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And there I Was

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And There I Was

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 Art

by

Jennifer Jones

B.A. McNeese State University, 2017

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Abstract

Working with found imagery and objects, I explore transformative sculptural processes and manipulated photographic methods as a metaphor for mental and physical transformation. Creating large scale cyanotypes that are exposed on painter's linen, I have developed a unique process for stretching and coating linen that allows me to make images that feel more like paintings than photographs. Reflecting and analyzing aspects of my adult life, I present images and objects that challenge traditional gender roles that were impressed upon me throughout my upbringing. My process is defined by experimentation. During the exposure of the image, dramatic shifts occur that allow for both distortion and a clarity of light within the final artwork. I convey ideas of shame, fear, and isolation related to the perpetual objectification of women in our modern world. While I certainly recognize this issue of subjugating women stems from a long history and has strongly impacted many groups of women, my work is a dissection of my own personal and direct experience with this topic.

Key Words: cyanotype, film noire, objectification, crystals, art, found objects

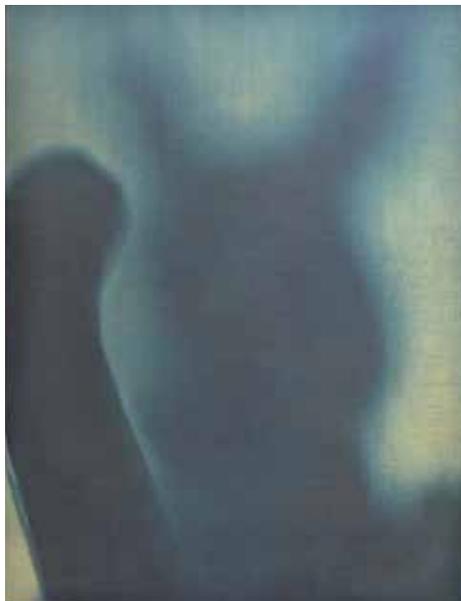
In my piece, "And There I was" (figure 1), the overexposure of the image becomes essential in providing an ominous quality to the image and its traditional blue color lends itself to the themes of my work by evoking feelings of sadness and loneliness that draw on the aesthetics of film noir.



(Figure 1) Jennifer Jones, "And There I was," 2020

Film noir is often said to be gloomy and cynical. Most famously, noir stories portray characters confined to undesirable predicaments and the world as a fundamentally crooked place. I use the aesthetics of film noir as a way to explore contemporary female objectification in my work as seen in my piece, "Lurk", (figure 2).

In this piece, I use an obscured image of a rabbit to produce a feeling of looming anxiety. The genre of noir provides heavy handed examples of chauvinism and sexism. It is a portrayal of the way women were treated; something that hasn't changed much since the fifties and is still



(Figure 2) Jennifer Jones, "Lurk," 2020

representational of the institutionalized discrimination towards women today. Aesthetically, film noir embraces dramatic, high-contrast, low-key lighting (figure 3 and 4). We can find the use of film noir aesthetics in the work of many artists such as Bill Armstrong (figure 5) or Japanese photographer, Daido Moriyama, best known for his confrontational, black-and-white images illustrating the contrast of traditional values and modern society in postwar Japan (figure 6). He utilizes non-traditional approaches to the photographic process by focusing more on subject matter than the technicalities of photography.

Moriyama employs high-contrast, strange angled shots, and drama in his imagery (figure 7). Working in a similar way, I use scale and high contrast to induce unsettledness or feelings of being intimidated as a way to convey the aftermath of objectification. One example of this would be my piece, “You Missed this Time,” (figure 8) a large-scale image of a bullet hole in a window.



(Figure 3) The Maltese Falcon,(Movie Still) 1941

In an interview with Moriyama for Document Journal, journalist, Miss Rosen, stated, “In Moriyama’s photographs, what we may otherwise block out, ignore, or dismiss becomes something poetic, profound, and deeply intimate.” I feel connected to Moriyama’s work in the way that my images and objects are forthcoming, but through further inspection

the viewer will discover layers of material that hint at something more underneath. In my piece, “All the Pretty Things,” (figure 9) I use collage to create abstract imagery that looks like random shapes and tones at first glance but after close observation, the viewer can find gems and skulls.

