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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

A Thesis Submitted to The Faculty of

The College of Art & Design

School for American Crafts

In Candidacy for the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

Glass

The Sense of Anxiety

by

Suhyeon Kang

August 7th, 2020

Committee Signature Page

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Table of contents

Committee Signature Page	2
Thesis Abstract	4
Introduction	5
Section 1: Context	6
Section 2: Artist References	11
Section 3: The Body of Work	16
Conclusion	25
Bibliography	27
Illustrations & Work Images	29

Abstract

My thesis research explores the use of glass, and several other mediums to reflect impressions of traumatic memories without directly representing the details of a personal story. Sensory experiences act as metaphors for memories. In my work, glass serves as a medium for preservation of those impressions. The frustrating and fragile characteristics of glass parallel my annoyance with my anxiety. I discovered, however, that working with glass has a therapeutic effect for me. I researched the psychology of traumatic memory and the work of artists whose work is related to my inquiries. This process allowed me to use visual language to better understand my own experience of uneasiness and my relationship with my traumatic memories.

Introduction

I am a delicate flower. This is the sentence I use when I introduce myself to new people. I feel fragile because of early childhood trauma that left me with anxious memories. Memories from my childhood often include impressions of anxiety and fear. This has made me nervous and has influenced my personality. More recently, I have experienced the discomfort of working in another country and another language. As I developed my studio practice, I extended this analysis. I had questions about what my angst means to me and how it influences my life and my studio work. My work examines my questions in a way that reveals impressions of the experience of anxiety without representing details of my personal story.

My work explores how my anxious memories are triggered by sensory experiences. Instead of being direct representations, the pieces I create are metaphors for my trauma. I refer to the discomfort that results from sensing gaze or from overstimulation of olfactory, auditory, and visual sensory experiences, or from miscommunication. I have learned to use glass, photography, video and mixed media to examine these experiences.

Furthermore, creating glass art has become a significant therapeutic act for me because it redirects my attention away from my uneasiness. Glass demands close attention. There is also a connection between my experience of trauma and the characteristics of glass, especially fragility, transparency, and preservation. Seeing the connection between glass and the impacts of my trauma led me to delve into ways to use the power of my experiences to inspire my studio practice.

Context

“Without anxiety and illness, I should have been like a ship without a rudder.”

Edvard Munch (Norwegian painter)

This quote really spoke to me about the impact of anxiety on one’s art. It confirmed for me that am not the first person to be artistically impacted by my angst. My review of other artists’ work confirmed that for me. It has always plagued me. It always chases me, and is reflected in my daily behavior. It affects how I react when someone talks to me, or when I am faced with a new situation. Sometimes, even without thinking about being anxious, I over prepare for something as simple as a trip to the post office. I have spent considerable time thinking about my concerns, how they began and how they influence my daily life and my art.

My anxiety originated with a traumatic experience. The origin of the word *trauma* is Greek— a medical term meaning a wound. In modern psychology, however, it is widely used to mean a psychic wound—a response to an unexpected mental shock or experience. Sensory experiences can trigger my traumatic memories. I feel uneasy when I am in a crowded place or feel another person’s gaze upon me. In a crowd, my eyes dart around so fast I have trouble focusing, and it makes me feel overwhelmed. When sleeping I wake up from the smallest noise, and I have trouble achieving deep sleep. A conversation in an unfamiliar situation often makes me extremely anxious. In these moments, my body switches on instinctual survival mechanisms. I feel a need be really alert and I have a tendency to act before I think. These experiences can be annoying and distracting. But they serve two purposes in my art. One is to stimulate my creative work by suggesting concepts for me to explore. Moreover, the experience of stress motivates me to find an escape in the focus required to create with glass.

Not all anxiety is negative. It has some benefits. In his book, *Useful fiction*, Author Michael Austin claims “anxiety can cause us profound discomfort, to be sure, but at least some of the time it makes us uncomfortable with things that should make us uncomfortable, and it activates behavioral responses that can save our lives” (Austin 44). In evolutionary psychologist Randolph Nesse’s article, *What Good Is Feeling Bad: The Evolutionary Benefits of Psychic Pain*, the author states that it is a useful emotion in our lives. (Nesse 33). Popular perceptions of discomfort suggest it is a negative emotion. Austin and Nesse propose it is an emotion that cannot be explained with black-and-white logic or simply as good or bad. It makes me think of the harmony and balance of yin and yang. For example, after reading these, I reflected on past actions and recognized that my unease pushed me to make better life decisions and influenced how I made artistic decisions within my practice. Initially I was cautious in approaching my art. When I began to think about the possibility that my nervousness could be constructive, I realized I could be more experimental in my work. This freedom requires the enhanced focus that makes glasswork a channel for escaping my anxiety. Once I understood how working with glass was restorative to me, I began to think more directly about how my traumatic memories affected me and, especially, how they emerged. I realized that memory is not simply information stored in the brain, but is stored through the senses. In my case, memories of my trauma are triggered by my senses of smell, sound and gaze. As I analyzed each of these triggers, I began to think about how they could be incorporated into my studio practice.

The sense of smell is one of the strongest stimulants for memories. Marcel Proust’s, *Remembrance of All Things*, is a well-known literary work that describes how the sense of smell triggers memories long forgotten. The book begins with the author being served a madeleine which he dunks in black tea. The smell of the food triggers his memories of childhood. I investigate this interaction of senses and memory through my studio practice to

explore my memories of anxiety, and to create metaphors of that by exaggerating scents, sounds or visual impressions in my containers and my performance pieces.

