2008

The Conflict of Desire

Joetta L. Maue

University of Massachusetts Amherst

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THE CONFLICT OF DESIRE

A Thesis Presented

by

JOETTA L. MAUE

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

May 2008

Studio Art
THE CONFLICT OF DESIRE

A Thesis Presented

by

JOETTA L. MAUE

Approved as to style and content by:

__________________________________________
Susan Jahoda, Chair

__________________________________________
Shona Macdonald, Member

__________________________________________
Jeremy Boyle, Member

__________________________________________
Jeanette Cole, Graduate Program Director
Studio Art Program
Art Department

__________________________________________
William Oedel, Department Chair
Department of Art
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The thesis and body of work that culminates in Lovely could not have been possible without the support of the many people who have provided me with their guidance and encouragement. Foremost are the faculty of the University of Massachusetts Art Department whom I’ve had the pleasure and privilege of working with these last 3 years. My deepest gratitude goes to my thesis committee; Susan Jahoda, whose challenge and encouragement have been invaluable, Jerry Kearns for his constant belief in me, Shona MacDonald for her honesty and openness, and Jeremy Boyle for expanding my way of thinking. Their generosity, guidance, and honesty have helped me to grow as an artist and individual.

Additionally, I thank my family whom has celebrated my uniqueness and individuality without fail and who give me the strength and courage to do and be whom I want. I thank my dear friend Hilary, who reminds me of who I really am, deep down, even when I forget. Much gratitude goes to my fellow graduate students whose challenge and support have brought me to this moment, a special thanks to Jimmy Rhea for his hugs, Lyndsey Baldwin for her friendship, and Megan Randlett for her camaraderie and partnership. Thank you to my students who act as a constant source of inspiration and joy.

Lastly, I thank my husband who allows our lives and private moments to act as my inspiration without complaint and who has remained a constant support and best friend to me, as an artist and an individual. I am thankful toward him and deeply thankful for him.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

“I speak for those of you who don’t yet know the words, who’ve lost your tongues, who have not found your voice, who are afraid to tell your stories; fearful they may be too telling.”

As humans, we live in a state of dynamic, conflicting emotions. In moments of pain we experience joy and in moments of joy we have sorrow. In the work that culminates in my thesis show Lovely…, I visually celebrate the contradictions and dynamism of the joy and sadness of life. Just like the word “lovely,” which we may use to describe everything from a wedding ceremony to a funeral service, life is an indefinable experience. It fluctuates, never remaining in one moment or emotion for long. This dynamism creates the complexity of life, the beauty of life, and the path of life. As Joanna Freuh says, “life is sloppy” and, as an artist, I want to celebrate, question, and reveal the sloppiness of our lives.

I use my daily life as the main subject of my work to make it honest and accessible. The idea of the work being honest, even painfully so, comes from my desire to be true to my emotions, insecurities, strengths, and intelligence without fear of ridicule or censure from a patriarchal society. By making work that resides within the realm of the everyday, I am attempting to defy and contest masculine censure. In effect, I reclaim my femininity: the quality of being feminine, without the fear of losing strength or respect. Though the autobiographical drives the work and is necessary for it to exist,

1 Joanna Freuh, Erotic Faculties, University of California Press, 1996, Mouthpiece.
ultimately it is transcended, enabling the viewer to have his or her own independent relationship to it.

I am not an extraordinary woman. I do not live under extraordinary circumstances. I am a woman who has both flaws and fears and also strengths and hopes. Through the depiction of these characteristics, I invite the viewer to relate to and connect with Lovely…, the artist, and the subject of human experience.
CHAPTER 2

ART AND FEMINISM

There are many aspects of feminism that I fully embrace, but simultaneously there are others that I have ambivalence toward. As an artist I investigate and celebrate these contradictions believing that the agency to choose particular aspects of the movement strengthens what is central to it. My beliefs and perspectives have their antecedents in the writing, speech, art, and performance of artists such as Joanna Freuh, Janine Antoni, Annette Messeger, Carolee Schneemann, and Polly Apfelbaum, who have gone against various paradigmatic feminist ideologies, offering new ways to think about being a woman.

