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Somewhere, Somehow, Something is Growing:

An Artistic Exploration of Internal Organs, Pink Glitter, and Queer Sub-cultural Experience

An exegesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the postgraduate degree of

Master of Fine Art

at Massey University,
Wellington, New Zealand.

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Abstract

I have a sculpture-based practice concerned with understanding and upholding contemporary queer identities. Through the exploration of 'bodies', narratives and intimacies, my work deconstructs (reconstructs) these things and their relationships to the societally enforced hierarchies that privilege some bodies, identities, and communities and abject others.

This thesis is concerned with references and notions of present-day queer-ness. The social experiences of being alive and being LGBTQIA+ in the (economically, politically, and societally) unstable here-and-now. Through the making visible of my own personal narratives, connections, and experiences my aim is to critique homogenising technologies, such as; pervasive ideas of normalcy and otherness, and pay homage to ideas of queer-ness past. The art, protest, and politics that have had a significant impact on the creation (and development) of queer-ness as we understand it today.

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*You may forget but
Let me tell you this:
Someone in some future time
Will think of us*

-Sappho



Notes on 'Queer'

'Queer' is a word that holds many meanings. The term 'queer' itself can function as an adjective, verb, and noun; one can 'be' queer, one can 'do' queer, and one can 'have' queer. With roots in the Indo-European 'terkw' queer means to turn (*twist*) away from, turn (*twist*) towards. To slant, slope, or be skewed (to move through the world in this way) (Kosofsky-Sedgwick, Orjis, Sayers). But the word has become intrinsically linked to non-normativity in regard to sexual orientations and gender identification. Originally 'queer' was used as, at best a sexual signifier, but more commonly, an insult. A slur, directed specifically towards LGBTQIA+ peoples. Derogatory; hateful. However, in recent decades, thanks to the efforts of the gay rights and liberation movements of the '70s, '80s and '90s, LGBTQIA+ communities have worked towards gaining increasing levels of social acceptance, visibility, and basic human rights, and in the process reclaimed the word queer as our own.

As an adjective 'queer' describes non-normative gender and sexual identities that actively reject traditional cis-heteropatriarchal categories (Orjis). Queer, in this sense, is a fluid entity, subject to indeterminate change. As a verb 'queer' works to deconstruct these traditional categories, to reconfigure dominant social norms, to make strange, or odd, or different (Gelfand). Queer, in this sense, is a challenge. And as a noun 'queer', as Richard Orjis offers in his 2021 exegesis 'Below, Behind, Across', describes "entities that are reimaged through queer theory" (Orjis 9) (i.e. queer space, queer bodies, queer time). Queer, in this sense, acts as a reconfiguring of anachronistic normative terminology.

Throughout this text I use the term queer, in all its forms, for all of the affirmative significations noted above. For the meanings of resistance, fluidity and provocation that queer embodies. Queer is my own preferred personal identifier, and while I am aware of, and acknowledge the fact that the term queer is still a painful reminder of suppression and hatred for those who were a part of its past and those who remember its origin (Orjis), this term has become crucial to both my personal, and political identities, and, in turn, my art practice as a whole.

on Queer Art and Being a 'Queer' Artist

I have spent my time here at Massey constructing a queer sculptural practice. I intentionally use the word 'constructing' because this is still very much a developing process. It is fluid, and undulating, and something I am not sure will ever truly resolve itself, but resolution was never my intention. I find that I am comfortable in this messy, unrestricted (*queer*) space of experimentation. A space defined by both failure *and* success, along with whatever it is exactly that comes in between the two.

As an artist operating within the realm of queer visual culture (i.e.: making queer works of art) I often question what exactly it means to do this. 'Queer' is such a multifaceted, adaptable concept that the question then becomes: what exactly *is* queer art? How do we define it? How can we recognise it? It is not enough to simply say that queer art is the product of queer artists, that a queer identification is all it takes to enter this category – even though it is often considered to be the minimum requirement.

Within my practice, I have been attempting to interrogate my position within this discourse and how it has influenced the works I make. I aim to make objects that relate to my own queer-ness (queer experiences/the queer world/etc). But my works do not often rely on overt employments of queer aesthetics or modes of identification in order to express queer themes and/or thinking. Instead, I prefer to draw attention to a potentially more subtle mode of queer-ing, things that may not read as queer at first contact but aren't not queer either; things not quite right, not quite normal. Not quite the expected order.

As a feminine-presenting queer woman (femme) my social presentation does not often offer the expected subcultural signifiers of queer-ness, i.e. the perpetuated stereotypes that structure how the hegemonic system associates with, and understands queer-ness and queer people. In this sense, my works act as reflections of myself. But does that alone make my practice queer? Does my work reach the individuals I am trying to connect with? Does it do them justice?

On one hand, I can understand the rhetoric of *queer artist = queer art* as much as I feel it is a gross oversimplification of queer visual culture and the discourses surrounding it. I am unable to separate myself, or, by virtue, the art I make, from my identity as a queer woman. As I am unable to remove these things from myself it makes sense to me that they would influence my creation process (Tilley). But, conversely, to believe my work is queer simply because I - the artist, am queer, is reductive. My art is, and has always been, a way to explore (interrogate/deconstruct) the world as I have lived it, and that world is filtered through several different systems; through my queer-ness, through my cis-gender female-ness, through my

immigrant-ness, through my Pākehā-ness. I don't wish to be pigeonholed into the box of 'queer artist' when in reality it is the other way around; I am an artist who also identifies as queer. And while my queer-ness has proven to be a significant factor in my social experience so far, it only makes up a portion of who I am, and what I stand for.

Within this text I want to position queer art practices as those privileging the works of queer artists and queer-ly themed art (Orjis). Such as that of the work of Grant Lingard, an artist who was formative to the Aotearoa art scene at a moment in time when identity politics were transforming how the New Zealand art world operated (Boniface). His works explore a gay-male relationship to ideas of masculinity, desire, and identity (the inclusion and exclusion of this). By transforming intimate and/or ordinary objects into reimagined spaces of consideration, through the disruption of the accepted order of things, he reconfigures the stabilizing features of straightness (its traditional imagery). He points towards that which is unresolved, a direction to 'take notice.' To look - look and take part in the conversation.



Lingard, Grant. *Mummy's Boy*, 1993, White enamel-coated laundry drying racks, sheets, pillowcase and towels, Christchurch Art Gallery Collection.



Lingard, Grant. *Swan Song*, 1995-1996, White enamel-coated laundry drying racks, sheets, pillowcase and towels, Christchurch Art Gallery Collection.

In a society that has predominantly been curated by/for straight, white, cis-gendered, able-bodied people. Our queer being-in-the-world is constantly politicized. And growing up queer also means growing up a strange, uncomfortable, difficult-to-understand, thing in a world not made for us (Butler, Slyka). We are flooded, daily, with images and representations of domestic cis-heterosexuality. Heteronormative families, heteronormative friendships, heteronormative intimacies. We learn the nature of these constructions from birth; from conception. Our lives take on the shapes of these forms, this lineage. As Sarah Ahmed suggests in her book *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Other's*: "heterosexuality is not then *simply* an orientation towards others, it is something we are orientated around" (Ahmed 90-91). A strange inheritance, one the queer-ness inherently refuses. But if cis-heterosexuality is not *simply* an orientation, then queerness is *more* than sexuality. It is a way of living, a way of being in the world (Foucault). Or else queerness, Sarah Ahmed argues, "involves a personal commitment to living in an oblique world, or in a world that has an oblique angle in relation to that which is given" (Ahmed 161).

