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**Ambiguity**

by

Rinoi Imada

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Fine Arts in Glass

School for American Crafts

College of Art & Design

Rochester Institute of Technology

Rochester, NY

December 3, 2021

**Thesis Approval**

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Thesis Title

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Thesis Author

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of  
The School  
Rochester Institute of Technology | Rochester, New York

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## Thesis Abstract

*Ambiguity* explores the sense of ambiguous identity through conceptual investigations of glass and language structure. This body of work and thesis refer to my personal experience and scholarly research to observe transformation and transition of identity. My thesis considers glass as a phenomenal substance through its transformative materiality; my body of work reflects materiality of glass as an ephemeral identity of humanity. Utilizing glass as a transformative material, my body of work is the result of experimental art practices which are observations of photography, fusing glass techniques, live and site-specific gestures, and hotshop glass techniques.

## Introduction

Japanese is my primary language that has multiple pronouns to express identity. In English, “I” is the primary subject to describe one’s self to others in conversation. In Japanese, we have several subjects to express “I” by occasions, personalities, and gender. For example, English “I” is commonly translated in “*Watashi*(私)” in Japanese, however I often use “*Atashi*(あたし)” in a conversation with other Japanese friends. Young boys often use “*Boku*(僕)” or “*Ore*(俺)”, some old literatures use: “*Wagahai*(吾輩)”, “*Soregashi*(某)”, “*Sessha*(拙者)” and so on to add the role and the personality to the characters. When I am in Japan, I use two different subjects: “*Watashi*” and “*Atashi*” depending on different occasions or people. These different subjects are showing parts of my identity to communicate with others, however at the same time, I felt the delusion of identity through being at least two different roles of myself.

Since I moved to the United States and learned to speak in English, I recognized I have been singularizing my personality and identity, since I only use “I” as a subject to express about myself. When I describe myself to others, I say “I am a Japanese, female, glass blower and an artist”. I can describe myself by utilizing these clear and solid labels to others. It is a good thing for me to have a clear identity with the single first-person pronoun. However, at the same time, I recognized I adjusted my identity and personality by using different pronouns when I speak in Japanese. I cannot reenact this gesture when I speak in English, and I am interested in the fluidity and ambiguous sense of identity by utilizing different language structure.

This written thesis and body of work explore my sense of ambiguous identity defined through the languages I use. I see fluidity particularly in spoken language since it changes over time and from outside influences, such as communication. I find the similar quality of fluidity

through glass as a material. Glass is a phenomenal substance, it exhibits many traits of materiality such as hot versus cold, soft versus hard, and brittle versus flexible. I often overlap this materiality of glass as an identity of self. Especially, being as a glass blower in hotshop, direct contact with molten glass is like a conversation between glass and myself. It transforms into various forms as the glass becomes hot and cold in front of me. The glass changes like a person as they grow up and their language transforms through time and outside influences. Referencing my relationship with language and glass, my work emulates a transformation of self through the usage of language.

## Context

My thesis and body of work heavily rely on my interaction between language and identity. Language is the tool of communication, and communication is one of the most important elements to construct an identity. Spoken language is invisible and transient through time and human memories, yet people learn it from their parents and through their education to construct who they are and what they want to do. Linguistic matters in Japan influenced how my personality was constructed even though I may not have recognized the evolution. When I was a toddler and I tried to talk about myself, my first-person pronoun was my nickname. Some examples would be; “Ricchan go a museum”, and “Ricchan ate dinner”. This sounded very childish to me when I turned five or six years old. I have used “*Atashi*” as “I” since then when I am speaking Japanese. I still remember the first moment I used “*Atashi*” in front of others, I felt ticklish and proud of myself at the same time because I was using formal language. My identity was built through using “*Atashi*” as my pronoun to represent myself as a self-assured girl. I started using “*Watashi*” as my subject when I turned into a late teenager during my first part-time job, using polite language and being joyful in front of the visitors. However, this was not the happy moment such as my five-year-old memory, I had to be a part of a “role” in the workplace to show myself as a good worker and performer. Before doing this job, I enjoyed talking with people, however, the forced interaction made me too exhausted to talk with others to this day.

From this finding, I am interested in Japanese as a role dependent language. I refer a theory of role language from Satoshi Kinsui, who is researcher of Japanese linguistics. Kinsui states that:



the origin of role language can often be traced back to actual spoken language, except for purely imaginary varieties. From actual language usage, individuals acquire knowledge about the relationship between a particular variety of the language and its speakers, then categorise and reinforce this knowledge. What is important here is that this kind of knowledge does not remain with a particular individual; rather it disseminates among people and is shared by the community. When such conditions are met, role language becomes established as a linguistic stereotype and an effective communication tool<sup>1</sup>.

This theory reflects my experience of using two different first-person pronouns. “*Watashi*” is commonly used in textbooks and polite situations in Japan. “*Atashi*” is often used by young girls when they are with friends and families. These two pronouns helped establishing my character and identity through communication. My first-person subject and language kept changing by the "role" I was/am in. Japanese “I” is more than the word, it symbolized who I am, it is an identity for myself.

