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You are a Weird Bird.

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You are a Weird Bird.

Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Masters in Fine Arts

by

Natalie McLaurin

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Unless noted, all works are by the author.

Abstract

How a person is treated because of their gender is potentially very frustrating. I use bird plumage patterns to illustrate humans as animals and idioms in language to illustrate these ideas. The artworks by Natalie McLaurin mentioned in the paper are *You didn't see me*, *Untitled*. Nancy Horne, *Don't be such a Nostradamus Wild Beast*, *Don't be such a Nostradamus Man Beast*, *Don't be such a Nostradamus Air Beast*, *Don't be such a Nostradamus Domesticated Beast*, *Ballet Lessons*, *Throwing a Fit and Falling in it*, *Gravel Kick*, *Cocksure*, *Peckerhead*, *Mockery*, *Naked as a Jaybird*, *Naked as a Jaybird too*, *Naked as a Jaybird as well*, *Tennessee Trash*, *Tennessee Trash State Animal*, *the Raccoon*, *Beard Measuring Contest*, *Cockery Mockery*, *He needs me*, *Chaka Kahn thinks she is the mocking bird of babes*, *Territorial Peckerhead*, *Tennessee*, *Territorial Peckerhead*, *Bed-Stuy*, and *Territorial Peckerhead*, *7th Ward*.

Keywords

feminism, birds, idioms, gender, sculpture, fiber

I. Introduction

Everyone has something he or she hides from or wishes he or she did not have to deal with. It could be situations, people, or things he or she is afraid of: flying, spiders, crowds, strangers, the dentist, and failure. Difficult and complex situations like institutionalized sexism, racism and homophobia. I have a tendency to curl up in a warm blanket and sleep when confronted by things I do not want to think about like writing, the possibility of failure, or having blood drawn. We can only hide from these things for so long before we have to face them. A person can pretend they do not see what plagues them but any outside viewer with their eyes open sees them playing blind. My body of work is related to hiding from or trying to confront the ideas and situations I wish I could avoid. While doing this, I use repetitive processes to distract myself from the stressful idea at hand.

One of the things that I worry about is how people see me as a woman. It affects what jobs or abilities they think I have. My sculptures, drawings, videos, and prints use figures that either hide from gender stereotypes or confront them. Some of the figures express frustration in a comic way, while other figures appropriate male gestures of power. I would like to move beyond stereotyped understandings of gender to a more complex understanding. A move towards a way of thinking that can honor the legacy of craft techniques traditionally associated with women. A complex understanding of gender would allow people to move seamlessly from women's activities to men's activity that have been assigned by gender without questioning one's womanhood or manhood. The sculptures are figures in costumes designed to disguise human female gender attributes. I think that if no one can tell the gender of the figure, then it cannot be kept in that gender role. In *The Subversive Stitch*, Rozsika Parker remarks that society defines

these roles, not nature: “In other words, femininity, the behavior expected and encouraged in women, though obviously related to the biological sex of the individual, is shaped by society.”¹

The toys that you are given as a child are almost always gender specific. Boys are given cars and toy woodshops. Girls are given baby dolls and toy kitchens. Unless you have a parent that is actively trying to avoid these gendered toys, a child will end up with a clear message about what their gender role entails.

Humans have signifiers of gender in the proportions of their hip, waist, chest, and height, though these signs of gender are not absolute in humans. Some women are taller with broad chests. Some men are shorter with wide hips. One of the main ways I symbolize gender identity is through bird plumage patterns. In birds, gender is often signaled by difference in plumage and size. This plumage can make a bird stand out, but sometimes it helps it blend into the surrounding foliage. Birds are wild animals that are almost everywhere on earth with humans, even in an area like New York City with large areas of very minimal flora. I still see pigeons and seagulls in urban areas like Brooklyn. Scott Husband and Toru Shimizu write in their book about avian vision that “Birds are the most successful of the terrestrial vertebrates, found on every continent and in almost every ecological niche.”² The fact that everyone in the world sees these kinds of animals makes them universal to a human experience. Birds, additionally, are all over suburban areas in the landscaped gardens and woods around peoples’ houses. Birds can survive in this situation because they have the ability to fly up and away from predators or humans. A fox

¹ Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch* (London: The Women’s Press, 1974), p 3.

²Scott Husband and Toru Shimizu, “Evolution of the Amniote Brain,” in *Avian Visual Cognition*, edited by Dr. Robert G. Cook, <http://www.pigeon.psy.tufts.edu/avc/husband/avc2amnt.htm> [accessed May 23, 2014].

needs the woods to hide in, but a bird can just fly to higher ground, a tree, a tall building, or a hole in the side of a building to protect itself.

I work mainly with the plumage and patterns of male birds because they get to be the biggest, the strongest and the most beautiful. Also, most of their sex organs look more like those of a human female. They get to have it all. If they suffer from anxiety attacks and bouts of depression, it does not appear to effect their motivation to do what they instinctually need to do to survive. They are only thinking about what they have to get done in order to survive. They thrive by following their instincts, not rules, manners and ideas about what other people want them to do. Wild animals do not write theses.

II. Past to present

My undergraduate degree is in industrial design. While in that program, I was questioned about whether I actually wanted to be an industrial designer because I had an alter ego that I dressed as frequently. My projects would end up being costumes, or fake products, not functional designs. Once I was out of school, I realized I had a bizarre portfolio after my first interview. I had door handles made to look like legs with locks that were very genital-like. I had designed and mocked up a pants clip that would warn the wearer when your pants were low enough for your bottom cleavage to show.

After school I worked as a fabricator and art handler and was making things like appliqué wings from scraps of red cloth inspired by a cardinal that had been puffing up and flying at a window close to me at work. I participated in twenty-four hour shows put on by a collective I was a part of, but never called myself an artist. That is when I first started making bird creatures.

In an exhibit called “Inevitability of Failure: The Impossibility of Desire,” I showed the first one of the bird creatures, *You didn't see me* (figure 1). I made the appliqué wings for the piece after seeing a male cardinal fluff up at its reflection in a window. It thought there was another male bird, not a reflection. In its desire to be the dominant male it failed, and it attacked the reflection, trying to dominate itself.



Figure 1. *You didn't see me*, 2010, newspaper, tape cast of legs, appliquéd fabric, artist's shoes and pants.

The wings and legs came together in the sculpture as a late stage solution. I had also been working on a cast of my own legs wearing my sneakers and jeans. I made this after my roommate said, “I would like to warm his hands between my legs,” while looking at a cute guy at a party. She was very shy and I loved this sweet and sexual phrase that came out of nowhere. I had this idea that heat would radiate out of the crotch of the legs I had made. The appliquéd wings

and the legs felt incomplete by themselves until I put them together. I combined the submissive female desire with the boasting animal male desire. Both the cardinal and my friend were constricted by what was expected of them, so I made it look like the head and upper torso were trapped in the wall. My friend was constricted by her ideas about how demure she should be, and the bird was constricted by his animal nature.

