

# CRAFT AND FEMININITY: MASTERING THE MUNDANE

by

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A THESIS

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As a craft-based artist and feminized person, I often struggle to understand where my art belongs. Not where it physically belongs, but how it will be remembered in an art historical context. After studying Japanese ceramics as well as French and English tapestries, such as the Unicorn Collection of Tapestries, I was inspired by the conversation surrounding craft-based arts in a male dominated historical art realm that values masculine and fine art over feminine and utilitarian art. One can argue that craft-based art is *more* valuable in a historical lens *because* it existed within the home and lifestyles of people during a designated time. Oftentimes, romanticized and idealized sculptures and paintings are more expensive, more elitist, and therefore more conventionally valued. In my research, I would like to create commentary through the feminist lens on the commodification and value assigned to art through ceramics, weaving, and prints by setting a domestic dinner scene with items I made. Through exploring this in an academic setting, the creative practice is at the forefront of my research. The pieces in my exhibition are reflective of the line of questioning I unpack in my research. I want to pay tribute to Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*, a fellow Illinois raised artist, and to the many artists in Homer, Alaska who made the bowls I ate from, the quilts I slept under, and shaped the craft-based community that defined me as a crafter and artist. I will explore the idea of an area in-between craft and fine art, by creating pieces that will be used for everyday mundane tasks *and*

are aesthetically pleasing. In many ways, these items will explore functionality, whether they can or cannot be used for their intended purpose. I want to romanticize the mundane in a way that critiques, inspires, and transforms the viewer's idea of valued art. I hope to *play* with clay and fibers to recreate the childlike act of creation and reject the idea of commodified creation. The goal of my research is to challenge the patriarchal structure implemented in art museums, galleries, and the classroom and to inspire other feminized people to create authentically.

## Acknowledgements

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Thank you, Brian McWhorter, you allowed me the space and confidence to write my thesis in a way that felt true to my work, despite the unspoken expectations of academic writing and work. Your joy inspired me to enjoy my process of creation and to rethink the way I approach writing and art in the context of academia.

To my love Aaron who made me feel seen, cared for, and understood. You are my greatest joy.

To Alexandra, my mother, and my father, your creativity has inspired me, your honesty has pushed me, and your care and love for me has helped heal my inner child and allowed me to create solely for her. I see each of you in every piece I made.

To Sydney Lee, you are one of the coolest artists I know, and you will always be a dear friend and inspiration. Your quilts are everything.

And to every jerk that has treated me like a small and worthless artist...this is not for you, I made this for myself. Deal with it.

## Table of Contents

Introduction	6
The Foundation	8
Setting the Scene	8
The Trailblazers	10
The Contemporaries	14
In the Studio	21
Clay	21
Fibers	30
Out of the Studio: Putting on a Show	37
Conclusion	42
Appendix	45
Bibliography	46

## Introduction

*Creating things from the dirt, I have built my own reality with clay and cotton. I sit and sulk in my own woven mess. I no longer wish to let her go*

While studying art and art history at the University of Oregon, I have been consistently delighted with the conversation of craft versus fine art along with the existence of feminized people in a male and masculine dominated industry. How can my “feminine” and “domestic” work exist within a strictly academic and masculine realm? Why do I feel like my work has to fit a certain criterion to be deemed valuable, innovative, and relevant? In my thesis titled *Craft and Femininity: Mastering the Mundane*, I hope to create a collection of work that challenges the historically patriarchal expectations of valuable artwork in an academic and historical setting. I will create a dinner scene, inspired by Judy Chicago, which consists of 4 place settings, a stereotypical American family. I want to depict a moment that is inherently mundane, boring, and almost expected. In doing this, I will have the space and scene to explore how femininity and domesticity exist within the standard American family. This will allow me to comment on a much larger scene, the patriarchy within the arts, labor division, and the capitalization of feminine labor.

My pieces will appear almost completely functional, but when used they will prove moderately useless or somewhat non-functional. In experimenting with craft and fine art, or functional and non-functional, you can create items that imitate the act of “playing house,” as you once did as a child. These pieces are inspired by the children’s toys that imitate domestic labor and feel chunky, awkward, and full of joy.

There is an element of beauty and aesthetic that is not utilized in stereotypical craft-based work. I want my thesis to feel ironic or comedic in the extravagance of daily items. For example, a ceramic dustpan is not entirely functional because it can break or a placemat with holes is not able to prevent food from touching the table. In creating these items, I am exploring the intentionality of domestic craft items and how they interact within the context of fine art.

## The Foundation

Craft-based art, such as ceramics and textiles, have often been disregarded as women's work and have therefore been ignored in conversations seeking to define art. Rather than trying to fit within the patriarchal definition of what art is, many feminist creatives have used these art forms to express new ideologies and to reclaim these artforms, rather than trying to fit within the patriarchal definition of what art is. Through observing and analyzing specific artworks by contemporary artists and reading texts that discuss the sexual division of labor and the division of craft versus fine art, one can begin to understand the patriarchal hierarchy of art and how to approach craft-based arts with a new lens. The intention of this research is to understand how gender and sexuality are tethered to specific art forms and to discover what lies in between utilitarian craft-based arts and aesthetic fine art. Through setting a scene of modern domesticity with items that explore the realm of fine art and craft-based art, my work challenges the patriarchal ideologies present in the world of art.

### Setting the Scene

When attempting to understand art, we must first understand the systems in which the art is created. Art is either a physical embodiment of the climate in which it exists or a push to move away from the current reality. With the division of labor in the arts and crafts movement, many women feel removed from a movement that they in fact inspired. With the push for industrialization, the work that was once done with love and care within the home became commercialized by men—the textile industry was at the forefront of this industrialization. The shift in the industry shaped the way folks perceived textiles because of how quickly and affordable textiles were being produced. This transition resulted in textiles feeling fully utilitarian, and less creative and personal. Alongside the growing of the production of industrial



textiles, there was an increase in the gender gap of labor. Women and feminized people were at the forefront of craft-based arts, but with the increase of production, consumption, and profits, there was a shift in the hierarchy between craftswomen and men who pursue crafts for profit. Women's work was capitalized on, and their labor was exploited (Callen 1984).

