MONSTROSITIES:
GENDERFLUIDITY AS ART PRACTICE

A Critical Engagement Paper
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
For the Degree of
Master of Fine Arts
in
Interdisciplinary Studies
University of Regina

By
Sarah Jean Ferguson
Regina, Saskatchewan
May 31, 2017

Copyright 2017: S. J. Ferguson
Sarah Jean Ferguson, candidate for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies, has presented a thesis titled, *Monstrosities: Genderfluidity as Art Practice*, in an oral examination held on April 28, 2017. The following committee members have found the thesis acceptable in form and content, and that the candidate demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of the subject material.

External Examiner: Dr. Roewan Crowe, University of Winnipeg

Co-Supervisor: Dr. Claire Carter, Department of Women's and Gender Studies

Co-Supervisor: Prof. Leesa Streifler, Department of Visual Arts

Committee Member: Dr. Risa Horowitz, Department of Visual Arts

Committee Member: Prof. David Garneau, Department of Visual Arts

Chair of Defense: Dr. Troni Grande, Department of English
Abstract

This paper engages the art conducted for my MFA graduating exhibition, *Monstrosities*. The assumptions and inscriptions of gender which inform bodily meanings are critiqued. As a genderqueer/trans person, the issue of how to represent my genderfluidity, despite my ‘female’ sexed body and its implications, is all consuming. Art provides a means. The desire to represent myself is the central theme of the work in my exhibition. This paper is divided into nine sections. The first, *Autobiography, Queerness, and My Creative Process*, relates to the background that informs my art practice. I discuss definitions and the forces which inform and propelled the exhibition, and briefly touch on my creative process. The second section, *Artistic Influences*, touches on the artists that inspired my project and I discuss the challenges I face when applying their approaches in practice. The third section of my paper explores how theories of melancholia, the abject and the monstrous relate to my art practice and photographs. The fourth section, *Monstrosities: An Overview*, is a summary of my exhibition and its contents, and future plans. In the fourth section, *Beginnings*, I discuss the starting point of my art practice. The sixth section, *On Queering the Female Body*, unpacks key theories that relate to my body and my art, as well as my shifting queer identity. The seventh section, *Key Gender Theorists, Inspirations, and Influences* discusses key gender theories that I drew from during the creation of my exhibition. The eighth section, *Phenomenology and Objects as Inspiration* discusses how I chose the objects in my photographs. The ninth section, *Queering the Appeal of The Photograph* describes my relationship to photography and the camera.
Acknowledgement

First, I would like to thank my supervisors, Professor Leesa Streifler and Dr. Claire Carter, for their insight and support. Working with both of them has led to an array of opportunities and insights, and has broadened my knowledge in my field. Their guidance and encouragement has made this endeavor a success.

Second, I would also like to thank my committee members Professor David Garneau, and Dr. Risa Horowitz for their expertise and wisdom in the completion of this project. Their guidance has been essential to my growth and development as an academic.

Finally, I am grateful for the support of my partner, Jerry, who has been a constant source of support and kindness during my program.
Dedication

I would like to dedicate this paper to all LGBTQI people who are struggling for acceptance, love, and actualization in the world.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... 1  
Acknowledgement .......................................................................................................................... 2  
Dedication ......................................................................................................................................... 3  
Table of Contents ........................................................................................................................... 4  
Introduction ....................................................................................................................................... 6  
Overview and Personal Statement ................................................................................................. 6  
Section Overview ............................................................................................................................. 11  

## 1.1 Autobiography, Queerness, and My Creative Process ........................................................... 12  
1.2.1 Regarding Sex and Gender .................................................................................................. 14  
1.2.2 Queer Definitions ................................................................................................................. 15  
1.2.3 My Focus ............................................................................................................................... 15  
1.2.4 Creative Process .................................................................................................................... 16  

## 2.1 Artistic Influences .................................................................................................................... 16  
2.1.1 Cindy Sherman ..................................................................................................................... 16  
2.1.2 Francesca Woodman ............................................................................................................ 17  
2.1.3 Catherine Opie ..................................................................................................................... 18  
2.1.4 On Materialism ..................................................................................................................... 19  

## 3.1 Melancholia, The Abject, The Monstrous ................................................................................ 22  
3.1.2 Melancholia: Butler and Freud ............................................................................................. 22  
3.1.3 The Abject ............................................................................................................................. 28  
3.1.4 The Monstrous and Monster Theory .................................................................................... 32  

## 4.1 Monstrocities: An Overview ...................................................................................................... 35  
4.1.1 Series One: Points of Reference .......................................................................................... 35  
4.1.2 Series Two: Conversation Pieces ......................................................................................... 36  
4.1.3 Doll Making, Jay Prosser, and Theories of Transexual Identity .......................................... 37  

## 5.1 Beginnings ................................................................................................................................. 41  
5.1.2 Foundations .......................................................................................................................... 41  
5.1.3 The Role of Camp in my Art Practice ................................................................................... 45  

## 6.1 On Queering the Female Body ................................................................................................ 48  
6.1.2 The Notion of ‘human’ .......................................................................................................... 49  
6.1.3 An Identity Crisis ................................................................................................................. 55  

## 7.1 Key Gender Theorists .............................................................................................................. 56  
7.1.1 Judith Halberstam and Female Masculinity .......................................................................... 56  
7.1.3 The Well of Loneliness ......................................................................................................... 57  
7.1.4 The Diaries of Anne Lister ................................................................................................... 59
8.1 Phenomenology, Objects as Inspiration...........................................59
8.1.1 Queer Phenomenology, Object as Metaphor, Homing Devices........ 62

9.1. Queering the Appeal of the Photograph........................................64
9.1.1 Other Theorists That Inform My Photographs................................67
9.1.2 More Considerations.............................................................. 68

Conclusion.......................................................................................71

Notes.................................................................................................73

Bibliography.....................................................................................78

Fig.1 ..................................................................................................81
Fig.2 ..................................................................................................82
Fig.3 ..................................................................................................83
Fig.4 ..................................................................................................84
Fig.5 ..................................................................................................85
Fig.6 ..................................................................................................86
Fig.7 ..................................................................................................87
Fig.8 ..................................................................................................88
Fig.9 ..................................................................................................89
Fig.10 ..............................................................................................90
Fig.11 ..............................................................................................91
INTRODUCTION

Overview and Personal Statement

“…despite one's best efforts, one is undone, in the face of the other, by the touch, by the scent, by the feel, by the prospect of the touch, by the memory of the feel. And so when we speak about my sexuality or my gender, as we do (and as we must), we mean something complicated by it… I am constituted by a social world I never chose… given over from the start to the world of others…”

- Judith Butler, Undoing Gender

It begins with the body, my own.

My body: a thriving, conscious bag of cells, flesh, and organs, made of tissues, blood, nerves, fat, and bone. It sweats, excretes, expands, contracts, starves, hurts, expels, bleeds, vomits, moves, breathes. A human body is assigned social meaning from the moment it enters the world, and is classified according to its physical characteristics, appearance, attractiveness, genitalia, capacity to perform various tasks, and the like. These categorizations are dependent on social paradigms and mores, especially gendered ones. Living with the knowledge that we are all classified according to the appearance and ability of our bodies, is not easy. There is a constant sense of having to conform to be accepted bodily, in order to be recognized as a person. I have felt it since I was very young and I have done my best, but I must live in, and with what I know. I have never lived up to Western feminine ideals. My relationship with my body has always been problematic. It has never conformed to what society has asked of it, because it cannot. I am genderfluid: it can never represent all of who I am, and this feels like betrayal.
Genderfluidity, the desire to remain flexible about one’s gender identity or to express multiple genders at once, falls under the genderqueer/trans umbrella, and relates to people who transgress distinctions of gender. According to medical records, my body is sexed female. From a superficial perspective, this means I have breasts, a functioning uterus, ovaries, and a vagina. These characteristics categorize me as a woman. But what is a woman? I have never felt comfortable in my body: I am taller and larger than average women, I have more body hair than most women, my voice is deep, and has often been called ‘masculine’, I cannot have children; I have never felt comfortable with the social forces that I have always sensed, pressing on my body, urging it to exalt or deny aspects of itself, or even destroy itself for not fitting into society’s expectations of what a ‘woman’ is.

My body appears feminine, so it would seem easy to identify as ‘female’, and yet, there are times, particularly in the presence of certain people or situations, where I do not feel female. This does not mean that I automatically identify as ‘male’, however. There are no words for what I represent. I have had dreams of inhabiting a male physique, or felt the need to engage in ‘male’ pursuits. At other times, I have felt repelled and confused by my body and its fleshiness and curviness, by my breasts, my stomach, and everything about my physicality. There have been other moments where I have felt genderless, or where I have found the idea of gender, and the relation between my gender and my physical characteristics repulsive. I have wished for a body that wasn’t gendered or human. Wearing clothes sometimes makes my skin crawl, but not wearing clothes can also feel repulsive. My body feels like a skin suit, that is slowly smothering me, and
from which I can never escape. Sometimes I feel like a man in drag, even though the outside world insists that I look great in dresses, or affirms and confirms my assumed femininity, for example, when I am told that I look ‘hot’ and get harassed at my local gym by horny men, or at a gay bar by women who ‘love my curves’. None of it sticks to me, feels real, or completely registers. I hover, suspended above myself, watching the judgments, in a continual state of disassociation.

This confusion, this dwelling in a gender, this ‘in between’ space is overwhelming and painful. I have never completely understood the invisible forces that propel me to behave and act the way I do. My current art practice attempts to make this invisibility visible; to give my emotional dissonance, my dysphoria, my discontent, and confusion toward the cultural expectations projected onto my female sexed body a shape. While I pass as a woman, I do not feel like one, and have never felt comfortable with that designation. In my ideal world, gender would not define anyone. Gender is assumed natural, but is actually a series of beliefs forcefully inscribed on our bodies, without our consent, from the time we are born. Judith Butler claims that if we do gender wrong, or if we do it in a way that disturbs the public dimension of our bodies, we are punished, ostracized, and excommunicated from the designation ‘human’. If we do not perform gender adequately, we will be ridiculed, ignored, or even killed. These social constructs are so embedded in our consciousness and unconsciousness as human beings, that it does not register as a social construct, but as ‘reality’.³
It is this realization—that my gender is a social construct— which led me to create my current photographic series, featured in my MFA exhibition Monstrosities at the Mackenzie Art Gallery, which runs from April 23-30, 2017.

In the following sections, I discuss my thinking and artistic processes. It is important to note that the works and series I have made over the course of my program coincide with the complexities and evolution of my identity and the challenges that go along with that. I see each of my works as points on a map, leading to a steady progression and greater realization and articulation of my identity. The philosophical basis for my work is drawn from a trajectory of epiphanies, which began with the gradual discarding of my rigid ‘female’ conditioning, in favor of a fluid identity which exists beyond the gender binary. Articulating my identity is still a work in progress and there is no conclusion. Rather, by engaging in a visual dialogue with the tropes associated with my body’s feminine appearance, and by working with the props I have chosen as stand ins for what I cannot fully express or give shape to, I am creating a space to question and mourn that which cannot be. I will never get ‘there’, but through the criticism of the gender binary and ‘naturalized’ norms associated with it, there is room to move and evolve.

The art in my exhibition is informed by five theoretical concepts, which will be discussed further in this paper: Judith Butler’s concepts of performativity and melancholia, Kristeva’s theories of the abject, Sara Ahmed’s theories about queer phenomenology, and notions of the monstrous. My exhibition contains fourteen photographs divided into two bodies of work. The first, Points of Reference, comprises ten works that range in scale and are named for the prop or character that is the focal
point of the work: *Torso* (Fig.1) and *Satyr* (Fig.2) are 32 x 45”, *Buffalo* (Fig.3), *Alien* (Fig.4), and *Fish* (Fig.5) feature two portraits each, that measure 27 x 42”, while *Clam* (Fig.6) and *Poodle* (Fig.7) are solo portraits with the same measurements. Also included in this body of work is the four part 12.75 x 18.75” series *Portrait of the Artist Wrestling with Themselves* (Fig.8). These photographs are fashioned in the tradition of feminist self-portraiture, related to dialogues with my body, feminism, gender identity, and my environment, and were made in the early to mid-stages of my program.

