the 1977 film “Pumping Iron,” director George Butler emphasizes this idea, whether intentionally or not. After the opening credits, we find ourselves in a crowded weight room with the partially clothed men grunting and sweating while the chosen music track seems suggestive of a 70’s porn flick. Shortly after, we find the 5-time Mr. Olympia champion Arnold Schwarzenegger posing for prisoners in the yard where we hear comments of him having a “beautiful body” and being a “big dude.” An inmate even asks Arnold for a kiss after he forcefully kisses what looks to be the only woman in the crowd.

¹³ Ibid, p. 521

Contemporary bodybuilding has only gotten “harder” and more masculine as our conceptions of gender have shifted since the 70’s, which makes it less explicitly homoerotic, but at the same time, even more so. The men remain wide-eyed for other men.

In the case of women, reality tv shows such as the Real Housewives franchise and other spinoffs parody what it is to be a housewife (a filthy rich one). To some, these shows may seem degrading and present women in a lower position; however, if watched through the lens of satire and absurdity, these hyperfeminized, glammed and glittered representations of women tip the scale in the opposite direction, displaying just as queer and camp of a “woman” as the men of the hypermasculine. I would suggest that these two polarizing swings eventually merge and become indiscernible from one another, challenging, and therefore dissolving, the extreme binaries set in place. The impetus is the performance and over performance of it all. In the end, it all appears to be some form of Drag.

The overperformance of gender is displayed in both the visual language and functionality of this exhibition of objects. The lace detailing, complex design, and ornately decorated installation places the viewer in an aggressively feminine domestic setting. The mechanization and necessity of the body to activate each work forces the user to (over)perform the task at hand. The design of each piece reinforces this overperformance and queerness by asking the viewer to participate in actions that would never take place in mass produced products.

For example, *Feather Duster Rotisserie Candelabra* requires the user to pick up the awkwardly heavy tool to dust in a nonsensical way that would likely make more of a mess than a standard duster. The horizontal swirling plane also puts the user in a rather odd position of being to the side of the action, rather than head on, making it difficult to accomplish any cleaning. *Exploded Compact* offers another example of this over performance in its absurd slapping of makeup powders, which both criticizes and enjoys this action of makeup application.

Military Decoration (images 4-6) uses a slightly different tactic to address the performance of identity and conformity. As a veteran, and the granddaughter of a former Brigadier General, military culture and identity has long been a part of my life. In making this specific piece, as well as other similar work, I have been able to deconstruct and reconstruct the identities associated with the military, especially in my personal gendered experience of it. By creating a makeup pallet that references the ribbon rack of dress uniform, a facade is baked into the design, and the makeup reinforces this “covering up” necessary to conform and comply. Military medals are awarded for numerous occasions including good conduct and heroic action. For myself, this piece is complex as it discusses both personal and societal assumptions about military service.

Military Decoration offers a complex display of the absurdity (and honor) that is required to become a part of the US military. Just as an individual applies certain outward expressions to fit within a societal construct, so does the service member to become anonymous. This piece plays on the dress uniform as a method of concealing one’s identity while simultaneously exposing the tools used in the concealment. In doing so, the

wearer displays an exaggerated, performative version of decoration that exhibits both an outward manifestation of its purpose and function as jewelry, while also existing as a tool dedicated to the act of concealment or camouflage.

For me, this act of concealing has many layers; It is a covering and conforming to fit within gender stereotypes as to avoid question or ridicule; it is a compliance with the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” Policy that was still in effect when I was an active member, barring service members from expressing their queerness; it is an active removal of any identifying characteristics or individual expressions; and, problematically, there still exists an unavoidable attachment and honor involved in choosing to adorn oneself with such an award.

Chapter 5: Domesticity

When thinking about the domestic space, or the home, one can consider how it immobilizes its inhabitants—specifically, its gendered inhabitants. “Home,” as described by Guiliana Bruno in her book *Public Intimacy: Architecture and the Visual Arts*, “is the very antithesis of travel.”¹⁴ Sarah Ahmed, author of *Queer Phenomenology*, describes homes as “effects of the histories of arrival.”¹⁵ The idea of home asserts an intimacy within a space, but also a place to which we return to repeatedly. In other words, “we learn what home means, or how we occupy space at home and as home, when we leave home.”¹⁶ For many, home is a place of comfort. For some, including women, the LGBTQ+ community and other marginalized groups, the home can become a space of distress, immobility, and disillusion. When one is not granted the same privileges to travel to and from home, as the stereotypical “husband” is, the relationship between body and space can become an entangled complication—one is never truly free.