Another well-known artist whose work is reminiscent of film noir is Cindy Sherman, an American photographer known for her work responding to women’s issues. Sherman’s seminal series the, Untitled Film Stills, comprising 70 black-and-white photographs made between 1977 and 1980 are made to look like publicity pictures taken on movie sets, inspired by 1950s and 1960s Hollywood, film noir. Sherman uses herself as a model in all the images of this series (figure 10.) Her characters are representational of clichés, career girl, bombshell, damsel in distress, housewife, etc. In her work, Sherman is



(Figure 4) Rita hayworth, The Lady from Shang Hai, (Movie Still) 1940

¹Miss Rosen, Above the Fold:Discovering Magic in the Mundane wit Daido Moriyama, Japans Street Photographer Godfather, <https://docujentjournal.com/2020/01/discovering-magic-in-the-mundane-with-daidomoryiama-japans-street-photography-godfather>, 01/28/2020



(Figure 5) Bill Armstrong, "Untitled, (Film Noire) # 1401, 2011

most often in film noir. In her piece, "Untitled Film Still #183," (figure 11) Sherman poses as an iconic, Victorian woman. At first glance, you recognize the portrait of someone of importance, but after further investigation, you can see that she has given herself over-the-top breast so large that they are stretching her skin. Her characters are mysterious and evade the expectation of conventional fashion. Sherman often does this by making herself unattractive in her portraiture when portraiture, historically, has an emphasis on beauty. Furthermore, her

stills are able to convey the same mood and ideas seen in film noir without the use of traditional aesthetics.

The images I make are supported by a parallel body of work that investigates ideas of transformation and the veneer of what's on the surface through manipulating found objects I connect with. Daido Moriyama says in an interview with Document Journal, "No matter whether it is abandoned or not, an object is an object. I do not distinguish between discarded things and others. There are countless beautiful existences." This is how I see my found objects, beautiful existences. The surfaces of the objects I find are heavily weathered with no ability to be repaired. They have lost the ability to function as the tools they were built to be much like the way an aging woman can feel. Their surface tells a story of struggle. They are discarded and have been deemed irrelevant. I am able to recontextualize these objects and use them as a host to grow



(Figure 6) Daido Moriyama, "Bandaged Finger" 1987

²Simon Schama, *The Cultural Construction of a Citizen: II Casting Rolls: Children of Nature*, Random House, 1989

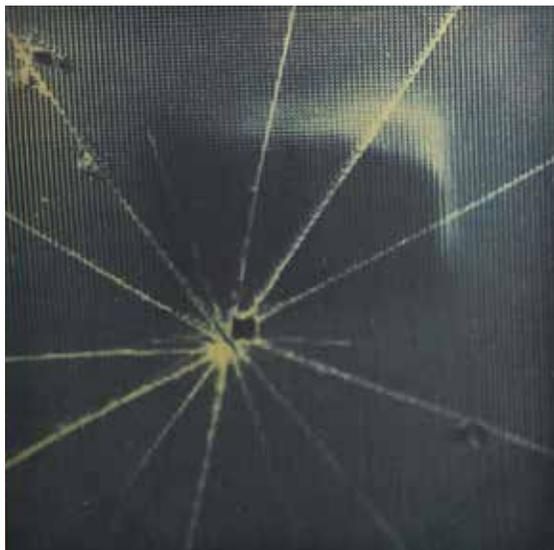
³Elizabeth Prettejohn. *Interpreting Sargent*. Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1998

crystals derived from chemical compounds (figure 12). This process of transformation allows me to see the object in a new way. The same way my mother's lipstick made me feel transformed as a young girl. Although the crystals are attractive, and they give the objects new life, it doesn't give change to their true nature. I apply flocking, a synthetic material used to protect and enhance surfaces, as a way to conceal and hide what lies beneath; much like the way a woman uses makeup. In my mind, these crystals become a metaphor for the way western beauty is perceived and manufactured while flocking acts as a representation for how many women manage their own appearance with the intention of hiding what is really there (figure 13).



(Figure 7) Daido Moriyama, "Eros or Something other than Eros" 1969

The aesthetic quality is an important aspect of my work. Growing up, my mother was



(Figure 8) Jennifer Jones, "You Missed this time" 2021

a hairdresser and exposed me to a world of pageantry as a child. I loved dressing up like a doll with perfect hair, mascara and lipstick to perform at my dance recitals. I vividly remember playing dress up in my mother's heels and sitting at her vanity decorating my face with her engine red lipstick wanting to impress. I was four years old, but I was developing a complex understanding that the veneer of outer beauty was associated with attracting suitors. As I got older, I began

to understand the impractical nature of these things and that I was taught, with the best intentions, to self-objectify. My work with found objects is a response to the ideals and pressures women face to live up to unrealistic ideologies and the great lengths they go to mimic the ideal demonstration of beauty according to the pressures of our modern society.

