

“Full of Thorns”

by

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School of Art and Design
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Bachelor of Science in Visual Arts

Purchase College
State University of New York

May 2024

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This senior project has been an exploration of myself as an artist and finding my true expression. The work has been based on self-reflections gained from leaving my comfort zone to explore what's outside of it. The research has been informative to the making and representative of what safe spaces mean, what femininity means to the work generally, and what happens when ideology behind free thought and resilience takes form. To push the art, I've been forced out of my typical comfort zone to find new ways of thinking, looking at art, and perceiving those around me. This was useful in finding new strategies to make, using new materials, and gaining new experiences, which have all contributed to the final product.

Making of the sculptural and painted pieces for this thesis was more than a process of what looked and was deemed as "pretty" by societal standards. It was about finding beauty in the unknown and using the art making process to find closure for this chapter known as my college experience. Going into this it was evident that some pieces would be updated or remade. It took a deep dive of research to decide what aligned with my practice and how I will go about deciding what no longer connected with my practice. Learning here was about how art can be therapeutic, what safety networks can be linked to my art, and how individuals could get the chance to connect with each of my pieces. This process was about challenging my perception of what happens when you make art in alignment with your own values.

Rather than looking at the process of making art as something that must get done and solely focusing on the outcome, here it was important to take time to appreciate what's happening in front of you, based on how the material at hand moves with you. It was important to take note of thoughts and how those thoughts are reflected on the work. Every piece of this was personal, leaving no room for my own timidness to get in the way. As an introverted person, at first this was difficult, but it allowed me to grow to love the aspects of my art that I may have held back on or stopped pushing once the ideas got too personal. Through practicing

techniques of art therapy, I created “Timid”. Here I freely associated the themes I wanted to further develop. The black lines are abstracted roses, the skin tones as the background are representative of beauty found in all, and the red splashes serve as a representation of a menstruation cycle.

During the process the experiences that seemed unperceivable became perceivable. To emanate this feeling the steel purse that is made with gray leaves on the outside is meant to carry extra thoughts and serve as a basket to throw your fears into. Attending weekly meetings with my advisor pushed me to continue this journey of finding comfortability in myself when faced with the unknown. The final product wouldn't have been possible without keeping this open mind.



Figure 1 “Unperceivable” Welded Steel and painted prop leaves, 6in x 6in x 8.5in, March 2023



Figure 2 "Timid", Acrylic on Canvas, 11in x 14in, March 2023

A theme in the work has been what feminism means to me and how it's reflected onto the art. Feminism is about women expressing themselves without the opinions of those whose space isn't deemed as safe to that individual. A safe space for a woman is one that women's rights are free from "expectations" set by society. These expectations may consist of societal standards from a young age, where men are called "little man" and women are taught to cook, clean, and make sure the house is comfortable. The "preferred" life is one that doesn't include doing the housework or fighting for liberation (De Beauvoir, 1956). In this thesis, femininity is the ability to show emotion in situations deemed as difficult or complicated, show empathy, and connect with one's true spiritual self. Here the meaning of resilience was explored, this is where taking a difficult situation and looking for meaningful opportunities within it to create art that represents growth (Southwick, 2011).

The sculpture that makes up a woman's vagina and leg area is representative of the constraints and regulations put on women. The ribbon is a symbol of constraints aimed at women's bodies, it is soft and delicate yet powerful, a theme continuously showcased by the artist. The ribbon sends a message that at first sight may seem discreet, but with further examination is meant to raise questions. The muted color palette of the flowers that sit on top of the legs represents the hidden beauties that go into womanhood, the daily interactions and the different experiences we have that make us each unique are expressed in this piece.





Figure 3 "Resilience", Ceramic, ribbon, and painted prop leaves, 18in x 9in x 9in, May 2023

Creating a welded gate behind the woman is another form of the symbolism that is represented by the ribbon. Although the metal piece that hangs is soft on the eye, delicate to the viewer, it is a tough piece of steel. The durability of the steel is opposite of the softness of the message behind metal stars that are welded onto the gate. These stars serve as a disconnection from reality by emanating a space for thoughts to flow and get lost in. Including this three-dimensionality onto the gate was necessary in further spreading the message that with what may feel like a sharp edge and can be discomforting, comes growth. When life is “rough around the edges” we must adapt to find where we fit in.