I moved down to New Orleans in 2009. A friend suggested that I become a member of an artist collective, but I still was not calling myself an artist. It was only after I was curated into a show by a well-known curator that I started to think, “maybe I am an artist.” In retrospect, putting a name on what I was doing was frightening. If I was an artist, then I would be choosing a path that is not easy to navigate. There is no boss telling me what to do. I would be my own boss and I would have to create my own product and demand. I never wanted life to be stable and predictable, but being an artist is unstable and unpredictable. I would correct someone if they called me an artist for a long time. I was a fabricator and art handler with a hobby.

In the first year of my masters, I made clothing cocoons that hung from trees, *Untitled* (figure 2). The clothes were brushed with clear resin, with tape casts of myself as structure. I was thinking about life changes and what people leave behind. Clothing is specific to a time and place that will be over at some point. I had moved for the second time in my life two years before, had started calling myself an artist, and was about to get married. I was no longer a fabricator who lived in Brooklyn and was single. By resin-coating the clothing, I made it so it would not decay. I turned the clothing into mementos of an earlier time.

In my first year I also made a wing and leg figure, but this time it was based on my alter ego in college, Nancy Horn. Dressing as Nancy was a way for me to poke fun at the culture of

where I grew up in East Tennessee, but also a way of keeping in touch with something I feel very nostalgic about. That something is the lowbrow Tennessee woman. She smokes cigarettes at her job at the gas station and wears country western clothes. The wing leg creature, *Nancy Horn* (figure 3), had wings made of appliquéd denim with black leather fringe, dark jeans, and purple cowboy boots. The boots were cast in purple wax.



Figure 2. *Untitled*, 2011, clothing and resin.



Figure 3. *Nancy Horne*, 2011, cowboy boots cast out of wax, denim from thrifted jeans, leather fringe.

I also started making two-dimensional works, which I had not done since high school besides my college design assignments. The flat works were watercolors at first because that was my medium in high school, other than costumes. I also started making serigraphs on paper. It felt like a natural connection because I could print on cloth and had done so as part of sculptures before graduate school. I used the natural patterns of the animal I was basing the piece on and then added my own human pattern. During my second year of school, I made a set of prints based on a verse in Revelation 4:7-8.

7 The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature was like an ox, the third living creature had a face like a human, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. 8 Each of the four living creatures had six wings and were full of eyes inside and out. Without stopping day or night they were saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, who is, and who is coming."³

Thinking about an apocalypse or anything uncontrollable is a way of hiding and not thinking about present problems. The prints were of animals with an eye pattern. In the verse, the animals are full of eyes, inside and out. I made three prints depicting the animals in the verse, one of a lion, *Don't be such a Nostradamus Wild Beast* (figure 4), one of a man beast, *Don't be such a Nostradamus Man Beast* (figure 5) and one of an eagle, *Don't be such a Nostradamus Air Beast* (figure 6). All were filled with eyes. I also made a three-dimensional calf beast, *Don't be such a Nostradamus Domesticated Beast* (figure 7), to go with the prints. It was made of fake fur and had over a hundred taxidermy eyes all over it.

³The King James Bible, Revelation 4:7-8



Figure 4. *Don't be such a Nostradamus Wild Beast*, 2012, screen print

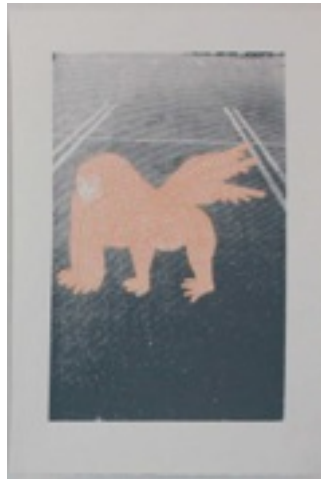


Figure 5. *Don't be such a Nostradamus Man Beast*, 2012, screen print

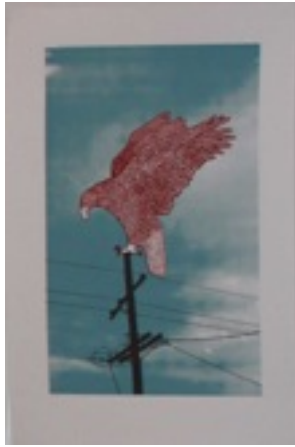


Figure 6. *Don't be such a Nostradamus Air Beast*, 2012, screen print



Figure 7. *Don't be such a Nostradamus Domesticated Beast*, 2012, fake fur, taxidermy eyes, photocopy, watercolor, cardboard

In my second year, I thought about two-dimensional work that could seem three-dimensional. I thought more about how to make the sculptures seem alive and made projections that were on the floors and walls, like *Ballet Lessons* (figure 8). The projections were videos of myself with my torso in a hole that I had dug in the ground or a hole that I had made in a wall. All of these projections used the wings I had made in the past, positioned like one of my leg wing sculptures. Then I started using the background material in the projection. For example, in *Throwing a fit and falling in it* (figure 9), I painted fake grass carpet white, placed it where the projection was, and then cut out a shape in the fake grass carpet where my body was projected. The video of grass was being projected onto astroturf. I also used this technique in *Gravel Kick* (figure 10). This time, the projection had gravel in it, so I covered the floor with gravel where it was in the projection, keeping it out of the area that had wings and where the body moved.



Figure 8. *Ballet Lessons*, 2012, projection of green screened performance



Figure 9. *Throwing a Fit and Falling in it*, 2012, video projection onto astro turf



Figure 10. *Gravel Kick*, 2012 video projection, fabric and gravel.

I started to think about how Nancy was really just a part of me. I had worked at a gas station in Tennessee, and I wished I had more of a Tennessee accent. I realized the work was all about me. The winged figures were really self-portraits. All but two of the pieces I had made in the past had been casts of myself. If I wanted to be more of a Tennessee redneck, what else did I want to be? I wished I was more confident. Artists need to be overly confident to keep going. At that point I made *Cocksure* (figure 11). *Cocksure* is a cast of my lower body on its knees in the position assumed by rock stars for guitar solos. Being on one's knees like that is the embodiment of both vulnerability and extreme confidence. It is not a strong position to be in, but playing a guitar with hips thrust forward shows how confident the guitarist is while playing. When a guitarist does this at a music show, the guitarist is commanding all eyes to be on him while he does something complex or badass. In the sculpture, the upper body is covered by a peacock tail made of many triangles, similar to a traditional acorn quilt pattern in the colors of a real peacock: shades of blue, green, and beige. Peacocks are known for their showiness. They are very vulnerable birds because of their fancy tails and small wings. Their instinct, when threatened, is to puff up their tail as big as possible to scare away a predator or other male peacock. The back of the tail looks like a shell because of the shape and also the feather spines that run up it. Some people use threatening tactics to feel confident; the peacock feels confident when acting threatening.