⁴Ariel Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*, Pocket Books 2006

⁵Ginny Dougary, *Yes We are Bovvered*, *The Times London*, 2007



(Figure 9) Jennifer Jones, "All The Pretty Things" 2020

as she was considered quite beautiful. The term "professional beauty" was used to refer to her and to a woman in general who



(Figure 11) Cindy Sherman, "Untitled Film Still #183" 1988

Objection to the objectification of women isn't a new issue. This is a problem with a long history and the problem is evolving. John Singer Sargent's portraits of Madame X (figure 14) are an example of the codependent relationship where both expats, American and living in France, used one another to gain higher social status in French society. Madame X, a very wealthy socialite married to a banker, was highly sought after for the

opportunity to paint her portrait

uses personal skills to advance herself socially. During this time, it was common for women to use their beauty as currency as they had little control over their financial



(Figure 10) Cindy Sherman, "Untitled Film Still #06" 1977

lives. Historically, the objectification of women was deemed to be induced by men, but women are now associating self-objectification as a symbol of feminist strength, wearing provocative clothing and engaging in lewd behavior as a

⁶Barbara Fredrickson, Objectification Theory: Toward Understanding Women's lived Experiences and Mental Health Risks, *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 1997

⁷Dawn Szymanski, Lauren Moffitt, Sexual Objectification of Women: Advances to Theory and Research, 6-38. *The Counselling Psychologist 2011 Report of the American Psychological*

⁸Association Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls, Executive Summary, American Psychological Association, 2021

⁹Klaus Ottmann, Yves Klein by Himself: His Life and Thought, Paris: Editions Dilecta, 2010

¹⁰Julie Steinmetz, Behind Enemy Lines: Toxic Titties Infiltrate, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture Society*, 2006



(Figure 12) Jennifer Jones, Work in Progress, 2020

way to rebel and exercise “power.” Contemporary America’s sexualized culture not only objectifies women, it encourages women to objectify themselves. My piece, “I Can See You,” (figure 15) I photographed and obscured a lifeless figure beneath a grate. This piece is a representation of the way women may feel trapped in a society conducive to the idea of exploiting their own bodies to get ahead in life or to be seen by others. While contemporary culture encourages this behavior, some have argued that the feminist movement itself has contributed to the problem of the sexual objectification of women by promoting “free”

love and encouraging women to be oversexed or engage in promiscuous acts, “...because if men can do it, why can’t I?” As a woman, I would agree that some of these actions may initially feel empowering, but I also recognize the deep-rooted problems self-objectification recruits. Many feminists and psychologists argue that sexual objectification can lead to serious psychological effects including eating disorders, depression, and sexual dysfunction and can give women negative self-images because of the belief that their intelligence, and competence are currently not being acknowledged by our society. Girls’ understanding of the significance of appearance in our culture will likely lead to feelings of fear, shame, and disgust during their journey to womanhood. Young women are especially vulnerable to objectification, as they are often taught that power, respect, and wealth can be derivative of outward appearance. It is an infectious way to think but something I often consider when making work.



(Figure 13) Jennifer Jones, “Untitled 1” 2021

As an artist, I operate in a world where aesthetics has great value and often times

influence the validity of a piece of art. We are inherently attracted to beautiful things, but beauty is perception. Valuing anyone on the sole merit of any characteristic would be detrimental. One might argue valuing human beauty isn't different than valuing human intelligence, competent, or creativity. I would argue that the latter hasn't created the havoc that subjugating groups of women has, historically.



(Figure 14) John Singer Sargent, "Madame X", Oil on Canvas 1884

Incorporating an amplified scale and overstated use of the color blue is meant to provide an overall impression of cohesion while the imagery creates an ambiance of unsettledness and anxiety. The removal of other colors forces the viewer to experience the work without other elements of distraction. The color blue is symbolic of power as well as loneliness and isolation. Ironically, men favor this color, and the color blue is historically masculine. For this reason, I find it amusing to use it in my work in an exaggerated manner. Yves Klein is known for his use of the color blue in his work and even claimed to invent the color blue in response to his viewers widely misunderstanding his work. His first public showing was the publication of the artist's book *Yves* in November 1954. The book featured a series of monochromes (figure 16.) From the



(Figure 15) Jennifer Jones, Work in Progress, "I Can See You" 2021

responses of his viewers, he realized that they thought his consistently colored canvases were a new kind of abstract interior decoration. This was not Klein's intention. The work was actually inspired by the many cities he had lived in the previous years. From then on, Klein capitalized on this misunderstanding and he began making work using the color blue alone. Klein is best known for his work using nude, female models' as "live paint brushes" by directing naked women to smear blue paint over their bodies and conducting performance pieces by instructing the nude women to then roll around on a canvas on the floor of his apartment or press

their bodies against a canvas that had been hung on the wall (figure 17). One critic, Julie Steinmetz, says in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture Society*, “Klein saw this demonstration as a way to distance himself from subject matter and thus his artistic process. As Klein attempts to create art in this detached state, directing his models to smear themselves with paint and roll on the floor or press against a wall, inevitably the artist-to-model relationship develops into a power dynamic.”¹¹ This, to say the least, is