The experience of gaze is another source of discomfort that triggers unpleasant memories for me. According to *Natural history of the senses* by Diane Ackerman, 70 percent of human sensory receptors are in the eye, so we evaluate and understand the world primarily through looking. (Ackerman 152) Gaze is a non-verbal way for people to communicate with their eyes, In psychologists Roser and Antonia's article *The role of eye gaze during natural social interactions in typical and autistic people*, the authors explain that "when we see a pair of eyes we can gather information about what other people are looking at, and how they feel or think. At the same time, we can use our eyes to strategically cue another's attention." (Roser and Antonia 1). They go on to point out that making eye contact with someone if you sense someone's gaze, you can sometimes redirect their attention using eye-contact. This made me think about my experiences of gaze. When someone is looking at me, I sense their gaze and that makes me feel uncomfortable. If I look directly at the person and realize it is a friend, my discomfort may be relieved. If that person looks away, my gaze has redirected their attention and that may relieve my stress as well. When it is not relieved, perhaps because the gazer is a stranger, or does not shift attention, my discomfort increases. This made me think about gaze in a power relationship. If there is a balance of power, as when I recognize a friend, or can redirect the other's attention, less disquiet develops. If there is an imbalance of power and I cannot recognize or redirect it, then anxiety increases.

Investigating the gaze and its psychological impact on communication and anxiety allowed me to think about using the eye in my practice. I realized that glass is an excellent medium for exploring the effects of the eye and the gaze because it shares so many characteristics with the eye. Artificial eyes are often made of glass. In our physical eyes. the lens, the cornea, the retina, all function to transmit, reflect, focus, or diffuse light for us to

see. Glass affects the transmission of light in similar ways. Using glass eyes, I explored how gaze triggers uncomfortable emotions. I explored those moments when gaze is not comforting eye-contact between friends, but times that gaze can disconcert, as it so often does for me. My photographic works, *Watch you*, *Wherever* and *Three eyes* employ an image of the eye or a glass eyeball to simulate gaze by placing eyes in unusual settings and patterns. I continue that exploration in my video work, *Can You Understand Me?* The potential source of discomfort in all these pieces is the fact that looking back at the source of gaze does not prompt any change in the video or eyeball. The gaze persists and therefore gains power.

It took me a while to appreciate the characteristics of glass and their value in managing my anxiety. My first impression about working with glass was that it was sharp, hot, and the facilities were noisy. This experience was a negative one for me, as these things made me uncomfortable. As a result, I initially began working in ceramics rather than glass. Ceramics was a safe, more forgiving medium. If I grew tired of working on a piece, I could take a break and return to it later without much fear of consequence. However, after taking a flame working class in my third year as an undergraduate student, my thoughts on glass changed completely. During that time, I discovered I had to concentrate while I was working with glass to be able to react immediately to the temperature and the timing. All my thoughts had to be focused on what I was doing at all times. I felt completely involved in my work. This process was healing and gave me a sense of play.

The properties that make glass attractive to me relate to my anxiety and trauma in several ways. I draw a connection between a psychological state of mind and the process of creating with glass. Like glass, nervousness is constantly frustrating me. I had a chance to attend Dr. Jane Cook's Visiting Artist Lecture at Rochester Institute of Technology and see her video lecture about glass chemistry. In the lecture, she said "glass is a frustrated material." (Cook 43:12-43:15) I was curious to learn her thoughts about whether there are

any commonalities between the physical properties of glass' and a person's mental state. In a personal correspondence she explained that “glass is inherently frustrated, and this creates a material that is lacking in ways to cope with sudden changes, more sensitive to old memories and scars, more likely to break to pieces at a seemingly small provocation. Glass remembers its traumas, stores them up, doesn't heal” (Cook). I was able to visualize this concept as a crack on glass that continues to break slowly over time. Glass remembers damage in a similar way I remember my personal damage. Thinking of glass as a frustrated substance allows me to acknowledge my own concerns.

Working through my challenges is a form of meditation that helps me understand and cope with my anxiety. According to author Glen Adamson in, *The invention of craft*, there is some parallel between traumatic response and craft work. One of the specific symptoms of trauma is repetitive behavior (Adamson 185). A repetitive act arises unconsciously and becomes a physical performance used by the subconscious to forget traumatic memories by concentrating on an action instead. A repetitive behavior reproduces the original distressing event, but it also protects the artist from the fundamental and unresolved conflicts they face. Adamson calls this “the pleasure of the unthinking or flow” (Adamson 186).

I can see that repetitive actions of the glass working processes allow me to forget painful memories. When I am working in the hot shop, there is only glass and me. Glass is unpredictable. When working with hot glass there are many variables that can cause it to change at any moment. I must be vigilant when I am working with it so I can anticipate these changes. There is no room for anxious, intrusive thoughts when I am working with glass. The material's working time is limited. The act of changing the form by repeatedly applying heat to make it the desired shape makes me feel a catharsis, releasing me from my anxiety and sensitivity. Through this repetitive action of the processes, I become aware of the joy that goes beyond my nervousness while communicating with glass. I realized that focusing

entirely on this making process and discovering the instantaneous timing of glass felt like discovering a new door to creative possibility.

The forms of artwork I create are also related to traumatic recollections as symbols and as metaphors for preserving unpleasant sensations. Humanity has used glass for storage and preservation since 3000 BCE. There are multiple reasons why glass has been used for containers from that time until today. The most common reasons are that glass is transparent, impermeable, and non-reactive. For these reasons, we see glass containers used to collect and to preserve items everywhere, from museum to science labs, to homes.

In my work I use glass containers as metaphors for the concept of the container or psychological compartment. Compartmentalization is a “defense mechanism in which thoughts and feelings that seem to conflict or to be incompatible are isolated from each other in separate and apparently impermeable psychic compartments.” (APA) This psychological defense can give an individual a sense of disconnectedness if it is used excessively against traumatic memories. Compartmentalizing is a coping mechanism for me. I try to divide and isolate my traumatic memories from my normal, everyday feelings. Moreover, this line of thinking draws me to the idea of the functionality of containers. If you can separate your memories, you can visualize them as being stored separately. This is a means of managing them. I use the functionality of a container as a tool for collecting and maintaining metaphors for my traumatic memories while keeping them from intruding on other parts of my life.

