

pop in between

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last summer and any time Freddie starts uncontrollably laughing out of nowhere. “CC! AAAYY-DEEEEEE!! OOHLOOHLOOHLOOHLOOH!!!” *Damn straight.*

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Finally, to Dad - when I look back on it now, I think it was you that day in the garden.

This one’s for you.

i remember

I remember back on that night in the emergency room, you slipped and said “husband”, and that’s how I knew you were gay. You told me something along the lines of “you’re good” - kidding about the power of my heightened intuition.

I remember my mother sitting in the dining room, the sun shining through the crabapple tree on the other side of the window. She told me she had been watching Mary and I fervently dig into the dirt and push the roots of the small lilac bush into it’s new home - “you brought me back...I thought he was going to come back and walk down the street at any moment and you brought me back to reality that life is going to go on...”

I remember doubling over on the patio, customers bursting the old house-turned-restaurant at the seams with cocktail valentining and steak chewing. The Katy Perry movie had taught me that if I put my arms out like an airplane and bent over at the waist at a 90 degree angle, my tears would fall straight through my eyelashes, keep all my make up in tact, and the show could go on even if it meant divorce.

I remember standing at the island in the kitchen while my mom talked to Terri by the front door and thinking about how I was going to have a “Darkest Night of the Soul” while arranging tulips in a mason jar of fresh water with bananas hugging near the base on the worn wooden cutting board, being so proud of the still life I made. I was committed the next day.

I remember the second time I was hospitalized, being in the shower as I spotted a razor in my bag that some idiot medical assistant had forgotten to remove from my personal belongings. I was too scared of how much it would hurt to attempt it.

I remember being as elated as a little kid at the carnival that there were so many excavators around the hospital while my mother did everything she could to keep from falling apart.

I remember getting the orange juice out of the fridge. I left the door open, a bad habit yes - but the contents would be returned shortly. I poured out all thirty blue tablets of clonazepam, and handful at a time, brought them up to my mouth like Skittles. I swigged the juice straight from the container to help swallow, returned it to it’s resting place, then climbed the stairs back to my room and crawled back into bed so that I could get some rest too.

I remember I made him breakfast the next morning and told him I’d never been bent over the counter before.

I remember Rose Hill, where I never slept all the way through a single night. I worked in the kitchen, and usually did nothing but cut fruit or iceberg lettuce. For the first few days, I circled around another resident like a hawk as he struggled to halve a thick watermelon, wondering if I could grab the knife fast enough.

I remember falling down in my mother’s room, feeling the top of my head hit the sharp point of the door frame. I remember next sitting on the hard kitchen floor in front of the refrigerator - my mom told me later that I had grabbed a sail boat magnet off of it and had it in my hand. I remember

next being on the couch and Gary's hand on my head, asking me if I could hear him. I remember next hearing the sound of the ambulance door shut - I think it was the left one.

I remember my boss pulling her obnoxiously oversized car half-cocked into our snowy driveway. Through smeary frosted pink lipstick and the passenger window half down, she told me about her daughter's torn ACL and asked that I say a prayer. It is the last recording on tape that I have of her.

I remember my mom telling me details about that day in June - still in bed and half asleep, I told her that I had planned to go to the gym that day. It's nice to know my suicidal subconscious still wants a tight ass.

pop in between

a constant search
a repeated lurch
a hunt for pattern
twitch and chatter
no break, no sleep
hoof beat sounds, must be zebras

a friction,
not a this or that
an adaptation,
not a limitation
[swallow all that blue in a few gulps of orange]
death before static

what is the distance between half and halved?
transmigration before transformation

a frantic fanatic
confused by polarity
relieved by the middle
defense in numbers
no sting
no bite

splinters of gestalt
excavating the fault line
shedding the inside out
by seeking the inside in
[holding all that heavy in polypropylene]
to tell the truth with all that popping in between

Abstract

“So, for the person in pain, so incontestably and unnegotiably present is it that ‘having pain’ may come to be thought of as the most vibrant example of what it is to ‘have certainty,’ while for the other person it is so elusive that ‘hearing about pain’ may exist as the primary model of what it is ‘to have doubt.’ Thus pain comes unsharably into our midst as at once that which cannot be denied and that which cannot be confirmed.” - The Body In Pain

“Yes, sir, and a very lonely place it is too, sir, when I wake up in the middle of the night with my pain.” - A Clockwork Orange

“Personally, I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good.” - The Yellow Wallpaper

“‘ecdysis’ - the process of shedding old skin, or casing of the outer cuticle.” - forensic/poetic

In the body of work that came to be *pop in between*, I challenged the viewer, regardless of the hazed and glazed look of only a few moments time so common in observing art, to decipher both every detail of what had happened to me, as well as feel precisely what I felt during a catastrophic time in my life. Quickly discovering the impossibility of this venture, I would unexpectedly explore the unobtainable search for the middle instead. Not just any middle, casual split, or mathematically equal divide in an object or timeline; rather *where the exact location exists* of the perfectly balanced, evenly spaced, omnipresent coexistence that lies between ecstasy and agony.

