

# "Hot and Moody"

A Senior Thesis  
by Bevin Macutay

I was hoping that my vulnerability would show people that I am a person, who has thoughts, feelings, and experiences just like everyone else. I've experienced so much in my life, both positive and negative. Sometimes, those experiences would bring me to the highest of highs, and then in an instant, to the lowest of lows.

My relationships never seemed right to me, sometimes. It was either "I'm supposed to be there for you, but I'll leave you behind if I forget" or "I want this from you and that's the only reason why I spend time with you" or "You mean everything to me, but stop doing that thing that I think is annoying." It was a back and forth; nothing was ever certain. And inevitably, I was confused. If the people who were supposed to treat me right didn't, then who could I really trust?

Those relationships; an amalgam of abusive, manipulative, loving, considerate, uplifting, and traumatic relationships; led to my eventual diagnosis for bipolar II and anxiety disorder, illnesses that I've had to deal with ever since I can remember. Through the pain, the trauma, the confusion, I found comfort in the things that weren't good for me. I would intentionally hurt myself to distract from the emotional, yet somehow physical, pain. I would consume substances that could kill me to convince myself that I am a living, breathing person. And for some reason, I didn't recognize that.

I thought, 'If those people that I care about so much don't treat me the way that I should, why should I?' So, I found myself trapped, numerous times. I figured that maybe if I gave them what they wanted, they would appreciate and respect me more. And thus, I found myself in the arms of strangers who were looking for a hole to fill instead of my heart.

These are the feelings and experiences that I've struggled so hard to come to terms with. It was traumatic, and I couldn't deal with the fact that I had actually lived through it. I decided to make

a body of artwork based on it because I finally understand my self-worth. The moments I felt sick to my stomach, literally bleeding, because I felt betrayed by the people that I thought loved me - they were real. And I'm alive to say that I survived the turmoil, sharing my experiences in a form that I love the most, in an effort to feel less alone and hope that others may feel the same, too.

This project was an exposure of myself to the world - an introduction to who I am, what I go through, and what I still have to live through. Instead of mistreating myself through unhealthy behaviors, I wanted to create something meaningful out of it. A solidification, per se, or something that was tangible enough it could influence your heart and your mind.

Despite fulfilling my life with negative relationships, I can admit that they've helped me grow as a person. I learned that I shouldn't have looked for love in other people, I should've been looking for it in myself.

I give and I forgive too much. People like to take advantage of that, and sometimes, I let them. You'd think that I'd know by now, but I'm still learning. Entrust that I will figure it out eventually.

In order to execute the project, I wanted to focus on others' perceptions of me, being the person that I am, and my subconscious reactions to that. I know that I am an attractive person, inside and out. Of course, it comes with benefits, but there are people out there who don't understand that they can hurt you. I am not as strong as I could be and they can see that I'm weak. Yet, I'm hoping that sharing my experiences through my art enacts a response that develops into a more beneficial life for myself.

There isn't enough proper sex education or information taught on morals out there in the world. People's lives are shaped by those around them. In this society, they grow up thinking that it's okay to disrespect another person, even just by the way that person looks.



These people believe that they deserve the right to make contact with me despite my being clearly uncomfortable. There have been countless instances where I have faced traumatic experiences - innumerable experiences riddled with different embodiments of abuse and assault - ever since I was a child.

The entirety of my work is meant to represent how no matter what I say, what I do, or what I wear, people still perceive me in a sexual context. I wanted to show people what they wanted to see - an open and raw documented experience of my life. The almost anonymity of the whole work represents my feeling of a lack of a true identity - not really being seen as a person, but more like a body.

The project seeks to be a more conceptual discussion on sexism and stigmas against those who struggle with mental illness. Hopefully, as a result, my vulnerability will become something useful and influence more positive relationships in my life.

Throughout my undergraduate career, I've learned various artistic techniques and practices that I have seen shape other artists and have helped them grow. Essentially, the work for my project involves various concentrations of visual art, including digital design and videography. My pursuit in a BSWA degree allowed me to expand the components of artmaking into forms that I think would best suit the supposed theme of the work.