Artist References

As I worked through my thinking about anxiety and traumatic memory, and confusing communication, I looked to the work of several artists to learn more about the metaphorical exploration of these ideas. There are several artists whose work and ideas about the

therapeutic nature of artistic practice and their exploration of difficult experiences of memories lead me to the studio work I did my last years at Rochester Institute of Technology.



I often look to artist Yayoi Kusama for inspiration because of how she discusses her mental illness through her practice. In an interview, she said “I have been struggling with pain, anxiety, and fear every day since childhood. The only method I have

found that relieves these is to keep creating art.” (Forrest 97) Kusama’s work is her own expression of her illness and a method of treatment, much like my art practice is for me.

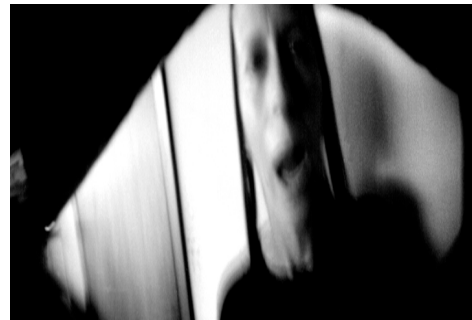
We both have feelings of fear and dread because of childhood traumatic memories. We also know that this is the energy that drives us to be creative individuals. Yayoi talks about how fear and anxiety cause things around her to blur, but making art lets her focus. This concentration creates an obsession. “In front of paint brushes and Canvas my hands react to them and make my work before I think of anything... (Louisiana Channel 04:50-05:59) When I am creating my work so everything disappears around me and my hands create my work.” (06:13-06:23). She portrayed this obsession as repetition of polka-dots, but I connected this obsession with my studio practice. This need for concentration led me to take a closer look at my engagement with my work. The obsession led me to focus on my creative process more intensely.

Kusama’s works provide indirect experiences that let others slip into her mental reality. Through my study of her work, I got the idea of how something ambiguous and overwhelming can turn the familiar into something uncomfortable. Kusama demonstrates how perception causes an optical illusion when we are confronted with overwhelming visual stimulation. The trademark of her work, innumerable dots, blurs the boundary between the reality and unreality of space. She uses an overwhelming number of dots in contrasting colors

and varying sizes to fill a space, thus creating a visual illusion that blurs boundaries. My pieces, *Watch you* and *Wherever*, photographic works, are about the use of images of an eye to stimulate discomfort. The eye is a familiar image, but by using multiple images of the eye or unusual placement, I increase the discomfort by making it seem unfamiliar, blurring the boundaries between the real and imagined.

As an international student, working in a different language and living far from home, I became interested in the experience of miscommunication. This sometimes added to my uncertainty and other times created humorous situations. Ann Hamilton's photographic work, *Face to Face* leads me to explore misinterpretations resulting from relying on vision and from being watched and watching others. *Face to face I-67* reminded me of the visual illusions and errors of judgment—the idea that seeing similar forms can prompt confusion and misunderstanding. This *Face to Face* features 67 prints of different individuals and landscapes. Hamilton made this piece by placing a small pinhole camera in the mouth. The photo is exposed when the mouth is opened. On her website, she explained that “The figure or landscape becomes the pupil in the eye shape

created by one’s mouth, much the same way as one sees a tiny image of oneself in the reflection of another person’s pupil.” (Hamilton) When I first saw this work, I thought it was simply a



photograph of an eye shape, but after reading her explanation, I realized that this was not actually an eye but a mouth. It shocked me. I wanted to explore the optical illusion in my work *Wherever* which uses repeated images of an eye eventually leading to doubt about what is there or to other interpretations of what one is seeing.

Gaze is the most unnerving trigger of my personal anxiety. My idea of stimulating emotional reactions by applying gaze was influenced by the work, *The Artist is Present* by

Marina Abramović. In this work, Abramović sits at a table with an empty chair facing her. Audience members come one at a time to sit silently opposite her and maintain eye contact. There are no conversations, just gazing at one another. This work persisted for eight hours a day, for three months. She made eye contact with 1000 strangers. There were various responses to her performance. Throughout her performance, some participants shed tears, some made eye contact with her for a long time, and others left the chair after brief interaction. I wondered what influenced the participants thoughts.

I believe that people can feel emotions through gaze without spoken language. We think we can read another person's condition or feelings by their facial expressions or lack thereof. Through her work, I came to think about how I could effectively stimulate an



emotional reaction to my work by initiating acts of gazing. To create an overwhelming experience of the gaze, my work *Can you understand me?* was projected on a large wall to create a sense of being watched while also watching.

Glass artist Silvia Levenson's works allow me to think about how the medium of glass can be used metaphorically in art. She uses cast glass as a medium to store evidence of people's memories or objects for future generations (Bryan 30). I saw a commonality between our uses of glass as a metaphor for preservation. She also said that it is not the beauty of glass, but preservation and protection that has greater meaning for her. *Strange little girls* is one of her series of works using glass casting techniques. She combined a mannequin of a child's body with a cast glass animal's head. In this work, she explores childhood and the idea that "those years to me delineate an era where the edge between "reality and dreams is very evanescent... I refuse to think of childhood as "the golden years" to be looked back with

nostalgia. As in the Tori Amos' song, children in my work do not know where they are going" (Levenson).



After reading her words, I began to research how to solve the relationship between glass and memory preservation in my own way. She investigated this preservation through glass casting techniques, while I focused on using the container-as-preserver. I exploit the transparent qualities of glass that allow for visual recognition of contents. In other words, this is “seeing” and recognizing my memories preserved in clear glass.