Nearing the end of July, on a late morning already blistering with heat, I could be found hunched over the largest front garden, right where my little corner of the earth began to curve around to the left and slope downhill. I was examining the ground extensively, making sure nothing had burst out of and escaped through my carefully installed layers of plastic sheeting and multi-thousand small stones. I had been scrupulous in my attempt to snuff out the chance that anything foreign and lurking below could emerge from underground and blemish my meticulously weeded garden. I never realized gardening to be such a grueling and awarding activity until that summer of 2014. It makes so much sense in retrospect really, with all those decisions in color, material, placement, craftsmanship, and grunt work; I soon realized this new endeavor had actually morphed itself into my latest work as an artist. Perhaps the term “land art” is a stretch, as I kept mostly to the humble confines of my mother’s front garden beds. For me, however, it was a newfound medium to try my hand at; one that would cultivate an entirely new understanding for what lies beneath the surface.

Before I knew it, I found my face alarmingly close to an eerily bizarre yet beautiful insect near the exposed base of a lilac bush my sister and I had planted years before in honor of my father. It sat completely still and radiated *so blue*. A kind of blue I had never seen in an insect before – the wings a translucent and shifting ombré of aquamarine at the top, pale sea foam towards the middle, and deep indigo at the tips. Together, the colors vibrated and hummed on top of an alien, greenish grey thorax. Its front legs clung toward the top of what appeared to be a hollow, shriveled, and sharply pointed exoskeleton that contrasted all the blue with its glossy, amber brown. Even though I could tell that this semi-discarded shell had been the former host of a now patiently hardening body, I found myself absolutely baffled by the difference in appearance between the two, and snapped a couple of quick shots with my phone. Eventually, I would come to learn that the insect I saw that day was a cicada; a mesmerizing creature with a cyclical life span and transformative story that would soon crawl through and mirror my own.



Opening itself up to me as a rather fucked up Valentine's Day gift, my own two-for-one deal of ecstasy and agony would come in a non-returnable package of a trip to the emergency room in February of 2015. As one of the worst winter storms in recent years ravaged outside the hospital walls in Mishawaka, Indiana, I could be found tucked away in one of the beds at Saint Joseph Regional Medical Center, exceptionally oracular and severely confused.

Without the slightest inkling of hesitation, I can still conjure up every detail from that night: the acidic smell of sterilized equipment and hospital grade detergent in the gown they gave me to wear. The lullaby choruses of different call bell tones coming in through the ever-ajar doorway of my room. The odd feeling of nonslip stripes on the bottom of the socks the nurse had wriggled onto my feet. A medical assistant, pushing a needle into my left inner arm to gather a blood sample whom I cried in a whimper to – "I know what this looks like," my mind immediately associating the site with sensation, and that somehow, automatically, a needle in my arm inevitably meant that I was being surmised as a pathetic junkie. Soon after this, the same nurse that had put on my socks earlier prepared to distribute two enormous yellow pills to me. I spotted the familiar orange vial in his hand as my mind, rapidly linking everything yet again declared – "they're drugging me already." In reality, they were potassium tablets, levels of which showed low after a urine sample.

Earlier, when I had been asked to give this sample, I confused the order of the procedure in which I was supposed to complete it, soon fearing that all the medical staff involved in my case were already concluding that I was trying to cover something up. I was given water to drink so that I could repeat the test again, delivered to me in a white styrofoam cup with a lid and straw that bent a quarter of the way down the shaft. I pounded every drop down, soon becoming infatuated with chewing on the bottom of the cup. I chewed and chewed until eventually, my teeth had slashed holes into it. I felt feral and alone, my mind begging me to stop what I was doing, my teeth refusing to listen. Though I was acutely observant to both every minute detail of my surroundings and the rapid thoughts that kept tearing through my mind, I continued to swing back and forth – philosophical

musings one moment, reduced to dithering and torrential tears the next. The diagnosis - ICD-9 CM: 296.7, more commonly known as Bipolar 1 disorder.

