

Washington University in St. Louis

Washington University Open Scholarship

Graduate School of Art Theses

All Graduate School of Art Theses

Spring 5-5-2020

A Jungle, a Dream, a Wallowing thing

Liz Moore
lizmoore43@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/samfox_art_etds



Part of the [Art and Design Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Moore, Liz, "A Jungle, a Dream, a Wallowing thing" (2020). *Graduate School of Art Theses*. ETD 138.
<https://doi.org/10.7936/ryxc-wr56>.

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the All Graduate School of Art Theses at Washington University Open Scholarship. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate School of Art Theses by an authorized administrator of Washington University Open Scholarship. For more information, please contact digital@wumail.wustl.edu.

“A Jungle, a Dream, a Wallowing Thing”

By
Liz Moore

A thesis presented to the
Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts
Washington University in St. Louis

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

Director of the Graduate School of Art
Patricia Olynky

Thesis Advisor
Meghan Kirkwood

Primary Advisors
Arnold Nadler | Richard Krueger

Graduate Committee
Julia Walker | Lisa Bulawsky

Abstract

I view my creative process as jumping head first into material, laboriously wringing it dry, and wetting it again until it transforms into its own. I use felt, silicone, family heirlooms, and embroidery, which contend between each other materially and connote feminine and fantastical landscapes and characters. I drench the felt in pastel colors and excrete silicone filled paint through cocoons of lace, to call forth associations of beauty and the grotesque. I am very interested in the tension held between two and three dimensional space, and how teetering on this line allows me to question reality, expectations of language, and tactility. Inspired by the pattern Toile de Jouy, my work uses the symbolic ideas of this Rococo French pattern to create art that investigates childhood, the grotesque, and domesticated nature. It is my assertion that through the use of metaphorical, fantastical landscapes and paintings, my work can allow viewers to transcend their expectations on the language of beauty and the power of the sculpture.

Table Of Contents

Abstract.....	1
Introduction.....	3
Section One: Felt	6
Section Two: Space and Time.....	10
Section Three: What makes a Monster and what makes a Man?.....	12
Section Four: Child-Ish Dreams.....	16
Section Five: Toile de Jouy.....	18
Section Six: The Landscape.....	22
Conclusion.....	24
Figures.....	26
Bibliography.....	41
Notes.....	42

Introduction

When a person enters into a museum, gallery or art space, they must leave their preconceptions of the world behind. What is waiting at the approach to an artwork, is the opportunity for growth, discomfort, and progress. In order for these feelings to come to bear, one cannot let themselves be locked into what they know; they can always pick it back up again at the door when leaving. It is important to shed the mind nude in order to see art.

When one approaches my art, they enter into a fantasy world. It is my internal world manifested visually for the viewer to converse with. The facts and reasons of this world, manifested as such, only pertain to that specific place. French Expressionist Henri Rousseau for example argued that the woman in his painting, “The Dream” (Figure 1), was having a dream, and in her state of mind there laid tigers lions and bears. Rousseau believed that his internal world had escaped him onto an exterior substrate and could only be expressed in this particular way.

Art is a fantasy world that breaches many expectations. Art engages a certain type of experience that allows for contemplation without physical harm. Viewing art can be implicated to consider a myriad of physical, emotional and mental possibilities, without having to suffer of them ourselves. For example, in Yayoi Kusama’s “Infinity Nets” paintings (Figure 2) there are implications of the fragmented body laid out for the viewer. The viewer does not have to suffer from hallucinations in order to visually contend with Kusama’s dizzying, multiplying polka dots. This could be described as an aesthetic truth, or as Werner Herzog puts it, Ecstatic truth.¹ Objectively, this truth relies on fantastical living in a metaphorical atmosphere. Art provides an alternate universe that always points back to our world and reality. To engage in art is to link the

connection of problems to solutions, and identity to the metaphysical. Sometimes, this engagement is slow, like wading into a river naked on a warm day, feeling the water collapse naturally overtop the blood in your body. Sometimes, it's like a polar plunge, where the water feels so cold that it's sore and painful at first. In between these approaches, the promise and experience of the work will always be visceral.

There is a need for this space in the museum to have a sense of safety because of visceral possibility. Art can put the mind and body at risk by adding new content. Through emotional, mental and physical encounters, one could argue that art is the only place in our reality to experience content in this way. There is no other platform that can really push the status quo, ask hard questions, be abrasive, illegal or kind. There is no place where the outcome is to *suggest* an idea for the sake of the idea. A direct relation to the internal body, artwork can exist because the artist exists. The value of the work begins at this reality.

My art explores topics that depend on this safe space to exist. Whether it is questions of identity, the body, or objecthood, these subjects need space and time to be tilled to be fertilized. My fiber sculptures bare pain, happiness and confusion. By doing so they are engaging in the fantasy environment art sets up for them to live within. Art creates space for anything to happen it has opened my mind to possibilities of mixing many things in the world don't exist together; but, in my world; do. For example, the grotesque,² is generally understood to be the root of ugliness and otherness; it claims a more complex identity that involves beauty and empathy.