I use the world “feminism” and “feminine” advisedly. The fact is that these words are indefinable; their definitions are individual and dynamic and may produce different meanings for different individuals, the meanings are “messy”. My ambivalence towards feminism springs from my skepticism toward the belief that men and women need to suppress their differences and try to assimilate into each other in order to be equal. I also reject the encouragement of women to masculinize themselves. I believe that the strength that characterizes women lies in their differences from men, not in their similarities. The femininity of women and the masculinity of men should be celebrated; this is not determined by the idea of traditional roles but rather by biological differences. Joanna Freuh and Carolee Schneemann specifically were interested in celebrating the female body and insisting upon their right to do so. This paved the way for artists such as Janine Antoni, Vallie Export, and myself. Joanna Freuh implicitly and explicitly embraces...
sexuality and the eroticism of the body and soul as essential to life and humanity. In her book, *Monster/Beauty: Building the Body of Love*, she states:

> The erotic is not exclusively or even necessarily sexual…. Most important, it encompasses relations whose potency, unpredictability, and usefulness proceed from and create the capacity for individuals’ intellectual, emotional, and spiritual transformation, which may activate social transformation.²

This idea reflects my belief that sexuality is the basis of life and of individuality. One’s sexuality and the roles they play through it is what make them who they are as an individual. Therefore the individuality of ones sexuality must be encouraged rather then suppressed, not mattering what it is.

The revered feminist artists Hannah Wilke, Francesca Woodman, and Carolee Schneemann used their physical bodies to encourage the physicality of women in society, culture, and themselves. By weaving my daily life and intimate relationships into my art, I continue to encourage the embodiment of women.

When, Janine Antoni was recently questioned about how she defends the use of her nude body, specifically her naked breast, she quoted Carolee Schneemann:

> I did not appear naked in my work because I wanted to be fucked…I did it so other women could be embodied. I made a gift of my body to other women: giving our bodies back to ourselves.³

This statement embodies the confidence and strength behind the female voices that spoke it, giving women ownership of their body and allowing them to create work that acknowledges the body rather than hides it. This practice of acknowledgement creates a positive and productive viewpoint toward women and their femininity.

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We are indebted to the 1960’s feminists who enabled women of my generation to have options in their careers, and choices as mothers and wives. However, this should not entail a rejection of women who make more traditional lifestyle choices. The goal of feminism is the choice to decide the roles we play within society, the home, and the family.
In order to be progressive, the fight for women must evolve and adapt to societal changes. In the women of my generation and younger, there is a rejection of early essentialist feminism as an ideology, and a reticence to identify themselves in this way. Many contemporary women are actually feminists. However, they feel judged by the 1960’s/70’s feminists for embracing child rearing and homemaking, and therefore have chosen to disassociate from their predecessors. There is a desire, perhaps a sentimental desire, in young women; myself included, to be sexual and feminine and to return to a more traditional, less hectic lifestyle. This is evident in clothing, home design, television, and books trends. For example, women’s clothing is becoming “retro” and “girly,” magazines focused on child-rearing and home design such as *Martha Stewart Living* and *Cookie* are seeing huge success, and a multitude of books are being published on home decoration, craft based hobbies, and new parenting. Instead of rejecting these desires I embrace the idea of feminism in my art in a way that engages these desires and yearnings. These desire and yearnings develop out of the reality that the “idealism” of the 1950’s nuclear family is no longer possible. As a result of economic and lifestyle changes it is no longer a choice for middle class parents to stay at home. This is a result of a society that has become obsessed with money, status, and career. I, as do others in my generation, question these values and work toward developing a society and family unit founded on humanity and love. Feminist theory must invite and acknowledge these yearnings or risk moving backwards.

As a woman, I consciously look toward women as role models. As a result of my desire to be both a mother and an artist, I specifically began researching women artists who have had children. Historically, women artists were often forced to hide the fact that
they had children in order to be respected by their male peers. This attitude was based on the misconception that one could not be a serious artist if she was dealing with the “frivolities” of raising children. My ongoing work titled fulfillment grew out of this research. This piece is a handwritten list of women who are committed visual artists and have had children. The names are written in alphabetical order, directly on the gallery wall, with each name followed by the quote “is a mother.” This work offers no apologies and no hierarchy, embodying both the role of mother and artist equally, the epitome of feminism. This work is ongoing. It will grow as I discover and research more women artists with children. I have been struck by how difficult it is to determine if an established female artist has children, and I believe that points to a continuing bias against motherhood in the art world. For this reason, I plan on publishing the list as both an artist book and website.

