

**Translating Sentience through Form**

By

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## *Translating Sentience through Form*

Combining my knowledge of psychology with my discipline in sculpture has allowed me to create a body of work that speaks on a variety of personal experiences. My work contains influences from Louise Bourgeois, art therapy practices and developmental psychology. I use sculpture as a way to translate experiences into a three dimensional space. Having the ability to manipulate an experience in a certain way has allowed me ownership over feelings and events that I once did not have ownership over. My emotions are embedded into my current artwork; I plan to continue making art in this way by pursuing a career in art therapy.

I describe my artwork as abstract. I use steel, ceramics, and fabric to create a dialogue about connection, dependence, and comfort primarily in a familial context. With these materials I make ambiguous forms in place of figures to show moments in time, interactions, and feelings. Using a range of materials has allowed me to experiment with scale and to discover how weight, size and colors can influence the meaning of the works. I am heavily influenced by events in my personal life and my psychology studies. I use these themes and materials to create art that serves as a coping mechanism for myself. Whether it be rationalizing something really pressing or something minuscule, I find it is very cathartic and comforting to take an experience and abstract it into a three dimensional form. In addition to making the work for myself I aim to create a narrative that the viewer can relate to. Although my work comes from my experiences, I find that I am speaking about things that are universally experienced.

My work has developed immensely during my time as an undergraduate student. My earlier works touched upon general themes. Earlier on, I focused a lot on femininity and what it means to identify as a woman in this world. I have taken those ideas and grown them into

something that is more personal and specific to my experiences. My current work is no longer explicitly speaking about gender. I wanted to move away from talking about being a female artist because it does not add any context to my work. I felt it was redundant to make work talking about being a female artist because my work will be perceived as “female art” whether or not I am explicitly stating it.

As I created more work I realized that I was delving into my personal life and using that as an inspiration to create work. I am highly uncomfortable talking about some aspects of my personal life but I found creating art about it made it easier to grasp for myself and allowed me to share it with those around me. My main themes of making art being connection, dependence, and comfort stem from a traumatic loss I experienced when I was younger. My work is not exactly about this event, but about how experiencing a traumatic life event has played a pivotal role in my personal and emotional development. My senior project, *Translating Sentience through Form*, highlights how I use my emotions and my own experiences to create art.

I am using fabric, ceramic and steel in my senior project. Using metal has allowed me to work larger and stronger. I am interested in how metal can be manipulated to form organic shapes and how metal acts as an armature for supporting other materials. I am not interested in the aesthetics of metal so I add fabric to give life and context to the sculptures. The fabrics in my work are almost entirely found materials and personal pieces from family members. I use fabric to add softness to sculptures in a way that aims to lighten a harsh theme or to beautify something that is traditionally unpleasant. I also use fabric as a skin for my sculptures to give them body and a shape that suggests they are taking the place of human figures. Large scale metal pieces and fabrics have been significant in my body of work because it gives the sculpture a place in the

world like a person. There is a human-like quality to something that is to scale of a person. I want the viewer to feel like they can relate their own self and their own experiences to my work and I find that possible through using abstract human-like figures.

Making art in ceramic has given me a tool that can mimic a variety of other mediums. I use ceramic to make lively body parts, to imitate fabrics and to create organic shapes in place of a figure. I use ceramics and metal in a similar way. I use the materials' plasticity to form the figures in a way that fits the context. I find myself drawn to putting these figures in nurturing poses and tensed pulling scenes. The figures are always connected in my sculptures. Each figure relies on the other to be literally supported. The way in which the figures in the sculpture are interacting gives context to the mood being portrayed. If the figures are resting on each other it suggests there is comfort and calmness between the two and they are safe. If there seems to be pulling it suggests there is tension.

Some pieces in my senior project appear to have no figure present. For instance, I created a canopy out of mesh and steel pencil rod, adorned in felted wool and ceramic. This sculpture is about my severe cold sore outbreaks brought on by stress and illness. The sculpture, at first glance, is very appealing. It is 7 feet of dreamy pink mesh but upon getting closer there are large invasive sores inside. I wanted to create a large sculpture about just my mouth to show the intensity of these sores. Creating this sculpture was a way for me to reclaim an ugly thing that I have dealt with forever. It allowed me to take many painful, uncomfortable and sometimes embarrassing experiences and make it less grotesque, by turning it into an object that traditionally provides comfort and beauty to a space.

Taking ownership of a situation through sculpture has been my goal throughout the entirety of my senior project. I found that Louise Bourgeois has been a great inspiration to my artwork in this way. Bourgeois works directly from her childhood traumas and uses her unconscious mind to create sculptures in a way to help her cope and reclaim situations. I feel very connected to Bourgeois's body of work because we are taking inspiration from similar places. I admire her vulnerability as an artist and hope to continue making art that is full of such raw emotion in a way that viewers can understand the context. Bourgeois uses techniques that are similar to art therapy practices. In Louise Bourgeois's *Drawings and Observations*, she unpacks elements of her drawings and sketches in a way that explains how her work is directly speaking upon her past experiences.