When I moved to the United States in 2015, I realized that there is no flow of my personality through speaking English. Because of English grammar, I singularized my personality by using “I” as my first-person pronoun. The new interaction of language brought some changes; I stopped modifying myself by my pronoun. I see others without a stereotype from their pronouns. I became conscious about my identity with language since then. Secondary language challenges myself to express my thoughts and opinions since there is a step of

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<sup>1</sup> Satoshi Kinsui, “Stereotypes and Role Language”, in *Virtual Japanese: Enigmas of Role Language* (Osaka: Osaka University Press, 2003), 127.

translation from my native language, yet this motivates me to question how an identity is formed through communications by my experience of changing gazes towards people and myself.

In addition to language structures, the idea of ambiguous identity is rooted from my culture. I find the similarity with the concept of ambiguous identity and the aesthetics of imperfection. Tenshin Okakura, who was a scholar of Japanese modern art history, describes “worship of imperfection” as an essential part of the art of tea ceremony developed in Japan in his book “The Book of Tea”. Okakura introduced the architecture of the tearoom (*sukiya*) and the room purposefully left imperfect things for the visitor's imagination to fill the void<sup>2</sup>.

Imperfect elements often associate with nature, such as an empty station to place a flower and vase or white stone garden that emulates natural phenomena with white sand and stone. This concept parallel with my idea of identity which changes over time and outside influences. The idea of imperfection become a base of my artistic gesture towards glass and body of work.

My approaches towards glass before the graduate study were passive. Before my graduate study, I considered my work as my persona, and they directly represented my ideas through realistic approaches. Through my graduate research including pre-thesis research from the first year, I pushed material possibilities of glass to reinvestigate what materiality of glass fascinates myself. Since I started graduate study, I have been questioning why I am obsessed with glass as a material. After several experimental practices during my pre-thesis research from the first year, I started to perceive glass as a conceptual substance, and used its materiality to explore my concept instead of representing my concept. I am obsessed with the inherent materiality of glass such as clarity, invisibility, and fragility, at the same time I have rediscovered

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<sup>2</sup> Tenshin Okakura, “The Tea room”, *The Book of Tea*, (originally published from New York: Putnam's, 1906, the edition of Global Grey, 2014) 24, Accessed November 16, 2021. <http://pdf-objects.com/files/Book-Of-Tea.pdf>

that glass is unstable, transformative and a time dependent material. From the new perspective of glass, I utilize the materiality of glass to create conceptual observations to explore an identity which is ephemeral and transformative over time and outside influences.

### Reference

#### **Influence: Concept and Gesture**

Studying through my interest towards identity and language, I draw inspirations to my body of work from the Conceptual Art Movement and artists who explore identity matters through simple language and gesture in their works. In this thesis and body of work, I adopt the concept from Sol LeWitt who states conceptual art in his writing, *Paragraphs on Conceptual Art*:

What the work of art looks like isn't too important. It has to look like something if it has physical form. No matter what form it may finally have it must begin with an idea. It is the process of conception and realization with which the artist is concerned. Once given physical reality by the artist the work is open to the perception of all, including the artist. (I use the word "perception" to mean the apprehension of the sense data, the objective understanding of the idea and simultaneously a subjective interpretation of both.)<sup>3</sup>

This statement motivates me to create observation-based artworks. LeWitt's approach was a breakthrough for myself to create a seed of exploration as a work. In this thesis, I use this theory

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<sup>3</sup> Sol LeWitt, *Paragraphs on Conceptual Art*, (New York: Artforum), 1967.

to consider that ideas and concepts are languages which artists are using to communicate with viewers and/or even their artworks.



From the Conceptual Art Movement, I refer to Adrian Piper who is a conceptual artist and philosopher. Piper was born in a middle class African American family. Piper was alienated from her identity from both black and white people<sup>4</sup>. Although she identified herself as a black person, it took a long time to comprehend what it meant to be black for her for long time<sup>5</sup>. Piper's art practices relate her dilemma of identity, it extends a fact of racism and fiction of race<sup>6</sup>. From her art practices to dual with her identity, I am inspired by her work, *What Will Become of Me*. Piper corrects her hair, fingernails, and dried skin in twelve honey jars and smaller jars, and two documents which addresses her personal trauma and statement of the work. The document of statement states this body of work will complete with the artist's cremated ashes<sup>7</sup>. Piper constantly adds her bodily remnants to this work, *What Will Become of Me* exists as a living diary and archive of herself. The work demonstrates artist's somatic identity and aging process. Even though the somatic identity gets evanescent by time, Piper keeps her thoughts and idea; they may mature over time until her death. I resonate with its transforming and aging process that the work itself contributes.

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<sup>4</sup> Adrian Piper, "Passing for White, Passing for Black." *Transition*, no. 58 (Indiana: Indiana University Press 1992), 4

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 9

<sup>6</sup> Holland Cotter, *Adrian Piper: The Thinking Canvas*, (New York: New York Times), April 19, 2018. Accessed November 16, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/19/arts/design/adrian-piper-review-moma.html>

<sup>7</sup> MoMA wall text, Adrian Piper, *What Will Become of Me*, 2020. <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/153243>

*What Will Become of Me* motivates me to explore how a concept lives as an artwork which is a form of archive, and what is the purpose for cumulative archives.