The intentions of feminism are to establish the space for women to bond with all aspects of their heritage and continue to evolve. This is portrayed through the words of Virginia Wolfe, one of the foremothers of feminism, in the book A Room of Her Own:

For if we have five hundred a year each of us and rooms of our own; if we have the habit of freedom and the courage to write exactly what we think; if we escape a little from the common sitting-room and see human beings not always in their relation to each other but in relation to reality; and the sky, too, and the trees or whatever it may be in themselves . . . then the opportunity will come and the dead poet who was Shakespeare’s sister will put on the body, which she has so often laid down. Drawing her life from the lives of the unknown who were her forerunners, as her brother did before her, she will be born.⁴

CHAPTER 3
SELF AS SUBJECT

My work while both personal and autobiographical moves beyond the specifics of my story and voice into the broader voice of human experience. To quote Janine Antoni, “In all of my work… I go to the personal but it’s not about me. It’s about my mother. Even though I’m using my mother … I really want it to be about the viewer’s mother, all of our mothers.” I use my voice in the same way Antoni uses her mother, where my voice becomes the viewer’s voice, all of our voices. The work is about the experience of being human, specifically within that experience the ambiguity and difficulty of being loved, being individual, and being loving.

In the piece, sentiments, the statements such as “I am so afraid,”

Figure. 3. Joetta Maue, I am so afraid, detail from sentiments, 2007
“This is fucking Bullshit,”

Figure. 4. Joetta Maue, This is fucking Bullshit, detail from sentiments, 2007

and “I love you so much it scares me,” resonate with most anyone. Through this resonance we, the viewer and the artist, connect.

I choose the image of reality that I present to the viewer. I am fully aware that I create a self-conscious construction of an illusion of honesty without the promise of it. This illusion punctures the appearance of idealism in the work in an attempt to destroy the idea and desire of the ideal. I acknowledge the “messiness” and difficulty of life.

The artist, Sophie Calle also makes work that is very private. In her piece and book Exquisite Pain, she conveys her feelings toward a lover who has left her. However, though the initial subject is personal, it is presented in an open-ended manner, allowing the viewer to imagine themselves as the woman who has been scorned. Like Calle, I utilize photography, journal text, and other media to document my life, body, and
relationships. I am empowered through the act of creating the work from personal sources. This empowerment comes from being able, as an artist, to give an aspect of my life to the viewer without feeling vulnerable. This brings up questions towards private and public emotions and space. I use this subtle manipulation and questioning of self-exposure and vulnerability both as subject and tool - a tool in that it creates trust and empathy in the viewer, drawing them in and allowing them to create a personal relationship to the work. One can imagine himself or herself as the individual in the experience or image.

As I document the daily moments in life through photography, I create and push the limits of documentation. Considering that I am both the subject and object of my photographs, I am forced to be acutely aware of the moment that I inhabit in order to photograph it. I see the moment, locate my camera, and then re-enter the moment. The act of re-entering changes the reality, narrative, and honesty of the moment photographed. Therefore, the work is made with a high level of consciousness and that in itself distorts the truth. As soon as one becomes self-conscious of an act, the individual’s relationship toward the act itself changes.
I refer to this in much the way Roland Barthes speaks of the act of being photographed in *Camera Lucida*. He says:

Once I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes: I construe myself in the process of “posing,” I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image. This transformation is an active one…. an image - my image – will be generated… I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death. I am truly becoming a specter.\(^5\)

This quote generates many questions regarding the representation of the truth. Photographs have a viewpoint, a frame, and an exposure: as a result, they are a “version” or part of something, not a complete representation. This aspect of photography is evident in the photographs of Tina Barney and Nan Goldin, who both approach their work through the documentation of their lifestyle, friends, and social class. In her project, *Theater of Manners*, Barney, who comes from an upper class New England background, photographs her family, herself, and friends in their everyday activities and environments. She shoots with a 4x5 camera, a slow and laborious process that provides lush detailed images, and sets up studio lights for her photographic shoots. The nature of her methods therefore creates a fiction, even though she is photographing everyday activities of her own family within her own home. As a photographer, she becomes hyper self-aware of the act of viewing, and as models, her family becomes aware of the act of being viewed. Through this self-consciousness both the photographer and model are changed, thereby changing the image. Thus self-consciousness becomes a built in aspect of the subject of the photograph.