Given this, I was determined to develop a performance art piece and, as almost a translation or a backstory, a physical book. These concepts were intended to be more solid, more in your face. I didn't want to hide anymore, and I was afraid that others wouldn't understand until it was placed right in front of them. Although the audience may choose to not engage with it, their reactions are still inevitable. My goal was to get my voice out there, in an aggressive, yet intriguing, way. I can't control how viewers will perceive my work, but their emotions, thoughts, and actions will still be there. All things

All things considered, it's up to the viewer to decide how they want to continue to live their life. Hopefully, by the end of it, they've learned something.

I make the art that I make so that I can express myself in a way that is beyond just words and actions. My thoughts and emotions are apparent, and I'm willing to share my experience through my art, in an effort to connect with others and make a statement.

With performance art, the main subject of the work is one's body; it's expressive and raunchy. For the performer, it's almost an exercise of mindfulness. In my case, I am seemingly devoured by the state that I'm enacting, as if it's a form of method acting. I feel more present in the moment, rather than consumed by unwanted, anxious thoughts. It is therapeutic, not only in the sense that it helps me ground myself but, because it simulates a sort of reenactment of a past experience that is expressed in a way that is more poetic and performative.

In addition, the creation of a physical book allows for a kind of intimacy between the author and the reader. In order to engage with a book, one has to place it right in front of their face and in between their hands. It can be presented whenever the owner allows for it, adapting to the environment that it's in, and pretty much hidden when it's not open.

In order to execute the project, it was essential that I be in a comfortable headspace and consider the concept of the work in an effort to engage myself fully. I dedicated myself to spending at least a couple of hours a day to make this happen.

Since I'm also minoring in Arts Management, I was required to take the course, Funding the Arts, in which students are taught how to raise funds for their business, organization, project, etc. The concepts I learned throughout the course helped me configure a letter; a letter to those whom I felt might be interested in supporting me:

Dear Reader,

Growing up in a world where pain and suffering exists is almost unbearable, but sadly inevitable. Yet still, it's the one thing that unites us all together. No matter where we've been or where we come from, we all have experienced something that has been detrimental to our wellbeing - to who we are and who we have come to be.

With being one of the many to live through this kind of unavoidable pain, I have become part of the 1% to be officially diagnosed with bipolar II disorder. I'm still unsure on whether the cause was hereditary, if it had developed through the years of trauma, or if it was a combination of the two. However, despite all of the negative experiences I had been through, I survived. I am still here, and I am (finally) so grateful for that.

As you may know, I'm currently a senior at SUNY Purchase studying Visual Arts, Psychology, and Arts Management. During senior year, each of the students are required to invent a project of their choice based on the various ideas and practices that they've learned throughout their time here.

For my senior project, I wanted to get the chance to express the struggles that I have been through through a form of art that has fully allowed me to do that. Ever since high school, I escaped my problems, in a healthy way - by writing poetry. It finally allowed me to put those incoherent thoughts into words and tones and feelings that made sense. During the first few years of my college career, I discovered that I can create something new from pieces of my environment that I adore. I learned that collage wasn't just about gluing a bunch of magazine cut-outs onto a piece of paper; it was about color,

composition, shapes, and so much more. Not only that, but I realized that any time my art professors gave me the freedom to do whatever I wanted for a project, I always made a book. So, thus, through my love for writing poems, collaging, and making books, I decided, 'Why not combine all of those things together - all of the things that I love doing - and create a book out of it?'

There's a story I want to tell, and I didn't want my years of pouring my heart out through poetry to get lost just as my voice did. I want to show people what I've been through so that they know that they aren't alone; so that they can relate to somebody out there in the world and feel something.

However, I didn't want to stop there. My determination and dedication convinced me to create, essentially, Part 2 of my senior project: a silent protest. A protest symbolizing the vulnerability and victimization that I have experienced from various forms of trauma and abuse, while serving as an act of martyrdom for those who have experienced the same. The performance will be presented publicly, without notice, within the center of campus, and will be documented through video and audio. The goal of the performance is to capture the reactions and interactions of passersby to a seemingly vulnerable, walking entity.