Figure 11. *Cocksure*, 2013, unwashed thrift store sheets, wire, foam, plaster, artist's shoes and pants

III. Description of Sculptural Work

In my thesis show, three figures form an awkward rock band. When they were all together, they were a singular piece with sound pieces that belong to each sculpture. They were spaced a few feet from each other and were making noises intermittently. The piece has periods of silence and periods of overlapping sound. One was on its knees, leaning back as if playing a guitar solo in a rock band. Its upper body was covered in a costume that looks like a peacock tail. The figure was wearing bright blue jeans and worn-in black high top Converse sneakers. Intermittently, an electric guitar played from the piece. It sounded like a cross between a peacock call and a hardcore band's guitar. The figure, titled *Cocksure* (figure 11), did not have a clear

gender. It had a very vulnerable yet open posture on its knees with its hips thrust forward. It communicated the idea of confidence and the vulnerability that kneeling creates, just like a guitarist playing a solo in front of the crowd with all eyes on him or her. My sculpture *Cocksure* was made with bed sheets from a thrift store. It was confident even with all the possible remnants of bodily fluid on it. The phrase also connects having a cock with confidence. The figure was leaning back with the upper body flat as if the arms are outstretched to the side. This is a very open posture, while in a compromised position on its knees on the floor. When a guitarist takes this position at a concert, he or she is very confident about the solo they are playing. The guitarist cannot check to make sure that his fingers are on the right strings or frets when his head is thrown back like that. It is a powerful position on his knees with his guitar as a penis extension. There is no equivalent to the expression “cocksure” that uses imagery of a woman's genitals.

Even with all of those weird undertones, *Cocksure* (figure 11) is humorous. It is brightly colored like a clown. The idiom “cocksure” is a funny phrase. *Cocksure* is soft because it is fabric, but sharp because it is made of triangles and armature wire that makes the tops of the quilt curve forward. It is humorous that the viewer might think someone is inside the sculpture, which is also startling. It is a *trompe l'oeil*, tricking the eyes, because the viewer thinks someone is there. To make the figure I spend hours casting myself in packing tape, filling that cast with expandable foam, pulling the tape off, then sanding and carving the legs down so they are smooth. I finally put my own pants, socks, and shoes on the legs I have made.

On the sheets, there are possible body fluids that people do not like to think about that make us like birds and other animals. The viewer knows this by reading the label that lists unwashed thrift store sheets as a material. Having poop on your clothing or costume is not

socially acceptable. Having semen on your clothing would be read as a person not caring about themselves or that someone else does not think much of them either. If a person has semen on themselves, another person might assume he or she is a prostitute, a trade that people associate with low self-esteem or drug use. We have all of those functions; we just do not do them out in the open in our culture. I think it is ridiculous to be ashamed of something that everyone does. There is some kind of happy medium between throwing excrement out in the street and being too embarrassed to poop in a public restroom. Women are judged for how many people they have slept with and men are congratulated. *Cocksure* wears the sheets that have strangers' exfoliated skin, liquids, and whatever else on them, and is proud and confident.

The second figure, *Peckerhead* (figure 12), is crouched, squatting down with its head lowered and its arms around its ears. Its patterning is similar to a red-bellied woodpecker and it wears a hooded sweatshirt, hiding the face. The costume on this figure almost completely envelops the piece; only the back of the head shows. The fabric is resist-dyed and uses a pattern based on Slovakian indigo dyeing, which is based on the shape of an egg. Real Slovakian Indigo dyeing uses woodblocks to beat a potato resist into the fabric and then it is dyed. The fabric has been quilted in the pattern of the feathers of a real bird. The viewer can see the feet and upper thigh of the figure between the tail and wings of the costume. The figure is wearing my old hot pink skate sneakers and dark denim jeans. Intermittently, a recording of someone playing a drum kit plays from inside the piece. This figure is not confident like *Cocksure*. Both are self-portraits but *Cocksure* is how I would like to be, while *Peckerhead* is closer to what I am sometimes. "Peckerhead" is a derogatory term used for dumb hillbillies. John Waters defines this

colloquialism as, “ a dumb white person, a hillbilly.”⁴ I am from the hills of Tennessee and sometimes I feel like a dummy from the hills that is insensitive or unaware. My great grandmother was from Slovakia, which is why I chose the indigo print look and pattern. It is also an area known for uneducated rural people. When I feel like a dumb redneck, I want to hide under something comforting like a quilted blanket. The sculpture is a self-portrait, so it wears the hot pink sneakers that were mine until they were worn out, and the pants are mine as well. Like the guitar, it sounds like a cross between the bird call of a woodpecker and a drum kit solo in a rock band. The viewer cannot distinguish much about the figure. The figure has a closed off and primal posture. The position is primal because it is the way you sit when you poop outside and also it is the way a primate sits. It communicates the ideas of protecting oneself but not seeing anything because of protecting itself. It is like the ostrich in the old wives’ tale, burying its head in the ground when threatened. The figure is not fighting or flying. It is just avoiding.



Figure 12. *Peckerhead*, 2013, foam, unwashed thrift store sheet hand dyed using a resist, wig, artist’s shoes, pants, and hoodie.

⁴ John Waters, quoted by Laura Miller, “Movie Interview: Peckerhead,” Sept 24, 1998, <http://www.salon.com/1998/09/24/int/> [accessed May 23, 2014].

The third figure is standing three quarters towards the wall with both hands up. It is wearing a knitted costume that has the color of a mockingbird plumage. The knitted pattern is Fair Isle. Fair Isle is a two-color knitting pattern where the knitter floats the yarn on the back of the piece instead of cutting to change colors. To be considered a Fair Isle pattern, the yarn cannot be floated more than five stitches. This Fair Isle pattern is used in each feather shape to further denote the barbs in a feather. The figure is wearing patched grey jeans and pink high top Nike sneakers and a gray sweater. The costume is positioned so the viewer can almost see the face. Intermittently, a voice is heard using vocal fry to sing birdcalls of brackish water birds, because they are the birds from the area, from within the piece. Vocal fry is a way of singing and making one's voice deeper and potentially more evil-sounding. This figure, titled *Mockery* (figure 13), has a more open posture than *Peckerhead*, but still not as open as *Cocksure*. The figure is standing forty-five degrees from the wall with its arms up. This figure could be thinking of flying or fighting, but for now is settling for hiding its face. It communicates ideas of protection, and like all three pieces, pretending to be something else to hide one's self. If anything, the piece is mocking its overdramatic self.