In a subsection titled “Traveling Domestic: The *House Wife*,” Guiliana Bruno examines the 1936 film *Craig’s Wife*, a film that depicts a fashionable woman who seeks independence from her position as a wife through the acquisition—and control—of a house. According to Bruno, “the house represents her [Harriet Craig’s] way out of domesticity and domestication.”¹⁷ By controlling and forcing out every other inhabitant of

¹⁴ Bruno, Giuliana, and Vidler, Anthony. *Public Intimacy: Architecture and the Visual Arts*. MIT Press, 2007. P. 165

¹⁵ Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Duke University Press, 2006. P. 9

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 9

¹⁷ Bruno, p. 170

the home, Harriet becomes the house, freeing her of her marital duties and status as a subservient woman. However, by using a method of working within and against the confines of domesticity to achieve independence, the *housewife* is left alone and trapped within her own dwelling, just as she would have been had she played into the subordination of patriarchal culture, just without a partner. Ultimately, the escape that she imagined was always impossible within the heteronormative system because of her gender identity. Domesticity remains an enclosure.

What is captivating in this writing is the mobilization of the domesticated persons and the domestic space itself, an idea that I consider in the transportive installation designs of my own work. Domesticity becomes mobile through its “epidermic qualities,” as an extension of the skin to be worn and removed.¹⁸ In viewing the home as adornment and fashion, it muddles the domestic barriers with a Camp aesthetic, confusing and diffusing the prison that it can become. This outward presentation of home, that becomes distinct from the space itself, parallels Ahmed’s claim that “spaces are not exterior to bodies; instead, spaces are like a second skin that unfolds in the folds of the body.”¹⁹

If the home is an extension of skin, one that can be molted and regenerated as we move through different spaces, then it becomes an evolving and impressionable facet of identity. Many iterations of home occupy us; however, in the context of identifying as anything other than what is socially acceptable or demanded, the adorning skin can become suffocating or even intolerable. The objects in this body of work address these

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 175

¹⁹ Ahmed, p. 9

issues of domesticity through Camp and absurdity, intentionally so as to encourage accessible entry and lasting contemplation, as well as to enjoy. Each object is self-aware, proudly peacocking its dysfunctional qualities within the realm of masking and performance. They are extravagant and to be used extravagantly. This aesthetic quality allows for play while maintaining seriousness, giving rise to a complex relationship between that which is laughable and that which is often hard to bear. It sets the stage for drama to unfold.

The installation of this body of work involves objects that are steeped in quintessential domestic decoration. Rather than opting for the traditional pedestal or wall mount, each object is displayed on a piece of furniture and adorned with highly decorative wallpaper. This intentional choice allows for the transportation of the viewer, both in time and space. The furniture itself references 18-19th century design that is outdated due to its material, style, and hyper specific function. The reference to this antiquated style reinforces the idea that the space and the objects do not belong and are not attempting to fit in. The temporal element allows for a certain detachment and encourages the sentiment that “things are campy, not when they become old—but when we become less involved in them, and can enjoy, instead of be frustrated by, the failure of the attempt.”²⁰ Positioning the objects in a familiar, yet unfamiliar setting creates a sense of disorientation and displacement.

²⁰ Sontag, Susan. Notes on “Camp”. Picador. 1964. p. 8

A further disorientation exists with the installation of the wallpaper, which can be seen in both *Exploded Compact* and *Military Decoration*. Rather than bound to the wall, the wallpaper floods onto the floor, distorting the perceivable horizontal and vertical planes, fusing them into an oscillatory hold. With no right-side-up present, other than the upright orientation of the objects, the viewer is left with minimal spatial direction, queering their bodies upon approach, displacing the viewer. The integration of domesticity and queerness, which will be further discussed in the next chapter, works to disassemble and confuse these dominant social constructs.