The division of labor and the idea of domesticity reveal the gap between different creative outlets. For example, quilting is a craft that was formed out of a place of necessity, i.e., utilizing scraps to make a blanket to stay warm. But, with time and care, quilting has become an art form, a way to minimize waste, *and* a way to create something aesthetically pleasing (Hedges 1990). Yet, quilts are rarely, if ever, seen on exhibition at well-established art institutions or universities. Instead, they are seen at craft sales and within the homes of those who were gifted them. Quilts are more than a craft item or an art piece; like many other mediums, they exist in-between those. So, why are these stunning homemade works not seen as work that can be exhibited or publicized?

Oftentimes, the craft items created by women are made in the home and for the family:

What distinguishes art from craft in the hierarchy is not so much methods, practices, and objects but also where these things are made, often in the home, and for whom they are made, often for the family. The fine arts are a public, professional activity. What women make, which is usually defined as 'craft,' could in fact be defined as 'domestic art.' The conditions of production and audience for this kind of art are different from those of the art made in the studio and art school, for the market and gallery. It is out of these different conditions that the hierarchical division between art and craft has been constructed; it has nothing to do with the inherent qualities of the object nor the gender of the maker (Parker and Pollock 70).

Women create art with different intentions than men who publicize their acts of creation, so why is the genius act of creation by women any less valued? Callen tries to understand this question when they say, "while hallowed as an almost sacred undertaking and duty for women, domestic activity at the same time was not recognized as real work. It was a labor of love" (Callen 1). Men

and masculine people tend to be more performative about their creative endeavors, whereas women and feminized people are not. By putting their work out to the public, masculine artists are creating with the intention of being recognized or to make a statement. In contrast, much of the work that women and feminized folks create is based on the intention of domesticity. Because of the masculine and patriarchal structure of art museums and art education, feminized work, i.e., craft work, has often been overlooked and undervalued.

Fortunately, labors of love are *slowly* gaining appreciation and recognition in academia and art institutions. Folks are realizing that art should not have to prove itself through the public lens to be valuable. Instead, the beauty and joy of creation and the intention of sharing and utilizing creations in everyday life is rewarding enough. But it is important to understand that historically women's work, which has almost *entirely* been defined as domestic work, is often disregarded because it was created in and for the home, and is most often made by and for women.

### **The Trailblazers**

During the second wave of Feminism in the 1970's, artists were beginning to explore the conversation of women's rights and ownership over our own bodies through art that was *mostly* craft based. Looking at exhibitions by artists such as Judy Chicago, Miriam Schapiro, and Betty Woodman—all of who created scenes that defined the trajectory of women and feminized people in contemporary art—one can begin to see where the inspiration for my collection came from. Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* is a table setting which depicts 99 place settings, each of which is unique and dedicated to prominent individuals (1974-1979). This iconic exhibition by Chicago has stimulated a plethora of conversations regarding women in academic and art institutions (fig 1). Chicago's work has shaped and defined the work of many other feminist

creatives with her abstract forms, grand ideas, and critical perspective. In honor of Chicago's dinner party, I will also depict a dinner scene. Instead of 99 place settings, I will seat a family of four. Oftentimes, the place where we share a meal is a clear indicator of what roles individuals occupy, specifically regarding gender-roles and expectations, and I hope to recreate, or reignite, the conversation trailblazers like Judy Chicago initiated.

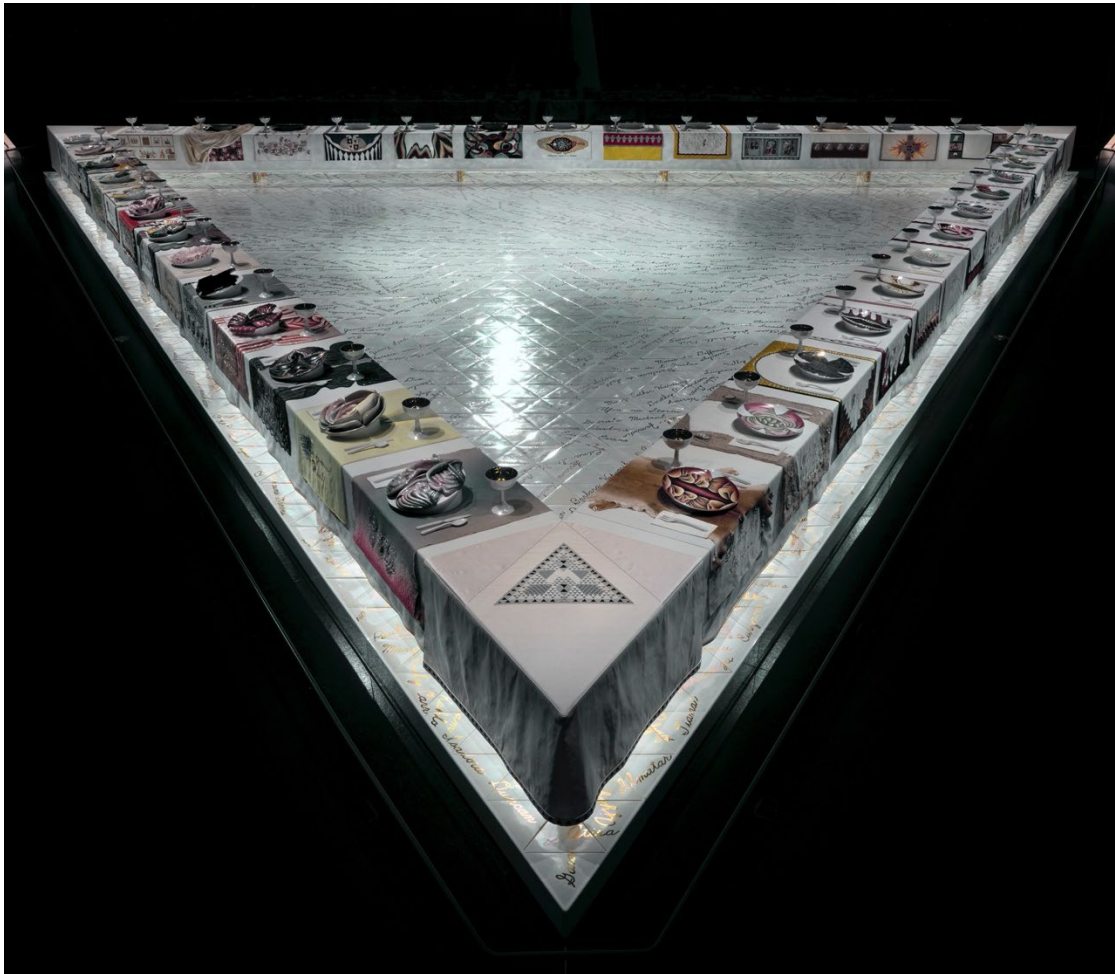


Figure 1: Judy Chicago. *The Dinner Party*, 1974–79. Ceramic, porcelain, textile, 576 × 576 in. (1463 × 1463 cm). Brooklyn Museum; Gift of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Foundation, 2002.10. Photo: Donald Woodman

