Moppet*Sense

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MOPPET*SENSE

A Thesis

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requirements for the degree of
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ............................................................................. ii

ABSTRACT ............................................................................................... v

SHOW IMAGE ............................................................................................ 1

INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................... 2

CHILDREN’S STORIES AND FAIRY TALES ................................................. 6

FAMILY CRAFT ........................................................................................... 11

CONTEMPORARY FEMINIST AND FEMININE ART ................................. 13

GIRLHOOD PLAY ......................................................................................... 16

THE INSTALLATION ................................................................................... 18

CONCLUSION .............................................................................................. 25

REFERENCES .............................................................................................. 28

VITA ............................................................................................................. 30
ABSTRACT

*Moppet*Sense is a hybrid collaboration between my adult self and a fictionalized version of me as a young girl, or moppet. Through use of craft, textiles, sound, light, color and narrative the work describes a space where both woman and moppet can join to engage with one another in a playful exchange of knowledge and experience.

Saturated hues, exaggerated scale and a playful approach to the handicrafts offer the viewer an overwhelming, hyper-realistic experience of girlhood and play, which they can each physically explore and navigate throughout. The work refers to the nostalgic and domestic through its employment of familiar domestic objects, materials, space and craft. It seeks to uncover ways that the seemingly disparate worlds of girlhood and womanhood can meet, question and better understand the desires, aesthetic and interior worlds of one another.
View of *Moppet*Sense during week of installation, April 21-25, 2009, at Glassell Gallery in the Shaw Center for the Arts, in downtown Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
INTRODUCTION

I was once a moppet, and viewed womanhood as an enticing mystery. A "moppet" is an archaic term, used as early as 1601, which refers to a girl between birth and adolescence, and is "usually [a little girl] you are fond of".\(^1\) Moppet was also a word used to describe a mop, rag doll. The term fell out of usage sometime after Beatrix Potter's 1906 publication of “The Story of Miss Moppet”, about a cat named Miss Moppet, a mouse and a dust mop; at one point in the story, Miss Moppet wears a dust mop on her head to fool and catch the mouse, but the mouse eventually escapes through a hole in the dust mop.\(^2\) The world that Potter creates in her children’s stories has brought me joy since I was a moppet, and it was a delight to see her using a word which had so captivated my own interest.

I was drawn in by the playful and whimsical sounding nature of the word, and its appeal was only increased by the outmoded nature of its role in modern English. Moppet sounded to me like a word I might have encountered while re-reading many of the classic fairy tales I have used as literary sources for this body of work, invoking an air of nostalgia for a remote past, here, that past refers to my girlhood years. In this piece, I use both the literal meaning of the word and the way in which its sound evokes a sense of girlhood fancy, but a fancy that is anachronistic to the modern, adult viewer. I point to how the world of girlhood that I have created in \textit{Moppet*Sense} is characterized by the logic of a young girl, as well as to how this world is

\(^1\) Online Thesaurus. Princeton University, 2003-2008, \hspace{1em} <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/moppet>

\(^2\) Potter, Beatrix. “The Story of Miss Moppet”. Kids Corner. Athens, Ohio: A Presentation of Ohio State University, Fredrick Warne & Co. \hspace{1em} <http://wiredforbooks.org/kids/Moppet/Mm00.htm>
described through a sensuous encounter with sight, sound and touch. This work makes material
the whimsy and sense of irretrievability, of that tenuous time in a woman's life.

As young as five years old, I can recall ways that I sought to mimic perceived rituals and
practices of womanhood, such as the application of make-up. Setting alone atop the bathroom
counter, with my mother’s eye shadow in hand, I would try to apply the shadow to my eyes just
as my mother demonstrated each morning. It was frustrating that attaining womanhood, unlike
learning to read and write, could not be gained through simple study and practice. Even though I
could learn to mimic the application of my mother’s eye make-up, I did not somehow magically
transform into a woman.

Each story and fairy tale I had watched my mother read to my younger sister and me only
seemed to highlight my desire to know more of the world of womanhood. One story in
particular, The Dream Tree, written by Steven Cosgrove in 1974, gave voice to my angst. The
protagonist, a young caterpillar, watched great butterflies flit about the large tree she called
home. She longed to know what it felt like to fly so high in the air, but the butterflies ignored her
cries. Only once did she receive an answer, a very cryptic “Some day you’ll know”.3 My moppet
heart ached with empathy for the little caterpillar. The little caterpillar eventually did became a
butterfly, yet every time my mother finished reading the story I remained a little girl, still no
closer to possessing a complete understanding of womanhood.

