

AGENTS OF CHANGE: PRODUCING
THE PALPABLE FROM THE INTANGIBLE
THROUGH THE HUMAN EXISTENCE

by
CHEALSEA ANAGNOSON
B.A., B.A., B.S. Cedar Crest College

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Art
in the School of Visual Arts and Design
in the College of Arts and Humanities
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

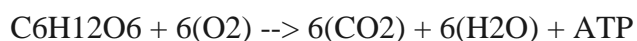
Summer Term
2017

Major Professor:
Ryan Buysens

© 2017 Chealsea Anagnoson

ABSTRACT

The world around us is in a continual state of change; we, as humans, are agents of change simply through our existence. Moreover, our choices become catalysts of change and have profound effects on our environments. This paper will use the chemical formula of glycolysis as an extended metaphor to expound the notion of the human existence in a continual state of change.



The above chemical formula represents glycolysis, a chemical reaction during which glucose ($\text{C}_6\text{H}_{12}\text{O}_6$) and oxygen (6O_2) combine to produce carbon dioxide (6CO_2), water ($6\text{H}_2\text{O}$), and energy (ATP). This is the first step in aerobic cellular respiration, a process that all complex organisms use to convert nutrients into usable energy.

This formula metaphorically illustrates my creative process. Glucose represents the fabrication process through the combination of concepts (C_6), materials (H_{12}), and interactions (O_6), with the addition of my own interactions with my environment (6O_2) to produce a conceptual experience (6CO_2) with a physically interactive component ($6\text{H}_2\text{O}$) to elicit change (ATP). However, as in aerobic respiration, glycolysis is simply the first step; my finished work is only a beginning.

To the one who is always with me, who inspired and believed in my creativity from the beginning, and who taught me that beauty is education.

Grandma Mickey, thank you for the milk bottle and so much more.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks to the instructors and mentors who have been more influential and helpful than they'll ever know. Ryan Buysens, JoAnne Adams, Keri Watson, and Jason Burrell, it is with your assistance and patience that I've realized this milestone, thank you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|------|
| LIST OF FIGURES | viii |
| CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| CHAPTER TWO: C ₆ H ₁₂ O ₆ (GLUCOSE/FABRICATION)..... | 6 |
| Concepts..... | 6 |
| Materials (“Weeping Whispers”)..... | 13 |
| Interactions (“Rainbow Connection”)..... | 23 |
| Relational Aesthetics | 26 |
| CHAPTER THREE: 6O ₂ (OXYGEN/LIFE EXPERIENCES)..... | 30 |
| Background..... | 30 |
| Influences | 33 |
| CHAPTER FOUR: 6CO ₂ (CARBON DIOXIDE/CONCEPTUAL EXPERIENCES)..... | 37 |
| “We Are the Coqui”..... | 37 |
| Historical Parallels | 40 |
| CHAPTER FIVE: 6H ₂ O (WATER/PHYSICAL INTERACTIONS)..... | 42 |
| “Lend Me A Hand”..... | 43 |
| Contemporary Parallels..... | 45 |
| CHAPTER SIX: ATP (ENERGY/CHANGE)..... | 46 |
| “PolyMar”..... | 48 |
| CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION | 54 |
| APPENDIX: LETTER OF PERMISSION..... | 55 |

LIST OF REFERENCES 57

LIST OF FIGURES

| | |
|--|----|
| Figure 1: "Lend Me A Hand" Photo by Author | 10 |
| Figure 2: "We Are the Coqui" Photo by Author | 11 |
| Figure 3: "PolyMar" Photo by Author | 13 |
| Figure 4: "Weeping Whispers" Photo by Author | 14 |
| Figure 5: "Weeping Whispers" Photo by Rachel Schuster | 15 |
| Figure 6: "Weeping Whispers" Photo by Rachel Schuster | 18 |
| Figure 7: "We Are the Coqui" Photo by Author | 21 |
| Figure 8: "PolyMar" Photo by Author | 22 |
| Figure 9: "Rainbow Connection" Photo by Rachel Schuster | 24 |
| Figure 10: "Rainbow Connection" Photo by Rachel Schuster | 26 |
| Figure 11: "We Are the Coqui" Photo by Rachel Schuster | 39 |
| Figure 12: "Lend Me A Hand" Photo by Rachel Schuster | 44 |
| Figure 13: "PolyMar" Photo by Author | 50 |

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I create interactive work to explore the concept of connectedness and how every action and inaction affects continual change. By combining my backgrounds in art, science, education, and theatre, I make mixed media installations to investigate the notion of an artist's control or lack thereof while allowing the viewer to manipulate the environment around them to discover their own connections.

Conceptually my work centers around the belief that every being is connected and every action or inaction affects all others in a universe of continual change and evolution. The work may be a physical representation of this connectedness, or it may be a representation of the concept through the process of the piece. That is to say, each piece either has physical elements that represent connections, whether they be threads that connect one object to another or crocheted materials that loop within themselves and physically tie elements together, or as the piece progresses it changes in a way that exhibits connectedness and makes the idea apparent to the viewer or participant.

Every being, every living thing is connected, is part of a system. Humans have the greatest effect on this system, though most do not recognize their role. This universal system, a web of interconnections, is ever changing as the connections are ever changing. Humans need to recognize their role in this system. My work draws attention to these connections so that individuals may realize the existence of their role in this system. Each work acts as its own system, a viewer's presence creates change within the system that is the piece.

The viewer is involved in the progression of the work because the work is interactive; the viewer may become a participant by choosing to alter a piece according to given instructions. Once the viewer becomes a participant and alters the piece, the work is changed in a way where it cannot

be undone; each alteration is permanent and will affect the alterations that occur after. Once I install a piece, I forgo control as the artist and allow the viewer to alter the works. In the sense that the viewer is involved in the progression of the work, there is no definite final product and each piece becomes the foundation of a community, the viewers (rather, the participants) becoming the members. The intended audience is not a strict proposition of who may or may not interact with the work. It is my interest that the general public (people who may not generally have easy or frequent access to artistic works) be the intended audience.

The work's interactivity stems from a completely selfish desire (I want to touch everything), but leads to what others have referred to as a generous gift of giving control of the artwork over to the participant, if they so choose to receive the gift. I started creating interactive artwork because I myself am a very tactile person, I need to touch and physically manipulate things. I honestly become very frustrated in museums and galleries where touching is not allowed- I have to clasp my hands behind my back as a reminder not to do so. The thought "I can't possibly be the only one who feels this way" occurred as a result of this. Allowing others to manipulate my work is giving up control though, which is quite the paradox as during my fabrication process I need complete control over the work. At times this becomes counterproductive because many of my installations are substantially labor intensive. It is very unlike me to allow others to contribute or even see the work in progress until I see it as installation ready. However, once it is installed, I no longer see it as my work, it becomes its own community and therefore is the work of that community. I may be the original creator, but the work wouldn't become what it evolves to be without each individual participant.

Each work is designed for installation, as the work is intended to be interacted with, and the manner in which it is installed becomes incredibly important. The work could easily be

installed in a way that is uninviting or does not welcome participants to interact with it. I have found my work is most successful when it is an immersive environment where the viewer is physically surrounded by the installation. Through my observations it is apparent that the viewer becomes less hesitant to become a participant when they are immersed in a piece rather than simply looking at an object. With these pieces, the viewer changes the space in various ways, first by their presence, second by their choice to physically manipulate the work in a way that permanently (or temporarily depending on the choices of the participants following) alters the piece. Physical interaction is inherent to the concept of each piece as my work centers around connections and how each action or inaction affects these connections; without any viewer manipulating the piece the concept will be lost and unapparent. The work must be installed in a manner that invites the viewer to become a participant.

I am most satisfied with my work when I see audience involvement. Simply stated, my work is experiential. It is for this reason that I often hesitate when asked for photographs of my work. Viewing a photograph doesn't allow for the experience, moreover, the work has to be explained and meaning is lost. The moments of participation and engagement satisfy me the most, when I see others gaining knowledge and experience through the nonverbal communication that is my work.

With my work, I create pieces that have indefinite life cycles. Each iteration of a piece has its own life cycle and each piece as a whole has an extended life cycle. Each iteration of each piece changes slightly over time, these slight changes build to create a more noticeable change within the lifetime of each iteration. The pieces will not be able to be installed and uninstalled without deterioration. This deterioration can be mended, but overtime the piece will reach the end of its

lifecycle and have to be retired. For example, in “We Are the Coqui” the Raku fired ceramic frogs are lost and broken with each iteration, the leaves that make up the ground are crunched and fragmented, some leave the piece with the viewer so the piles become smaller, and the chemicals within the interactive frames are depleted and become less reactive over the course of the piece. Each of these things can be mended, but there will come a time where the mending simply isn’t feasible (due to a variety of circumstances- inability to replenish the leaves, limited access to resources such as a Raku kiln to fire the frogs, etc.) and the piece will need to be retired. Moreover, with the continuation of the life cycle, the content of the piece may become clearer, especially if the viewer has encountered the piece multiple times. For instance, with “We Are the Coqui”, the frogs and leaves are becoming fewer, the environment within the piece is deteriorating, just as the natural environment of the coqui has degraded with human interaction. This life cycle and deterioration of the piece is part of what makes each iteration unique. Other constituents that make up the uniqueness of the piece include the space that the work is installed (each iteration is site specific, but the site could be in a variety of places- galleries, museums, science centers, a park), and the experience of the viewer.

