Regression, Suppression, and Indulgence: A Senior Thesis

Regression, Suppression, and Indulgence: A Senior Thesis

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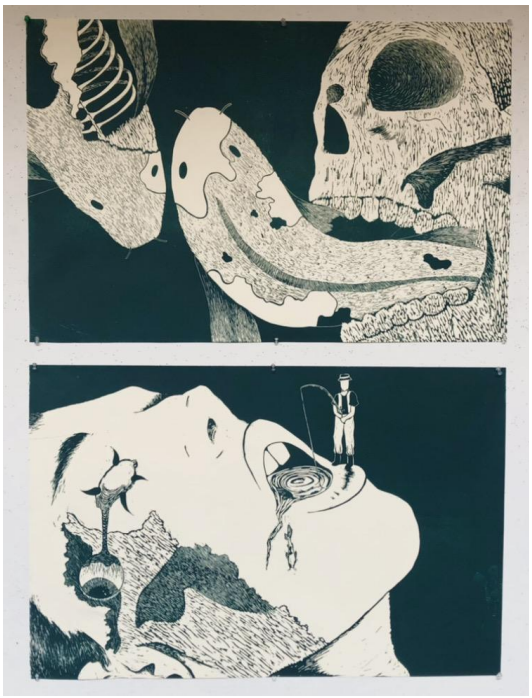
In my art I explore the disconnection I feel from my own body and humanity by breaking those two concepts down to the one thing everyone shares: life and death. The drawings I create to express these concepts are adapted into prints, primarily through the mediums of screenprint and linocut. These images focus on the cycle of life and death, and the odd space between the two. Life and death persists within the everyday, and informs the way we understand nearly everything. Through these works I express how I feel regarding my personal connection to my body and the earth that surrounds it.

The disconnection and dysphoria I feel towards my own body greatly affects how I feel I am perceived by the world. In this way I tend to use life and death in my work as a metaphor for my personal struggles with gender. Through my art I depict a dissociation between one's sense of self and physicality; how one's insides, brains, guts, and DNA impact their identity and ability to participate "fittingly" in this world. Additionally, my work uses a surrealist context and a fantastical stylization along with more realistic anatomical depictions of the inside of the human body to portray the emotional complexity that is present when the body one is born with is out of sync with who they feel they are. I attempt to navigate my relationship with myself through my practices.

I did not consider myself an artist until about 3 years ago. I hadn't taken a single real art class before coming to college, only coming with the knowledge that I had a creative energy and a knack for picking up new skills quickly. Not to say that I'd never made art before, but they were always small doodles in sketchbooks that never turned into full pieces. At the time I was comfortable in my doodles and sketches, using markers and pens to add color and finish whatever I was working on before I moved forward to the next project. I rarely thought about my work, nor did I really feel like I expressed myself through my work. I look on this phase of my

art fondly, and to this day it is still important to me to always keep a sketchbook. It allows me to not think hard and just create something, which is very valuable to prevent burnout. If every art piece I make turns into a project, I'm worried I won't have the motivation to do my life's work.

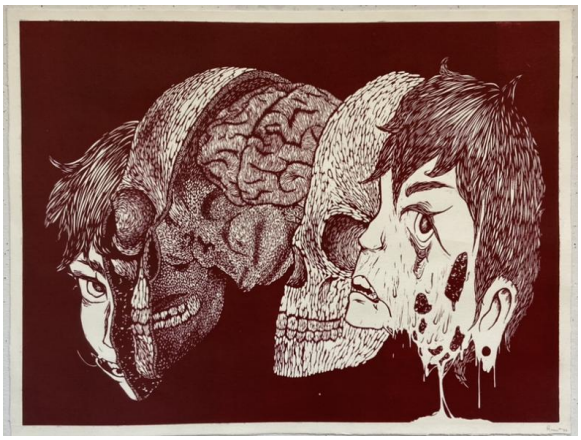
One of the first formative pieces that I completed during college was a one layer linocut diptych that I created in Junior Studio. This was before I made a habit of trying to title my work.



This work served as several firsts for me; it was my first large scale work, first work using my own face as a reference (something that became a very consistent theme in my later works) and the first time I used darker, more gorey elements. This is the first piece that I started to incorporate themes of life and death into, life emerging from death, life rotting away, and the two coexisting with each other in the everyday. In this strange void, life and death act as one, almost indistinguishable from one another. Being forced to do such a large piece with only one layer of linocut really pushed me into experimenting with different textures of carving, which ended up proving valuable for the way and informed how I would create linocuts going further.