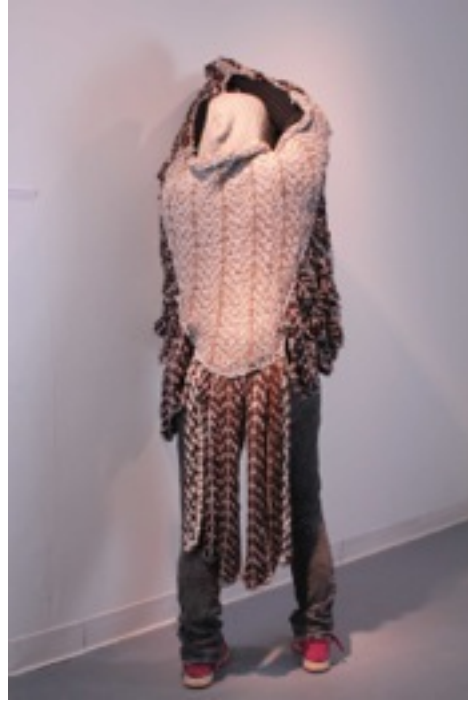


Figure 13. *Mockery*, 2014, foam, plaster, wire, mannequin torso, yarn from thrift store women's sweaters, artists's shoes and pants.

III. Birds

The drawings, *Naked as a Jaybird* (figure 14), *Naked as a Jaybird too* (figure 15), and *Naked as a Jaybird, Also* (figure 16), similarly illustrate this gender discrepancy through a relationship to the common male bird's lack of recognizably human male genitalia. They are drawings made with colored markers that depict blue jays. They have pursing lips all throughout their feathers, with the white of the paper used as background. This pursed lip pattern is based on the term "cloaca kiss." This is called a cloaca kiss because male birds have genitals more physiologically like human females and they mate by "kissing" or touching their genitals together for the sperm to travel to the uterus. Rather than typical feathers, these images replicate

the pursed lips of a kiss in repetition, a use of patterning that relates back to the sculptures' patterns. The birds in *Naked as Jaybird too* and *Naked as a Jaybird Also* are not complete. Only the body and the head of the bird are visible in *Naked as a Jaybird too*, and only the wings and tail in *Naked as a Jaybird, Also*. In removing parts of the bird, I am repeating this simplification by omitting its wings, tail, or body and using pattern to draw attention to the way it reproduces. I am simplifying it down to the way it looks and how it has sex. I see young women in the media being simplified down to these qualities. The majority of male birds lack a penis and this calls to mind Freudian envy. Freud believed that women were envious of men's penises because they lacked visible genitals.⁵ I think Freud was right that women are jealous of men, but they are jealous of their power and strength, not of their genitals. Some males in the animal kingdom get to be bigger and more beautiful, which I think is much more desirable than the way genitals function.



Figure 14, *Naked as a Jaybird*, 2013, marker on paper

⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex* (Washington, Public Domain Book, 1920) Kindle edition, p 37.



Figure 15, *Naked as a Jaybird too*, marker on paper.



Figure 16, *Naked as a Jaybird as well*, marker on paper

IV. Feminism, Craft, and Culture

Feminism, as defined by Peggy Phelan in the *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* catalogue, is “the conviction that gender has been, and continues to be, a fundamental category for the organization of culture. Moreover, the pattern of that organization usually favors men over women.”⁶ Feminism has been important in the art world since the 1960s. Irving Sandler writes, “Feminism surfaced in the art world around 1969, when women artists formed consciousness-raising groups in which, as Faith Wilding remarked, ‘each woman shares and bares witness to her own experience in a non-judgmental atmosphere.’”⁷ The prevalence of the use of craft in the feminist art movement was there from the beginning of the movement. Sandler explains, “Many women found that they preferred to use handicraft materials and techniques historically identified with women’s work.”⁸ Feminism is also very complex and has many different views on what it means and what its values are. Cornelia Butler writes,

Moreover, I want to assert that feminism constitutes an ideology of shifting criteria, one influenced and mediated by myriad other factors. Whereas art movements traditionally defined by charismatic individuals tended to be explicated and disputed through manifestos and other writings, feminism is a relatively open-ended system that has, throughout its history of engagement with visual art, sustained an unprecedented degree of internal critique and contained wildly divergent political ideologies and practices.⁹

Process and pattern are important in the work. The costumes the sculptures wear use traditional crafts like quilting, dying and embroidery; they are constructive in that they have

⁶ Peggy Phelan, quoted by Cornelia Butler, “Art and Feminism: An Ideology of Shifting Criteria,” in *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, edited by Lisa Gabrielle Mark (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, 2007), p. 15.

⁷ Irving Sandler, *Art of the Postmodern Era* (Boulder: Westview Press 1996), p. 114.

⁸ Sandler, *Art of the Postmodern Era*, p. 114.

⁹ Cornelia Butler, “Art and Feminism: An Ideology of Shifting Criteria” in *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, edited by Lisa Gabrielle Mark (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, 2007), p. 15.

shape because of stuffing and stitching, but are also flexible because fabric is woven or knitted.

By choosing the medium of fabric arts, I am continuing the work of generations of women before me and in so doing, honoring the value, relevance and importance of this gendered work.

It is gendered because it is associated with women's work and the making of a home. Parker states, "Embroidery, by the time of the art/craft divide, was made in the domestic sphere, usually by women, for 'love.' Painting was produced predominantly, though not only, by men, in the public sphere, for money."¹⁰ She also states, "But rather than acknowledging that needlework and painting are different but equal arts, embroidery and crafts associated with the second sex or the working class are accorded lesser artistic value."¹¹ Parker wrote this in 1974, but even now I have been told not to call myself a fiber artist because of the connotation that I am making quilts for loved ones and not sculptures for the public. Calling myself a sculptor is a better word to qualify myself as a visual artist. But by doing that, I am buying into a value structure that fiber arts are less valuable than other processes of making art. Parker writes, "The classification of embroidery is a difficult task. To term it 'art' raises special problems. Moving embroidery several rungs up the ladder of art form could be interpreted as simply affirming the hierarchical categorizations, rather than deconstructing them."¹² I grew up around women who were seamstresses, potters, weavers, and fiber artists. I think all of their work is valuable and I want to call myself something that makes me part of that group. In my work and life, I am continuing and honoring the skill set that encompasses most of what anyone needs to survive. If the world

¹⁰ Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*, p. 5.

¹¹ Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*, p. 5.

¹² Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*, p. 5.

loses power, I will still be able to clothe myself in preparation for cold weather. I value the importance of the homemade and the skill that comes with it. By using these traditional craft methods, I am physically connecting traditional female craft aesthetics with contemporary art.

My interest in using traditional craft as art is nothing new. Nikki Davis writes, “The interest in quilting that we see today has its origins in the turbulent years of the 1960s and 1970s, a time when many involved with the counterculture and feminist movements began to take up handcrafts. It was also during this period that the perception of quilts in the art world began to change, with them being viewed for the first time as art.”¹³ There are now quilt shows at museums, and whole museums devoted to craft and artists who use traditional craft processes in their work. Hanshew writes in her book about Montana quilters, “While the hippies of the day took up handcrafts as a reaction against mass production and consumerism, so too did many feminists who sought recognition for the contribution that women’s domestic work had made to society.”¹⁴ By using these processes, I am also rejecting mass production and continuing to recognize the value of the work that women did domestically in the past. These lines between low craft, domestic, and high craft, fine art, are still there, but major artists show craft-based work. In “Knit Dissent,” Julia Bryant-Wilson writes, “But within craft theory and contemporary art, the art versus craft divide is slowly eroding, even as there persist classed distinctions

¹³Nikki Davis, “Material culture and the rise of quilt indexing,” *Indexer* Vol. 30 Issue 2 (June 2012) : p 81.