Each viewer will have a unique experience of the piece as every individual has in any immersive environment. Each viewer is an individual who has their own individual knowledge set, ideas, ways of thinking, and learning style. With this in mind each viewer will notice different elements within the piece, they will also take notice of these things in a unique order. Some viewers may see the frogs first, some viewers may not see the frogs until they are surrounded by them, and instead they see the leaves the frogs are resting on. Furthermore, each viewer will participate with the interactivity in a unique way, if they even choose to become a participant. Some may try to make as little of an impact on the piece as possible, even tip toeing through the leaves while others

may embrace the invitation to touch and do so eagerly.

The intention of each of my works is to cultivate a unique experience for each viewer, within the limits of the lifetime of the piece. This experience will convey a specific idea that unfolds throughout the encounter with the piece. As each piece changes over time, I would encourage the viewer to experience the piece multiple times, as the experience will change with the piece. The experience a viewer has at the beginning of a piece's lifecycle is not the same experience a viewer will have toward the end of that same piece's lifecycle. Each iteration of each piece will provide a different experience even though the content of the piece doesn't change. As the overall lifecycle continues with each piece, every iteration will progress the lifecycle and the piece will change over time. As the piece changes, it is in a sense decomposing. These changes may make the message or content of the piece more obvious.

CHAPTER TWO: C₆H₁₂O₆ (GLUCOSE/FABRICATION)

Glucose is the nutrient an organism consumes to convert its own environment into useable energy. If we think of my artwork as an organism- which is an apt description as every work is an ever changing thing, the fabrication process and each constituent can be represented by glucose and the elements that make it up. Glucose is made up of three elements, as is the fabrication process in this instance, the carbon (C₆) representing concepts, the hydrogen (H₁₂) representing the materials, and the oxygen (O₆) representing the interactions.

Concepts

Carbon is the element present in all organic compounds, in a way, it makes up all life. Concepts drive my work; each piece, at its fundamental core is a concept, or a combination of concepts. My concepts center around universal connectedness, while each piece may either delve deeper into this broad idea, or it may point out a specific example of where this concept has been clearly illustrated. Each concept comes from a place of empathy within myself. Merriam-Webster defines empathy as “the action of understanding, being aware, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feeling, thoughts and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner; also: the capacity for this”. This empathy branches from me to all lifeforms and is often the precursor to the content of a piece.

Within my body of work, each piece begins with the content. Content and concept drive my work, however form overrides the content when the piece becomes physically realized. The content is what begins each piece so the form would not exist without the content. However, within

each piece the aesthetics of form must become more important because if they are not given priority, the aesthetics will distract from the content. That is to say, if the piece is not well crafted or aesthetically pleasing, attention would be taken away from the true purpose of the work which is the content. In my work form and content go hand in hand, but in the end form becomes more important because it is the necessary component to communicate the content.

My process begins with an idea, sometimes not even a whole idea, sometimes my pieces start with just a seed of an idea and they grow and evolve until they are a fully manifested installation. I am not an artist who can create in a completely improvisational manner. My process leaves room for improvisation, but doesn't start with it. These ideas all stem from occurrences in my everyday life, occurrences that support my way of thinking. Furthermore, these occurrences originate from an empathic state.

I know that every being is connected. Our actions affect the beings around us, we are all living within the same system. Affects are easily seen within our own local ecosystems, but they also exist on a global scale- climate change is an unescapable example of this. We, as humans, have a place in a system that cultivates life. We need to recognize our place in this system and act accordingly. This belief is the core of my own being, my actions and purpose are all driven by this one thought: we are all connected. I want to impact these connections (and therefore the beings that are connected) as positively as possible; I want the web that radiates from my being to reach out and support others rather than bringing them down or merely just supporting myself; this is also the core purpose of my work. Letting people see physical representations of this idea in my work is the best way I can positively impact the connections. I seek to illustrate these connections because something being a truth for me doesn't make it fact for everyone else. Education,

facilitating awareness of the connections is the first step to people understanding, then embodying the concept, ideally leading them to an empathetic nature within themselves.

In a perfect world every participant would have an epiphany. Each participant would recognize the fact that they play an important role in the universal system and would choose to keep this in mind in their day to day life. People would begin making decisions with a conscious effort to support the system in which humans play such a large role. In a perfect world, every participant would leave my pieces resolved to also impact the world's connections and beings in the most positive way possible, but the world isn't perfect and I can settle for some of the participants leaving with a thought. Thoughts, like carbon molecules are easily linked and can form chains that grow in size and complexity. This singular thought acts as the first link of the chain. The thought may lengthen easily with some, or may need another occurrence or catalyst to foster its growth with others. The thought will be different for every person, but ultimately this is my most basic goal with my work, to provoke or cultivate thought regarding interconnectedness, even in a singular form. This cultivation begins with the physical fabrication of a piece and fabrication begins with materials, this cultivation is also progressed by varying levels of craft and technical skill in working with the chosen materials.

Craft and technical skill are of utmost importance when creating public art. With immersive installation, my first concern is safety. Technical skill is required to ensure that an installation, where many of the elements are suspended from above the viewer, is in fact a safe environment. I have confidence in my technical skill to create elements that will endure the duration of an installation and the physical interactions of the participants.

Additionally, as my work is content driven, if craft and technical skill are not up to par, the form will distract from the content. The craft must be at a level where it does not distract from the

communication of the content. Each piece incorporates varying levels of craft, some even use a lower level of craft to enhance the content.

“Lend Me A Hand” was intentionally crafted at a lower level. The interactive component involves an activity that takes one back to childhood. Every elementary student at one point traced their hand on a piece of paper. The paper was dyed in a colorful fashion to enhance the invocation of nostalgia. This nostalgia is the draw to the piece. People like nostalgia, they enjoy participating in activities that are familiar. This form of interaction was intentional, it allows the participant to recall a simpler time where sharing and caring about the others within your environment was a primary concern. While the paper hands represent the individuals within a community, the ceramic hands represent the concrete pillars of a community, the things that are not so easily or quickly changed: the governments, school systems, laws, and social constructs. The ceramic hands were crafted to compliment the paper hands. Made from paper clay and splashed with colorful underglaze, the ceramic hands directly correspond with the participant’s paper hands. The ceramic hands were cast in plaster molds and left untrimmed. Clean cut, pristine molds wouldn’t be suitable with the paper hands of the participants, the feeling of nostalgia would be lost when the paper hands were hung with the ceramic hands if they didn’t hold the same qualities. The piece would have a much different feel if the hanging ceramic hands were flawless replicas of the hands that were molded.



Figure 1: "Lend Me A Hand" Photo by Author

In “We Are the Coqui”, the screened wall panels were built to be reminiscent of a sun room, porch or viewing room of a nature center. Familiar and simple, not anything too highly crafted as the coqui are a species that are found in areas with similar, simple architecture. Increasing the level of craft of the wall panels would decrease the familiarity of the panels. The familiarity is welcoming and inviting, a higher level of craft may read coldly and discourage viewers from entering the piece as the panels would become more of a viewing case. This is an example of how choosing materials becomes rather important.



Figure 2: "We Are the Coqui" Photo by Author

Each material in a piece is chosen for a variety of reasons, some of these reasons are symbolic whereas others may be for aesthetic purposes. The environments created are fabricated

environments. These installations are not meant to be replicas of nature, but imitations that use a variety of materials, and not always purely natural to the environment they are mimicking. For example, the floor of “We Are the Coqui” is covered in leaves, the vast majority of these leaves are oak leaves. These leaves are symbolic of three things. First, the El Yunque forest is home to over 200 species of trees, some of which are oak trees of a similar species to the oak leaves that were harvested here in Florida. Second- while there are other types of leaves present, there is a majority of one type. This is a representation of decreased biodiversity, as the El Yunque Rainforest is deforested, the biodiversity of the rainforest decreases, and this includes the variety of trees.

“PolyMar” Was crafted with materials that could easily replicate nature, but that are very far from it. The bulk of the installation was created with plastic to reinforce the fact that the Earth’s oceans are overrun with plastic. If plastic consumption continues at the same rate, there will be more plastic in the ocean than natural marine life. I left some natural materials, such as sand and shells, but the majority of the piece is created with plastic or plastic like materials including spray foam, silicone, pvc pipe, and acrylic paint. As a society, plastic is so common within our daily lives that one may not notice at first glance that the installation is primarily plastic because we, as a society have become desensitized to our consumption of plastic. This isn’t an issue where individuals can pass blame, plastic is so pervasive in our society that it is used frequently on a daily basis without awareness or consideration. Our environments are becoming primarily plastic, so this environment was created with plastic as the primary material to reinforce this fact and call attention to it.



Figure 3: "PolyMar" Photo by Author

Materials ("Weeping Whispers")

The materials I use to create my work are considerably chosen, like the hydrogen in glucose, the materials are the most abundant element within my pieces. The viewers and participants are surrounded by the materials, which therefore support the concepts. Each material used has been given thought and has been chosen specifically to infuse symbolism within the piece. "Weeping Whispers" exemplifies this materiality.



Figure 4: "Weeping Whispers" Photo by Author

“Weeping Whispers” (2016-2017) is a piece that invites the viewer to walk through hanging strands of crocheted copper to find a stone that calls to or interests them. The hanging strands are wispy branches radiating from a trunk in the center of the space. The trunk is the skeleton of a tree trunk. It is the idea of a trunk created from glazed ceramic and crocheted copper. Together the trunk and the wispy branches form a structure resembling a weeping willow tree. Hung on the copper branches are ceramic leaves and stones. Within the installation space one can hear wind and faint whispering. The space is dark, with light glimmering from the leaves and glinting off the wispy copper, with earthy scents mingling in the air. Walking through the branches one will find instructions:

Find your stone.

