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Bear Fruit

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Bear Fruit

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Report

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Dedication

This report is dedicated to my immensely strong grandmothers, Isabel Heins Lawrence and Ruby Lee Scoggins, and my unfailingly supportive and loving parents Dianne and Richard Lawrence.

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Abstract

Bear Fruit

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2016

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This Master's Report is a discussion of the ideas, research, and methods I have developed over the course of my three years of study at the University of Texas at Austin. My work draws from a multiplicity of traditions from classical figurative sculpture, feminism, mid-century modern design, large-scale outdoor fountains, to Victorian crafts. The fountains use neoclassical figurative sculptures of women as a point of departure. The original sculpture is translated through a feminist lens and recreated using fruit, rearranging and displacing gender specific sexualities by replacing otherwise sexualized bodies with representations of pears or a pineapple, among other fruits. Cultural references to these specific fruits, a pear-shaped body or the exoticism and colonialism inferred with a pineapple, are important contextual references in the transmutation from figurative sculpture to fruit fountain. The high relief wall sculptures, smooth body parts monochromed in soft colors, speak to the fragments of classical sculptures while conflating gender cues. They confuse our ability to stereotype as non-binary representations of body. In all, the work mimics moments of bodily intimacy while playfully dealing with reproduction, eroticism, as well as the problematic aspects of the sculptural tradition embedded within the patriarchal system.

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My childhood bedroom was veritably coated in Claude Monet's pastel water lilies. Echoing their soft colors on the bedspread, sheets, pillow shams, and curtains, I laid my head on his impressionist images during many of my formative years. I was enthralled by the magic of Giverny, a place where flora and water collided into an almost singular, undulating mass. Scanning my memories, my infatuation with Monet's water lilies is the first instance of my interest in the combination of water and color, the human perception of elemental activity. Unsurprisingly, the colors found on my childhood bedding are nearly identical to the palate of my sculptures.

Relatedly, the influence of family is an indelible aspect of how I continue to make and interact with the world. My mother and grandmothers, all seamstresses and interior designers to some extent, gave me a strong sense of personal taste, arrangement, and beauty that I am unable to shake, even when it works against me. My experience and desire for color finds its origin in their tastefully decorated homes (ranging from midcentury farm house to modern glass and steel) and the care in which they chose and created outfits, both theirs and mine. I was instilled with a desire to be 'put together', a phrase I heard often from all of the women in my family. From my father, a true maker in his own right, comes an engineering mind and an early love of construction. The co-owner of a hardware store during my early years, he put a hammer in my hand early on. While other children were playing with blocks I had a giant bolt-washer-nut toy that my father gave me to learn about hardware. With a conscious desire to fulfill the roles of a son and a daughter, I took to both building and sewing. In much of my work I am trying

to fill the space I felt between this dichotomy: my attempt to exist outside of gender stereotypes by wrapping them up into a singular mass.

My research is focused on the examination of systems and structures of control around bodies, and in particular the female body, using food as a reference and replacement. I use mythologies, linguistic and image reciprocation, and physiological organizations around produce to process and re-present imbalances of power. Ranging from static sculptures and fountains to videos and drawings, these differing modes of work offer several points of entry using tactics such as humor, parody, monument, and surrogacy, among others.

The easy substitution of language between fruit and the body has been a mainstay in folklore and literature for thousands of years. The biblical story of Adam and Eve in the garden, pomegranates in the Greek myth of Persephone and Hades, and the Chinese goddess Xi Wang Mu with her cherries of immortality are all examples of how fruit has been folded into our collective cultural consciousness. Humans are also forced to have associations with fruit for our survival- we are tuned at a cellular level to appreciate its sweetness, softness, and ease of digestion. It plucks a chord with us both biologically and nutritionally. Food has many purposes: it is both a material thing that we interact with and a potential source of energy for our bodies. It is a part of our primate lineage: we have moved from the tree to the earth and yet still search for the choicest of fruits.

Fruit in particular has become an important reference and interest of mine. Botanically speaking, a fruit is a seed-bearing organism that develops from the ovary of a flowering plant. Throughout history fruit has symbolized fecundity and fertility: the

phrase “to bear fruit” is used as an idiom for success or the creation of progeny. Fruit is also associated with eroticism and humor, at the core of which exists the body. More specifically: women’s bodies have long been associated with the sweetness, softness, and the shape of fruits. Torsos are sorted into apple or pear shapes. Fruit is used as a representation for the size of a tumor. Fruit has become a metaphor for sexual experiences and sexualized body parts: bananas bear the brunt phallic jokes, popping the cherry for a woman’s loss of virginity, breasts are compared to melons and peaches to posteriors. Pregnant women take weekly pictures of their bellies with pieces of produce equivalent in size to their growing fetus. There is a reciprocation of language around bodies and plants: they are both pruned, grafted, sculpted, consumed. They both ripen and decay.