On Kawara's gesture of capturing an existence inspires me to keep on track of the changes of identity over the time. Today Series was started painting daily on January 4, 1966 and ended with his death in 2014<sup>8</sup>. The date on the painting also indicates where Kawara was by the grammar; they have their own handmade case along with a newspaper clip of the date<sup>9</sup>. When Kawara could not finish up the painting by the end of the date, he destroyed the paintings<sup>10</sup>. Comparing with Piper's work, Today Series minimize the identity of Kawara himself, however more generally he is showing that he is a person no matter who he actually is, and he was there at the moment. There is no explanation besides the case and newspaper of the date, but I admire the simplicity that Kawara showed in his daily life in this painting series. Kawara's works bring me to question how the small transformation and change are recognized by myself and others.



I see similarity between Piper and Kawara works, both time dependent and explore artist existence through a simple gesture. I consider the difference of each work is that Piper

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<sup>8</sup> Dia: overview, On Kawara, Accessed October 8, 2021. <https://www.diaart.org/exhibition/exhibitions-projects/on-kawara-exhibition>

<sup>9</sup> ibid

<sup>10</sup> Roberta Smith, *On Kawara, Artist Who Found Elegance in Every Day, Dies at 81*, (New York: New York Times), July 15, 2014. Accessed October 8, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/16/arts/design/on-kawara-conceptual-artist-who-found-elegance-in-every-day-dies-at-81.html>

demonstrates flow of her aging through her cumulative observation, Kawara shows his existence day by day with clear language. This gave me an idea to merge their examination of identity to create a series of conceptual observation. For the language choices, I am influenced by Stephanie Syjuco's work *I AM AN...*

Stephanie Syjuco expresses the matter of Asian American identity through her work: *I AM AN... 2017*. *I AM AN...* is an installation artwork with a sewn cotton panel which is originally a color inverted copy of the poster on a Japanese American's grocery shop during World War II<sup>11</sup>. Syjuco created a homage of the poster which showed the Japanese American's identity which was unevenly treated under racism during World War II<sup>12</sup>. Syjuco folded the part that says "AMERICAN". I consider that this is the representation of distorted identity that Asian American face in their daily life. The folded part of "AMERICAN" makes me think about the ambiguous identity that I was built through my language. Also, I am not



American, however this work evokes my experience that several people ask me if I am Chinese. I feel awkward when I am misidentified by others even though I understand it is hard to identify several Asian people. It is not a huge problem for me however I imagine the feeling of Asian American people who are asked if they are alien to the United States. This work raises me the question of where the identity exists with the word of "I AM" and inspires me to use the letters with a gesture that emulates identity through my body of work.

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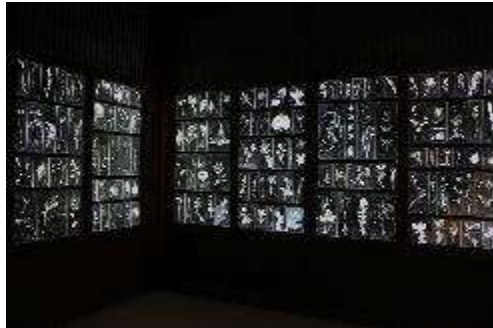
<sup>11</sup> Stephanie Syjuco, *Total Transparencies*, Artist Website, <https://www.stephaniesyjuco.com/projects/total-transparency-filter>

<sup>12</sup> ibit

## Influence: Material and Process

To pursue conceptual observations in order to create my body of work, I am inspired by artists who use experimental processes to explore a concept within their artwork. My art practices towards this thesis have been greatly influenced by Rui Sasaki's art practices. Sasaki's work is about the exploration and discovery of subtle intimacy in unfamiliar spaces<sup>13</sup>. Her idea is coming from her absence of being in Japan and how that changed her meaning of home<sup>14</sup>.

Sasaki's situation is empathized by myself as being an international student and away from Japan for almost six years. There is no room for me in my home since I am not occupying the space for years, I have lost the connections of my friends. I consider this situation as losing and waning identity by outside influences. Sasaki's conflict of being an outsider in her own country reflects



her work: *Subtle Intimacy*, 2013. *Subtle Intimacy* is the archive of residue that she attempted to re-connect her sense of being a Japanese person using plants and seaweed in Awashima, Japan<sup>15</sup>. Sasaki uses fusing glass technique in this work, she placed plants she collected in

sheets of glass then fired the glass. Although the installation is visually fascinating, I consider that the action of making and collecting Japanese plants and seaweed, then fusing glass as her body of work. Each repetitive gesture can be a meditation to adjust artist's identity as Japanese. Sasaki's gesture and how she displays her gesture as an artwork influenced my body of work. To

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<sup>13</sup> Rui Sasaki, *Artist Statement*, April 2020. Accessed November 16, 2021. <https://rui-sasaki.com/page/1-Artist-Statement.html>

<sup>14</sup> ibid

<sup>15</sup> Rui Sasaki, *Subtle Intimacy*. Accessed November 16, 2021. <https://rui-sasaki.com/section/445511-Subtle-Intimacy.html>

record physical gestures into glass works, Anna Mlasowsky's art practice also draws my inspiration.