The period of feminine maturity that I yearned for as a moppet is now tangible. I have
baby-sat for a handful of young girls over the past four years, and have observed in them that
same hunger to be familiar with the realm of womanhood, something I too had wished to know

3 Cosgrove, Stephen. The Dream Tree. Danbury CT: Serendipity Books, Price/Stern/Sloan
when I was their age. It has been a surreal sensation to be on the other side of such knowledge; I possess a quality that these girls wish to grasp but, at the same time, cannot. These more recent observations as an adult woman wheedled me to reexamine not only my own past girlhood desires, but also those of young girls today, as well as those of a broader spectrum of women who were once each moppets themselves.

By way of engaging myself in this exploration I sought out, and discovered, a happy collaborator: Girl. Girl was a moppet of my own fictional conceit, born from memories of girlhood. In this body of work, Girl operated as chief creative consultant, muse and companion, embodying a whimsical, hybrid interpretation of the curious moppet I once was. Together we navigated the desires of girlhood, offering one another a window into our respective worlds of girlhood and womanhood.

Girl sought to understand what it means to embody the feminine and sexually mature aspects of womanhood, while it was my job to facilitate this playful exploration for her. The collaboration, however, did not remain one-sided. In collaborating with Girl I learned how to carry my adult knowledge of womanhood into the work, which afforded us the opportunity to reclaim and redefine qualities of girlhood desire for one another. Girl was able to peek in through the window of womanhood that I offered her, and she restored in me a sense of wonder and delight in girlhood and play. Reflecting on the nature of this relationship, I am reminded of reading books like *Anne of Green Gables* and *Little Women* with my mother. Books classified as “crossover literature,” wherein I as a young girl and my mother as a grown woman were “provid[ed] a forum for sharing and connecting [between] generations”. “In the shared reading of these texts, girls and women demonstrate continuity between life stages: girls look forward to
future adult experiences, and grown women look back, nostalgically, to their pasts”. The
relationship between Girl and myself is an example of this type of crossover, wherein we crafted
a new, hybrid identity that joined together the control and confidence of an adult woman with the
playfulness and flair for the fantastical of a young girl.

We have provided one other with narrative, images, and materials, in order to stimulate a
multi-sensory experience of girlhood and womanhood. The three most common elements of
sensory memory - the iconic (visual), haptic (tactile) and echoic (auditory) are converging to
emphasize the sensuous nature of our investigation for the audience. These elements featured in
the work, build richness and depth and allow the viewer to make connections to their own
autobiographical and sensory memory.

A. Mitchell and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh. Westport Connecticut, London: Greenwood
CHILDREN’S STORIES AND FAIRY TALES

Girl and I have an affectionate connection to many of the classic children’s stories and fairy tales which are commonly known and shared throughout Western culture. We plucked and gathered from this vast catalogue of literature in order to piece together a narrative which could relate to our own shared history. These selected narratives were able to touch on and embrace the broader well of knowledge and experience of our audience.

At about the age of five or six there was one particular book-on-tape entitled, Happiness, a story from the Standin’ Tall series by Janeen Brady, that was an obsession for me. I centered on the idea of a magic dress, the “perfect dress” that could transport me into womanhood, and the mature state of femininity that I dearly wished to embody. The story is about a young princess, and her father, the King, who gifted her a magical dress that could mimic any phenomena in nature: the sun, the moon, the stars, a babbling brook, a field of flowers, and so on. I constantly indulged myself in fantasies about this magical “perfect dress,” how it would look, what good deeds would be required for me to complete in order to magically obtain the dress, and countless others. Girl caught the fever and asked me to make for her a dress like a flower garden; us both being fans of The Secret Garden, by Frances Hodgson Burnett, the value of making such a dress became a worthwhile venture and mutual delight to create.

It is only recently, while re-reading many classic fairy tales that I came across the tale of “Donkeyskin”, by Charles Perrault, and noted the similarities between this tale and the book on tape of the princess and her magic dress that had so bewitched my girlhood imagination. “Donkeyskin” distinguishes itself from the previous story in that here the young princess is being

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asked to give her hand in marriage to her widowed father, the king. As a way to stall the inevitable, the princess asks her father to lavish her with seemingly impossible gifts of fancy: the first two tasks were requests to make a dress the color of the sun, and the other the glowing shade of a full moon. The princess eventually escapes her father’s grasp, and it becomes these very dresses that help to reveal her natural beauty to a prince in a nearby land.\textsuperscript{6} I find the essential role that these dresses’ play in the outcome of the tale encouraging: the garments play accessory in her escape from being forced to commit incest, and are vehicles in her success to build outside connections, and seek more appropriate companionship elsewhere.