Miriam Schapiro's collection, *Anonymous was a Woman*, is another source of inspiration for many contemporary artists, including myself (1977). Her collection comments on the

invisibility that women are often victims of when creating craft-based work and labor. Her prints mimic crochet items, but they are prints that can be framed and formally admired in a similar way to more masculine art forms (fig 2). This collection is meant to remind the viewer of the forgotten labor of women. Though this work may seem minimal or irrelevant, Schapiro is bridging women's work and domestic labor with fine art and art institutions. She continued a conversation in what labor, work, and art deserves to be noticed and valued.

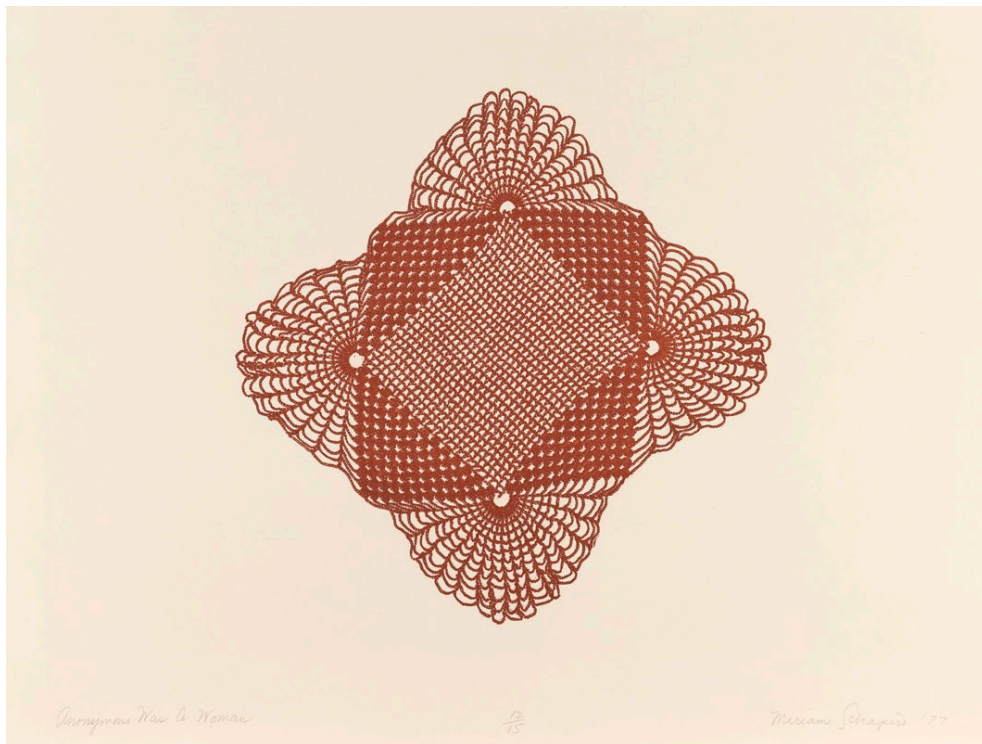


Figure 2: Miriam Schapiro, *Anonymous was a Woman I*, 1977. Soft ground etching on paper, 46 x 60.3 cm. National Gallery of Art.

Betty Woodman is “a leading ceramist whose inventive forms and painterly use of color have won her international renown...although her ambitious experiments with clay have wrought great changes in her work, it still refers to some practical function even if her baroque, expressive forms are no longer strictly utilitarian” (Smithsonian). Woodman was fascinated with crafts and pursued a career in ceramics, but her focus on functionality shifted in the seventies

when her work became more witty, ironic, and visually engaging (fig 3 and 4). Her humorous view of the relationship between fine art and craft allowed her to create infamous work.

Woodman was fascinated with the domestic aspect of ceramics and wall art, which can be seen in her collection *Illusions of Domesticity* in 2015. She critiqued and reimagined the idea of the home and the pleasures of domesticity.



Figure 3: Betty Woodman, *Aztec Vase #8*, 2008, Glazed earthenware, epoxy resin, lacquer, 37 x 31 x 35 inches.



Figure 4: Betty Woodman, *Ceramic Pictures of Korean Paintings*, 2001-2002. Made of glazed earthenware, clay, and canvas.

## The Contemporaries

Most of the inspiration for my collection is from current working artists who are pushing the boundaries of ceramics, weaving, fibers, and more. I, like every other creative, pull inspiration from other artists and find invaluable information on techniques and ideas to explore. Graphic glazes and chunky ceramic sculptures by Katie Stout and Xanthe Somers exhibit the ideas of inaccessible utilitarian ceramics. Everything is an item which can be used, but their work is almost *too* chunky and awkwardly large to be utilized. In conjunction to the dichotomy of utilitarian art and fine art, artists like J.P. Morabito are recreating classical artworks, such as his *Madonna che allatta*, which is a duplicate of Leonardo Da Vinci's *Madonna and Child* (2020). This colorful tapestry shows how historical Catholic art can be remade through a queer and avant-garde lens (fig 5). Morabito's combination of bright and modern weft colors with a luxurious gold warp thread reimagines fine art that depicts the maternal love depicted in the Catholic bible. His work has similar themes, but he has modified and adjusted them for the modern viewer. Morabito has made visionaries and "geniuses" like Leonardo Da Vinci feel accessible and universally understood.





Figure 5: J. P. Morabito, *Madonna che allatta (dopo Leonardo da Vinci)*, 2020, cotton, wool, glass beads, 76 by 41 inches.