Anna Mlasowsky's works are related to her experience of being a "foreigner", and her conflicted self-stuck between cultures, languages, and her mental condition<sup>16</sup>. Her background overlaps my experience being in Japan and the



United States. It is my choice to move in the United States, however I am facing difficulty from language and culture differences. Mlasowsky's works show her conflicts and difficulties towards culture and language by simplest forms. I am inspired by her interaction between her concept and gestures with glass. *Hand-Made*, 2010 is the combination piece of sculpture and video performance, Mlasowsky recorded footage where she is manipulating the hot glass with her gloved hands. She states that glass in malleable states is too hot to touch directly, and a tool functions as a translator of movement<sup>17</sup>. This statement and her body of work make me realize my first interaction with molten glass. It was an unforgivable material, and I was struggling to create a solid sphere at the moment. This also overlaps my first interaction with an English speaker, I was too nervous to say even a word. Mlasowski's practice motivates me consider how to create a gesture of translation and how I use the response of the action as a work especially in glass work.

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<sup>16</sup> Anna Mlasowsky, Statement, Accessed October 8, 2021. <https://www.annamlasowsky.com/statement>

<sup>17</sup> Anna Mlasowsky, *Hand-Made*, Accessed October 8, 2021. <https://www.annamlasowsky.com/handmade>



## Body of Work

My body of work asks two questions of transformations of identity and language. The first question is how identity itself changes and transforms over time and outside influences. Whether a language structure affects a construction of identity strongly or not, people typically wear several different hats to introduce themselves to others. I explore this question through conceptual observations using glass as a core and seedbed to express the changes of identity. The second question is how the changes of first-person pronouns affect my identity. This question is more critical; how was my identity formed through using two different languages? In this investigation, I use glass as a documentation tool to record transformations of my first-person pronouns in Japanese and English. In both bodies of work, glass is utilized as a documentation substance to capture changes and impressions.

### ***I AM***\_\_\_\_\_

“I am” is the primary way to start explaining identity to others. It was the very first English sentence I learned when I was a child, even if I did not understand what an English speaker was saying. When I heard the sentence starts with “I am-”, I could understand the person was talking about themselves. Moreover, after saying “I am-”, both noun and subjective come to describe who they are, how they feel, and what they are doing. The phrase “I am-” drew my attention to the possibilities that the simple three letters which can easily explore a person’s identity.

*I AM*\_\_\_\_\_is a project originally started with an Instagram account @i\_am\_\_\_\_\_diary, expanded through multimedia projects. In this series of work, I use capitalized letters “I AM” to symbolize a person. I utilize letters as a seedbed and core, then using various materials which easily transubstantiate and deteriorate to cover up the seedbed and/or create the core itself. The changes of the material represent transformations of identity over the time and outside influences such as communication.



### *I AM*\_\_\_\_\_Time Based Observations

@i\_am\_\_\_\_\_seed 1.22.2021-2.2.7.2021, @i\_am\_\_\_\_\_crystal 2.8.2021-3.15.2021, and @i\_am\_\_\_\_\_sick, 1.13.2021-3.11.2021 are sequential photographs, each square section was posted on Instagram. I chose Instagram as a platform to exhibit the processes every day, since I was inspired by its temporary pleasure that people are often deeply obsessed with. While many people spend so much time with Instagram and other Social Network Services, we rarely remember what we see there. I found the connection of the idea of temporary and evanescence pleasure with my idea of ambiguous identity. I utilized casted glass as a seedbed in the work: @i\_am\_\_\_\_\_seed 1.22.2021-2.2.7.2021 and @i\_am\_\_\_\_\_crystal 2.8.2021-3.15.2021 to observe the growth of seeds and mono-ammonium phosphate. In @i\_am\_\_\_\_\_sick, 1.13.2021-3.11.2021 I created casted sick glass letters to observe its decomposition. Working through transient and living materials, I have seen some specimens change dynamically everyday while other do not change. This is similar to our body; this work transformed and decayed over time.

@i\_am\_\_\_\_seed 1.22.2021-2.2.7.2021 is a sequence of radish sprout seeds grown with a glass seedbed. The sequential photography shows the seeds grew and covered the glass seedbed that read “I AM”, and the seedbed appeared with the sprout’s death. I used radish sprout seeds for this project to represent the maturation of human identity from birth to death. Glass casted letters is considered as a bare body; seeds represent acquired identities such as memories which develop and wane through a lifetime.



@i\_am\_\_\_\_crystal 2.8.2021-3.15.2021 is a sequence of monoammonium phosphate crystals grown with a glass seedbed. This is longer transition from @i\_am\_\_\_\_seed 1.22.2021-2.2.7.2021. I stopped observing the crystals once the crystal solution had dried up. In this conceptual observation,



I focused on development and rooting process of identity. This is similar to @i\_am\_\_\_\_seed 1.22.2021-2.2.7.202, however I consider the identity in this observation as irreversible such as handy skills and matured personality.

@i\_am\_\_\_\_sick, 1.13.2021-3.11.2021 is a sequence of casted “sick” glass (glass without stabilizer). Since the glass is lacking stabilizer, it lost its stability and water solvable. This sequential photography only showed the transition about two months. The sequence only shows the slight changes around the casted “I AM”. This



transformation represents our body and appearance that we often ignore but certainly happens over the time. We often do not recognize the small changes of our body either in ourselves or in others like friends and family.