In addition to this already disorienting situation soon came more news to digest. In addition to finding out about my own diagnosis, I learned for the first time that very same night that my father, whom had passed away almost fifteen years prior of a malignant brain tumor, too had bipolar disorder, also referred to as manic depression. I would later learn that at the time of his diagnosis, he and I were the exact same quartered age of 25, an age where he was grinding away at medical school. Though our textbooks differed significantly, both of us knew, deep down, something was very wrong by the time our psyches had reached critical mass.

Eventually going on to become a practicing family physician in our hometown until cancer struck, I merely assumed that the matter of mental illness was kept purposefully private. The only two people to know immediately in his life were my mother and his own personal psychiatrist. No other family members, no other fellow doctors or colleagues, no friends. Several years later, around the time my only and older sister Mary was thirteen, he disclosed the news of his mental illness to her, with the notion she was beginning to show signs of having it herself. This would turn out not to be the case, but rather some vicious teenage angst common in middle school years. When my father passed in April of 2000, the knowledge of this illness remained below a surface none of us knew we had constructed. Though the channels connected, the pathways remained closed in a nameless triangle of silence.



In the days that followed my visit to the emergency room, the fog of newly prescribed medication clogged my usual razor sharp memory. I remember sleeping... so much sleeping. I was stationed in a recliner in the living room, and some sort of Judd Apatow rom com marathon on Comedy Central was playing on television, a fitting end to the saccharine-overload of Valentine's Day Weekend. I kept managing to wake up at the start of each movie, then fell back into sleep immediately, groggily reawakening right as the same movie ended. This cycle repeated three different times, with three different movies, until day fell into inky black night.

I had many visitors in the days that followed as well, and was eventually taken out for several excursions, always getting picked up or dropped off as driving was out of the question for quite a while. One evening, my sister and I went to the local grocery store to get some items for dinner. I do not recall being in the bakery, nor do I recall having any intention of getting myself something sweet. In addition to the full sheet, round and tiered, ice cream, and custom orders, my hometown's grocery store also made half cakes. Not just a cake that is baked as usual and simply halved with a knife, but rather a cake *made to be half*. Everything from the exposed middle layer of frosting dividing layer one from two, the ruffled piping along the edges that stop exactly at the sharp top and bottom points of the center, to the custom made plastic half plate that it sat on – this cake made me just as aware of its presence as it did its absence. It was late February, and my half birthday was on the 25th as my real birthday falls on August 25th. I felt a tug deep down that this cake carried the weight of both a celebratory symbol of 25.5 and a visual reminder that I had survived. It made its way into our cart shortly after that.



In the first few days of March, as spring tried hard to convince the Midwest it was her turn, I was trying to convince myself that everything was okay, or at least, improving. Getting back from a lunch out with my former childhood babysitters one Saturday afternoon, I soon fell fast asleep on the couch. When I woke up to the sound of my mom coming in through the garage door, I was confused to feel myself wheezing, deep down in my chest. Though I found it odd, I forgot about it shortly after and went about the rest of the day.

As I found a great amount of comfort in the sounds of the different voices on the television, I had been sleeping downstairs more nights than not. By the morning of my scheduled follow up appointment with my family doctor post ER, my eyes had become so swollen that it felt as if my bottom and top eyelashes had entangled themselves into hundreds of knots. I could hear my sister near the living room, and told her to come over to the recliner. I made her watch and witness as I audibly pried open and ripped through the dried mucus my eyelids had produced overnight, freakishly exposing my eyeball the likes of Alex in *A Clockwork Orange*. As I relayed my issues of wheezing, puffiness in the face, and the alarming state of my eyes that morning to my doctor, it was decided that a reaction was occurring due to the medications I was prescribed post- emergency room (lithium carbonate and olanzapine) mixing with an antibiotic I was already on prior to for acne (doxycycline). Though I felt better to have things sorted out, the following morning was a different story. My eyes had turned into all but two slits, while my lips had grown at least three times in size, looking like a badly botched cosmetic job. In a panic, I called my family doctor back, where her nurse informed me to go to the emergency room immediately. Somehow, I became alarmingly calm; I evenly folded every single blanket in the living room and managed to put on some different clothes before foolishly driving myself back to the hospital.