Nan Goldin approaches her work from a different background and technique. Throughout her career, she has taken very ‘raw’ images of herself and friends who are involved in heroin abuse, prostitution, and abusive relationships. Her images are often technically flawed, as she does not compensate for issues such as lighting, blur from movement, or contrast. Goldin shoots with a 35 mm camera, which allows her to respond and take an image quickly and easily. Even so, her images are just as much fiction as Barney’s. Goldin’s friends and models are hardly ever unaware of the camera and are often looking directly into the lens, and/or physically posing, conscious of their role as subject and Goldin’s role as viewer. Though Goldin is a part of this community, her rise to artistic superstardom separates her from her subjects, as most of them are the overlooked misfits of society. The photograph oscillates between fiction and non-fiction.

My own art leaves the viewer similarly unsure of what is true and what is fabricated. This oscillation, in my work, is seen not only in the photographs but the installation as well. I embrace and manipulate the contradiction of reality and fiction. For instance, while the text I use in a piece may have held true at the work’s inception, it can shift in meaning and become false, through the passage of the time of its making. In addition, I use text that is not actually the reality of my particular circumstance but fits into the context of the work. In the presentation of the work I make no distinction between the two.

At a recent lecture, artist Christian Boltanski said, “We can only truly speak of something that the other can understand.”

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the accessible and relatable subject of my everyday. Yet I question this statement’s truth as much as I believe it. For instance, my husband recently got up in the middle of the night to use the bathroom, and put on his glasses. I found it strange that he could not even walk to the bathroom without his glasses. In that moment, I realized that in actuality one could never completely understand another’s perception; they can only attempt to connect to it. This is what I do.

The use of the self as subject works as a form of validation. By making work that is accepted into the public and social realm, I validate that my thoughts and experiences matter. My individual voice is heard. Therefore, it is important to me that my work maintains an overtly female voice and communicates my identity as a woman, as opposed to an androgynous one.

The dichotomies created through these contradictions and conflicts in my statements and images seen are meant to act as a device to collapse the identity of the artist into the work. One can neither separate the art from the life, nor the artist from the individual. The contradictions imply an ambiguity within the “sense of self,” specifically the ambiguity toward ones identity, and the ambiguity of life.
CHAPTER 4
THE EVERYDAY AND ORDINARY

The content of the exhibition Lovely… lies within the space of the everyday and ordinary. The intentional placement of the work within the everyday is used as a tool to discuss the conflicts within the experience of being human, after all human experience is made through the accumulation of days lived. The work embodies the moments of the mundane through the material choice, medium, and its process of making. These moments are collected through journaling everyday as part of the art process. Commonplace materials and processes, such as sewing/embroidering are utilized as a critique of the domestic realm. I utilize the form of expression and the potential as metaphor that an object already has and emphasize it. To quote artist Tara Donovan, “the inherent physical characteristics of an object might allow it to be transformed into art.” Donovan does this by using multiples of everyday and cheaply found mass-produced materials to create ethereal landscapes and to comment on process.
Similarly, Artist Tom Friedman uses everyday materials to comment on society and create a discourse with the art world. Art historian and artist Lou Cabeen uses her collection of embroideries, inherited from her grandmother, to articulate women’s roles, both historical and contemporary. These artists and their practices work as models of how “found” materials can add a depth and content that is not fabricated from conventional art materials.

By making work specifically about the everyday, the daily practice of working and observing becomes part of the subject and content. This works toward collapsing the space and the activity of the home into the space and activity of the studio. The singular site of the studio expands into the places and activities of daily life: colleagues’ studios, the home, watching a movie, the experience of having coffee with a friend or having talks with a spouse, the act of watching television, riding the subway, sitting in lectures, and traveling. This expansion of the “work” site is also seen in the many times that a moment in my life is stopped, while being experienced, in order to be photographed and documented for the work. Therefore, the experience of the everyday is the work and the
work is the accumulation of this experience.

