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## Snake Tube Adventure Racing... and More!

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Snake Tube Adventure Racing... and More!

A Thesis

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

Master of Fine Arts  
in  
Fine Arts

by

Jane Tardo

B.A. University of New Orleans, 2008

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## **Abstract**

My work revolves around using a specialized blend of art, design, and craft to interpret political narratives through fabricated products. These objects weave contemporary commentary and consumer indulgences into sculptural cultures. Each product is designed to mimic its own marketed culture—offering an enticingly tactile, interactive experience that is equal parts confusing, concerning, and delightful. The products are accompanied by investment opportunities in the form of popular, limited released merchandized objects, such as hats and patches. Using humor and subtlety, my gamelike installations explore arenas such as agency, autonomy, intimacy, and dueling realities in a time of ecological collapse and cultural reification. I also examine these themes in the construction of my ‘sock puppet’ tapestries. Present in my work are my own frustrations about the past, doubts on the present, and concerns for the future; however, I also strongly believe in a better world.

Keywords: fine arts, craft, sculpture, installation, interactive, fiber art, invention, late-stage capitalism, reification, spectacle

## interpreting political narratives

(an introduction)

In my work, I question contemporary ideas of agency, autonomy, intimacy, and dueling realities in a time of cultural reification and ecological collapse—or namely, Late-stage Capitalism. Annie Lowrey, with the Atlantic, summarizes Late-stage Capitalism as "... a catchall phrase for the indignities and absurdities of our contemporary economy, with its yawning inequality and super-powered corporations and shrinking middle class."<sup>1</sup> I find it difficult to look away from such absurdities, especially under the unexplainable reasons that drive myself and others to continue to participate in such a folderol system. In his essay "'Late Capitalism' in the Artworld: The Arrival of a Cliché," Art historian Kerr Houston discusses several reasons why artists are attracted to Late-stage Capitalism. [In order] "to distance themselves from the gaudy spectacle that is contemporary art," and "communicating a hope that a better world lies around the corner,"<sup>2</sup> are two of Houston's reasons that I most respond to in my obsessions with prodding this irreparable, solution-less system.

The gap between the rich and lower classes continue to grow, gender and race inequality has not been solved, the increasing evidence and effects of climate change on marginalized populations, failing education and infrastructure, the rising momentum of fascism and white supremacy, and the list could continue to go on of things that are "not fine." Being highly aware and sensitive of these troubling matters facing my generation and upcoming generations, I find it difficult to go about daily tasks as if "everything is fine," yet that is the narrative I encounter most when I attempt to vocalize my feelings of hopelessness and concerns for the future.

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<sup>1</sup> Annie Lowrey, "Why the Phrase 'Late Capitalism' Is Suddenly Everywhere." *The Atlantic*, May 1, 2017, accessed October 11, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2017/05/late-capitalism/524943/>

<sup>2</sup> Kerr Houston, "'Late Capitalism'" in the Artworld: The Arrival of a Cliché." *The Vocabula Review* 16 (2014)

In response to my hopelessness, I do not seek a complete avoidance of reality or escape into absolute nihilism (in which nothing is real, and nothing matters). To the contrary, my desire as an artist is to remain in a state of active nihilism and to push others into the same direction. In the *Revolution of Everyday Life*, author and Situationist philosopher Raoul Vaneigem describes active nihilism as combining “consciousness of disintegration with a desire to expose its causes by speeding up the process.”<sup>3</sup> The causes which he mentions is that of French philosopher Guy Debord’s *the Spectacle*; which is, as I understand it, the prepackaged, preordained, unauthentic living experiences offered as consumable goods, interactions, and organization under a hierarchical capitalist system.<sup>4</sup> I view the Spectacle, its causes and symptoms, as the topmost enemy of the world and I do not believe there is hope for the future without presenting a constant challenge to the Spectacle. Thus, it is my ultimate goal as an artist to prod at the Spectacle by creating my own reflections and satire of the Spectacle in my work.