¹⁴ Annie Hanshew, *Border to Border: Historic Quilts and Quiltmakers of Montana* (Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 2009), p 176.

between ‘high craft’ meant for institutional display (Rosemarie Trockel or Louise Bourgeois, for instance) and ‘low craft.’”¹⁵

My process and material choice of fiber connects me to the culture I grew up in. The Chinese artist Cai Guo Qiang uses fireworks because he is Chinese (figure 17) and fireworks were invented there. The Nigerian Yinka Shonibare MBE uses Dutch wax cloth because of its complicated history with Africa and colonialism, anti-colonial symbolism and class associations that do not translate to Europe (figure 18). Like many people who grew up in more rural areas of the United States, I grew up where the history of frontier life is revered. There is an abundance of craft at county fairs and as decoration in most civic buildings. As a child, I went to many old log cabins and looked at the quilts and baskets made by people who lived there over a hundred years ago. As I wrote earlier, I grew up around women who knew how to make everything and were willing to try new processes. Their interests were all in traditional crafts that are thought of as women’s work, but not necessarily women’s art. This connection and growing up where these skills are valued is what draws me to other peoples’ work and traditions.



Figure 17, Cai Guo Qiang, *Black Rainbow*, 2005, <http://www.art21.org/images/cai-guo-qiang/black-rainbow-proposal-2005?slideshow=1>.

¹⁵ Julia Bryan-Wilson, “Knit Dissent,” in *Contemporary Art: 1989 to the Present*, edited by Alexander Dumbadze and Suzanne Hudson (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), Kindle edition, p 245.



Figure 18, Yinka Shonibare, *Leisure Lady Ocelots*, 2011, http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/yinka_shonibare_mbe/.

Pattern is a key element in most craft processes. Pattern is very important to my work both in the mimicking of the bird plumage and the traditional patterns used in fiber crafts. The designs and patterns that I used for *Cocksure*, *Peckerhead*, and *Mockery*'s fiber wings are all based on the patterning of the plumage of those specific birds. *Cocksure* is based on acorn quilt patterns, *Peckerhead* is based on patterns used in indigo dyeing, and *Mockery*'s knitted pattern is Fair Isle pattern. Within these patterns, I used the Fibonacci sequence to decide how the triangles will get larger on the *Cocksure* or how much space will be between the two colors of stitches in *Mockery*'s Fair Isle. The Fibonacci sequence shows up in nature all the time. I am taking something that happens in nature, using it to design a pattern, and then applying that pattern back to a bird's plumage. Basing the patterns on sequences and patterns in nature allows me to be meditative and not question every step once the piece is designed. This meditative quality is brought up frequently by knitting enthusiasts. There is comfort in a repeated motion based on a

pattern, where I know what is going to come next. In the video *The Tennessee Trash State Animal is a Raccoon* (figure 19), I am out on the street at night in a large furry tube based on a raccoon's tail. In the audio I am singing a song from a public service announcement from the seventies that illustrated how littering is low class. Its lyrics include, "there ain't no lower class than Tennessee trash." The lyrics are meant to resonate with Tennesseans because no one wants to be Tennessee trash, especially if that is the lowest class of trashy people. The public service announcement is using shame to remind Tennesseans not to litter. I chose to use a raccoon tail because raccoons are the Tennessee state animals and they are nocturnal, so the video was filmed at night. Like birds, raccoons have adapted to living around humans and scavenging, so the video being set in a human space was also important. The comparison to a prostitute on a corner at night would be easy if you could see anything about me. But, all you can see are my shoes.



Figure 19. *The Tennessee Trash State Animal is a Raccoon*, 2012, foam, fake fur, artist's shoes.

I moved to New Orleans because of the prevalence of specific culture and pride in that culture, especially that of Mardi Gras Indians (figure 20). Mardi Gras Indian tribes parade a few times a year and spend hundreds of hours each year making a suit that they wear on Mardi Gras

day. They make these elaborate costumes to show pride in their tribe and culture. They hand-bead patches and sew lots of expensive feathers to their “suits” in order to be the “prettiest” on the days that they parade. *Cocksure* is the piece that is closest in shape to a Mardi Gras Indian Chief’s suit. The suits are beaded and feathered, while *Cocksure* only alludes to feathers. I want to feel connected to my own heritage and I do this by using a pattern similar to Slovakian indigo resist dyeing patterns, using Scottish Fair Isle patterns, and quilting which I would connect with Tennessee. By making things this way, I am continuing a connection to my grandmother, my mother, women who taught me how to do various craft processes, and many people I have never met who came before me. Unlike my grandmother and the generations before her. I do not knit things because I need to, but because it makes me think of those people and gives me a connection to them. Julia Bryan-Wilson describes this kind of crafting for pleasure rather than needs: “In other words, it had become more symbolic, nostalgic custom and ritual rather than an actual material necessity.”¹⁶ What they did has cultural value and I want to continue that culture of craft.



Figure 20. Tootie Montana, Mardi Gras Indian suit, 1991, Know LA website, “Tootie Montana,” <http://www.knowla.org/entry/886/>, [accessed October 21, 2014].

My grandmother would not have used the term “craft” for knitting blankets and darning socks because it was part of what needed to be done to stay warm or prolong the life of a pair of

¹⁶ Julia Bryan-Wilson, “Knit Dissent,” p 247.

socks. I try to keep with that idea by using the thrift store for my supplies rather than buying new yarn or fabric. *Mockery* is made of “reclaimed” yarn. I bought many sweaters of various shades of brown, gray, black, and white and unwound them. I then knitted that yarn back together to make the piece. The reusing of multiple women's sweaters references the mockingbird behavior of singing the calls of multiple other birds in its area. This sculpture is made of the sweaters of multiple other women in my area. The figure is trying to be all the women by wearing their clothing. Also, *Tennessee Trash* (figure 21) and all of my sculptures use my own clothing or something from thrift stores and they are paired with the casts of my own lower body so that they look real.

