

# I've heard it All; Press Play for Stripes and No Polka Dots

By Briana Owsiany

Submitted to Painting and Drawing  
Board of Study School of Art + Design

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Purchase College  
State University of New York  
May 2019

Sponsor: Cynthia Lin  
Second Reader: Sharon Horvath

I sat underneath the dining room table playing and creating with all of my dolls for years; disappearing from the world that I lived in. I would drift off into this fantasy land of play and fun ignoring most of the awful things that I was dealing with in the real world. I would often run away from all of my problems as a kid; playing and wandering instead of being with everyone else. All of my dolls, from Barbies to Polly-pockets were my closest friends for a few years. They're still tucked away in the basement waiting for the next time to be played with. As I got older, I began distracting myself with art; hiding away in the different art classrooms, pretending that school was great and that I wasn't terrified of people and faces. When I entered my college career almost four years ago; I was unsure what to expect. I didn't know where to start when it came to my own work and how to be an artist when I knew nothing about the different mediums. The last three years have been a blur, an exciting whirlwind of emotions. I've made work that I'm happy about; I've made friends, built relationships, all the nine yards a college career should have. This thesis that I've been building up to has been challenging yet rewarding.

### I've Heard it All; Press Play for Stripes and No Polka Dots

"I've heard it All, Press Play for Stripes and No Polka Dots" is about everything and anything having to do with craft, time (the past, present and future) and the emotional trauma that I endured while growing up and trying to grow and learn from those events. This thesis was countless hours of uncertainty, pain, draining myself emotionally and physically to get the work done and to dive into the deepest darkest secrets that I hold onto in order for me to create the work.

The earliest bodies of work that were created in the fall semester of this year revolved around dolls. They were built out of fabric, doll stuffing and hot glue. The very first one who has no name was the most important one I created; I built it out of anxiety and stress and with it, it answered a lot of unanswered questions that I had pent up. The questions I had, revolved around what the thesis was going to be about and whether or not I was ready for senior year. Craft and childhood began to form as the weeks progressed. I looked back on my own childhood and the dolls I played with along with the different patterns that would repeat in my life; stripes. The craft concept was important to me as it reflected the idea of always working with my hands as a kid, always watching other people's hands as they cooked or clean and just building in general; whether that would be a set design for the school play or new furniture for the house. The craft concept started way back then as a kid when my doll obsession started to form. I didn't have many things as kid, I didn't go out as often as I should have, and I didn't have many friends. While walking into my senior year at SUNY Purchase, I reflected a lot on the past and how to bring my childhood into my thesis and whether that would be a form of portraiture or something completely random, like collage based off of photographs and then made into paintings. Neither one I did since I built the first doll that started everything.

I continued to build dolls for the paintings, whether they were smaller, about a foot, or atleast 2 ½ feet. Each one represented a different time period, a different emotion that I felt while

building the pieces, or they just represented a different part of me from that moment of time that I was in. These dolls and their poses factor into the paintings and the paintings' scale.

Most of the dolls I create with the intention that they could move and bend any way I want them to. I think about climbing and ballet and weird poses that models make in advertisements while making the small dolls for the paintings. I think about how unnatural it is to bend specific ways for legs and arms and how abnormal it is to have extra-long arms or legs (I'm short so anything longer than my arms and legs, I'm inspired by). I'm fascinated in making the figure abnormal, awkward and uncomfortable in the painting whether that means to extend the arms or legs or even both. I tend to look at those body parts on humans since they can't bend that well only in a hinge style. It would be a forced manipulation to bend the arms and legs in a different way than what its intention is. While creating the paintings, I often think about how to break standard human movements and make this animal-like figurine that can break bones and not be able to feel anything while still be comfortable in that position.

When I was younger; my father would always yell at my sister and I for no reason at all. My sister and I were tiny adolescences, and imagine a six-foot stocky man pointing a stubby finger at your face while screaming for whatever reason at these preteens every other day. It was not fun and was traumatizing. The paintings I created throughout the last few semesters have been bigger than me; some are twice the size, the newest one is standing at 10 feet tall and others are just 6 feet. The size is the most important thing in the painting. It pushes that weird uncomfortable boundary for the viewers that I feel while painting it. These paintings and sizes are important to me because I'm able to give these weird inanimate objects, these paintings, a voice, personifying them even if they shouldn't. It forces the viewers to enter into a space that is occupied by these large figurine faceless paintings and forces them to feel weird and anxious. The paintings are built to take up space, to be looked at and to be viewed whether that is by looking up to it or facing head on.