My body of work seeks to upend all understanding of normalcy, expectations set upon objects and the aesthetic motifs that support them. I indulge and reveal histories of Toile patterns. I then turn them into completely different narratives that lean towards a broken reality,

rather than a fixed utopia. I wrap my sculptures with reference to Toile patterns in order to foreground the *idea*, rather than the patterns themselves; ultimately reducing the power of the visual information from decorative to fluid embodiment. I transform family heirlooms of jewelry into molding specimens, so that they feel alive-- confronting the viewer's space as a sublime entity. All of these elements -- patterns and jewelry-- defy their original intentions; exceeding utilitarian expectations, thus, becoming a parallel universe. Visually these elements are redescribed in the work to match the fantasy world of the museum. If they presented plainly, they would be merely a historical relic. By transforming the pattern's potency of Toile, the content is uprooted to mean more than just a historical pattern item. In the same way, the jewelry once worn on the arm of my grandmother is transfigured into an object which distinguishes the jewelry as art thus referencing a different world perspective.

The main prerogative of my research combines three very different ways of thinking. In this thesis I first consider the viewers understanding of abjection and beauty, through the grotesque. Second, I am concerned with the nature of patterns and how they suggest an innocent, childlike existence in interior spaces. Third, I am interested in the motives behind the act of domesticating the outdoors in pattern and decoration in order to visually fulfill ideal purposes. These ideas come together in my artwork, which explores the grotesque, Toile de Jouy, and the inversion of these aesthetic opposites.

Section One: Felt

“From cradle to grave, a material for kings and commoners, felt has gone its way through geographical space and time, and faithfully accompanying humankind.”³

I make large fiber sculptures, out of felted wool and a myriad of other craft materials, such as beads, tulle, embroidery, and silicone. The wool is felted to adhere to silk organza and the body of each wool roving adheres to the surface, like paint swatches that don't bleed into each other. In Untitled (Vitamin D) (Figure 3) I embroider countless knots that look like stitching that sutures two separated flaps of skin together, and raises the surface of the felt into a more tactile experience. The dynamic of the wool folds are reminiscent of flesh and a topographical map revealing information through ripples. By depicting the real and the metaphorical simultaneously, the felt generates an entire colored world as a complementary image of people.⁴ Joseph Beuys wrote about felt as the complimentary material to people's bodies in this way; “That is, to provoke a light world, a clear, light world, possibly a supernatural spiritual world through a thing that looks entirely different, a complementary image, to be precise.”⁵ The wool in felt is lightweight, and has historical prominence as a long lasting fiber that people use to protect them from harsh weather conditions.

Felt is complementary to the body in every moment of its life on earth. It is believed to have been an adornment of protection and a status symbol for people thousands of years ago, though no one knows its exact origin story. One origin story suggests that felt was created by travellers putting wool in their shoes to prepare for a long journey of walking, and as they

walked the friction of their foot and shoe flattened the wool to a sheet. As years have passed by, felt continues to change and shift meaning for different cultures. Felt is a piece of living nature, the molecular makeup of wool fibers, whether from sheep or plant tissue echo back to human skin. Polish sculptor, Magdalena Abakanowicz, writes about felt's nature: "It is from fiber that all living organisms are built - the tissues of plants and ourselves. We are fibrous structures. Handling fiber, we handle mystery."⁶

The felt I use is sourced from all over the world, but mainly Kentucky and Mexico. The colors are half synthetically dyed and half naturally dyed with plants and insects such as Cochineal.⁷ I mix both synthetic and natural dyes together in the work to introduce some complexity. For example the viewer might assume a synthetic "natural red" to be dull, when in actuality, a natural dye can be more vibrant. This confusion between the natural and the man made is held up in the unison of the colors, as they are felted together. This is the first of many ways in which I mix the natural and manmade. In the same way that the origin of the felt, the color identity is unknown, furthering the mystery of my works.

The felting process is carried out with a felting machine, where 3,000 abrasive needles puncture the two layers of loose wool rovings and silk. With the silk adhering to the top layer of wool, the process becomes a dry dreading act. The fibers in both the wool and silk are pulled in and out of each others stratosphere, binding them together through the process of repetitive pulling and puncturing. Felting flattens the wool which looks oddly two dimensional, though its feral threads still stick out like baby hairs. The line between the two-dimensional and three-dimensional qualities is what makes the felts so engaging it dismantles methods of every categorization.

Felt, exists in the world of craft, exceeding expectations of handiwork when it is large scale. More than just a painting or sculpture, the lifesize felt object becomes corporeal in the viewer's space and redefines the meaning of craft. In 1969, Lynda Benglis pushed the boundaries of one medium pouring latex paint onto the ground, engineering a new perspective of painting. In the same year, Jackson Pollock poured paint onto the canvas placed on the floor; however the specificity of Benglis pouring directly onto the floor brought paint into the three dimensional realm for the first time. The felting medium, much like Benglis' latex "Floor Pours" (Figure 4), challenges conventional material expectations. Organically fabricated, my forms retain their sense of anima; thus, asserting themselves as sculptures.

Sculptor Joseph Beuys used felt and stayed true to a neutral color palette. Beuys 'Felt Suit', 1970 (Figure 5) was made from the felt he had in his Dusseldorf home. Simply pinning the suit to the wall of the museum, Beuys stripped the suit of its everyday, practical function. The suit was hung by the museum to induce felt into a position of sagging. By hanging the suit on the wall, attention was brought to the suit's materiality. Felt does not stay the same shape for long; it is an ever shifting material with time. Beuys specifically brought attention to felts warmth by calling some later works "warmth sculptures."⁸ The breadth of his concern delved into questioning the function of the work rather than its appearance in color or form. Beuys' 'Felt Suit' brought attention to the unnecessary gap between the domestic (craft) and Fine Art.