This second trip to the emergency room comes back to me in pieces, but I know that I still remember everything. The PA heading the department that morning was a woman who reminded me so much of Rachel Maddow; with a speaking voice markedly loud and abrupt, I found myself both giggling and worrying everyone outside the always ajar doorway could hear the private details of my current state. As I waited for the news of whatever this was, I kept noticing

an odd and uncomfortable feeling inside of my mouth. Without a mirror nearby, I grabbed the next best thing, and turned my phone's front facing camera feature towards me. In just a few attempts, I landed what would be one of the most intense images of this work: my mouth was *saturated* in gaping, blistering canker sores, with what looked like a second set of teeth growing underneath my tongue. Within that image alone, my mouth is as open as a scream, yet unable to speak a word.



According to the PA's summation, what I was experiencing was a continued allergic reaction, as well as severely high stress. It was perhaps the case that my mind had registered all of the news in the last few weeks, but my body had yet to catch up. Once she finished informing me of her prognosis, I took a breath, mustered up the courage, and sat straight up in the bed: "umm...as you know with, uh, bipolar disorder...being sexually promiscuous is a thing...and...I want to do an STD screening and pregnancy test before I leave here today." With a resounding, reassuring, Maddow-like "**absolutely**", I fell back down flat in the bed and waited.

The memories go blurry again after this point, but I recall the feeling of yet another needle plunging into my right buttocks, and a long, dry cotton swab pushing up inside of me, while I watched the various medical devices and cords above my head dangle and sway; they reminded me of children's mobiles, suspended from their cribs at the age of complete helplessness.

The work of *pop in between*, similar to the diagnosis and aftermath that followed, had its own bouts of extreme. There were moments of complete stagnation: no matter how hard I trialled and manipulated all the errors, I was never satisfied with what resulted. Conversely, it had moments of complete chaos: no matter how intensely I tried to control the variables, the results remained more an artifact of experimentation, rather than the true representation of what I intended to create. Though the errors and experimentations themselves made for curious iterations of possible work in the future, the research, pondering, writing, and crawls back to the drawing board continued for several months. It would be in heeding the advice of one of my thesis committee members, who wisely suggested to, “go back to your body” (Van Pelt Petry, 2018) before I realized the solution had been waiting inwardly this whole time, rather than exclusively in an outwardly material or object.

It was time to go back to the ecdysis.

Three modular parts make up *pop in between*: *gestaltpaper*, *pharmgarden*, and *junk dazzle silhouettes*. Although the work has separate entities, the way in which this iteration is installed has all the variables acting as one whole. The materials I previously experimented with included a multitude of chemicals, papers, bleeding ink through paper, bleach, and sunlight. As *pop in between* manifested itself, materials would consist of enhanced matte paper, card stock, ink, fluorescent spray paint, blue 3M tape, altered and unaltered polypropylene, soil, water, and seeds, with photo-collage, sculpture, and performance as medium. Questions that frequented the forefront of my mind while both creating and installing the work included:

- How can I invoke a specific feeling in the viewer? Is this even possible?
- How do labor and repetition call into question illness and pain?
- With the body, is presence more or less important than absence?
- Can the presence of performance exist without the actual body?
- Can you construct a story via deconstruction of the narrative?

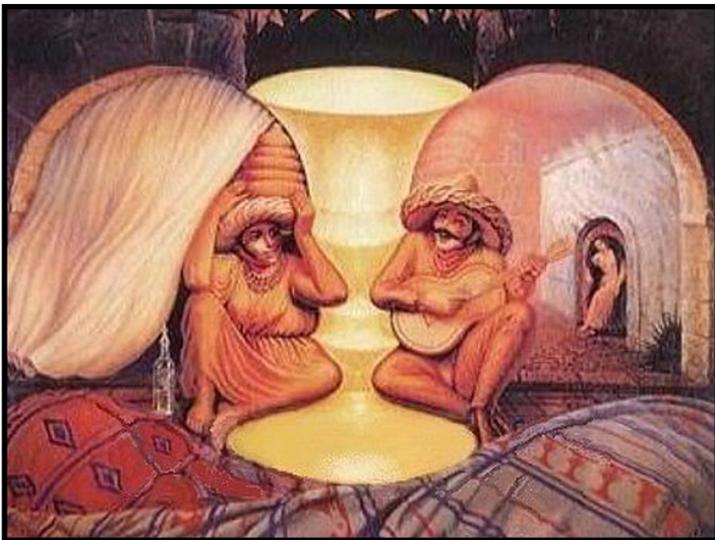
With *gestaltpaper*, I fabricated a wallpaper pattern by repeating six different elements continuously; the pattern became the paper itself, without the traditional method of full sheets applied to the wall's surface with glue. Three larger elements, all printed on enhanced matte paper, accompanied three smaller elements, also printed on enhanced matte, until the entirety of the sixteen-foot high and forty-foot wide gallery wall was covered. The three larger elements include the cicada perched on it's exoskeleton discovered back on that late summer morning, a topside view of the perfectly halved chocolate cake commemorating my half birthday, and my own blistered mouth, simultaneously opened wide yet closed with the underside of my tongue exposed.