In this way queerness is a politic, a position, a lens through which to see the world. A mode of being, of doing. A way to challenge dominant systems, to champion the other. Queerness is a strategy (a methodology). Throughout this exegeses a distinction will be made between queer-ness, as it relates to individuals, and identities, and queerness, as it relates to politic and methodology, through the use (and lack-there-of) of hyphenation.

My own queer art practice acts as an attempt at repositioning importance. A refocusing of the lens in a way that prioritises queer positions and queer lives. A reorganisation of ideas of dominance and normativity through the employment of odd bodies, disobedient organs, camp interjections, personal narratives, and taking-place. As ways to challenge; critique – *queer* the capitalist, cis-heteropatriarchal structures that dictate the ways our society functions (and doesn't function) on a day to day basis.

My artmaking is an exercise in speculation. I am just one person, in one tiny corner of the planet. I do not claim the role of spokespersonship, nor do I claim a complete understanding of LGBTQIA+ discourses, or the queer world. There is no overarching way to speak to, or for, queer experiences. The experiences and understandings of an individual could never hope to encompass the experiences and understandings of an entire community and it would be remiss of me not to mention the power dynamics that still work to structure queer lives and my position within this. I am a Pākehā woman, a first-generation immigrant, able-bodied, cis-gender, and have had the relative luck of being born to financially stable parents, meaning that even within this minority community I inhabit an inherent position of privilege. Which prompts the following questions (among others):

- How does my privilege impact my practice?
- What work needs to be done?
- What facets can be explored with/about/against privilege?



Galvin, Nicole. *To Mama, With Love*, 2022, Mixed Fabrics, Stuffing, Plaster, Plastic Eyes.

To Mama, With Love was made in mid-2022. It is a collection of soft organs; intestine pillows, made from velvet and faux satin. The sculptural parts are based on the biomorphic forms of large and small intestines. Organs, the parts of the body we all share. The parts of us that keep us alive (comforting in that sense) but made huge, transmuted - engorged, then turned back into something softer. These figures are laid out on the floor of one of the test spaces at Massey, similar to something you might find at a slumber party. Come closer, sink in, and let yourself be supported by misbehaving flesh.

Intestines constantly move. That's the point of them, that's how they function. A friend of mine is studying to become a surgeon and she mentioned one day that in surgery, when they take your intestines out of you (they're very big, they get in the way) they have to hang them up on special hooks around the surgical theatre. They wiggle too much otherwise, and they have to be controlled somehow. Or else they might just wiggle right off the table and onto the floor, and, I imagine, out the door, and into the hallway, and into the world.

As a teenager, I was obsessed with slumber parties (and discos). With playing manicurist, getting dressed up, watching shitty heteronormative rom-coms, eating far too much sugar, and talking to strangers on the internet. My friends and I used to roll out mattresses on the floor in the lounge of my mother's old house and sleep in a puppy-pile of blankets, pillows, and too-many-limbs. At this age, I was becoming aware, somewhere deep down, that I was gay, but I was doing everything in my power to deny it.

To Mama, With Love is a re-visiting of my closet. An exploration of queer approaches to girlhood and femininity. It examines being fifteen, and what it means to develop into adulthood as a cis-gender, queer, young woman.

I knew I was gay at 15. It had always been there, but I did not know what to call it, nor what form it might take, until then.

But wearing a catholic schoolgirl uniform and a golden crucifix I looked at myself in the mirror of the school bathroom and saw her for the first time.

Her;

me...

'Letters to my Friends, Family, and People I hope never to speak to again'

Personal Writing.

2019

I have always been what is traditionally described as 'girly' but my relationship with that idea has been tumultuous. For a long time I believed femininity was the antithesis of queer-ness, that being one rejected the other by default. After I came out at 18 I did all of the stereotypical transitioning-into-lesbianism things. I cut my hair short, refused to wear make-up, brought all my clothes in the men's section, wore my keys on a clip attached to my belt, etc. etc. this was - in my understanding, what being queer meant. These were the things I felt the need to perform, according to my received understanding of cultural coding, in order to be understood as queer, and to be accepted as such.

The privileging of 'masculine' qualities in the construction of queer female identities has a long history and is deeply connected to feminist liberation movements. In the process of critiquing the subordination of femininity in a male-dominated power structure, femininity (in all its forms) became synonymous with the oppressor; with male expectations of access and patriarchal rules (Hoskin). With giving up, or giving in.

The demarcation of femininity within queer spaces creates monolithic understandings of queer and lesbian sexualities. It does not uphold or reflect the plurality of these identities, and it renders invisible the existence of those who deviate from the accepted model (Maltry, Tucker). The femme identity is only one such example of this.

Originally 'femme' was understood to mean a feminine-presenting cis-gender lesbian. The direct counterpoint to the butch lesbian (Hoskin). But contemporarily, femme identities encompass the full spectrum of gender and sexual identifications. Rhea Hoskin unpacks this further in the essay 'Femme Theory: Refocusing the Intersectional Lens':

Femme is a form of divergent femininity that strays from the monolithic and patriarchally sanctioned femininity. Femme follows the

same logic and application as queer in that both queer and femme are deviations from the celebrated norm. Consequently, both queer and femme provide critiques of normalcy and compulsory identities. Neither queer nor femme is reducible to singular applications: both can be used as nouns, adjectives, identities, embodiments, expressions, political invocations, or as a theoretical framework... There are many ways the invocation of femme identity may veer from the feminine cisgender lesbian model: sassy queer men; unapologetically sexual straight women; trans women; crip bodied femmes who refuse to be desexualized or degendered; and femmes of colour who refuse to approximate white beauty norms, to name a few... Ergo, femme identity (and femmephobia) is applicable to diversely positioned bodies and describes a range of experiences across various intersections of difference. (Hoskin 99).

It took me a long time to deconstruct my own internalized social coding surrounding femininity. To remake myself in my own image, to become truly comfortable in what I present to the world. I have claimed my femme-ness. Chosen it. It is something I now own.

To be queer and femme acts as a constant disruptive force. Judith Butler, in the book *Gender Trouble*, describes a “casual and structural link” (Butler XIII), maintaining the fact that “sexual practice has the power to destabilize gender” (Butler XI) through the process in which gender and sexuality construct and affirm each other (Maltry, Tucker). Femme-ness, therefore, is an entirely separate construct to ‘womanhood’ and rather, can be understood as: “a body signifying queer acts from a queer space” (Maltry, Tucker 95). In passing unnoticed, unconsidered - misunderstood through the fabric of the social femme-queerness acts in perpetual subversion of cis-heterosexist sexual and gender norms (Jones, Harris)

To Mama, With Love, then, was an attempt at exploring ‘femininity’ and femme-ness. In the creation of this work, I aimed to privilege those things that have historically and stereotypically been linked to ‘womanhood’ and ideas of ‘the feminine’. An ironic embracing of sewing and softness, things that I have not often incorporated into my practice, but I am relatively happy with the results. Should I make this work again, I would choose to make it much bigger, to take up more space. Fill the room like the pillow-forts we built in front of the television in my Mama’s old house. To reconstruct the sacred space of the teenage sleepover; and truly they were sacred spaces - the very beginning of our intimate lives. Although I do enjoy the eeriness of them portrayed this way as well, clustered together in the cold, Massey test space. Pillows without bodies; strange figures – the very uncanniness of this. *To Mama, With Love* is very much an experimentation in process, a re-working of youth, queer-ness, and self-understanding. A reimagining of being fifteen, only this time no one is hiding.