[I] locate my experiences within the rituals and construction of daily life, empowering that which is often ignored and disvalued: the handmade, the laborious, and the meditative, which speak to the artist’s [my own] valuation of the process over the end product. The viewer, in bringing their own experiences to [my] intimate processes, is put in a position of empathy, and the dramatic acts [I] engage in then have a foundation of recognition which enables the viewer to identify with [my] work and concepts.  

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CHAPTER 5

DOMESTIC SPACE AS PLACE

The home, as a place, provides a subject in the installations and a context in the photographs and represents a “psychological diagram of the analysis of intimacy.” It is a space that all humans have a relationship to. As a space the home can expand and contract within different moments, much like how the work in Lovely… expands and contracts as it oscillates between happy and sad, bitter and sweet, hopeful and hopeless, and between moments of intimacy and loneliness. Within this expansion and contraction, the house, as space and object, works to defend intimacy as well as create seclusion. A viewer cannot remain indifferent to the home. Yet the idealism or hope of a happy home is precarious, even though we unrealistically “daydream of its security.”

In the pursuit toward the “happy home, happy marriage, happy life,” women attempt to create order. Miriam Shapiro writes extensively on the role of housework for women as a way to control their life and destiny. She states “domesticity is chaos, woman intends to keep chaos at bay.” Shapiro goes on to explain that with the lack of choices and feelings of entrapment within the social conformity of the 1950’s housewife, she, the housewife, began to gain control through the cleaning and designing of her home. This is the period of contemporary history when design and home beautification became a huge consumer market and American culture became obsessed with cleanliness. Housework and beautification became the primary tools to create order from chaos and/or lack of control.

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This idea of the domestic is important to the work. The work documents domestic space through the photographing of the home, chores, and relationships and is materially placed in the domestic space through the embroidery and handcrafts. The female, the familiar, and the seemingly insignificant are often overlooked and disempowered. By contextualizing the work within the home and the everyday, the work comments upon the work of the home, the domain of the female, and the place of familiarity. Therefore, it empowers and gives voice to the female, the familiar, and the seemingly insignificant, and attempts to validate their relevance and worth in the gallery-a traditionally male dominated space - and its audience.

Through the act of cleaning or tending, the housewife’s craft- and it is a craft, as much as painting or poetry or any other art- transforms household objects in much the same way as paint is transformed into ‘painting’ or words into a poem. With that, the woman affirms the significance of the cleaned and restored object, of the household, and of herself. A cyclical contradiction occurs again: the dirt and mess of daily living versus the order of an inviting clean home - the sloppiness of life.
CHAPTER 6
THE ACT OF MANUAL LABOR

The reference to domestic activities and handmade objects, whether through a photograph of a pile of laundry or the actual sewing of an image on linen, refers to my interest in the practices of everyday housework, of raising a family, and of maintaining a relationship. The roles of women are honored through the choice of materials and the places these materials occupy within domesticity. Therefore, it becomes important for the work to be practiced each day. The accumulative aspect of the work infers the temporal: my days, my life, and my thoughts. For instance, during the process of making one piece, I turned 29, celebrated my 4th wedding anniversary, worked a gallery job, left that job, moved to NYC, moved back to Massachusetts, fought with and made love with my husband, and still the piece is not yet done. The piece acts as a documentation of all these things and how these moments, relationships, and “subject” have changed. The piece and the labor-intensive practices are evidence of my existence, evidence of emotions, evidence of voice, evidence of labor, and evidence of time. The richness and depth of life and time literally build within the work. The manual labor acts much like an artifact of what has already occurred; the piece may begin as cloth and thread, but through time, it becomes the artifact of self. Artist Catherine Bertola uses the domestic and the act of labor similarly. She states, “My work is about labor, investing time in a very ordinary material. I use daily domestic activities or chores such as vacuuming and dusting to make my work. The manual labor involved adds value to something that usually gets swept.
away.” The everyday is what grounds our lives and determines our impact. The work pays homage to the importance and value of the historical woman, whose life was spent mostly in the home and at the service of her family. As well, the work embraces and celebrates the modern woman, who balances career, family, liberation, and femininity.