Accompanying these elements are three smaller ones, each behaving as a complimentary piece to the corresponding larger element. These additional visuals push the idea of wallpaper further, acting at first as a decorative touch, only to have the viewer infer more upon closer inspection. The elements include a single, vibrantly orange cicada wing, a set of two individual and frosting-like pinkish white teeth, and small, multiple circles in candy color hues of pink, yellow, purple, and green. The small cicada wing vibrates in contrasting orange to the many shades of blue found within the full cicada, while the playfully jarring teeth echo the visual discomfort of the blistering mouth, further drawing attention to what appear to be a second set of teeth growing under the tongue. Finally, some of the colorful circles have a line drawn through them while some are left blank, hinting at the oscillating idea of whether it is a sprinkle or a pill, an additive or a necessity.



All of these elements became their own sole entity via “gestalt”, defined as – “something that is made of many parts and yet is somehow more than or different from the combination of its parts” (Merriam-Webster). Rather than focusing on the visual trickery commonly thought of with gestalt i.e. Dalí’s “Old Couple or Musician” (right) and “Old Woman or Young Woman” (left), I asked my work to tell a whole story in the elemental parts that I plucked from what visual evidence I had saved. By utilizing this construction via deconstruction, I attempted to create a gestalt that showed viewers both an overwhelming presence and quiet absence at the same time. Having carried the digital weight of these images around with me on my cell phone for years, I went back like a scavenger, hunting and gathering the ones that made the most sense to tell the story. I then scavenged even further by cropping in and excising specific areas of the image, turning what I harvested from the whole into separate signs, thus becoming signifiers. As these signs were sourced from different points of origin that my illness began to surface, the quality of the image itself is worth noting as I had an iPhone 4S at the time of capture. Four years later and severely outdated at the time of manipulating and printing in 2018, it will be outdated even more so to the readers of this thesis in 2020 and beyond.



I surmise that this picture quality adds to my exploration via gestalt: the cicadas appear highly resolved from afar, only to pixelate upon closer inspection. The mouth is clearer, save for some noise speckling in areas, while the half cake is ironically the most vivid shot of the three. I claim this to be ironic as I remember I had to hold my breath while shooting it, standing on a chair while carefully angling my arms high above the surface of the kitchen counter before fumbling my thumb down on the shutter button. In the entire spectrum of multiple shameless selfies, gratuitous food photos, and incessantly shaky concert videos I possess in the iPhone curated scroll of my life thus far, this photograph was caught in one shot.