Lean in close and softly reveal all that is troubling you.

When you are through, lift the stone and keep it.

Let the tree carry your troubles.

Turning to leave the space one will see a table with copper, tools, and a video. The video shows one how to make a simple piece of jewelry with a stone, if one wishes.

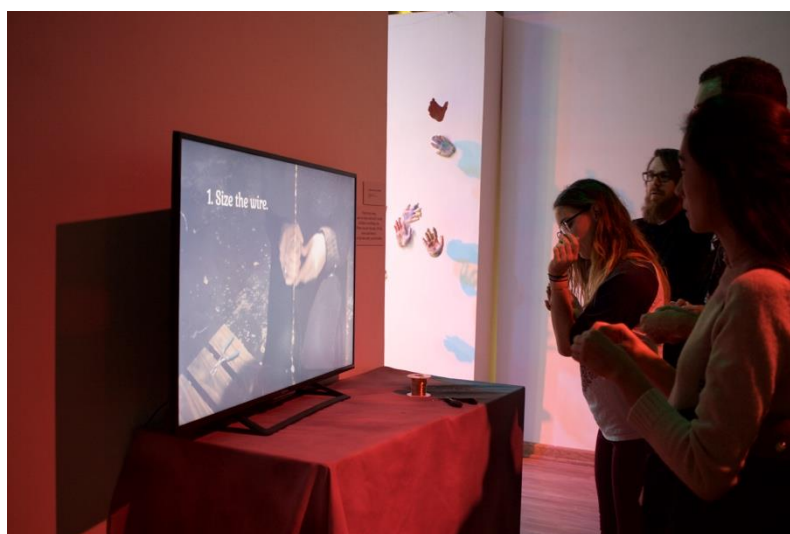


Figure 5: "Weeping Whispers" Photo by Rachel Schuster

Each element of this piece has been chosen because of the symbolism behind the materials. The primary material is crocheted copper wire, chosen for its malleability and the manner in which it degrades over time. The malleability of the copper allows it to be crocheted quite easily, that is with every movement of my wrist I can interlock it together, using it as a thread to illustrate how our actions interlock with others, but these actions can be easily undone. However, the trace of these actions, the kink in the wire are not so easily removed, the evidence remains, just like the evidence of actions taken in daily life remains. Undoing the copper chain makes the wire more difficult to work with, sometimes it does not, sometimes it even aids in the progression of the chain as the kink may create a foothold for the next loop. The copper wire used is the same wire an electrician might use; copper is conductive and carries energy, though this ability can degrade as copper oxidizes over time. This oxidation takes place in stages. First the new copper is bright and shiny, after some time of being exposed to the open air it begins to dull, the color starts to darken, first a brick red, then a muddy burgundy. With more time comes more change, the texture of the copper isn't so smooth, flecks of green start to appear until the entire wire is green and slightly bumpy. These changes are welcome, but could be undone at any stage with some work. If one chooses to remove the oxidation, the copper will appear to be fully returned to its first state, bright and shiny, but it won't be as good as new. Some of the copper will have been removed with the oxidation and the removal process will create scratches and more surface area on the copper, allowing oxidation to occur at a faster rate, making it more susceptible to change. Once this process of change has occurred, things will never be as they once were.

Clay is a material I employ frequently, many of my installations are representative of things that come from the earth, "Weeping Whispers" is certainly no different, and using clay allows me to represent something from the earth with earth itself. Clay is a type of soil comprised of

microscopic particles of rock with small fragments of organic material found naturally in the ground- clay is earth itself. As a tree grows, it changes from young and spry, bendable to strong and sturdy, clay does the same as it is processed. A raw, material framed into slabs that are dried to a point where they are still moveable, but hold their shape, are then fired to a state where they too are sturdy and strong.

Stone also makes frequent appearances throughout my works. The stones I choose to use within each piece are also chosen specifically as stones have various meanings. “Weeping Whispers” utilizes jasper, peridot, rhyolite, and new jade. Stones have traits that have been studied for hundreds of years by many cultures including Native Americans whose interpretations are the ones I follow. I use the knowledge of these properties to inform my choices. For instance, jasper is attributed with grounding energy, peridot is associated with healing, unconditional love, and light, rhyolite aids with balance and regeneration and new jade assists with emotional cleansing. I believe that when a person walks through “Weeping Whispers”, they will find the stone that best suits their needs. This particular installation was inspired in part by the current political climate in the United States and these stones were chosen to help with the struggles people might be facing as a result of this climate.



Figure 6: "Weeping Whispers" Photo by Rachel Schuster

Sound is an incredibly useful material when creating an immersive installation. For “Weeping Whispers” I produced a looping soundtrack with rising and falling levels of wind layered with whispering to create an atmosphere that welcomes viewers to become participants by whispering their own troubles to their chosen stone by allowing their whispers to be hidden by the whispers within the track. While the track’s whispers are somewhat intelligible, one may be able to pick out single words, the passage chosen for this track was chosen specifically for its language and tone so that it may convey the feeling of willingly telling a secret to a trusted friend.

The space is dim so that one may feel the comfort of being alone, but some light shines off the glaze and copper. Green and amber lighting have been chosen to highlight the tree and its constituents. Amber provides warmth, while green helps with contrast allowing the leaves to blend and the copper to pop. Green also symbolizes growth and healing while amber represents wisdom.

Finally, scent is used as a material to complete the environment, fully immersing the viewer into the installation. For “Weeping Whispers” I first perform a Native American cleansing ceremony with white sage, to air the space and rid it of any lingering emotional impurity. I place the still smoldering sage in the lattice above the piece so that smoke falls through the branches and swirls around the trunk. I also frequently use essential oils, the therapeutic properties of which, like stones, have been studied for hundreds of years. I again ascribe to the properties attributed to the oils by Native Americans. The space is permeated with Peru balsam oil, an earthy scent that is used to empower and ease the mind of stress.

“Weeping Whispers” uses texture to reinforce the idea that something can be delicate yet strong. Copper wire is crocheted into a fabric form that is malleable, yet sturdy representing the unseen connections that are the core of my work. These connections are flexible and change, but are never eradicated. The lighting of the piece emphasizes the texture of the copper, the facets of light glimmer as one moves through the piece calling attention to the material. The wire itself is smooth, but the fabric is rough illustrating that within one thing opposites can exist. The texture of the copper strands is the same. The strands are delicate, they can be torn with little force, but they are also strong. The strands are strong enough to bear the weight of stone and ceramic leaves and endure the handling of the viewers. The texture of the strands also changes over time. The strands weighed down with leaves and stones are held straight by gravity, as weight is lifted from the strands, they curl and become springy, the strands begin to move with ease. This is symbolic of when an individual lets go of their own ideas and perceptions that weigh them down, as an individual lets their worries go and releases the weight, they too can move through life with ease.

Each of my pieces uses specifically chosen materials in this way; each element has meaning and symbolism. Each element has a purpose. I immerse the viewer in an installation that

incorporates four of the five senses in order to take them away from their own reality so that they may truly enter the space created.

My installations often incorporate science, though I do not see the installations as science exhibits, they are art and this is the primary difference between the two. Science exhibitions exist to enhance understanding of fact, whereas my art exists to enhance understanding of concept, but also to evoke an emotional response so that the viewer or participant has a more intimate connection with the information that is conveyed through the work so that a sense of empathy may be developed. I use a basic understanding of color psychology (each color can enhance a variety of positive and negative emotions) to inform my choices of lighting for each piece. The intention of these choices is to enhance the evocation of emotion through the experience of the piece. Essentially, I use lighting as an additional material to work with within each installation.

“We Are the Coqui” primarily uses warm colors with some green. Yellow and green are used to mimic the natural environment where the coqui are found, but they also play a role in the emotional response. The installation predominantly uses yellow lighting gels, in this case I use yellow and orange to create warmth in the piece- it should be a welcoming atmosphere at first glance. Yellow can exude friendliness; alternatively, it can enhance feelings of anxiety and depression. The first half of the path is lit with yellow, orange and green to create a sense of welcome, abundance and peace. The text within the installation is found on the second half of the path, it is lit with yellow to intentionally enhance feelings of anxiety and depression so that the viewer or participant walks back through the piece in a different frame of mind and takes notice of the flaws within the environment (the trash within the leaves, and the charred and incomplete frogs). When an individual is feeling positive, they are more apt to notice pleasant things in their surroundings, whereas when an individual is feeling negatively they are more likely to notice the

negative aspects of their environment.