I use color in felt because I choose to connote deep emotions of belonging and materiality that goes beyond associations of felt as a utilitarian object. The palette that I gravitate toward tends to be warm yellows, pinks and oranges. Sprinkled with cadmium red and cobalt blue, the electricity of the wool is bound up in its color. In A Soft Disruption (Figure 6) the felt

has so much compacted color that it is hard for the eye to follow. A sense of disarray and lack of control is elevated by the color dominating with such jarring, complimentary colors. The strokes of light and tone in the palette enforce a compelling gesture rather than a passive supporter of the form. As I progress the history of sculptors using felt as their material, I leave domestic expectations behind, as did Beuys. I intend to further elevate the uniqueness of felt by coloring it and building it to be an environment, not just an object. Color choices become a very powerful set of rules that I set for myself, as it is my intention to create atmospheres that evoke childishness and otherworldly.

Section 2: Space and Time

Sculpture, which is commonly associated as a hard, masculine genre in art, is only now being reassociated with a softer materiality. With the introduction of yarn bombing, the resurgence of quilting, and other craft methods seeking a place in the capital “A” artworld; traditional sculptural materials are being tested. My felt sculptures allow me to introduce notions of intimacy and play, two effects that I rarely experience in contemporary sculpture today. The importance of soft sculpture allows for more space to think about the bones of the structure. The materials I use to build massive forms are common household items that often go unnoticed, such as bubble wrap and conduit pipe. Because felt is lightweight, it doesn’t need to be supported by mounds of concrete or steel, just a simple steel bar, or a few wraps of foam. The bones are supportive as domestic fiber is itself. However, their place in the gallery is as natural as a Richard Serra sculpture. The felt, as it is wrapped around large circular and twisting forms, becomes more animated as it is surged through high and low space.

Richard Serra was a part of the Process Art Movement, where the end goal of the work is not the object itself but the process to which it came to be.⁹ Serra’s sculptures stained the art world into thinking that sculpture, made with chiseling tools or not, must be very hard. Yet, sculptors such as Lynda Benglis and Sheila Hicks have challenged assumptions that sculptural works must be hard, rusty and plain. My work aligns more closely with Benglis’ revelatory practice. She extended Pollock’s action by intentionally pouring paint on the floor, revolutionizing painting forever and more so, changing it from a hard material, to a fragile one. I, in the same way, adopt Serra’s action of intuitive building, from caring about not only the process, but turning the end product into a revolutionized idea of what a sculpture can be.

The space between the felt and the frame of a sculpture seem as fluid as flesh and bones. They take up space in works such as, “A Soft Disruption” (Figure 6), where the structure and felt make up tiny arches for viewers to duck under before it bellows down again on its opposite side. Much like Serra’s work , there are notoriously large arches that invite the viewer to participate. But on the contrary the participation is stunted by the introduction of the sculptures exterior being more vulnerable to human touch than Serra’s steel. This awareness of materiality being vulnerable to damage by human touch, much like the fragility of Benglis’ paint on the floor, is the shift between being a righteous viewer and an aware viewer. The vibrancy of the pelt-like wool surges energy up and down the spine of the sculpture, much like a painting carrying the eye. However, the space in “A Soft Disruption” is like a blanket gesturing in the air, frozen in time. Its monumentality allows space for awe and its tactility creates room to breathe with ease.

Section 3: What makes a Monster and what makes a Man?

In the 1996, Walt Disney production of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, a gentle character (Quasimodo), sits on the top of a gothic trellis, looking down onto the parties of the town with admiration and longing. His creature-like appearance anthropomorphic with his protruding back and bulging, big eyes keeps him from joining in with his fellow neighbors out of fear of being rejected or worse, ignored. He is an outcast who brings vitality to the gorgeous monument on which he perches, ringing the bells silly to bring pleasure to the people of the French town. He is the definition of grotesque: departing markedly from the natural, the expected, or the typical. Quasimodo becomes the hero in the end, and defies the expected norms of love, friendship and decent humanity. It is through the hunchback's story, that Disney proliferates an opportunity for a grotesque appearance to become an adored, and endearing quality.

At the end of the movie Quasimodo moves out into the crowd with deep hesitation, and is met by a little girl who softly caresses his bulging face. Then he is lifted up onto the shoulders of the crowd, as the town sings a song that asks the question, "...*what makes a monster, and what makes a man.*" This ending is a Disney creation, as the original 1831 ending by author Victor Hugo, ends with Quasimodo dying in a mass grave with his love Esmeralda. By capitalizing on the defect of the hero's deformity, Disney transformed the understanding that the grotesque can be more than repulsive, and rather alluring.

Quasimodo's back is hunchbacked, rounded at the top resulting from a shortening of the spine. His body appears as an abstraction of a "normal" human's back, more anthropomorphic than human. It could be that the fifteenth-century townspeople of France thought of him to be an

“unfinished” figure, an abstraction. He is not what they expect. He is rejected because of these things, until he comes out and redefines them. Through his grotesque nature, he is able to question the normalcy of bodies and provide a different perspective of beauty.

In “Carla (Anxious Grids)” (Figure 7) the work was born from a basic weaving technique, and gradually digressed into a new type of weaving. The change from a basic weaving to a new weaving was through the addition of oozing foam, dripping lace bubbles and tulle popping from the center, using grotesque gestures but implying an alluring delicacy. The structure underneath started out on a weaving loom and exercised the rules of the warp and the weft. I broke these traditional technical rules by omitting the weft and the horizontal plain becomes overtaken with bulging lace. It is a redefined “weaving,” like the felt sculptures make, transforming craft sensibilities into a more bodily state. In “Carla (Anxious Grids)”, the sculpture is slumped against the wall and provides a contrast to the perfect plaid lines. “Carla” leans back, bloated, against the perfect lines and reveals her misaligned body. The maximalist aesthetic shines forward and reveals that the leaking, ooze (Figure 8) can be quite alluring, and redefines the weaving technique from a normal practice into a redefined representation.