While creating the paintings; I tend to think about traumas and secrets and these weird emotions that we all harbor even as a kid. A lot of the paintings that I created within the last semester and half are secrets that are about my family and me. No one knows about the secrets, but I had to talk about them in a way without verbally saying it. These paintings are like the toy chest that I had as a kid that was blue and white and plastic. It suffocated the living room, but it held all of my treasures and toys in it. It also held a lot of secrets and represented a lot of lonely nights when my parents were always working and there wasn't much to do. I could get lost in it if I wanted to when I was younger and much smaller. After years of having it empty and it taking up space, I finally made the decision to throw it out. The toy chest held a lot of weird nostalgic emotions that I didn't really understand until now. The toy chest is similar to the paintings in a way that the paintings hold a lot of sentimental value during the process of making them; however, when they're done, it's an empty unsatisfying feeling. Once that toy chest had no purpose left to it, it became trash. The question of whether the paintings will become trash after they are done and looked at for a while is up in the air.

"I've heard it all; Press Play for Stripes and No Polka Dots" is a thesis revolving around abstraction and figuration along with craft and time. The abstractions are nothing more than just

etchings on a copper plate or pen on a gesso piece of wood. They are shapes and lines that come out of thin air. There's no explanation for why the drawing is the way it is once it's done. However, most of the lines that I created and the drawings that I make represent parts of sentences I have heard, song lyrics I'm listening to or simply an emotion I'm feeling; that emotion is usually shown through the type of mark making I make. If it's often very fast and scratchy that usually indicates I had a lot on my mind while making that specific drawing. The figures that I make are usually of me in different forms. I often feel like a puppet being dragged along in this never-ending cycle of life. I never liked puppets, but I'm fascinated by the technique it takes to control one. I'm fascinated by all of the strings and movable parts in some of the more complicated puppets. The last two pieces I created this semester; the ten-foot painting "If only you held my hand" and the puppet I had suspended in the air for the senior BFA show "The Cow Jumped Over the Moon" represented this combination of puppets and abnormal body image. I was never satisfied with the way I looked, I often compared myself to other people or to these celebrities wishing a different part of me was different from such an early age until now. The body parts like legs and arms often emphasized the most in the bodies of work, as I wish to always be built differently in those areas.

The Painting "If Only You Held My Hand" is a 10-foot painting that has attachable long arms made out of monoprints and fabric hand stitched onto the canvas. There was a lot of uncertainty going into this painting knowing it would be my last official painting of my BFA career and also by the height of it and the difficulty I knew I would endure while attaching the arms. The arms were the most important factor of this piece as it would represent the idea of longing and moving on and continuing to the next chapter. They do hang alongside the painting as if they're waiting for something to come up to them. The puppet that I suspended from the air was a combination of mixed fabrics done by mono-printing. The shape of the doll, two outstretched legs, one longer than the other and two arms one grabbing for something and the other longer and more whimsical, represent this idea of climbing and jumping away from something. The body parts were not perfect on the doll, there are practically two knees on one leg and the thigh continues forever on the other leg. The legs represented physically how I felt while putting myself through the process of making the piece. Constantly moving, constantly sitting and or standing on my legs and bending them in a way that was stiff and uncomfortable while sewing the piece. I wanted both pieces to be a summary of how the year went; with the combination of being controlled by the inevitable future and this idea of manipulation to the body. Paintings like "I've heard it all", "If Only Mom Knew", "Tomorrow is Today?", "Let's Play" and "Dollhouses for Adults" were all important to me as like before they held secrets that I can't share, feelings that I feel every day and this terrifying realization that the future isn't as predictable as it was in college in the early years. No one knows what to expect with the unexpected.

I've looked at a number of artists in my career; focusing on artist who tend to have a traumatizing early life before they became artists or artists that I was fascinated with. Franz Kline, Helen Frankenthaler, Louise Bourgeois and recently Nicola Tyson are all artists that inspired a lot of the work that I created. Whether it was their color palettes, are their forms in their work or the mark making that created the pieces; each one had an impact on how I created my work. Nicola Tyson is the most recent artist I looked into; her figurines and the idea of no faces in any of her portraits is what fascinates me. Normally you should have a recognizable face

within portrait pieces of work but with her she uses the paint, patterns and shape to give each of her figures their own personalities. It is also the way she defines the figure. One large shape with a few individual lines in the shape to define where the legs and arms are. The use of her color and the solid backgrounds for a figure that is well-shaped with line and mark-making fascinates me. Not many artists are bold enough to place stand-alone abstract figurines onto a solid colored background. Even though most of her work is simple with just a few unique line marks; each of the marks are very effective, they define where the elements of a face should be, they define the body movements that the figurine is making in the painting. She's inspired me to no longer have the head in the pieces.