The slow continuous formulation in the building of embroidery parallels the slow continuous formulation of a home, relationship, marriage, career, and the nurturing of a childhood.

The use of the handmade and its consequent labor acknowledges the imperfections that exist within life relationships, marriage, and the home. Just as handmade objects are made out of love so is a relationship. A handmade object is appreciated for its imperfections and that imperfection implies the maker and the act of making. Through the act of making one can trace the hands, the thoughts, and perhaps even the heart of the maker.

Additionally I use the history of craft to create tension in the work. Historically, the art of needlework has been paid little attention as a form of expression but considered only a hobby and pastime of affluent women. The actual act of embroidery was seen as an act of frivolity and decadence. One invested time yet it had no utilitarian purpose. Through this idea, the act of embroidery began to be looked at as a way to prove women as virtuous as they spent their time engaging in a non-threatening and non-essential activity. Women, however, became engaged with the pleasure of the “work” itself and also with the space and time to be with their own thoughts and meditate upon them, both

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9 Catherine Bertola,
http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/1637_outoftheordinary/artists_detail.php?artist Tag=bertola
individually and collectively. As a woman was able to be free in her expression in needlework, she was able to reclaim her body as the maker and her mind as her own, asserting her freedom.

The fact that women’s craftwork is private and personal is vital, and to a great extent determines the media, scale, content and the work’s formal properties. The fact that much of it is done for pleasure, for love and not for competition, exhibition or sale is part of its strength and value.\(^1\)

Needlework began to act much like a diary of women’s lives, hidden behind decoration and pattern. I use the act of needlework, especially in the installation, \textit{sentiments},

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{sentiments.jpg}
\caption{Joetta Maue, detail from \textit{sentiments}, 2008}
\end{figure}

as a diaristic expression; however, by using ‘from the gut text’ the expression and emotion is overt rather than disguised. The viewer is simultaneously comforted and dejected. For example, when my father read my embroidery that reads, “I am so afraid,”

\begin{flushright}
\footnotesize
\end{flushright}
he had concern and asked me if I really was afraid. My response was, who is not afraid?

We are all afraid; I am just stating the obvious.

The ‘pile’ is used much like the time intensive practices. The piles of objects and collections become a metaphor for time in that it is an accumulation of the residue of process. For painters, this might be in layers, for sculptors, perhaps in materials, but residue is always part of making and living. This is seen most clearly in the piece, **Remnants**. **Remnants** is a piece comprised of scraps collected over the last year relating to the work that has been made out of fabric, broken needles, thread, fabric scraps, and yarn, all collected in glass jars displayed in a glass door nick knack case. This piece challenges what is important: the work itself, the act of making, or the remnants of what is left over. Like many performance artists, this work is built out of what is left of the work, not the work itself. For example, Janine Antoni generally shows what remains of the act she performs as opposed to the performance as seen in her works such as **Gnaw**, where she ate away at a chocolate and a lard minimalist cube,

![Figure. 7. Janine Antoni, Gnaw, 1992](image.png)
and Eureka, in which she displays the imprint of her body in a lard filled claw foot tub.

Artist Annette Messegner, when asked about how she recycles previously exhibited pieces and images again and again, replied, “being an artist means healing one’s own wounds and simultaneously opening them up again in the process.” By physically engaging with a piece through the act of embroidering and sewing, I am able to embody both the piece itself and the work as action. The action of wrapping can metaphorically speak about the act/process of healing a wound. When one is physically wounded one is literally sewn back together, and for most of history that has been with a needle and thread. So as an action in the work, the stitch symbolizes the healing of one’s wounds from the difficulties and struggles in the decisions and processes of life. The fragility of the thread is like the fragility of life. Craft works like spirituality and ritual. As I am forced to slow down in the act of making, I am allowed to regain control of my hands, body, and voice. As my fingers map the thoughts and images, I am allowed to slow down and be with them for long periods, attempting to understand or believe them through the time spent.