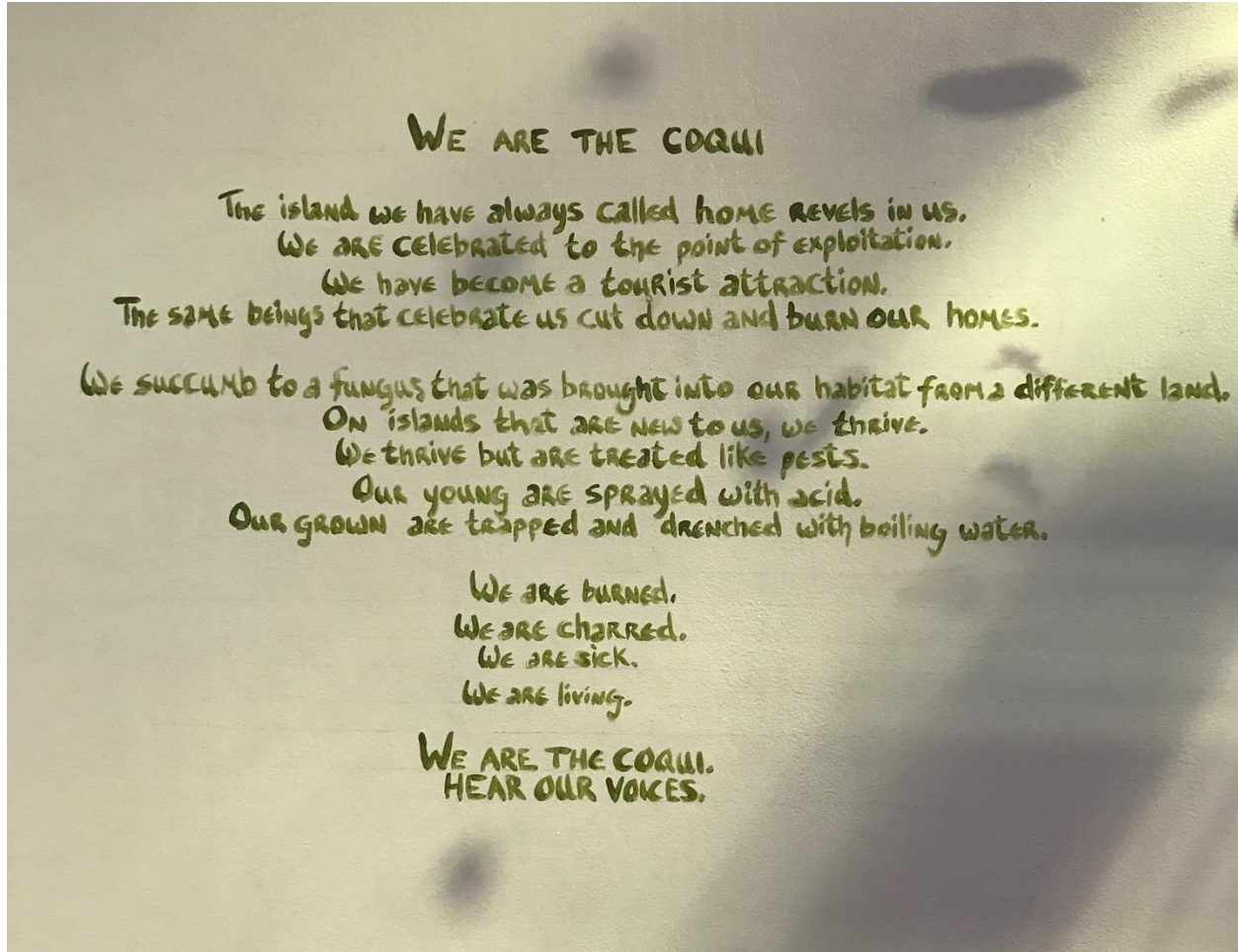


Figure 7: "We Are the Coqui" Photo by Author

Blue helps to create a sense of serenity and calm and purple encourages contemplation, these colors and feelings permeate "PolyMar". However, blue also exudes coldness. I lit the teal text (teal is an effective color for communication) with a cold blue and included a red spotlight on the whale carcass beneath the text to heighten the visual impact of the information being conveyed in that section of the installation. Red is a color of power, passion and aggression. I use the combination of these colors to help instill the knowledge that we as individuals are powerful and can make a substantial difference if we take aggressive action within our own daily lives in an effort to reduce our consumption of plastic.

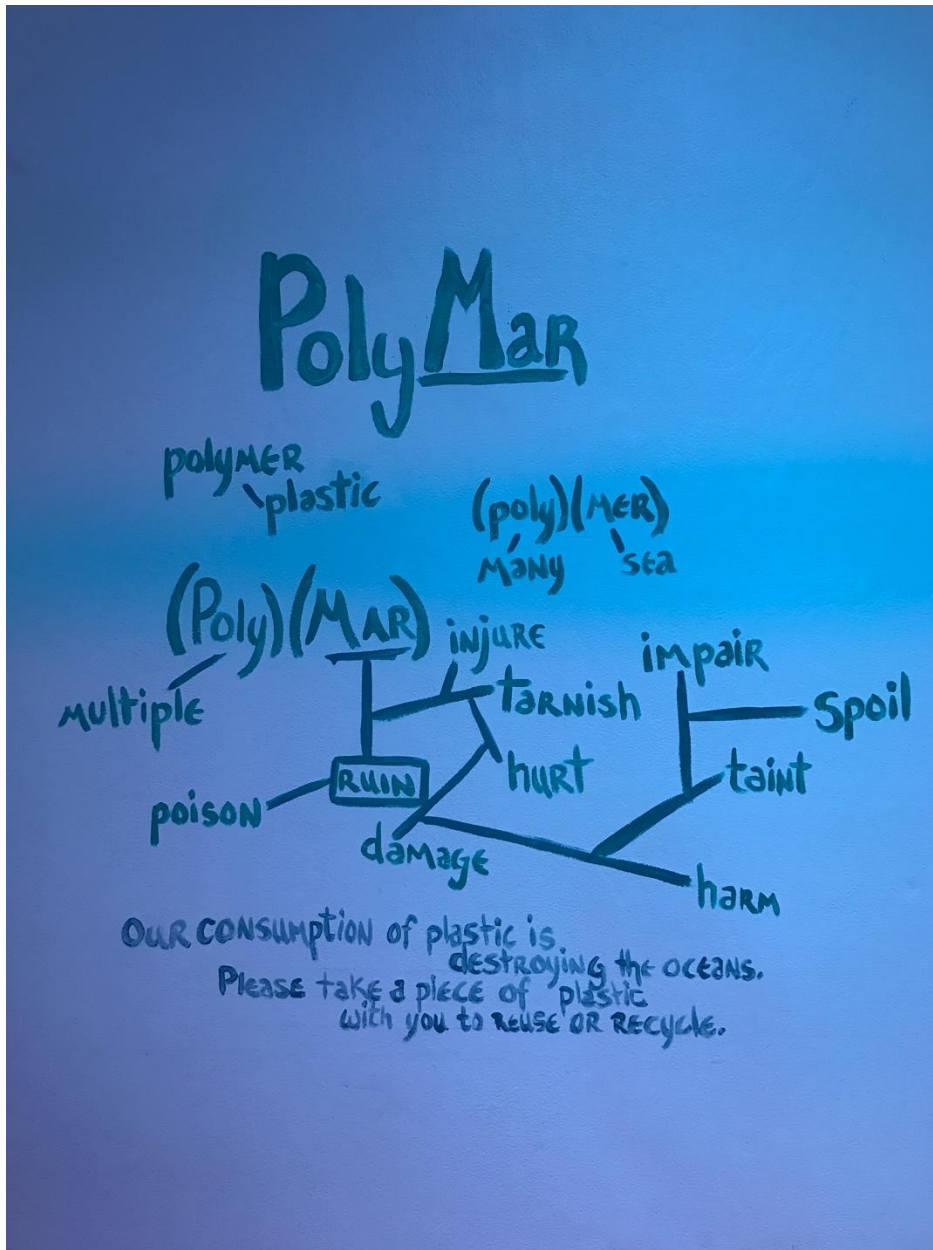


Figure 8: "PolyMar" Photo by Author

Green is indicative of harmony and balance; it works with the stimulating red in “Weeping Whispers” to create an environment where the participant can create harmony within themselves by letting go of some of the negative thoughts that weigh them down.

Interactions (“Rainbow Connection”)

Oxygen is needed for life; for my installations to truly live, the interactions of the viewers turned participants become the oxygen. Multiple types of interaction occur with each of my pieces. The simplest form of interaction occurs within every visual art piece- the movement of the viewer’s eye. Once an artwork has directed the eye of the viewer, the viewer has, in a sense interacted with the work. The viewer’s presence within the piece is also a form of interaction and will change the piece, this is an act of passive interaction and may take place in two manners. First, a viewer might unintentionally physically alter the piece by stepping into the installation and moving around within it. Second, a viewer may alter the course of action of another participant with their presence, the participant may feel pressured to alter the piece in a way that they weren't initially planning to, or they may not want to alter the piece while someone is watching and elect not to participate any further when their original intention was to indeed change the piece. Finally, a viewer may choose to become an active participant when they consciously choose to physically alter the piece. Examples of these three types of interaction are readily available in considering “Rainbow Connection”.



Figure 9: “Rainbow Connection” Photo by Rachel Schuster

“Rainbow Connection” is a free-standing, in-the-round installation. Six walls and an entrance form a heptagon. Approaching from the outside, the structure is black, the entrance is a doorway filled with white strands hanging to the ground, through the entrance, one can see color obscured by the strands. A sign is posted at the entrance instructing viewers to take a strand as they enter and pin it in or next to something that speaks to them or piques their interest. Upon entering the installation one is greeted by an explosion of saturated color. Objects are attached to the wall, some are familiar in an everyday sense and some may invoke nostalgia.

From the outside, the viewer’s eye will be directed from the dark to the light before it attempts to focus on the color peeking through the strands. This direction of the eye is a result of the subtle movements within the light- the stands are lightweight and move slightly with the air currents. When the viewer enters the installation, their eyes will follow the strands that others have

already placed around the installation before moving from object to object. The strands are crocheted filament and unravel as they are pulled; as the viewer moves through the installation their movement may cause the lengthening of some strands, the more people have participated, the more this occurrence is likely. Finally, if the viewer chooses to become an active participant, they will place a strand somewhere within the interior of the installation and their strand will affect the other strands that have already been placed and the strands that will be placed after it, simply by being present.