The word grotesque originates from the word Grotto. I have researched French grottos as part of my thesis, and the architecture in these grottos is how I described Quassimodo to be, anthropomorphic. Many of the grotto entryways depict human mouths or hands, and inside the table legs are paws. The experience of being inside a grotto is strange, because it is familiar in some representations, but then made alien through the mixing of natural and unnatural elements such as half animals, half human beings and objects. Understanding that the term grotesque

stems from these caves of dichotomy, suggests that grotesque entities don't rely on being pure horror, but exist in a cycle of being both repulsive and alluring.

Quasimodo's character and story serve as a metaphor for the lines of inquiry in my practice and what I hope to reveal to my viewers. To challenge the assumptions about the grotesque is to make the viewer aware of the ways in which it calls forth many other contexts, such as the sublime, beauty and horror. The grotesque is often described as just horror, but this is too narrow a definition.

My work challenges assumptions of the grotesque as the abject by its soft materiality and bright color palette. The abject as defined by Julia Kristeva is described as "our reaction (via horror) to a threatened breakdown in meaning caused by the loss of the distinction between subject and object or between self and other."¹⁰ While I agree with Kristeva's delineations, I would argue that while the abject is a breakdown of expectations of the distinction of self and other, it is more so building up *tolerance* between ourselves with the other. Perhaps the breakdown is a threat because of a lack of tolerance rather than merely a loss between the self and other thus initiating a horrified response. Here, the horrified response is heavily dependent on appearance, which Kristeva defines as a psychological experience of what people find to be ugly. She described that it is not only the appearance of an unfamiliar scene or person, but an unrecognition of how we once saw them that horrifies the viewer. I agree with Kristeva on this point and would even suggest that maybe we never saw them without a blinded bias of our own in the first place.

My work "Yellow Like Acid" (Figure 7) exemplifies what I am describing as the build up of tolerance. The form of the pinned up sculpture has the appearance of a body pillow that is

scarred with bubbling threads rising across its lower belly. There are holes cut out of the middle, which excrete a tinted teal jelly and fur. The initial reaction to the body of the form is not quite a scream, but it is frightful to see a pillow represent the flesh so closely. So the viewer steps closer, building up a tolerance of looking and accepting that the pillow resembles their skin. It is not ugly, it is unusual, and unfamiliar. The viewer most likely has never seen a pillow act like this before. Seeing the scarring pillow for the first time, the looking process becomes a tolerance of that relationship that a pillow could be a scarred body.

All of these actions by the viewer of my work are a response among the flesh. I think that the grotesque cuts up our responses, and gives us a new way to think about the familiar, to gain access to probes and be hyperconscious about the subjectivity of what we're looking at. Within this kind of subjective space, the grotesque can take shape to its surroundings, context and color palette and creates a tone of rich ambiguity. I find the grotesque to be summarizing, but not finalizing, a euphoric display of human derivation of emotion, reaction and universal dynamics, and for this reason explorations of the grotesque represent an important aspect of my practice.

Section 4: Child-ish Dreams

An underlying theme in my work is my childhood bedroom. This room has stayed clear in my memory, yet I know that as time goes on, this journey back and forth becomes more blurry. The work physically manifests this journey in the ways that my material, never give a direct starting or end point. My work denies finite existence, as the material is always weaving in and out of each other in constant motion. With no solid end or beginning, my forms concretize constant expressions and activate the mind. The ambiguity of where each sculpture begins and ends furthers the action of forms asserting themselves as those that belong among us. Existing in their own consciousness, the works remind us of the depths and lengths that our own awareness can embody in a physical state.

The color pink was a common palette in my childhood bedroom, and laying on my pink shag rug I believe impacted my sense of materiality and color.¹¹ In “Pockets of Youth” (Figure 8) the fur is fluffy and dripping with pockets of 70s dress fabric and braided wool tails. The work does not denote my childhood experience specifically, but rather connotes a childhood essence. This essence is noted in the backdrop of pink shag as the body of Pockets of Youth, mirroring my own shag rug memories. The braided circles in the piece are eminent of learning how to braid hair for the first time and wanting to braid my hair over and over, fascinated with the motion, as if it was a new invention. The childlike essence entails the use of childish language to question the meaning of things. In the same way that the braids are eternally cyclical, so is the way that

children ramble until their cycle of unsatisfied questions gets tired. “Pockets of Youth” embodies a sensibility of care as well as a violent reiteration of the domestic. Anthropomorphic in scale, the tail at the bottom of the piece leads the viewer to question if this is an object or a being.