The language around food has seamlessly transferred into how we speak about social exchanges, emotions, and the human form. The connection between body and food moves well beyond sustenance, an important consideration in my work. Nearly all humans have a haptic understanding of fruit: we know how it feels to hold a pear, bite into a pineapple, or squeeze a lemon. This touch memory adds a layer of access that goes hand-in-hand with the relatable nature of fruit as an easily recognizable symbol.

My large outdoor fountains rearrange and dispute gender specific sexualities by replacing otherwise sexualized bodies with large-scale representations of bananas and pears in *The Kiss* (Figure 5), a stack of Eve’s forbidden fruits in *Forbidden Fruits (Eve’s Stack)* (Figure 6), or a double crowned pineapple in *Reclining Nude* (Figure 10). By employing parody and substituting fruit for the body, I aim to deal with the humorous,

erotic, and problematic aspects of the sculptural tradition and heteronormative, patriarchal systems. Humor and playfulness enter as a buffer for the challenging subject matter with which I am dealing. Though to a much lesser extent, I think about the way a comedian uses humor to tackle the taboo or social commentary. Humorist Mary Hirsch commented that, “Humor is a rubber sword – it allows you to make a point without drawing blood” (Cohen, 1). In my work humor, color, and scale can all operate as distractions in the first read, allowing connections and charged sociopolitical topics to simmer beneath the surface and emerge over time.

The shift from material metaphor to image metaphor marked an important conceptual and formal tuning in my work. Moving from the use of organic materials such as juicer pulp in the sculpture *Stacks* (Figure 2) or gelatin in many of the *Eupepsia* (Figure 1) sculptures to image based metaphor as seen in *summerhead* (Figure 8), the speed in which information is relayed to the viewer modulates. Juicer pulp is a slow read- it is possible that the viewer may never recognize it without reading the materials list. An image of a pear, on the other hand, reveals itself quickly and transfers information instantaneously. It carries its own baggage of sociocultural history and personal connotations that a mysterious material cannot. The inference is direct rather than roundabout. This brings back a familiar dichotomy: abstract experience versus representational image.

Examining Charles Umlauf’s highly figurative and representational midcentury bronzes, and neoclassical statuary as a whole, is now a vital part of my process. Using Umlauf’s work as a reference point and opportunity to push against patriarchal,

heteronormative, and decidedly misogynistic sculptural imagery, I pluck key figural aspects of each sculpture to recreate using fruit as a replacement for the body. I am able to press his work through my own sieve of intersectional feminist logic. Using Umlauf's work as a point of departure and critique, I begin on a footing that I then work to break down: a form of composting. This way of working began with the three fountains made specifically for the Umlauf Prize exhibition in September of 2015. *The Lovers V* (Figure 4) was in response to an Umlauf bronze of the same name, as was *The Kiss* (Figure 5). *Forbidden Fruits (Eve's Stack)* follows a similar line, as it is in dialogue with three female nude bronzes located in a close proximity. This way of working has a mooring, a specific set of referents that are tied to each of my fountains. I've found a greater sense of action and critique in the present work that was not present in the material metaphor.

My fruit is skewed in scale, placement, and arrangement. This removes it from our day-to-day understanding of these objects. The question of origin is especially fertile territory as the particularities of source are obscured, multiplied, and complicated. The fountains *The Kiss* (Figure 5) and *Reclining Nude* (Figure 7) are especially relevant examples. In *The Kiss*, a banana at the scale of a human male seems to hold a two-headed pear body horizontally. The pear has no calyx, the outermost whorls of anatomy that form a flower. Without the calyx there could be no flower and thus no point of origin for the fruit. It must come from somewhere else, using a logic of reproduction separate from that which we know. *Reclining Nude* raises a similar question: without the bract, the area of connective tissue between the stem and the fruit, how did the pineapple come into the world? They are becoming something else, signaling that their frozen, monumentalized

form is not the end of their path. They are caught in a moment of transformation. This leads to the idea of many potential futures, futures untethered from the past.

