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Point of Contact

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For my thesis, I conceptualized and produced an art exhibition entitled, *Point of Contact*, covering various media: photography, sculpture, installation, performance art. While my BFA emphasis is in sculpture, I chose to incorporate multiple media as it both reflects my studio practice and larger trends in contemporary art.

The exhibition revolved around ideas about non-verbal communication (epitomized in dance, especially through contact improvisation), experiences of the [female] body, and the possibility of mark-making when two “bodies” come into contact. Each piece of art fabricated for this exhibition was developed to engage with each of these ideas in different ways.

Over the course of my four years at the Gwen Frostic School of Art, I discovered a subconscious tendency to create works questioning how we (societally) define womanhood and the traditional forms of gendered labor we perform and pass down to youth, hence the frequent allusions to blood (menstruation) and sewing. Once realizing this trend, I leaned into it for my thesis, discovering there was a depth of meaning I could mine from. Once I was consciously making decisions to speak on a female experience, I found I was able to make my concepts clearer to an audience.

But, while I tend to lean toward considering the female subject in my artwork, I also am curious about the experiences of the skin, regardless of identity. Namely, the sensation of skin-to-skin contact between two humans, or, as in this artwork, a human and human-substitute, especially through dance. I focus heavily on dance as it was the form of art I studied extensively before coming to visual arts: it is a language I understand well and wanted to incorporate into the mode of visual arts. I have nearly two decades of dance education, particularly in modern techniques, which influences my artistic practice in every way possible. Going into my thesis exhibition, I really wanted to incorporate dance into my visual artwork. Half of the work I created for this show relied on dancers.

For one in particular, I hired dancers to perform with quilted canvas sculptures that were doused in iron oxide and made to be substitutes for a dance partner. I planned two performances: one at either end of the week of my exhibition. Midway through the week, one of my professors on my committee, Patricia, asked why I wasn't performing, since I too am a dancer and it is my artwork. After much tedious deliberation, I ended up taking her advice and I

performed at the final event. Looking back, I think it was the best decision I could have made. Not only was I able to interact with the sculptures in the exact way I imagined (and could ride that great endorphin high that comes with performing) but it has expanded my future considerations for how I can continue incorporating dance and visual art.

As for the potential of a mark made at a point of contact, in life, scars blemish our skin and serve as indications of previous touch. Our skin is prime canvas for various types of marks. In my thesis exhibition, I explored this through the use of pigments (iron oxide, powdered graphite and charcoal) to interrupt the “skin” of performers, sculptures, gallery walls, etc. This too comes from a lengthy fascination with dance: an art form that relies so heavily on touch. I have always been curious how this ephemeral experience could be translated visually and permanently.

All of the various symbols and metaphors I developed with the types of materials and application processes I used weren't fully formed when I began creating work for my thesis exhibition. It was through lots of reading, research, individual conversations with each of the faculty on my committee, and lengthy introspection that I was able to parse out what I was trying to communicate, even though I did enter the venture with a semi-formed idea of what it would look like and represent.

I do believe my thesis exhibition was a success—a belief reinforced by comments from my committee, professors, family, and peers. The content, concept, and quality of craftsmanship, all markers of artistic evaluation, were all well executed, as were the necessary, auxiliary factors of an art exhibition: the promotional materials, gallery presentation, and event planning for the reception.