In order to complete my senior project, I need help raising funds so that I can finally get to express what I've been trying to let people know my whole life and so that people like me will empathize and know where I'm coming from. It'll build deeper connections, not only with myself, but with the world around me, and give me the opportunity to show people who Bevin Mirielle Palana Macutay really is.

So far, everything for my project is planned out. Most of

book is finished, and all I need is more materials to help me carry out my goal. I already know many artistic techniques from attending various classes such as Book Structures; Make, Mix, Move; and Performance Art. According to my senior project advisor, I am currently on track and just need the materials to continue working on my project.

Since I am still a student at college, the only employment opportunities I can have during the semester are unpaid. Although they provide a wonderful experience, it doesn't provide enough monetary stipend to assist in my completion of the project.

Nonetheless, I am still determined to share my thoughts and express my feelings with the world. I have experienced so much in my life that not many people have, and I'm hoping that others can look at my work with an open mind and understand where I've been. With that, my dream is to allow people to reach inside themselves and think about things that they don't normally think about. I want them to connect and relate to each other. I want them to learn more; I want them to grow more. And, as a result, I hope I do the same.

I know I'm not the only one who has gone through conflicts in their life without an outlet to express what they're feeling. I'm hoping that you can help me make that change and be that difference.

Help me say the things that I have been trying so hard to say, so that I can be the one to let people know that they're not alone; so that people can see, with their own eyes, what I have gone through; so that they can be the change, too. You can help me do this by offering a financial gift to me, Bevin Macutay. Any contribution is greatly appreciated and will mean the world to me.

After the project has been completed, you will receive a free autographed copy of my book and a CD of the performance with your contribution of \$300 or more.

Thank you so much for taking the time to read this letter. Again, any contribution is appreciated and will help me finally make my dreams come true.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bevin Mirielle', written over the typed name.

Bevin Mirielle

Mixed Media Artist



With the success of the letter, I was able to obtain the materials that I needed to execute my work. However, due to the constraints provided by the current pandemic, some of my ideas had to be altered. Originally, I was hoping that I would be able to hire freelancers in order to assist me with the documentation of the performance and its process. Due to the recent mandates implemented by the New York State government, citizens are currently required to remain at home as much as possible and avoid contact with others. Considering the limitations in place, my only option was to confine the performance work into a video, rather than live. In addition, without the ability to be in a proximal distance to one another, the documentation and refinement of the performance could only be executed by me.

Using the funds raised, I made the decision to invest in a digital camera to make everything still possible. This was almost a challenge for me, as I hadn't dabbled too much in videography before. However, I managed to record and edit footage into a video that I think successfully presented the ideas that I wanted to express.

For the physical aspects of the performance, virtually the only sculptural aspect involved was embroidery. Since middle school, I've practiced the art of sewing, but only for practical purposes. Participating in a Fibers course in the past allowed me to realize that thread and fabric could be used as media.

The main element of the performance was a veil with the words, "CAN YOU SEE ME NOW", embroidered onto it. The words were displayed almost like a protest sign, bold enough to make a statement. It's a constant question shown throughout the video; a question repeatedly asked before the viewer's eyes.

Concerning the veil as a symbol, it is meant to conceal for protection purposes rather than for deception. When someone wears one, it is mainly for modest



reasons and is mostly worn by women and sacred entities. During marriage, once the veil has been lifted from the bride's face, it symbolizes the act of being 'handed over' to the groom. The color of the veil was also important. I chose black, as the color is associated with power, fear, strength, authority, and elegance, which are all traits that I strive to possess. Not only that, but the choice of fabric needed to be considered. I chose lace because of its ability to conceal and reveal at the same time. In a sense, it is considered more erotic than nudity, and is one of the only fabrics that is used for both modest or immodest purposes.