Galvin, Nicole. *To Mama, With Love*, 2022, Mixed Fabrics, Stuffing, Plaster, Plastic Eyes.

Inheritance/Legacy

I would like to unpack briefly what it means to be 'contemporarily queer', to be queer in the here-and-now of this 2022 scenario. To take into consideration what it means to be post-AIDs queer in the setting of this coronavirus reality. To be queer post-law reform and marriage equality legalisation is, to put it simply, an interesting phenomenon. We are living at an inflection point of queer history. A time and space where adversity and opportunity are equal in measure (Shapiro, Lim, Yu). The world is constantly changing, and while we reach out toward things we can't yet see with both hands, I am incredibly aware of my place in the world, of my role in its history.

I often look back over time to imagine queer-ness past, what it might have been like to have been alive ten, twenty, thirty, fifty years ago in queer spaces. I am consumed with the desire to know people I will never meet, to understand how they lived, and why. What made them angry? What might it have been like? Who might I have been then? I find that I am greatly inspired by the artists and activists who lived and worked during the AIDs-era. Much of today's 'contemporary queer-ness' can be attributed to the work of those who examined the roles of art as direct political action during the '70s, '80s and '90s: Keith Haring, Grant Lingard, Fiona Clarke, David Wojnarowicz, Carrol Hepper, Linn Underhill, Catherine Opie, and their uncovering (critiquing) of the relationship between homophobia, social stigma, and queer mortality (Pillow).

We are still living, today, with the relics of these past societies. Still working to deconstruct the remnants of hatred and stigma that were, and are, so prevalent.

Queer history is something that exists in fragments; in over-priced clubs, closed-down bars, and old cruising spots. It is carried in the bodies of dead queers and the minds of alive ones. Our queer histories are not linear, they can't be – queer people are not guaranteed queer young and queer young are not often born to queer parents. There is no passing down of knowledge and lineage from parent to child, parent to child, over and over again until the end of a line. Our ways of intergenerational knowledge are more complex than that. Our knowledges, our secret, subverted histories must be uncovered from behind the shroud of the normalizing rhetoric of straight culture. A rhetoric that has, for a very long time, excluded, erased, and restricted LGBTQIA+ experiences and understandings (McDonald). But we queers today are living, breathing, legacies of all those who came before us. Of every queer person who lived, loved, fought, and made it possible for me (for us) to exist, here, the way I (we) do; with relative safety, acceptance and the basic civil rights I (we) enjoy as residents of 21st century Aotearoa. We queers today are living at the start of a future queer history, and with that comes a

responsibility to those who next take up this mantle of resistance; of activism (*of queerness*). The actions happening here and now will inform the progression of queer-ness to come. After centuries of oppression, repression, and violent opposition I would argue we have moved into an in-between stage of social change. In between moments; like the blank page that starts off a whole new chapter.

But still there is so much to fight for.

And while being contemporarily queer has its privileges it is impossible to ignore how our societies are taking a turn towards the conservative. Hard-won human and civil rights are coming under threat. The United States' recent overturning of the Roe-vs-Wade decision is one such example of this. Homophobia, sexism, racism, ableism, etc. are built deep into the structure of our society.

And there is still so much work to be done...

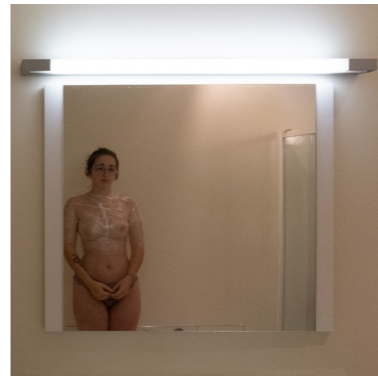
I am reminded now of a statement by Martin Zebraki and Ryan Lietner, in their text 'Queer Monuments.' They ask: "how can I, as a queer, carry on and continue the work of my chosen family heritage?" (Zebraki, Lietner 5) and I suppose, with all that I am working towards in my art practice, this question is the one I am most trying to answer. Having a queer art practice affords me the privilege of a platform, of a space in which I can create room for engagement with these ideas, to put into the world my own experiences/worldviews/understandings for others to access. So that they might see these and see queer ways of living as viable, as valid (as understandable). So that I might contribute, in any way I can, to the creation and dissemination of queer representations through creative means. To put forth myself and maybe bring another comfort, to add another voice, another lived experience to this collective conversation (Orjis).

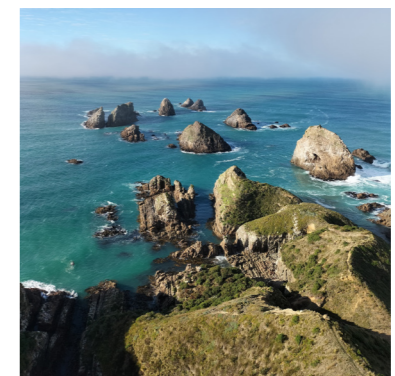
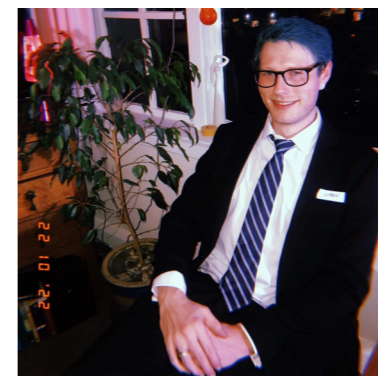
The more we, as a collective society (both nationally and globally) understand about queer cultures and queer peoples, the more conversations and discourses we are involved in, the less room we give to ignorance and, potentially, the closer we come to creating a diverse and understanding world.

I Used to Be 23 (Por Meus Amigos, Te Amo xx)

~ A Photo Series ~







I used to be 23 (Por Meus Amigos, Te Amo xx) is a photo series in two parts. I recently came across a box full of film from six years ago that I never got around to developing. It had been so long that I couldn't remember what they contained, and I thought, after all this time, it might be fun to get them developed.

This was a time capsule I had never intended to make. I had taken photos of the ocean, of my old room at my dad's house, of interesting doorways, of the flat I was living in at the time, of my friends (some of whom I haven't spoken to in years, some of whom are still my most important people). There were photos of a girl I had dated once, of a friend's car that is now my car, of a hospital stay, of my favourite candy, of the life I had lived once upon a time. A temporal moment long since passed, but recorded here.

The world ends, or it doesn't.

Time perseveres. The clock ticks over once more.