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<sup>3</sup> Raoul Vaneigem and Donald Nicholson-Smith, *The Revolution of Everyday Life: a New Translation* by Donald Nicholson-Smith with a Preface by the Author (Oakland: PM Press, 2012), p.157

<sup>4</sup> Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secerts, 2014)



## Art, Design, and Craft

(craft consciousness and aesthetics)

My class and gender are unavoidable aspects of my work. Bluntly, women sewing have never been looked on with much favor and women crafting are often consigned to blue-collar assumptions of Etsy and art markets. Art historian Rozsika Parker adequately assess such divisions as “the division of art forms into a hierarchical classification of arts and crafts is usually ascribed to factors of class within the economic and social system, separating art from artisan. However, there is an important connection between the hierarchy of the arts and the sexual categories male/female. Craft became the unpaid art of women in the home.”<sup>5</sup> However, it is not my intention to continue pettifogging debates of art vs craft but to rather highlight the ways I use traditional craft methods and materials to establish aesthetical qualities in my work.

An important aesthetical aspect of my process is striving to use craft methods in a way that showcases the techniques and materials. Contemporary artist Grayson Perry describes well my sentiments: “A lot of artists are really bad craftsmen and most craftsmen are really bad artists. “ I try to have the best of both worlds, making things as well as I can and developing ideas that are chunky.”<sup>6</sup> Likewise, in my craft I aim to maintain a craft consciousness in which I try to be aware of the histories and stigmas of working with methods and materials that have predominately been associated with working class women, and thusly devalued.<sup>7</sup>

My methods using fiber derive from traditional embroidery, sewing, and quilting techniques. It involves a complex joining of thread and fabric using a range of interfacing and stabilizers. I also employ traditional sculptural methods in my work. I construct forms using chicken wire, paper mâché, and material infused epoxy compounds. Assemblage and

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<sup>5</sup> Rozsika Parker, “The Creation of Femininity,” in *Feminism-Art-Theory: an Anthology 1968-2014*, ed. Hilary Robinson (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), pg 236.

<sup>6</sup> Sarah Thornton. *33 Artists in 3 Acts*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2015. Pg 305

<sup>7</sup> Maria Elena Buszek, *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2011))

reductive methods are likewise found in the creation of my objects. The colorful fabrics, threads, and yarn I use are all carefully selected for their associative functions and ability to convey my narrative. Their colors, patterns, and textures contain and translate the intentional references to tragedy, pain, humor, and strangeness in relation to social, political, or personal perspectives of events that impact my life and work.

In *Touch-less* (Image 1), I crafted a new toy for breaking barriers of intimacy and communication between friends and strangers. It is composed of motorized parts, epoxy clays, machine and hand embroidery, and various textiles. The color choices of red, green, and yellow represent caution and uncertainty, while the textures and crafted visuals entice interaction with the conceptual theme.



Image 1. Jane Tardo, *Touch-less*

Contemporary artist Doreen Garner assigns important purpose and narratives to the wide array of materials used in her subject charged model and assemblage sculptures. In *Candy Coated Rain Drop* (Image 2), Garner fuses untraditional sculptural materials such as crystals, pearls, hair weaves, tampons, ribbon, and rubber bands in a revolting, yet intimate bodily-like specimen. Garner describe her process with materials as “... a high percentage of chance. I use many many mixed materials that are relocated throughout my studio and often forgotten. As I build new pieces, I rediscover the materials in new locations, and they begin to repopulate the works. At times the palette blends, and the works become incestual.”<sup>8</sup>



Image 2. Doreen Garner, *Candy Coated Rain Drop*

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<sup>8</sup> Doreen Garner, “Interview with Sculptor and Performance Artist Doreen Garner,” *She/Folk*, July 8, 2015, accessed October 10, 2018, <http://www.shefolk.com/creatorinterviewsrss/2015/7/8/interview-with-doreen-garner>

## contemporary commentary and consumer indulgences (sculptural cultures)

My work explores the creation of sculptural cultures around series of invented, fabricated products. These products are designed to mimic and satire traditional marketing techniques, in which, I believe, the idea is to influence its consumers to a particular idea or notion. I consider each of my series of products to represent a branded culture: it has its own logos, color schemes, and slogans. For example, in the case of *Spermalive* (Image 3), a line of dolls and accessories for men and boys that aid sperm carriers in the appreciation of their own life potential, the sculptural culture is aiming to address the inequality of bodily autonomy and reproduction rights within contemporary society. Much of my work follows similar themes of concern, namely agency, intimacy and dual realities present between differing opinions and interpretations of facts.