“I had to make the quilt to keep my family warm. I made it beautiful to keep my heart from breaking.” ¹¹

CHAPTER 7
TEXT AND LANGUAGE

The challenging property of text is the fact that it is never fixed; it is always in relationship to the reader and their subjective interpretation, as found in the use of words such as feminine, masculine, feminist, and love. The way in which my work conveys the text gives the viewer one impression while often the actual meaning is obscured. Through the act of stitching the text is wound around images and materials and through its contradictions, discomfort, and honesty, the punctum of the body of work emerges.

Generally, in samplers, text was used to create a welcoming or religious sentiment, but I use it to voice my deepest fears, changing emotions, and to express my feelings of doubt and anxiety. This type of text contraindicates the use of the embroidery technique because a tension is created in the expectation of the work (serene and lulling) and its actuality, (brutally honest and sometimes accusatory)

Once, while embroidering a pink and white flowered handkerchief with pale pink thread, a woman said it was “very lovely” and asked if it was being made as a wedding gift. This question implied that the design and color of the embroidery were related to the idea of something non-threatening, a symbolic gift, for a wedding or anniversary. The text being embroidered actually read “sometimes I am afraid you will stop loving me, but today I am afraid you will stop fucking me.” This language is inappropriate for an idealized event such as a wedding, yet is an appropriate reflective of the reality of relationships in the everyday.
The work ruptures the idea that the pretty object, or being, is simply innocent, passive, and non-threatening. The “pretty surface” is punctured, much in the same way Victorian writer Charlotte Perkins Gilman did in the short story *The Yellow Wallpaper*. Gilman uses the decorative yellow wallpaper of her heroine’s room to metaphorically explore feminine madness. The wallpaper becomes the unexpected antagonist of the woman, driving her to madness. The innocent and pretty become something threatening and malevolent.
CHAPTER 8

THE WHITE BOX

Conceptually the work is interested in being placed within the established gallery space specifically in how it validates and contextualizes the artwork. The “white box” is traditionally a male dominated space reserved for “serious” art. The work challenges the “male” dominance of the “gallery” and the tradition of medium by forcing female artists, their practices, and the feminine voice into the space. The symbolic attributes of the materials and imagery are used to push them into a contentious relationship with the formal qualities of the installation. I specifically want the work to be in traditional galleries, as well as alternative spaces, to force the alternative, the ‘other,’ the woman, into them, instead of allowing it to be pushed into a different venue. The role of installation forces the work to be validated by the gallery space. And yet the challenge and difficulty of the work moving from studio to gallery destroys the work simultaneously. Once the work is moved into the gallery it is changed, it becomes finite and static, even if only temporarily.

Through the practices of photography, journaling, embroidery, and knitting, I join the canon of artists that have previously challenged the notion of what art is through these practices. The gallery challenges the work back, not supporting the work in the same way that the studio does.

The fact that doilies are supposed to protect tables from dust and scratches should not disqualify them from consideration as art. If doilies are to be regarded as table coverings, then paintings should be regarded as wall coverings. Because of the pressure on women to be constantly productive and practical, it is hardly surprising that the hundreds of hours devoted to their art form are
rationalized as the creation of useful goods. There are far easier ways of constructing table coverings and clothing.” 12

Further, the techniques and forms incorporated connect to the history of minimalism. I subvert the history and devices of minimalism to critique patriarchal art history, just as my predecessors Janine Antoni, Eva Hesse, and Polly Apfelbaum have. A conflict of meaning and form is created and the conflict challenges the set conventions of materials and techniques within the history of art making. This in turn criticizes the discipline itself and the history of minimal art, for example, the use of the grid in the piece sentiments, an installation of 50 embroidered handkerchiefs, holds the space much like Sol Lewitt’s wall drawings, using negative space, the wall, and the grid similarly. In comforts, I use line, shape, and color much like Donald Judd and Dan Flavin did in their wall installations. thread and My tools are direct references to the arrangement of the color paintings of Ellsworth Kelly and the Color Chart paintings of Gerhard Richter. Yet through “failures” in the installation such as bowing shelves, curling paper, negative spaces, and loose threads, the structure of minimalism does not fully support, both literally and figuratively, the work. This is able to work as metaphor of the conflicts of roles, artist, women, mother, wife, and individual.