The attachment of the words, "CAN YOU SEE ME NOW", onto the veil needed to be sturdy enough, easily withstand movement, and represent soft, nurturing qualities. The texture of felt seemed ideal in this situation, as it is malleable and strong enough to maintain the boldness, yet softness, of the text. To develop this structure, embroidery seemed more sensible, as it is consistent with the textures of the other materials and is durable and virtually long-lasting. With this, the colors for the felt and the thread used were to be teal, since the color represents the ribbon for sexual awareness.



As to not distract from the main element of the performance, my attire needed to be simple, yet cohesive enough to follow through with the concept of the work. I decided to wear an entirely black outfit, in accordance with the veil and the previously referenced symbolization of the color itself. It was essential that the clothing items worn be plain rather than flashy, so as to not distract from the veil or the overall message of the performance. It was necessary for the colors of the entirety of the outfit to be the same throughout, so it



wouldn't cause confusion due to unrelated significance.

The choice of clothes were to be flattering enough so that it wasn't too revealing. In order to test the viewers' reactions, it was important that my attire conceal just enough of my body to still be considered "socially appropriate". Although it is not an invitation for sexual connotation, I understand that others may view it in that context. This form of exposure through the chosen clothing items was another attempt of mine to influence how others would respond or react to the video.

In order to maintain the same perspective for the concept of the performance, the source of the documentation needed to follow through with it, as well. The purpose of having High Definition video footage establishes the time period as current. The absence of an attached time frame allows for the performance to exist at any time, or whenever the video is being watched.

Following the succession of the reenacted voicemail messages, I'm seen hammering nails into the wall to spell out "WELL?" The nails attempting to represent a less spiritual form of martyrdom, or by definition, a display of exaggerated suffering to obtain sympathy. When referring to the act of hammering nails in one's dreams, it usually means one is holding power in some area of their life. It is binding, and therefore, the dreamer may feel trapped or feel forced into doing something that they don't want to do. The question is meant to be directed to the viewer, capturing their attention and bringing them into my world. The noise from this footage is apparent and shocking. The whole scene resembles my anger and the urgency to be heard.

After the seemingly never-ending array of repetitive disconnecting tones following my hammering of nails into the wall, there is a surprise waiting for any viewer who gets the chance to witness it. It's silent and there's a still frame of me facing toward the



camera, still with the veil covering my face. After a few seconds, I bow my head down and lift the veil from its original position to reveal what I actually look like, but instead, the words, "GUESS NOT", are painted onto my face in blood red. The color choice is meant to represent the pain that I've gone through and the repressed anger accumulating deep within me. The words seem almost scrawled onto my face, but refined enough so that it is still legible. With such a close-up shot of the scene and the intensity of the response written on my face, it catches the viewer's attention to something that is somehow both quiet and violent. This actual ending to the performance is meant to represent my last attempt at a protest. I positioned myself to look straight into the camera, to seem as if I was looking directly at the viewer. This hostile, indirect response to those who witness it is a reference to how I tend to react in situations like this -- being seen in an objectifying way and not really being heard despite my numerous attempts to make that happen.

Being that the performance needed to be converted into a video, the auditory aspects had to be considered as well. Since I could no longer elicit others' reactions from a live rendition of the performance, I had to figure out a way to show the audience how people really interact with me without my saying too much of anything directly. With this, I settled on a compilation of messages that others have sent me in recent years; messages that have made me so uncomfortable that I felt uneasy in my own skin. The messages were to be recorded and read in my own voice, considering the fact that my natural voice is deemed erotic by most people who have heard me speak. This was an attempt to provide the audience with a contrast between what they want to hear, my naturally soft and sultry voice, and what they don't want to hear, a narration of a progression of messages that would make anyone feel uneasy.

In order to increase the intensity of the performance video, I intentionally added the sound of a clock ticking in the background. The repetitive sound begins quietly at a normal pace and slowly increases in speed and volume as the video progresses. Not only is the



ticking a sound that I loathe, it is also a symbol for something repetitive and unwanted, being that some of the interactions I have experienced from others in my life, unfortunately, are as well. The escalating intensity of the sound mirrors the intensity of the concept of the work. It is meant to keep the viewer watching and to leave them feeling uncomfortable -- basically, how I have felt for most of my life due to those that refuse to respect me as a person.

