Art, Objects, and Memories

A Thesis Presented for the
Honors Center
The State University of New York at New Paltz

Katherine Voska
May 2021
Abstract:

As humans, there are millions of factors that shape our identities. From culture, geographic location, and family life, to education, career path, and sexuality, every aspect of our lives make us who we are. For me, the work I make as an artist and a student is a result of my identity. I am a straight, half Japanese, half American, cisgendered woman, raised in the same small town for most of my life. My parents were married for over 25 years until they separated the summer before my senior year of high school. I am the third generation of my family to be living in the same childhood home. I was raised to appreciate nature, history, and to be more giving than those who gave to me. I attend a liberal college where I majored in art but took classes in history, philosophy, music, film, language, and culture. All of these things have affected my perspective of others, the world around me, and how my work fits into it. As a society that prides themselves on the things that they own and possess, what do the objects I create add? This exhibition highlights my life and how the objects I create are influenced by other objects, my identity and experiences.

Keywords:

Visual Arts, Identity, Exhibit, Liberal Arts, Material Culture, Nostalgia, Memory.
Kathy Voska Honors Thesis Exhibition

WELCOME

Art, Objects, and Memories

Katherine Voska Honors Thesis Exhibition

VIEW EXHIBIT

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Kathy Voska

Kathy Voska, originally from Long Island, is a multimedia artist currently living in New Paltz, New York. She works in many mediums, including metal, printmaking, and ceramics. Kathy enjoys exploring new processes and techniques within these mediums. Her work focuses on the process of making rather than the concept. Some of her inspiration comes from her Japanese heritage and highlights themes of identity, irony, and the ready made. Kathy's work was displayed in the Student Advocacy Month Show at Islip Town Hall in 2018 and the SUNY New Paltz Foundation Exhibition in 2019. Her interest in material culture and museum curation stemmed from her high school internship at the Islip Arts Council in 2018. She is currently working on curating her works for the SUNY New Paltz Online Senior Art Exhibition (2021) and her Honors Thesis Exhibition titled: “Art, Objects, Art, and Memories”. In May of 2021, Kathy will be graduating with a Bachelor of Science in Visual Arts from the State University of New York (SUNY) at New Paltz. Kathy is currently working to become involved in a Long Island based fine art studio to continue her artistic career after graduation.
Kathy will be doing a Virtual Exhibit tour during her Honors Thesis Presentation on April 30th, 2021. Please email her at katherinevoska@gmail.com for meeting link.

Livestream coming soon

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GALLERY

A Plant Even You Can't Kill, 2021, 18.5" x 7";
Copper sheet and wire, placed in hand thrown stoneware vessel

Articles About the Works
There are several articles written about a few of the works, describing their personal stories and relation to the artist. Click below to see additional material and read more.

VIEW ARTICLES
Keep it Together, 2019, 22” circumference, cut brass sheets and wire
Day Off, 2019, 24" x 18", cut paper
Honey Vase, 2021, 5.5” x 5”, Soda fired stoneware with black underglaze
Who Do You Meet in the Valley of the Flowers?, 2019, 11” x 7.5”, Etching ink on stonehenge and chine-colle
Carnival Catch, 2019, 2.75" x 1.75", Riveted copper and brass sheets, copper wire
Contrasted Serving Bowl, 2021, 5.5” x 5’, Glazed, cone 6 fired, hand thrown stoneware
Peep Show, 2018, 9” x 8.5”, Birch plywood and glass
High Tide, Low Tide, 2019, 11.5” x 15”,
Gouache and etching ink monotype on stonehenge
Brushed Serving Bowl, 2021, 3.75” x 7.5”, Glazed, soda fired stoneware with black underglaze
A Plant Even You Can’t Kill, 2021, 18.5” x 7”
Copper sheet and wire, placed in hand thrown stoneware vessel
A Plant Even You Can’t Kill