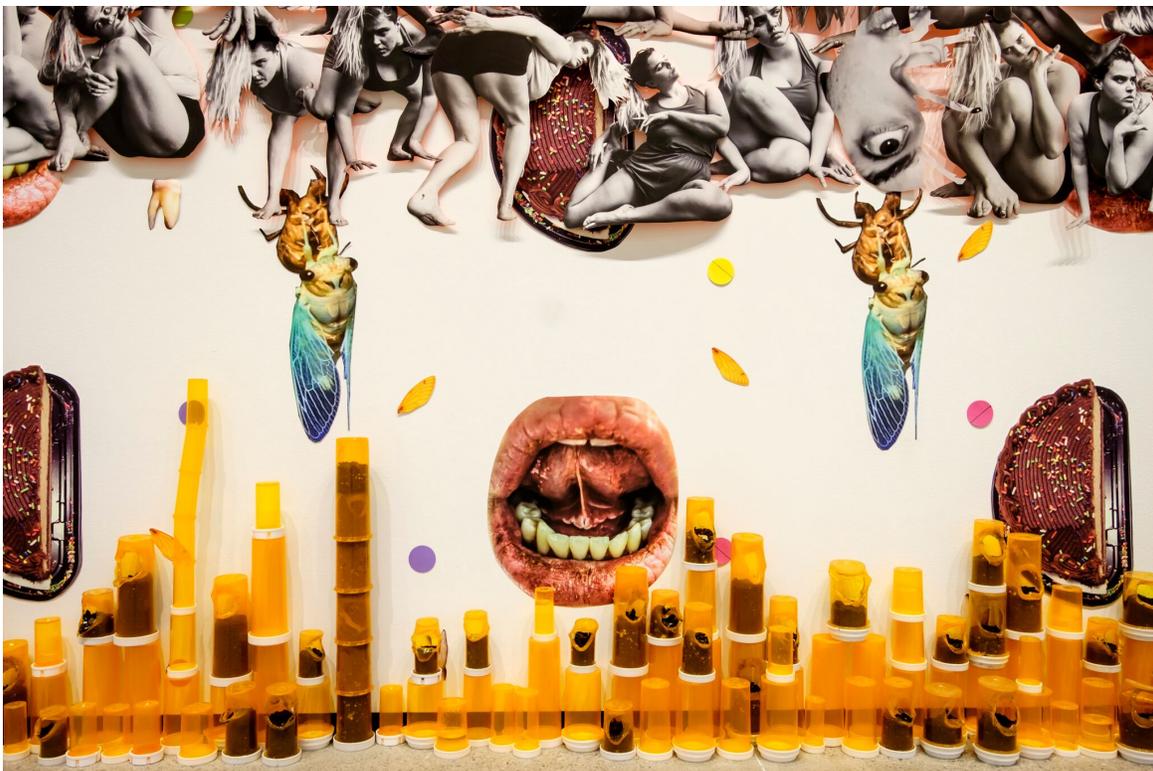


In *pharmgarden*, I invite viewers to come up closer to the work, who are now more acutely aware of what is at their feet when standing right at the wall. Completely traversing the width of the very bottom of *gestaltpaper* is a line of upside down amber polypropylene vials, more commonly known as prescription bottles. While some touch the floor, others are stacked on top of each other anywhere from two to nine bottles high – leaning, climbing, always reaching upward. Some of these structures remain unaltered; some hold water, while others still blister and burst outward at the viewer, filled with soil right up to the bottom of

where the agape, mouth-like opening begins. Within the soil lie dormant, blue bachelor button seeds, a deeply blue-hued flower that blooms in droves during spring. To date, at the time of constructing this written thesis roughly a month after the opening, the seeds have yet to show any sign of germinating, and I doubt very much that they ever will. The process in creating *pharmgarden* involved placing the soil and seeds into the vial, replacing the cap just as millions of people do on a daily basis, then flipping the bottle upside down to its newly altered state. To prevent rotting while in the gallery environment, I mixed baking soda into the soil, and added a bit of apple cider vinegar to the spray bottle I would use to water them once inside of the space. When all the bottles were ready to go, I applied a highly concentrated source of heat using a paint-stripping gun, aiming it towards the upper center along the side of each bottle, until the plastic began to give way. The heat was so strong that for just a brief moment of time, the plastic suspended into a liquid, becoming a bubble that sometimes burst immediately outward, other times gently popping inward.



Even though I was trying to prevent decay and mold, the methods I used to go about it are absolutely what I believe to have caused the seeds to never sprout. In the planning stages, I saw harmonious, stunning shades of blue bouncing off the day-glow orange of the bottles. In its execution, the bottles remain silent, empty relics, a connection I make to the hollow husks the cicadas leave after shedding their exoskeleton for the final time. Viewers will undoubtedly recognize the materials used, associate their own connections or disconnections as to what pharmaceuticals mean, and perhaps wonder at what was here, what remains, and what might be coming. I also connected this to the idea of titration – many times medications simply do not mix well, nor do they work for the individuals taking them. Connecting further, I wonder with prescribed medications, is the patient ingesting a piece into their body that is physically “missing”, and is therefore “whole” once it is taken? Lithium carbonate, described as “a white odorless alkaline powder” (RxList Inc., 2018) comes in various forms of caplets and tablets. I wonder further still - is the pill itself gestalt when taken individually and whole when inside the bottle? Or, does it become whole once ingested and coursing through the bloodstream of the individual that’s taken it? Is the substance ever actually “whole” if the initial state is a capsule-trapped powder form? Alas, my exploration for construction via deconstruction continues, more the search itself than the answer it may hold.