My piece “...They breathed their last until it was light again” (Figure 9) is another metaphor for the liminal space of childhood. The work was inspired by a pattern that was in my childhood bedroom called Toile. The tree form is pulled from a tree in the pattern which I isolated it from its normal environment to extend its meaning. The work is acidic yellow and pumped with the fertilization of fake flowers and real grass. The base of the tree is grounded, like a couch cushion, with my grandmother's bracelet beads, matching the yellow of the tree bark. Collecting foliage, velvet and mushrooms excessively at its root base, the tree leans over as it grows, as if it's trying to run away from the complicated relationships it has grown below. The work conveys an experience that is similar to being in a dream and trying to run very hard, away from someone but where your legs feel like they're running through molasses. Slowly spiraling upwards and over, it is a really frightful feeling, of willfully trying to find your way and being held back by unknown forces. The slowness of the tree's presence is reminiscent of the slow pace of life depicted in the Toile pattern, and the slow process of growing up like the tree. Dreams are an uncontrollable reality which tend to dig up deep desire, fright and enchantment. This disorientation of the self is parallel with walking into a museum, in which participants no longer hold their conscious accountable and can let themselves fall deeply into an unrealistic, yet incredibly tangible state.

Section 5: Toile de Jouy

I grew up with Toile curtains and bedding in my childhood bedroom, and Toile is now a main inspiration of my work. The Toile, like the pink shag rug, was hanging around my walls for me to linger and meditate on as a child. I was obsessed with its repetitive depictions of beautiful girls running around in pastoral scenes, carefree, and it made me want to be like them. As I've grown older, I've come to realize the complexity of this type of young desire, to be like a woman that you are not in a place where you are not located. I desired to become the essence of a colonial idea, one that paraded an unrealistic lifestyle. Toile is beautiful in its design because it was intended to enchant those of the bourgeois, however, it is also ugly in its origins of inaccessible imperialism. Now, I would describe Toile as grotesque.

Toile was invented in Paris by two french men, Christophe-Phillipe Oberkampf and Jean Baptiste Hue. Who together started the Jouy Factory.¹² In (1760) inspired by Rococo paintings, the detailed drawings that make up Toile were particularly suited to textile, so in the factory they began to print large spools of Toile de Jouy fabric. The drawings themselves started out as French countryside scenes. As popularity for the fabric grew, the images began to depict new themes, such as architectural advancements. Toile patterns also began to actively praise the monarchy and presented these ideals in the landscapes as endless, idyllic spheres.¹³ (Figure 10) Marie Antoinette, who spent money excessively to decorate Versailles, endorsed Toile, and it became an image of status. To print Toile on the wallpaper of an entire bedroom was a luxury

that only the Bourgeois could afford. The idea of Toile was simple at first, but the idea grew to be a display of elitism and wealth.

Whereas Toile once represented a novel and playful farm life, the pattern became a sort of team flag, representing the visual language of many political intentions, including those of the United States. Toile has been adopted and used throughout the centuries in bourgeois living rooms, world war porch flags, and now appears in hobby lobby clearance items. Depicting scenes of whimsy, floating dogs and eternally windblown trees, the figures inhabit a frozen state of perfection. By continuing to only display the white, elite French in Toile today, is to ignore the unjust system it depicts.

Being from the south, I grew up thinking that Toile was a southern invention. This wasn't too far fetched considering much of the nineteenth century American South mirrored the eighteenth century French environment. Through sharing a bucolic landscape, a majority white population and colonialist history, the South inherited Toile imports from France with pleasure. They used them as flags to support presidents and embellished their rooms similarly to the French style of covering entire bedrooms (Figure 11). However, the southern perspective of Toile wasn't as "rich" because the printing wasn't expensive as it had been a century prior. So to have Toile in one's room did not come from the French practice of displaying wealth, but rather the belief in the bucolic reality of the pattern itself.

The tradition of the Toile bucolic landscape comes from one specifically called "La Douce France" or "Sweet France." It is described as a geography as much as a history, which is the sweetness of a classically well-ordered place where rivers, orchards, and wood are all in harmonious balance with each other.¹⁴ Landscapes can be self consciously designed to express

the virtues of a particular political or social community, and the myths of these inheritances have surprising endurance through the centuries, and power to shape institutions we still live and work within.¹⁵ As Toile was adopted by Southern culture, the memory of what it once stood for, wealth and status, was transformed into identity and longing. The environment of the simple countryside became a standard thereby transforming the Toile from a representation of reality to depicting a utopian reality. This yearning for a perfect life in the country has become imbalanced. Simon Scheima explains this transition of the landscape this way: “It is at this point, when environmental imperatives are invested with a sacred, mythic quality, which is said to demand a dedication purer and more uncompromising than the habits of humanity usually supply, that memory may help to redress the balance.”¹⁶

Through reconfiguring Toile to be sculptural experiences in “They breathed their last until it was light again” and “A Jungle, a Dream, a Wallowing thing,” I challenge the audiences' assumptions of the type of environment that they're walking into. The visual attributes of Toile inherently declare excess, large amounts of greenery, time and space to move around in. Just as Toile idealizes everything my work also is excessively covered in foliage such as mushrooms and fake greenery.¹⁷ The work is clearly artificial, by its plastic foliage and jewelry for flowers. In “They breathed their last until it was light again,” for example, the tree is based off of a Toile tree. I excavated the tree from a mythological Toile pattern called “La Chasse” (Figure 12) and revealed how it idealizes nothing. This abstraction of the land in these two pieces is like a grotto, unexpected. My work, when seen beyond its garish mesmerizing fake foliage, is asking for viewers to reconsider the temporal landscape, one that has previously avoided aging and my work is revealing its wrinkles. Because the scars in my pieces are blemished, and scratched by

the harshness of life unlike the real Toile, the work is able to open up dialogue concerning Toile's realistic believability. Contending with the pattern of Toile, which is deemed neutral in the interior realm, the work lays bare the tension it holds both politically and morally.