Yuko Nishikawa, another contemporary artist, creates unique light fixtures that are both accessible and utilitarian. Through abstract ceramic sculptures that mimic typical light fixtures, Nishikawa is creating sensible and momentary art. It has an intended purpose and can complete that purpose, but the act of using that item feels romantic and intentional. It is a transformation of a mundane experience. Nishikawa plays with pastel colors in her light fixtures. This choice amplifies the airy and earthy element in most of her works, and especially in her piece titled *You See a Sheep* from 2018 (fig 6).



Figure 6: Yuko Nishikawa, *You See a Sheep*, 2018, ceramic, steel cable and electrical components, 9 x 5 x 15 feet, Photography by Cary Whittier

Katie Stout is one of my main sources of inspiration. Her sculptures are recreations of the drawings she created as a child. With a creative practice that is both whimsical and authentic to her youthful self, her work has become recognizable and greatly enjoyed by a large audience. One of her most popular collections is *Lady Lamps* (2021). This collection is made up of life-size clay, glass, and bronze women holding lampshades. Each figure is built of ripe and decaying fruit, imitating how women's bodies exist within our culture: the ornament that eventually rots (fig 7). Stout informs the viewer of her sculptures' value with the bronze detail which adds a metallic sheen and allure. Yet, her pieces border on the line of grotesque and decomposable



because, again, each woman's figure is made of overly ripe fruit, soon to rot. Her work made of organic materials imitates the organic from an abstract and unique perspective. She uses clay, from the dirt, to create fruit which originates from the dirt. This collection feels cyclical and therefore inherently feminine. When admiring each *Lady Lamp* all I can think of is "fruit of thy womb" and the historical, romantic, and fleshy relationship between women and fruit. Because of Stout's work, I chose to incorporate fruit in my exhibition, specifically ceramic wild blueberries scattered on the tabletop.



Figure 7: Katie Stout, "Janet," 2021. Ceramic, bronze, glass, gold luster; 69 x 32 x 17 in (175.3 x 81.3 x 43.2 cm).

Courtesy the artist and Venus Over Manhattan, New York. Photo: Blaine Davis.

Xanthe Somers is another sculptural ceramicist who has pushed the boundaries of craft-based work. Her graphic glazes and witty structures encourage the audience to interact and engage with her work. One specific piece that brings me immense joy and inspiration is her large sculptural lamp *Yank My Chain* (fig 8). This piece appears to be inspired by Katie Stout's *Lady Lamps*, but Somers's lamp feels more comedic and less grotesque. The large yellow and pink lamp has a blue ceramic chain, and the lampshade reads "yank my chain." This one simple phrase makes fun of the viewer's engagement with the lamp. The text is gestural, similar to the rest of the patterned glaze. Somers' work inspired my glazes to be gestural, playful, and organic. In utilizing glazes that feel fresh and organic, Somers proves that the relationship between fine art and crafts is more closely related than what institutions would originally claim.



Figure 8: Xanthe Somers, *Yank My Chain*, 2020. Ceramic.

Though many of the artists used as references in this thesis are craft-based artists, I also found inspiration in more traditional and typically valued fine-art mediums. One specific artist whose visuals encouraged my work is Laura Letinsky, a photographer who is currently based in Illinois (another Midwest inspiration). Her photographic work was originally focused on people, but the work that truly shines are her still lifes. She photographs dinner parties, dining tables, and other scenes that center around alcohol, food, and good company. Letinsky's photograph *Untitled #19* (fig 9) is a popular photograph from this collection. It has a grayscale backdrop and discarded oyster shells with the pop of lemon wedges and halves scattered on a round dining table.

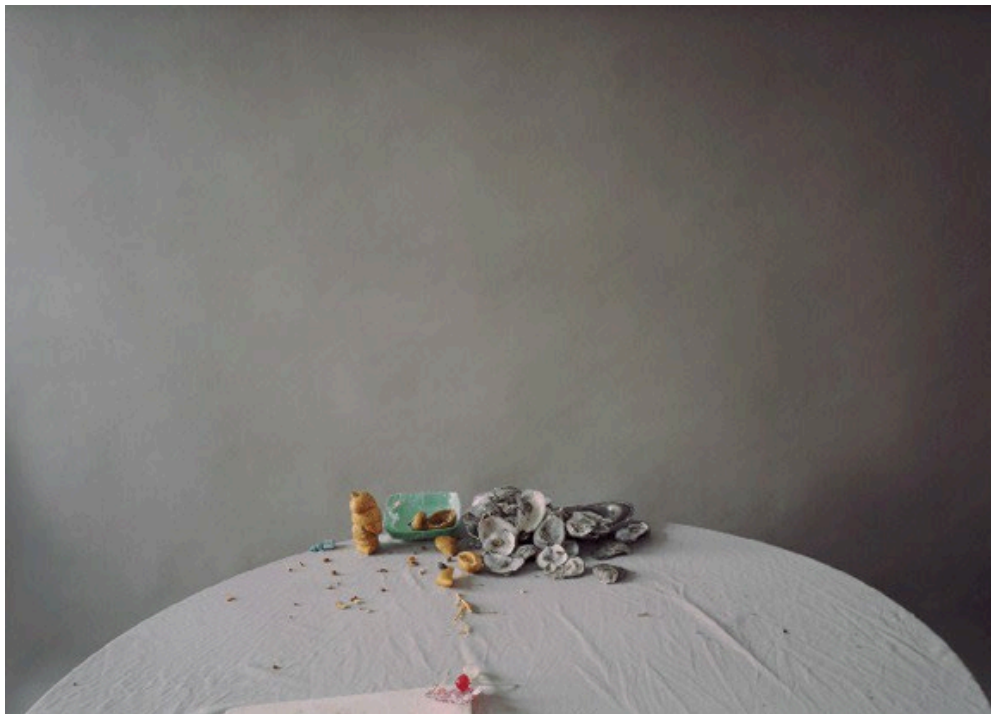


Figure 9: Laura Letinsky, *Untitled #19*, from the series *The Dog & The Wolf*, 2009. Chromogenic print. 44 x 58 inches, edition of 9.

This image was the core reason as to why my plates include lemons. The contrast of the pop of yellow on a monochromatic table setting felt meaningful to my own exhibition. I also hoped to recreate the sensation of a sour citrus fruit sliced on a plate contrasted to my sweet and

soft imagery and patterns. Along with the lemon, Letinsky decision to depict oysters paired well with the citrus. Eating, or slurping, oysters is a messy, engaging, and humanistic action. It feels sexual and erotic. Letinsky was able to capture a wide range of sensation in this photograph.