### *I AM*      *Sculptural Based Observations*

Starting with the combination of digital era and observing based projects, I worked simultaneously with fusing clear glass powder which looks pure white before and after fusing. I am obsessed with the delicate and translucent textures of the fused powder glass. Furthermore, I observed its fast transformations, since all the experimentation had done overnight. Compared with the photograph series of *I AM*\_\_\_\_\_, this fused glass series of work shows the remnants and outcomes from the changes. I consider an identity ephemeral; it not only changes with time but also some influences affect identity immediately such as moving to a new place and meeting new people. In this experimentation and body of work, I used clear glass powder which seems pure white which has a quality of translucency after fusing. The powder also captures its texture before fusing, after being fired the glass texture remains on fused glass such as an embossing technique. I use historical typefaces and screen-printing techniques to create glass embossed sheets and sculptures to reflect this materiality on this observation.

*Experiment #1* is made out of screen printed powder glass directly onto the kiln shelf. During the process of the firing, the non-serif letter I AM distorted. The size of the screen print affected the outcome shape of the firing, bigger letters left more readable letters. Unlike *Experiment #2-#4*, Letters “I AM” were completely distorted in *Experiment #1*. I overlapped my experiences of moving to different countries and states and how it affected my life through this experiment.



*Experiment #2* is also glass powder screen print, instead of placed onto the kiln shelf directly, I placed clear fine frits first then printed the words with the clear glass powder. The clear glass powder worked as a glue to combine clear frits and it gave an effect similar to crochet. I enjoyed how the I AM letter is subtle and almost looks disappeared however it is still there. This conceptual experiment refers my desire to be seen and unseen. This contradicted desire causes me to suffer because I started creating artworks because of my shy personality; *Experiment #2*'s gesture expresses this desire efficiently.



*Experiment #3* and *Experiment #4* are the pieces I used typefaces to make embossed plates. Unlike powder screen print I used for *#1* and *#2*, embossing keep the clear shapes of the letters and because the words are on the white, they disappear at certain angles at the same time.



Similar to *Experiment #2*, I see my personal characters of shyness and desires which are often contradicted in these experimental remnants through the experimental sculpture.

With *Experiment #1* and *#2*, I decided to glue the piece onto a clear glass panel. The panel is for hanging the works on the wall, but also, I wanted to raise the piece from the wall slightly about an inch, so the shadow from the piece casted behind the clear glass panel.

*Experiment #1*'s shadow is unreadable, however it created interesting curvy lines almost like handwriting. *Experiment #2*'s shadow revealed the letter which is hardly read on the first sight on the piece itself.

### *I AM*      *Live, Site-specific Observations*

Through gestures of time and sculptural approaches through identity using letters; “I AM”, I am interested in creating site-specific observations that can be seen moment to moment. The time and sculptural observations of *I AM*\_\_\_\_\_ works ended up showing the result of the transformation, however I believe it is necessary to show on-going conceptual observations which are irreversible in a gallery space. This means fewer people are accessible to my observation. There is a saying in Japanese, 一期一会(*ichigoichie*) which means treasuring every encounter with others, for it will never recur. I use the essence of *ichigoichie* in this series of work to demonstrate an ambiguous identity.

*I AM\_\_\_candle* and *I AM\_\_\_ice* is the observation that I address my interest of remnants of the transformation. Both works were activated by lit actual candles and pulled ice from the refrigerator. I displayed two pictures that showed what the piece looked like to give a clue to the viewer. These two were live pieces and also the quickest transformations in the *I AM\_\_\_\_\_* series. *I AM\_\_\_candle* was burned in less than 10 minutes, and *I AM\_\_\_ice*



was melted in about one hour and half. Although in the photograph *I AM\_\_\_candle* and *I AM\_\_\_ice* seem visually pretty similar and both transformation is occurred by melting, they have opposed materiality. *I*

*AM\_\_\_candle* left more physical remnants than *I AM\_\_\_ice*. With *I AM\_\_\_candle*, candle and candle wicks are present and



captured the change. *I AM\_\_\_ice* left almost nothing in the bowl, since water evaporates. I consider these two observations as one work that compares the changes of seen and unseen identity through the remnants and live observation.

*I AM\_\_\_powder* is the observation which addresses the transformation of human interaction. In this work, I consider how direct bodily interactions such as touching affect to human identity. I placed this work close to the fused powder pieces *Experiment #1-#4*, this work showed how the fused glass pieces on the wall were made, but also I made this piece as a site specific work. I screen printed “I AM” letters with glass powder on black wooden board. Glass

powder is easily moved by vibrations from the gallery floor and wind. I did not put any sign to force anyone either allowing them to touch or prohibiting them to touch this work, since I wanted to investigate how people interact with this observation. I expected to see a subtle change from wind and vibration to show the



durability of identity. Through the exhibition period, someone kicked the panel and also someone directly touched the powder. This was not my expectation; however, I appreciate the strangers who had direct interactions with this work. I consider this small incident as communication that has the power to change



someone's identity. This is what I attempted to express not only *I AM\_\_\_\_\_powder*, but also other *I AM\_\_\_\_\_* series

*I AM\_\_\_\_\_invisible* is a cast glass piece and extends from my depression experience I had in the first year of grad school. This work was placed a dark corner which is not lit up, it is almost unnoticeable in the gallery space. I saw myself as useless, helpless and worthless when I had a depression. I always felt I was an out of circle and invisible, this work is a one of the responses to my experience. *I AM\_\_\_\_\_invisible* turns out as an Easter egg for viewers to find, but also addresses a part of my desire to be seen and unseen. This work addresses partially same and



similar emotional investigation with my sculptural observation works; *Experiment #2, #3 and #4, I AM\_\_\_\_\_invisible* is focused on physical gesture to show the invisibility using clarity of glass.