A garment can serve as accomplice, companion and guide into new areas of maturity and identity. That is what the acquirement of a magical dress represented for me as a young moppet, listening to the story of the young princess in the “Happiness” recording. It naturally followed that Girl would want me to make her a dress: a magical, \textit{Garden Dress} to rival all other gowns in existence. The power of magic is quite a prominent idea in stories such as \textit{The Secret Garden}, as well as in many classic fairy tales. Hodgson Burnett, herself, did not ascribe to any one religious group, but held fast to a personal philosophy that guided her life and work. Magic played an important part in this philosophy, “I believe, of course, in magic,” she affirmed in 1911.\textsuperscript{7} Hodgson Burnett’s fast-held beliefs, in relation to the wonders as well as the unpleasant realities of daily life, can be best exemplified by the following quote: “Magic is the bringing about of

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unbelievable things through an obstinate faith that nothing is too good to be true, and many things are too idiotically bad to be able to stand up on their own feet if you charge right at them laughing aloud and with your lance in rest”.

It is with similar determination that I once believed so faithfully, that if I closed my eyes and concentrated hard enough on the idea of a magical dress, that upon opening my eyes I would be in physical possession of said dress. Girl was captivated by similar ideas of magic. From its first breath, this dress was meant to express a physical embodiment of magic, as well as notions of girlhood desire and play. In making Girl her Garden Dress, I helped Girl to endow this garment with properties that could enchant both herself and our audience. By making this dress fantastically large, and over-loaded with color, texture and media, I could create an object of overwhelming and otherworldly charm.

The exterior of the Garden Dress makes specific allusions to the skirt as an expression of a cultivated garden-scape. We derived inspiration for the flowers in our garden from Hans Christian Anderson’s, “The Nightingale.” In the opening passages of this tale Anderson describes the Imperial Garden of the Chinese Emperor: “In the garden you could find the most wondrous flowers. The most splendid among the flowers were trimmed with little silver bells that jingled, and you couldn’t walk by without noticing them. Yes, everything was arranged quite artfully in the Emperor’s garden…”. In much the same way that we knew the Garden Dress to be magical, and not of this world, the garden in Anderson’s story described a reality that is truthful only to fantasy. In sheer mass, this dress also connoted ideas of a fantastical ideal. It is

8 Ibid.

quite true that Girl would never be able to wear, let alone move around in such a massive and physically engulfing garment. Here, we used notions of magic to point not to reality, but to qualities of an ideal fantasy. Making the Garden Dress as an adult, in collaboration with Girl, gave satisfying contrast to the frustrations I felt as young girl wishing for my “perfect dress” fantasy to be fulfilled. We shared the physical expression of our personal fantasies with our audience, allowing them to travel with us to this ideal world where magic could occur.

My memories of “Happiness” were exclusive to the princess and her magical dress, however, I have recently re-read the story in its entirety and discovered that it was not the magic dress, a “possession” that offered her ultimate happiness; instead, it became necessary for her to find joy and happiness from within. The story ended with her giving away her dress, and many toys, to all the other children in the kingdom. The moralizing end of the story strays from the nature of the traditional fairy tale structure, where, according to the writings of Bruno Bettelheim, The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales, moralizing is supplanted by ambiguity, and no right or wrong conclusions are directly offered to the young reader; this offers the child the opportunity to arrive at and insert their own sense of justice to the tale. Regardless of this fact, I found it oddly uncanny that Girl and I concluded to frame the installation in a similar manner: we focused on creating, and obtaining, a dress that realized our own mutual fixations on a “magical dress,” and then proceeded to frame it in a way that allowed our audience to share with us in the experience.

10 Brady.

The creation of Girl opened a gateway which could transport myself, the work, and our audience to a world where magic could be encountered. Each aspect of the installation became an opportunity to imbue this microcosmic world of my own invention, with a magical sensibility. There is an idea in the dramatic arts that an audience may be persuaded to enter into the fictional reality of any well-crafted, directed and performed narrative by way of what is known as a “willing suspension of disbelief.” I aimed to create a narrative that could excite my audience with a sense of wonder. The work guided them on a journey to excavate the qualities of the other-worldly evident throughout, doing so in a manner that persuaded them to suspend all disbelief, and willingly engage in a world where magic was a corporeal part of everyday life, history and experience.
FAMILY CRAFT

The materials and methods that Girl and I decided to employ in this show directly reference the creative roots that stem from within our family circle. Chiefly noted, it was our father, a professional silversmith, and mother, an expert seamstress, in addition to our maternal grandmother, also an expert seamstress, quilter and maker of teddy bears and dolls, that informed our early knowledge of and attraction to traditional craft methods. We gathered our knowledge and understanding of the various craft-practices from father, mother and grandmother in order to emphasize and honor the strong bond which connected us with the craft-saturated world of our childhood.