Dissection is my favorite piece I've made to date. There's a direct correlation between the previous diptych and the development of *Dissection*. Made roughly about a year later, I have continued to push my use of texture to create a cohesive image that feels almost visceral in appearance. All of my works are self portraits, long before they were intended to be. I had always expressed myself through my markings and content, but it took some time before I

realized just how significant my work was to me. This piece is where I started to purposefully apply a theme and further explore what my art means to me, as well as verbalizing those meanings outloud to other people. *Dissection* expresses several degrees of separation I



experience with myself and what's inside me. I often feel inhuman and disconnected from my physical being, and I portray that often in my works. Visiting artist Layqa Nuna Yawar described my work as primal and animalistic in regards to the way I portray myself. Nitpicking at my form until more layers are unveiled helps me feel more connected with myself and gives me a greater sense of physicality. The "insides" of *Dissection* seem human enough, featuring an anatomically correct human skull and brain, but the face and skin that covers it isn't quite right. There is a tension between the human aspects of my subjects and something utterly inhuman. While this tension changes from piece to piece, it is rare for me to make a piece where its subject is 100% human.

The melding of linocut and screen print is important to me, and I am excited to further push the limits of what I can do when combining these two processes. I have only ever used one layer of linocut in any of my pieces, because I find the process of registering two separate blocks to be difficult and I find I am never able to fully line them up to my liking. The blocks are also never the exact same size which may cause issues for me, even if it's only off by an "insignificant" amount. This is why screenprint is so exciting to me, I am easily able to make multiple screen print layers, and I have a much easier time with registration. I enjoy the textures of my linocuts, and when combined with the layers, colors, and transparencies of screenprint, it's

like I can see color for the first time. In the future I wish to push these two mediums further together. While linocut seems more rigid and unchanging to me, screenprint can have soft and subtle layers that can change the reading of the entire piece.

I first realized the potentiality of this combination with *Morning Kiss*, a print that combines one layer of linocut and 6 layers of screenprint. I had shared with peers my writings

about life and death and the connected and replenishing nature of it all, and this was the first piece that those same peers connected to in regards to these writings. The ambiguity of the time of day, the figures, and the overall scenery leads the viewer to a strange place between time, between life and death, between human and inhuman. The figures lean in for a kiss, but it is not lips that connect, it is the entirety of their forms; melding and mixing into one. It's impossible to tell in the face where one ends and the other begins. This is because there is no "one" or "the other." Even though I have some gripes with the way this piece visually turned out, I cannot deny how important the narrative of this piece is in informing the way I feel about my other works as well.

The ability to easily change is another reason why I have started to enjoy the combination of linocut and screenprint. *Morning Kiss* was originally 5 layers of screenprint, but upon the first critique, there were some struggles in differentiating the middleground and background. Instead of having to reprint the whole thing, a solution was to add another darker blue layer to the background. While there is sometimes value in a total reprint, my brain does not often have the patience for this. I also ended up enjoying the ambiguity this darker blue layer added in the

reading of time of day. There are bright orange and yellow colors, signifying potential daytime, but the dark layers of the linocut in the figures and the screenprint of the background could also be read as evening or nighttime, despite the naming of the work. This strangeness I felt added to the theme, and I have warmed up to *Morning Kiss* significantly since printing it months ago.

In addition to 2D works, 3D works have also always been significant in my life in one way or another, specifically in regard to textiles. I started sewing in middle school, taking after my grandmother and great grandmother, who were both exceptional seamstresses in their own rights. Having access to all of their old buttons and other hardware made it incredibly easy to start sewing. At the time, I had any color of thread I could hope for, I began using old clothing to make small stuffed animals and learned how to make my clothes fit me better so I didn't have to get rid of them. All this is to say that textile work has been just as important of a creative outlet as my 2D work in my life, so it was inevitable that this love made its way into my college art career. I ended up taking several classes that are adjacent to textiles, including Book Arts and Papermaking. These were incredibly formative classes, but they had always seemed to occupy a different section of my brain when I thought about my art. "My art" was my printwork, "my hobbies" were sewing, papermaking, and bookmaking. But I loved to create a physical object that I could hold in my hands just as much as I loved carving linoleum and making prints, so why do they not deserve the same treatment? Taking several of these classes with passionate maker Amanda Thackray changed my perspective on my "hobbies" and allowed me to give them the same treatment as my prints. I began making books where I applied the same level of thinking and application of my themes as I did for my prints, painstakingly planning pages and design to create an interactive narrative that delved into my brain. In a way, making books in this manner felt more intimate than many of my prints do from a viewing perspective.