Although this work does not directly show a

transformation of identity, *I AM\_\_\_\_\_invisible* shows the form of identity instead of transition by its materiality.



### ***Wave***

Referencing from Kinsui's theory and my experience, I am interested in the flow of identity transition using three different first-person pronouns. Japanese language is a role dependent language, this characteristic appears in its grammar and pronouns. Japanese people use several pronouns in daily conversations to characterize each person or group. Through my life, I use three pronouns for saying "I": *Atashi*, *Watashi* in Japanese, and I in English. Each Japanese pronoun has its own characteristic and role. I switch my character and identity when I use *Atashi* and *Watashi*. "I" has a neutral characteristic for me, my personal identity leaves when I speak in English. Since English is my second language, there is a process of translation in my mind to fill a gap of meaning. I attempt to make sense of Japanese and English as close as I can, however it is impossible to fully match them. I often lose some of the sense through my word selection especially when I have a live conversation.

*Wave* is the project that I consider the process of dismissal and translation to explore an identity through spoken language. I recorded my voice of saying "I" in Japanese and English, then I create sound waves out of the recordings. I utilize the sound wave for two purposes: a

documentation tool of dismissal and a model of ideal language. In this body of work, I create work in hotshop to observe soundwaves through malleable states of glass.

### *Gesture of Dismissal*

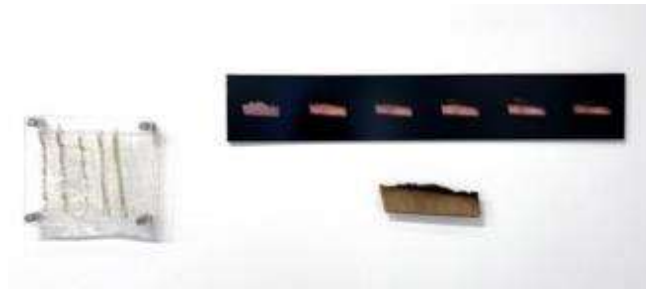
In this section, I focus on dismissive gesture using three first-person pronouns in my spoken language. Through this observation, I attempt to express the sense of losing the definition from each pronoun. However, I also show how much the definition remains through this investigation. I consider the definition of each pronoun as an identity and characteristic of a person. The installation work, *Wave: Atashi, Watashi and I*, I create three sets of remnants from investigations for each pronoun: a glass sheet, a cumulative photograph and an MDF board I used for the processes.



*Wave “Atashi”*



*Wave “Watashi”*



Wave "I"

This investigation was held in hotshop, I made glass cylinders with several white lines to capture the shape of sound waves. I use MDF boards which were cut to the shape of the waves. MDF boards were used as tools to translate the waves by pushing them against hot blown glass surfaces. Glass is the receiver that captures the transformation of sound waves, it captures the shape of waves getting loosened up by glass's heat. During the process in hotshop, the burned MDF cutout is photographed with a black background each time I push them against hot glass, to visualize how much they were destroyed by the heat of the glass. Although each MDF board loses the details of each sound wave, the base and some flow of the waves remain. The MDF board from *Wave "Atashi"* and *Wave "I"* turned out pretty similar shape after being burned out, the result makes me to think about the roots of my identity through these pronouns.

I consider that this burning and recording process represents the sense of losing the definition of identity, but also this eventually shows the phenomenon of Gestalt decomposition which usually happens when a person stares at the same letter, especially *Kanji*, for long time. Either the person became unable to recognize the letter or the person start cognizing the letter part by part, then losing the sense of the meaning<sup>18</sup>. This phenomenon refrains not only the pronouns I observe in here, but also how I think about identity itself. I am interested in this

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<sup>18</sup> Yuri Ninose, and Jiro Gyoba, *Delays produced by prolonged viewing in the recognition of Kanji characters: Analysis of the "Gestaltzerfall" phenomenon*, (Tokyo: The Japanese Journal of Psychology), 1996. Accessed November 9, 2021. [https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/jjpsy1926/67/3/67\\_3\\_227/\\_article/-char/ja/](https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/jjpsy1926/67/3/67_3_227/_article/-char/ja/)

parallel of phenomenon which deludes my sense of identity. This finding continues to the next section: Gesture of Translation to explore a repetitive process of identity and language cognition.

### *Gestures of Translation*

In this section, I use the sound wave of “I” as a sample of language to translate from. To create the wave with hotshop glass, I drew the sound wave on hotshop floor. I use my drawing as my reference for sculpting the wave on hot glass surface. There is a couple translating processes happening to create this body of work; the first translation is the floor drawing that is a translation from the actual sound wave. The second translation is the glass sculpting process that is a translation from the floor drawing. This repetitive process is paralleled from my work, *Wave: Atashi, Watashi*



*and I*, instead of losing definitions from the wave by physical contact with glass, I am actively losing definitions by coping and translating the wave by my hand. This makes me think about how I learn English and my challenges to use it as accurately as possible. Using this process, I create two wall pieces *Wave: Landscapes* and *Wave: Topography* to observing the gesture of translation.