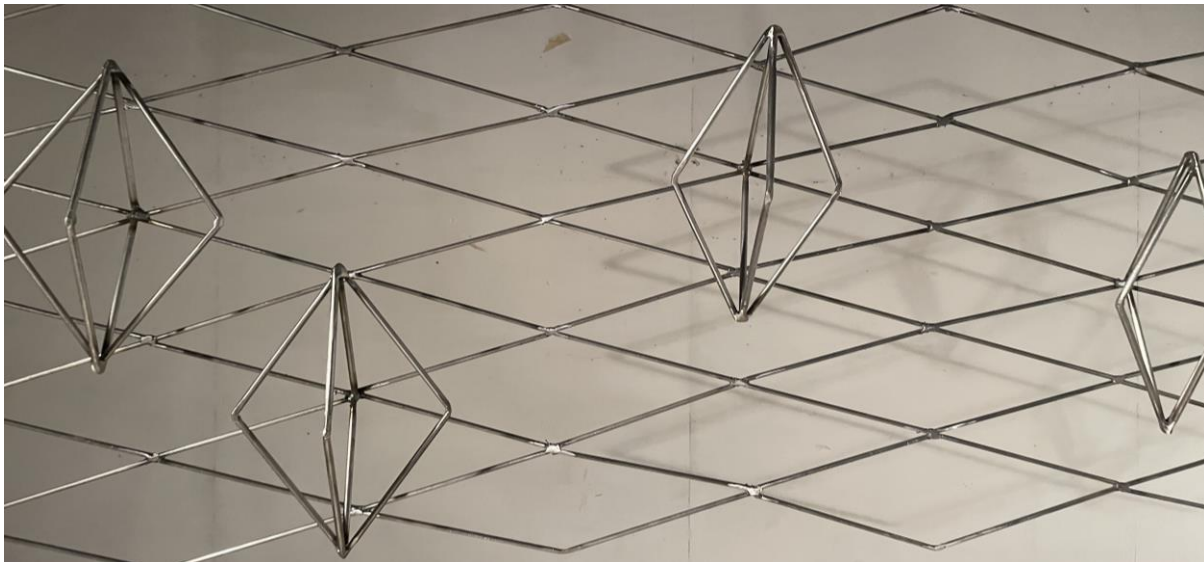
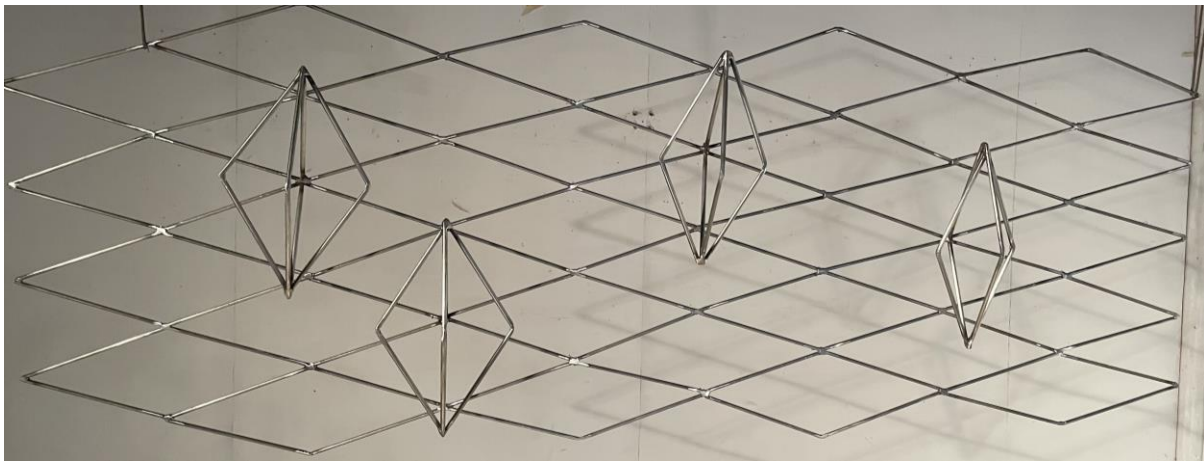