Chapter 6: Queerness

Queerness arises in this work as both an identity and a theory. Whether the object itself is causing a queered experience, or asked to be seen through a queer lens, queerness is deeply embedded within the work and carried out through its performance and overperformance. Disidentification, as described by Jose Esteban Munoz in his book *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, allows for a method of “recycling and rethinking encoded meaning” which “scrambles and reconstructs” it.²¹ This manipulation and reappropriation of dominant culture “works to make visible these infinite varieties of identity—or nonidentity—that present such a threat to dominant forces; the act plays on the stereotype and moves away from it.”²² Disidentification parodies the stereotype and functions as a mirror. It forces the accuser to point at themselves, while those on the periphery of normative culture reimagine the components to their benefit.

In her essay, “Put Your Thing Down, Flip It, and Reverse It: Reimagining Craft Identities Using Tactics of Queer Theory,” Lacey Jane Roberts applies the ideas of reclamation, reappropriation, performance, and disidentification to aid craft in reestablishing its own identity. Craft is not definitive or fixed, as we are finding with the rather expansive resurgence of traditional practices from certain marginalized communities. Though this late acceptance is mostly an issue of race and gender, I imagine that what we define as “craft” will have to continue to evolve and be more inclusive.

²¹ unoz, Jose. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999. p. 30-31

²² Roberts, Lacey Jane. “Put Your Thing Down, Flip It, and Reverse It: REIMAGINING CRAFT IDENTITIES USING TACTICS OF QUEER THEORY.” In *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*, edited by Maria Elena Buszek, 243–59. Duke University Press, 2011. p. 247

Roberts claims that this evolution may result in a “hybridity” of craft that, through the tactics of disidentification, “breaks down stereotypes rather than reinforcing them.”²³ With the use of queer theory tactics, craft is neither dissolved under the banner of art, nor is it cast aside as entirely separate; craft remains an idea that slips between, never declaring a fixed identity, instead, it is “always in the making.”²⁴ This lack of definition challenges the systems which craft could fit into, as well as allowing it to maintain its power because once defined, it becomes controlled.

With the acknowledgment of the queerness in the crafting and material of the work, it is important to understand how the mechanisms function to queer the viewer’s experience. Reinforced by the tactics of overperformance and disidentification, the action required in both *Feather Duster Rotisserie Candelabra* and *Exploded Compact* cause the user to engage in a ridiculous act. As stated in Chapter 4, the over-the-top nature of these tools is intentionally designed to underpin the absurdity of gender and domestic performance. By participating, one is both aware of the stereotype while simultaneously overperforming it. This allows the viewer to exist both within the system and outside of it at once.

The success of these tactics resides in their ability to never completely remove the viewer from the oppressed state; awareness of it is always present. Where a utopian outlook might suggest a world that does not yet exist, or possibly one that may never exist, utilizing tools to distort the real as we currently know it engages in a criticism of it.

²³ Ibid, p. 257

²⁴ Ibid, p. 257

Certainly, we could say that the idea of a utopia criticizes the way in which we live, but I prefer the much messier way of criticizing it from within.

Another tactic embraced in this work is the idea of a queer phenomenology, a shifting of orientations that I mentioned briefly in the previous chapter. Sarah Ahmed, author of the book *Queer Phenomenology*, examines the orientations towards objects as it has been written by various philosophers such as Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Martin Heidegger. In the dissection of these texts, she is drawn to the mention of objects and domestic spaces as they recede into the background, becoming nothing more than a setting for the important work—philosophy. As described within the written works of these philosophers, phenomenology asserts a turning towards or a perception of something that exists independently of consciousness; these objects are merely within our perceptual field until they are not. This orientation towards an object suggests a familiarity and awareness of its presence, prioritizing the subject over the object as one positions their body in the direction of whatever is in view.