## **In the Studio**

*I sit and ponder my existence in the one place I feel safe: the studio.*

The fascination towards how craft-based arts existed in the fine art realm stemmed from my time in the studio. My labor felt underappreciated when I made something that did not fit into society's idea of "fine art." My work was often referred to as "naïve," "simple," and "underwhelming," but my intent was never to make work that had a shock factor. I simply wanted to create from a place of joy and love. I found myself growing to dislike the studio in courses that inflicted a specific idea of what my work *should* be. But, after sharing these experiences with other feminized creatives who focused on similar mediums, I realized how prevalent and normalized this sensation was. This was the beginning of my creative practice in femme-centric craft-based work. I focused on ceramics, weaving, writing, and print based works, all of which fit nicely in the definition of craft-based artwork. Many of those mediums stem from a place of necessity. A necessity to eat out of a bowl, to sleep under a blanket, and to read the words of others. Every piece I made in this collection stemmed from a place of urgency: a necessity to create, to build, and to use.

### **Clay**

In my attempt to create from a place of bliss, I also decided to create works that are critical of their intended purpose. This creative thesis was a platform and outlet to explore, experiment, and sample different materials, techniques, processes, and iterations within a limited space. I wanted to mock the obsession with fine art and utilitarian work by combining the two in singular forms. This process began with my first ceramic collection of dustpans. Dustpans are found in every home, but they never define the space they occupy. I decided to craft B-mix slab-

built dustpans that were beautiful and appeared functional, but in the process of cleaning with a ceramic dustpan, you could easily break the beloved tool, enacting a comedic and cyclical process of cleaning up with the same style dustpan. Slab built items entail rolling out large slabs, adding moderate pressure to rid of any air bubbles, and scoring and slipping your desired shapes together. Score means to make deep cuts on both sides of the slabs you are hoping to connect and then you apply slip, a form of clay that has a high-water content, to ensure that each part sticks together. After building and processing the pieces in bisque fire (fig 10), I was able to play with glazes. Each dustpan has a unique underglaze pattern. Some have checker print with cut outs, others have floral patterns or stripes (fig 11 and 12). These patterns and motifs are scattered through all ceramic pieces in this collection of work.



Figure 10: Process photo of Dustpan in bisqueware stage.





Figure 11: Glaze process photo.

Figure 12: Finished *Forget-Me-Not* Dustpan.

Along with my many dustpans, I also created a ceramic dinner party set for four, consisting of four forks, four knives, four plates, and four cups. All the dishware is chunky and non-functional, somewhat reminiscent of play kitchen sets for children, such as the ones by Melissa and Doug, a children’s toy company. In creating pieces that are inviting and playful, I hope to reclaim the term “naïve,” a word that is consistently used to describe feminized and women’s work. Each item is made from B-mix clay and hand-built. Hand built simply means that no wheel or molds were used, and that each work was shaped by my own two hands. Each fork and knife were formed by rolling and squeezing the clay between my hands, similar to how a child plays with playdough (fig 13 and 14). But, the underglaze patterns, like those on the

dustpan, elevate the piece and illustrate my ability to skillfully glaze and craft my work. There are no chips, unwanted texture, or drippy glazes. Instead, my pieces imply a naivety to the untrained eye, but to those who admire art and craft often, there is clearly more to my craft. I intended to fool the audience with my work and to dismantle the elite attitude occupied in galleries and studio spaces.

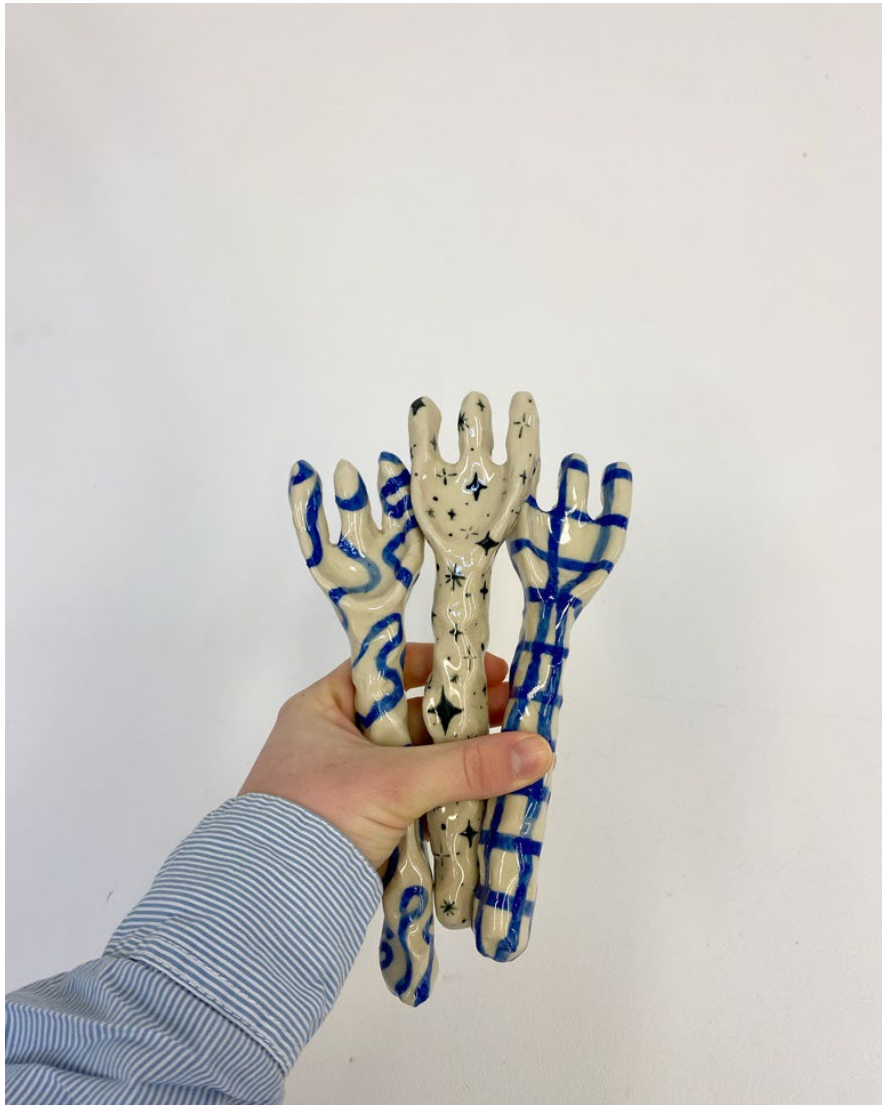


Figure 13: This is 3 of the 4 ceramic *CHONK Forks* made for this collection





Figure 14: *CHONK Knives*.