Art therapy practices have been one of many inspirations for the work I am making now. A goal of mine is to become a licensed art therapist so I have been very focused on how I can translate the experience through the artwork. Art therapy uses a variety of visual art practices like sculpture, painting, drawing, and photography as a form of expression. Art therapy allows for broader accessibility to therapy because not everyone can benefit from traditional therapy practices. I am so passionate about pursuing a career in this field because of my personal therapy experiences and how impactful that has been for me. I want to bring people that same feeling of solace and understanding while using visual art expression.

Studying psychology has influenced how I make art. Psychology has allowed me a scientific approach to viewing art. This scientific lens has made my art physiological in that I use the body and its traditional functions in an abstracted way. I am also interested in developmental psychology and psychopathologies and how those two work together. Currently, in terms of my

senior project, I am interested in how experiencing a traumatic event during a critical time in development is related to psychopathologies and how I can use art to express these concepts.

I am using psychology in my art practice but I wanted to expand further. I also wanted to work with a population that I hope to work with in my anticipated career as an art therapist. I worked with Pat Amanna, the director of the Children's Center at Purchase College, to create a way to incorporate the children in my art making for my senior project. I chose to teach the children how to use clay. I would be teaching them a new art material and also teaching them how they can create with purpose and not just mechanically. I worked with the oldest classroom at the Children's Center, a group of approximately 20 children ages 4 to 5. My goal was to show the children that they can use their emotions to create artwork.

I began by introducing the clay to the kids, we talked about how it comes from the earth and how it feels different from other materials they are used to working with, like play dough. We talked about how you need to use really strong hands to form the clay. The density of the clay was a workout for their fine motor skills. I showed them how they can roll clay in coils to build structures. I showed the children how they can roll out the clay to create a flat surface to make a picture or to cut out shapes. They were allowed to use the clay to make whatever they wanted. I brought in a piece of fired clay to show the class that clay has the ability to last forever but it will only last forever if we put it in the kiln. We discussed the difference between fired clay and dried out clay. I explained to the children the kiln has the "powers" to make clay last forever and how dry clay is brittle and will break if it is unfired. Showing the children that they would be making something eternal gives them a sense of responsibility and drives them to make something they really like.

After giving them the basics of how to use clay, we talked about our emotions. Children this age don't yet have an abstract view of emotions, however, they are very good at using symbolism for representation. When I asked the group of children what it looked like to be happy or sad they gave me a very literal answer, a happy face or a sad face. The more I tried to use these prompts the less expressive the children would be when making. I changed my approach and did not directly ask them how they show emotions. I asked what they were making as they were using the clay and they would usually give me a well thought out and detailed story, from there I would ask what emotions are tied with that. One child made three oval shapes and told me it was a cracked egg, this reminded them of making breakfast with their mom, which made them feel happy. However, not every sculpture was explicitly emotion based. Sometimes the group would be talking about something they did over the weekend or their families and would make something they observed. One child made furniture for their doll and they talked about how the doll would be excited for a new bed. Another child made a flower pot that eventually turned into a wine glass, which later turned into a nest after we talked about why we can not have wine glasses in school. Children at this age are very observant and learn through what they see. They have an egocentric view of the world, meaning their thoughts and feelings are surrounded around themselves. This makes them very good at observing how things affect them and allows them to act out their experiences through symbolic play and art making.

I worked with the children for only a month and a half, our time was cut short due to the campus closing down. I have 31 small pieces from a portion of the class, unfortunately some sculptures were left at the Children's Center and it is uncertain if they are still there or if I will ever have access to them. I am incredibly grateful for the Children's Center allowing me to have

had this experience. The children had redirected the assignment to best fit their needs and taught me how self expression can look different for everyone.

Studying psychology and sculpture has given me the skills to create a world in which I have ownership. Connection, dependence, and comfort, are goals that I have been attempting to achieve as a person who is healing and also as an artist. I find that self expression through art is an experience all people should have access to, and I hope to spread that knowledge in my anticipated career. My experience working with the children taught me to keep the process of art making a malleable experience; what I anticipate creating is not always the outcome. *Translating Sentience through Form* has grown into a body of work that encapsulates my research and my personal discoveries in art.



## Bibliography

“About Art Therapy.” *American Art Therapy Association*, The American Art Therapy Association , June 2017, [arttherapy.org/about-art-therapy/](http://arttherapy.org/about-art-therapy/).

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Cook, Joan Littlefield., and Greg Cook. *Child Development: Principles and Perspectives*. Pearson A and B, 2005.