A queer phenomenology suggests a nauseating disorientation rather than an orientation towards something. If we see orientation as that which is familiar and positions our direction in space, and even influences how we inhabit it, then disorientation can be that of a failure to orient, “a bodily feeling of losing one’s place,” or that develops a space in which bodies “do not extend their shape, or use objects [to] extend their reach.”²⁵ Queering our conceptions of phenomenology invites us to ponder how the “strangeness

²⁵ Ahmed, p. 160

that seems to reside somewhere between the body and its objects is also what brings these objects to life and makes them dance.”²⁶

By fusing these methods of queer theory and applying them to these fabricated objects, as well as one’s perception of those objects, a multi-layered experience is invoked on the viewer. Though this experience is not exclusively sensorial, it is implemented to instigate questions about how we are approached and impressed upon by the things that often go unnoticed. And that which goes unnoticed usually defaults to the domestic space and peripheral communities. But with a focus on the objects of such glossed over areas, I can imagine the used makeup brush laying atop the counter or the feather duster hung in a closet. Each of these tools disappears until needed, receding into their storage spaces, only existing as an element in the background. However, due to how I have designed and installed this body of work, the objects stand proudly and loudly, demanding attention and disorienting the viewer’s perception.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 163

Conclusion

To conclude, this body of work is about coming to terms with the way things are and how they can be manipulated or transformed to one's own benefit. There are no longer any rules, as the structures have all been bent and twisted to adapt to a being that is continuously becoming. While still recognizing its original strict framework, the work now seeks to laugh with and at all that has led to this point in time. There will always be reverence for past experiences/selves, just as there will always be a critique of the structures that bound them. There is a freedom to the work that allows it to be serious and hilarious and "real." These tools help me to combat adversity while enjoying doing so; they keep me grounded while simultaneously transporting me elsewhere. These tools and objects exhibit an authenticity that would otherwise be impossible to achieve without their construction.

Images



Image 1

Feather Duster Rotisserie Candelabra

Brass, copper, feathers

36" x 30" x 12"

2025



Image 2

Exploded Compact

Brass, copper, wood, brush fibers, glass, jewelry armoire, various make

up

52"x 18" x 12"

2025



Image 3

Feather Duster Rotisserie Candelabra (detail)

Brass, copper, feathers

36" x 30" x 12"

2025



Image 4

Military Decoration

Brass, nickel, steel, brush fibers, make up powders, shredded military patch

Variable Dimensions

2024



Image 5

Military Decoration (detail)

Brass, nickel, steel, brush fibers, make up powders, shredded military
patch

Variable Dimensions

2024



Image 6

Military Decoration (detail)

Brass, nickel, steel, brush fibers, make up powders, shredded military
patch

Variable Dimensions

2024



Image 7

Military Decoration (installation view)

Installed as part of *an exit between two places*

Brass, nickel, steel, brush fibers, make up powders, shredded military
patch

Variable Dimensions

2024



Image 8

Installation as part of *an exit between two places*

Works Cited

- Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Duke University Press, 2006.
- Beauvoir, Simone de, 1908-1986. *The Second Sex*. London :Jonathan Cape, 2009.
- Blitz, Mark. "Understanding Heidegger on Technology." *The New Atlantis*, Winter 2014, No. 41.
- Brown, Bill. "Thing Theory." *Critical Inquiry*, Autumn, 2001, Vol. 28. No. 1
- Bruno, Giuliana, and Vidler, Anthony. *Public Intimacy: Architecture and the Visual Arts*. MIT Press, 2007. 163-186.
- Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" in *Theatre Journal*, Dec., 1988, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Dec., 1988). The Johns Hopkins University Press. pp. 519-531.
- Heidegger, Martin. "The Question Concerning Technology," in Martin Heidegger: *Basic Writings*. Edited by David Farrell Krell. New York: Harper & Row, 1977. Pp. 287-317.
- Mazanti, Louise. "Super-Objects: CRAFT AS AN AESTHETIC POSITION." In *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*, edited by Maria Elena Buszek, 59–82. Duke University Press, 2011.
- Munoz, Jose. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999
- Owen, Paula. "Fabrication and Encounter: WHEN CONTENT IS A VERB." In *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*, edited by Maria Elena Buszek, 83–96. Duke University Press, 2011.
- Roberts, Lacey Jane. "Put Your Thing Down, Flip It, and Reverse It: REIMAGINING CRAFT IDENTITIES USING TACTICS OF QUEER THEORY." In *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*, edited by Maria Elena Buszek, 243–59. Duke University Press, 2011.

Sontag, Susan. "Notes on Camp." Picador. 1964.