My four plates and cups were created in a similar style as the cutlery, that is, hand built with little focus on the delicacy typically expected from dishware. Each plate is flat, textured, moderately small, and quite heavy; making it unappealing to eat a meal from, but aesthetically appealing enough to invite you to take a seat at the table (fig 15). Each plate is glazed with cobalt blue and similar motifs as seen in every other piece. In choosing to have similar glazes, my pieces are clearly for a set. This theme can also be seen with my cups. Each cup is too shallow and heavy to enjoy a beverage from, but the idea of the cup and its beauty invites the audience to hold it (fig 16). They appear comfortable due to the texture and size, but each cup weighs around

1 pound, making it too heavy to enjoy and too shallow to properly fill your cup full with wine or water.



Figure 15: Stacked *CHONK Plates*.

By making pieces that appear functional, but fail in practice, I was able to create small moments that engage, mock, and critique the audience. Each audience member feels absurd

when they interact with my work, similar to the expectations of fine art in academic and art institutions. Though this work is not intended to be handled in the final exhibition, it is relevant to discuss the relationship between the audience and ceramics because ceramics are almost *always* created with the intention of being handled in everyday life.



Figure 16: *CHONK Cups*.

Atop of each plate is a full fish and a lemon wedge, like the meals I grew up with in the Alaskan summers (fig 17 and 18). While simple, this meal shaped my childhood and made me feel like a grownup. My family would cook one whole red salmon, and I wanted to recreate that moment for each place setting. I used B-mix clay for both the lemon wedges and the full fish. I shaped them with my hands and added the small details and texture with a needlepoint tool. I

decided to use colorful underglaze to create personality and depth for each item on the plate. I used yellow and white for the lemon wedges, and blues, pinks, and white for the cooked fish. I then dipped each of these items in a clear glossy glaze to have a sheen and alluring texture often seen in both ceramics *and* food.



Figure 17: *Dead Fish and SOUR Lemons.*



Figure 18: Place setting, the whole picture.

To complete my ceramic collection, I decided to create decor for the table. I made a heavy and chunky vase—sharing the chunky aesthetic of all my dishware—as a centerpiece. Along with the vase, I decided to create individual blueberries to scatter on the tabletop. These blueberries were simply made by rolling clay between my palms, etching out the texture on top, and under glazed with the cobalt blue seen throughout the entire collection. Blueberry picking is a common activity that I engaged with as a child. My family would take our boat across Kachemak Bay and spend hours picking for blueberries, and if we were lucky enough, salmonberries. Fresh pickings from across the bay were always an exciting dessert and pastime.

After filling our buckets, we would dip our feet in the cool pacific water and feast. For me, these are the most animalistic and youthful aspects of my childhood.

The ceramic pieces that make up this collection expose the inaccessibility of the combination of art and craft, but they also show how pleasurable and engaging ceramics can be. I feel that these pieces reveal the joy I had while creating them, whether that be due to the childlike sensation of playing with dirt and clay or the illustrative underglazes. The culture in the ceramic studios is often serious, traditional, and occasionally judgmental. My work was frequently seen as different in this space compared to the thin and delicate wheel-thrown teapots my peers were making. Yet, I found that those who worked in crafts, whether that be fibers, ceramics, or woodworking, enjoyed my work the most. They understood my delight in the act of creation, in contrast to the focus on perfectionism that is expected in many fine art studios. I hope that eventually everyone can enjoy art in the way that traditional crafts people have enjoyed the timeless act of crafting and creating.

## **Fibers**

Textiles, like ceramics, is one of the oldest crafts, yet its popularity is fading due to mass industrialization. By incorporating weaving, I have allowed my collection to reclaim and renovate this unique skill. For weaving, I made work on a 4-heddle floor loom. Floor looms were made in the 13th century, making the fibers studio feel medieval and as if I am referencing my history, my heritage. In order to weave on a loom, you must first properly dress the loom. Dressing the loom entails: warping the thread, threading the heddles, pulling the warp threads through the comb, and attaching the heddles to the proper pedals. I decided to stray away from traditional dressings of the loom to alter my woven structures. This was done by altering the



warps-per-inch (WPI) and ends-per-inch (EPI) and adjusting the spacing of the warp threads through the comb. This can be seen in the images below (fig 19).

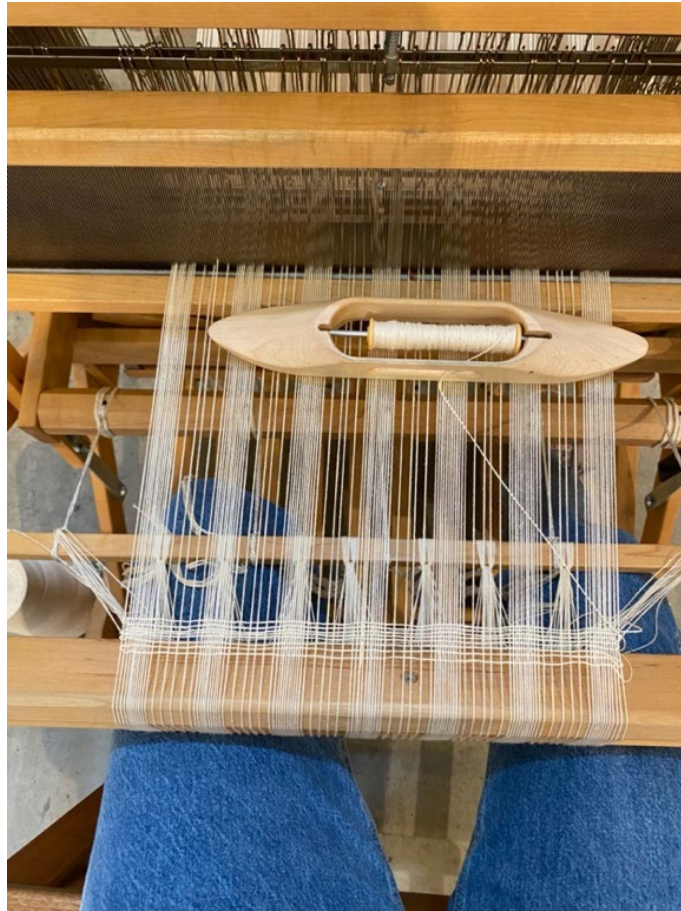


Figure 19: On the loom, altered warp with tension.