*Wave: Landscapes* is a wall sculpture, that shows the sound wave in vertical. The wave on this piece appears like a ripple on the water, so I created this piece with translucent white to emphasize the marks I sculpted on blown glass.



*Wave: Topography* was made same process with *Landscapes*, instead of displaying the sheet glass vertical on the wall, I made a cross section of the sound wave with clear glass. Clear glass represents the sound and voice from its clarity, it also creates unique



shadows underneath of this piece. *Topography* is a supplemental piece for *Landscapes* to exhibit to the viewer what the object looked like when it is sideways, but also I consider it as a new tool for the translation of “I” by its shadow and lighting.

Various bumps on these two wall pieces illuminate lights and shadows on the surface of glass and the back wall, I consider the phenomenon as a part of the translation process of language and identity. The shape of the waves is not shown through lights and shadows from these two pieces, I consider the phenomenon is the outcome of the translation. From my experience, I often lose my sense of original thoughts when I repeatedly think and express in Japanese and English. Nonetheless, it sometimes turns out new ideas. I attempt to create these two wall pieces to reflect my gesture of language translation through their making processes, also I am interested in making a glass work that is visually successful. I consider the success in glass works as the level of perfection and the quality of light and shadow through the work. Especially the light and shadow are parts of my obsession towards glass, I aimed to explore the quality through this body of work.

### Conclusion

In my thesis and body of work, I intended to combine my question towards identity and how language affects it by time and outside influences. I consider an identity as ambiguous; languages we use in daily life define and transform an identity through communication. Through

study of linguistic matter and artist influences, I created two series of thesis work which have the similar concept but different directions. In both series of work, I emulated the process of changing and transformation of identity and/with language in my body of work.

I was obsessed with glass since when I was a child and continued to work on this material for a decade, it always amazes me, and I emphasize through its materiality. The idea that I overlapped my identity with glasses materiality, and now I use glass as a conceptual vehicle to explore my work. Especially the series *I AM*\_\_\_\_\_, I minimized the usage of the glass however it is, depending on how glass acts as a human being to emulates their natural cycles of changing.

I believe the questions I asked in my body of work in this thesis are similar or even the same as what I was asking before graduate school. Before I started my graduate study, I strongly believed myself as a material-based person, and I had a desire to create physical and sculptural glass works. I tended to make my works as my persona and hide myself from my works. I am not denying that I still have the desire. However, the discussions and experimentation-based studies which I contributed to this graduate program expanded the ways of seeing materials and concepts. The first year of the graduate experience and first semester of second year was a prosperous time to explore glass as physical and conceptual material. Many of my body of works were influenced by the experimentation I had in my graduate study. My thesis is not the perfect answer to the questions I had; it still has the potential to dig down in my artistic career. However, I was able to find a way to approach these questions.