April 29, 2021

_A Plant Even You Can’t Kill, 2021, 18.5” x 7”,
Copper sheet and wire, placed in hand thrown stoneware vessel_
Some people collect stamps, sports memorabilia, designer vintage clothes, or fast cars. I collect rare house plants. As a child, I spent a lot of time outside and in nature. However, in the winter time, I helped my mom tend to the houseplants we had indoors. Some of these plants came from my father’s mother and some were from friends. Nonetheless, we had to bring them inside after it got too cold, turn on the grow light, and water them when they needed it.
After some time, I asked for a few plants of my own and was gifted a three as a Christmas present. A year later, a three plant collection grew into a six plant collection, then six to twelve, expanding with no end in sight. I loved these plants. I loved to watch them sprout new leaves. I loved to document their watering and lighting needs in a journal. Giving them love and attention, these few plants gave me growth and satisfaction in return. I brought these plants back and forth with me each semester of college and made sure that I always had someone to water them when I went on vacation.

In March of 2020, after we were all sent home from the dorms because of COVID-19, I took my dozen plants home with me, and discovered that my room in my childhood home had a few empty spaces that could fit just a few more plants. I joined some plant sale Facebook groups and learned that houseplants could be bought online and that there were so many more species than what was offered at my local big box stores, such as Lowes and Home Depot. I discovered rare tropical plants like aroids and philodendrons. I became infatuated with the intricate foliage and high maintenance care they required. I learned the terminology used among the plant community and was vacuumed into this world. A few months later, a dozen plants turned to two dozen and more shelf space was built to house my growing collection.

Most recently, I have over forty house plants in my collection, ranging from common and simple to rare and exotic. However, a staple plant that I had not owned at a time was a Monstera adansonii, also known as a swiss cheese plant. I used my fascination of the plant's fenestrated leaves to create the chased and repousse-ed work titled, A Plant Even You Can’t Kill, an immortalized replica of the plant I so badly wanted for my collection. I hand threw a vase to display this work properly.
Following the in class critique of this work, I was determined to get my hands on this swiss cheese plant. I inquired about a trade on a local Facebook group named, “Hudson Valley Rare Plants BST (buy, sell, trade)”, and within minutes I got a response. It is now in my possession and I will take care of it with the best of my ability. However, in the case that it does not survive my care, I still have *A Plant Even You Can’t Kill.*
Recent Posts

Carnival Catch and High Tide, Low Tide
May 7, 2021

Peep Show
May 7, 2021

Day Off
Apr 29, 2021

ART, OBJECTS, AND MEMORIES

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POWERED BY GODADDY
Carnival Catch and High Tide, Low Tide
May 7, 2021
One day, a sign appeared at a local park advertising a carnival that was going to be held for a few nights in April. It mentioned rides, games, food trucks, and fireworks. Some of my friends from my high school agreed to join me in hopes to destress from school and have a bit...
fun. We arrived at the carnival and immediately bought tickets to ride on the many attractions that were there. We enjoyed greasy foods, impossible games, and most of all each other's company.

As the end of the night approached, I voiced my want to win one of the carnival games so I could be awarded a goldfish. I don't know why I was so committed to becoming a pet owner of carnival goldfish, but my friends fully supported my goal. Each of my friends pitched in a few dollars and tried their hand at winning the ring toss so I would have my goldfish. About an hour and fifteen dollars later, as a group, we won three fish, which I took home at the end of the night.

Over the course of the next year, two of the three fish died from the inadequate living environment I provided, but one fish seemed to not mind the tank at all. Another year later, this one fish was still alive. I decided that it was time to upgrade his tank because he became too big for the original one. The new one I purchased had a filter, lights, and oxygen bubbler. I added live plants, some shrimp, and rocks for the fish to hide around. I am guessing that he (I am not entirely sure of the sex of this fish) is enjoying this new environment because, now four years after winning him, he is still alive and nameless.

While I was away at school, I paid my sister ten dollars a semester to feed him at least once a day. Every so often, I would ask her if he was still alive, and to my disbelief, each time I asked she said yes. The immortality and resilience of this fish consumed a lot of my day-to-day thoughts, resulting in the creation of the two pieces, *High Tide, Low Tide, and Carnival Catch.*

Both pieces comment on the mortality of my fish and how the decision I made four years ago to catch a fish at the carnival has affected me and my art ever since. I recently learned that in the right conditions, common goldfish can live up to ten to fifteen years. I grew fond of this fish and enjoy spoiling him with treats and new additions to his tank. I am looking forward to caring for him for the next six to eleven years and I thank my past self for winning him at the carnival.
In November of 1956, Kenneth John Voska was born to Arleen and Frank Voska. The family lived in a small house on Richardson Lane. Another family lived across the street. They had young children at a similar time. All of the children played together, went to school together, and grew up around one another, all on the same street. Over sixty years later, Kenneth has two daughters of his own and the young girl across the street has a son and daughter, and now four grandchildren. To this day, they still live across the street from each other.