Finally, in *junk dazzle silhouettes*, the viewer is met with what is perhaps the most overwhelming visual of *pop in between*, as numerous, paper figures of my own body writhe and vibrate on top of one another in a cluster that gathers just right of center on the wall. In addition to the polypropylene bottles, the different figures that I constructed were created anew, rather than imagery sourced from the past. Arguably, the biggest similarity was the use of my iPhone's camera to capture the images, as I would position it in a lo-fi manner of balancing it against my studio's wall, the leg of a chair, or a stack of books I would maneuver until just the right height. Once set, I would worm my index finger in and find the shutter button, setting off a ten second timer that would count down with a flash of light, flashing rapidly as it got closer to snapping the shutter down and capturing whatever was in front of the lens. This was the most performance-based component to my work, both in the making and manifestation of what it physically became.

By contorting and twisting, swinging and pushing, pulling and stretching, I asked my body to go back and inhabit a time of trauma and make a memory become physical. At times, it felt like I was completely missing the mark as I struggled to figure out the "choreography" of what this looked like. My body continued to move, however, over and over in a manner of remembering things I truly believe my body compartmentalized over my mind, especially in the frequent oral and ocular fixation. Whether in the studio or my apartment, I moved until exhaustion brought me to the floor in a sweaty yet eager heap, anxious to see what I had manifested.





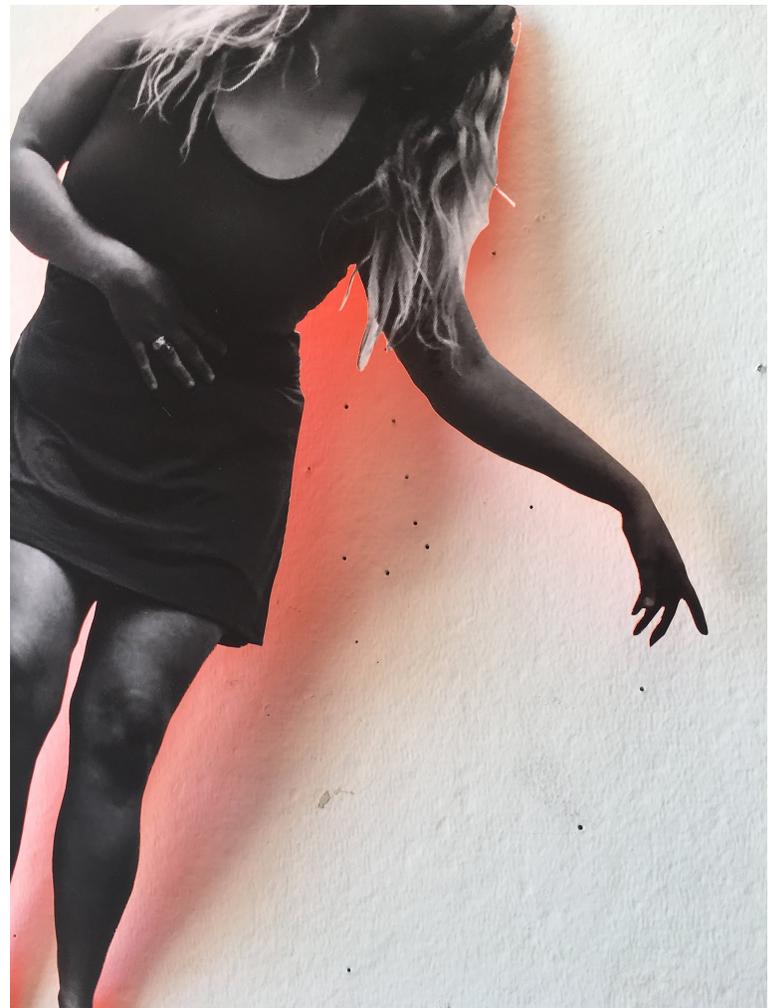
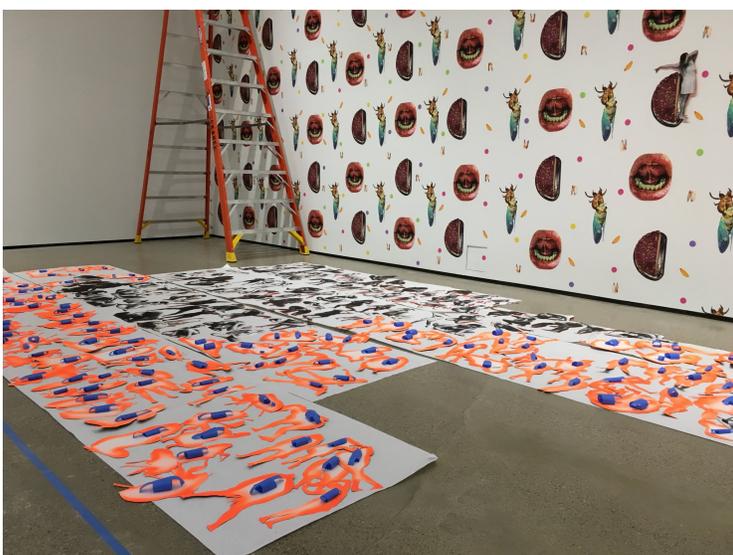
Over the course of several weeks, hundreds of shots were taken, with final choices cropped in on and pen-tooled around my silhouette in Adobe Illustrator. I also incorporated found images of molting cicadas, individual cicada bodies, and empty cicada shells in varying sizes. Zooming in even further on my body with details of my eyes, teeth, hands, and other body parts, I collaged my own images in the found image's silhouette. Once printed, I used an x-acto knife like a scalpel, freeing my body from the paper one slicing knick at a time.