The second body of work in my exhibition, *Conversation Pieces*, gives shape to gender dysphoric sensations through the form, colour, appearance, and textures of a grotesque handmade doll. The series is the beginnings of my interactions with transgender theory that occurred in the last year of my program. Its contents and ideas form the basis of my proposed doctoral research. *Conversation Pieces* is composed of four 32 x 48” colour photographs, which are numbered from one to four, and feature a variety of cheerful effeminate objects leaking from the doll’s orifices in two of the works, and prostheses protruding from those same orifices in the other two. The photographs are shot in a variety of proximities: one depicts close up detail of the objects leaking from the doll’s midsection (Fig.9) another features the doll in its totality, yet another focuses on several of the doll’s orifices, and one is a solitary angular portrait of the doll sitting on a bed, viewed from the neck down, sporting a pair of rubber breasts.

Each series differs in its representational approach, but both are unified by a common subject: my attempts to make my body represent my genderfluidity. The exhibition is also informed by my belief that taking a photograph, making an object, and performing can give agency and physical form to genderfluid feeling, sensation, being and knowing.
Art can be a vehicle for solving the problem of genderfluid representation, (representing multiple genders while living in a singularly coded/gendered body), by providing a means for me to transcend the societally read gendered body, and accordingly, the gender binary, cisgendered society, and heteronormativity.

To restate, my physical body is limited or unable to perform the genderfluidity I wish I could express, and it is equally limited by its capacity to express interior states. Photographs and other art forms offer a greater range of representations and possibilities. They are images freed from the body and its social codes and can represent momentary states. They are capable of behaving like bodies without being confined by them. In other words, the photographs in my MFA exhibition illustrate how the art object and its reception can hope to disrupt heteronormative and cisgendered assumptions that Western society imposes on an individual.

Section Overview

This paper is divided into nine sections. The first, Autobiography, Queerness, and My Creative Process, relates to the background, vocabulary and impulses that inform my art practice and current work. I discuss definitions and the main forces which inform and propelled the exhibition, and briefly touch on my creative process. The second section, Artistic Influences, touches on the artists that inspired my project, and how my work was affected by their approaches and theories. I discuss the challenges I face when applying these theories in practice. The third section, Monstrosities: An Overview, is a summary of my exhibition and its contents, along with my future plans and trajectory as an artist. In the fourth section, Beginnings, I discuss the background of my art practice
and my evolution during my Masters Program. The fifth section, **On Queering the Female Body**, unpacks key theories that relate to my body and my art, as well as my shifting queer identity. The sixth section, **Key Gender Theorists, Inspirations, and Influences** discusses key gender theories that I drew from during the creation of my exhibition and their application to my work. The seventh section, **Phenomenology and Objects as Inspiration** discusses how I chose the objects in my photographs and explains why they are relevant. The eighth section, **Queering the Appeal of The Photograph** describes my relationship to photography theory and the camera. The ninth section of my paper explores how Freud’s theories of melancholia, and Kristeva’s theory of the abject relate to my art practice and photographs.

### 1.1 Autobiography, Queerness, and My Creative Process

My own life (autobiography) has always been my starting point as an artist. I have always used my in-the-moment emotive responses as springboards to fuel my creations. There are endless examples of this phenomenon in my body of work throughout my lifetime, and the photographs in my MFA exhibition are no exception. The personal has always been a source of inspiration for me. Leigh Gilmore writes in *The Limits of Autobiography* that every autobiography is a fragment of a theory and an assembly of theories of the self and self-representation; of personal identity and one’s relation to a family, a region, a nation; and of citizenship and a politics of representativeness (and exclusion). My work is borne out of what I have experienced, and is inspired by reactions to those experiences. I am well-aware of my work’s subjectivity, and of its highly personal implications in relation to viewers, and I worry about whether it will be
considered too personal within an academic context. The view of autobiography as therapy or as a transparent veil through which the artist’s life can be read is one of the most frustrating perceptions clouding the reading of artwork.\textsuperscript{10} Smith and Watson say that the generic understanding of ‘autobiography’ in Western culture complicates things further by obscuring the balanced representation of women- not included in the category of ‘great men’, who are most often associated with the term.\textsuperscript{11} I would argue that the issue of non-inclusion and invisibility- is equally, if not more so the case with LGBTQI artists, whose relationship to history is often obscured or omitted through lack of documentation or homophobic attitudes. This is a particularly important point, given that the autobiographical artist’s life is interconnected to the society they inhabit.\textsuperscript{12} As a queer individual, the elements that inform my photographs include homophobia, transphobia, bullying, harassment, and varying amounts of self-hate and self-omission. My photographs and their capacity to represent the trouble I have lived as a queer individual, provide entry points into what it means to live a life in full sun, in spite of the homophobia and heteronormativity present in Western society. Equally relevant is their capacity to provide visibility. Queer bodies have an unwritten and viscerally understood relationship to death, disease, and suffering, but in recent years they have also become agents of change and evolution relating to the family, child rearing, and other ways of being.\textsuperscript{13} Art related to queer life and queer viewpoints is especially relevant in light of these facts and this, combined with the current political climate the in West, makes my work relevant within these social realities and pressures.
1.2.1 Regarding Sex and Gender

Before I elaborate further on how gender dysphoria and body dysmorphia contribute to my art practice, I must address and clarify the definitions of sex and gender that appear throughout this paper, as the two can often become confused, and are markedly different from one another, though they often appear in tandem throughout my writings.

Western definitions of sex and gender center on how notions masculinity and femininity are definable, binary and ‘natural’—that is, that a person’s gender identity is bound to their sexed body and its culturally defined implications. This idea, reiterated through some feminist defined distinctions between the sexed body and gender, or the social conventions that define masculinity and femininity, contends that anatomical differences are connected to gender—that sex is biological and gender is historical.

Taking more cues from Butler, the philosophy behind my artwork questions the foundations of the cisgender/sex binary, and assumes that sex is not "a bodily given or a canvas on which the construct of gender is artificially imposed, but... a cultural norm which governs the materialization of bodies." Further, I base the subject matter of my art on the Butlerian notion that sex "is an ideal construct [which relates to gender and is] materialized through time, not a simple fact or condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize ‘sex’ and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms."
1.2.2 Queer Definitions

I must also clarify what I mean when I inject the word ‘queer’ into this discussion. David Halperin defines queer as whatever is at odds with the normal, and that there is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers: it is an identity without an essence. ‘Queer’ incorporates a broad spectrum of identities, and is often used interchangeably (sometimes wrongly so) with gay, homosexual, lesbian, and trans-related dialogues, and in relation to other non-binary oriented individuals. In this paper, ‘queer’ refers specifically to my identity, which falls into the LBGTQI categories of genderfluid and transgender. It is important to note that the language surrounding ‘queerness’ is in flux, and with that fluctuation, the relationship between the self and the body also fluctuates. In other words, ‘queer’ is not a static term, and neither is my identity.

1.2.3 My Focus

The focus of the photographs in my exhibition, Monstrosities, variously express the inability of my body to physically represent who I am, and the difficulties I face in my attempts to move beyond the social meanings of my body and my gender.

Essentially, the art in my exhibition is driven by five overarching theoretical concepts: Butler’s concepts of performativity\(^{19}\) and melancholia\(^{20}\), Kristeva’s theories of the abject\(^{21}\), Sara Ahmed’s discussions surrounding queer phenomenology,\(^{22}\) and Jeffery Jerome Cohen’s notions of the monstrous\(^{23}\). Additionally, Judith Halberstam’s discussions of Female Masculinity\(^ {24}\) and Jay Prosser’s theories of the relationship
between trans identity, gender, and the phenomenon of transition\textsuperscript{25} were foundational points from which I was able to build my assertions about my work. These theories are discussed throughout this paper, drawing from key works in my exhibition, and alongside key methodologies that inform them: autobiography, the photograph, and phenomenology.

1.2.4 Creative Process

It is important to note that the creative process which informed the production of my images changed shape throughout the course of my program, as my gender identity shifted from a female perspective to a genderfluid one. I began with the realization and creation of my self-portraits. After exhausting and reaching the limits of what I felt my body and the props I incorporated into my work could represent, (which coincided with what I felt were the limitations of feminism’s ability to represent my identity) I then made the decision to shift the camera’s gaze away from my body, onto a handmade object (doll). The result was the second series of works in the exhibition, which represent my dialogues with genderfluid and trans perspectives. In the following paragraphs, I will describe the artistic influences of my photographs.

2.1 Artistic Influences

2.1.1 Cindy Sherman

There is no denying that both series of photographs in my exhibition are inspired by the work of Cindy Sherman, and relate to her film stills (1975-82), along with her fashion, art historical, and disaster portraits (1983-90).\textsuperscript{26} The details in both series of photographs related to animal masks and costumes, particularly those found in my \textit{Fish, Buffalo},
*Clam, Satyr, and Poodle* images, are a direct reference to Sherman’s work, as are the found objects in *Alien* and *Torso*. The campy grotesque feel of the images in the first group of works, and in the case of the second group, the latex surface of the doll, the references to body fluids, colour of the paint chosen, and objects I complicated my doll with (rubber hearts, breasts, nipples and organs, plastic babies, insects, and dildos) that relate to consumerism and the abject, also draw from Sherman’s pictorially grotesque aesthetic in her disaster series, which includes references to everyday items, as well as menstrual blood, vomit, and bodily fluids.\(^{27}\) In addition, my photographs echo the camera’s function in Sherman’s works—as a stilled capture of an anonymous gaze, through which the viewer is implicated\(^ {28}\).

I was taken by Sherman’s self-portraits involving feminine representation—particularly those related to unattractiveness, ugliness, and aging, which involved masks, rubber prostheses, and costumes. Inspired by their grotesqueness as I engaged with key concepts related to queer and feminist theory, I created self-portraits with a similar aesthetic, but with aspirations of projecting a degenerate, campy, feminine, or melancholic metaphoric portraits related to the dysmorphic, genderfluid aspects of my identity.

### 2.1.2 Francesca Woodman

Another artist that has a bearing on my practice is Francesca Woodman. Woodman and I share the belief that the photograph can be construed as a private expressive space.\(^ {29}\) The intimate composition of her self-portraits, the use (and isolation) of her body in those portraits, her choice of objects, and particularly her tendency to be drawn to ruinous
environments relates to my own preferential treatment of dilapidated, decayed ones, and inspired the collapsed farm shelter setting in *Torso*, as well as the intimate worlds depicted in *Satyr* and *Clam*.

Like Woodman, my earliest works were created within the confines of enclosed, vulnerable, intimate spaces. However, while Woodman’s subject matter centers on the vulnerability of her identity and body, as a young woman in relation to her environment and the prying eyes of the world, the vulnerability I depict in my work relates to the fact that my body does not necessarily conform to feminine ideals or appearance.

The intimacy and solitude in each of these early series allowed me to experiment with how I wanted to adorn my body with objects, or interact with them, away from my audience, as I wanted to become more comfortable and sure of my body and my performances in front of the camera. It is relevant to note that in these early works, I am engaging in a dual dialogue related to the environment, and objects outside my body. It is also worth mentioning the deliberate construction of these scenes, as each object within each of the images was picked carefully, and with due consideration.

### 2.1.3 Catherine Opie

Emotionally, I am also influenced by the photographs of Catherine Opie. Her work, particularly her queer portraits, address and explore the concepts of queerness, trauma, and appropriation, and their aesthetic was one I worked from during the production of *Buffalo*. What I found most inspiring about her work was her unapologetic vulnerability and willingness to document her own sexuality through her images. Her honest approach toward her subjects and their lives was one I attempted to emulate throughout my first series of works. I was especially moved by her self-portrait ‘Cutting’, which
involved a childlike, minimal depiction of two female figures holding hands, cut into her skin, highlighted by her blood. Her vulnerability was inspiring, and a starting point for the urination subject matter of *Poodle*. I also identified with her artistic stance of attempting to override conventional queer notions of sexual orientation as gender based and biologically fixed, and was moved by her proposal that sexuality is mediated, not compromised, by traumatic experience.\textsuperscript{33} This attitude was one I carried into all of my performances with the camera, and one I wish to emulate as an artist, and through my subject matter.