Living in 2020, there is a need for humanity to have a greater sense of wholeness. I feel that wholeness comes from considering how we see our world and identifying the lenses that we have become blind to. We've been told to see our world in a certain way through the colonial lens. For example, the grotesque (like Quasimodo) was never intended to be synonymous with the outcast; rather it started as the anthropomorphic grotto. Grottos were filled with both animal and human likeness, as well as mystery and allure. In the same way, Toile has been seen for a very long time as an innocent, childish representation of the countryside, however, it is actually a grotesque expectation of the elite white culture. It's all based on perspective. Toile is not just the opposite of the grotesque, it is a form of the grotesque that has been manipulated to the advantage of a certain set of people's choices. My work explores these tensions, vis-à-vis mushrooms and mold, and seeks to provide a space for an alternate interpretation of wholeness: one that considers accumulating mold to be a great delight and mushrooms to be underground communicators for the greater vitality of our bodies. In my work I want to recuperate the sublime, to be more sensitive of how we abstract land, time and history.

Section 6: The Landscape

In “A Jungle, a Dream, a Wallowing thing” (Figure 12) the landscape has been set apart in space, it is floating, and all of the foliage is dripping and swirling around the land, as it nauseatingly rotates on its axis. I wanted the work to “move” like in a dream: very slowly and in a manner that alludes to a chase. Among the field of layers are hundreds of red clay mushrooms. They seem to be eating the landscape, as if the ground and the mushrooms are having a slow-forming transaction with each other.

Mushrooms exist only by growing on death, rot and the like. Through their growth, they are a true *grace* and also a theme my work “A Jungle, a Dream, a Wallowing thing” explores. Mushrooms are communicators. Underneath the ground they tell trees whether or not the tree is at risk of dying or suffering an attack. The nutrient knowledge spared beneath the ground is passed back and forth, through an age-old ritual. The mushrooms give the trees grace through the act of being underground communicators. The mushrooms thrive on death, yet they give trees the grace to be aware of the future in order that they might live a little longer. So while mushrooms are described as decay, underground, they are actually the communicators of life.

A different form of death, mold, that is present in another work titled, “Untitled (Running so slow like running in a dream)” (Figure 15) In this piece, a set of 25 individual, tiny sculptures cascade down a 40-foot wall arranged as if they are falling downward. Each piece looks like it is leaking out of the wall and into the museum space. In each mini work, jewels are engulfed into pockets of naturally dyed wool, stuck inside by silicone like a fly caught in a spider's web. This serves as a representation of the ornamental being swallowed up by its natural surroundings. The jewelry in the work used to belong to my living grandmother, Sandra Huff. I chose to use family

heirlooms in the “wall molds” to give the work a sense of vulnerability, and to submit my personal self to the work. The wool and silicone continue a pastel palette, but their form is something unruly, growing and chasing. In this piece I intend to provoke a sense of sublime fright, as if to realize that in the natural ways mold grows, it is almost always found growing somewhere else than where you first found it. Inviting viewers to be aware of their body and aware of their distance the molds ask them to draw near. Mold is another fungi also which points to the mushrooms acting as another overlooked grace carrier. Aching with the weight of its jewel carrying flesh, the molds provide a space for the viewers to assume alarming growth, and then be countered by glittering, dainty pearls. (Figure 15) The power of grace acted out in the work balances out the power of assumption. Can we rewire our minds to believe the grotesque as beautiful, cascading dreams of pleantry? Can these moldy residues connote a sense of delight, one that keeps us coming back for more?

Conclusion

There are many tales of the othered monster, the Hunchback of Notre Dame, Frankenstein, Tim Burton's Edward Scissorhands, and Phantom of the Opera, all existing in the Romantic era where culture was obsessed with beauty and defined normalcy. The 'requirement' that beauty places on a viewer enables a false sense of longevity, and is sourced from the phenomenon of unceasing begetting. More so, sponsors of this idea of begetting, such as Plato and Dante, describe it as a perpetuating duplication that never stops.¹⁸ I think this is linked with the desire people have to keep things sensorily present to them. Elaine Scarry describes this experience as looking at something, not choosing to sketch it down, but to desperately lock eye contact for as long as possible.¹⁹ Inducing this sort of in between place, bouncing back and forth between the urge to own and the urge to see clearly can lead to an unhealthy yearning. Such yearnings are linked to the notion of the sublime, as an aesthetic force of both begetting and fear. The desire to hold precious, and the fear to get too close that you might lose something.

This back and forth dance between wanting to control and admire is the issue in which my work is constantly revolving around. By introducing new interpretations of my materials, the visual experience my works create is charged in a way that stretches the mind. By reframing the grotesque, I challenge assumptions about what people dismiss as ugly. By recasting rotting jewelry and mushrooms as graceful messengers I crush preconceived notions of kindness. By revealing colonial systems and displaying their instability through my use of Toile, I push the reset button.

There are so many ways in which we operate and think that have gotten us this far, but there is a need for progress. The only way to encourage a kind of jaw dropping progress is by

walking into environments which already believe, and to enter into this new reality. The museum, art gallery or art space is this place, allowing us to breach our minds and believe in something deeper, richer and more equal. We desire to hold this precious reality of equality, but we are afraid to let our old assumptions go and thrive in the world. My work is asking that question: how can we submit to our desires and simultaneously let them be free to operate in the world? How can we look at a piece of art and be mystified by its parallel universe and still think of ourselves?