I wanted to develop containers that could be used for more than simple preservation. I wanted them to contain material that could evoke visual memory, but I also used scents and sounds to stimulate olfactory and auditory memories. *Bugging me2* and *Trace* are made with the idea to stimulate recall and cause discomfort through multiple senses. I made these two works using glass domes. *Trace* is simply a visual metaphor of the attempt to preserve a past memory. *Bugging me2* captured overwhelming smell and evoked gaze with a glass eyeball. Smell is invisible, but by preserving the smell in the clear glass dome, I connect it to my reaction to physical symptoms like dizziness when I feel anxious.

The idea of communication using language and sound interests me as an artist and as a student working in a language other than my native tongue. Through the work and life of Christin Sun Kim, I have been inspired by how she uses art to give new meaning to communication challenges or disabilities. She is a deaf Korean American. Her work explores the sense of sound, which she has never experienced in her daily life, as art. She expresses her own sounds through performance and two-dimensional work. In her work, *face opera ii*, she explores communication through facial expressions and body movements. This performance is a group of primarily deaf people and shows them “singing” songs without

using sign language as communication but instead using only face markers or visual nuances. Her thinking behind this work is that roughly 30-40 percent of the communication through American Sign Language is done by the hand and the rest is expressed through movements of the face or body. She removed the manual element of communication in this piece to explore facial expressions and body movement is a way of communication. I responded to this work



because as a non-native English speaker I understand the importance of having as much visual information as possible to help me understand.

In considering her work, I began to explore the sense of hearing to discover what, besides verbal communication, can create true sympathy.

My work, *Can you understand me?* and *Breaths* is a response to the concerns of how to communicate beyond language barriers and how to express this communication through glass. *Can you understand me?* and *Breaths* were my answers to two questions: 'Is there any way to communicate other than with language? What is true communication?'

Learning about my own trauma, the psychology of anxiety and its management, combined with my exploration of glass and performance art expanded and informed my studio practice.

The Body of Works

My studio practice explored the mental elements of anxiety through various glass techniques, videos, and photography by combining sensory experiences with the use of glass containers. My work is a survey of my curiosity about uneasiness, recall, and communication. My work has been informed by a study of other artists exploring similar ideas and by reading about the psychology of anxiety, and memory. I explored how all my work can be developed along with my obsessive work process and conceptual ideas of anxiety by balancing each.

The works in my thesis year are my investigation of this concern and a record of my thinking as I created a visual language for discoveries.

Can you understand me is a video work that explores the experience of the communicative my body and mind, as well as my experience of communication barriers as a foreigner. This is an extension of an earlier work, *I AM FINE*, which explored my discomfort concerning the difference between my inner thoughts and my outward demeanor. I soon realized that, like gaze, my reaction to this confusion over language varied. If I was interacting with good friends, I saw humor. Otherwise these experiences could be extremely stressful. This video shows me speaking while using a glass gag with a smiley face emoji on the front. I do this to express the occasional humor in situations of misinterpretation. I explore ideas of unease by using a flame worked glass gag. I use a transparent glass gag to attempt to create the effect of a lens. The result distorted the shape of my mouth and the appearance of the inside of my mouth. The visual distortion complicated the communication and referred to the tendency of people to speak more loudly if they do not think they are being understood.



Using only the distorted sound coming from my mouth, I create my own interpretation of conversation. Even though I added inflection and pauses to sound conversational, in this piece communication is intentionally interrupted due to the glass gag. As I attempt to speak,

the glass becomes foggy with condensation. Rather than generating meaningful conversation I instead generate meaningless, repeated sounds. The essence of my attempts of communication are hidden and obscured like the cloudiness in the glass gag. The more I try to speak, the more the sound and the image are obscured.

In addition, by only revealing a close-up view of my face, I consider the idea of gaze. I think about the duality of being watched and watching others. While gaze can be a means of communication it is also often a source of discomfort. The large-scale projection of the video magnified the uncomfortable aspects of the gaze strengthening that sense of being watched. From Abramovic's recording of her work, I realized that for *Can You Understand Me* and *Breathe*, the glass work is not enough by itself, rather I needed to explore more actively. With video I can trigger the discomfort more effectively and intensely using movement.

After *Can you understand me?* I began to think about what is memory and how it is stored and recalled. I think of *Trace* as a metaphor for a diary or photo album that I would have used to store memories. This work is the preservation of my memories. This piece consists of alginate formed into skin-like wrinkles placed inside of a glass dome. A moment becomes a memory as soon as it passes. Memories can be forgotten over time; and the length of time varies depending on their importance. Memories are forgotten if they are never revisited, if they are not significant, if we did not pay enough attention or if they are too traumatic to remain in our consciousness. Memories are precious because we know we cannot go back to that time. For these reasons, people often keep a diary or photos as placeholders to remember specific moments. I want to preserve meaningful memories, both significant and day-to-day.

My attempts at this are like preserving alginate in the glass dome. After helping a friend make body molds, I collected alginate that was thrown into the trash. Alginate is a material that captures body detail and, therefore, is often used for casting teeth or body parts for masks or costumes. However, unlike plaster, and unlike the *pate de verre* casts by

Levinson, alginate does not last long. When the moisture within alginate evaporates, it crumbles like a powder. I tried to connect this property of alginate with the characteristic of memories. Like alginate, memories can deteriorate over time. At this moment, I recalled the commonalities of alginate, memory, and physical properties of glass. All three elements can be manipulated to capture a recollection of a moment.

Through blowing and cold working techniques, I re-shaped a glass sphere to a half-



sphere, forming a dome. By filling the glass dome with water to continue to supply moisture, I made sure the wrinkled skin-like alginate could keep its form for a longer period. By using clear glass, you are able to observe changes the alginate in the transparent dome. I installed this work on the wall at eye-level to ensure the details of both the deterioration and the preservation were observable. I also wanted to connect

to the concept of memory preservation using photographs or family portraits, which can also fade or deteriorate over time.