The process of x-acting the bodies and cutting the wallpaper elements with scissors became masochistically pleasurable and painful all the same. Though I do not have an exact count of how many hours I spent cutting the elements of *pop in between*, my thumb, index, and middle finger went completely numb in parts, and developed such thick calluses that my iPhone could no longer read my eroded fingerprint to login.



A final manipulation before going onto the wall came in the form of orange fluorescent spray paint. I flipped each paper cutout over, spraying a rim of paint around the edge of each silhouette, being careful not to get paint on the image side. This process produced a delicious glow that vibrated when the silhouette was eventually secured to the wall. Unlike the organized wallpaper elements in *gestaltpaper*, all of the elements in *junk dazzle silhouettes* were applied organically and with the idea of improvisational performance in mind. In a curatorial fashion that echoed Susan's earlier sentiments, I was advised to "go into a trance...dance with these and see where they want to go" (Tang, 2018).



The silhouettes physically popped off the wall just slightly, allowing again for the fluorescent glow and also creating a space for the bodies to touch one another. Considering the image of the body itself backdropped by the orange glow of paint and further still with the shadowed outline, I harken to the layers that are involved when a cicada pushes itself out of its shell; bursting through a slit within its own back, the cicada pushes out and crawls up onto itself, resting until its body is strong enough to crawl. They are all installed in a cluster, at a height that an average, able-bodied adult viewer could engage with eye to eye. When observing, the viewer will find that my image is portrayed in numerous ways, and no portrayal is ever duplicated. I collaged my body into the body of a cicada. I pulled my mouth open horizontally and exposed all the teeth that I could. I yanked on my eye both upwards and downwards, till the entire pupil and iris disappeared into stark white. I was not afraid to reach out and touch the very spot where people like me were once frequently lobotomized, the prefrontal cortex punctured and scrambled like eggs so that we could somehow go through life more static than shell. I made my body frightened, distraught, and defiant. I made my body childish, manipulative, and ethereal. I made my body rabid, sleazy, and aloof. I inhabited every single thing that is my experience of manic depression thus far, and in the way that it has crawled and claimed its way through me; I have only just begun talking back.



When I began this thesis work, I did not start off with the knowledge that trying to find the very central divide of two extremes would be an impossible endeavor. What I ended up finding, however, has left me with a plethora more of questions:

Is the cicada's life beginning with the rip of its ecdysis, or is it beginning to end? Can it feel this process? Does it feel painful? Does it feel like freedom? Is this the penultimate moment of genetic coincidences? Or is this simply predetermined fate? Am I a truer version of myself without the pills that I take? Am I a truer version of me because I take them? What did it feel like for my dad when it manifested above the surface for him? Did he feel like Spiderman too - blessed with great power and even greater responsibility? Are not all artists operating in visions of grandeur? Was I manic depressive the moment I became a zygote? Was it only inside of the sperm? If I fall in line with the inheritance of my father's height, acne, and bipolar disorder, does it mean that brain cancer is next? If you have half of a cake to begin with, can you then have your cake and eat it too? Does anyone possess any actual agency over their body and mind? Does one rule the other, or do they tandem teach? For if only this wall could talk, this is what it would say:

“And so the search continues, only now you have the clarity that you are not one, the other, the either, or the or - you are the pendulum of the swing, and not the other way around. For even the tightrope walkers wobble, and one time you felt the whole of the universe inside you. Breathe in, it is still there. Breathe out, it is still there. You are the frequencies that buzz between ecstasy and agony, mania and depression.

You are the motion itself. You are the motion. You are.”



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P.S. - let Roland Barthes eat all the half cakes, this author is very much alive.