My mother and father have worked together as sole-proprietors of a silversmithing business, Art Craft Silversmiths, since I was a year old. I have many memories of spending sick-days from school at their shop, sleeping on the couch in the break room, drinking ginger ale that my paternal grandmother, who was their secretary for the first ten years that they owned Art Craft, would purchase for me from the neighboring international foods store. After their lunch hour was over, I would begin my inquisitive exploration of the shop. My mother, the silver-plater and polisher, would explain various aspects of the silver-plating process to me, and then turn me over to my father for jewelry-making instruction. My father taught me how to extrude rods of pewter to thin wires that I could twist, cut, shape and solder into rings for myself, as well as make gifts for childhood friends. My sister, Brandi, was also tutored by our parents. I still wear a pair of crystal stud earrings that she and my father made for me when she was seven.

Craft pervaded much of our family’s domestic realm as well. My father was, and still is, a weekend carpenter. This led to a constant improvement of our family home. My mother sewed all the dresses, Halloween costumes, quilts and pillows that my sister and I had as young girls. My maternal grandparent’s home was swathed in hand-crocheted doilies, decorative wall-pieces
and tablecloths, hand-painted and crafted wooden dolls and doorstops – my grandfather did the woodworking, as he was something of a weekend carpenter himself - in addition to a basement filled with teddy bears which my grandmother custom-made and sold at local craft fairs.

Brandi, and I were immersed in a world of professional and domestic practices of craft. We saw how objects could be made and how they could pervade and occupy a domestic space. Each object was made with such care and thought, that when I began studies in the studio arts I was not aware of any necessity to make formal distinctions between craft and fine art. It took me some time to come to terms with the dichotomy that had been established between the two by some factions of traditional academia. Later study of contemporary art revealed to me artists like Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, both of whom were seeking to deflate such distinctions in their own work. I identified with this work, and soon sought to merge the materials and methods of craft into my own studio practice.
CONTEMPORARY FEMINIST AND FEMININE ART

As we pay tribute to our family for all that they taught Girl and I about the craft arts, we also recognize the pivotal role that early feminist art of the 1960s and 1970s played in legitimizing the application of traditional women’s handicrafts for the fine arts practice. Our use of such craft-based methods and materials honors this historical precedent. Directly, we point back to some of the more famous examples, as mentioned in the previous paragraph: the abstract, femmage, quilt-work of Miriam Schapiro, and the collaborative “Dinner Party” installation, 1979, organized and arranged by Judy Chicago. The “Dinner Party” was composed of porcelain plates with china painting, each made to represent a specific, historic, female figure, and each were formal, bas-relief and three-dimensional interpretations of the vulva, arranged with hand-embroidered table runners on a very large, triangular-shaped table, complete with table settings. Hand-embroidered vignettes on the individual table runners told stories of influential female figures throughout history, such as Eleanor of Aquitaine, Mary Wollstonecraft, Emily Dickenson and Margaret Sanger. Through the use traditional women’s handicraft, as well as honoring the achievements of women throughout history, Chicago is giving voice and attention to a group of individuals, whose accomplishments were constantly undermined, or ignored by patriarchal society, or as Chicago once said, “there is some fundamental, resistance to incorporating women’s symbology and iconography into the mainstream cultural thrust”.12 It took over twenty years for the Dinner Party to find a permanent home with the Brooklyn Museum of Art. These artists aimed to sound a universal voice for the struggle of women, and establish a more prominent awareness of feminine aesthetics in the arts.

More current contemporary influences come from artists operating in a more autobiographical context that uses traditional craft practices, while also finding ways to reveal qualities of female sexuality and femininity. Examples of these qualities are evident in the quilt-pieces of Tracy Emin, the feminine content and fairy tale characters abundant in Kiki Smith’s prints and three-dimensional works, and the playful, embroidered textile work of Maggy Rozycki Hiltner. Tracy Emin’s work installed within a one-person nylon tent, *Everyone I Ever Slept With 1963-1995*, 1995, has sewn to the interior walls, the hand-quilted names of every person that she ever slept in a bed with, whether that be sexually or platonically. I found the content, materials and context of this work especially provocative, as it forced the viewer to get down on their hands and knees, a position of submission, and take in very personal information through a medium not traditionally associated with fine art practices, but linked to the domestic work traditionally associated with women.

By looking at the recent past and present we have learned to use the history of craft and feminist art in a way that frames our work within a contemporary context. We reclaim these traditions and use them to serve our own specific aesthetic and descriptive goals for the work, touching on issues of femininity, sexuality and ownership. The work in *Moppet*Sense draws inspiration from the sheer massive scale of Chicago’s *Dinner Party* piece, as well as license to reveal personal experience from Emin. I have found the work of all artists mentioned in this section to be particularly gifted and driven to bring ever-greater awareness of, and appreciation for, the aesthetic of feminism and femininity in the art world at large.