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*Cold Sore Canopy*, March 2020, 6.8 x 3.3 feet, steel pencil rod, mesh, ceramic, wool



*Cold Sore Canopy*, Detail, 14 inches, wool, wax, plastic shopping bag



*Cold Sore Canopy*, Detail, 13 inches, 4 inches, ceramic, oil paint, wax



*An Obligation To One's Family*, November 2019, 4.3 x 1.25 feet, 4 x 1.58 feet, 4.1 x 1.25 feet, steel tubing, knitted blanket, mesh, latex



*Stress Dreaming*, October 2019, 5 x 4 feet, 5 x 4 feet, 2.5 x 1.25 feet, steel tubing, pencil rod, cement, muslin, yarn, wax, house paint, stain

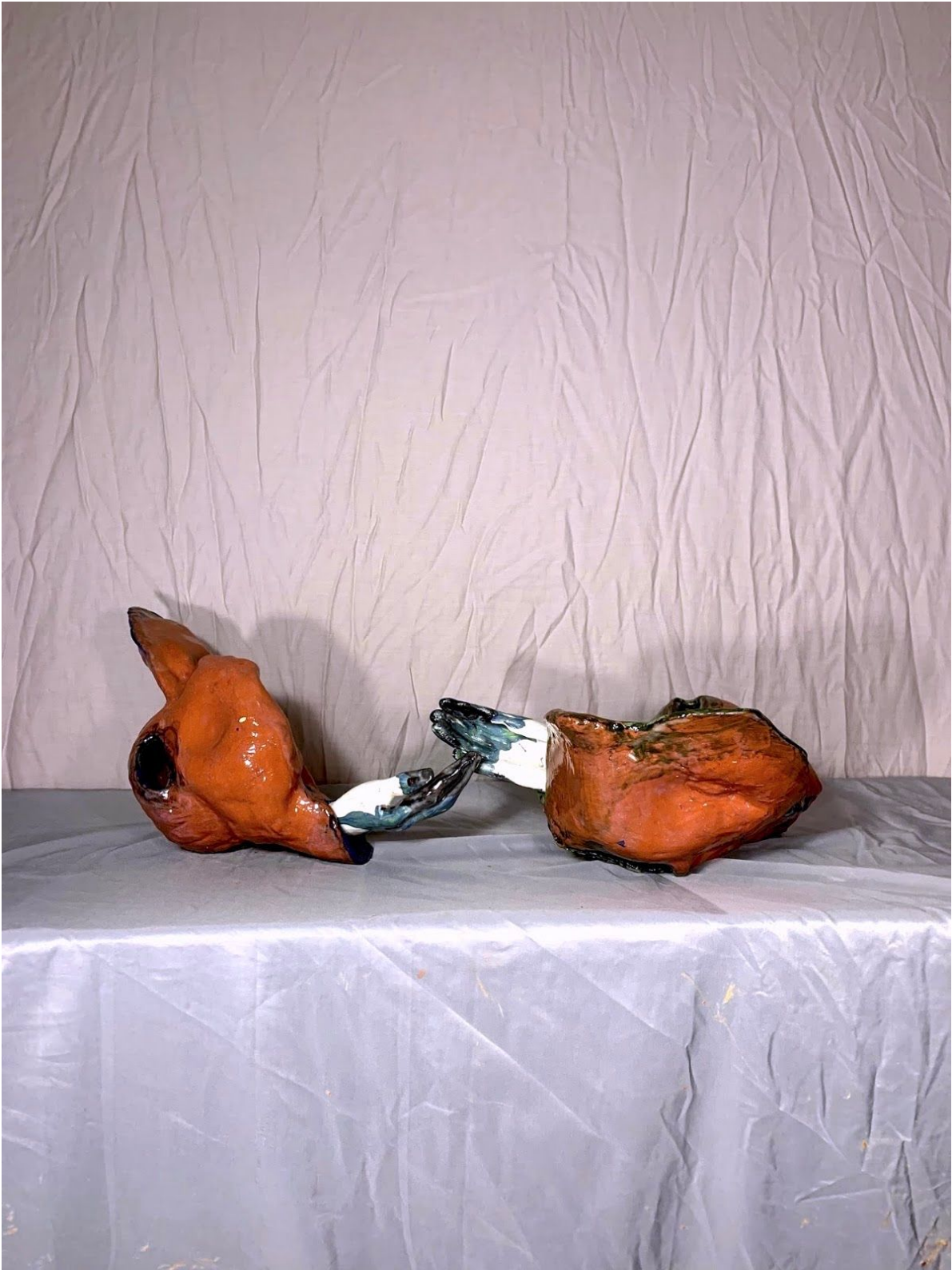


*All Connected*, September 2019, 3.5 feet x 2.6 feet, 3.7 x 2.9 feet, plaster, hot glue, house paint