The sun rises

Like it has every day that there has been a sun to rise.

Because ours is only one planet of 9 in this solar system,
Of God knows how many planets in this galaxy,
Or this universe,
And we were never at the center of anything my dear
How ignorant it was of us to think otherwise.*

We were just a moment in time you and I

*A minute, swallowed up by all the minutes that have been,
All the minutes that ever will be.*

*But what a nice moment it was,
To have tricked us into thinking that it might last forever.*

**viva la Pluto*

'Infinity is Just a State of Mind'

Personal Writing

2020

The discovery of these images initiated a desire to construct archives of captured moments, and drew me towards an exploration of domestic queer lives. With this in mind I began a continuation of this accidental archive. I took photos of my friends, of my family, of the ocean, of the car



Galvin, Nicole. *I Used to be 23 (Por Meus Amigos te Amo)*, 2017-2022.

that is now mine but once wasn't, of the flat I live in currently (a definite upgrade from the leaky, windowless Constable Street apartment that came before), of my art, of our cat Texas (A.K.A Texas-Chainsaw-Massacre) whom we adopted from a shelter for elderly cats and has since passed. This is my way of preserving the things that I refuse to let be lost to time, or memory, or distance. These people, this place we have made for ourselves here in Pōneke, Aotearoa. A way to remember them (us) as we are now, in this moment. I know that we will only ever be the way we are now once, and so it feels necessary to record this moment in time and space. To keep it for a future us. To remember who we were, and how we existed, before we all take on new forms and become something entirely new.

I used to be 23 (Por Meus Amigos, Te Amo xx) is a documentation of everyday moments, mundane routines, all the things that make life bearable (enjoyable), all the things that make life sustainable (Beck). A constantly mutating process of remembrance, of taking place (Lee). A collection of tiny moments that tell of a life being lived. The images from both eras are combined non-linearly; I am not so much interested in creating a chronological account of time passing (although I am interested in a noticing of it), nor a documentation of individual experiences. I am interested in the relationships at play. In the specific capturing of space, time, and significance within each frame. Each moment is organized by feel, and by emotional resonance, by the way each image speaks to the one directly before and after it.

The pictures from 2017/18 were taken on a second-hand Nikon film camera I found in an op-shop during the first year of my undergraduate studies. But film is expensive, and somehow I had more disposable income as a first-year Uni student than I do at 24, so the photos from the continuation of this project are taken on whatever image-taking device I could get my hands on at the time. In this sense there is a distinct visual difference between past and present, the old and the new. Like memories that lose clarity over time, it shows that time has passed. Is passing...

I have long been inspired by the work of Fiona Clark. By her treatment of the individuals she photographs, the relationships she builds this way. Within her works she structures space for the audience to connect with these individuals and this community (Clark). Her works explore queer cultures in New Zealand at a point in time when queer-ness was far less socially acceptable than it is today, they are remnants of something, now passed, but still spectacularly important. These photos act as rememberings of the NZ AIDs epidemic, Kiwi drag culture, and queer celebrations. Recording the 'coming-out' of Aotearoa's queer community into the world of the mainstream. An active archive tied to people and place, a publicly accessible private history, reminders of the transformative properties of time. Fiona Clark's work allows us (me) to access and connect with this past she is presenting to us, and it is a testimony to the indomitable nature of the queer spirit, even in times of great intolerance.



Clark, Fiona. Go Girl, 1970, Photograph.

There is power in archival processes, especially for minority communities. Archives become our connections to history. To people, place, and event. Within the cis-heteropatriarchal social structure archives have historically been an institution that controls how we access the past. They affect what we remember and how, and from within such institutions minority voices have all too often been repressed. Queer archives allow queer knowledges to become legible, consultable, and disseminated. They allow us to see versions of ourselves as real, as lived (as livable).

The photographs in *I used to be 23 (Por Meus Amigos, Te Amo xx)* are representations of my own queer way of living, a private language between friends, our own shiny microcosm of culture and space; of queer friendships, romances, and prominence. It is important to me that these are documented, not just so I might keep them as reminders for myself, but because it allows me to then give them to others. To maybe offer them comfort, visibility – connection.

On Love and Guerrilla Warfare

My practice is driven by a desire for connection in all things. Connections with people, with place, with this strange world we inhabit. My works develop from a process of writings, sketches, photographs, chemical reactions, 11 pm long-distance phone calls, dialogue between myself and my supervisors, my friends, strangers I meet in passing and never cross paths with again. Without these things, I am unable to make. I often work in the presence of others; whether that be in the studio, with friends, or sitting on the floor of my lounge at home, watching television with my flatmates; Amy, Dylan, and Emma. I have a desire, always, to be with others, to be understood by others. To be part of something in this way.

My house is filled with old artworks - sculptural interjections into our everyday living. I enjoy having them live their lives alongside my own, the space they make, the rituals that come from our cohabitation, and if nothing else they are pretty effective conversation starters at parties.

Into the ceiling of my dining room I have mounted one of the pieces from my 2021 series 'Sweetmeats'. In the time that it has lived here this work has affectionately been named 'The Wishing Tumour' by Amy which is a way of saying that should you stand under it at 11:11 (am or pm) and make a wish it will come to be true. Somehow the presence of the tumour puts one in direct conversation with the universe and is a much more legitimate version of the tried and not-true '11:11 make a wish'. I do not remember who decided on the work's new role (I'm pretty sure this was Amy as well) but none of us have questioned its appointed function, this is simply how we live now.



The Wishing Tumour, Personal image, 2022

I am greatly inspired by the people I love; the relationships I have with them, the comfort they bring me. They are my queer community, found family, and microcosmic social organism. They are artists, designers, writers, tradies, hospos, superstars, government relations consultants, and professional runaways and they have structured the world I inhabit. They are stoners, homebodies, party animals, anti-social socialites and good ole' fashioned ratbags; queers and allies alike, and I am sure, between the lot of us, we have the ability to change the world. The work I make is made for them (of them, by them) in all the ways that it is also for me (of me, by me).

Today my car broke down, in the underground parking lot of Countdown, Newtown. It was my fault. I'd been sitting on 'E' light for a solid four days but hadn't bothered stopping to fill her up, so I probably deserved it. It would have been easy enough to walk down to the petrol station and buy a can of gas, but it was late, and threatening to rain, and I pay a small fortune for roadside assistance, so I figured didn't mind listening to the mechanic's lecture about running my car dry so long as I didn't have to be the one to fix the problem. The wait was 45 minutes minimum, so I folded down the back seats of my tiny, red 2011 Honda Jazz, laid down in the boot, and called you. It had been a while since I had called. Sometimes we're good at this keeping-in-touch thing, sometimes less so; it's either phone calls four times a day or radio silence but it works for us, and you always answer the phone. You might be the only person in the world I give a shit about enough to do long-distance for, I hope you know that. I hope you know how important you are to me. You answer, like always, and your speaker is fucked so every time I talk I can hear the tinny echo of my own voice as it comes out of your phone. There's a few seconds of delay and the sound of it is freaking me out.

Don't you think it's funny that humans have figured out a way to send our voices all the way up to a satellite in outer-space and then all the way back down again several times a second just so we can feel less alone while also being alone?