### 2.1.4 On Materialism

In her essay *Survey*, Amelia Jones claims that Modernism’s repression of the body marks a refusal to acknowledge that all cultural practices and objects are embedded in society, as the body links the subject to their environment.\textsuperscript{34} Butler claims that one’s environment is only accessible through language and discourse, however being in the world, there are aspects of my existence that I feel can only be articulated through art. It must be acknowledged that my environment and its contents do affect and inform my perceptions and art practice. This idea of body as liaison to environment is also a crucial philosophical undercurrent in my body-based self-portraits. In each of them, I am working with, around, and in spite of my environment, incorporating construction zones, sandhills, dilapidated farm sheds, snowed-in fields, bogs, tall grasses, snowdrifts and everything that informs those spaces, locally and biologically. As the series progressed, I learned to move and shift with the demands of the environments I worked in. I got braver, and began to test my resolve and comfort levels, in an attempt to depict the risk and discomfort associated with the dysphoric and dissociative feelings in my body. I also
enjoyed testing and pushing myself athletically, as illustrated in the notes following the production of my *Fish* portraits:

“The slough was located down a remarkably steep hill, but its depth provided enough of a cover that I could safely remove my clothing and still remain hidden from view. This private aspect of the terrain was what appealed to me most. I made my way down the hill, body pumping with adrenalin, and disrobed, wrapped myself in the netting, and gradually slipped into the bog water. All around me, the croaking of small frogs could be heard, leaves rustled, grasses squished beneath my torso as I moved, and the texture of the soft, slippery mud helped me temporarily transform into the creature I had hoped to emulate.”

The making of *Alien* also involved an intimate relationship with my environment, along with extensive surveillance of that environment, timing, and serendipity. Initially creating the scenarios I hoped to depict seemed unlikely, but one day, while out on the backroads outside of town, practicing light metering with the camera, a friend and I came across a construction site. It was late July, early evening, and a clear day. The sun was beginning to set. I traced its light across the area to a series of hills made of red sand. Over the next week, I monitored the traffic coming in and out of the area, then pinpointed a time in early evening, shortly after everyone had left. I put the alien prop in the back of the car, and drove out to the site one hot evening in July. When it was certain that I was alone, I positioned myself on the sand dunes with the alien prop, and gave my assistant specific directions to take shots at certain angles, and with certain light metering techniques. She would take a picture, based on my direction, and show me the results. We took close to thirty pictures using this method, and from those, I picked the best for my series.
Torso and Buffalo were two other portraits within the group that pushed me to my physical limit. In the case of Torso which was inspired by several of Francesca Woodman’s portraits in ruined environments, it was not so much the nudity or even my choice of prop—a foam replica of a severed women’s torso—that made me uncomfortable, but the environment itself provided me with a challenge that I did not foresee: the area was crawling with ticks. There had been a severe forest fire that summer and the air was thick with smoke as well, and after the shoot, I acquired a lung infection from smoke inhalation that lasted for several weeks.

Artmaking in this manner exhilarated me, and provided a means of grounding my mind in my body. While acting in and reacting to my environment, I could not disassociate from my physical self, and this forced me to challenge the feelings that I had pushed down in an attempt to conform to my social environment. While catharsis was not the intention in the making of these works, it was a pleasant and satisfying side effect.

The decaying, domestic, cluttered environment I chose to document my doll in was also an important factor in the composition of my photographs and represented my failed attempts to play house or fulfill female gender roles in my female coded body. In spite of my belief that language and the body are socially interconnected, the physical environment was ultimately the catalyst that shifted the process of my artmaking throughout my artistic evolution: I made the physical leap out of private, domestic, environments into public, natural, and more open ones in Points of Reference, and returned to a private space again in Conversation Pieces.
3.1 Melancholia, The Abject, The Monstrous

3.1.2 Melancholia: Butler and Freud

According to Butler, gender is a kind of melancholy.\textsuperscript{35} Freud’s definition of melancholy, the unfinished process of grieving, applies here.\textsuperscript{36} For when gender is examined through a queer lens, in relation to Freud’s definition, it becomes part of the ego. Further, that ego is based in the body, and is therefore sexed. To explain further, the idea of loss in relation to gender, and the grief surrounding that loss, is founded on societal notions of compulsory heterosexuality, and the prohibition of homosexuality, which cannot be openly discussed. Masculinity and femininity, Butler says, are therefore formed through identities which contain disavowed grief.\textsuperscript{37}

She asserts that:

“…heterosexual identity is purchased through a melancholic incorporation of the love that it disavows: the man who insists upon the coherence of his heterosexuality will claim that he never loved another man, and hence never lost another man. That love, that attachment becomes subject to a double dis-avowal, a never having loved, and a never having lost. This ‘never-never’ thus founds the heterosexual subject, as it were; it is based on the refusal to avow an attachment, and, hence, the refusal to grieve.”\textsuperscript{38}

In other words, for most of my life I have identified as female, for the reason that my culture has labeled me female, and also because my body reads female. However, I now feel that my ‘biology’ does not match my gender, nor can society express my genderfluidity. Because I live in a compulsory heterosexual society and lack the bodily means to read or interpret myself, I can never be all of who I am, nor can I fully express who I am bodily or otherwise. This idea relates to Cartesian dualism\textsuperscript{39}, namely the impossible nature of my genderfluidity’s expression, and the limitations of artistic...
depiction. The result is an underlying sense of grief and frustration, which pervades my identity as an individual and therefore informs my art process. However, this grief and frustration finds outlets through my art and its ability to exceed the norms imposed on the body while working toward the representation of my identity, and particularly through the use of camp and melancholia, illustrated in the contents of my photographs. It is also through my photographs and their contents (props, costumes, objects) that I can create a space where I am ‘allowed’ to dialogue with my genderfluidity, despite melancholia. While it is seldom safe to openly dialogue with one’s gender without consequences (homophobia, hatred, threat to one’s safety), my art provides the means to do so.

Melancholia played a significant role in the meaning of Fish. In the image, I sport a fish like mask, while laying on the muddy shore of a bog, wrapped in a net, surrounded by abundant green grasses and plants. I wanted to depict the conundrum of a creature that could not speak or function in its environment: a water oriented creature, beached and landlocked on the Canadian prairie. Melancholic undertones are also present in Torso as well. The combination of its brutal form obscuring my body as I wrap my arms around it, while staring protectively at the camera, conjures up the idea of a silent conversation, of an unuttered secret, or an unspoken grief or sadness. The severed limbs of the female torso, even though it is a foam replica of a body, ultimately suggests violence, and could point to notions of the abject and melancholia. The idea that I worked with during the shooting of the series was to create a space to honor that melancholia and the violence imparted on my female body, both physically and psychically. The setting for the series also carried melancholic undertones: a dilapidated cow shelter, off a dirt road on
farmland outside of Regina. The weather had worn it down to the ground, manure and grass had slowly rotted and created a clay-grass hill inside of it. At just the right angle, sunlight shone through the cracks of the shelter. I scouted the area out after being tipped off by a friend, and felt it would be perfect for a private, if not eerie series. The torso is a violent looking object, one that points to the objectification and brutalization of women. To me, its brutality, if handled correctly, could carry a potent message. I felt an emotional connection to it immediately, and felt compelled to pose with it, care for it, cradle it, and shield it from everything that it signified. I wanted to project the concept of caring for the disembodied, brutalized genderfluid body, and even though I use the torso to cover my breasts and body in the portrait, I am still holding onto it. There is also a double meaning here: the idea of caring for the wounded rejected self, that I carry, that is forced to hide to protect itself that does not get the nurturing it needs or that is rejected and alienated.

The alien series came to me in a dream where I was trapped on the outcropping of a rock face. Far below were miles of red sand stretched into the distance that overpowered my vision. I felt a warm wind on my body and looked down at myself, realizing I was naked and vulnerable, isolated and alone. There was no sign of human life. I felt I was in danger, and that I would probably die. I remember straining my eyes, and attempting to cover myself. Not far from where I was trapped, I noticed some shiny fuselage that resembled a wreckage of some kind. And then I strained my eyes. They eventually fixated on a nearby form. It had human features, no mouth, no genitals, and its eyes were
wide open and motionless. The body was contorted in such a way, that its head was twisted backwards. Its eyes, black and expressionless, seemed to stare back at and through me, though the creature was obviously dead. I remember feeling a profound sense of empathy. Then I woke up.

Not long after my dream occurred, I happened to be researching objects on the internet, and came across a child-size alien prop. I looked at it, and instantly, a vision came to me: I was sitting in a red sand dune, with my arms wrapped around it, naked. I felt overpowered by a desire to create what I saw in my mind. I purchased it in early spring 2015 with the idea that I would find a way to create a series around it and my body, once the weather got warmer. I felt the alien in the dream to be a metaphor for my muted queer self. The notion of lying with it, photographing it, and putting it in a gallery for others to see made me feel less alone. However, I also believed that a photo series involving the notion or concept of alien could relate well to all forms of loss, and more abstractly, melancholia. I intended for the series to be an homage to my lost self, to the lost selves of all ‘alien’ humans, who do not fit or conform to what society asks of them, and who must kill off that self in order to exist or survive in the world. At the time, I also felt strong in my need to articulate the fact that an overweight female body needed to be showcased in my work, and I saw its depiction as a form of activism, against the conditioning I’d grown up with, and saw reflected in the media, online, in my environment and my research on fat activism, feminist theory, and the body.

I interpreted my dream as an allegory related to the experience of locating and identifying cultural melancholia in my psyche. Through the shape of the alien (the other)
and my desire to empathize with its dead body, I was able to find a physical way to confront and express the part of me that had to die in order for me to exist. Taking the confrontation one step further by transforming its essence into a physical object (the photograph) allowed me to actualize what is normally not discussed or invisible—the inability to allow ourselves access to the forbidden: melancholia.

Melancholia, I argue, also played a role in the misinterpretation of my mask and prop-related self-portraits by my audiences. In several of my end-of-year reviews, it was argued that, although the addition of masks, dildos, and props to my body provided an entry point into the surreal possibilities of other worlds, I had not accomplished my goal of complicating my body enough to reveal my genderfluidity. My body was often read as a distraction, or as a female body and nothing more. However, after reflecting on the phenomenon of melancholia, perhaps it was not so much that my body had ‘failed’ to represent me, but that viewers could not set aside the gender binary or disrupt their gendered selves and identities, in order to understand the metaphor behind my attempts at complication. To paraphrase Butler, because homosexuality is prohibited by our culture, a form of melancholia exists, and the unspeakable grief related to the prohibition of its existence is internalized and ungrievable. It appears that the issue of depicting my non-binary gender identity is complicated, not simply by the inability to fully represent myself in a physical way (and therefore be recognized), and the conundrum imposed by my sexed body, but my problem is also exacerbated by the inability to culturally disrupt melancholia. I would argue that Western culture’s prohibited beliefs about homosexuality, combined with the inability of viewers to openly disrupt their gendered
perceptions, means that the majority of viewers will approach my work without understanding their interpretations of it, because in most cases, they cannot. My work and its viewership is informed by the understanding that melancholia can never be disrupted, and I am obliged to recognize and work within this fact.

After all, how can a viewer interact with what my body represents in the work if they are unaware of the phenomenon of cultural melancholia? If a viewer is unaware of the culturally informed grief they are carrying related to homosexuality and gender, or the impact that grief has on their personhood or relationships to others, there is always a risk that what I am portraying will be misinterpreted. Further, without the language and discourse for such an issue to be addressed, cultural melancholia remains unacknowledged beneath the surface of our recognition and the Western psyche. Perhaps art is one way to confront and dialogue about this complexity. I remain staunch in my belief that it can.

In *On Narcissism*, Freud attributes the impulses of masochism and self flagellation, to the unexpressed grief resulting from melancholia, saying:

"it is not that one treats oneself as harshly as one was treated but rather that the aggression toward the ideal and its unfulfillability is turned inward, and this self-aggression becomes the primary structure of conscience: by means of identification [the child] takes the unattackable authority into himself"⁴⁰

Butler further elaborates on the impact of melancholia on the (queer) psyche, claiming that melancholia attracts the death instinct (the drive towards death and self destruction) to the super-ego (the conscience/critical self), creating regressive and self berating ways of being in the individual.⁴¹ This idea is especially relevant to my art practice and life;
for I feel that melancholia has been the driving force behind my inability to fully
actualize as a queer individual and has sometimes prevented me from being more honest
and ‘out’ with the world. More relevant here is that artmaking, and the series of works I
have created over the past three years especially, can represent, ground, dignify, and give
shape to the melancholia, death drive, and grotesque feelings I grapple with as a
queer/trans individual, thus allowing me to express the grief I deal with daily, in my
inability to represent myself in the world.