### What's Next?

The idea of what's next especially since this chapter of my BFA is coming to a full stop is terrifying. I intend to create work that is of the now and whatever is in my photo archive. I intend to focus on things that have to do with the future, and even with that I'm not sure what that will be until I find a way to create it. I've worked on pieces that focus on body image and distortion and time and craft. I don't know if anything that I create in the future will focus on any of that. I do intend, though, on creating collages based off of old pieces and working on the idea of what's to come from there. Nothing is really set in stone and whatever happens will happen. There's no rush to complete something that isn't fully rendered.

I want to say I'm going to continue making work about my past, but I feel that chapter has been completed. I want to go for adventure and travel and see the world and see if that would inspire me to make different and unique work. "I've Heard it All; Press Play for Stripes and No Polka Dots" in its entirety is about my troublesome past and present. The emotional trauma my sister, mother and I had to endure from my father who still has no excuses to any of his tantrums. All of the pieces are about all of the things that I wish I had, all the things I wish I could say, all the emotions I've been dealing with for years and all the pieces are all the secrets that I've been hiding for a very long time. The Future is inevitable; what's to come will be unpredictable.

Bibliography:

Artist

Helen Frankenthaler

<http://www.frankenthalerfoundation.org/artworks/paintings>

Nicola Tyson

<http://www.petzel.com/artists/nicola-tyson>

Franz Kline

<https://www.moma.org/artists/3148>

Louise Bourgeois

<https://www.artsy.net/artist/louise-bourgeois>



Title: It's Time to Dance  
Medium: Oil paint on stretched bed sheet  
Size: 72-inch x 60 inch  
Year: 2019



Title: No name (the first)  
Medium: Fabric and doll stuffing  
Size: 20-inch x 12 inch  
Year: 2018



Title: Dollhouses for Adults  
Medium: Oil paint on stretched table cloth  
Size: 48 Inch x 36 inch  
Year: 2018





Title: The Cow Jumped Over the Moon  
Medium: Mono printing ink on fabric  
Size: 48-inch x 60  
Year: 2019



Title: I've Heard It All  
Medium: Oil paint, charcoal, oil  
pastel and modeling paste on  
table cloth  
Size: 96-inch x 60 inch  
Year: 2018/2019



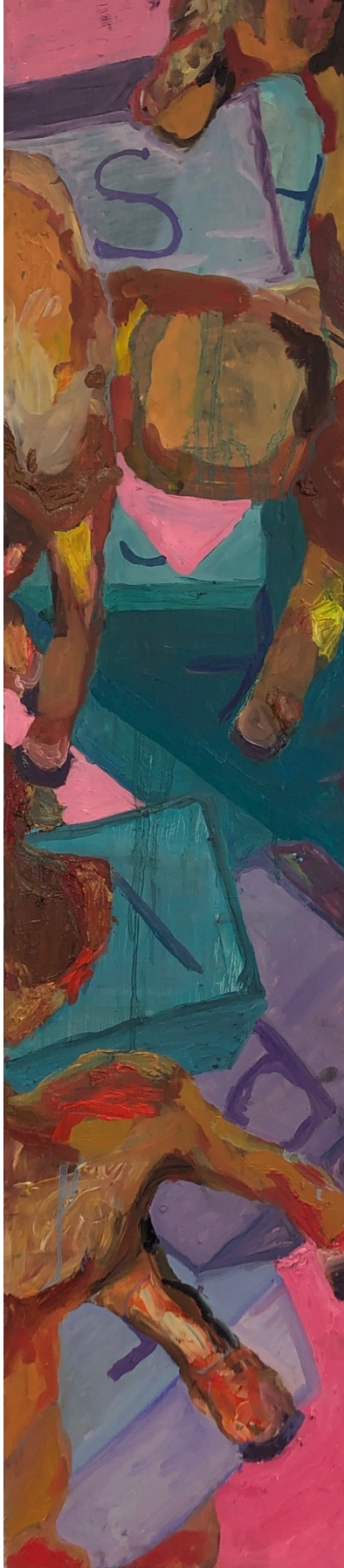
Title: If Only You Held My Hand  
Medium: Oil paint, fabric with mono-printing ink on stretched bed sheet  
Height: 120-inch x 60 inch  
Year: 2019



Title: Tomorrow?  
Medium: Oil Paint,  
charcoal and modeling  
paste on wood panel  
Size: 42-inch x 48 inch  
Year: 2018



Title: Let's Play  
Medium: Oil paint, ink and  
yawn on wood  
Size: 48-inch x 54 inch  
Year: 2018



Title: If Only Mom Knew  
Medium: Oil on wood  
Size: 12-inch x 36 inch  
Year: 2018