Image 3. Jane Tardo, *Spermalive*

My work on these lines of products is not finished; I continue to develop these ideas into a greater variation of limited editions and consumer indulgences. These indulgences

are intended to be commodified and sold to audiences in the form of hats, keychains, patches, and other popular merchandised items of fandom. This follows well with ideas from Guy Debord's "Spectacle of the Society," in which "(t)he proliferation of faddish gadgets reflects the fact that as the mass of commodities becomes increasingly absurd, absurdity itself becomes a commodity. Those who collect the trinkets that have been manufactured for the sole purpose of being collected are accumulating commodity *indulgences*—glorious tokens of the commodity's real presence among the faithful. Reified people proudly display the proofs of their intimacy with the community."<sup>9</sup>

Artist designed and self-imposed commodification of art as contemporary commentary has deep roots, perhaps most notable is Claes Oldenburg's installation *Store* (Image 4). In this early work, Oldenburg created with his sloppy, droopy, mocking wares a silly, yet remarkable commentary on consumer culture and the value of things versus the value of art.



Image 4. Claes Oldenburg, *Store*

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<sup>9</sup> Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secerts, 2014), pg 28



A more modern emergence of these ideas is witnessed in Skylar Flynn's *Two Thousand Words For Students, Artists, Workers, Owners And Everybody* exhibition at Jonathan Ferrara Gallery in October 2019 (Image 5). In this work, Flynn displayed numerous handmade, wooden, pop-artesque magazines, cigarette packs and interchangeable signs. These works hinted at political themes and enticed audience interaction through the hand-on nature of the objects themselves. In an interview with *New American Paintings*, Flynn describes his work as "eating fine art and shitting it out as advertising."<sup>10</sup>

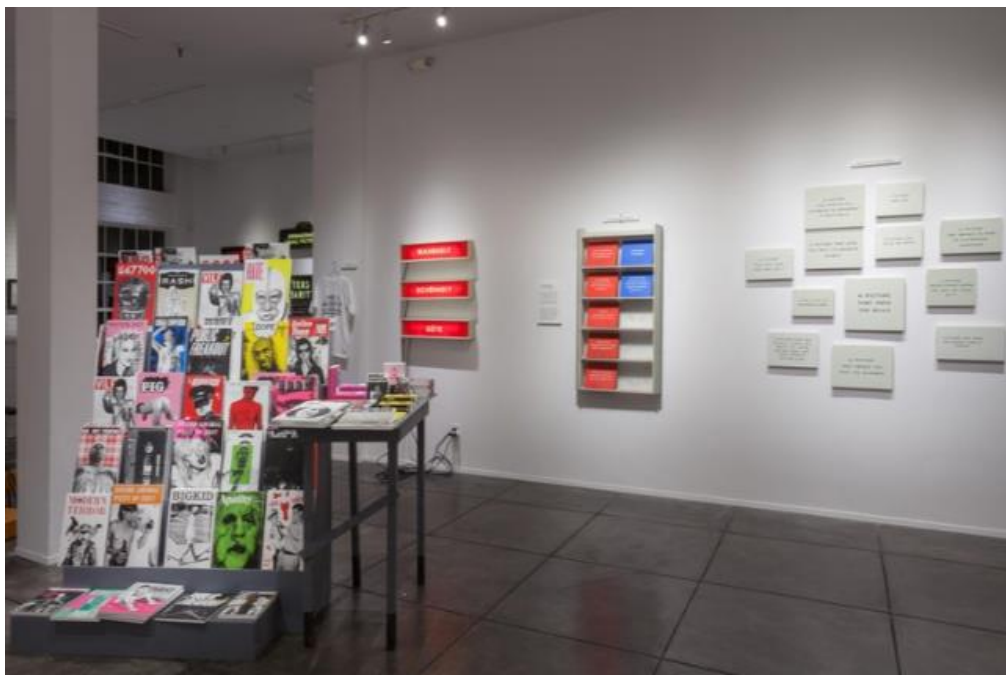


Image 5. Skylar Flynn, *Two Thousand Words For Students, Artists, Workers, Owners And Everybody* exhibition at Jonathan Ferrara Gallery