Ken is my father and I was raised in the same house he grew up in. The lady across the street, Mary, has a husband named Guy. Their son, Justin, has a wife, and lives next door to us. There have been many occasions of us having to walk across the street to get sugar. We share backyard garden harvests with one another. We house sit each other's homes and feed the many cats while we each took our own long deserved breaks.

Around my teenage years, Justin and his wife had two sons. My mom and I would care for the two boys when their parents worked. Eventually, I would have a few years watching them on my own. We would ride bikes around the street we were both raised on, sneak treats like cookies and ice pops and sit outside to enjoy the fresh air. In my papercut work, *Day Off*, one of Justin's sons is posed on my front steps, leaning against a
column, drinking orange juice. This boy's carefree attitude and appreciation for the little things, like sipping on juice after a day of school, inspires me. Caring for children many years younger than me, I feel as if they have taught me more than I could ever teach them. These two boys next door have taught me to not care about what other people think, you can wear rain boots and shorts in seventy degree weather. They have taught me to take time off to enjoy the simple pleasures of life.

I can't imagine living on a block where I am unfamiliar with my neighbors. The small community we've built in this neighborhood symbolizes the good that can be done when people trust, give, and share what they have. We raised each other. We shared with each other. We were kind to each other. If our families hadn't held onto the sense of community they had during their childhoods in the early 60s and 70s, I might not have experienced the same sense of community or have gotten the chance to babysit the third generation of Richardson Lane.

My morals and values were built around this community and how we cared for our neighbors and they care for us. I want my children to experience a similar thing. They might become the fourth generation to live in the same family home the Voska have had since the 1920s. To me, Day Off, is about this community and the significance of giving to your neighbors as you would give to yourself and your family.

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Peep Show

May 7, 2021
As humans, we hold onto objects. Sometimes we hold onto things because we are attracted to the object, or because they have sentimental value. Objects can hold memories, feelings, emotions, and protection. A talisman can bring luck, a worry stone can help cope with fear and stress, and a stuffed animal can comfort a child. We hold onto objects because we believe their history has the power to support us in times of need.

Before I left for college, one of my close friend’s mom made me a parting gift to help me feel at home while I was away at school. The gift was a star shaped ornament she crafted made up of broken sea shells found along the beaches of Long Island. This simple but sentimental gift helped me a lot while I was living 100 miles away from home. I kept the ornament on my desk at the dorms and it helped me find comfort when I was home sick or overwhelmed with work. It is interesting that an object can elicit such motivation and solace in a person. When I look at it, sounds of the ocean and the feeling of sand on my feet were brought back into my memory. It helped remind me that home is always there when I need it.

To further honor the power of this object and to keep it safe, I created a home for it: another object, for an object. This home protected the fragile sea shell star without hiding it away. Peep Show is made of birch plywood and includes a glass lens in the center of the cover to act as a viewfinder into the box. The wood burnt details around the box highlight the star shape and instruct the viewer on the correct placement of the lid onto the box.
Creating a star shape out of wood requires precise measurements that allow the ten walls to fit exactly against one another. If one angle or length was off, the box would not line up correctly, resulting in gaps or a lop-sided star. As I studied the star and put many hours of work into creating this box, I became more attached to the original shell object. More memories and emotions were being built around this object. It was no longer just a reminder of my home, it was a reminder of my work, creativity, and artistic abilities.

I hold memories in my mind of my childhood summers on the beaches of Long Island. I am the house that protects these memories. _Peep Show_, is a physical representation of this casing of memories. The box holds on to a precious reminder of the past the same way my mind protects the remembrance of a carefree youth, playing in the salty beaches.