*Feeling Everything in my Stomach*, March 2020, 6 feet x 10 inches, fired clay, wax, oil paint, knitted blanket





*Trying to Reconnect with You*, October 2019, 1.5 x 1 feet, 1.2 feet x 1 feet, glazed ceramic



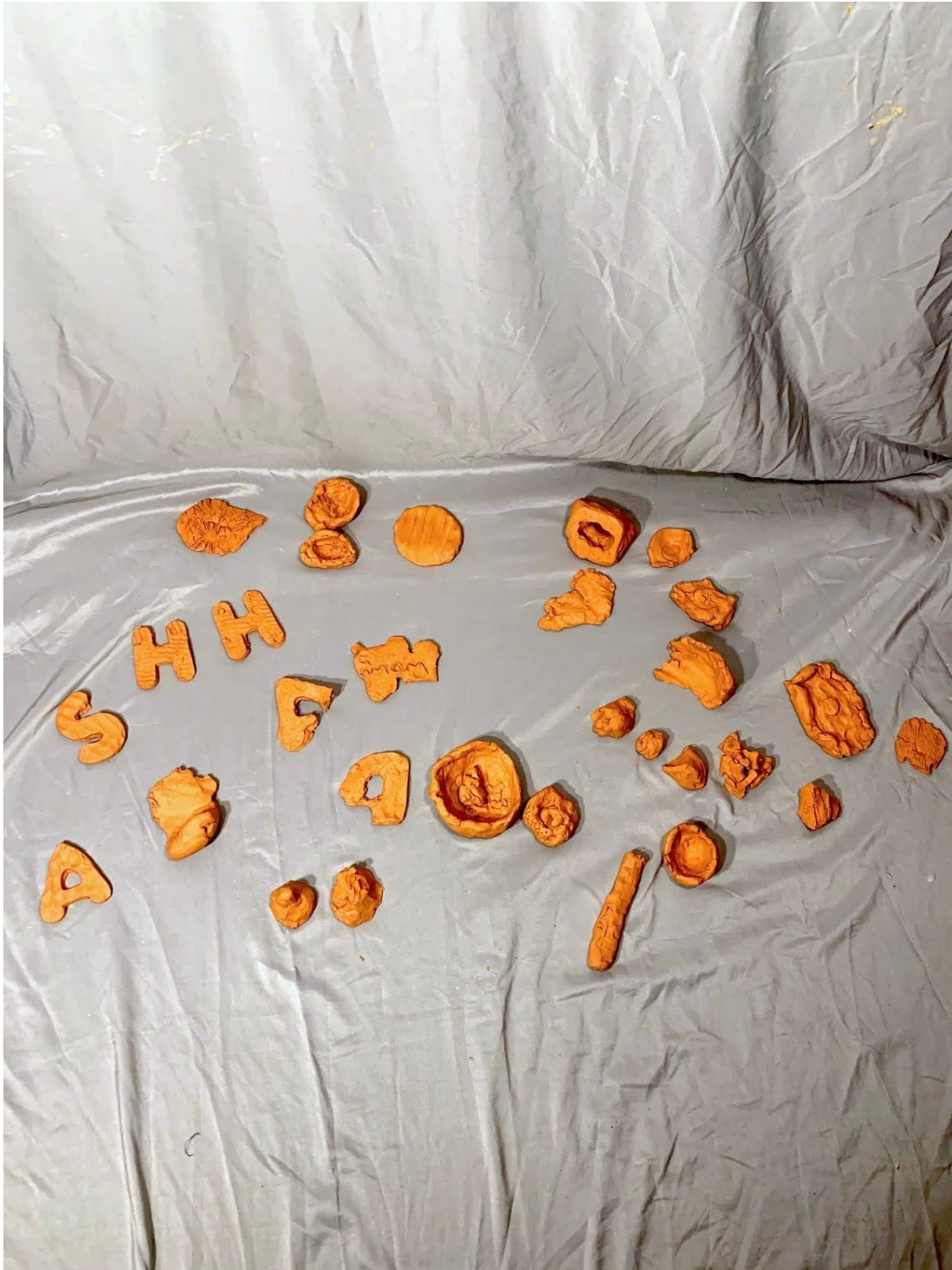
*Keep the Drain Closed*, October 2019, 1.25 feet x 8 inches, glazed ceramic, drain chain



*What is inside is affecting the Outside*, April 2019, 2.5 feet x 1.5 feet, 2.4 feet x 1.3 feet, 2.5 feet x 1.4 feet, cement, house paint, water



*Amygdala; to scale*, March 2019, 3.5 feet x 2.6 feet, 3.7 x 2.9 feet, plaster, spray paint, plastic bags



*Sculpting with our Emotions*, Collaboration with the Children's Center Blue Room, February 2020, 31 fired clay pieces