Figures



Figure 1

Title: The Dream

Creator: Henri Rousseau

Medium: Oil on canvas

Date Created: 1910

Physical Dimensions: 6' 8 1/2" x 9' 9 1/2" (204.5 x 298.5 cm)

Credit Line: The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Nelson A. Rockefeller

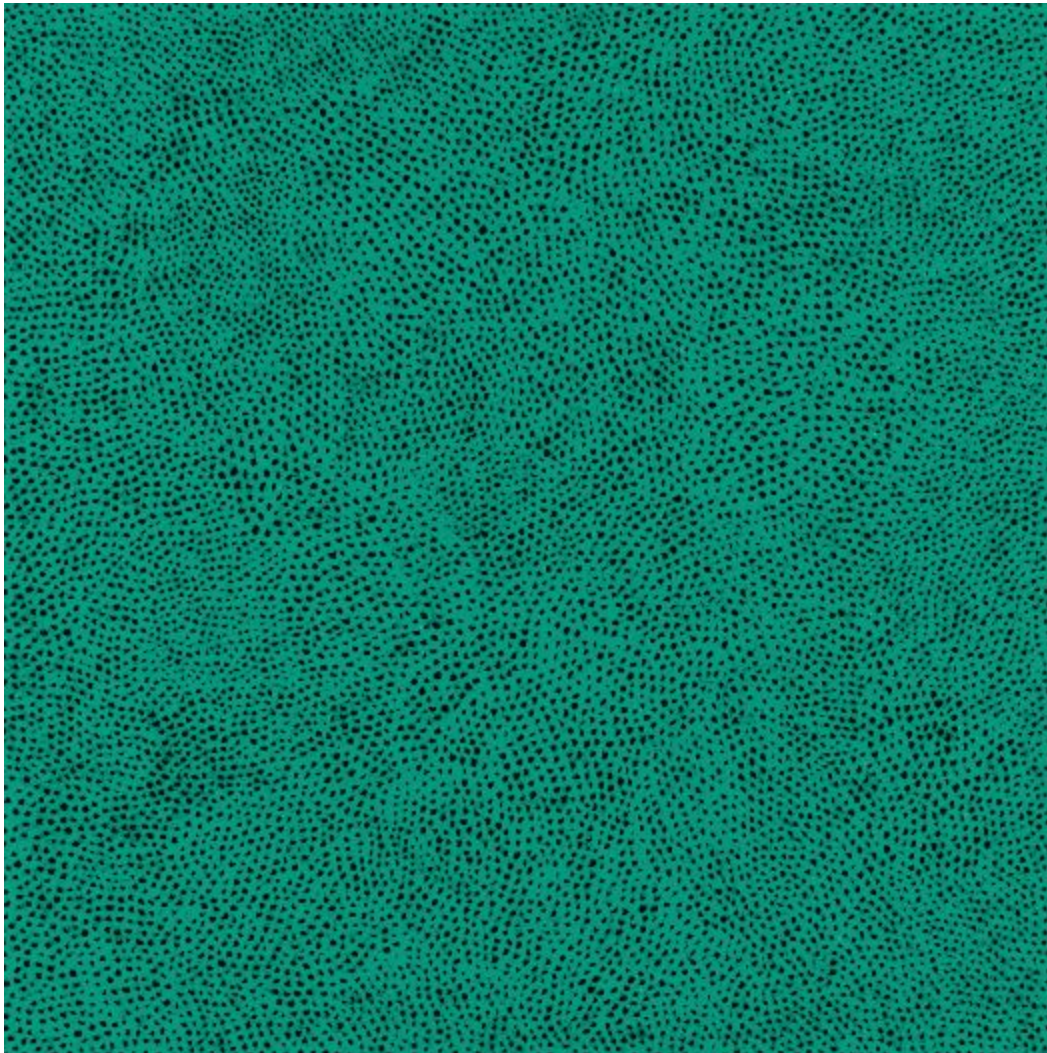


Figure 2

Title: *INFINITY-NETS*

Creator: Yayoi Kusama

Medium: Acrylic on Canvas

Date Created: 2007

Physical Dimensions: 39 3/8 x 39 3/8 inches (100 x 100 cm)

Credit Line: David Zwirner Gallery



Figure 3

Title: Untitled (Vitamin D) detail

Medium: Handmade Felt, Embroidery and Mixed Media

Date Created: 2018

Physical Dimensions: 42 x 72 in



Figure 4

Title: Blatt

Creator: Lynda Benglis

Medium: Latex Paint

Date Created: 1969

Physical Dimensions: 128 x 103" (325.1 x 261.6 cm)

Credit Line: Gift of the Fuhrman Family Foundation through The Modern Women's Fund



Figure 5

Title: Felt Suit (Filz Anzug)
Creator: Joseph Beuys
Medium: Felt and wood
Date Created: 1970
Physical Dimensions: 1660 × 660 × 260 mm
Credit Line: Tate London



Figure 6

Title: A Soft Disruption

Medium: Handmade Felt, Embroidery and Mixed Media

Date Created: 2019

Physical Dimensions: 7' x 13'



Figure 7

Title: (Carla) Anxious Grids
Medium: Mixed Media
Date Created: 2019
Physical Dimensions: 63" x 45"



Figure 8

Title: (Carla) Anxious Grids (Detail)

Medium: Mixed Media

Date Created: 2019

Physical Dimensions: 63 x 45 "



Figure 9

Title: Yellow Like Acid

Medium: Painted Faux Fur, Embroidery and Mixed Media

Date Created: 2018

Physical Dimensions: 5' x 3'