In “Rainbow Connection” line is used in the form of the strands that extend through the piece starting at the doorway. The strands act as physical representations of the connections that drive my work. The strands are a visual element that originate at one place, but expand outwards, limited only by the physical environment they inhabit. The strands also represent the individuals that place them throughout the piece. Like individuals, the strands remain the same strand for each lifecycle of the piece, though they change overtime, each individual strand stretched and unravels and is physically moved and comes into contact with other strands and objects over the duration of the piece, much like an individual throughout their own lifespan. The strands are lines that connect elements throughout the piece, by connecting one point to another, the strands prompt the viewer’s initial experience of the piece where their eye follows the movement of the lines. These lines act as the viewer’s initial engagement with the piece.



Figure 10: "Rainbow Connection" Photo by Rachel Schuster

Relational Aesthetics

These types of interactivity, both the passive and active examples described fall under the umbrella of relational art or relational aesthetics. This term was coined, observed and highlighted by Nicolas Bourriaud, a French art critic. (“Happy to Meet You: An Introduction to Relational Art”) Relational aesthetics is defined as “a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space.” In this form, the artist is a designer. Rather than the center of a piece, the artist is the catalyst of a piece. (Bourriaud 113) The terminology used when describing relational art is quite similar to that of the 1990s Internet boom. Terms such as user-friendly,

interactivity and DIY (do it yourself) are used in the same manner (Bishop 54) to describe work that creates a social environment where participating in a shared activity is encouraged. (Bourriaud 13) This is the type of work I create, though I call the social environment a community, the artwork plays a role of being a model of action within the existing reality that is the fabricated environment. (Bourriaud 13) These environments are fabricated in several types of venues, the majority are public spaces, but due to the nature of the installations they may create what feels like a private space within the public space. Some of the spaces are informal public spaces- “Rainbow Connection” is featured outside rather than in a gallery, it can be taken to and exhibited in public parks, “PolyMar” and “We Are the Coqui” can find homes in places such as science centers and nature exhibits.

Within relational aesthetics, the artist is the designer, or catalyst for the piece. This takes place in each of my works. I design the piece and implement its installation in a way that encourages interaction. This encouragement comes primarily from the immersive nature of each piece. I use the instructions I provide as a catalyst for the work. I develop a set of guidelines for each piece, but the way the piece will change is unknown. I, as the artist can have expectations and predictions of how the piece will grow and change over time, however once the piece is installed and open to the public, I have relinquished my control of the piece and it may go in directions I hadn’t anticipated. I am excited at this prospect, I enjoy not knowing how exactly a piece will change and how the participants choose to advance the progression of the piece is often a creative take on the guidelines they’ve been provided. “Lend Me A Hand” is a great example of this. I expected people to create different shapes with their hands and to embellish them in some way, but there were other elements that I did not predict. One participant traced their foot instead of their hand, a few wrote uplifting messages for the community to read, and there was one hung that

wasn't one hand, it was two clasped together. The participants often surprise me and these surprises are entirely welcome.

Furthermore, relational aesthetics change the way a space is perceived. Pieces within the realm of relational aesthetics often take intimate space and make them a public experience, or they may take a public space and create an intimate experience within it. My work tends to follow the latter. "Weeping Whispers" is a strong example of this- the tree is installed in an open, public space, but when a viewer chooses to participate they create an intimate, private moment for themselves within this space by following the given instructions (whispering their troubles), an action that the average person would not typically do in an open environment.

Bourriaud describes these types of works as "hands on utopias". (Bourriaud 9) I would be thrilled if my work was described as such as part of the reason I choose to create interactive pieces is because of wanting to touch and interact with art in my own experiences. In my utopia, all artwork would be touchable, would allow the viewer to manipulate it in some way. Others see interactivity and experiential art as catalyst of understanding the work. The artwork is not only an object, but also an opportunity for communication as it becomes a provocative social vehicle to engage the viewer in a hands on analysis of relationships. This allows viewers to become more actively engaged with the art thus encouraging learning and communication. (Choi)

The potential for relational art to be used as teaching and learning tools is also being realized. Residencies such as "The Summerhill Residency" are proof of this. (Irwin) Endeavors such as the "Echo Project" have people from multiple fields (anthropology, musicians, and artists in this case) developing a relational aesthetics piece to create a virtual space to argue the point that relational aesthetics isn't limited to the visual arts. (Boudreault-Fournier) This is a particular interest of mine, as previous discussion alludes, my work does not necessarily belong in a gallery

setting. In the future I will pursue collaborations in multiple fields including, but not limited to education and ecology.

Relational art is on the brink of becoming a new “-ism”, it is following much the same path as Impressionism, expressionism, and cubism. Each of these movements followed certain trends at their beginnings. Each redefined the concept of art, had artists who were considered part of the movement but vehemently denied it, and each had a founding exhibition. (“BBC iPlayer - BBC Four”) The 2002 exhibition title *Touch: Relational Art form the 1990s to Now* was curated by Nicolas Bourriaud at the San Francisco Art Institute as “an exploration of the interactive works of a new generation of artists.” The exhibition featured the following artists Angela Buloch, Liam Gillick, Felix Gonzales-Torres, Jens Haaning, Phillippe Parreno, Gillian Wearing and Andrea Zittel. (“Features | Nicolas Bourriaud and Karen Moss”) Each of these artists draws a parallel to my own work because we all use art to create varying forms of social interaction that alter public and private space to deal with the fundamental issues regarding these spaces. (Cobb) We choose to employ an open-endedness rather than an aesthetic resolution without works. The work lives and breathes as an environment or community, it is never quite finished, nor does it last forever. My work has reached this point because of my various backgrounds and influences.

CHAPTER THREE: 6O₂ (OXYGEN/LIFE EXPERIENCES)

In aerobic respiration, glucose combines with six molecules of dioxygen (O₂) to form ATP. Dioxygen is the form of oxygen that occurs naturally in our environment. There are two equal parts in each molecule; my life experiences occur in two equal parts, my background and my influences. These parts combine with my own personal nutrients, or glucose (concepts, materials, and interactions) to create the energy (ATP) that I associate with my work. I consider my life experiences to be my interactions with my environment. My environment has changed over the years, sometimes a new environment is thrust upon me, and sometimes I willingly step into a new one. Each of these environments and my interactions within them creates opportunities for new backgrounds or influences to emerge within my life and being. For the purpose of this discussion I will define background as a knowledge or skill set that I have consciously chosen to learn whereas an influence will be defined as an environment or being that has changed my way of thinking without my consciously choosing to make it so.

Background

My work would not be what it is today without the various life experiences that formed what is now my personal background. Each of these experiences act as a foundation or stepping stone within my life and together they have intertwined to create my background. Learning and needing to share what I learn with others is what has driven me for as long as I can remember; I have always been a teacher. My sister could tell you (if she hasn't blocked it from her memory)- as kids playing "house" wasn't a thing, I was more inclined to make her play "school" where I would be the teacher and she would be the student. I would make worksheets for her to do (usually

in the subjects I knew she was struggling with) and wouldn't allow a recess until she completed them and they were corrected. My parents absolutely loved it, I was a free tutor.

Somewhere along the line I lost sight of wanting to become an educator, I became more involved with athletics, science, and theatre. In college I pursued degrees in theatre and forensic science; I realized after a couple years that I should study art as well, as art has always been a part of my life, so art was added. It was late in my third year of undergrad when I had an epiphany. I am an educator, so I added secondary education to the already long list of majors and switched forensic science to general science as my content area, I proceeded to add an integrated focus onto my art major as well. Mere days after this decision was finalized, I received a letter that gave me affirmation and solidified my confidence in the decision I made. The letter was from my kindergarten teacher, she wrote that she had been going through some things and had come across a picture she wanted me to have. I had drawn her and I, and wrote (with assistance of course) "When I grow up, I want to be an awesome teacher, just like Mrs. Carr". Teaching and sharing my knowledge with the world is the best way I can impact it positively- helping others to realize and reach their own potential through education so they might continue to change the world one bit at a time.

Not only do I teach in the traditional way, but I also teach in a few alternative ways. It is not unlike me to share random facts and tidbits of knowledge with my friends, coworkers and peers, just so they know or have some food for thought. My artwork is also a teaching tool, whether it seeks to make viewers more environmentally conscious, allow them to learn more about themselves, or provoke thoughts focused on the connections surrounding them. Each background plays a part in this foundation.

Involvement in athletics my entire life has taught me to thrive with constructive criticism, one can always improve, and learn from mistakes. It also gave me quite a competitive edge, a thirst to be the best, but also the drive to remain a team player where I help to build others up so that we may all achieve our goals rather than pulling other people down and being lonely on top, after all, we are all one and in this game of life together.

Everything is science. From the literal breakdown of matter to the processes we use day-to-day. Daily decision making is simply the scientific method applied to everyday life. With science I learned to question and explore everything around me, to look for answers to questions and in finding answers to develop new questions that need answers. Science filled me with curiosity about the world and how it works and how it continually changes. The life lessons learned in science inform my teaching style- I work by way of the Socratic Method where the students learn through questioning and exploration to discover answers.

My love for science has also instilled me with a great sense of environmentalism. Frequently my pieces pursue an environmentalist message (“We Are the Coqui” and “PolyMar” are prime examples). This stems from a combination of acquiring knowledge about the environment and environmentalist efforts and my belief that we are all connected. This combination of knowledge and beliefs leads me to the conclusion that I have a responsibility as a human to minimize my impact on the environment so that it may continue to thrive and flourish just as it has allowed me to. Nature works in a series of give and take to create balance, it is not my role to offset that balance with my lifestyle or daily actions, though I acknowledge and accept that I will and do in some capacity regardless of my efforts. In being connected, all living things form a community and communities, like relationships require maintenance.