The grotesque sentiments I deal with in relation to my body are echoed in the aesthetics I
choose to exalt in my work, and even the feminine connection to the etymology of
‘grotesque’, stems from early misogynistic cultural meanings which reference ‘grotto’ or
‘cave’ in relation to the female body.42

3.1.3 The Abject

Julia Kristeva describes abjection as the feeling when an individual experiences, or is
confronted by one's ‘corporeal reality’ : a breakdown in the distinction between what
is self and what is other.43 One cannot touch on the phenomenon of the grotesque
without giving a nod to her essay The Powers of Horror. Through Kristeva’s
descriptions of the unspeakable forces that live in the mind, and her affective
descriptions and sensations of the lived-in body and its instincts, systems, and impulses, I
found my inspiration as an artist. In her rejection of the depiction of the abject as a
physical object, I found my creative starting point. Once identity transcends the sexed
body, once gender is not dictated by the body it inhabits, it has no grounding point, no
physicality, and the world according to that identity must be articulated outside of what
is assumed and gendered. Art fills such a need, providing a space for the emotional
undercurrents that arise from the need to articulate one’s self as ‘human’ through
objecthood. In the case of my art practice, giving my feelings and instincts a shape
through objects (photographs, sculpture) and physicality has provided me with the
validation that I am real, that my feelings are real, and that despite my invisibility, I
exist.

As I have articulated earlier in this paper, in my more dysphoric moments, where I am
disassociating from the discomfort of being alive and unable to escape how I am read as
a human being, I revert to the abject: my body feels like a sexless, revolting bag of meat
that I drag around and live in. In extremely painful moments I am overly conscious of its
physicality, from the amount I sweat, to the unevenness of my frame and its asymmetry,
to the amount of fat and body hair that it carries. In Poodle, I dialogue with my
overawareness, discomfort with female gender roles, and feelings of disgust. The poodle
is a symbol of coiffure, and immaculate grooming and I wanted to pervert that meaning,
and soil that image through the use of a poodle mask, my body, and deviant behaviour. I
painted my body white, then drove out to a field, drank several gallons of water, and
urinated in the snow repetitively, over the course of a four-hour period. This series, more
than others, relates to the abject, through its references to the body and urination. In the
image, I am crouched and obviously urinating in the snow, naked, covered in white body
paint, and wearing a white poodle mask. I again chose black and white imagery over
colour in this instance because of the textures and contrast it provides.

Artistically, toward the end of my program, I wanted to project my feelings of disgust
that I described above, amplify them, and render them into a physical object. But how
could I portray the need to ground my body? I decided to embrace my dysphoric
feelings, and felt a doll would be an ideal way to project myself onto an object. After all, dolls are representations of a human, and are associated with childhood. I felt such an object could refer to one’s feelings, but also referred to the formation and regression of the self.

The photographs in *Conversation Pieces* revolve around notions of the abject, highlighted by three zippers on the doll’s body in what could be interpreted as vulnerable, leaky areas: the chest, the abdomen, and the genital region. These areas could be viewed as orifices, portals, or openings related to body parts, organs, fluids, or genitals. Searching for objects that I wished to stuff into the zippered pockets of the doll was a visceral process. I let myself play and become childlike about what I could fit into them. I began with rubber figurines of insects, organs, hearts, butterflies, and babies, mixing icons associated with femininity with elements of the campy grotesque. Keeping with the abject theme, I also considered dildos, packers, added six extra nipples to the doll’s torso, and also engaged a pair of rubber breasts which could be strapped to the doll and contorted or removed. I added patches of hair to the genital region as well, after I consulted with a seamstress who helped me add the zippers to the form.

Being physically validated through my body is confusing because whenever I have had to confront other’s opinions about my body’s presence in physical space, I have always experienced a level of disassociation. My body feels disgusting. It is a series of sensations, a stumbling skin bag covered in the meanings of others that sticks to me, a receptacle holding a collection of comments continually fired at me over my lifetime, in social spaces. It is a breathing, smelly, oozing blanket, covered in sweat and hair, and
hanging flesh. I do not feel ‘sexy’ or ‘beautiful’ or ‘evocative’. These words feel manipulative, contrived, forced. When I must socialize, and dress my body to conform to what is asked of me, it is as though I am watching my fellow humans perform automated procedures, and relaying scripts that are to be carefully followed without question. I get praised for wearing a good costume, when the clothes drape on my body correctly. Yet I am told that I am awkward, that I look like a lesbian, and walk like a man. I am bullied and picked at when my body does not behave the way a woman’s is supposed to. When I look correct, people want to touch me. When I look incorrect, people shun and insult me. When I don’t want to partake in the social scripts and meanings assigned to my body, I am punished or rendered invisible, and must live with the subsequent consequences and feelings of that alienation, because I can never leave my body as long as I am alive. I am swallowed by, and trapped in my sensations and repulsion towards myself.

Kristeva’s visceral descriptions of her body and her overawareness of its functions relate to my own:

“A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay…without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands…I am at the border of my condition as a living being.”

Kristeva’s discussion on psychoanalysis and catharsis was also one of the foundational inspirations that led to the construction of the prop for my final series of photographs, *Conversation Pieces*:

“One must keep open the wound where he or she who enters into the analytic adventure is located—a wound that the professional establishment, along with the cynicism of the times and of institutions, will soon manage to close up…. It is rather a heterogeneous, corporeal, and verbal ordeal of fundamental
incompleteness: a "gaping", "less One." For the unstabilized subject who comes out of that-like a crucified person opening up the stigmata of its desiring body to a speech that structures only on condition that it let go-any signifying or human phenomenon, insofar as it is, appears in its being as abjection. For what impossible catharsis? … the corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us.”

Her discussion, which relates to how a patient enters analysis through a gaping wound of incompleteness, guided my thinking into how such a wound would be depicted, particularly in relation to queer melancholia, and eventually became the foundational concept of the doll I constructed, and whose conception was inspired by feelings of dysphoria.

3.1.4 The Monstrous and Monster Theory

Finally, the monstrous is central in my theoretical discussions as it has a great bearing on my art practice from both philosophical and artistic perspectives. In his essay *Seven Theses of Monster Culture*, Jeffery Jerome Cohen proposes a method of reading cultures through the monsters they engender and his allegorical analysis of the concept of monster can be easily applied to the meanings of both series of works in my exhibit. Cohen describes how cultural boundaries (temporal, geographic, bodily, technological) influence the construction of a ‘monster’—a categorical label which he claims as an extreme version of marginalization. In this light, the concept of monster can easily be connected to queerness, and through proxy, onto the subject matter of my artwork.
In the first series of photographs of Monstrosities, I complicate the reading of my assumed female body through the use of cultural artifacts—props, masks, sexual devices-- to become my own interpretation of a monster: neither human, nor animal, and like my gender identity, my monster defies classification. In part one of *Buffalo*, I stand straight on the top of a cattle ramp, on a warm summer day in July, imposingly over the viewer, and appear larger than life. My stance is strong, almost arrogant and masculine, yet my breasts are exposed, and my head looks like that of a caricatured bull buffalo. I aimed to complicate the depiction of gender as neither animal nor human. The energy my body and stance emits in the image is exactly what I was intending to portray.

Within the series, I also interact with several grotesque, monstrous props. In the four-part series *Portrait of the Artist Wrestling with Themselves*, I wrestle with a life size hairy spider. My body is naked, sometimes contorted, and suspended in dark, black, space. The spider prop is half my size, and represents the parts of myself that repress my identity in favour of keeping the peace. The female spider is always larger than the male, biologically, and so this battle or wrestling match that I document could be interpreted as me wrestling with the concept of my femininity.

Finally, in my second series of works, I create and document the monster that I have imagined in my own mind, connected to my disorientation, frustration, and feelings associated with dysphoria in my inability to represent myself in the physical world. According to Cohen, deviant representation is especially prone to being monstrosicized, because of its refusal to participate in the classificatory ‘order of things’.47 Hybridized
(queer) bodies become dangerous because of their ability to threaten distinctions,\textsuperscript{48} he says. And yet, he claims, it is through the concept of the monster that we can safely confront our fears and prejudices.\textsuperscript{49} The doll that I created and documented provides a vessel for these. It gives the dysphoric, disoriented feelings associated with my identity and body a shape, and holds them on my behalf, transporting their meanings and sensations beyond the limitations of my body, and transforms them into something outside of myself that might be legible, confusing, playful, and horrific.\textsuperscript{50} Through my art, I claim the monster as a means of articulating my invisible dilemma with the classifications and assumptions placed on my body and mind by the physical world. The monster, then, is the artistic vehicle through which I address the subject matter and failure of the gender binary in relation to my life.

I have never fully articulated my attraction to, or the need to work with the grotesque, and create ‘ugly’ art, but melancholia theory provides a hypothesis as to why I do. Being at odds with one’s body creates a sense of repulsion, depression, dysphoria, and disassociation. I try to create or simulate those feelings in my work, and in doing so, am able to express the grief I normally must refuse to openly discuss with the world, out of fear (homophobia) and to maintain a sense of safety. In my need to camouflage, I am not unique. In my ability to repress or silence myself, I am not alone. The need to hide in an unaccepting world is an issue for many LGBTQI people. Because I am an artist, I can give my silence a shape, and share that language, and the abstraction of myself with the world in an environment (the gallery) and claim that space as mine. In this context,
making art is a means of survival and provides my mute, invisible genderfluid self with an alternative vocabulary through which it can speak and make sense of the world.

4.1 Monstrosities: An Overview

4.1.1 Series One: Points of Reference

*Points of Reference* is the first of two bodies of work in my exhibition. Its contents represent the majority of the body of work produced during my program and an aesthetic shift in my art practice—-from a purely digital one, dissociated from my body—to a photographic, body-based approach. Photography is now my primary medium. I continue to evolve and develop my artistic and creative processes as I learn more about its technical applications, theory, and practices, applying those to the challenges of articulating my genderfluid body and identity as a gender studies scholar and art-based researcher.

The series was first conceptualized when I was charmed by the appearance and qualities of masks, props, and devices, and wished to create metaphorical works related to feelings of disassociation, melancholia, and dysphoria related to my body and gender through camp and dark humour. Some of the costumes and techniques I have used in my work are film related, and are meant to recall ideas of mise en scene or tableaux vivants, but they also relate to Artaud’s concept of the theatre of cruelty—a form of theatre that he hoped would unleash unconscious responses in audiences that were normally inaccessible.
Each photo series represents a phenomenological conversation between the object and myself. They were conceived in the summer of 2015, through a series of visions, sketches, backroad explorations, and dreams. With the help of an assistant, I was able to articulate exactly which angles and concepts I wished to portray, as I could not always take the photos of my body myself. The process was straightforward. I would be drawn to an area while driving outside the city, and stake it out. I would assemble my props and apply the GPS coordinates to the mapping software. We would arrive at the area. I would disrobe, get into position. Then I would suggest an angle, she would attempt the shots, I would advise, we would confer repeatedly, and I would keep the best images—the ones I felt to be the closest to what I was aiming for—to choose from. The self-portraits in *Points of Reference* arose from a yearning to immerse my body and self in the physical aspects of the prairie environment, as they have had a profound effect on me, my creative process, and my upbringing. I had spent most of my adolescence in Saskatchewan, and lived in the Regina area on and off for almost thirty years. I will also note that there is an immediate, stereotypical connection between women and nature that can be assumed in the work, however, I did queer that connection, through the props and costumes I used in my photographs, and that will be discussed throughout this paper.

### 4.1.2 Series Two: Conversation Pieces

The second body of work in my exhibition, *Conversation Pieces*, is an attempt to give shape to gender dysphoric sensations through the form, appearance, and texture of a handmade object.

This past spring, there was some difficulty related to the interpretation of my mask-prop self-portraits at my end of year review. It was argued that I had not accomplished my
goal of complicating my body enough to reveal my genderfluidity because of my inability to avoid depicting my identifiably female sexed body. Discussions of cultural melancholy aside, my spring review and its complexities made me reflect on the notion of representation, yet again, and after that reflection, I decided that the only way I could dialogue about my identity and my body, was to move beyond my body.

I decided to design my own prop to photograph. After grappling with the problems related to gender dysphoria, my body, and its representation for most of my program, I focused on the problem of depicting and describing my identity through the creation of an object: a six foot ambiguously gendered doll, made of quilting fabric, bound in twine, and covered in latex. I felt that taking the focus away from the problems of superimposing meaning on a female coded body, allowed me to have more freedom of expression in regards to my identity. This issue, of depicting genderfluidity, became the driving force behind the final series of photographs in my MFA graduate show.