There is an undeniable ability in the ways absurdity and humor draws in an audience by manipulating the subject matter into something more approachable than a blanketed truth. It is in this appeal to the absurdities that I attempt to impact audiences with my work. I look towards the efforts of artists such as Meyer Vaisman's "turkeys." His

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<sup>10</sup> Ellen C. Caldwell, "SKYLAR FEIN AND THE DARK ART OF POP," *New American Paintings*, June 1, 2019, <https://www.newamericanpaintings.com/blog/skylar-fein-and-dark-art-pop>

comical, mixed media turkey sculptures eloquently jab at “complacent suburbanites and social strivers, polite conformists and trendsetting deviants, art aficionados and dedicated philistines.”<sup>11</sup> In *Untitled Turkey XVI* (Image 6), Vaisman assembles synthetic hair, bobby pins and ribbon on to a taxidermized turkey, the effect of which makes the audience laugh at the absurdity of the materials and scenario but also presents a powerful commentary on female objectification in beauty standards and advertising.



Image 6. Meyer Vaisman, *Untitled Turkey XVI*

Like Vaisman, Flynn, and Oldenburg, I combine materials and content humorously in order to make commentary around consumerism and advertising. In *Polly/Pauly Pumice*

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<sup>11</sup> Linda Weintraub, Arthur C. Danto, and Thomas McEvilley, *Art on the Edge and Over: Searching for Arts Meaning in Contemporary Society, 1970s-1990s* (Litchfield, CT: Art Insights), 206-207.

(Image 7), I used textiles, hand and machine embroidery, pumice stone, and found objects to create a new product designed for do-it-yourself genital exfoliation.



Image 7. Jane Tardo, *Polly/Pauly Pumice*



**confusing, concerning, and delightful**  
(ecological collapse and cultural reification)

Despite a nearly 95-97% consensus amongst the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that climate change is happening, human caused, and urgently concerning—only 42% of Americans believe that is happening at all. Furthermore, 78% of Americans do not believe there is a scientific consensus on the causes and effects of climate change.<sup>12</sup> According to the World Health Organization, climate change has already affected 11% of world communities and will continue to be responsible for the deaths and suffering of nearly half the human population of the planet if urgent measures are not taken.<sup>13</sup> Despite the science, warnings, and daily evidence of climate change, I feel as if myself and younger generations are doomed to live through a complete climate collapse. What would this world look like? As a survivor of Hurricane Katrina, it is not difficult for me to imagine and fear for the worst.

Concerned by the calls of urgency and confused by lack of action; I create whimsical and delightful 'Guilt Quilts' which are my ongoing series of sewn, quiltlike wall tapestries. In *Self-Portrait 1-3* (Image 8), I depict myself lassitude and inert in the face of sea-level rise, school shootings, and in my own inevitable destruction in a world that feels doomed.

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<sup>12</sup> Sander L. Van Der Linden et al., "How to Communicate the Scientific Consensus on Climate Change: Plain Facts, Pie Charts or Metaphors?," *Climatic Change* 126, no. 1-2 (June 2014): pp. 255-262, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-014-1190-4>, p.255-256)

<sup>13</sup> "10 FACTS ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND HEALTH," World Health Organization (World Health Organization), accessed March 23, 2020, [https://www.who.int/features/factfiles/climate\\_change/facts/en/](https://www.who.int/features/factfiles/climate_change/facts/en/)



Image 8. Jane Tardo, *Self-Portrait 1-3*

I admire the *apriladeras* (Image 9) made by Chilean women to document the horrors of life under the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet in the 1970s. The quilted work of these mostly unknown women brought international light to the scenes of daily dehumanizing actions of the Pinochet regime—an estimated 10,000-40,000 people were disappeared or murdered.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Nowell, Cecilia. "Chilean Embroiderers Record Memory Stitch-by-Stich." *Bitch Magazine: Feminist Response to Pop Culture* Spring 2017, Issue 74: pg 29-33