Theatre also provides community where every member has a role and that role is vital to the success of the whole. Theatre is a temporary establishment that is built up and dismantled over and over again, even though it contains the same elements every time, every show is invariably different. I may create and install several iterations of the same piece, but it will be vastly different every time because it forms a different community with each iteration.

Lastly, Cedar Crest College is a small, private college located in Allentown, Pennsylvania. It is a women's college and where I completed my undergraduate work. Attending a women's institution for education reinforced and polished my feminist ideals. While I wouldn't label my artwork as feminist, I cannot separate it entirely from the word. The core of feminism is that we are all equal, this idea goes hand in hand with the core of my work- we are all one. That being said I am a female artist who considers herself to be a feminist. I also use some methods, such as crocheting that are labeled as feminine. However, I use crocheting as a method of making material, I do not view it as feminine or masculine. I may create a piece with a feminist message in the future, but in my current work there is no intention of any feminist undertones.

Influences

Throughout each learning experience that have shaped my background, I have encountered influences. Each background has their own, but with the art background, three people have had a lasting effect on my work- Casey McDonough, Joseph Page, and Jill Odegaard. Their thoughts and ideas coupled with the physical nature of their work has directly influenced my own body of work as an artist.

Casey McDonough works in a way where the pieces serve as expanded meditations on what draws him to clay since his first encounter with it. He pokes and prods, but ultimately no concrete answers are found only more questions are discovered. McDonough also has a background in science (B.S. Marine Science) and knows that both subjects- art making and science are problem solving ventures where a problem is never truly solved because it leads to more questions and therefore more problems with greater implications. This leads the perception of reality to continually change. This notion drives his investigation of interconnectivity. He chooses to build complex systems of information out of simple, autonomous elements. These elements illustrate a flow of energy that builds a hierarchy through an environment. (Casey McDonough Studio)

The creation of flow charts begins with these hierarchies- choices can be made and with each decision comes a consequence. The nature of this work, just like any system is temporal; the works have a finite lifetime because of his material choices. This mimics the breakdown of complex systems- an entire system can easily become null and void with a single element taken out of place. (Casey McDonough Studio) This concept is also illustrated with the choice of materials- he juxtaposes and emphasizes the qualities of the materials. He, like myself returns to clay frequently because it is simultaneously so many things- precious but everlasting when it is fired, malleable, but fragile and brittle. Casey McDonough and I have the same thoughts when it comes to science and art, the two fields go hand in hand and the processes from one can readily inform the processes of the other.

Joseph Page also combines science and art. In his “Flow Chart” series, he creates simple manifestations of cycles and systems present in nature, but his aesthetics are derivative of early videogames. These aesthetics speak to the basic underpinnings of the world- there exists a rules

based system within both the natural world (in the form of science) and within the realms of early videogames (technological advancements). His pieces use the form of a rules based system, he creates sculptural parameters to employ a certain compositional logic to ultimately create spatial relationships. (Joe Page) Like my own installations, his work creates a new environment for the viewer to become immersed in. Each piece has a different iteration with every installation as the space it is filling is never exactly the same.

The escapist allure of immersive environments is what truly drives his work. He wants the viewer to feel comfortable within the space and therefore uses forms that might feel familiar or incur nostalgia, yet he wants to pique the viewer's curiosity so that the viewer may feel and react. His materials and imagery represent a paradoxical anachronism in that the creative process is analog and object based. He expects the viewer to have some knowledge of early digital culture because the work is installed in a very similar manner to the way in which early videogames were created. In his words, "clouds mountains, waterfalls, wind currents, rays of light, and the growth of vegetation all fall within the same values dictated by this endlessly insistent, possibly authoritarian repetition. The reductive simplicity of these environment is at once comforting and cloying, sincere and cynical." (Joe Page) His was the first work that sparked the thought "I have never gone big enough" within me. With his work I realized I could create a different world with my art, and in that world form a sense of community.

Community is inherent in the work of Jill Odegaard. As a fiber artist, she weaves and ties different elements together, each piece whether a tapestry hung on a wall or a sculpture suspended from the ceiling is its own community. In her recent work she has used weaving to illustrate community itself. Her work titled "Woven Welcome" is created by working with a community as a whole. These works are months long processes that involve reaching out to the community,

donation of materials and educating the community in which the work is created. She travels to a community and seeks donations of material to be woven, old curtains and upholstery fabrics, sheets and linens that when received are cut into strips by volunteers. She then holds classes in libraries, churches, schools- the pillars of the existing communities and uses the weaving process to illustrate how a community functions and what the individual's role within each community does for the community. ("Woven Welcome")

Looms are rented and taken to more places by ambassadors- volunteers who want to reach out and unite their community. Each loom is a standard size so that each tapestry woven can be tied to the next. When enough tapestries are created, they are tied together end to end and untied, then an installation is created showing the community what can be accomplished when they work together. When the exhibition is complete, each tapestry is returned to where it was made to be hung on the wall as a reminder of their togetherness and role within their environment. ("Woven Welcome") Her use of symbolism throughout the process and efforts to educate the community on the connections each individual has with one another parallels my own work- we are connected and our choices and actions affect others- we are all one and we can build with each other to support one another.

Each of these artists has deeply affected my work in similar manners- they have achieved with me what I would like to achieve with the participants of my own work. Their way of seeing has enlightened my own and changed the way I view the world, in subtle and not so subtle measures. I was initially drawn to each because of our similarities, but ultimately affected because of our differences. The introduction to community art is possibly the greatest influence in my work.

CHAPTER FOUR: 6CO₂ **(CARBON DIOXIDE/CONCEPTUAL EXPERIENCES)**

After glucose interacts with oxygen, three compounds are produced, the first is carbon dioxide (6CO₂). Carbon dioxide does not frequently come to mind as a compound responsible for life, however it is indeed an imperative component. Respiration in animals begins with oxygen and has a byproduct of carbon dioxide, in plants the reverse is true; animals provide for plants while plants provide for animals, both processes are necessary for life to continue. In art, conceptual experiences have historically taken a backseat to the physical form, just like carbon dioxide often takes a backseat to oxygen in biochemistry. In my work, however, the conceptual experience is not a byproduct of the work (as is the tendency of one to think of carbon dioxide), rather it is an equal constituent.

“We Are the Coqui”

The conceptual experience that occurs when viewing my art works in tandem with the physical form, one would not exist without the other. My piece titled “We are the Coqui” exemplifies this. When entering the installation one is seemingly surrounded by hundreds of frogs, suspended in the air and climbing the walls. As one continues to look around, a path through the leaves emerges. As the viewer follows the path, they will find panels, these panels when pushed or prodded change color and emit the call of the coqui. The path winds around until it abruptly stops at the back of the entrance wall. A statement is written:

We are the coqui.

The island we have always called home revels in us.

We are celebrated to the point of exploitation.

We have become a tourist attraction.

The same beings that celebrate us cut down and burn our homes.

We succumb to a fungus that was brought into our habitat from a different land.

On islands that are new to us, we thrive.

We thrive but are treated like pests.

Our young are sprayed with acid.

Our grown are trapped and drenched in boiling water.

We are burned.

We are charred.

We are sick.

We are living.

We are the coqui.

Hear our voices.

The participant must then retrace their steps as the path does not loop. As the participant has spent time growing accustomed to the brightness and overwhelming amount of frogs they start to see the forest for the trees, or the individual frogs rather than the masses. The frogs upon inspection are individuals, some are bright and lustrous, healthy, while others are dark and charred. More details within the environment emerge: there is litter throughout the leaves that make up the ground, the call of the coqui are interrupted by a beep, their calls start out strong and numerous, but with each beep dwindle until there is one that slowly fades. A seemingly warm and bright

environment at first glance becomes dark and chilled. This will not be the experience of every viewer, but it is the intended experience.



Figure 11: "We Are the Coqui" Photo by Rachel Schuster

Historical Parallels

The physical form of the installation shapes the conceptual experience. The message of this piece would not be felt on an emotional level without the physical form, this isn't new to art. Others that create an experience along these lines are: Andy Goldsworthy, Yayoi Kusama, and Tomas Saraceno. Each manufactures an environment with their own style and materials unique to them.

Andy Goldsworthy uses nature to alter nature. He views his work as a collaboration with nature, using the elements therein to alter the environment and therefore call attention to it. He works to participate in nature as intimately as possible, with rare exceptions does he ever use tools in his work preferring to utilize what nature has provided. Photography serves as an evidentiary tool, but if one comes across Goldsworthy's work in person it is then that it is experienced. He works with the existing environment so that the viewer may have a transient or ephemeral experience.

The ephemeral is the opposite of what Yayoi Kusama focuses on in her work; her pieces bring infinity to the foreground. Many of her installations are fully immersive and create an experience where the viewer can physically lose themselves, as the space seems to continue on in all directions. Her works feature repeating loops and dots that leave space for the viewer's imagination to fill.

Imagine a new way of existing in your environment- Tomas Saraceno does this with his works. He creates installations with the intention of aiding viewers in imagining new ways of inhabiting and sensing the environment around them. His installations are quite often participatory so that the viewer experiences his concepts on many levels- mental, visual and physical.