In Clement Greenberg’s article *Modernist Painting*, he states:

… the making of pictures means, among other things, the deliberate creating or choosing of a flat surface, and the deliberate circumscribing and limiting of it. This deliberateness is precisely what Modernist painting harps on: the fact is, that the limiting conditions of art are altogether human conditions. ¹³

As much as I place the work in the gallery to be validated, I simultaneously am interested in creating a conflict within the gallery. This is done by installing the detritus of making, such as a row of thread, scissors, and rulers on the wall, a cabinet of fabric, or an iron into the show. By including these objects, as they exist in the studio, the installation rejects the gallery as validation as much as it embraces it. Yet the gallery rejects these objects as tools and transforms them into being minimalist objects, simply by context. By attempting to rupture the gallery the work is ruptured instead. The conflict of the work revealed.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the body of work in Lovely… deals with the many multiple conflicts of roles and identity. As I move forward in life as an artist, a woman, and an individual, my roles change and shift. This work is a direct response to many of these shifts and the anxieties and fears associated with the dynamism of life. This emotional content is grounded through the use of medium, technique, installation, and references to art history. The work appeals to the viewer through its familiarity and honesty. As we look at how today’s culture and society is so heavily dictated by computers and technology, we yearn for the handmade, the familiar, the intimate, the loving, and the secure. One of the values of art is its role to connect us back with community and my critique questions the absence or gap in this arena. My hope in this work is to suture and repair this tear, and in doing so, embodying and ultimately empowering the female voice and the everyday.
TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Each piece will be discussed individually below.

**comforts** consists of seven hand-knitted scarves made with various yarns readily available at most craft supply stores. Needles used were metal and range in size and include numbers 9, 11, 15, and 16. The embroidery was done with a plastic yarn needle. The gray scarf was hand knit by Jamie Sparks, all other scarves were hand knit by the artist.

**sentiments** was created by hand embroidering on to linens found at various antique and thrift stores. The embroidery was done with a standard embroidery needle using DMC 25 100% cotton embroidery floss. The rubber and wooden embroidery hoops were purchased at Michaels craft supply; metal embroidery hoops were a special order item. All of the actual embroidery was done with a rubber embroidery hoop.

**happily**... was made from inherited and found hand crochet doilies. They were hung with standard thumbtacks, staples, and sewing pins.

**thread** was made from various skeins of DMC 25 100% embroidery floss on a custom-made poplar shelf, and painted with White Dove by Benjamin Moore.

**My palette** was a pile of various colored standard 100% cotton quarter flats (18”x22”), purchased at Joanne Fabrics, on a custom made poplar shelf, and painted with White Dove by Benjamin Moore.

**On the edge** was comprised of a custom-made poplar shelf painted with Ace house paint. The stack of found bed linens, purchased at the Salvation Army was installed next to a found pillowcase embroidered with DMC 25 100% cotton embroidery floss.
**In bed with you** was raw linen embroidered with DMC 25 100% cotton embroidery floss, displayed in a large wood oval quilting hoop.

**Schematic Skein** was comprised of # skeins of yarn purchased at Michaels displayed on a sheet of white Reeves BFK printing paper.

**Pins and Needles** was comprised of four standard tomato pincushions in various colors and size. Each pincushion was holding pearl top sewing pins in a matching color with various sized needles. This was placed on a standard gallery pedestal.

**fulfillment** was made by writing directly on the wall with a graphite pencil. The piece consists of the names of female artists whom have had children. Each name is followed with the words “is a mother.” The names are alphabetized from top to bottom by the last name of the artist. The list ended with the text “I want to be a mother.”

**My tools** from top to bottom was a pair of standard metal sewing scissors, a pair of standard orange fabric scissors, a spool of 1” orange satin ribbon, a roll of standard blue painters tape, a metal ruler, and plastic t-square. All objects were hung by white painted nails in a vertical line on the wall.

All C-prints were made on Kodak Supra Endura, F surface, color paper. The images were shot with a Hasselblad medium format camera using Kodak 120 mm UC 400 speed professional grade film. Photographs were shown in white frames purchased at Ikea or custom made at Michaels Craft Supplies.

All text used in the work is written by the artist.

The artist based embroidered images on the tracings of the artist’s original photographs.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


PHOTO OF ARTIST AT WORK