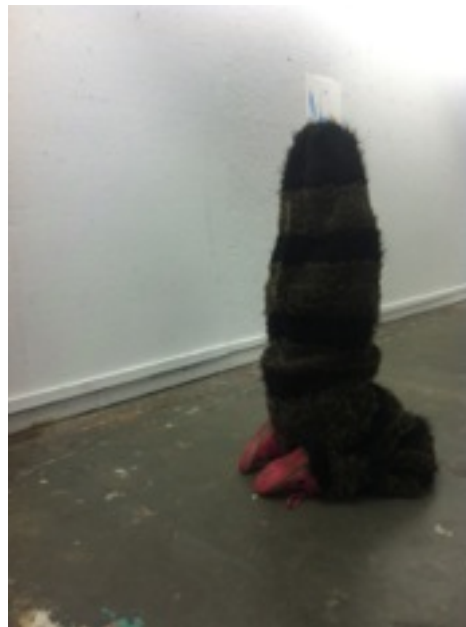


Figure 21. *The Tennessee Trash*, 2012, foam, fake fur, artist's shoes and pants

The values that I have were formed by my parents being second wave feminists. Second wave feminists fought for equal pay, The Equal Pay Act of 1963, for employers not to hire based

on sex, The Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the right to contraception.¹⁷ The quote on page twenty of this paper by Cornelia Butler from the *Wack!* catalogue is especially apt at describing third wave feminism because of its overwhelming amount of different opinions about what its issues are and who is a third wave feminist. My work most closely identifies with Catherine M. Orr's description of the issues with third wave feminism in "Charting the currents of the third wave."¹⁸ She states that the sense of individual empowerment is the weakness of third wave feminism because the society does not treat men and women equally yet. She writes, "Yet this feistiness also kept me asking questions, specifically about the limits of third wave feminism's emphasis on individual empowerment: how powerful is a sense of entitlement in a work (or any other) culture that has yet to recognize it? Is a sense of entitlement enough? Certainly the answer must be no."¹⁹ This sense of entitlement in a culture that does not recognize it is frustrating. *Beard Measuring Contest* (figure 22) is a reaction to this frustration of being told that I will be treated the same as men in life, and finding out that it is not true by the time I was a teenager. *Beard Measuring Contest* is a photo of myself with my long feminine hair braided into a masculine beard. Like all of my work, I am hiding my face in these photos, though only the lower half in this work, with my own hair. I am looking out at the viewer with glassy eyes and my head cocked. I am holding my hand in a loose fist with my fingers towards the sky. I chose this hand position because, as a child on the playground, I overheard boys asking each other to look at their nails. If a boy looked at his nails with his palm down and his hand flat, he would be

¹⁷ Britannica website, "Women's Suffrage Era," <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/724633/feminism/216009/The-postsuffrage-era#toc216008> [accessed October 22, 2014].

¹⁸Catherine M. Orr, "Charting the currents of the third wave," *Hypatia* Vol. 12, (Summer 1997), p. 34.

¹⁹ Orr, "Charting the currents of the third wave" p. 34.

ridiculed and told he was a girl. I internalized this experience and decided I would not look at my hand that way because it seemed there was nothing wrong with the fist and fingers up, but there was something wrong with palm down and fingers flat. I have changed the idiom from dick to beard measuring contest because I have used my own hair to make my own long beard. I want the respect that is associated with being a man, but still want to be a woman. But like the implication of dick measuring contest, it is a stupid argument. It is also a stupid idea this fake beard would give me respect or make me feel safer. A beard does hide a weak jaw line or skin imperfections. If I was a bearded lady, and I looked at my fingernails right, would I get to do whatever job I wanted, even if it is a “man’s job”?



Figure 22. *Beard Measuring Contest*, 2013, digital photograph.

In my video, *Cockery Mockery* (figure 23), I am wearing the upper costume part of *Cocksure* and I am on my knees thrusting my hips forward at the vacuum, the washing machine,

at one of my sculptures in my studio, and in my yard with a soundtrack of a guitar mimicking a peacock call. Like Rebecca Horn's *Finger Gloves* (figure 24), I am doing a repetitive motion, but unlike Rebecca Horn, I am changing locations. Also like Horn, I am changing the shape of my body, using costumes, which she did in different ways in the series *Berlin Exercises in Nine Pieces*. In the series she created nine costumes for different people including herself, and filmed them performing repetitive, sometimes ritualistic tasks. In *Cockery Mockery*, I am gender bending in that I am doing the dominant activity of humping rather than being humped as the female. In animals, like dogs, humping is a way to show dominance and power over something else. In dogs, it is also a way of acting out instinctive behaviors that no longer make sense with domestication. Most pet dogs are fixed, but they will still hump other dogs. In my video, I am showing dominance over the various places and things that I am humping on or around. Horn piece's *Unicorn* (figure 25) is also sexual in that the female costume wearer's breasts are bared and she has a horn or phallus on her head. The horn is not intended to be viewed as a phallus, but simply as an extension. Horn says in an interview that her "performances started out as body sculptures, based on extremities to create extensions."²⁰ In *Cocksure*, the peacock piece makes the upper body much larger. In *Tennessee Trash* and *Tennessee Trash State Animal is the Raccoon*, I am not extending the body, but simplifying it to the most basic shape. All of my pieces restrict extremities rather than create extensions for those extremities.

²⁰ Rebecca Horn, Germano Celant, Nancy Spector, Giuliana Bruno, Katharina Schmidt, Germano Celant, Stuart Morgan, *Rebecca Horn, the glance of infinity* (New York: Scalo Publishers, 1997), p 55.

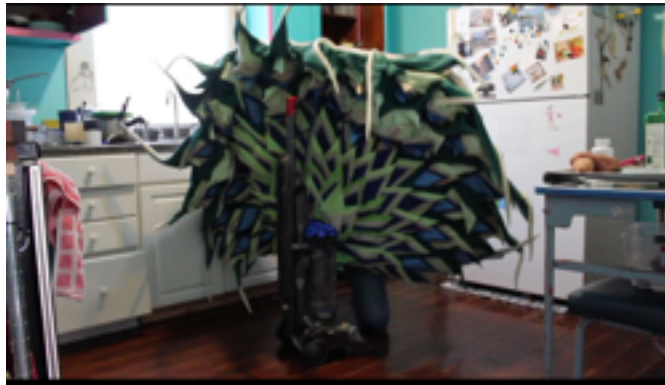


Figure 23, *Cockery Mockery*, 2013, HD video



Figure 24, Rebecca Horn, *Finger Gloves*, 1968, *Rebecca Horn, the glance of infinity*.



Figure 25, Rebecca Horn, *Unicorn*, 1970, *Rebecca Horn, the glance of infinity*.

V. Idioms and Language

Idioms like “piece of tail” informed the shape of *Tennessee Trash* and *Tennessee Trash State Animal is the Raccoon*. Most of my work is inspired by the slang word “bird,” used to refer to a woman. Women are called birds when one man is talking to another man or a man will be called a “bird dog” because he is trying to steal other men’s women. As a child I watched the 70’s british show, *Are You Being Served?*, and the actors used “bird” as a slang term for a woman, young or old. “Cocksure” is an idiom by itself, but *Cocksure* was also informed by the phrase “pea-cocking around,” which just means showing off. Looking at a peacock with its tail up, it looks like it is showing off because there is no logical need for a tail that is only a large ornament.