Figure 10

Title: Pockets of Youth
Medium: Faux Fur, Felt and Mixed Media
Date Created: 2018
Physical Dimensions: 48" x 72"



Figure 11

Title: ...They breathed their last until it was light again...
Medium: Felt, family heirlooms and mixed media
Date Created: 2019
Physical Dimensions: 9' x 5' x 4'



Figure 12

Title: La Chasse (The Hunt)
Creator: Marvic Textiles
Medium: Toile Pattern
Date Created: 1785 Copper plate reproduction
Physical Dimensions: 55" wide x 37.75" repeat
Credit Line: Marvic Textiles



Figure 13

Example of Toile covering an entire bedroom



Figure 14

Title: A Jungle, A Dream, A Wallowing Thing
Medium: Felt, family heirlooms and mixed media
Date Created: 2020
Physical Dimensions: 6' x 5' x 5'



Figure 15

Title: Untitled (Running so slow like running in a dream)

Medium: Wool, silicone, family heirlooms

Date Created: 2020

Physical Dimensions: size variable to installation



Bibliography

- Bataille, Georges, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, 1957
- Danto, Arthur C., *The Abuse of Beauty*, Carus Publishing Company, 2003
- Dietz, Dieter, *All About Space, Vol. 3, ALICE's teachings, Beyond the Object: The Imagination of Space*, Park Books, Germany, 2008
- Duncan, Carol, *The Aesthetics of Power: Essays in Critical Art History*, Cambridge University Press, 1993
- Gablik, Suzi, *Has Modernism Failed?*, Thames & Hudson, New York, 1984
- Kentridge, William and Morris, Rosalind C., *That Which is not Drawn*, Seagull Books, 2017
- Kristeva, Julia, *Powers of Horror: An essay on Abjection*, New York : Columbia University Press, 1982
- Scarry, Elaine, *On Beauty and Being Just*, Tanner Lecture Series, Yale University, 1998
- Schama, Simon, *Landscape and Memory*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1995
- Siegele, Starr, *Toiles for all Seasons: French and English printed textiles*, Bunker Hill Publishing,
Boston, In association with Allentown Art Museum, 2004
- Taussig, Michael, *Beauty and the Beast*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2012
- Thomas, Katharina, *FILZ: Kunst, Kunsthandwerk und Design*, Arnoldsche Art Publishers, 2001

Notes

1. Brad Prager describes Ecstatic truth this way, “There are deeper strata of truth in cinema, and there is such a thing as poetic, ecstatic truth. It is mysterious and elusive, and can be reached only through fabrication and imagination and stylization.” See: *The Cinema Of Werner Herzog: Aesthetic Ecstasy and Truth*, Brad Prager - Wallflower Press - 2007
2. A style of decorative painting or sculpture consisting of the interweaving of human and animal forms with flowers and foliage.
3. *Filz: Kunst, Kunsthandwerk Und Design*: Katharina Thomas - Arnoldsche Art Publ. - 2000, p.62
4. *Filz: Kunst, Kunsthandwerk Und Design*: Katharina Thomas - Arnoldsche Art Publ. - 2000, Joseph Beuys, Notes on Felt, p.12
5. *Multiplies Werkverzeichnis Multiplies und Druckgraphik*: Joseph Beuys, in: Jörg Schellmann + Bernd Klüser (eds.) Joseph Beuys, Munich 1985 (6th impr) 1965 - 1985.
6. *Filz: Kunst, Kunsthandwerk Und Design*: Katharina Thomas - Arnoldsche Art Publ. - 2000, p.63
7. Cochineal is a really special indigenous tradition of dying by drying and grinding the insects body into a fine, red powder. It has a PH level and changes to neon orange with acid and a dark purple with alkaline. I did a residency as Arquetopia Oaxaca, working and studying on a farm that harvested this dye among others.
8. Beuys, Joseph, “Felt Suit”, 1970, Tate Museum, London,
<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/beuys-felt-suit-ar00092>
9. I have mentioned another colleague of this movement previously, Jackson Pollock.
10. *Powers Of Horror: An Essay On Abjection*: Kristeva, Julia, Roudiez, Leon S., New York : Columbia University Press, 1982. Print.
11. So many moments were spent laying and dreaming on my rug. It was one of my first impressions with a physical object, and was so pure because it was untouched by human interference. My physical relationship to the rug sparked a longevity of chasing after soft materiality.
12. *The History Of Surface Design: Toile De Jouy Textile read-See also-Textile History* -
<https://patternobserver.com/2014/09/23/history-surface-design-toile-de-jouy/>
13. *Design Moments: Toile De Jouy, C 1760*, Bernice Harrison -
<https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/homes-and-property/interiors/design-moments-toile-de-jouy-c-1760-1.3126777>
14. *Landscape and Memory*, Simon Schama, Alfred A. Knopf, 1995, p.15
15. *Landscape and Memory*, Simon Schama, Alfred A. Knopf, 1995, p.15
16. *Landscape and Memory*, Simon Schama, Alfred A. Knopf, 1995, p.18
17. French intellectual and writer Bataille would describe this as *depense*. See “*Erotism: Death and Sensuality*”: Georges Bataille, *Taboo* (Chapter III) and *Transgression* (Chapter X), 1957
18. See “*On Beauty and Being Just*”: Scarry, Elaine, *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, Yale University March 1998, Ch.1 p.5 & Ch. 1 p. 6
19. See “*On Beauty and Being Just*”: Scarry, Elaine, *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, Yale University March 1998, Ch.1 p.5 & Ch. 1 p. 6