Image 9. Violeta Morales, *Unknown title*

I use my quilt work to approach and document the horror of real and imagined scenarios of climate collapse. In lieu of human figures, I use sock puppets as stand ins for victims, as a way to soften the visuals I am presenting and as a reified representation of the general disbelief and inaction of US citizens and policy makers in regard to the facts of climate change. In *Deaths in the Desert* (Image 10), I used a textile collage technique to construct a desert scene in which both U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers and migrants are experiencing troublesome circumstances.



Image 10. Jane Tardo, *Deaths in the Desert*

Through this work, I explore what I view as an internet fueled acceleration of a process of reification. Hungarian Marxist philosopher Georg Lukács describes the reifying process: “its basis is that a relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a ‘phantom objectivity’, an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people.”<sup>15</sup> I view this phenomenon as a new branch of reification, in which real humans have ceased believing or knowing the difference between objects and people, thus resulting in a disbelief of authenticity of the personal, often traumatic life experiences of others.

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<sup>15</sup> Lukács György and Rodney Livingstone, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (Aakar, India: The Merlin Press, 2016), p.83)

My feelings are gracefully echoed by historian Timothy Bewes: “A crust has formed between reality and representation—indeed, the former has been displaced by the latter, to such a degree that a world uncorroded by the image is no longer accessible. A ‘reified’ society is one from which meaning has vanished, or in which meaningful statements have become impossible.”<sup>16</sup> It is not uncommon to hear examples of this in political discourse: dismissing global migration as a hoax, disbelief in the science of climate change, accusing the survivors of school shootings to be actors, or delegitimizing sexual assault.

Specifically, I am fascinated by the trend of calling social media users ‘Socks’ and the effects this has had on both political rhetoric and our social landscapes. The term ‘Sock’ is short for sock puppet, which is when users in online communities create multiple accounts in order to manipulate the ways other users perceive and engage in topics of conversation.<sup>17</sup> An example of this use is often found in the comment section of a news article or Facebook post where users argue endlessly about the humanity of other people. Arguments often begin or end with users calling each other a ‘Sock,’ a bot, or a fake account. The sophistication of the programmed algorithms used to generate the appearance of authentic online users has made a difficult task of determining if one is conversing with a real person, a robot, or some combination of the two. It’s difficult to discern the full extent of the problem as newer, more elaborate Socks emerge each day, however it is suggested that “Facebook reportedly has around 170 million known fake accounts, and Twitter may have as many as 20 million fakes.”<sup>18</sup> In *Sock Accounts* (Image 11), I created a visual representation of this algorithmic reification of internet users.

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<sup>16</sup> Timothy Bewes, *Reification, or, The Anxiety of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2002), p.xii)

<sup>17</sup> Srijan Kumar et al., “An Army of Me: Sockpuppets in Online Discussion Communities,” *Proceedings of the 26th International Conference on World Wide Web - WWW 17*, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1145/3038912.3052677>)

<sup>18</sup> Tom Trewinnard, “Sockpuppets and Spambots: How States Manipulate Social Networks,” Medium (Meedan Updates, February 8, 2016), <https://medium.com/meedan-updates/sockpuppets-and-spambots-how-states-manipulate-social-networks-c77ecdc46e0a>)





Image 11. Jane Tardo, *Sock Accounts*

## **a Better World, a Better Conclusion**

(On Snake Tube Adventure Racing)

*All the reasons for making a revolution are there, not one is lacking. The shipwreck of politics, the arrogance of the powerful, the reign of falsehood, the vulgarity of the wealthy, the cataclysms of industry, galloping misery, naked exploitation, ecological apocalypse. We are spared nothing, not even being informed about it.*

(The Invisible Committee, *Now*, 2017) <sup>19</sup>

I first read the above quote written by The Invisible Committee, a group of one or more French philosophers, at the beginning of my graduate career. And now, three years later I am still contemplating their modernization of Debord's and Vaneigem's Situationist Theory proclamations. How is it that the same makings for a revolution are still true, why do so many disenfranchised humans put up with this inequality, what will be the breaking point, and will we even know this point once we experience it? These are questions that have haunted me. I suspect that we surely must be nearing a breaking point due to the unusual circumstances of the Covid-19 world pandemic paired with the effects of climate change and unprecedented greed. But what kind of people do nothing other than just watch from the sidelines? To tackle these questions, I wanted to create a largescale installation that would in turn represent an accumulation of the skills I had acquired during graduate school, as well as delve into my previous posed inquiries.