During my undergraduate years I spent my work-study hours hand-sewing buttons, zippers and hemlines, cutting fabric, dressing actors, and designing costumes for in the university theatre costume shop – a cozy, one-room operation dominated by women. I began to incorporate embroidery and fibers into the materials and content of my studio work. The practice of craft
with fiber and textiles became a way for me to slow down with quiet, repetitious activities such as hand sewing and embroidery. I was able to subvert traditional notions of the studio practice, in a manner that recognized and honored the pervasive nature of traditional craft in contemporary society. Girl and I found that with the ever-increasing popularity of Do-it-Yourself (D.I.Y.) culture today, the time was ripe to make a show centered on craft-based media. Our audience, inculcated with numerous D.I.Y. shows on cable television and public broadcasting – it was first popularized here - understands D.I.Y. culture and this gives them an entry point into the work we have made for Moppet*Sense.
GIRLHOOD PLAY

Seeking ways to incorporate craft influences from our family upbringing, contemporary artists and culture helped Girl and I to reconnect with our past and propel the work forward, maintaining a feminine aesthetic that speaks, simultaneously, to experiences of both girlhood and womanhood. We delve back into childhood memories in order to help describe the world of girlhood, in a manner that erases the phenomena of what psychologist Carol Gilligan calls “covering over.” “Covering over” is a common mode that many adolescent and adult women use to “selectively ‘forget’ certain experiences” of girlhood play and culture. In order to end this pattern of “covering over” I worked with Girl to recover girlhood memories in a way that was identical to the three stages outlined by social science researchers: “recalling, questioning the memory, and working out what it means in the present”.¹³ I have discovered the sources of inspiration for the aesthetic structure and play of the Garden Dress evident in memories of play that I engaged in with my sister, as well as the play I engaged in with my male cousin, Michael.

The interior of the Garden Dress was inspired by the times spent during my girlhood sharing a bedroom with my younger sister, Brandi. At bedtime Brandi and I would push our trundle beds close together, leaving enough space for the two of us to lie down in the middle, and stare up at the bedroom light as it glowed through the hand-made quilts we used to cover the gap between our two beds. Even today, this memory of quiet delight in childhood play remains one of the most pleasant, iconic memories of my girlhood. My cousin, Michael, and I also arranged small play environments, “couch forts” as we called them, by stripping every couch cushion

from my aunt and uncle’s living room couch, in order to make, most times, a “fart factory” within the interior. These “couch forts” were a space that no adult could fit inside of, and neither would they willingly wish to, which gave us no end of humorous delight. With Brandi and Michael, respectively, I was acting participant and co-maker of these intimate play spaces. I referenced these recovered girlhood memories when working with Girl to create an exterior and interior environment of play and fantasy that could engage and enchant Girl as much as it would work to do the same for our viewers.

The function of my role in this installation was that of facilitator, as opposed to my girlhood role of participant. Or rather, it merely appears that I operated as facilitator in this collaboration, for, inevitably, I was collaborating with myself, and maintained complete control. I kept my own memories of girlhood in mind during the guise of collaboration with Girl in order to make a space that could speak authentically in reference to those memories of play with Brandi and Michael. The *Garden Dress* became the solution we arrived at to address these memories of play. Additionally, the *Garden Dress* offered an answer to the significance of those past environments of play. As children, Brandi, Michael and I wanted a space that we could make our own, and that adults could not enter. I am an adult now, and I have created this dress structure with Girl in order to create a space that my adult body, as well as the adult bodies of our audience, *could* enter into – a space that references and describes childhood play spaces, remaining relatively intimate in scale, but no longer exclusive to child participation. Play, fantasy and delight are now welcome and open for all to experience.
THE INSTALLATION

Our *Garden Dress*, is a skirt-structure that stands eight feet tall, thirty inches wide at the top tapering out to nine feet wide at the base. Exterior embellishments for the skirt begin with seven tiered and gathered levels of sixty womens’ skirt and dress slips, all dyed varying shades of cream, pink and red. Pinned over the womens’ slips, in a manner that mimics the floral clusters of a lush garden terrain, are over one hundred hand-crocheted and sewn five-petal flowers of varying sizes, color and texture. In addition, the floral terrain is augmented by hand-crocheted domes that mimic stylized versions of the central reproductive organs of a flower – these domes, likewise, allude to the nipples or breasts of a sexually mature woman – the flowers and domes each made of yarn. I detached the bodices of all the womens’ dress slips that make-up the tiered layers of the skirt, and gathered them into individual bunches, resembling rose blossoms. These rose blooms are pinned under, beside or on top of the five-petal yarn blossoms. Additional embellishments included the decorative pins that affixed each flower to the skirt structure, soft, acrylic pom-poms of varying size and color, and looped strands of colored and clear plastic beads. Through a part in the dress, beginning at a height of approximately six feet, the viewer could enter the interior of the skirt structure.