I use language like this as a jumping off point for imagery and sometimes because it becomes clear that there is an idiom that alludes to what I am trying to convey with a piece. *Naked as a Jaybird* is a title that came after the work was complete. “naked as a jaybird” means completely naked. The origin of the phrase could be about jailbirds or prisoners when they are stripped naked as they are admitted to jail, according to Vauxhall Alan.²¹ Another possibility, is that the phrase is rooted in the slang “jay”, meaning a hick. “Jaywalking” is something a person who lives in the country does in a city because he or she does not know the rules of crossing the street.²² So “naked as a jaybird” possibly refers to a hick getting swindled in a city because he or she does not know any better. The drawings are about being naked or somehow vulnerable, and

²¹ Vauxhall Alan, “Where does ‘naked as a jaybird come from?’” *Leading Britain’s Conversation*, <http://www.lbc.co.uk/where-does-naked-as-a-jaybird-come-from-8903>, [accessed October 20, 2014]

²² rafiki910, commented on “Where did the term naked as a jaybird come from?” *Answerology*, http://www.answerology.com/index.aspx/question/3202818_Where-did-the-term-naked-as-a-jay-bird-come-from.html, [accessed October 20, 2014]

how that can be used as an excuse to take advantage of someone. In the case of women, the less clothing she has on, the more it is socially acceptable to be objectified or treated badly.

Cocksure and all of my figurative sculptures always use jeans and sneakers. I do not want to objectify myself in my work and dressing as a tomboy works for that. My figures do not have to “dress sexy;” all the sex is in the plumage and not in the human part. The legs signify that the thing is human, but not the thinking end. They are covering themselves and ready to run. I want to talk about sex without having to undress or compare myself to a sex worker.

Beard Measuring Contest is a play on the phrase “dick measuring contest.” A dick measuring contest is a dispute between two people intensely arguing about something of little relevance. If either backs down, there is a fear that the losing party will seem to have a smaller dick or be weaker. Winning the argument is more about masculinity than who is right. In the photograph, the hand gesture I am using is an example of something arbitrary that is a signal of masculinity but has nothing to do with strength or ability. Men place great value on how big someone’s beard can get. It is a sign of masculinity and a rejection of being tamed. I write this because jobs frequently require a clean shaven face. And even if a man has a job that does not require a clean shaven face, not all men can grow a full beard.

These cultural idioms reveal our society’s attitude towards gender, among other things. Deborah Cameron states that, “Our metaphors are more cultural than natural; they also reflect the realities of power.”²³ Idioms and phrases that are used for masculine behavior are strong or competitive: “cocksure,” “dick measuring contest”. Idioms and phrases that mean weak or negative are based on female genitals or sexual roles, such as “being a pussy” and “that sucks

²³ Deborah Cameron, “Naming of Parts,” in *The Routledge Language and Cultural Theory Reader*, edited by Lucy Burke, Tony Crowley and Alan Girvin (New York: Routledge, 2000), p 215.

dick.” When we say these kinds of phrases, we are unconsciously reinforcing ideas about gender and power. Deborah Cameron continues, “...their linguistic manifestations emanate from a profoundly unequal culture in which the power to define reality has historically resided mostly with men.”²⁴ Because men have been in positions of power for so long, our language reflects that power. With titles like *Beard Measuring Contest*, I am poking fun at the absurdity of our idioms. Deborah Cameron states that continuing to use these kinds of phrases keeps our gender power roles intact, “This corresponds to the feminist theory that the very words we use in day-to-day living entrap us within the male psychic arena.”²⁵

“Don’t be such a Nostradamus” and “throwing a fit and falling in it” are personal idioms within my family. “Don’t be such a Nostradamus” is a phrase to use when someone is being overly negative about the outcomes of a situation. It is appropriate to use a phrase like this when illustrating the end of the world as described in the Bible. Worrying about the apocalypse is not helpful and coming up with negative possibilities of what will happen in the future is also not helpful. “Throwing a fit and falling in it” is similar to “biting your nose off to spite your face.” When I throw a fit and fall in it, I have made my problem worse than it was before. A child that does not get what it wants at the store, throws a fit, and then has to go home and does not get to go anywhere else, has “thrown a fit and fallen in it”. All of these are situations where a person can get lost in complaining about something and miss out on what he or she actually wants.

²⁴ Cameron, “Naming of Parts,” p 215.

²⁵ Dan Cameron, “Post-Feminism,” *Flash Art International* Issue 132 (February/March 1987), p. 82.

Like the feminist artists Yoko Ono and Carolee Schneemann, I am using my body as the locus for my work, but unlike them, I make a cast of myself for the sculptural work.²⁶ I use my old shoes and pants because the sculptures are self-portraits. To someone I might be a “bird” or a “piece of tail,” but I am more complex than that. Very few people are fond of being reduced to a quality like that. I am proud of being “Tennessee Trash,” but I do not want someone to think I am racist and ignorant. I think being Tennessean has given me a real connection and appreciation of nature because I grew up so close to the Smoky Mountains and East Tennessee has lots of trees and foliage, even in the cities. My father is blue collar and the jobs that I do are mainly also physical labor, though usually in museums, not the woods like my dad. Part of my attachment to “Tennessee Trash” is embracing the thing that someone could make fun of you for. Kara Walker uses exaggerated black silhouettes in her work *Pictures from Another Time* (figure 26). She beats you to the punch line by using extremes depictions of stereotypes of people of color. The standing figure has a bottom that is exaggerated to the point of absurdity. I am beating the viewer by just calling myself Tennessee Trash before they can. There are so many people that are so important to me that are part of my Tennessee heritage. Like my sculpture *Tennessee Trash*, I want to hide from that identity. But I still want the viewer to know it is me, and that is why I use my sneakers and pants. At this point in my life, pink high top sneakers are a signature item, so if the viewer sees me and the sculpture at the same time, it is clear that the sculptures are me.

²⁶ Cameron, “Post-Feminism,” p 80.



Figure 26. Kara Walker, *Pictures from Another Time*, 2002, http://www.klonaris-fine-art.com/dateien/artists/kara_walker.html.

VI. Hiding

Nick Cave is a contemporary artist who also creates costumed figures, concealing their identities. Cave says that he made his first *Soundsuit* (figure 27) in reaction to the Rodney King beating. In an interview with the *New York Times*, he explained, “It was a very hard year for me because of everything that came out of the Rodney King beating.”²⁷ He said, “I started thinking about myself more and more as a black man — as someone who was discarded, devalued, viewed as less than.”²⁸ While being a woman and being a black person in America are very different, in many ways, both groups are marginalized. The similarity between his work and mine is that we are both hiding identity to hide the trait that might be one of the most important qualities about oneself. Also, it is complex, frustrating, and sometimes frightening to reveal

²⁷ Nick Cave, quoted in Jori Finkle, “I Dream of the Clothing Electric,” *New York Times*, March 31, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/05/arts/design/05fink.htm>, [accessed May 23, 2014].