I conceived of a project called *Snake Tube Adventure Racing* (Image 12 and 15). *Snake Tube Adventure Racing* is the world's first quilted radio-controlled snake tube adventure racetrack. Racers are able to pick out their own snake from a tank, insert it into a custom RC car, then race with up to two additional racers around 24 ft of quilted dystopian landscapes. Installed on each car is a phone mount which allows the racers the option to record or livestream their experience of the race.

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<sup>19</sup> The Invisible Committee. *Now* translation by Robert Hurley, (Ill Will Editions, November, 2017), p.5



Image 12. Jane Tardo, *Snake Tube Adventure Racing*

*The Walthamstow Tapestry* (Image 13) and *Historjá* (Image 14) were informative works regarding the skill and scale I required of my project. The former (measuring in at around 10ft x 50ft) is by Grayson Perry. It follows the birth and death of a singular human life: “[t]he subject is a take on the journey of life, but seen through shopping”<sup>20</sup> While the latter is an epic 78ft long embroidered Sami folk history by Britta Marakatt-Labba that “resurrect[s] nearly erased memories and critique[s] contemporary life.”<sup>21</sup> What I find most marvelous about both of these works is their overwhelming cheerfulness in palate and form while negotiating much darker narratives and how the artists issue an organization to the chaos of life.

<sup>20</sup> Grayson Perry and Jacky Klein, *Grayson Perry: with 374 Illustrations, 357 in Colour* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2013), p.267)

<sup>21</sup> Lunds Konsthall, “Britta Marakatt-Labba History in Stitches,” e-flux, November 19, 2018, <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/226277/britta-marakatt-labbahistory-in-stitches/>)





Image 13. Grayson Perry, *The Walthamstow Tapestry*



Image 14. Britta Marakatt-Labba, *Historjá*

These works by Perry and Marakatt-Labba inspired me to focus more on the meticulousness of the craft and to attention-to-detail as a way to convey my hopefulness for the future; I was also led towards pushing my ideas further on what art could be. *Snake Tube Adventure Racing*, at 172 square feet (or 10' x 17' laid out flat) is composed of multiple panels sewn together using nylon thread. Each panel contains a wide variety of fiber art techniques, including piece, applique and free motion quilting, machine and hand embroidery, free standing lace, crochet, textile collage, and fabric transfers. The installation also includes a check in booth for registering racers and mechanical maintenance. In addition to the interactive design of the piece, there exists a performative component of the work as well. A 'Pit Crew' of five performers were trained in receiving racers, running races, and maintaining the experience.



Image 15. Jane Tardo, *Detail of Snake Tube Adventure Racing*

*Snake Tube Adventure Racing* was scheduled to open for public interaction on March 14, 2020. It was through this speculative performance that I hoped to have a better artistic understanding and testimony towards my themes of interest—namely, why do we continue to be frivolous in unprecedented times of disease and distress. Due to the rapid spread of Covid-19, the opening for *Snake Tube Adventure Racing* has been indefinitely postponed. However, I remain hopeful for a better conclusion in the future.

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## **Vita**

Jane Tardo was born and is currently based in New Orleans. She earned her Bachelor of Art in International Studies in May 2008, after which she lived and worked abroad for 7 years. Jane will earn her Master of Fine Art in Sculpture from the University of New Orleans in May 2020. She is a grant recipient of Colloqate Design, a Southern Heat Exchange digital resident, and has exhibited work in Baton Rouge Gallery, Good Children Gallery, and Barrister's Gallery.