Through these memories of the past, I had the idea of how trauma influenced me and how to express it in different ways. By combining the themes of my earlier works, *Fly* and *How I can create the smell*, I have created *Bugging Me*, which metaphorically expresses memories of trauma by using language and the sense of smell. This work refers to the duality of language. I created a flame-worked glass respirator and filled it with aroma oil. By attaching it to the blown glass dome the aroma was able to travel through the respirator. When placed on one's face, an individual inhales the scent of roses while being confronted with imagery of flies.

The inspiration for this work came from two sources: one involving my traumatic memories and the other involving double meanings. Some of my memories involve awful scents, so when I am reminded of those scents I want to escape. My trauma annoys me like a fly buzzing in my ear; it is the driving force to escape from my memories. By using floral fragrances and senses of smell, I consider the impact of olfactory memory. In using the imagery of flies, this work is a representation of contradictory meanings.



I became curious about words that have a double meaning. I found it to be interesting that there can be different meanings depending on the time and place in which they are used. Among them, the word 'bug' has a general meaning of an insect, but when it is used as a verb, it also means to annoy and irritate someone. By referencing this concept, I use the image of the fly to express the idea that trauma bothers me like flies irritate other beings. To accomplish the fly imagery, I initially used the pate de verre technique in my previous work, *Fly*. However, in this second iteration I used decals on clear glass because they imagery was more recognizable. I create conflicting sensations by encasing floral aroma oil in the glass dome covered with the fly imagery. Flies are often associated with dirty trash cans, smelly odors, and rotting flesh. Beautiful fragrances conflict with common knowledge regarding flies.

Bugging Me is used to stimulate olfactory and visual impressions through imagery. However, with *Bugging Me 2* I further developed the use of senses by adding sound. This piece involves two glass domes, one transparent and one opaque. The two domes are connected by a tube. The clear dome has a flame worked eyeball on its front and contains aroma oil. While the previous work utilizes the visual image of flies for double meaning in

language, *Bugging Me 2* includes fabricated buzzing sounds produced by flies to allude to the idea that real flies live within the opaque glass dome. This work was an attempt to explore double meaning through sound and aroma to generate an uncomfortable state of mind.

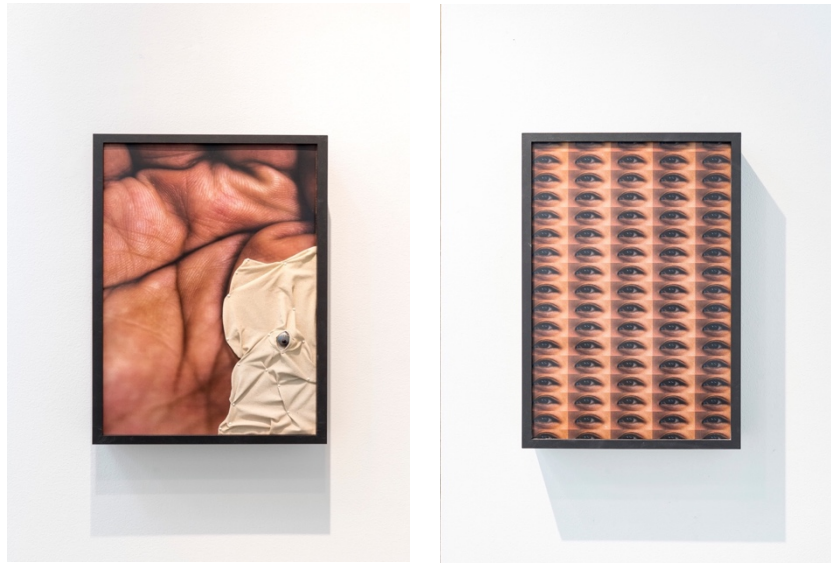


By putting excessive amounts of lavender scented aroma oil into the transparent glass container, this overpowering scent produced disquiet and discomfort, contrary to the original purpose of aroma oil which is used for healing and relaxation. I created an overwhelming experience of smell which distorted the scent's original meaning, like Yayoi's use of overwhelming quantities of an otherwise familiar visual device like the polka dot.

The fabricated eyeball is meant to emulate feelings of discomfort through gaze. Through this work, I wanted to create a state of physical and mental anxiety. This work conveys an uncomfortable experience through human senses by juxtaposing two familiar entities outside of their normal context.

Whenever and *Watch you* is one piece composed of two parts. These works are part of a series expressing the discomfort resulting from the gaze. Someone's eyes make me uneasy because I think they are judging me and trying to read my uncomfortable thoughts. Even if I try to close my eyes and cover my eyes with my hands to block out the sight of someone's gaze, I can still feel like I am being watched. This gaze is in my imagination. It does not

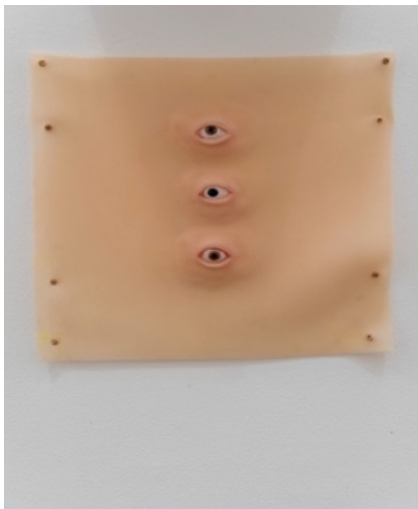
really exist, but it keeps hovering in my head. I feel less powerful when I feel a stranger's gaze.