I told you I killed Rosa (the car) and you laughed, understandable, but not too hard, also understandable - you've done the same thing yourself once or twice. I like the back of the car. It's cosy and small, like a womb made from plastic and sheet metal and discarded clothes and empty cans of red bull. I can't remember what we talked about, probably the same old shit:

“How’s life?”

“Good. How’s Uni?”

“Fine.”

Wellington feels weird without you in it... It’s weird not having a 24/7, ride-or-die, Shaggy and Scooby style sidekick (in this metaphor you’re Shaggy and I’m Scooby (obviously)) but I think that means this is good for us, co-dependency isn’t cute. It’s still easy to talk to you, it always has been and I don’t know why I was worried that would change when you left but it didn’t, we’re better than that.

It took the mechanic an hour and seventeen minutes to arrive. I know this because that’s the exact length of time my phone said we spoke for, and I don’t know why I’m writing this anymore other than to say: I miss you, I hope you’re doing okay, and I’ll talk to you again soon xx.

‘Letters to my Friends, Family, and People I hope never to speak to again’

Personal work by Author

2021

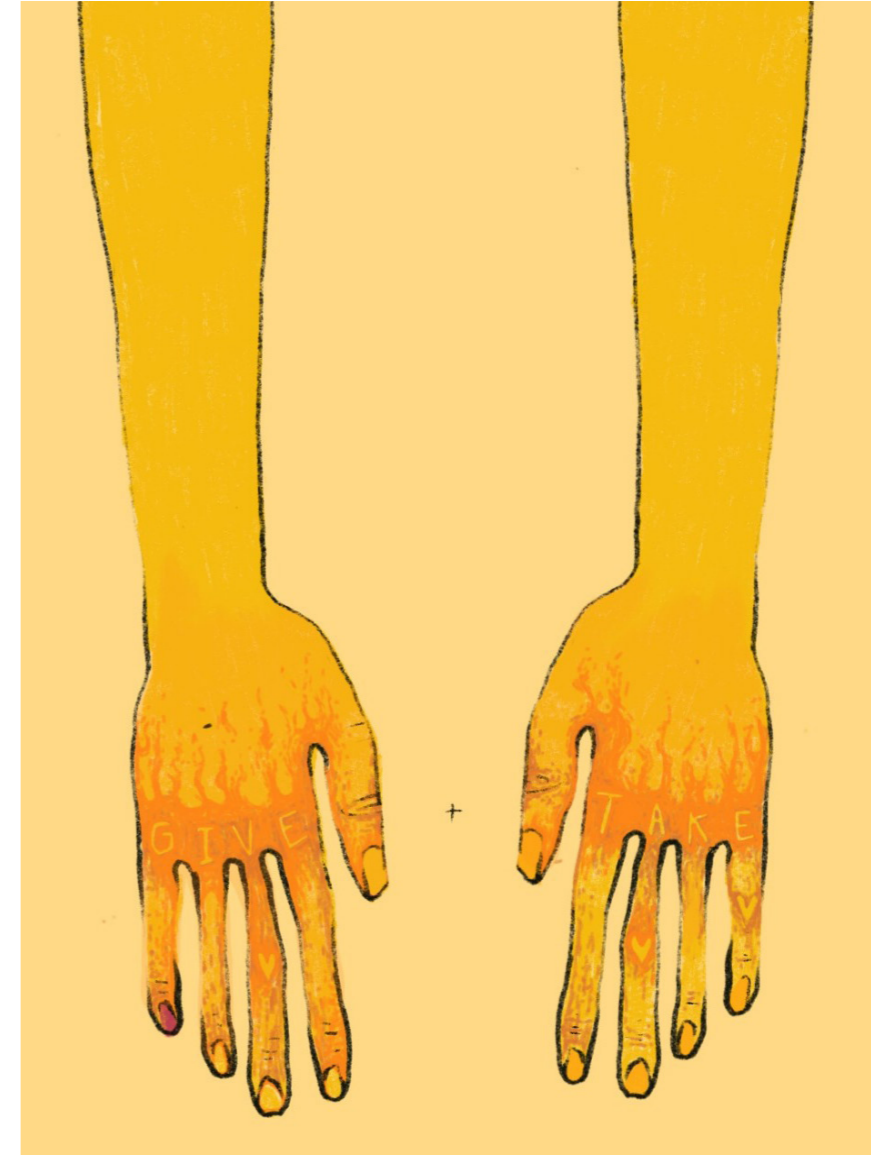


Vanlife, Personal image, 2021

Pictured above is Nina Ross. We sat next to each other in the first semester studio class of the first year of our undergraduate degree and we have been making art next to each other ever since. She is also an artist, and a writer, and for the last six years she has been a great sounding board, pseudo-production manager, and the person who unwillingly coats my naked body with substances in the name of art-making. Our practices have developed alongside each other’s as we grew, shifted, and changed as artists and people. The works I make have been heavily influenced by her (her’s). She has not lived in Wellington for nearly two years and still, it is not uncommon for us to make the same things without realizing.



Galvin, Nicole. *Poems About Love and Other Stupid Things*, 2022, plaster, tinfoil



Ross, Nina. *Give_And_Take*, 2022, Digital Drawing



Galvin, Nicole. *Venus [up]Rising*, 2022, paintball vest, toy gun, helmet, pink glitter

Venus [up]Rising is my most recent 2022 work. It is so recently made, and really, still in the process of finalization that it is difficult to discuss it beyond its conceptualizations, but I will unpack briefly, my thinking around this piece.

Venus [up]Rising is made from a collection of military-esque objects gifted to me by a friend of a friend. The vest and the handgun came from an old set of paintball equipment, and the helmet was originally part of an old army costume. They are toys, marketed towards men and boys - tools to play war. With pockets for extra ammunition, padding to protect against attack. I coated these objects with several layers of pink glitter, rendering any camouflage qualities useless.

This work is inspired, predominantly, by a list Nina and I wrote earlier this year shortly after the end of her three-year relationship. One weekday morning, over the phone, we began compiling a very specific set of requirements for any future engagements. It was titled 'the codependency list' and was an attempt at stopping the repetition of some of our more 'tried-and-true' romantic mistakes. These rules aren't serious in their intention, more of a how-not-to guide for romantic entanglements than concrete directives; a methodology, if you will.

The rules-for-engagements are as follows:

1. No more being so awesome everyone falls in love with you
2. Don't accidentally ruin people's lives
3. No more falling in love
4. No more manic-pixie-dream-girl
5. No more introducing them as the love of your life
6. No more being friends
7. No more being the most stable person
(always be the hot mess)
8. Age-appropriate partners only.

It is probably important to note that between the two of us we have broken almost every one of these rules since making them, but the exercise had me thinking about love and its erratic qualities. How it can exist in so many different ways, the strangeness of our societal (heteronormative-ized) obsession with romance that creates distinct power hierarchies within a concept as abundant and all-encompassing as the idea of love. Love, as a thing/idea/concept has always been interwoven with institutions of normality (Halperin).