4.1.3 Doll Making, Jay Prosser, and Theories of Transexual Identity

In the fall of 2016, I began to explore transsexual theory. The theories of Jay Prosser were my starting point, and led to the desire to explore trans theory further in my doctoral studies. Prosser’s claims that to name one’s self transsexual is to own one’s gender displacement and that transition was a symptom of the constructiveness of the gender/sex system\(^{54}\) were empowering and I wished to adopt them for myself. Applying these claims to my identity seemed to relieve me of the need to figure out how to relate to the gender binary, and helped me move beyond masculine and feminine ideals, and into a broader definition of myself. Using Elizabeth Grosz’s words, that the body is viewed as a conceptual blind spot in Western philosophical thought, Prosser claims the
body not as object, but rather a route to analyzing power, technology, discourse and language. Keeping this idea in mind, and feeling frustrated with the limitations of the masculine and the feminine, led to the conceptualization of Conversation Pieces. While Butler’s theories had given me the means to dialogue with gender through performativity, Prosser’s theories on transsexuality allowed me to transform my frustrations with the depiction of my body into an ambiguous, agendered object, a sculptural body: a doll.

Dolls are distancing mechanisms in photography and are often used as stand-ins for human forms. Additionally, they are intricately tied to the medium’s history through the work of artists such as Hans Bellmer or Louise Bourgeois. Inspired by Diana Thorneycroft’s transgressive photographs of doll piles, and the concept of the monstrous, I decided to plan what my doll would look like, and came up with several templates after studying the bodies of insects and cuts of meat. I wanted to remove my sexed body from the image, and create a more abstract representation of the issues that I had been addressing in my work.

I worked on the concept of dollmaking, after some lengthy research and conceptualizing, and began construction, over the summer and into fall of a grotesque doll that represented agendered/genderfluidness.

I researched a number of horror-based effects and materials that could mimic the appearance of rotting meat. Latex when applied to rough or inconsistent surfaces creates a slimy, viscous appearance that appealed to my senses and so I decided to incorporate that material into my work. I learned a few basic sewing stitches from a friend and through online tutorials I pieced together a six-foot-tall, pillowcase-like form, which I
handstitched, stuffed and assembled over a month. I added humanistic features—hands and articulated joints. However, something was missing, namely the appearance of fluidity, so I added another head and two extra limbs. As the form began to complicate itself, I returned to images of Louise Bourgeois’ fabric dolls, Hans Bellmer’s pubescent doll sculptures, and their references to the uncanny and the surreal as starting points. But, I wanted to move beyond the sexualisation of the body and into the realm of feeling related to disgust, disorientation, melancholia, and being at odds with one’s self.

I finished the doll at the end of October 2016, but I wasn’t satisfied, because the fabric was a brilliant white: too pristine for what I was attempting to communicate. While I planned to apply latex to its surface, it needed more complication. I felt a desire to contort its shape. I did some brainstorming in relation to my body and its limitations, and dialogued with the feelings and their residue from the spring critique related to my sexed body. I began to study bondage, specifically knots and rope related to BDSM practices. I began to tie the doll up, using rough twine, and over the succession of several weeks, managed to cover its body in entirety, with a series of knots. After testing the latex on several samples of twine and fabric, I coated the doll alternatively in latex, then spray paint related to bodily fluids and expulsions (greens, reds, yellows and browns), three times over.

When it was finally completed, I at last felt confident that I had conceptualized the confusion, disgust and sensation of being trapped in a body that couldn’t be related to. In a way, I had transcended my physical self by providing a body for the viewer to gaze at that was not mine, but that I had made. There was great satisfaction in the completion of this project, both conceptually and technically, and a desire to learn more about
techniques related to costume design, horror, and abject subject matter, which I plan to apply to future projects in my art practice.

I also felt the use of a physical object as a conversation piece within a photograph, or as a point of reference within the liminal space of genderfluidity, could help to ground the complexity of the queer identity-based concepts I was attempting to depict. Photography's capacity to both transcribe and distort appearances has engendered a wide variety of images that transform the figure. In particular, photographing in very close proximity to the subject allows a photographer to turn the familiar into images of bizarre and ambivalent references. The uncanny, grotesque appearance of my completed doll form made it an ideal subject for the camera to peruse.

Over a three-day span, I took over 200 photographs, choosing to document it in a campy domestic setting. I placed it on furniture and beds, stuffed the zippered orifices to overflow, and let the contents spill out as I snapped pictures. I let myself be vulgar, and playful, filled its zippered orifices with dildos and child’s toys, documenting, objectifying, observing, and producing images that I felt symbolized the confusion and war I have had with my body and my identity over my lifetime.

The results of my efforts are a series of works which are displayed in large scale. Through their depiction of grotesque and saccharine textures, they attempt to illustrate the complexities, conflicting sensations and sense of dysphoria and chaos I have experienced throughout my life that comes from being alive, in a body I never chose, in a world I can seldom speak openly in.
5.1 Beginnings

5.1.2 Foundations

I was accepted into the University of Regina’s Interdisciplinary MFA program in the fall of 2014 on the basis of digital collages that I had been building for four years. This work was fuelled by my anger toward representations of women’s bodies in the media. These constructed, photoshopped bodies which represented the skinny, hairless, pre-pubescent, youthful, white feminine ideal are a taken-for-granted part of Western culture. They were a source of my frustration. But they were also my inspiration for gender explorations.

My artworks were surrealist-inspired, anthropomorphic, hybridized forms of collage and digital sculpture. Their inception revolved around found and replicated photographs that I cut, re-assembled and combined in Photoshop. They addressed issues of anthropomorphism, photography, femininity, the female body, the internet, new media, and advertising. The works were well received by local audiences when I showed them at the Fifth Parallel Gallery in 2013, and their success propelled me to return to university. I had initially hoped to situate their contents within feminist, queer, body based, and media-based theoretical perspectives. I planned to adhere their subject matter to my explorations on the abject, Butler’s theories of performativity and gender, Foucault’s theory of repressed sexuality\textsuperscript{62} and feminist perspectives that studied the impact of capitalism on women’s bodies. After delving into aesthetic theory during my first semester, I discovered it was also possible to relate the products of my art practice to Philippe Lejeune’s concept of ‘palimpsest’\textsuperscript{63} (borrowed by Gérard Genette in his book *Palimpsests*); that texts (images) are constantly engaged in relationships with other texts and that those relationships are dependent upon the past, and continuous processes of
rewriting and reproduction. Lejeune’s theories about the interrelations of texts could easily be transferred onto the cultural meanings and psychological meanings of human bodies in advertisements. It was a good fit, but something did not feel right.

During the fabrication of my collages, I always felt uneasy. While I could not verbalize it, each time I assembled one of my works, I had to push aside a feeling of dissonance; a physical disconnect between my ‘cut and paste’ relationship to the media-imaged bodies of women, and my own female sexed body. The act of disassembling, and re-assembling bits of ‘bodies’, from my point of view, was violent. When I re-examined my creative process and my own behaviour towards those bodies, I became increasingly alarmed and disturbed. Without realizing it, I was replicating the violence and misogyny done to female bodies in Western culture and the world, under the guise of my art practice. I had internalized the violence that had been imposed on my body during my lifetime, as a woman, and rather than speak out about it, I was immersing myself, numbing myself out, and in essence, embodying the violence and oppressive treatment of women, that I was attempting to critique. I was not being honest with myself. As I reframed my process during my first few months of that first semester, I realized my naiveté. I felt like a hypocrite. Several weeks into my introductory classes related to feminist and gender theory, it became evident that despite my efforts to critique the well-trodden cultural path regarding the media’s treatment of women’s bodies, I needed to regroup, and reconsider my approach.

It was during that first semester, in September 2014 that Judith Butler’s concept of performativity dovetailed with my studies of art theory and a newfound fascination with
photography and the camera. I found myself rethinking my approach to artmaking, and
my work began to change shape.

In my directed study that fall, I engaged with the camera as an artmaking device. The
essays of Susan Sontag, Laura Mulvey’s psychoanalytic analysis of visual culture, Roland Barthes discussions on semiotics, Jeff Wall’s physical interpretations of the
history of the medium, and Alan Sekula’s theories about the human body and the
archive all resonated and helped me articulate my direction and my goals. Their
philosophies transformed the photograph from a taken for granted, readily available,
documentary-oriented object into a complex, politically charged, artistic one. These
theorists all played an important part in my development, and their works are still
touchstones in my art practice today.

When it came to actual interactions with the camera, I was stumped. I am not formally
trained, and that meant learning about the camera as I worked. Because I had spent time
consumed with altered photographs of female bodies, I decided to begin the task of
depicting my own. I felt that to make art honestly, I needed to foster awareness in
myself. Projecting my gaze outward was a form of self avoidance and allowed me to
disassociate from the discomfort related to my body. One day, I found myself in a
costume shop, drawn to a campy werewolf mask and a furry pair of wolfish hands.
Impulsively, I purchased them, went home, put them on and stood naked before my full-
length mirror. There, staring back at me, was a three-dimensional embodiment of what I
had been attempting to depict in my work for many years. I took a picture which was the
foundation for my first series of photographs, She-Wolf (Fig. 10). In that simple act of
documenting my body, I had articulated the subject matter of my art practice in a new way. More importantly, by playing and creating with my body through the addition of props and costumes, my body was no longer my body—it had become something fantasmic: a representation of a real object. I was no longer human, and I was certainly not a wolf. I was a human, attempting to represent a human-wolf hybrid.

The campy wolf costume in She-Wolf propelled me to create four more photographs. For Girl and a Mirror (Fig.11), which was based on discussions with Dr. Horowitz about the contents of her MFA show, Girl Before a Mirror (2000), I dressed in a gingham red and black checkered dress and a German Shepherd mask, and performed a series of lewd, obscure, suggestive acts before a mirror. I let the camera record me freely, and set it off at different angles, while it took shots in two second intervals. The resulting images solidified a performance-based way of working with images. In all, reflecting on my photographs, I deduced that the act of putting on the costumes had moved my explorations about female bodies from the outside of me (my environment) back into my body. While my explorations with image making began externally, they eventually migrated to my internal self. The frustration and tension I had been grappling with in the subject matter of my collages and the hypocrisy I struggled with and discussed earlier, were sated, and a new body of work began. Through the act of photographing my own figure, I began to transform my art practice from a virtual one into a physical one related to my body and identity.

My encounters and physical dialogues with the exaggerated, kitschy pop culture caricatures of werewolf and dog became the catalysts for more performative, body-based
portraits, involving masks, costumes, and other props in *Points of Reference*. Their campy contents were not about attempting to replicate the creatures they represented. Rather, they represented a failure to represent anything, or an unnatural representation of what they attempted to be: neither wolf, nor dog, nor human. It is through their campy unnaturalness, that I feel they succeed in representing confusion, and indirectly, the confusion related to my gender identity.

**5.1.3 The Role of Camp in My Art Practice**

Susan Sontag explains ‘Being-as-Playing-a-Role’, an extending of one’s self in sensibility, to extremes of the metaphor of life as theater. Her assertions can be woven through Judith Butler’s discussions on performativity which are covered, further on in this paper. Sontag’s assertion that gender is vulnerable to the sensibilities of camp because of its propensity for stylized exaggeration is worth noting, and can be applied to Butler’s discussions of drag and stylized gender which she is best known for, and which have inspired my creative process.

My photographs contain a variety of popular cultural references, related to props I applied to their composition and they are easily recognized entry points into my work. The alien that I lie with in two of my portraits, for instance, is a well-known trope associated with science fiction narratives. Animal masks like the buffalo, fish, and clam that I complicate my body with in three of the others are caricatures that anthropomorphize bestial characteristics and behavior, which I use to complicate the reading of my body.
In my satyr portraits, I created a human animal hybrid after acquiring a set of styrofoam Dall Sheep’s horns and was inspired to create a character who represented lust in a genderfluid way. In the series, I combined feminine pornographic tropes with feminine gestures and masculine icons (in this case, a dildo/packer) to create a humorous, campy take on my own sexuality.

On a deep level, camp possesses the capacity to provoke laughter. It exists, as author Scott Long argues, on a disparity between high seriousness and the absurd. In *Clam*, I aimed to complicate and humorize the reading of my body using a rubber clam mask. *Clam* is of course, a double entendre, slang for ‘vagina’ and I couldn’t resist posing over top of a mirror, exposing all of myself as a double meaning.