Each of these artists draws parallels to my work, but often in ways that are in opposition to my methods. Andy Goldsworthy alters nature with nature to call attention to nature, I use nature as an inspiration and frequently fabricate alternate and exaggerated environments that resemble the natural but are clearly not nature to call attention to nature. Yayoi Kusama creates immersive installations that are so deeply immersive and seemingly infinite that a viewer has the ability to literally and figuratively lose themselves. While it is my intention to aid the viewer in getting lost in their thoughts, I do not build spaces where they might actually feel physically lost. Tomas Saraceno builds architectural spaces that are immersive and participatory, but our aesthetics are on either ends of the spectrum. I create spaces that are primarily organic whereas he chooses to build spaces that are quite geometric. Though the physical forms are varied, the purpose of the physical form remains unchanged- the physical form shapes the conceptual experience.

CHAPTER FIVE: 6H₂O (WATER/PHYSICAL INTERACTIONS)

Physical interactions are to my work what water is to life. Water is a part of every organism, it exists both within the organism and within the world surrounding the organism. Water is the second compound produced when glucose combines with oxygen, in glycolysis, it may also at first glance be considered a byproduct as the goal of glycolysis is energy transfer, but water is the liquid that brings life; the physical interactions incorporated into my work bring life to the art as well. A viewer's physical presence both inside and outside of the work is necessary for the work to exist as intended; if the viewer does not step into the space of the piece, the experience will not transpire. The roles of both viewer and participant must be filled.

The definition of interactivity is subjective. I choose to define interactivity in reference to artwork as engaging the viewer in a way that physically changes the piece in a permanent manner. Once a viewer interacts with my work, they become a participant and the work is not the same as it was before they participated. The interactions are guided by instructions. These instructions are merely guidelines for the interactions, the instructions are intentionally somewhat open-ended so as not to limit or restrict the participant in their choices. Having rules of any sort is a restriction, but leaving the interactivity completely open would detract from the content of the piece. Furthermore, having instructions that still allow freedom and creativity invite both sides of the spectrum of this learning style. Some learners thrive with structure while others thrive with freedom, open-ended instructions such as "Please take a piece of plastic to reuse or recycle" (as provided in "PolyMar") gives some structure while still allowing creative freedom.

The interactivity incorporated into each piece is intended to enhance the content, though it is not strictly necessary for every viewer to become a participant. Some viewers may decide that

they are content without participating and that is perfectly fine. The content of the work can still be conveyed without every individual participating with the piece, though each piece does require that some viewers choose to become participants to progress its lifecycle. Without the interactive components, the work would not change, it would become stagnant in its lifecycle, therein lies the importance of the interactivity. It is not only a meaningful part of the viewer experience in that it enhances the communication of the content, but it also progresses the piece itself.

“Lend Me A Hand”

When a viewer takes part in a physical interaction with the work, they then become a participant. Without the physical interaction, the piece will not change or grow, this is a necessary step in all of my works, but some rely on this step more heavily than others. The piece purposely titled “Lend Me A Hand” is a prime example of this heavy reliance on participation.

A space is sectioned off- to get to it, one must pass a table, on this table are utensils and paper. There are squares of paper, all the same weight, but each is unique in color and abstract patterns. A statement on the table instructs the viewer to choose a square and trace their hand and alter it so that it represents them as an individual. When their hand is done, the viewer is to punch a hole in it and enter the space beyond the table. This space is full of hands suspended at all levels. Some of the hands are like theirs, paper of the same weight, some are ceramic. The ceramic hands are permanent fixtures, they cannot be moved or altered, however the paper hands can easily be rearranged. As more viewers elect to become participants, this community of hands grows, the ceramic pieces representing the unchangeable pillars of a community, the paper hands representing the flexible individuals within it.

As “Lend Me a Hand” progresses, social norms dictate that leaders may emerge, rearranging the hands as they see fit, perhaps to create a specific path through the community, perhaps because they simply enjoy the power it gives them to alter this growing society of hands. Whatever the reason the hands will be moved intentionally and unintentionally. Some of the hands will become worn, others may fall, some may be hung high enough that they are unaltered through the duration of the piece. Each represents a different aspect of a community and the viewer must move through it to get to where they are going next, their movement through the piece becomes passive interaction as their displacement of air will alter the suspended hands and create movement within the piece. The interactions, whether passive or active become the physical experience.



Figure 12: "Lend Me A Hand" Photo by Rachel Schuster

Contemporary Parallels

Other artists employ a use of physical interaction within their work- many belong in the realm of relational aesthetics including Rirkrit Tiravanija and Felix Gonzalez-Torres. The interaction transforms the work and allows the conceptual experience to occur.

Rirkrit Tiravanija uses human interaction as his primary material to create conceptual works with social implications. The viewer becomes a participant in art that blurs the lines between public and private. The works are often labeled as social experiments but have an underlying performance element wherein seemingly mundane tasks become social events.

Mundane tasks as simple as picking up a piece of individually wrapped candy from a stack are the physical interactions that transform the creations of Felix Gonzalez-Torres. These transformations in their nature are so small individually that his works are often labelled as process art, because the changes occur subtly over time. His pieces also have a universality, where the conceptual experience can be related to by most individuals. This is the beauty of his work, a simple task transforms a piece into a powerful message with societal implications. “Untitled” (Placebo) (1991) is a specific example of this. The viewer is invited to take a piece of candy wrapped in shiny silver from the six-by-twelve-foot carpet filled with the candies. Over time as more and more viewers participate, the piling of candy dwindles (Chong). Each participant plays a part, though each individual action seems insignificant, the sum of these actions dramatically alter the piece implying that individuals can do the same in society.

The works of Gonzalez-Torres and Tiravanija relate to my own in the sense that they also use physical interaction as a tool to progress their pieces conceptually. The message comes through the experiential nature of the work- without the experience, the concept is easily looked over or lost to the viewer.

CHAPTER SIX: ATP (ENERGY/CHANGE)

The end result of glycolysis is the production of ATP- the source of usable energy for the cells within an organism. ATP is what brings about change within an organism. All of the constituents discussed thus far factor into the formation of the energy within my work- this energy is the change I wish to create- it is what I elicit from the participant. Ideally each of my pieces will provide a viewer with a deeper understanding of the content, an awareness of the connections we have with others, and a new question in their mind, because questions lead to curiosity and curiosity leads to discovery.

With each experience an individual encounters, a shift or change in their viewpoint occurs. An individual has a mindset prior to any experience, throughout the duration of an experience, this individual will be introduced to new thoughts and ideas, or existing notions may be expanded. This is also true of the viewers of my work, as each piece is an experience. I make the assumption that no individual viewer will have my same way of thinking, therefore some of the thoughts and ideas conveyed through my work will be new to the viewer, or will expand upon the viewer's existing knowledge. This new awareness, or expansion of thoughts is the change of viewpoint a viewer will undergo through the experience of the piece. Simply stated, the viewer's anticipated viewpoint prior to experiencing a piece is one that does not include the entire content of the piece. After experiencing the work, the viewpoint will have changed to incorporate some or all of the content within the work, in essence the change of viewpoint is directly related to the experience of the piece and as new knowledge or ideas are acquired through the encounter, it is a learning experience that causes a shift in the viewer's point of view, though this shift may be slight. In the event that the viewer is already aware or has prior knowledge of the content of the piece, the installations provide an opportunity to be physically immersed in the idea, reinforcing the viewer's awareness

and hopefully leading to action in the future.

This shift can be seen in the piece “PolyMar”. In our current society, we come into contact and use plastic materials every day. We are so surrounded by plastic that we become desensitized to its presence and our consumption of it. I perceive the viewpoint of the viewer to know that they are a consumer of plastic and that they know that it has a negative impact on the environment. I do not expect the average viewer to have an acute awareness of how devastating our society’s consumption of plastic is on the ecosystems of the Earth’s oceans. “PolyMar” was designed to illustrate this devastation. The ratio of marine life to plastic in the oceans is plummeting- in short, the oceans are becoming plastic. As a viewer experiences “PolyMar”, they will see the abundance of plastic in the fabricated environment. The text within the piece solidifies the awareness of the presence of the plastic and it is after encountering the text that the viewer may choose to become a participant. This choice determines whether the change of viewpoint is slight, or if it will take a more active role in the viewer turned participant’s daily life. If the viewer chooses to remain a viewer, their viewpoint has still incurred a shift- the desensitization of the plastic surrounding their daily life has briefly been interrupted, and they were (even if only for a moment) made aware of its presence. If the viewer has chosen to interact and become a participant by taking plastic with them to reuse or recycle, their viewpoint has more actively changed by the individual choosing to take action. The change is even more evident if the individual chooses to continue their awareness and course of action through their daily life and make an effort to consume less plastic.

This change in viewpoint is elicited effectively through the immersive and interactive qualities of my work. Being immersed in an environment as a viewer is immersed in my work cultivates a deeper understanding of content through a higher level of engagement. I incorporate elements within each piece that engage four of the five senses, allowing more room for each

learning style to become engaged. There are many types of learning styles and the definitions vary from theory to theory. A Widely accepted and studied model is the VARK model, developed by Neil Flemming. This model expands on the neuro-linguistic programming models and incorporates four main learning modalities- visual, auditory, read/write, and kinesthetic learning. All individuals use each of these four modalities in different variations, I myself am primarily a kinesthetic learner with read/write in the secondary position; I learn most effectively by touching and doing with great assistance through reading and writing. Others may learn most effectively through the auditory modality, or by listening. As each individual has a unique blend of the learning styles that make up their own personal learning style, incorporating a variety of ways to become immersed in the experience enhances the effectiveness of the cognitive understanding of the concept to be conveyed. My own kinesthetic learning process is why I incorporate interactivity throughout all of my work. By being able to actively do something to the piece using their sense of touch, I am reaching out to the other kinesthetic learners who don't often have the opportunity to experience artwork through their primary learning modality.