Venus [up]Rising is an attempt at a queer reclamation (or commentary), a repositioning of love, and intimacy, in all their forms. As David Halperin explains in his text 'Queer Love': "The installation of romantic love as the fundamental attachment of humans has been central to the normalization

of heterosexuality and femininity... it has become a way of expressing desires for normal life" (Halperin 389). The privileging of love-as-romantic has traditionally existed at the centre of 'normal' life. Of concepts like; marriage, reproduction, the nuclear family, etc. These societal infatuations with sexual/romantic associations devalue other forms of intimate relationships that might exist to community, and place (Orjis).

*I had a dream the other night,
About a wolf*

*That chased me down and tore me to pieces
While I clawed at the ground and begged it to stop.*

*I woke up sobbing and it woke you up too.
You said that dreams are prophetic,
That dreaming of wolves is a sign of strength, or freedom, or power.
I think you meant for that to be comforting,
It wasn't.*

You roll over after that and sleep like the dead.

*It's fucking infuriating but I leave you be
And lay awake the rest of the night
Thinking of long teeth dripping blood,
The rending of flesh,
And the damp, sour smell of animal.*

*You see, I wasn't me,
In the dream,
I was the wolf,
Devouring myself.
The taste of metal spilling down my throat.*

Soft meat warm and full in my stomach.

*Bones from my own body cracking like toothpicks under strong teeth and
jaw.*

*It was not strong
Or freeing
Or powerful.*

*It was hunger, like a gnawing pit,
Aching inside of me.
Mangy and vicious,
desperate to survive.*

*Tell me again how I'm not like any of the girls you fucked before,
Because I don't need for you to love me.*

*'Letters to my Friends, Family, and People I hope never to speak to again'
Personal Writing
2019*

Structures such as marriage, reproduction, and the family are things queerness inherently refuses, and queer subcultures have learnt alternative modes of intimacy. To love queerly is an undermining action, as Damon Young proposes:

Queer love is a form of relational inventiveness that is neither detached from eros nor reducible to sexuality, a love that reorients the social without abandoning it, forges lines of solidarity and affective connection across difference, resists traditional hierarchies (or invests in them perversely) and inspires, perhaps an ethos of experimentation in art and in life. (Young 209)

This is not to say that all queer intimacies are rejections of love, but because of their resistance to the heteronormative-ized 'romance template', queer intimacies are often reduced to ideas of sex, sexuality, and sexual activity, and notions of queer domesticity and queer friendships are often overlooked in the conventional representations or descriptions of our existences. Foucault, in a translated interview from the French magazine 'Le Gai Pied' explained:

one of the concessions we make to others is not to present homosexuality as anything but a kind of immediate pleasure, of two young men meeting in the street, seducing each other with a look, grabbing each other's asses and getting each other off in a quarter of an hour. There you have a kind of neat image of homosexuality without any possibility of generating unease, and for two reasons: it responds to a reassuring canon of beauty, and it cancels out everything that can be troubling in affection, tenderness, friendship, fidelity,

camaraderie, and companionship, things that our rather sanitized society can't allow a place for without fearing the formation of new alliances and the tying together of unforeseen lines of force. I think that is what makes homosexuality "disturbing": the homosexual mode of life, much more than the sexual act itself. To imagine a sexual act that doesn't conform to law or nature is not what disturbs people. But that individuals are beginning to love each other – there's the problem. (Foucault 136-137)

The aim of this artwork is to explore intimacies beyond the hetero-romantic model. To re-claim and re-privilege those relationships this model lets down; friendship, intimacy, care - all these tender aspects, usually considered removed from queer forms of relationality, are enduring actions. Ones with the power to stabilize and construct non-heteronormative alliances (Dumortier). Love, as an emotion we perceive, is a part of our biological foundations, essential for cooperation and survival (Meserve). It is how the human species endures in all manner of conditions.

The title: *Venus [up]Rising* imagines a personal agency over these things, and explores the forms of intimacy and connection, the spaces and communities, and the care, that queer subcultures carve for themselves in (often) hostile territories.



Galvin, Nicole. *Venus [up]Rising*, 2022, paintball vest, pink glitter

Odd Bodies

*Have you ever cut yourself so badly it breaks the tension of your skin?
The tightness released, flesh spewing forth from the wound like air
rushing through a puncture in a vacuum. A liberation. Isn't it wild that
everything inside of us is nothing more impressive than a bunch of meat?*

Spilt
Personal Writing
2021

My practice often takes inspiration from the forms and functions of the human body; its structures and small components, its matter and processes. Having a human body is a strange phenomenon. Our bodies are the vehicles through which we experience the world - through which we experience ourselves. They are the barrier between us and everything else, padding from the world. But at the same time, our bodies are constructed by social interplays, relationships, and societal regulations (Saunders). Shaped by (and shaping) the environment surrounding them.

I am intrigued by ideas of human embodiment (I am painfully aware of my own). By the duality of the human condition; of the body and its host. We are remote control robots, made from biological components. Powered by organic supercomputers that manufacture thoughts, feelings, emotions, and personality out of electrical impulses and hormone-infused brain secretions. It is hard to tell if this is divine planning or some sort of evolutionary fluke.

Do you ever get the feeling you are trapped behind your own face? Encased in skin and sinew. Is it comfortable in there? If there was a way to separate your human body from its consciousness would you do it? Maybe you could upload yourself into a computer program like in that episode of 'Black Mirror' with the cute lesbians, or a data storage server, or a robotic body. Or do you think you would miss the feeling of your own matter? I think I would. I think I would miss the weight of my own bones, the feeling of skin pulled taut over muscle and fat, the tightness of it. The feeling of compression, of being pulled inwards into myself, like my own centre of gravity. Embodiment is the base condition of being-in-the-world. The requirement for every perception. Every thought, feeling, and action. The core of our every understanding. It is inescapable, but sometimes I wish it weren't (Wehrle).

As a person, who moves through a heteropatriarchal system in a lesbian body I spend a lot of time thinking about how my body exists in relation to the rest of the world. How it presents, and how it is perceived. Lesbianism, for all that it is completely separate to heteropatriarchal structures,

is unable to escape them. Sapphic attractions, women-loving-women relationships, and queer women are too often hypersexualized, fetishized, for the joy and consumption by/of straight men (Hammond). This narrative of women as consumable, of queer women as consumable, of people, in general, as consumable has real world and damaging consequences, and I feel the need to subvert this whenever possible. To create things, at times, that terrify, that seek to destabilize the core of the expected order of things. To become an uncontrollable body, and to be repulsive, and unapologetic in this effort (Ray, Martin).

*I hold my girlfriend's hand walking down Oriental Parade, it's a nice day.
A middle-aged man walks straight up to us and asked if we'll let him
watch us fuck.
He was stale smelling, pot-bellied, with gaps in his teeth,
The day is less nice now.
I tell him to get lost but he follows us most of the way home anyway.
It is summer, and I have just turned 19.*

Wellington Graphic
Personal Writing
2017

The employment of abjection and the grotesque are things that re-occur often within my practice, and they have been crucial in my exploration of normative technologies and their influences/impacts on queer bodies and queer beings-in-the-world. The role of abjection and the grotesque is to reject, disturb, and destabilize expected forms or conventions, as a means to provoke (challenge) established realities (Connelly). I am concerned with exploring these things, and how they work to construct, deconstruct, and re-construct the physical body and its materiality.