Whenever uses photography, fabric, and a glass eyeball to express fear caused by the illusion of the gaze. This is in the form of a shadow box using, a flame worked eyeball, skin colored fabric and photography. I wanted to make an uncomfortable feeling associated with gaze by creating an image that mixed reality and imagination. *Watch you* is also a photographic piece created by replicating the image of the eye. The photograph repeats the image of my eye multiple times. This represents the visual distortion caused by discomfort. Unusual external stimulation affects our vision and transforms it or attempts to extract a specific meaning from unclear and unspecified phenomena, sounds, or images. I used photography to ensure I had an accurate representation of an actual eye to explore how an image of a real eye can still be distorted and cause anxiety. I used my own eye with the idea that I was looking at my eye while my own eye was looking at me. Multiple replicated eyes are recognizable at first, but through misunderstanding of optical illusion they can reference other forms, such as lips or female genitalia. Using multiple eyes changes the meaning of a single image and creates ambiguity and weirdness that can lead to confusion and discomfort. I wanted to investigate the shape and functional aspect of the eye and its psychological

impact of looking. People recognize visual information through the eye to the brain and store it as an image. I got the idea of exploring optical illusion created by actual photographs from Anne Hamilton's work *Face to Face*, which uses the framing of a photo to create an illusion, but I was curious about optical illusions created by realistic photographs themselves.

Three eyes is based on the idea that the eye provides visual information, visual association, and visual illusion. Eyes are also the source of gaze and the means of communication through gaze. This piece is made of a silicone surface with flame worked eyeballs placed in a vertical line in the middle. This work uses distortion to further cause discomfort, maximizing fear and anxiety. Although the fabricated skin made of silicone has



no veins or blemishes on the surface, it can still be perceived as skin because of its color and texture. The number and placement of eyes that cannot be found in actual human anatomy generates discomfort and fear similar to seeing a monster like the one in the film, *Pan's Labyrinth*. Placing the fake eyes at slightly different angles expressed different perspectives. By installing the work on

the wall, I intended to create natural wrinkles using gravity, which replicated the look of real skin being stretched.

Honey was an attempt to finalize my answer to the traumatic memories that I had been thinking about. The memory of trauma endures and changes over time. I wanted to make this work about trauma by using time and gravity together to show that it is possible for traumatic memory to become less contaminated over time. This work is time-based and uses gravity. Two separate glass containers are connected through a tube. Honey transfers from the top container to the bottom through the tube, which acts as a filter. The top container is messy with rough honey, while the bottom container fills with purified honey as time passes. I got

the idea from the shape and function of the hourglass and added the filter for its purification properties. Under gravity and time, the bottom container filled with clean honey. Since I had created several domed pieces, I wanted to extend my practice by diversifying the shapes I was creating by making two blown glass spheres, and then using cold working to transform those shapes into flat discs rather than hemispheres.

My memories change over time, just as the clean honey gathers over a long time. This work investigated how the memories of past trauma change over time and become less destructive. By installing the transparent glass on the walls, the appearance of the dripping honey can be seen more clearly. Furthermore, hanging the pieces with only two screws ensured that the only visible components were the glass and the honey without the distraction of the non-artistic components of display.



Breathe is my second video experiment. In the video there are two people, one male and female of different races breathing into a glass tube. I intended to represent the complexity of communication and language use between races and genders.

The glass portion was made by a flame working technique to make the borosilicate glass tubing Q-tip shaped. There is a hole at each end. The recording shows us breathing at the same time into the tube. Also, the breathing sound was emphasized by recording the sound separately from the video. If people have different breathing patterns, the inside of glass tube does not change when they both breathe into it. But at some point, their breathing patterns take on the same rhythm. When condensation forms on the glass tube it means they are breathing in the same pattern.



This represents the understanding that happens when we communicate. Language can be changed, or it can hide meaning or intention depending on the situation. But, breathing, an unconscious physical activity, can be a way to true communication beyond language. This is an action that is only allowed with people we feel close to. To show the condensation in the glass more clearly on the screen, the video was edited in black and white rather than in color. By starting the recording with the tube outside the mouth and then beginning the breathing and playing it in a loop, it can make it easier to see where is the beginning and the end.

CONCLUSION

My first year in this program, my work focused on technique. Much of it was pretty and technically well done. Everyone acknowledged that but then asked me what the narrative behind the work was. That was a personal question. I was not sure what I was comfortable saying about myself since my story involved childhood trauma. So, my dilemma was how to tell a true story of my trauma and anxiety without revealing the details. I eventually realized I could make my work more abstract and metaphorical, exploring angst and discomfort through visual metaphors. Over time I learned to explore the impressions of trauma rather than the memory of trauma itself. I wanted others to relate to the anxiety that is within me. By artificially creating stress-inducing environments, I can investigate it in a more general

way without revealing the details of my personal experience. Through doing this work it has become clearer to me how trauma affected me and my work.

My curiosity about anxiety lead me to expand my artistic range not only using glass, but also investigating mixed media, photography, and video. Through my process, I was able to identify how I deal with personal conflict. At first unfamiliar places, culture, and language barriers caused anxiety and were overwhelming for me as a foreigner. Some of my work helped me explore this. I asked myself, “What can I make?” and “Why am I here?” My work process is a record of these investigations of my identity, along with my concerns. By experiencing and investigating all these things, I was able to discover new aspects of myself. I am an anxious person, but I have also learned the therapeutic value of my practice. My art helps me manage and explore my uneasiness. Anxiety can power me. Glass demands my attention and channels my angst in constructive ways.

In the future I see myself living with my anxiety forever. That will only serve to push me to continue to explore and heal through my creative work.