I recently made a book that is simply a monster. Everything in this book, from the inside pages to the cover, is meant to represent a single living creature. It featured stitched leather on the cover, sculpted teeth that physically stuck out of the book, and each page showed what the insides of this creature was. Each page was a range of watercolor painted organs, teeth, internal structures, anything that you might find on the inside of a creature. It was confusing, repetitive, without a clear direction of positioning in these organs in relation to the creature itself. This book is different from anything I've ever made before visually, but it is not that different from my typical body of work. The intimate nature that comes from this piece having to be opened and flipped through to be viewed properly is something that struck me. There's a degree of separation from the viewer and my prints, the viewer stands back and picks apart the texture and color purely with their eyes. But with this book, the viewer had to get up close and physically dissect the object in order to actually view it. The textures and colors suddenly became tangible, and texture was no longer a visual thing, but an intimately felt thing. Something that cannot be shown entirely in one photo, or even video, clicked something in my brain. Where my prints had separation from the viewer, my books forced the viewer to become a part of the piece.

I still view my 3D artworks as self portraits. This made the viewing of my books an unintentionally intimate thing, which is not something I thought about or planned for when originally putting this book up for display. Now instead of just viewing curated depictions of myself from afar, suddenly people were opening me, touching every page of me, and feeling all of the textures with their hands rather than with their eyes. The viewing of both kinds of pieces are important to me. The viewing of my 2D prints feels exhibitionist, pinning myself up in an unmoving position for people to see in any capacity. Someone can choose to stop and gaze upon these prints for longer, picking apart each intended and unintended detail, or simply give me a

passing gaze as they walk on to their destination. I have pinned up a static portion of my work in the intended way it was supposed to be seen. But this is all untrue when it comes to my books. My books have to be picked up, held, touched, and flipped through to properly observe and perceive and appreciate the entire thing. One must make a conscious decision to stop, put their things down if they are holding something, and take time out of their day to dedicate to holding this intimate piece of me in their hands.

Both of these kinds of viewing are important to me, one is not better or a more true way to view my work, as both hold value in different ways to me. As I've been developing these thoughts, I knew I wanted to have a piece that combined my 2D and 3D ways of expressing

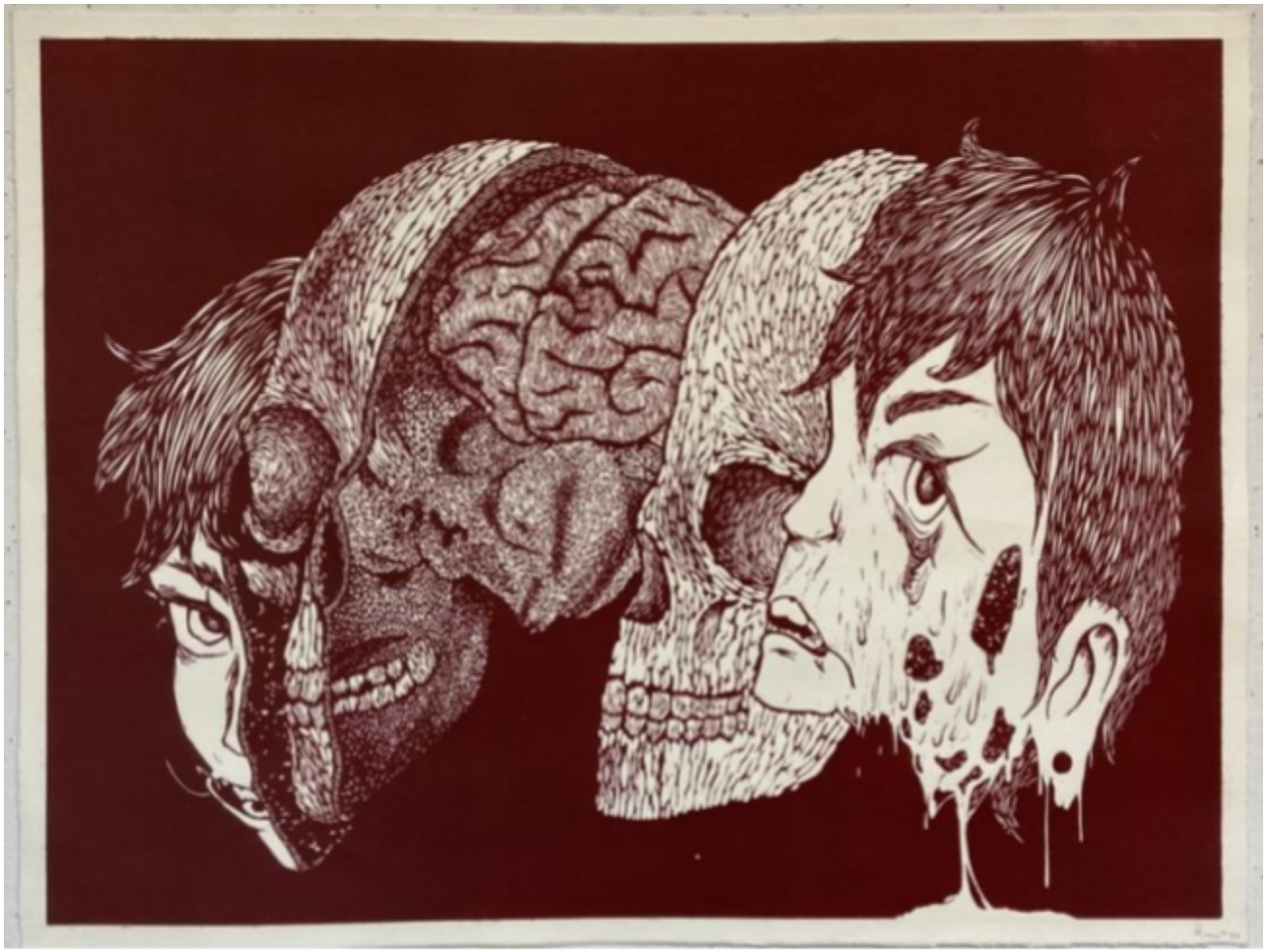
myself. This is when I created *Baby's First Steps!*, a print that combines linocut, screenprint, and sewn dolls. I found humor in the creation of this piece. I wanted to make a family portrait style polaroid that depicted an inhuman creature playing with these dolls as a fun family moment. Whether these dolls are also creatures is ambiguous, but regardless, a physical version of these dolls were created alongside the figure for display. *Baby's First Steps!* also features a dangling earring on the creature in the print. This same earring also makes an appearance in *Morning Kiss*. A part of the reason why my 2D print works feel like such exhibitionism when pinned on the wall is because the figures are almost always modeled after reference photos I take of myself. I use the lighting in my reference photos to figure out contours of the muscles, positioning, and shading as I begin to carve my linoleum in