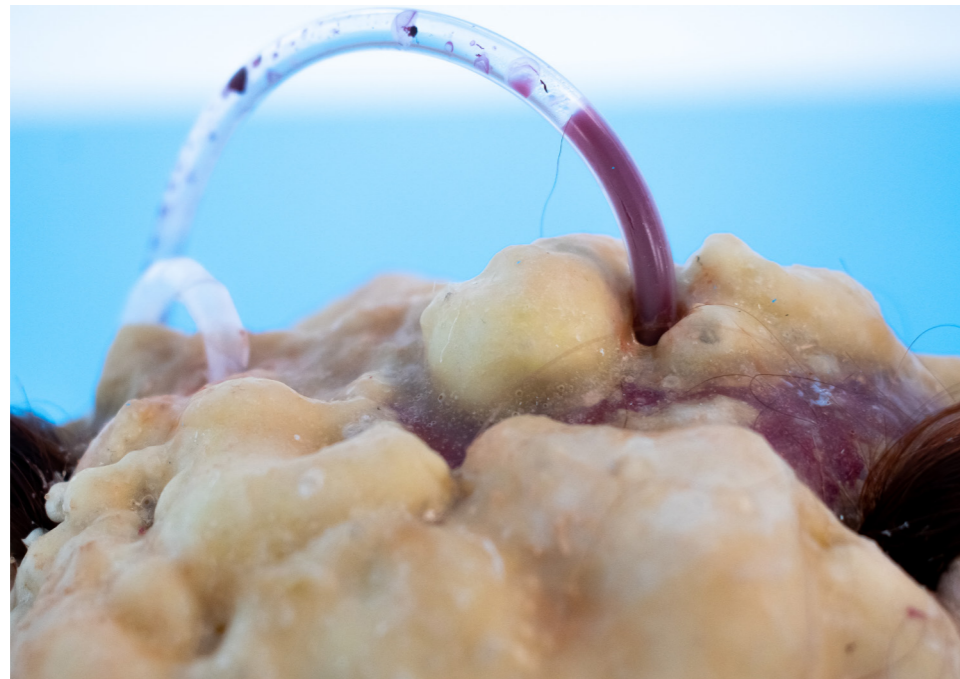
Michael Bakhtin describes the abject (grotesque/monstrous/*informe*) body as: "a body in the act of becoming... never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body" ([Bakhtin] Connelly 4).

Abjection and the grotesque are foundational to the preservation (continuation) of subjectivity and society (Arya). Fear of the other is integral to normative technologies of social control. Normativity and abjection work, in a sense, as inversions of each other; as included subject and excluded (rejected) other (Butler). Rina Arya explains this further in the text 'Abjection and Representation': "[those] individuals and groups in society who are on the fringes and are stigmatized because of their differences are not understood. They are seen to represent a threat, a fact

that legitimizes their exclusion from the social fabric. In their otherness they are regarded as abject” (Arya 7).

But, as a tool (through reclamation in art) abjection, the grotesque; monstrous and non-normative bodies, imagery, and themes work to transgress boundaries of normativity and otherness. To break open confines, to overflow; merge together, or undermine completely. These things break down the distinction between abject, grotesque, monstrous, *queer* bodies and their ‘normal’ inversions – ‘other’ bodies and their ‘regular’ counterparts. It is a reminder, in this way, of our similarities (Corner).

I can't help but wonder if maybe part of this continuing exploration (interrogation) of the human form is a reflection of my desire for distance from it; a desire to remove myself from my body (I don't like the way it speaks for me). Or else a desire for connection, a desire to get back inside myself (to make it mine again).



Galvin, Nicole. *As Intimidades (the intimacies)*, 2021, expanding foam, latex, human hair, teeth



Galvin, Nicole. *Big Boy*, 2021, expanding foam, latex, human hair, teeth



Galvin, Nicole. *Big Boy*, 2021, expanding foam, latex, human hair, teeth

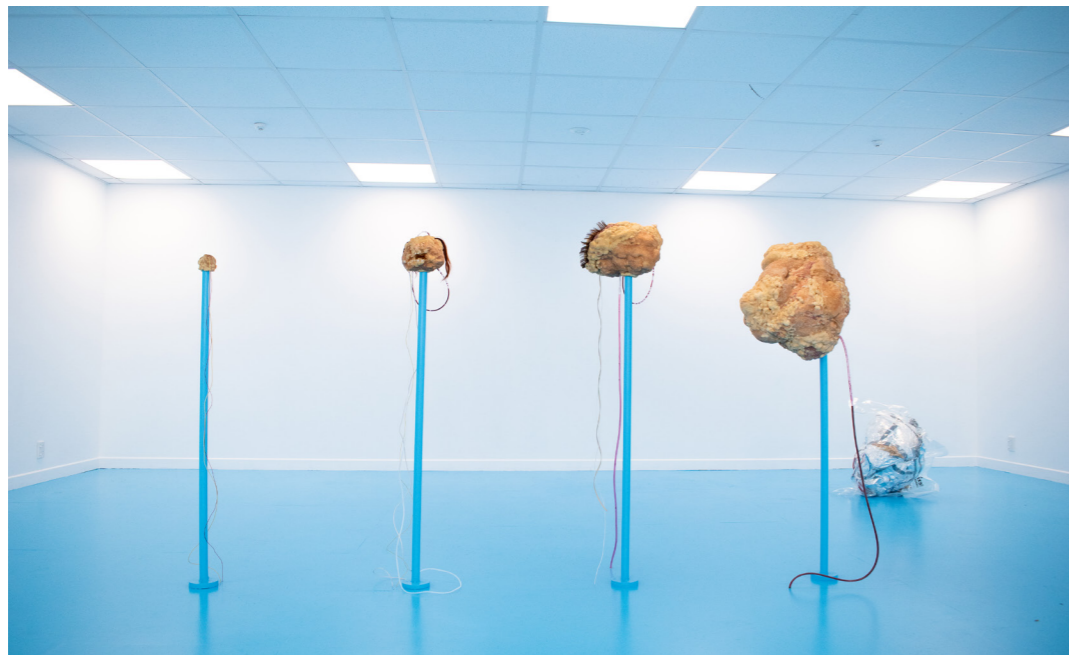
As Intimidades (the intimacies) was the last work I made in 2021. It is a collection of artificial, extravagant tumours made from latex, expanding foam, human hair, fake teeth, tinfoil, duct tape, and plastic tubing. The nature of expanding foam is uncontrollable, it grows with its own agency, forming its own shapes and combinations. The foam is naturally the colour of fatty tissue, a satisfying yellow-beige. I then coated these forms with several layers of latex, to act in the place of skin, an encasement - *an encasing*. Skin is the only human barrier between the interior and the exterior. A thin, permeable and porous membrane that holds within it every part of the person that we cannot see.