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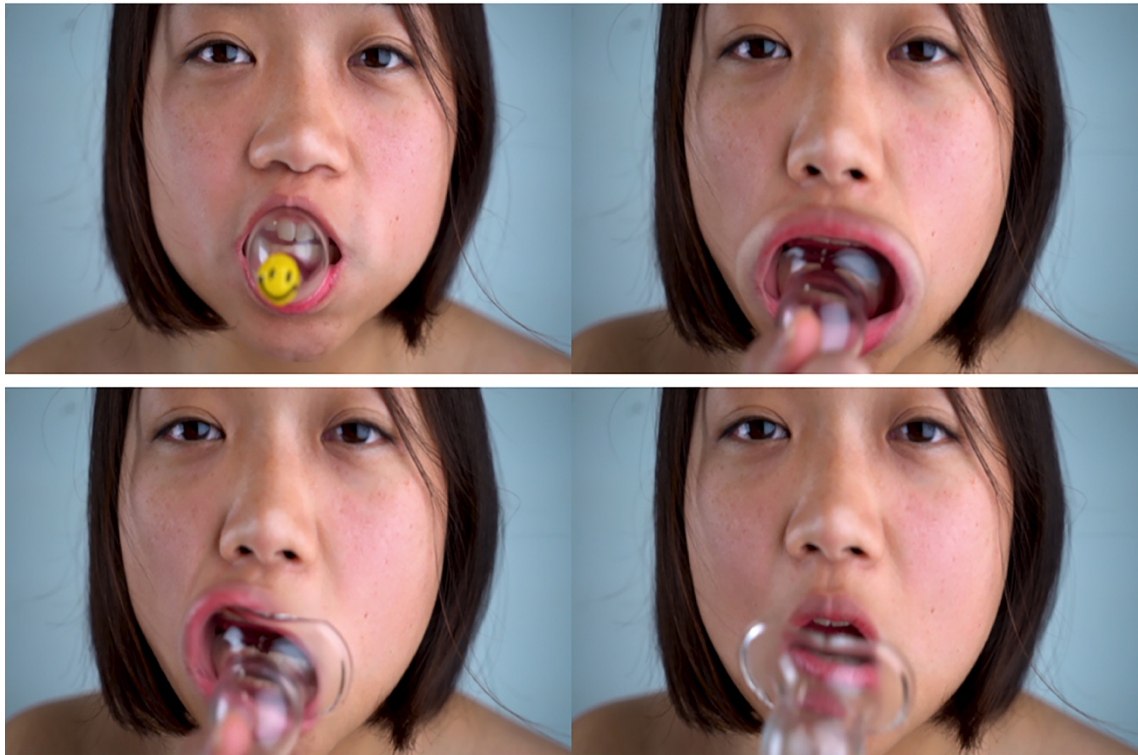
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Illustration & Work Images



Can You Understand Me?
Borosilicate Glass, Performance
Video
2018

youtu.be/iS9b4tFqfFM



Trace
Blown Glass, Window Glass, Alginate,
Beads
9"x8"x2"
2018

Photography by Elizabeth Lamark



Bugging ME

Blown Glass, Borosilicate Glass, Aroma Oil,
Vinyl Hose, Image of Fly
10" x 10" x 6"
2018

Photography by Elizabeth Lamark



Bugging Me 2

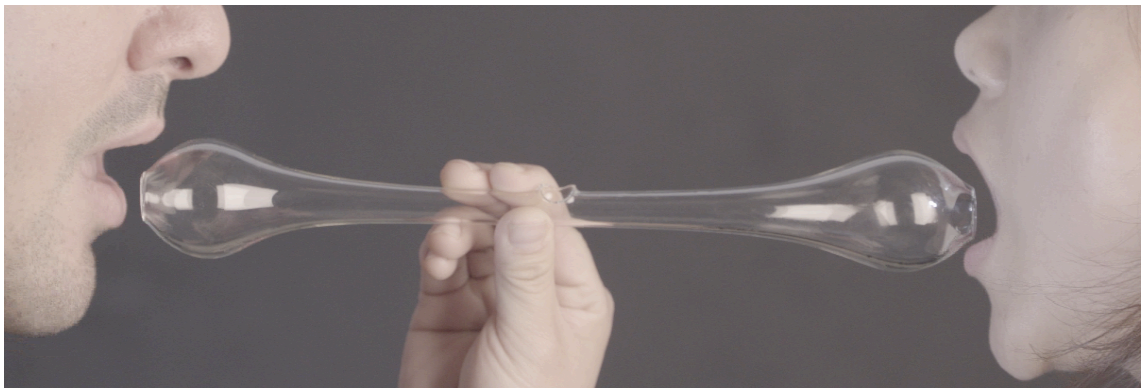
Well Piece:

Blown Glass, Borosilicate Glass,
Vinyl Hose, Aroma Oil
11"x 11"x 12.5"
2019

Bottom Piece:

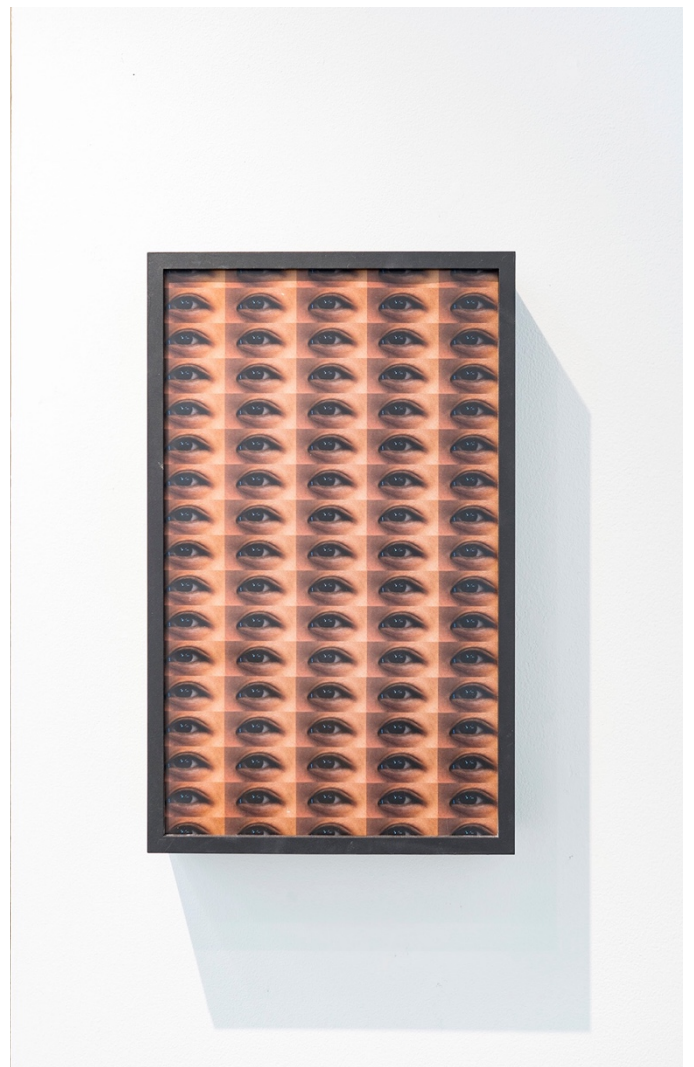
Blown Glass, Motor, Sound
equipment, LED, Wood
18"x 18"x 15"
2019