Prior to entering the interior of the *Garden Dress*, the viewer is asked take off their shoes, for the interior floor was made of a one-and-a-half foot high layer of cushions and pillows, encased within a large yellow, floral-patterned, patchwork-like pillow case, nine feet wide in diameter, to completely fill the base of the interior. Over twenty found bed sheets, pillow cases, mattress covers, comforters and hand-knit or crocheted blankets are suspended and draped, beginning at the central “waist” height of eight feet. One foot below the gathered suspension of found bedding materials hung a single light bulb, diffused by a swath of yellow bedding material. The play of reflective color between the yellow floor and yellow light source create a
warm, soft glow, lending a feeling of calm and comfort to the experience of the interior. A series of delicately embellished crochet chains form a soft, decorative “chandelier” below the light feature. Speakers hidden behind the draped walls of bedding materials, play, at low-volume: a twelve-minute long sound piece, that incorporates the sound of a woman alternately breathing and singing popular German and American music of the twentieth century; a child alternately talking, singing and playing; and the sounds of a suburban outdoor environment. The sound piece was arranged with a fantastical structure that weaved in and out of these various auditory layers, with overlapping textural complexity.

The long-term echoic memory can be held in one’s consciousness for an extended period of time, which is one reason why the alphabet was taught to us as children in the form of a song; with repetition and practice this large amount of information can easily be contained and stored for reference at any given moment. My mother studied German during high school, but could not remember more than one or two spoken phrases; however, she remembered all the traditional German songs they learned in class. “Lili Marlene,” a song made famous after being sung by Marlene Dietrich, is one of the German songs that my mother could recall, and sung to my sister and I as young girls. For this reason, “Lili Marlene” possesses, in my echoic memory, the attributes of a lullaby, and I have used it as such in the sound piece for this show. Additionally, my maternal Grandmother Marlene was named after Marlene Dietrich, since her father, my great-grandfather, was from Germany. The song “Lili Marlene” and Marlene Dietrich, the actress, have set root in my cultural identity as an individual of German heritage, and as a woman that appreciates the low, rough yet soothing voice of Dietrich. I also source Buddy Holly’s song, “Everyday,” for the sweet, lullaby-like feel it has as well. “Everyday,” also connects me to the girlhood fixation I had with all things relating to 1950s culture, a fixation typical of many young girls during the 1980. The television show, *Happy Days*, and film version
of the musical *Grease* were prominent media influences that lent attention and focus back to this era. In this way, the sound work directly embodied the nostalgic nature of the show as a whole.

As discussed in the previous section on *Girlhood Play*, the interior has been transformed into a feminized version of a fort structure - a place to retreat to, for children and adult viewers alike. The sound work installed within has not only the quality to stir up echoic sense memories for the viewer, but also the ability to lend a feel of magic to the experience of the interior. Bettelheim expounds in the section of his book on a child’s “need for magic” on theories of how animism, as a component of magic, remains part of a child’s perceived reality up until adolescence.\(^{14}\) Animism, making the inanimate animate is a common device in many fairy tales, as well as in some contemporary children’s movies, i.e. the furniture and domestic objects in Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast*. I have chosen to install sound work, hidden within the interior of the *Garden Dress* in order to lend an animistic quality to the space. The sound is perceived, but cannot be seen, giving the impression to the viewer that the dress is singing, playing, breathing as an animate subject would.

The interior and exterior of the *Garden Dress* were created in a manner which makes believable the conceit that they were realized in a collaborative effort – a structure crafted by adult hands but dreamed-up by the mind of a young child. Over-loaded with visual information, and over-saturated chroma in many parts of the exterior, this structure was a hybrid embodiment of girlhood aesthetics, wherein, for many, hot pink and excessive decoration reign supreme. It is an exuberant expression of the rush of satisfaction attributed to attaining all that one desires, and the physical gratification of that being found in an article of clothing; much like the sugar-rush

\(^{14}\) Bettelheim, 45-46.
experienced after a frenzied candy binge, or the ecstatic glee felt after concluding a massive shopping spirt.

This piece was not meant to act as a symbol for an everyday, “perfect dress;” it was an over-sized, over-the-top and magnificent garment, which fulfilled dream-like fantasies of personal adornment and fancy made tangible. The Garden Dress has been fashioned into a textile garden that is an exterior of monumental ornament, with an interior play space of quiet refuge and respite.