Long writes about the power of camp and its relationship to homosexual representation and provokes his reader by asking them to imagine him delivering his essay wearing a gold lamé cocktail dress, black pumps with three-inch stiletto heels, a raven wig, and a beaded cloche with peacock feathers. Long’s attempts to humour his reader throughout his essay are nevertheless overshadowed by a grieveable reality about homosexuality, which he talks about poignantly in the first few paragraphs of his work, and which sum up my art’s relationship to camp and my queer identity.

He states:

“...The purest form of oppression practiced against the homosexual deprives him of the minimal power even to threaten… In camp, he defuses by parody the devices of oppression... [it] imitates the oppressive mechanism only to expose it by forcing it to its extremes: the tragedy grows so grotesquely great that only madness can persist in the attempt to domesticate it... To take a blue feather boa, or a crime passionelle in which a matron mutilates her gardener with pinking
shears, as an absolutely serious thing, to devote to it all available energies of appreciation and understanding, is an act of mockery and defiance against the configurations of power that control the labels and signs of absurdity, that define as dismissable certain attitudes or products or lives. Camp assaults a society that presumes it knows what is serious and what is not. It strives not to imitate this authority in distorted form but to expose it explicitly as inadequate. Hence it does not merely invert the opposition between the trivial and the serious: it posits a stance, detached, calm, and free, from which the opposition as a whole and its attendant terms can be perceived and judged.” 74

From an artistic standpoint, the theatrical props in my self-portraits are camp, and relate to failed attempts at emotionality, or expressing one’s self honestly: in essence, I see them as failed drag.

As Long states, when discussing the reception of male drag by cisgendered audiences:

“‘The purest form of oppression practiced against the homosexual deprives him of the minimal power even to threaten…He is like a politician in a foreign country, at the mercy of a perverse interpreter: he cannot understand why, no matter what he says, his incomprehensible audience guffaws. Met by laughter, he cannot react as he would if met by fear or rage: any serious response can be defused by another laugh. His tragedy becomes trivial.’” 75

Drag can never become what it attempts to depict, and each of my campy props are mimicked, over the top representations that can never achieve a sense of realism. To me, each prop represents the inability to speak openly or clumsy attempts to express messages which are trivialized by their inability to appear real. The alien prop, for instance, is an overly exaggerated, clichéd, dead alien doll made of foam, sporting a painful expression, with a trail of plastic ‘saliva’ hanging from its parted lips. It is easily recognizable: its grey-skinned, large head, prominent eyes, and silhouette register immediately as Alien, and were borrowed from a variety of science fiction films and
depictions. The grisly, bloody, armless and legless female torso that I worked with is also easily recognizable. Both of these would be profoundly disturbing if they were encountered as living things. As foam props, they are replicas, but not living breathing entities: they are attempts at horror. At best, when I am attempting to articulate the confusion of being trapped in a body that I did not choose, and that cannot represent me, I am not heard, because the coding of my body muffles my ability to speak. I am not cradling an alien in my portrait; I am holding the idea of the alien. I am not clutching a violated female corpse; I am clutching a foam shape that looks like a corpse. My desire to express what I cannot be or become what I want to be (genderless/genderfluid) is drowned out by how my body is read. The foam props that I engage with in both of these photographs are metaphors for what is silenced or un-utterable by the societal coding of my body.

The same logic applies to a variety of masks I incorporated into my earlier series of self-portraits, which are caricatures or bestial tropes associated with animals, grafted onto my body in obvious and obscure ways. Their ability to appeal to viewers stems from their recognisability and relationship to mainstream popular culture, as well as their accessibility: their campiness.

6.1 On Queering the Female Body

As mentioned earlier, Judith Butler’s discussions of performativity, humanity and melancholia were instrumental in my ability to express and articulate myself as an academic artist. Additionally, Judith Halberstam’s discussions of Female Masculinity, and Sara Ahmed’s philosophies and theories surrounding queer phenomenology were
also foundational. My explorations within the first two photographic series that I created in the first semester of my degree, (She-Wolf, A Girl and a Mirror) are directly related to associations with the natural, and Butler’s theory of gender being construed as a repetitive series of acts, and are attempts at complicating these, and therefore my body. The two series also drew on feminine anger, domestic environments, and costumes, and these themes continue to resonate in the work related to my final exhibition.

6.1.2 The Notion of ‘human’

As Butler points out in Undoing Gender, the designation of ‘human’, and the physical qualities associated with what constitutes ‘humanness’ (race, the legibility of that race, its morphology, recognisability of that morphology, sex, the ability to perceivably verify that sex, ethnicity, the categorical understanding of that ethnicity) are so intricately woven into our societal fabric and social impulses, that we take them for granted. Butler explains that people who do not fit the physical description of the ideal human are recognized as less than human and punished accordingly by being deemed unqualified to live. One need only glance at their social media feed to witness the vast amount of crimes inflicted on transgender, gay, lesbian, and queer individuals to confirm her point: society punishes, fetishizes, and obliterates those who do not ‘do’ their gender right. As Jasbir K. Puar echoes, queer bodies are culturally synonymised with death, through their relationship to the AIDS epidemic, homophobia, and notions of deviance, and perversion.

The concept of ‘doing gender’ refers to the Butlerian notion of performativity: gender is established and reinforced through a series of stylized acts (bodily gestures, movements,
styles) which create the illusion of an abiding gendered self. Such a self is not authentic, but a constructed identity, seen as an accomplishment, which we all come to believe and perform throughout our lives. Thus, continual performance is naturalized and relates to definitions of sex and the body, and is socially defined as gender. Butler claims that sex cannot exist outside of gender, that there is no ‘natural’ body. Gender is a verb rather than a noun, a ‘doing’ rather than a ‘being’. It is the repeated stylization of the body through a set of repeated acts within a rigid regulatory framework that, over time, produces a ‘natural’ substance, and is a performance that is continually being done: in short, the subject doing it does not pre-exist the deed.

Further, Butler claims that we assume gender to be a stable identity, a taken-for-granted, cultural fulcrum which relates to various acts, when actually it is an identity dependent on time and the exterior space it is constructed in (culture, the world).

Several of the portraits in my Points of Reference series relate directly to my dialogues and experimentation with the concept of performativity. Inspired by Linda Benglis’s Artforum photographs of the 1980s, where she sported a giant dildo as a form of protest against the male domination of the art world and its advertising, Buffalo was performative in the sense that the props were meant to make the acts associated with gender visible, through the campy qualities of the costume. I intended to combine masculine, feminine and bestial physical aspects, in hopes of complicating the idea of gender in a physical and humourous way. As it is with all of my self-portraits, certain elements in the work were pre-planned: a buffalo mask, bright purple dildo and harness, learning how to mount a cattle ramp and stand still, and the angle which I created the
images from. However, there was uncertainty as to how the series would turn out. I did not visualize its contents before I created it. The idea was to conjure up a larger than life figure, who embodied elements of the masculine and feminine, that related to the prairie, and that flew in the face of the omission and invisibility, of queerness in the area.

Another aspect of the research related to performativity in this series drew from my acting background and involved applying what I had learned in my elective theatre classes to my works, alongside my growing knowledge related to the camera. In the case of Satyr, for instance, the images were taken as I timed the camera, then stood over it or by it, or put it on a tripod and snapped the image. Like Buffalo, the stances and poses were aimed to suggest confidence, even dominance over the viewer. To amplify the performance, I borrowed accoutrements and the luxurious settings of a friend’s house to depict the idea of a man-woman lavishly surrounded by decadence, in the prime of his-her virility. Angles and lighting were important experimental aspects of this set of photographs, as was the relationship of my gaze to the viewer. The more confrontational gazes and gestures (for instance I am lewdly grabbing my flaccid ‘penis’ and staring coyly at the viewer as I do so) are the ones that strike me as being successful. After all, the concept of gender ambiguity is still taboo, and my confronting an objectifying gaze when I present myself as a taboo creature, is a way of reclaiming power. From a performative perspective, the props in the series make the invisibility of genderfluidity tangible, and offer a means of exposing gender through their campy qualities, and humour.
Performativity fascinated me, mainly because until I had been exposed to the term, I had assumed that the gender I was assigned at birth was what I was. Or maybe I had never really allowed myself to think about my conditioning. Or maybe it was because, in my mind, I had failed miserably as a woman, because my conditioning didn’t seem to take: I hated makeup, high heeled shoes, dresses, had an aversion to feminine interests, had no desire to be a mother, and preferred men’s clothing to women’s. However, I had a body that could not pass as male, and nor did the fact that I wasn’t drawn to feminine pursuits make me feel ‘male’. In some instances, I had been labeled ‘male’ because of my tendencies, but I never identified with that label either. That being said, throughout my development and life, I had had boyfriends and girlfriends. The idea of performativity and gender, that is to say the idea that gender was about social conditioning, and had little to do with my body, and everything to do with the meanings ascribed and projected onto it was very liberating. It made sense. When it came to my art though, my body had limitations as to what it could portray. Ultimately, no matter what I decided to conceptualize, my body was still read as female. There was no way around it. I addressed this problem by translating the idea of performativity into my work. I decided to complicate the reading of my body through masks, props, and prosthetics in my self-portraits.

When I began graduate studies, I felt secure in my feminine identity and identified as a bisexual woman. I now identify as a genderfluid butch. My introductory writings echoed that security, and focused primarily on female bodies, and feminist artists. I drew from quotes, statistics, and information related to feminist author and lecturer Jean Kilbourne’s documentary *Killing Us Softly*, that addressed the impact of advertising on
Western women, Simone de Beauvoir’s theories about female social conditioning and women’s bodies, psychologist Mary Pipher’s celebrated volume *Reviving Ophelia*, which discussed the psychological complications and conditioning of adolescent women, and Kristeva’s explorations about the abject, among others, as the gender theoretical basis of my art practice. I hinged those theories and discussions to the film stills and camera work of Cindy Sherman, the self-harm and prop oriented performances of Marina Abramovic, the abject, confrontational style of Tracy Emin’s installations, and Linda Benglis’s poses with a dildo, all which confronted cultural female stereotypes through their bodies, while using props and objects in their work. I applied their attitudes toward the composition of my photographs, as explained earlier in my discussion. My exploration of photography and activism in my directed study in the fall of 2014 also acquainted me with the theories of Susan Sontag and the feminist self-portraiture of Sarah Maple, Suzy Lake, Claude Cahun, and Francesca Woodman. Each of these artists offered examples of how I could complicate the reading of my body from a feminist/queer perspective, and enrich my photographic composition. I found myself gradually moving away from digital representation that fall, into the realms of photography and depiction.

From a gender theory perspective, that fall (2014) also marked the beginnings of a deeper engagement with Butler’s concept of performativity. Over time, I found that the frustrations and artistic impulses I worked with in my art were related to my problematic relationship with the label ‘female’. In time, I began to dialogue with the gendered label female and found myself growing increasingly uncomfortable. Who was I? How did I
really feel about myself? As I pondered the concept of a new body of work, and the subject matter of my art over that first semester, I began to dig deeper and gradually started to excavate my identity as a woman. I kept journals and wrote poetry. I traced my footsteps back through time, to the first time someone called me ‘sir’. I was fourteen. My body had not developed at that point, and I could pass as a lanky teenage boy. Looking at the present tense photographs of my developed body made me twinge. Why? And why did I always flinch internally when anyone referred to me as Miss, Ma’am, or Mrs.? I worked hard to pay attention to my body and the sensations that arose as I made my photographs, and translated them into my work. This often led to bodily harm. For instance, in *Portrait of the Artist Wrestling with Themselves*, the physical duress required to work with the heaviness of the spider prop, over the two-hour long period of shooting, resulted in heavy bruising of my body. After the *Torso* shoot, I left the site covered in ticks and suffering from smoke inhalation. After the production of *Fish* my body was sun burnt and tired, and by the end of the conception of *Poodle*, I had terrible chills and snowburnt feet.

As I developed an ability to articulate the sensations in my body, through my work described above and thanks to the vocabulary provided by the gender theories I was studying, uncomfortable feelings arose in me constantly, to the point that I could not look at myself for long periods of time in mirrors or in images. What began as a stance against body shame, fat hate, and a promotion of girl power was starting to feel strange and vulnerable. My body was beginning to feel more and more like a costume and I began to disassociate. I no longer recognized myself. When I evaluated the ten series of
images in the *Points of Reference* series in the Winter of 2015, it felt like I was looking at someone else, and today, it still does. If I was honest, those sensations have been with me all along. As my discomfort grew, over the following months and through the course of my program, I eventually found myself grappling for a new label or way to describe myself and my art practice; there was no other option.