“PolyMar”

Many of my works have a truly educational component- usually something to do with environmentalism. “PolyMar” is a piece I've created to bring attention to the state of the world's oceans and the ecosystems within them. Humankind's use of plastic has wreaked havoc on ocean ecology. As it currently stands the amount of plastic in the oceans out numbers the marine life six to one. For every animal in the ocean there are six pieces of plastic. Plastic does not degrade, once it is manufactured, it will always be plastic. Marine life dies because of plastic ingestion or

entanglement. Biodiversity is decreasing as a result of the presence of plastic. “PolyMar” illustrates the negative impact plastic has on the marine ecosystem.

The viewer first sees objects suspended creating an outside wall, this wall is comprised of marine life surrounded by plastic objects. Past the objects, the viewer can see the interior of the installation. Just past the wall is an opening, the space within transports the viewer into the ocean, the viewer is on the floor surrounded by marine life, jellyfish float around with sea turtles and an occasional fish. The while walking through the sand bars, the viewer notices that the sea turtles don't look quite healthy, some are deformed, some are missing limbs, some are trapped in plastic, the jellyfish- some of them aren't actually jellyfish, rather they are plastic bags. Then, in the corner seen last, a carcass comes into view; a segment of a whale with plastic spilling out of its belly, a creature so large, yet emaciated. It consumed so much plastic over its lifespan that it eventually starved to death because there wasn't enough room in the digestive tract for actual food. There is a statement above the whale alerting the viewer to the urgent need to transform our plastic use as a species- reduce, reuse, recycle. The emphasis on the first verb. The statement instructs the viewer to take a piece of plastic from the outside wall and either reuse or recycle it properly. As more viewers become participants, the plastic wall becomes more transparent; when all of the plastic has been removed, the wall becomes a window.



Figure 13: "PolyMar" Photo by Author

Composition is used in “PolyMar” to create a barrier. A wall made primarily of plastic separates the viewer from the interior of the piece, just as a wall of plastic hinders marine life from moving into the ocean. However, this wall is also comprised of negative space and has openings. The interactive element of “PolyMar” allows the viewer, if they choose to become a participant, to change the composition of this wall, to literally remove the barrier. This change exemplifies the

change humans can make in their daily lives to more positively affect the environments around us. This change in composition can instill hope- our society's consumption of plastic is not yet a lost cause.

The purpose of "PolyMar" is primarily educational, but its intention is to help instill both a sense of duty and hope in the viewer- little by little a difference can be made, it all starts with one small action until it builds into something bigger. Ideally, this piece will elicit questions and curiosity from the viewer while pointing out our connections with the living beings that share the earth with us so that the viewer may become a participant not only in the instant of the piece, but also in their daily lives.

In order to elicit these responses, the location and audience must be taken into consideration. Each iteration of each piece is site specific and the piece will vary with each installation, however the piece itself is somewhat flexible as to where it is installed. The pieces can be installed and uninstalled from multiple locations so that they may be exhibited multiple times, but many of them would also do well as permanent installations. Each piece is a public art piece, the intended audience for my work is the average citizen who may or may not have regular access to art. Ideally each piece would be installed in a public space in a high traffic area that does not necessarily have to be related to art. This means that in the future I would seek opportunities to install work in places such as public parks, science centers, nature centers, libraries, aquariums and other public institutions such as government buildings like City Hall. Furthermore, each piece doesn't have to exist as a single installation, multiple iterations can be installed simultaneously, much like a print can be exhibited in multiple galleries.

"We Are the Coqui" would ideally have long term or permanent installation spaces in a science center, aquarium, or nature center. In a perfect world, an iteration would permanently be

installed at the El Portal Rainforest Center, the visitors' center at the entrance to the El Yunque National Rainforest. This location would be ideal because it is a location that is a natural habitat to the coqui where the audience is already in the mindset to learn. Additional sites for additional iterations would be nature centers on the islands such as Hawaii, St. Croix, St. John, St. Thomas, and the Dominican Republic where the coqui are invasive species, but have high rates of tourism to call attention to the plight of the coqui's existence on these islands.

An aquarium or a nature center located near the ocean would be the ideal location for "PolyMar". Specifically, I could reach out to the Sea Turtle Conservancy's Barrier Island Sanctuary Management and Education Center in Melbourne, Florida where efforts are already being made to educate the public about the effects of the consumption of plastic. "PolyMar" is a great visualization tool in that it overrides the desensitizing society has become accustomed to in regards to plastic and would do well to be installed in a location where these effects can readily be seen on a smaller scale. A partnership with the Sea Turtle Conservancy would also allow for multiple iteration of the piece to exist concurrently.

A public space that is a pillar of an existing community would be the ideal place for "Lend Me A Hand". A hallway in a library or city hall so that the space itself reinforces the content of the piece.

The location of "Weeping Whispers" is quite flexible, it can exist indoors or outdoors without harm to the piece and has already had iterations in both types of locations. The piece is quite successful in an outdoor location where it can be viewed during daylight and nighttime hours. Ideally, I would feature "Weeping Whispers" outdoors because the exposure to the weathering elements would progress the piece further than an indoor environment would be able to due to the change that the copper would undergo as a result of the weathering process. A specific location

would be in one of the outdoor venues at the Maitland Art Center where visitors could happen upon the piece during a stroll through the grounds.

“Rainbow Connection” would be a successful pop up art piece at a public park where it could be exhibited for a duration of one to fourteen days. This pop up exhibition of the piece could take place simultaneously with an event in the park, or without an event. An example of the type of park and event would be Central Florida Earth Day at Lake Eola. Though the content of “Rainbow Connection” doesn’t speak specifically to conservancy, its content of connectedness would go hand in hand with the goals and ideals of the event (to inspire equitable decisions at all levels from individual to international). The high traffic event would be beneficial for the quick progression of the piece and an easy way for participants to see how quickly their connections can be changed and affect other connections when viewed periodically throughout the day.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

Glycolysis is a cycling process, this formula is simply the beginning of that process, just as my physical work is the beginning of something bigger. ATP is an energy source and a catalyst to change, my work will evoke curiosity that will also lead to change, it is in this way that it adds to the continuum that is art. My work fits within the realms of relational aesthetics. I modify spaces so that what was once public, can now be intimate, and that which was once private may now be public, but I choose to do this in a way that is educational. The educational components, the components that instill curiosity, questioning, and wonder within the viewer, are what make my pieces unique within relational aesthetics and invoke change. Every piece, like all of those in relational aesthetics, is experiential, but it is through the experiences within my work that one will find the catalyst for change.

Every artist creates work so that they may express something. Art is an expression of self, my artmaking is no different. My artwork is an expression of my need to express my beliefs in manner that is both informative and evocative. I began making interactive work to fill a void that I felt within the art world. As a kinesthetic learner, I love to touch and manipulate things and hadn't come across many opportunities to do so with art, so I started creating those opportunities for others. It is my ambition to create evocative experiences that form a lasting impression within a participant so that they are inspired to live their life with an awareness of the connections that bind us all together.

APPENDIX: LETTER OF PERMISSION

Photographs



Chealsea Anagnoson

Today, 3:21 AM

Schuster_Rachel@yahoo.com



Reply all | v

Dear Rachel,

I would like to include your photographs of my artwork in my written thesis. In order to meet university standards, I need your permission to publish your images in my paper digitally and physically in the university library collection. This is for purely academic use and will not be used commercially in any way.

I look forward to your response,
Chelsea Anagnoson

Photographs



schuster_rachel@yahoo.com

Yesterday, 8:36 AM

Chealsea Anagnoson



Reply all | v

Dear Chelsea,

Your permission is granted to use my photographs of your artwork in your written thesis.

Rachel Schuster

LIST OF REFERENCES

"BBC iPlayer - BBC Four". Bbc.co.uk. Accessed 21 Nov 2016.

Boudreault-Fournier, Alexandrine. *Microtopia in Counterpoint: Relational Aesthetics and the Echo Project*. 5 Vol. , 2016.

Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Relational Aesthetics*. Dijon : Les Presses du réel, c2002, 2002. Web.

Casey McDonough Studio. www.caseymcdonough.com. Accessed 30 Jan 2017.

Choi, Sunghye,. *Relational Aesthetics in Art Museum Education: Engendering Visitors' Narratives through Participatory Acts for Interpretive Experience*. 55 Vol. , 2013.

Chong, Doryun. "Felix Gonzalez-Torres" *In Bits and Pieces Put Together to Present a Semblance of a Whole: Walker Art Center Collections*, edited by Joan Rothfuss and Elizabeth Carpenter. Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Center, 2005.

Cobb, Chris "Features | Touch - Relational Art from the 1990's to Now". Stretcher.org. Accessed 21 Nov 2016.

"Features | Nicolas Bourriaud and Karen Moss". Stretcher.org. Accessed 21 Nov 2016.

"Happy to Meet You: An Introduction to Relational Art". *PLACE Project*.
place.unm.edu/relational_art.html. Accessed 15 Jan 2017

Irwin, Rita L., and Dónal O'Donoghue. *Encountering Pedagogy through Relational Art Practices*. 31 Vol. , 2012.

Joe Page. Joe-page.com. Accessed 30 Jan 2017.

“Woven Welcome”. www.allentownartmuseum.org/exhibition/woven-welcome. Accessed 30 Jan

2017