As concluded in the section on Girlhood Play, the Garden Dress acts as an instrument of play for our audience. This dress-structure is an entreaty to our viewers, a beckoning to call, for them to enter a hybrid world where qualities of girlhood and womanhood merge. In recognizable comparison, the primary form of the dress-structure resembles various familiar objects and environs: a multi-tiered cake, beehive, fort, tent, and so on.

This Garden Dress became the supreme body around which all other works in the installation radiated. Large-scale line-drawings painted onto found sheets and mattress covers, hand-embroidered pillows, and crochet chains operating as veils, decorative framing elements and color accents, each play their part in breathing life into the installation as a whole.

Preliminary sketches, sourced from childhood photographs and illustrations from treasured children’s stories and fairy tales, were a way to work out formal ideas of fantasy, and allowed me to determine how the logic of this world would look and operate. After developing the small drawings I wished to incorporate into the pillows made for the show, I began work on some large-scale reproductions of the original renderings with acrylic paint onto found bed sheets. Essentially, these works on bed sheets were drawings made with paint. Keeping mainly to the line drawing, illustration style of the originals, I used fluorescent pink paint to describe the lines of each object and character depicted. The fluorescent pink began to vibrate and pulse,
creating an attraction and repulsion flow during viewing. As I worked on this piece, the color hurt my eyes it was so bright, but because it was so very saturated I, as the viewer, was also drawn in, not able to look away. I felt the same way about looking back on memories from my own girlhood. These fluorescent drawings expressed a hyper-aesthetic, attracting the viewer much as my own desires as moppet once held me, but their over-ambition made me want to withdraw as well. There was something about the act of looking back on past desire, and also in seeing that similar desire in moppets I have known now as a young woman, that have unsettled me. I have found that this area between attraction and repulsion is where the work speaks best to the viewer. It asks the viewer, “Well, are you going to look away or aren’t you?” Here the work confronts, discomforts, engages and enchants the viewer. I liked it best when the drawings I made spoke to desire, and as a result, forced the viewer to yield to attraction or repulsion, or, ideally, kept them somewhere in-between.

Previously noted, the hand-embroidered pillows incorporated in this installation use some of the figurative, preliminary sketches from childhood photographs and book illustrations as their source. However, I also extracted floral imagery from past female artists, such as Frida Kahlo, Tracy Emin and Sarah Sze. I drew from these artists’ work as a way to connect myself to an aesthetic that went beyond a literal description of my girlhood, and opened the dialogue to a broader history of women making art. I deliberately chose artists whom I admire, and whose work had emboldened me as a budding young artist during undergraduate study.

These pillows, sixteen in all were crafted and arranged to imitate framed family portraits. I slightly altered this portrait concept, changing the “family” from a human family to a family garden, and remained exclusive to depicting imagery associated with gardens. Hung salon-style, this soft-framed portrait gallery displayed images of stylized flowers on the front, with hand-written, associative reflections on the back, meant to be turned over and read by the viewer. The
hand-written reflections detailed autobiographical, stream of consciousness connections to girlhood, in addition to moments that indicated my gradual passage into womanhood and sexual maturity. Maggy Rozycki Hiltner, a contemporary fiber artist, uses similar ideas of childhood and excess to speak on her own memories of moving from childhood into adolescence. While the main body of my work remains steeped in the years of girlhood, prior to adolescence, I found a kinship with what Rozycki Hiltner aims at in her own work, as she addresses it in her piece, *Pink Cloud*:

> I grew up a tomboy. Upon adolescence, I approached my newfound femininity and sexuality with this sporty gusto. Relationships, hairdos, food, sex – everything was a game, a contest, something to push on. This piece was created to evoke the overwhelmingly sweet smell of icing at a party or perhaps a flower shop on a hot day. Everything seems all right at first, upon closer inspection, my girls act out the consequences of overindulgence.\(^{15}\)

I love the verbal elucidation that Rozycki Hiltner makes here relating the pastels, sweets and line embroidery drawings of the girls and boys that exist within the space of *Pink Cloud* to the “sweet smell of icing at a party.” One can nearly taste the toothache sweetness of the icing in their mouth, and smell the fragrance of the hot house flowers that pervade Rozycki Hiltner’s *Pink Cloud* embroidered tapestry. Girl and I have sought similar ways to make these portrait pillows, as well as all the other pieces included in our own installation, pin-point a particular mood and feeling, as well as call to mind the idea of an assigned time and place. Rozycki Hiltner does not specify any one particular “flower shop on a hot day,” but leaves us, the viewer, to build that mental and sensory image for ourselves. The salon-style arrangement of the portrait pillows suggests to the viewer a domestic space, perhaps a wall in their grandmother’s living room where