²⁸ Cave, “I Dream of the Clothing Electric.”

those identifying qualities when dealing with other people in society. It is sometimes frightening to be a woman, walking at night by myself. Going to the hardware store can be frustrating because I might be treated like I do not know what I am doing or be given unneeded advice. With my gender hidden, I have more freedom because no one can subject me to their ideas of gender roles because they do not know which one to push on me. In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger writes about how women cannot do anything without thinking about how she looks and how others will look at her: “Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at.”²⁹ I could think that women spend too much time on their appearance but when I listen to how critically they are judged by strangers and friends for their appearance, it becomes clear why so much time is spent.



Figure 27. Nick Cave, *Soundsuit*, 1992, <http://www.nashvillescene.com/countrylife/archives/2012/04/03/last-nights-art-talk-nick-cave-at-lipscomb>.

In the video *He needs me* (figure 28), I have my head and shoulders down in a hole while my dog walks around me in the yard. The work is about avoidance and references the myth that an ostrich hides its head in the sand if it gets scared. The soundtrack is a recording of me singing Harry Nielson’s song “He needs me,” which Olive Oyl sings about Popeye in the 1980 movie

²⁹ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1972), p 50.

Popeye. In the video, I am avoiding responsibility for the dog, while the dog does not seem concerned at all about my strange behavior. This video highlights the very silly nature of hiding in order to not deal with problems.



Figure 28. *He needs me*, 2012, HD video

That same hole is used in the projection *Throwing a fit and falling in it*. Except in this piece, the video is projected onto a corner of a room onto a piece of fake grass carpet. My upper body is hidden by a knitted piece that is based on a blue jay's wings and body. In this video the "straight man" is a cat that walks into the scene, but unlike the dog, the cat slowly backs out as the figure furiously kicks its legs. The piece communicates ideas of avoidance by throwing a tantrum to not deal with a problem and how ridiculous that looks, even to a cat. The projection uses imagery from the work I was doing before and when I first started grad school. Like the figure in the video projection, winged figures were on the wall or on the floor. They were

missing the upper halves of the body, made clear by the lack of volume underneath the fiber wing pieces, for example *You didn't see me*.

VIII. Territory

The piece *Mockery* uses the mockingbird's call of imitating other birds as does the video *Chaka Kahn thinks that she is the mockingbird of babes* (figure 29). This work communicates ideas of territory and the desire to be someone else, perhaps multiple other "birds." In the video I am wearing a helmet with fake blonde hair glued to it in such a way that it resembles Dolly Parton's hair. Dolly Parton never lets the public see her without a wig or full makeup. In the video, I bike through different areas of New Orleans. When pieced together on a map, these areas create a large "territory." As I come to the middle of the screen, the song "Every Woman" by Chaka Kahn increases in volume, as does my phonetic reading of bird calls on a megaphone.

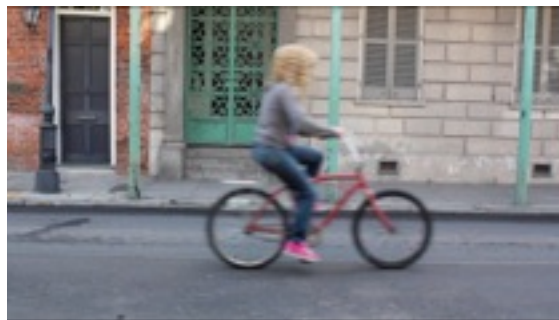


Figure 29, *Chaka Kahn thinks she is the mocking bird of babes*, 2013, HD video.

The three digital and screen printed pieces, *Territorial Peckerhead, Tennessee* (figure 30), *Territorial Peckerhead, Bed-Stuy* (figure 31) and *Territorial Peckerhead, 7th Ward* (figure 32),

also reflect on the idea of territory. Like the *Naked as a Jay bird* trio, the simplified serigraph of a red-bellied woodpecker is covered in pursed lips. This bird is printed on three satellite photos of the areas that I have lived in. The first image is west Knoxville, Tennessee, which is in the foothills of the Smokey Mountains. I was born there and lived there until I was eighteen years old. The second image is Bedford Stuyvesant in Brooklyn, New York. It was an area that was my territory but also was not my territory at all because it is a Caribbean neighborhood and I am a white lady from Tennessee. I lived there from eighteen years old until I was twenty-six. The final satellite photo is where I currently live in the Seventh Ward of New Orleans. Historically, this area was diverse, but during white flight after World War Two, it became a black neighborhood. Like Bedford Stuyvesant, some people might argue that I do not belong there because I am not like my neighbors. However, because of gentrification, this neighborhood is becoming more diverse once again. These works are dealing with the theme of territory and where I belong. The bird is positioned as if it is flying over and claiming a place as its own that its family is not from and it has no history there. These works are a metaphor for feeling awkwardly placed in a community but also trying to find territory in the workplace as well. On a social level, I am asking “what is my territory as a woman who is interested in fabrication and sculpture, two areas still largely populated by men?” When a bird migrates, it leaves everything it has gotten used to and has to move to a new place and create another home for itself. When a person migrates, he or she also has to find a new place and home for himself or herself and he or she might find himself or herself to be different than her or his neighbors and coworkers.



Figure 30, *Territorial Peckerhead, Tennessee*, 2013



Figure 31, *Territorial Peckerhead, Bed-Stuy*, 2013



Figure 32, *Territorial Peckerhead, 7th ward*, 2013

XI. Conclusion

In conclusion, my thesis sculptures, prints, and videos continue a tradition of hand craft. I use birds because they are the most commonly seen wild animals all over the world. Male birds get to be bigger and more beautiful than the female birds and do not have the genitals associated with being a man. All of these things together are meant to be both dark and humorous, gross and beautiful. *Mockery* has a stance with its body to the wall, face hidden, and it is making noises that leave the viewer thinking that the figure is unhappy. The sounds coming from the sculpture of someone trying to growl out the phonetic pronunciations of bird calls are humorous. *Naked as a Jay Bird* has beautiful colors and the shape of pursed lips is pleasing, but the viewer might be taken aback or grossed out by why I have chosen that pursed lip shape, the phrase for bird genitals and reproduction. All of the sculptures are trying to hide but do so unsuccessfully because the viewer can still see their shoes and pants, and sometimes heads and tufts of hair. These self-portraits are mostly self-deprecating, but sometimes aspirational. I feel frustrated with the way the world treats me, but I still know that I am more privileged than most people, which is mortifying when I think about it after complaining. That is still no excuse for men to treat me differently because they are privileged because of their gender. Sometimes it seems like it would be easier to call myself a dumb hillbilly and hide from or not think about all of these things that I should push against in my life because they are repressive to me or other people.

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Vita

Natalie McLaurin (b. 1982 Knoxville, TN) is the daughter of a logger and an architect/knitter. She has a Bachelors in Industrial Design from Pratt Institute. Hired for a two month stint as an art preparator for Prospect 1 in 2008, McLaurin fell victim to the charm of New Orleans. She moved permanently to the city in Fall 2009 and soon after joined Antenna Gallery. She is a founding member of the artist group T-lot and a board member of Press Street.