These imitation tumours are specifically based on the forms of the human teratoma. Teratomas are tumours caused by mutations in the germ cells of an individual (germ cells being the pluripotent cells that make up our reproductive components (ie. egg and sperm)). They contain all the necessary information to create any and all of our biological materials, the very beginning of human potential (Cinali, Rangan, Lehmann). These are the materials from which all humans were formed. Teratomas have historically been connected to sexual misbehaviour (Danjanov, Knowels, Solter). A manifestation of wrongness in the organs, physical symptoms of abstract aberrations. These types of tumours often contain arbitrary combinations of human materials (teeth, hair, bones, brain matter, eyes).

teratomas; monstrous objects, destabilize a body once normal (now not).

The installation pictured occurred in one of the test spaces at Massey. The room has always reminded me of clinical experiences. It has something to do with whatever the ceiling is made out of, and the fluorescent lightbulbs. It reminds me of going to the emergency room with problems that desperately needed fixing; burns, dislocations, allergic reactions. I painted the floor the most medical-seeming blue I could find - bright, harsh, glossy. Cold in the same way an exam room is, uncomfortable and clean. When I considered this install I couldn't stop thinking of these teratomas as things to be kept alive, things that, having been removed, were unable to survive through their own machinations, needing life-support.

In this series there are five counterfeit teratomas, ranging in scale from palm-sized to bigger-than-could-possibly-fit-inside-a-body. I named each one, for no other reason than because I wanted to; because I felt it gave them agency (because human elements require human treatments, because Frankenstein's monster was never given the dignity of his own personhood, and because what is a person really, beyond an elaborate collection of representation and recognizable features?). In order of smallest to largest their names are: Sweetpea, Louisa, Baby, Bigboy, and Homunculese.



Galvin, Nicole. *As Intimidades (the intimacies)*, 2021, expanding foam, latex, human hair, teeth

As Intimidades (the intimacies) was an attempt to deconstruct and understand (come to terms with) ideas of normativity (and difference). An exploration of how these things are applied to human forms, for which there is no outline. Even within identical twins exists physical differences, and bodies are far from normal. They are abject constructions in their own right; dense and fleshy, filled with all manner of liquids and meats, constantly negotiating the landscape of cultural ideology (Saunders). I am frustrated by the expectations and regulations placed upon us by ideas of 'decency' and 'propriety'. By these imagined constructions of control (Douglas). Advertisements, pop culture, dress codes, strangers with strong opinions, and-so-on tell us how our bodies should look, how they should act, in order to be acceptable (in order to be normal).

Normativity is a boundary that constrains us. I notice this boundary significantly because I am a woman. I notice it especially because I am a queer woman, and so these tumours; Sweetpea, Louisa, Baby, Bigboy, and Homunculese are my acts of rejection, representations of my own otherness on a biological scale. The human body – human potential, made grotesque, made other. Reminders of all that might lurk inside of us.

Somewhere, somehow, something is growing. Unseen, unnoticed, but growing all the same. inch by inch, meter by meter it grows, seeping into the spaces between, the cracks in joins, putting pressure on the system, splintering the foundations, filling them back in. Repairing them with new materials, with itself – (replacements).

Somewhere, somehow, something is becoming... so look carefully.

Clean Out the Open Wounds
Personal Writing
2022

Conclusion

Over the past two years I have spent time considering my positioning in the world that surrounds me, the roles I play in forming and unforming it, the way I - a twenty-four-year-old, self-identified queer woman exist and operate, within the world at large. How others, both like myself, and not, do the same. And I am struck by the nature of the world I am inheriting. The world we, all of us here (both queer and not) have inherited, and what it means to grow up under broken systems. To have come, now, into adulthood having watched those before us both decimate, and try to save, the world in which we are now (provisionally) coming of age.

In an era of societal migration toward the conservative these works, considerations, and discussions are attempts at unstructuring and restructuring the harmful and pervasive systems of oppression that impact the lives of individuals across the globe. A pointing at - making present, underrepresented queer histories and methodologies. A looking backwards, and a leaning forwards; to pay homage - to make better.

Let us reformat this world that was not made with us in mind.

It is also an effort to come to terms with this inherited world. A world where our day-to-day existence is structured by encounters with racism, sexism, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, etc. etc. To understand that while I, as an individual, have very little control over the current state of affairs, through connection, activism, and artmaking-as-social-critique, I am able to offer up my own voice, this practice-as-platform, to the collection of voices (queer and not) that raise against annihilating silence (Orjis). In the hopes that someday, somehow, the noise will be too great to ignore...

*“My Life had stood
- a Loaded Gun-”*

-Emily Dickinson

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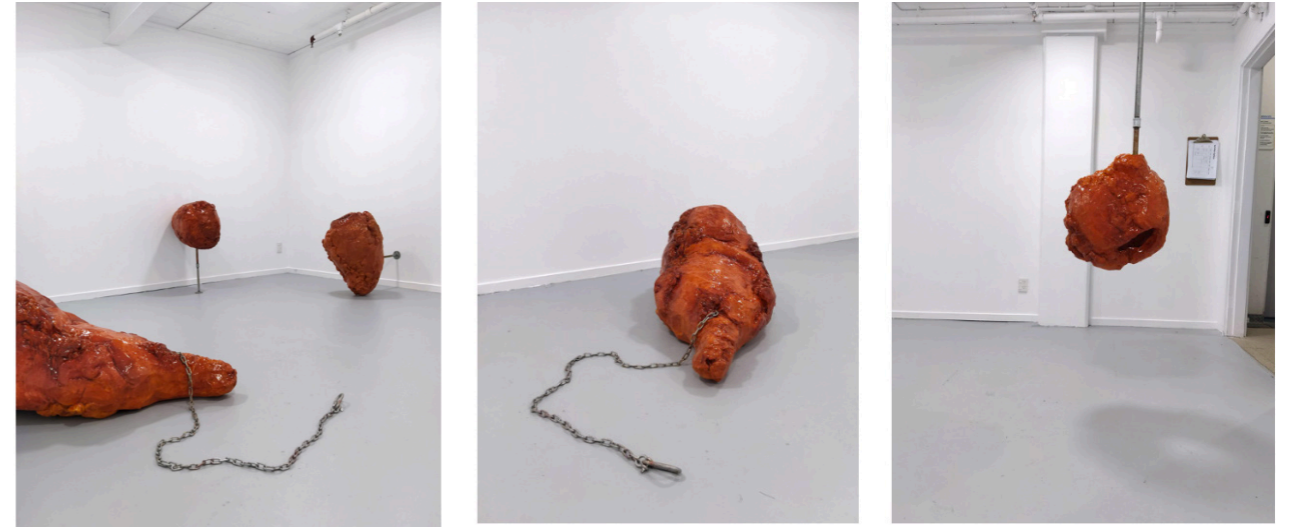
Appendix

Order of Works

Sweetmeats

2021

Expanding Foam, Resin, Chicken Wire, Chain, Steel Pipes



As Intimidades (the intimacies)

2021

Expanding Foam, Latex, Human Hair, Teeth



Poemsn About Love and Other Stupid Things

2022
Plaster



I Used to be 23 (Por Meus Amigos, Te Amo xx)

2017-2022
Photographs



To Mama, With Love

2022
Mixed Fabrics, Stuffing, Plaster, Plastic Eyes



Venus [up]Rising

2022
Paintball Vest, Toy Gun, Helmet, Pink Glitter