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a bountiful cluster of framed, family portraits hang on proud display for all inhabitants and
guests to gaze at and admire. Evocations of the iconic, haptic and echoic memory are what we
offer to our viewers in each piece.
CONCLUSION

*Moppet*Sense escorts the viewer through a hybrid world of girlhood that embodies overindulgent fancy, adornment and magical wonder. The various elements of the installation culminate to activate and delight the senses and sensory memory of the viewer, offering nostalgic reflection and momentary reprise of what is ultimately an irretrievable past. As the *Garden Dress* acts as a portal between all things moppet and womanly, the bedding materials appropriated for the structure, the large drawings with paint and the pillows symbolize sleep and the act of dreaming – a yearning for things to come or times past. Girl and I navigate between the world of moppet and woman, gifting one another with hints of revelation.

In looking back on the installation, three weeks after de-install, and processing how each piece was received by myself and by viewers within the gallery space I have been able to make some new observations about scale, space, craft and narrative within the work. I was pleased with the overall aesthetic of the show as it was installed within Glassell Gallery, and was overjoyed by the reception it got from viewers, especially those viewers that visited the interior of the *Garden Dress*.

The scale of the *Garden Dress* read very well within the space from both the interior and exterior street-view of the gallery. The structure was small enough to be able to gaze all the way up to the top, but not so large that the viewer felt crowded by sharing the liminal space of the exterior. However, most of the smaller pieces, became lost within the vast expanse of the gallery. I am not too upset by this fact, as the *Garden Dress* was intended to be the main focal point of the show, but this scale issue will be something that I shall seek to resolve further in future, when displaying larger-scale and smaller scale works in a large gallery space.

When considering the craft elements of the work, and how they read and related to my familial craft influences when on display, I find myself searching for ways that future works
could do the same, yet push the work further. I am currently brainstorming ways to build a future body of work that is more engaged in direct dialogue with the craft-work of my mother, father and maternal grandmother. By making more specific reference to the type of objects they each have had a propensity to craft over time, I hope to discover and reveal new layers that form the relationships I have to each of these family members, as well as to the respective craft techniques they employ.

In respect to the narrative aspects of the show, I found that the viewers were able to follow and read the fairy tale and children’s story book feel in the work, but in retrospect I see that the drawings and pillows would have served the whole better had there been a hint more of a connection between each. I believe that I can achieve greater continuity in future works by developing more concise and specific vocabulary for the work that is peculiar to the small “world(s)” I describe. By setting down to write and build the verbal structure of my ideas, I will be able to delve deeper into the world of my work, creating a richness and depth that will be more engaging for my practice as well as my viewers.

The greatest risk I took in this exhibition was in creating the large structure that was the interior and exterior of the Garden Dress. I was apprehensive about whether or not the scale of it would be too great within the interior of the gallery, but it ended up fitting in quite well. It was gratifying to discover that the ability I have developed for being a good judge of scale and proportion in the second dimension could be transferred successfully into the third dimension. Additionally, I was unsure whether my viewers would, first, enter the interior of the dress, and secondly, if they would “get” what the interior was aiming to offer them: a place to play, reflect, listen, relax, recall, and so on. I was literally brimming with joy to see and hear so many different experiences, interactions and stories that came from my viewers entering and engaging
with the interior. The exterior was a visual delight for my viewers, as I had hoped, but it was the interior that ultimately became the main attraction and destination for each.

This show has emboldened my creative drive and desire. I am proud of the work that I made and I am eager to push my materials, techniques and ideas further in future works. The exuberance and sense of fantasy and play will continue to inspire and drive the pieces I create in my studio practice; they drive me to make new work and keep me enthusiastically engaged in the art-making process.
REFERENCES


VITA

Tyler Mackie was born in 1981 in Portland, Oregon, "The City of Roses," to James and Sharon Mackie. Parental encouragement to study the arts - music, dance and the visually applied arts - was a constant for Tyler and her younger sister, Brandi. In 1999, Tyler was awarded a four-year scholarship with Ford Family Foundation (F.F.F.), to aid funding of her studies at Oregon State University. Tyler finished her time at O.S.U. in 2005 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts, with an emphasis in painting. In 2006, Tyler was awarded a two-year graduate level scholarship from the F.F.F., and applied this scholarship to her Master of Fine Arts studies in painting and drawing at Louisiana State University; she will complete her M.F.A. studies at L.S.U. in August of 2009. In June of this year Tyler will be traveling to Galway, Ireland, with five other LSU M.F.A. studio artists to participate in a group exhibition at the Galway Arts Centre.