direct relation to my body. I will often include the jewelry I was wearing at the time the reference photos were taken, for no reason other than I find it charming. This has caused some pieces to feature earrings, often the same ones, as I usually have one or two earrings in my piercings for longer periods of time. The topic of my reference photos also leads into the topic of nudity in my works. My works rarely feature clothing of any kind, and yet there are never direct depictions of nudity in terms of genitalia or nipples. The reasoning ties back into the way I view myself in my works, inhuman and disconnected. Living beings typically have genitalia and some species have specific indicators on how they can potentially reproduce. A disconnection from humanity also leads into a disconnection from my "purpose" in reproduction. I had always felt that if I included genitalia, I would be grounding myself too closely to humanity itself, or even just as a mammal.

How does one explain that they feel like nothing? In a world and a society that puts so much emphasis on being something, how is one supposed to navigate through a world built so strongly for a label of some kind or another? I have never felt connected to the human-made societal roles imposed on us, but how am I supposed to explain how much deeper than that it goes? So much of life is built around human-made concepts, but I struggle to navigate my relationships when I don't even feel grounded to the non man-made hard rules, like being a human itself. The made up concepts of labels like "boy" or "girl" don't make sense to me, but it's difficult when the concepts of "human" or "alive" don't resonate with me either, I have dissociated so strongly from myself and humanity around me. I navigate these complicated feelings through my prints, because there truly aren't words to describe myself as a concept. Visually depicting this dissociation helps ground me into something that is real and tangible and that can be looked upon. I find it comforting to have a part of myself that I can view as it is, without having to navigate these complicated feelings to sift through to gain a visual of myself. I

have already done that work to visually depict myself, and in an ever changing view of myself, it is greatly comforting to view a piece of myself like that. I cling onto life and death as a constant in this world. Everything will live and die. I view living as being, it extends further than breathing or growing. The buildings are alive, the ants beneath my feet are alive, the unmoving boulders are alive, and I am alive. In the same way that everything is alive, everything will die, in the obvious way that creatures die, but even static objects will die too. Buildings will rot and crumble as time takes over, vines will crawl and expand into the cracks as new things find life within the rot. This is my obsession with life and death, I am obsessed with this one constant that I feel this world truly has. Death informing new life in the way maggots feast on rotting flesh and bones. I find comfort in the temporary nature in everything around me, things will always change and grow anew.

Untitled
36”x48”
One layer linocut on lightweight BFK



Dissection
19”x25”
One layer linocut on white BFK

Morning Kiss
19”x25”
Linocut and Screenprint on Cream BFK

Baby's First Steps!
15”x17”
Linocut and Screenprint on Cream BFK, Sewn Dolls, Nails