### 6.1.3 An Identity Crisis

My gender identity crisis was brought to light in the Winter of 2014 when I stumbled across a quote during my Sexualities class, articulated by Julie Hartman in her essay *Creating a Bisexual Display: Making Bisexuality Visible*, which claims that if someone’s sexual behaviour determines their sexual identity, then a bisexual individual can only exist when engaged in a threesome, containing a man and a woman.89 Hartman claims that bisexuality could only be represented through sexual behavior. After asking myself how I could ‘do’ bisexuality outside of the bedroom and sexual preferences, and upon reflecting on Butler’s concept of performativity and the words of Judith Halberstam, I decided that the word ‘bisexual’ did not encompass what I was attempting to portray as an identity. An awareness arose in me, that the binarized, normative male and female characteristics which I had portrayed and represented, and which I had grappled with for years and pounded myself against, were not so much factual, but instead were social labels. For the first time, I stood outside of them. I came to the conclusion, after making this realization, that the issue of depicting gender through self-portraiture needed more reflection, and eventually settled on the label ‘genderfluid’ to represent what I stood for in the world, after being introduced to Trans theory in my Sexualities class. It is
important to note that at the time that Butler’s theory of performativity was published (1990), the articulation of genderfluidity had not been conceived. Butler acknowledges this in her latest introduction to the book, along with the fact that she would have addressed transgender and multiple gendered identities, were she to rewrite it today. 

I am fluid and not represented fully by the limitations of my body. I do enjoy working with what are perceived to be ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ ideals and representations through my manner of dress, and even my mannerisms. This aspect of my character is clearly depicted through my choice of camp-related aesthetic in the objects and masks that I work with in my photographs. The articulation of my gender identity and the subject matter of my artwork are interchangeable and interlinked. I am still coming to terms with, and moving away from the gender binary in my attempts to depict and represent myself physically, but am also considerate of and frustrated by the limitations of my body and how it is read.

7.1 Key Gender Theorists, Influences

7.1.2 Judith Halberstam and Female Masculinity

Judith Halberstam claims that very little has been written about the depiction of female masculinity and moves toward defining what it means through a series of discussions about different types of masculine women, across time, history, and in society. Halberstam’s aim, besides historicizing, reinvigorating, and articulating these invisible feminine masculinities was to separate and decode masculinity’s essence by looking beyond the dominant discourse of white male power associated with it, namely that masculinity becomes culturally legible where and when it leaves the white male middle-class body. This concept became the inspiration which led to the construction of my
doll in *Conversation Pieces*: how does one do gender outside of the body, and is such a concept even possible? My self-portraits, even through their attempts at being part-human, are ultimately bound to their readings by my female coded body and their symbolism, and the limitations posed by their contents made them challenging to describe.

I was especially taken with Halberstam’s research related to female inversion, a theory of homosexuality rejected by lesbian feminists, and later replaced by the gender androgynous woman-identified woman. The invert is not a synonym for ‘lesbian’ but a category of female masculinity related to biological women who felt at odds with the coding imposed on their bodies. The crux of the invert’s identity and her complications stem from the fact that she must constantly negotiate between her male identity and her female body, her status as female and her masculine bearing.

The notion of a masculinity beyond the appearance of ‘maleness’ and androgyny has always fascinated me. I also found comfort in Halberstam’s discussions of the female invert related to the character Stephen in Radclyffe Hall’s *Well of Loneliness* and the potent female-masculine energies described in her explorations of Anne Lister’s diaries. Both literary works, (and Halberstam’s critique of their contents) helped me to ground my body and identity in my photographic performances throughout my first series of works, allowing me to crystalize and project aspects of my genderfluid identity into my self-portraits.

7.1.3 The Well of Loneliness: A Study of Gender Dysphoria

In the case of Hall’s celebrated novel, written in 1928, it is how the queer woman Stephen navigates her gender expression that left the biggest impression on me. Her
wardrobe, her drive to cope with her dysphoria through her manner of dress, and her
fetishization of male clothing and mannerisms becomes her way of constructing gender
and spoke to me.\textsuperscript{96} Even more importantly, it is her relationship with her body, the
secrecy of her self-knowledge and relationship to her gender identity that struck me, and
helped me articulate the philosophical undercurrents of my body of work in my
exhibition.
The climax of the novel, which takes place before a mirror, relates to Stephen’s
masculinity, dysphoria, and alienated sense of her body, and echoes the feelings I
struggle with regarding my physical self, that inform my artwork:

“\ldots That night she stared at herself in the glass; and even as she did so she hated her
body... All her life she must drag this body of hers like a monstrous fetter
imposed on her spirit. This strangely ardent yet sterile body that must worship yet
never be worshiped in return by the creature of its adoration. She longed to maim
it; for it made her feel cruel; it was so white so strong and so self-sufficient; yet
within so poor and unhappy a thing that her eyes filled with tears and hate turned
to pity. She began to grieve over it...”\textsuperscript{97}

Stephen’s attitude toward her body mirrors mine. I tried to embody the emotions she
describes in this passage during my performances in the creation of my photographs.
Several times, I held this passage in my mind when I performed for the camera, and tried
to push it into my body, to attempt to capture the disconnect and pain I have felt while
attempting to articulate my identity, particularly during the creation of \textit{Alien} and \textit{Torso}.
However, its undercurrent and the feelings surrounding it remained influential
throughout the creation of all the photographs in \textit{Points of Reference}. 
7.1.4 The Diaries of Anne Lister: Sexuality and the Limits of Language

Anne Lister of Halifax, England’s diaries written from 1819-1826, recounts her relationships with a variety of female lovers, and describes the inconvenience of her physical limitations in relation to their bodies.\(^9\) She laments not having a penis and other times, she refuses to let her lovers touch her body. While she presents herself as androgynous and is often mistaken for a man, she sometimes still wears dresses.\(^9\) As historian Anna Clark puts it, Lister grafts her own desires onto the machinery of masculine desire in the absence of a functional model of her sexuality: to her, having a phallus was a symbolic way of representing her desire for a woman (and for male privilege) in a culture that gave her almost no other ways of representing a sexual lesbian desire.\(^10\) This notion, of using symbols to represent same sex desire, was one that I literally applied through the application of objects to my frame, namely dildos and packers in *Buffalo* and *Satyr*.

8.1 Phenomenology and Objects as Inspiration

I am obsessed with objects. In fact, my gravitation towards certain objects has become one of the foundational ways that I draw inspiration for new artworks. A love of objects, combined with a sensitivity to my environment are the main starting points for new creations which I incorporate into my art practice. I make art through my senses. In other words, I take a phenomenological approach to my environment, and this approach informs my creative process.

The term phenomenology, (interchangeable with ‘affect’), is sometimes viewed as vague and ambiguous.\(^10\) However, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy provides a
straightforward definition: that phenomenology is the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view.102

My material explorations and relationships to objects are instinctual and culturally informed. I always begin with my feeling self and relate to objects through their visceral ability to charm or affect me: in other words, their form, texture, appearance, colour, and their appeal to my creative self/unconscious. Over the course of my lifetime as an artist, the shape of the object may change, but my relationship to objects in my art practice has a consistent structure, and method, which I will describe further.

My artistic process begins when I receive or engage with an inspiring stimulus from my environment. In the past, I have kept my inspirational tendencies corralled to images rather than objects, as I have worked primarily as a two-dimensional artist, but in the past six months, as a result of some epiphanies related to my artmaking—namely a need to move beyond the constraints of how my body is read by society—objects and the creation of objects have become even more important to my process, as they offer more means for my body to dialogue with the world and social codes related to my gender.

The internet has been a constant source of inspiration in this regard, as it provides access to objects, costumes and images that inspire me on many levels. Additionally, my interactions on the internet and social media have served an important role in my coming out and the gradual articulation of my trans/genderfluid/queer self, which I do not always discuss in the physical world. Virtual spaces and communities provide opportunities for exploration and performance of one’s fluidity and identity, in ways that the physical world cannot. However, it can also be a space that is toxic and homophobic. As my
identity continues to shift, social media will likely become a more concentrated area for artistic exploration, particularly in my doctoral studies. My dialogue with the online world influenced the choice of objects that appeared in my self-portraits: for it is through my discussions with my online peers, and the information that I absorb there, that I become inspired, and open to new feelings, concepts, and visualizations.

I am moved by objects and when I am moved by objects I make things. I see my process summed up in Sarah Ahmed’s description of affect and phenomenology and the relationship of these ideas to objecthood. In it, she discusses how objects evoke feeling, and namely, emotional responses to objects: “A feeling can lift or elevate a proximate object”, she says.\(^{103}\) Ahmed also sums up how being affected by objects leads to art creation: “We are moved by things”, she says, “And in being moved, we create things.”\(^{104}\)

Once the object of inspiration is acquired, I experiment with it, and spend time with it. Over time, the inspirational object cultivates its own ‘personality’ as I work with it, and eventually my relationship with it becomes instinctual and visceral. As a way of keeping track of my instinctual responses to my art objects, I document them with my camera and those ‘documentations’ become my artwork.

My relationship with the objects in my photographs is best described through my process of choosing which ones would decorate and fill the leaky zippered orifices of my doll in *Conversation Pieces*. When I chose the plastic organs, rubber objects and knick knacks which appear in photograph #1, I wished to create a tension between the doll’s grotesque qualities, and the cheerful candy-like appearance of the objects that spill from its
orifices. In these photographs these items represent the feelings I have attempted to emulate in order to keep the peace and perform gender correctly in my environment. The rubber hearts, butterflies, and plastic gendered babies that are leaking from the doll’s body in the photograph were chosen with this in mind. I had found them several months earlier while shopping in a local toy store. I experimented with their forms and arrangements for two days, and photographed them alone, together, and finally in different sections of the doll, before deciding how to include them in my composition.

8.1.1 Queer Phenomenology: Object as Metaphor, Homing Devices

In the introduction to her recent work *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, Sara Ahmed dissects the subject of orientation and becoming orientated in the world through a phenomenological lens, and applies it specifically to the concept of sexual orientation. To queer the concept of orientation, she says, is to redirect our attention toward the less proximate, or that which deviates or is deviant. She claims that phenomenology is full of queer moments: moments of disorientation, the intellectual experience of disorder, the awareness of a contingency, and the horror with which it fills us. She also states that in order to become orientated, you might suppose that we must first experience disorientation.105

One way Ahmed claims to address the concept of disorientation is through the idea or memory of home and migration. Essentially, she proposes that through the concept of migration, that is, of becoming lost and moving away from home in order to reach a new one and arrive, we find ourselves. She discusses the phenomenon of “homing devices”, points that remind us of home or point us on our way toward our destination and our
arrival. I would argue that the objects I orient myself toward in my art practice help me find my way ‘home’, and lead me back to myself. Through my dialogues with them, they point me towards my perceptions, subconsciously and consciously, through their metaphorical and physical appeal to my being. It is through the process objects are made relevant in my artwork that I dialogue with in my environment and my art practice and that I make, which allow me to anchor myself in the world, despite my bodily/gender disorientation and dysphoria, and ‘orient’ myself in a direction. The objects in my life and my art point me toward my realizations as a human. They are touchstones on the journey, leading me ‘home.’

Ahmed’s discussion of orientation carries a double entendre within its meanings, in relation to my identity and my art practice. One aspect relates to the notion of how one’s physical body inhabits space, orients itself in relation to other bodies and social spaces, through direction, proximity, and distance. Secondly, orientation can also easily be applied to the physical duress of performing, of orienting one’s body to achieve a certain effect, or desire, or in the case of a photographed portrait, the idea of orienting and angling the body, the light, one’s face or physical aspects towards or away from the mechanical eye of the camera. A silent, abstract language emerges under these conditions, related to details in the image: the proximity of my body from the camera’s ‘eye’, the space created within the frame of the photograph, body language, and my relationship to the camera and my environment. The details, objects, and props involved in the composition of my photographs are meant to distill and highlight my
disorientation in the world, but nonetheless attempt to capture, through the ability to freeze or disrupt a moment, and objecthood, a moment in time, a sense of ‘I was here’.

9.1 Queering the Appeal of the Photograph

In her essay *In Plato's Cave*\textsuperscript{107}, Susan Sontag claimed that to photograph something was to situate one’s self in relation to physical space. To take a photograph, she said, was to establish a connection between the body and the world.\textsuperscript{108} It is from this philosophical vantage point that I will discuss my relationship to photography.