Figure 4 “Rough Around the Edges”, Welded Steel, 68in x 8in x 31in, May 2023

The duality of emotions carries over to the softness and blurriness of the pink and yellow self-portrait that hangs on the wall. This portrait was the first piece in this collection. It began as an art dump, a place to freely express feelings that hadn't been put into words. This explains why no aspect of the painting is symmetrical or typical of a self-portrait. This portrait showcases a face with one closed eye, and on the other side there is an indication of an eye but is blurred. The hair is not hair-like, it's geometrical and representative of harsh edges. Further, half the lips are recognizable, and the other half is blurred. The symbolism behind the blurred effects is the unknown, and a feeling while not knowing what the next steps were for the process of creating. The result is one that is a self-portrait of how the artist viewed themselves at the time of making and an uncertainty of not knowing what's next to now becoming rendered in a way that is simply expressive of these emotions.



Figure 5 "Duality", Oil on Canvas, 35in x 23in, October 2022

Roses are a constant in this project that kept appearing during my time studying art here at Purchase. The ceramic rose helmet with eyebrows glazed on was the first time the roses stood out to me. The helmet is a protective piece, meant to be individualized based on who's viewing the piece. Means of protection varies from person to person so there is no specific protective service this helmet affords. For me the helmet represents the brain, and the ideas that began as just thoughts and later turned into a curated thesis show. This piece networks each piece of this show together and creates a safety network, within a space that is welcoming of the unknown. Through its protective aspect, it's safe and through its brain-like feature it serves as a center point in the work, much like the brain does for the body.





Figure 6 "Safety Network", Glaze over Ceramic, 11in x 9in x 6in, December 2022

As I got closer to the finish line, I'd realized that the roses themselves represent a safe space to me and I wanted to spread this as a message. A safe space to me is where freedom of creativity is expressed, and judgment from the self or other is eliminated. Digging into my relationships, the most significant one kept standing out; the relationship shared between my mother and I is one that shapes key aspects of my core. In my family the rose is what keeps us together. With my mother's constant kindness and generosity, my brothers and I wouldn't be who and where we are in life, her values have always been pure and meaningful. She's always provided a safe space where we were able to express our hopes, dreams, fears, and everything in between. She is the person whom I'd thank for everything. The roses are her favorite flower, she's always had a rose garden and it's all fitting for her name, Rosemarie. Through her shared wisdom I've been able to keep an open mind, have empathy, and give back to the community that's served me my whole life. Like the metal pieces, and other ceramic pieces, the roses were

crafted in a way that has a soft appearance but is made in a way that is sturdy. For the main piece in the show, I decided to dedicate it to my mother. The show wouldn't be complete without it, much like I wouldn't be complete without my Rose. The roses created are handmade of ceramic, fired, then painted a bright red. This brightness is a symbol of my mother's bright personality, and eagerness to learn. The roses were then attached to a metal frame that stands on its own with recent and baby pictures of me and my mother. This piece is set in a way that the light hits the roses where it catches the eye. The images are printed in black and white to allow for the roses to do the speaking.



Figure 7 "Full of Thorns", Ceramic, steel, acrylic paint, and paper, 14in x 13in x 14in, April 2024

Taking the process of making art and viewing it as one that is therapeutic should change the way this art is perceived. Utilizing my time to focus less on the way something looks and more on the way that the material interacts with the space was pivotal in curating this show. This show's theme was safe spaces, with many discussions behind the scenes of how that would come to fruition. The title "Full of Thorns" is representative of the opposition between the softness of the roses themselves and the thorns on their stem. This duality has been a common theme in both the aesthetics and research aspects of my work. There are no visible thorns in this work but there are harsh edges throughout. In the end, the space was filled with art that came from my perception of what was safe and how this would be aesthetically portrayed without losing the important aspects of the research.

This project helped expand my mind and find what's important to me and what areas of myself and my art I'd like to continue growing. The next step for me is to foster safe spaces, empathy, and social safety networks for others. I'll be doing this by continuing my education in obtaining a master's degree in social work. To further my art practice, I'll continue my journey of testing new materials, new spaces, and new experiences where I am unfamiliar, to continue creating sculptures that translate the messages behind these ideas about self-reflection and safe spaces. My experience here was a process, where my art shaped me into the person I am and am excited to keep growing into. This thesis is just the beginning of what safe spaces, beauty, and womanhood mean to me.





Figure 8 Images from Senior Thesis Show "Full of Thorns"

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