If you watch the video carefully, most of my actions are seemingly normal; it involves my participating in common, daily routines. The goal was not to provoke more sexual harassment in my life, but quite the opposite. I wanted to show the audience that, not only do I have to live through this on a daily basis, but that my actions and the clothes that I wear should not be a deciding factor on how one should decide to treat me.

Since Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM) Day of Action was on April 7, 2020, it was essential that the performance be posted around, if not on, that date. Thus, the video was uploaded to my art Instagram, on April 9, 2020. However, the concept for the performance was not explained in the post because I wanted the audience to form their own opinions and reactions to the work rather than my providing hints. Despite this, I had a lack of doubt that it would be perceived any differently.

Aside from the performance, the book and its process fortunately didn't need to be altered. The only materials I needed were, more or less, a laptop and Creative Cloud software. The contents of the book were created using Adobe Photoshop and Adobe InDesign, programs that I have learned how to operate and practice with throughout the course of my undergraduate career.

My reasoning for utilizing digital means to create my book was to, not only allow the process of collage to be easier on my end, but to establish a more concrete, more producible, more easily consumed body of material. Refraining from the use of physical materials allowed the book to be more established than it would have been if it were physical. My goal was to share my thoughts with the world, and

through self-publishing, the book can be printed on-demand whenever possible. This seemed more fitting than only having a few editions of something more material. Although I have created more intimate, tangible books in the past, the idea of a mass production of copies will allow me to spread my thoughts out there and allow me to fulfill one of my dreams.

The book contains a compilation of poems that I have written since high school, collaged together with photos from my past. The utilization of pictures from my personal collection serves as almost a scrapbook. Since the book is essentially a history of a period of my life, it was fitting to include my own original photography.

As I had mentioned previously, there is no certainty on how the audience will react to my work. There are varying possibilities, both positive and negative. With the performance, the audience might either feel intimidated or personally targeted due to what is being presented in the video. Some may pity my experiences or, on the contrary, may actually resonate with the themes expressed. Others may not understand, or choose to not understand, and still decide to perceive me in a sexual context despite the apparent message that is consistently being displayed throughout the entirety of the video.

Since the book is less obtrusive than the performance, it is, in a sense, more consumable and thoughtful. Instead of a direct statement against those who have victimized me, the book serves as a more in-depth and poetic synopsis of what my life has been like since high school -- how my previous traumatic experiences relate to the current ones; how despite overcoming so much abuse and neglect, I still have to deal with these issues on an almost everyday basis. Since the material within the book is more conceptual, just like with any book, one needs enough patience and emotional capacity to read through it. The work is meant to provide audiences with a differing, yet similar, perspective when compared to the performance video. Some may decide that they don't have the patience to engage with it or may not understand, but others may feel a strong connection to it.

Overall, after viewing my work, I want others to understand a



different point of view -- the perspective of someone who suffers from comorbid disorders and encounters frequent instances of varying forms of sexual harassment. The ultimate goal of my work was to share and express the thoughts and feelings that I have struggled so hard to come to terms with. Creating the performance and the video allowed me to feel more free in a world where I have been silenced for too long. Hopefully, as a result, others will also feel encouraged to share the experiences that they have gone through without fear.