I do not claim to be a photographer, nor have I been trained as one. I am self-taught. I learned Photoshop through online websites, and managed to acquire copies from a variety of different sources over the past decade. My relationship to the camera is a visceral one. I follow my senses phenomenologically when I work, just as I do in other aspects of my artmaking. I have never been part of a club or organization that caters to photography. I have never worked in a dark room before, and while I did work at several processing photo labs, I can hardly claim to know the tricks of the trade. I did not arrive at the medium as a technician. On the contrary, I have much to learn about the behavior, processes, analysis, and language of photography. What drew me, initially to photography, however was its evolving accessibility as a digital and pictoral medium. To me, the camera is a tool that I can use to reproduce effects and visions that I experience internally and externally.

My attraction to photography is precisely because of the qualities that the art world criticizes about the medium— namely its universality, its immediacy, and its
reproducibility. Indeed, it was because of photography’s accessibility that I was able to return to academia and artmaking.

Through photography, I situate myself in the world. Through photography, I dialogue with the limits of the art world and confront my beliefs about those limits. Through photography, I mark moments in my life. Through photography, I reclaim myself again and again, through the act of documentation. When I take photographs, I allow my confusion and dysphoria, and the problematic relationship I have with my body: I validate my fluidity. In the act of taking a photograph, I look into the viewfinder and point the camera (both my eye and the viewer’s eye) away from or at my body and its assumed, ascribed meanings. The photograph can affirm these if I choose, or I can affirm my presence in the world by choosing what I photograph. When I make photographs, though, it is in relationship to what I capture in the lens. To take a photograph is to interrogate the relationship I have with my environment and the world, and affirm my existence. I root myself in physical space. A photograph is, therefore, an affirming, yet transcendent object. I am driven by my ability to look outward that affirms my presence: the social coding of my body can become irrelevant if I am photographing the world outside myself, but visible when I choose to photograph its dimensions. Another way to describe the agency of the photograph in my work is described in Dr. Horowitz’s paper concerning her MFA show *Girl Before a Mirror* (2000), when she states that in her exhibition, photographs allowed her “to create a paradigmatic self, open to being viewed, which is different from the space of being watched…outside of the photograph.”109 The photograph thus becomes a powerful way for me to address my genderfluidity. Within
the photograph, I can create a self that is different from my socially coded gender, tied to my body. In other words, I gain agency and visibility in the world through the creation of photographs and the manipulation of their contents.

One of the main ways that I deliberately manipulate my photographs is through the choice of whether to present their contents in colour or in black and white. Again and again, throughout the realization of my self-portraits, I have used black and white imagery to distance the objects and my body within the frame, from reality.

In *Fish*, I preferred that the series remained black and white, as that aesthetic captured the textures of the mask, my body, and the environment in detail, and removed the scene away from the physical world and into the realm of the surreal and fantasy. The *Alien* works are showcased in both black and white, and colour imagery. Those photographs that showcase both of our bodies in full are depicted in black and white. To me, the black and white aesthetic of those landscapes creates a separation from reality, and transports my body and that of the alien to another world, or the inner world of the psyche. Those depicted in colour are close ups, and relate more to facial expressions and interactions between the alien and myself. In this series, colour is an abstraction that relates to the silent conversation between the two of us, with the colours relating to life, emotion, and empathy. I intended to capture the idea of a dreamscape, or a fantasy beyond the physical world.
9.1.1 Other Theorists That Inform My Photographs

As Roland Barthes stated in *The Rhetoric of the Image*, photographs are not direct reflections of the external world, but rather a collaboration between the human eye and the camera.\(^{110}\) In other words, the photographer’s perspective, and the sociopolitical environment they inhabit, informs their photographs. Additionally, the photographer imposes standards on their subjects, making the photograph an interpretation (representation) of reality.\(^{111}\) Through this approach, all photography contains an element of the political and no photograph can be considered objective. To me, there are qualities about the medium of photography that fit my style of making work today, and more importantly, the act of taking a photograph, and its capacity to preserve visual information, while documenting human existence and life, it an ideal object for documenting and fixing queer lives, identities, and realities.

Jeff Wall claims that “Photography cannot find alternatives to depiction…it is in the physical nature of the medium to depict things…it can put into play only its own condition of being a depiction-which-constitutes-an-object.”\(^{112}\) Wall’s view of photographic depiction is a literal one, related to physical space. In contrast, my view of photography relates to emotional and mental states. In applying the concept of performativity to the act of taking photographs, though, there is still opportunity for dialogue on representation, namely regarding its limits on how the body is viewed or interpreted. Even if a photograph cannot move beyond physical depiction, and even if what it strives to depict (genderfluidity or gender stability) cannot happen or the camera may never achieve the aim, a performative study of the photograph can still produce
effective commentary on that lack of achievement. Through the depiction’s limitations, the photograph, as a cultural depictive tool, can expose the boundaries of representation, or disrupt cultural norms though its inability to depict what it cannot.

9.1.2 More Considerations

The photograph is a revolutionary object because to me, it is one of the few ways to situate the ephemeral nature of life within the realm of objecthood. It also situates itself well in digital culture. I feel it is a grounding agent in my practice, and as Alan Sekula has stated, a document of record.\textsuperscript{113} I can use the photograph to compose narratives, evoke emotions in the viewer, and explore the complexities of gender in a deeper, more meaningful way.

Photography allows a dysphoric individual to move beyond themselves. Viewing one’s self or perceptions from outside themselves allows for distance from the pain of being alive and having no control over the outside world, or its judgments. Taking photographs, in this light, is a transcendent act, one that can situate the confusion that arises from gender dysphoria, and the grief of melancholy but also, the camera, in its capacity to point its eye beyond the body, offers hope to anyone trapped in a body that does not represent who they are, giving that person power in a world that disempowers anyone who does not relate or conform to gendered perspectives. In this regard, photographs are more than captured moments in time, or objects that transcend death. In their objecthood, they offer hope, and in some cases, disrupt the sexed body and its meanings.
The photograph’s capacity to contribute to the archive, its ability to freeze time, overcome death, and hone the eye, or one’s sense of vision make it very powerful indeed. I also propose that the camera’s capacity to look outward makes it a tool of transcendence and hope: it becomes a means of projecting my agency. To take a photograph is to project one’s eye beyond one’s stance in the environment, and perhaps even beyond the body. The simple act of pointing the camera in one direction and taking a picture, moves us beyond ourselves. When fighting with feelings of rejection, dysphoria, confusion, melancholia, grief, or any intense emotion that is difficult to process, the act becomes profound. Additionally, when I am alone and take self-portraits, and when I stare back into the mechanical eye of the camera, I am validating myself. I am taking my identity into my own hands. I am positioning it in such a way as to represent myself the way I wish to be represented, while I perform before it. Or at least, I can hope.

In spite of my optimistic view of photography and its more salient, refreshing qualities, particularly in light of my dissociative relationship with my body and my gender, there is always, with the surrender of authorship to my audience, the prospect of difficulty related to my photographs and their contents. In light of the repressed cultural melancholia not yet introduced to queerness in my society, and the inability/lack of language available to articulate it, (one’s inner life versus one’s social life) there is a distinct possibility that what I am trying to say may be muted, ignored, disregarded, or overlooked.
The subject matter of my photographs displayed in my exhibition may be seen as controversial. Nudity, sex, vulgarity, gender confusion, violence, the uncanny, the grotesque, and the monstrous are all part of their subject matter, and are aspects of human existence that I fear will be viewed as controversial. In some cases, the viewer’s eye cannot move past the idea of the forbidden, and because of this, will label the subject matter of my work perverse. Cleverly articulated perversion, when viewed through a discerning eye, can still carry an important and thought provoking message, however. Nevertheless, there is always a danger, one that is well articulated through Laura Mulvey’s treatise on the male gaze and film, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, that the viewer’s eye will fetishize the contents of a controversial work. In particular, Mulvey discusses the Freudian term scopophilia, where the viewer of an image takes other people in as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze. Mulvey’s discussions relate to the patriarchal gaze in relation to the female body, but I feel the scopophilic instinct can also be applied to the visual relationship between cis gendered individuals and photographs of queer bodies and lives. In light of this instinct, the fetishization of queer images in a heteronormative world feeds the eye’s desire to look and contributes to their fame. Scopophilia can be equated to voyeurism, not appreciation. In the case of my own art practice, the labelling of several of my portraits as ‘distracting’ by a panel of predominantly male members during a presentation last spring, further illustrates this point. I was to give a three-minute synopsis of my art practice at the university’s three-minute thesis competition that summarized my art practice. I chose to
include an image of myself with my alien prop, an obvious (though in my mind, hardly
titillating) nude, projected behind me as I spoke. I assumed, because the panel were
judging students on the merits of their practices, that a nude photograph, especially of an
unideal feminine body, would not be viewed as controversial. However, during the
feedback session, where judges announced the winners, I was told that my photograph
was distracting to the (mostly male) panel. The contents of the photograph and my nude
female coded body eclipsed any breakthroughs or discussions that it provoked or
promoted. Though I placed second in the competition, I felt that the element of
scopophilia played a significant role in the interpretation of my work. What resonated the
most for me in that situation, and what frustrated me significantly was that yet again, my
genderfluid identity was drowned out by the normative reading of my body. In other
words, not only was the work misinterpreted, but my identity was overlooked by the eyes
of my audience. I was still invisible.

Conclusion

I cannot subvert gender norms or through sheer willpower and force, enact them
differently, but perhaps knowing this is power. In the disruption that occurs through the
inability to embody myself, either in life or art, there is agency. In creating and
inhabiting spaces of ambiguity, fluidity, and melancholy through the making of my
photographs, I confront the impossibility of achieving, and the power of norms. Perhaps,
in the space of the impossible, I instead foster a space to grieve and break the silence
they are based upon.
My art practice is a carnival of playful grotesqueness, of beautiful chaotic mess, of revulsion, rebirth, and resolution. All of it represents me and ‘not me’, and this brings me joy and gives me peace of mind. As Cohen says in his discussions of the monstrous, times of carnival temporally marginalize monsters, but at the same time allow them a safe realm of expression and play. At last, I have given the feelings that have haunted me a space through my art. At last, I have a way to describe them through the language of gender and art theory. Through that language, I am empowered, and through that language, I can articulate the inarticulable.

While the completion of my exhibition does not mean that I have resolved my issues, I consider artmaking and the act of taking a photograph soothing compulsions that I am happy to embrace. Despite the world and its complexities, despite the struggles one endures to become visible in a world that erases and silences through omission, ignorance, and violence, there is always art, and through art, dignity.
Notes

6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Foster, 110.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
31. Butler, 139.
32. Butler, 139-40.
33. Ibid.
35. Butler, 142.
36. Ibid.
38. Kristeva, 10-11.
40. Kristeva, 27.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
50. Prosser, 13
55. Ibid.
59. Ibid.
67. Ibid.
69. Ibid.
70. Long, 54.
75. Ibid.
76. Ibid.
79. Ibid.
80. Ibid.
81. Ibid.
87. Ibid.
88. Ibid.
89. Ibid.
90. Ibid.
92. Ibid.
94. Ibid.
97. Ibid.
99. Ibid.
101. Ibid.

103. Ibid.


106. Ibid.

107. Wall, 255.


110. Ibid.


Fig. 1. Sarah Ferguson, *Torso*, 2017, 32 x 45” digital print.
Fig. 2. Sarah Ferguson, *Satyr*, 2017, 12.75 x 18.75” digital print.
Fig. 3. Sarah Ferguson, *Buffalo*, 2015, 45 x 32” digital print.
Fig. 4. Sarah Ferguson, *Alien*, 2015, 32 x 45” digital print.
Fig. 5. Sarah Ferguson, *Fish*, 2015, 32 x 45” digital print.
Fig. 6. Sarah Ferguson, *Clam*, 2015, 45 x 32” digital print.
Fig. 7. Sarah Ferguson, *Poodle*, 2016, 32 x 45” digital print.
Fig. 8. Sarah Ferguson, *Portrait of the Artist Wrestling With Themselves*, 2017, 12.75 x 18.75” digital print.
Fig. 9. Sarah Ferguson, #1, 2017, 36 x 48” digital print.
Fig. 10. Sarah Ferguson, *She-Wolf (#3)*, 2014, 8 x10” digital print.
Fig. 11. Sarah Ferguson, *Girl and a Mirror (Detail)*, 2014, 8 x 10” digital print.