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## Work Images

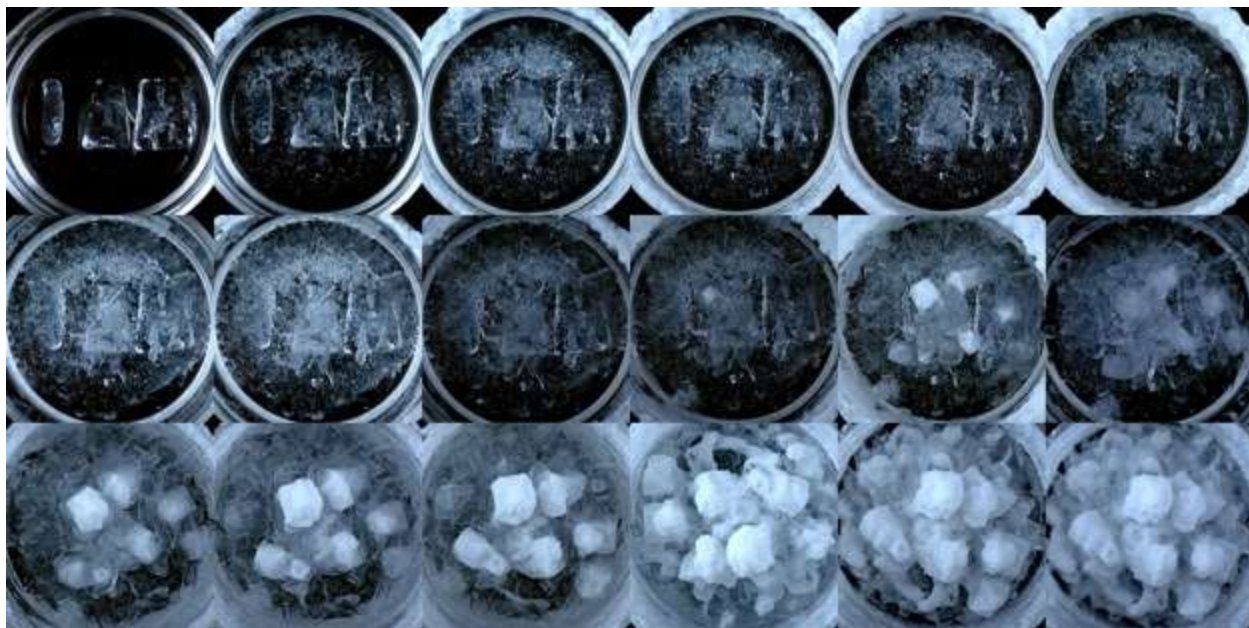


*@i\_am\_\_\_\_seed 1.22.2021-2.2.7.2021*

2021

photography, glass, radish sprout seeds

W35 x H10 inches



*@i\_am\_\_\_\_crystal 2.8.2021-3.15.2021*

2021

photography, glass, monoammonium phosphate

W30 x H15 inches



*@i\_am\_\_\_\_sick, 1.13.2021-3.11.2021*

2021

photography, glass, sick glass(Silica, NaOH)

W30 x H25 inches



*Experiment # 1*

2021

glass, UV glue

W4 x H10 x D1 inches



*Experiment #2*

2021

glass, UV glue

W6 x H8 x D1 inches



*Experiment #3(top), Experiment #4(bottom)*

2021

glass

W3 x H2 x D1 inches each



*I AM\_\_\_\_\_candle* (left), *I AM\_\_\_\_\_ice*(right)

2021

glass, candle(*I AM\_\_\_\_\_candle*), ice(*I AM\_\_\_\_\_ice*)

Size varies





*I AM\_\_\_powder*

2021

wood, glass

W12 x H12 inches





*I AM\_\_\_\_invisible*

2021

glass

W3 x H0.5 x D1 inches



*Wave: Atashi, Watashi and I*

2021

glass, MDF board, photography

Size varies

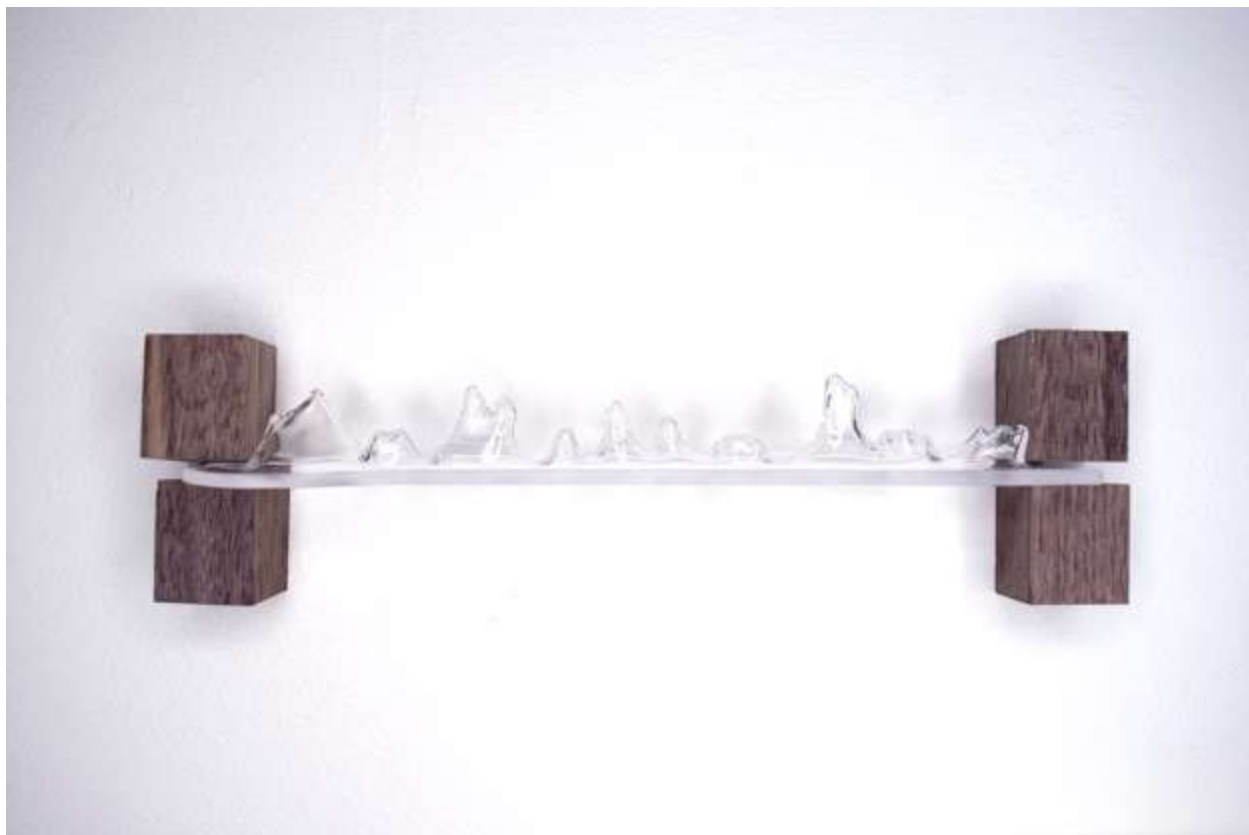


*Wave: Landscapes*

2021

glass

W9 x H13 x D1 inches



*Wave: Topography*

2021

glass

W19 x H2 x D1 inches