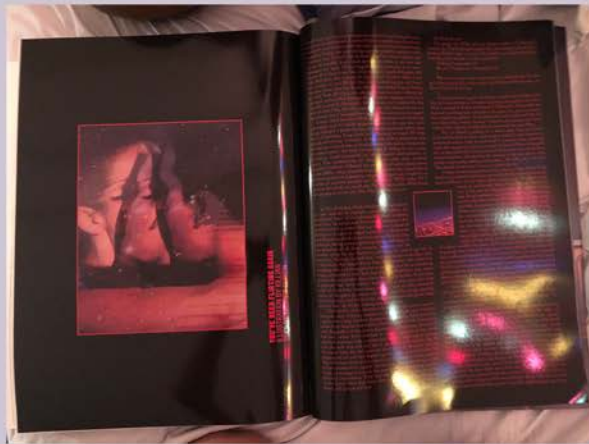
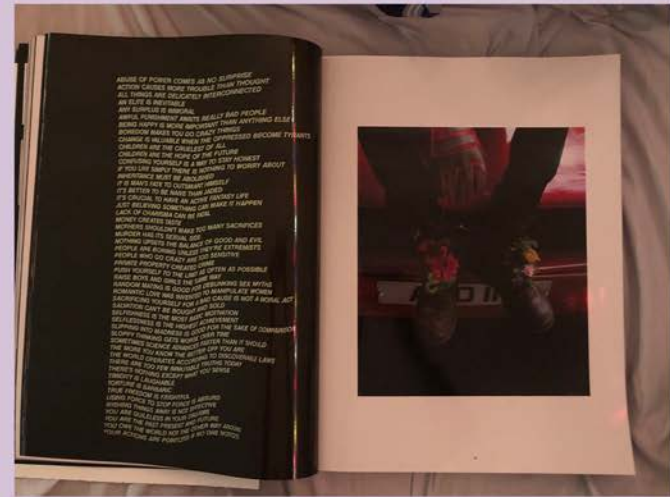
Considering the project as a whole, I gained inspiration through research and from other artists and their work. One artist's work that resonated with me was Emma Sulkowicz' "Carry That Weight". Her performance was referred to as "pure radical vulnerability", a concept that I wanted to mirror in my work. Emma states that she "think[s] that nowadays, art pieces can include whatever the artist desires, and in this performance art piece, it utilizes the elements of protest". Particularly with the performance video, I wanted to express my utmost disgust and discomfort to those that participate in acts of sexual predation. The use of direct statements through text within the performance enabled me to say what I wanted to say, without really saying much of anything at all -- a silent protest, if you will. One of Emma's quotes that really struck me was when she said, "To me, the piece has very much represented [the fact that] a guy did a horrible thing to me and I tried to make something beautiful out of it". My work tends to take on that persona of being both beautiful and deeply chaotic. Almost as a reflection of who I am, the art I produce is pleasing to look at, but as the viewer engages with it further, there is a hidden message that is secretly uncovered unless one doesn't inspect it close enough. And, like in Emma's situation, someone didn't treat her the way that she should have been treated. My work is vastly similar to hers, when considered conceptually, as others in my life, mostly cisgender men, have disrespected me in similar ways. Artists like Emma Sulkowicz have empowered me to speak up for myself in a creative, even radical, way.

For the creation of my book, I got most of my inspiration from books that I've read by other authors. The methods writers use to format their work and to present their ideas always interested me. One of the poets that has influenced me the most is Sylvia Plath. I was always intrigued by the way she articulated her words through her writing, evoking her strong emotions and passion for the things in her life. I, also, can't help but feel a connection with Plath, as she has dealt with a lot of experiences similar to my own. For the writing in my book, I wanted to particularly phrase lines and use effective words intentionally so that the reader would almost feel the emotions that I felt when I wrote it. Aside from that, the collages, in general, were mostly freeform. However, I made sure to maintain the overall theme of each poem in each spread so that it was cohesive.

The following are some examples of material that I have drawn inspiration from over the course of this project:







My expression of vulnerability throughout the creation of my work and within the art itself was an accomplishment that I am proud to say that I have achieved. Despite the intense emotions that I felt throughout the process of creating these pieces, I think it was worth it. I understand myself so much more, and I believe that my supposed exposure to the world has helped others understand me better, too. As a result, I hope that others will feel less afraid and will give themselves the chance to express themselves just like I have. Maybe by the end of it all, others will reevaluate their Negative actions toward people like me and learn how to treat others the way they should be treated. Hopefully, we can all continue to learn and grow more together.