Identity is deeply enmeshed with origin. Without the complication of a beginning, could binaries be demolished in favor of a spectrum? With this sense of a utopian alternative, I want these sculptures to consider a different future. They, untethered as they are to a sense of provenance, have the ability to engage with systems dealing with sexuality and gender with greater fluidity. Pushing past the binaries related to life and death, male and female, strong and weak, they are floating in a future-primordia that is disengaged to fixed notions of reproduction.

Pineapples are of particular interest in my work. Formally they are intricate, beautiful, complicated objects. Biologically they are classified as a sorosis, a fleshy multiple fruit created from the ovaries of several flowers that coalesce together in order to form a larger fruit. Culturally they have transitioned from being more valuable than gold to available at the local grocery for a few dollars apiece. Their history, deeply enmeshed with colonialism and global trade, is also an apt metaphor for the changing face of the global economy from the 15th to the 20th century. They are an American and European stand-in for exoticism and in turn tropical locals and foreign (often female) bodies.

The British and Americans categorized pineapples as ‘other’ in the colonial period. The apple was considered ‘honest’ and ‘upright’ while the pineapple was considered “foreign, exotic, seductive and dangerous” (O’Connor 70). Because of this seductiveness it seemed an apt replacement for the art historically omnipresent reclining female nude. I am fascinated with the gendering of fruits, colors, and objects over time.

As my research on pineapples deepened I found that the European gendering of the pineapple shifted from masculine symbolism to a version of seductive femininity (67). By the time Queen Victoria came to the throne, the pineapple had almost fully transitioned from being commonly know as the ‘Queen of Fruits’ rather than king (67). This swap in gendered language is illustrative of the manner in which our perception of objects and foodstuffs undergo changes over time that amalgamate into our conscious and subconscious understanding.

The disembodied arms and legs, in various states of flexing their muscles, have a similar sense of decontextualization that is held in the morphing fruits. Released from the body as a whole, yet still holding tension, the flexed arms in *know who you are at every age* and *sigh’s smell of farewell* (Figure 9) are singular and autonomous. They are both expanding and holding, like a ribcage during a deep inhale. I’m interested in the dichotomies of these forms- the arms are both slightly frivolous yet powerfully holding firm. The gender is attempting ambiguousness, conflating gender clues by combining a muscled bicep with a fanned hand holding a scrap of cloth.

All of the limbs are scanned from live models holding a specific position, translated through software, and scaled up to one and a half times life size. This presses the scale just enough to feel squarely larger-than-life. Classical statuary, and its often larger-than-life scale, is clearly present in the body fragments. The bodies are directly related to Greco-Roman sculpture in both scale and the fragmentation that often happens to statuary over time. I am interested in a sense of synecdoche, a part for a whole.

Unable to determine their material make up because of the smooth topcoat, these objects will age differently than bronze or marble. Over time they will degrade, water and environment will cause the paint to flake and the fiberglass to crack. I like that they aren't permanent. As the elements act upon them, they give way. Thinking about them in relation to time is hopeful; perhaps when the material breaks down the particular metaphor held in that object will no longer be needed. As though something in the world has healed and rendered the object unnecessary, as though the seed has shed its fleshy beginning and finally set roots.

Figures



Figure 1: *Eupepsia Installation*; mixed media; 2014



Figure 2: *Stacks*; Salted and dehydrated juicer pulp, flocking, steel, foam, wax cherry; 30"x14"x14"; 2015



Figure 3: *Fount of Moderate Apprehension*; Wood, resin, candy, atomizing pump, compressed sponges; 34"x12"x28"; 2015



Figure 4: *The Lovers V*; Monochromed fiberglass, steel, epoxy resin; 90"x32"x32"; 2015



Figure 5: *The Kiss*; Monochromed fiberglass, steel, epoxy resin; 102''x66''x36''; 2015



Figure 6: *Forbidden Fruits (Eve's Stack)*; Monochromed fiberglass, steel, epoxy; 80"x40"x40"; 2015



Figure 7: *seekers who are lovers*; Wood, gypsum, plastic, foam, epoxy, paint, fabric, paint; 50"x24"x10"; 2016



Figure 8: *summerhead*; Plastic, epoxy, pump, paint; 48"x36"x36"; 2016



Figure 9: *know who you are at every age and sigh's smell of farewell*; Wood, gypsum, plastic, foam, epoxy, paint, fabric, paint; each 34"x34"x6"; 2016



Figure 10: *Reclining Nude*; Foam, powder coated steel, epoxy, plastic, pump, concrete; 60"x72"x96"; 2016

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