Though there are many traditional styles of weaving that can be explored on the 4-heddle floor loom, I mostly explored and experimented with plain weave, which is a one-up-one-down style of weaving. I opted to mostly use this traditional and standard style of weaving to explore other elements and structures within my crafted items. I find that I can express my ideas better when I limit the space I work within. Though my weaving patterns were more simplified, I played with dyes, mostly synthetic, to explore functionality and aesthetics (fig 20). The use of dye in this context is inspired by the works of Laura Letinsky, specifically her collection titled *Stain* and her photography.



Figure 20: *Cotton Noodles*. Process photo of dyed cotton.

For this collection of work, I created four placemats, four napkins, one table runner, and three tapestries (fig 21). My four placemats were a modified plain-weave constructed from undyed cotton. I chose to use an undyed cotton because light colored placements are not a good choice to prevent food spillage. Once a chopped beet or any oily item touches the placemat, the stain will be difficult, if not impossible, to remove. Each placemat is also loosely woven, meaning that it fails in its fundamental purpose. Food can easily slip through the large gaps and impact the finish of the table.





Figure 21: *WRECKED Weavings*. Collection of cotton textiles in this collection.

Along with my impractical placemats, I made a stained table runner. This piece was again heavily inspired by the *Stain* collection by Laura Letinsky. I purposely stained the same cotton fibers as the placemats in a light red to imitate a wine stain for this piece. I wanted the table runner to feel used, but in an aesthetic manner that helps the viewer understand the purpose of

each item and how those purposes make the pieces beautiful and valuable. Art does not have to sit in a golden frame on a white wall to be valuable and meaningful. I used a plain weave that had a modified weft spacing, similarly to the placemats, to create a subtle texture. These minute similarities aid in the presentation of each piece belonging together. I want this collection to feel like an abstract set you would find in someone's kitchen cabinets. The ends of this weaving were twisted and tied off, adding a dramatic finish to the seemingly simple weaving.

When setting a table, it is necessary to have napkins, and what could be classier than woven cloth napkins. These napkins were woven with a slate blue silk and raw linen. I chose the materials because linen is well known for being absorbent and durable, while silk is quite the opposite. In mixing the two, each napkin would not do well during a meal because they would not help absorb food and oils from one's face or hands. They would stain easily, making the user of the napkin feel like a messy child at the dinner table. The actual weaving of these napkins is a modified Swedish lace (fig 22). Swedish Lace is a traditional style of weaving that is often seen in linen and cotton items for the home, whether that be a curtain or hand towel. This style of weaving is reminiscent of my placemats and table runner, but a bit more complex, sturdy, and interesting to look at. Like my other weavings, Swedish lace creates a grid pattern with the warp and weft, rather than attempting to imitate organic shapes. This contrast complements the organic ceramic pieces that interact and play with the woven works on the dining table.

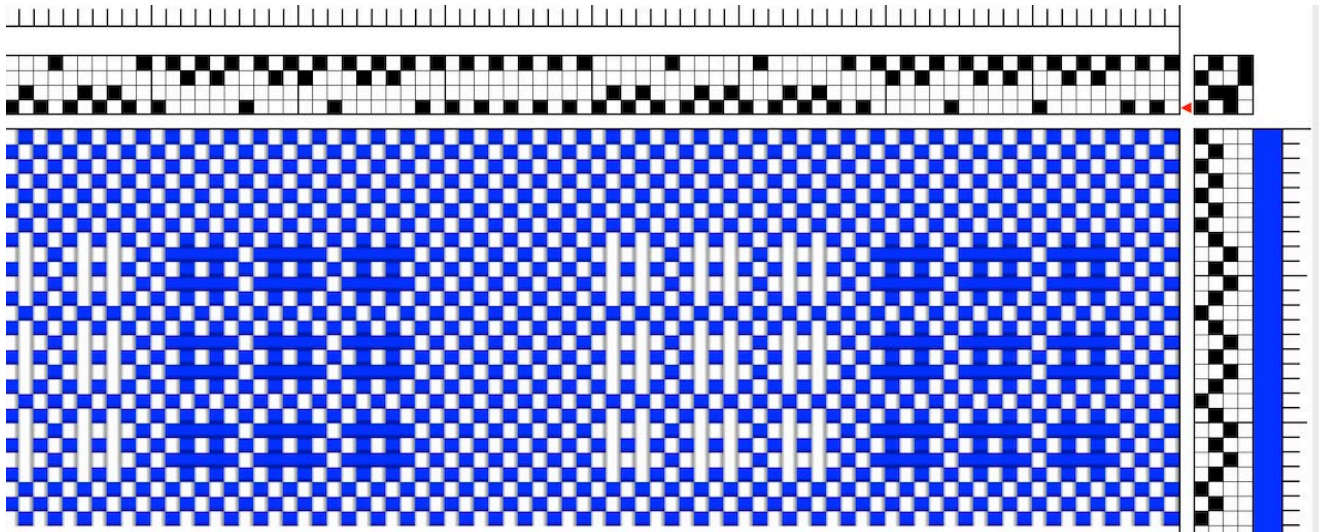


Figure 22: Fiberworks pattern of Swedish lace.

Though the focus in this thesis is the dinner table, I also wove three wall tapestries (fig 23). These weavings are a deflected double weave. This style of weaving allows floats, which are untacked weft threads, to define the form of each weaving. These floats add a depth and texture that cannot be accomplished in other styles of weaving. I created this specific pattern on my own using Fiberworks, an online application for weaving patterns. I decided to bring my weaving and ceramics together by weaving with two shades of cobalt blue. One is slightly more purple and textured while the other thread is a truer cobalt with no texture. Two of these weavings are identical, but the third weaving I reversed the weft thread pattern to make the floats the opposite blue. I found that the three weavings combined on the wall creates a dynamic and engaging collection in relation to each piece on the dining table.