Photography by Elizabeth Lamark



Beraths
Borosilicate Glass, performance
Video
2018

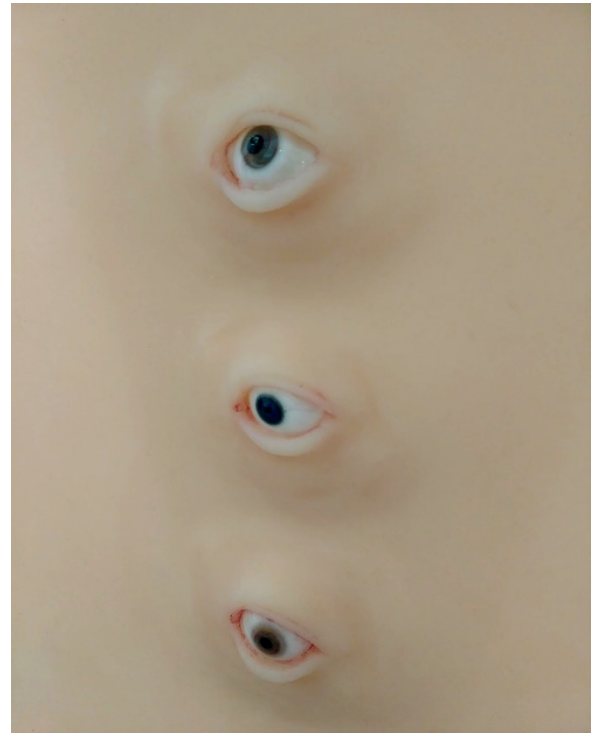
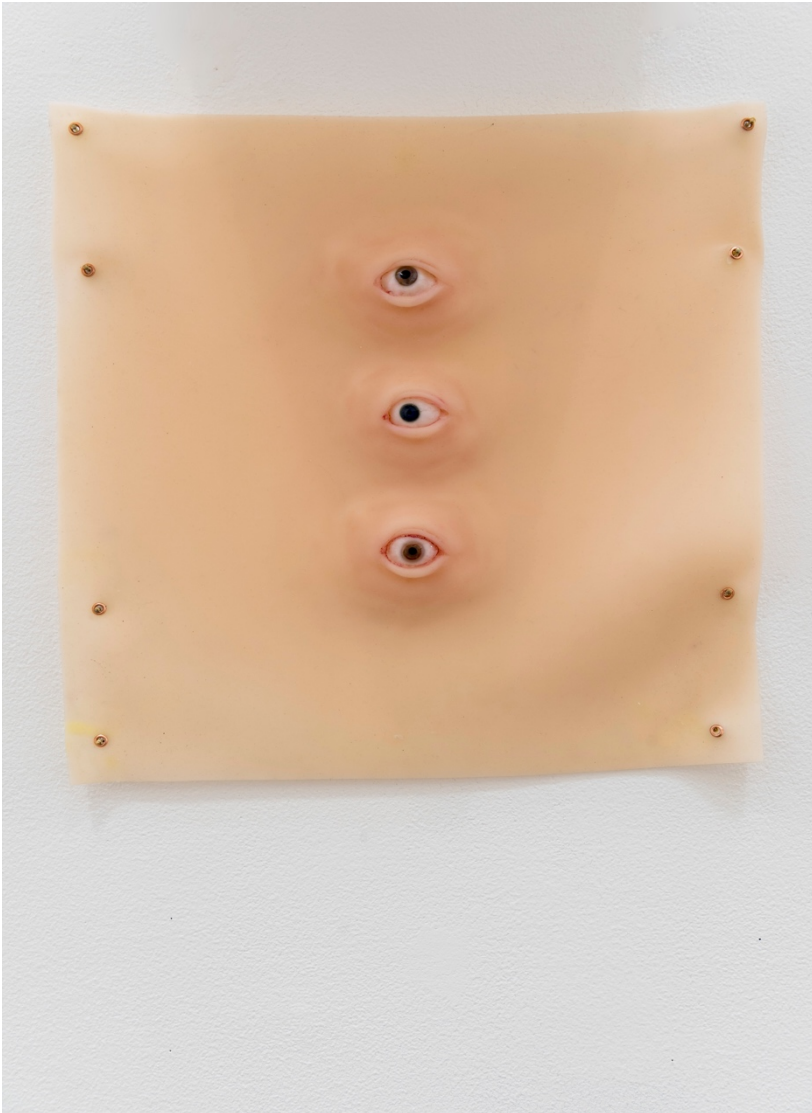
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Wherever (pictured at left)
Photography, Wooden Box
17.5"x11.5"x 2.5"
2018

Watch You pictured at right)
Photography, Wooden Box
17.5"x11.5"x 2.5"
2018

Photography by Elizabeth Lamark



Three Eyes

Dragon Skin (Silicon), Borosilicate
Glass, Painting
13.5"x14"x0.5"
2019

photography by Elizabeth Lamark



Honey

Blown Glass, Window Glass, Glass
Tubing, Honey, Wood
20"x18"x6"
2019

Photography by Elizabeth Lamark