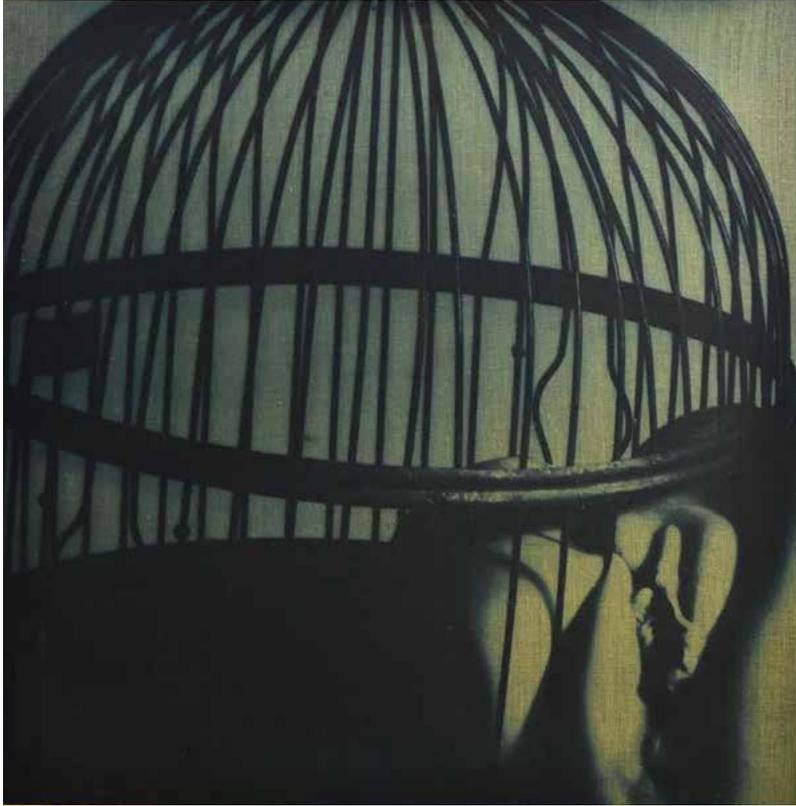
(Figure 16) Yves Klein, “Yves:Propositions Monochromes” 1956

what I’d say too if I were being “misunderstood” on a grand scale by my viewers. Klein exploited women to stay relevant under the guise of this said, “living paintbrush.” He plainly exploited women for selfpromotion. If this work was truly a way to distance himself from subject matter, wouldn’t the women he used be encouraged to move freely rather than be directed what to do with their



(Figure 17) Yves Klein, “Suaire De Mondo Cane” 1961

11Julie Steinmetz, *Behind Enemy Lines: Toxic Titties Infiltrate*, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture Society*, 2006 bodies? Considering the time this work was made, similar to that of film noire, this work is an ideal example of the power dynamic woman continue to fight where the male assumes complete control over a woman and what she does with her body. In my piece, “And there I Really was”, (figure 18) I construct an image that focuses on the vagina of a sex doll as it squeezes its way out of its cage, escaping. The



(Figure 18) Jennifer Jones "And There I Really Was," 2021

sex doll is a symbol of how prolific the reduction of the female body to an object has become; where women are treated like something only meant for the male gaze, thus enforcing typical, male-driven, patriarchal values that I reject in this piece.

In a world where many gender roles and sexuality are being challenged, it is important to acknowledge these challenges are not

welcome by everyone. Women have had to fight for hundreds of years to have the same right as men to make art about themselves and their struggles. Women have played important roles in the development of new technologies and processes. The first published cyanotypes were created by a woman. Anna Atkins was a botanist and early pioneer of the cyanotype process in the 1840's and to this day she has not received the praise that her contemporaries have. As I have researched its history, I found that her introduction to the process was only enabled because her father, who worked at a museum, had to look after her when her mother died at a young age. Anna Atkins would not have had this exposure otherwise as a female of her time. This has informed my work in the way that I feel empowered to make work as a woman that honors and encourages the progress of this issue in a medium with such a parallel reference in history.

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VITA

The author was born in Texas. She currently lives and works in New Orleans, Louisiana. She obtained her bachelor's degree in visual art from McNeese State University in 2017 and joined the University of New Orleans graduate program to pursue her MFA in 2018.