Figure 23: Deflected Double Weave in Cobalt.

Textiles, weavings, and all things fiber add a warmth to my collection of work. The combination of soft materials with a strict grid pattern allows for the work to melt together. Each grid transforms when it is removed from the loom and as it exists within the world. It softens and adapts to its environment. The juxtaposition of the grided and texturally soft weavings in relation to the rest of this collection pushes my work to another realm and allows the viewer to feel comforted by the softness.

## Out of the Studio: Putting on a Show

*I sat down and ate a fistful of my blueberries; they are less fresh than the ones we picked.*

The final step of this thesis was to create a physical exhibition that displays my work. I was able to secure a spot, with two other artists, in the Laverne Kraus Gallery in Lawrence Hall at the University of Oregon. Our show, titled “Sweetheart” focused on rebelling from the ideas expected of feminine folk. “Sweetheart” implies a sense of naivety and overt tenderness, but it also holds connotations that are demeaning and minimizing. We wanted our show to be comedic and intuitive. We intended to mock the space in which we decided to display our work, mainly to understand what it felt like to reimagine what belonged in the clean white showroom.

I exhibited my work in the left side of the gallery, the only side with windows that face outside. I chose this position in the gallery because it allowed me to imitate the warmth and sensation of being in a home (fig 24). I chose to bring in an old red rug, which is a part of my domestic space, and a wooden dining table with four matching chairs. This room is where a family could sit, feasting on their fish and berries.

Each table setting had one ceramic plate, one ceramic cup, one set of ceramic cutlery consisting of one fork and one knife, a full ceramic fish, and a ceramic lemon wedge (fig 25). Every plate sat on top of a cotton placemat and all of the cutlery sat on top of linen and silk napkins. Though each place setting was the same, there are small details that vary with each dish. Along with the table setting, I also displayed my five dustpans and three wall tapestries (fig 26 and 27).

The exhibition lasted five days and was the conclusion to my research. After my show, I was better able to understand my overall intentions and to witness an audience perceive my



collection. I wanted my work to be appreciated and valued in the gallery, yet I created from a place of personal contentment that I found myself not *really* caring about how people interpreted my work. I felt liberated.



Figure 24: Dining Table in the Exhibition.



Figure 25: Table Setting on Display.





Figure 26: Dustpans on Display.





Figure 27: Set of Three Tapestries on Display.

## Conclusion

*Finally, my work is finished...for now.*

Art holds a power that is not seen in other fields. There is a focus on community, creative intentions, and authenticity. Unfortunately, those values have been skewed due to capitalism, academia, and art institutions, all of which have been overly influenced by the patriarchy. The specific area I was eager to explore within my creative practice were not taken seriously by many of my male professors, my male peers, and my general institution. I found solace in the many femme creatives I connected with during my time at the University of Oregon and their passion, kindness, and artistic practices inspired me to continue pursuing questions such as:

- Why does my male professor not *hear* or *understand* what I am creating?
- Who is the general audience for my artwork? I do not see them here.
- Is my work art? Or am I a sellout because I want to make beautiful things?
- What does it mean to be a sellout? What does it mean to revel in that rejection?

There is immense benefit in feminine perspectives that cherish the home and welcome the simple, playful, endearing, and warm gestures and moments of everyday life. Creating work that brings the viewer and creator joy is a more nuanced perspective in the arts. The art and craft that focuses on enhancing the mundane moments of life, whether that be the dishes you eat from or the textiles that cleanse your hands. Oftentimes, the patriarchal perspective wishes to minimize, repress, or diminish these qualities by emphasizing control, perfection, and an inauthentic standard in the arts. There is an urgency to master every form of creation, yet not to master and relish in the mundane. This is why art like my own, and that of my peers and friends, is often undervalued or misunderstood by certain folks and institutions.

The reason we need to emphasize and create work that is femme-centric, domestic, mundane, and unique is because this work tells the stories of our everyday lives. How do we share meals? How do we care for the ones we love? Craft-based work is often created from a place of tender care, authentic joy, and an effort to support one another. Unlike fine art that focuses on creating to be perceived, crafters tend to create from a private place. Making an item in one home and gifting it to another home, greatly minimizing the amount of people who will experience or witness the work. My collection of work bridges these two spaces. I made work from a place of care, mainly for myself, but also with the intention to share my work. I also chose to display this work in a fine art gallery. This work was perceived by the general public, partially in hopes to critique the art academia realm and partially in hopes to inspire my craft-oriented peers to keep creating. There is enough space for *all* work to be shared, critiqued, and admired.

With dishware and textiles that emphasize play, my collection of work felt lighthearted, when handled in the studio or in my domestic space. Yet, when the work was fostered in a gallery and dressed for the public eye, it was perceived in an entirely different light. Each piece seemed more valuable and breakable. The final exhibition was a key factor when exploring and experiencing my thesis. With an emphasis on the space that my work occupies, I needed to create a space that felt authentic to my personal and academic narrative. I was raised in communities that fostered craft and community. After spending nearly four years in university, I have finally found a similar community after years of pain and critical questioning. Though my work felt more valuable in the gallery context, I also found myself not caring for the general audience's perception of my work. I already felt satisfied by my work, regardless of where it was displayed.

That specific feeling illustrates the frivolous nature of galleries and other art institutions. All that truly matters is the work, the intent, and the authenticity.

The end goal of my research and creative practice was to demonstrate a new way of engaging with art and craft. We are all creatives, but not all of us or all our work has been allowed to be seen and valued. All that we make is valuable, regardless of who made it, where it was made, and what intentions were behind that creation. Everyone deserves to create authentically.

## Appendix

The items listed below were made during my creative research and can be seen documented and described within this thesis. This list of work is the overall breakdown of each piece which was created during my research.

Five Ceramic Dustpans  
Four Ceramic Plates  
Four Ceramic Knives  
Four Ceramic Forks  
Four Ceramic Cups  
Four Ceramic Fish  
Four Ceramic Lemon Wedges  
Thirty Ceramic Blueberries  
One Ceramic Vase  
Four Cotton Placemats  
Four Silk and Linen Napkins  
One cotton Table Runner  
Three Woven Cotton Wall Hangings

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