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This conversation took place via email during the weeks after the completion of the theses. Lily Brooks, Chrissy Casavant, Henry Gilbert, Anna Hayes, Patricia Krupinski, Jenna Lavalley, and Kaelynn Maloney reflected upon various issues.

What is your process? What does a day in your research/process look like?

Lily Brooks: I usually begin with strong generalized topic that I can breakdown, however I already had a specific idea when starting my thesis. I knew I wanted to focus on the first portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer and the emergence of the 20th century modern woman.

Jenna Lavallee: Of all the multiple processes I use, the documented performances are the most entertaining. First, I decide what I will be wearing in a video, and I dress. Second, I lay down a bed sheet onto the floor. (I used to lay down brown craft paper before this, but I quickly gave up because the mess was so large that the paper became a pointless step). Third, I take my overused metal bin for pouring and fill it with acrylic paint and water. Fourth, I set up my cell phone for video recording. Finally, I tiptoe into the frame with my bucket, pour, and very quickly exit the frame to shut off the video, and begin the clean up! I then study my videos intensely and improve the next round to more closely achieve my goals and objectives.

Anna Hayes: I have to find something that gets me passionate and excited and then dive in.

Kaelynn Maloney: Research and pre-work land is most comfortable for me so it's sometimes difficult to push beyond that place. I felt that if I could fully resolve a hypothetical thing- the realized object would be perfect. This could not be further from the truth. Once I allowed myself to begin painting, building, and experimenting, many questions of form were answered through action. I still overplan, but I also appreciate the value of production.

Patricia Krupinski: I am a self-professed night owl and nester. Usually I would set up a space with all of my sources surrounding me, open my computer and go. I worked typically from 10pm through 2am, usually with a blanket and music playing. A lot of chocolate was consumed throughout my process of writing.

Henry Gilbert: Any given day of my research process would be dedicated to a major section or theme of my work. I found it helpful to stay within the microcosm of a single subject or idea and produce a concise, clear and effective portion of my thesis in a single sitting rather than to jump around and try to tie too many ideas together. The whole process was sort of like a puzzle in that way; all of the parts were completed her independently and this made the project of pulling everything together at the end under my unified whole a lot easier.

Chrissy Casavant: I generally start my process by finding content that I have an emotional connection to. It is more intriguing to me to create art exploring an emotionally charged place or subject than otherwise. Once I decide on my subject matter, I begin experimenting with different material and decide on what I feel would fit best with that subject. It was helpful for me to jump back and forth between my drawings as they were each in different stages of completion, rather than attempting to complete one drawing before moving on to the next.

How did you experience your thesis in a way that wasn't academic or discipline specific?

AH: Thesis was a way to finally enter into the conversation of art and ideas that we have been studying for the past four years. I had the opportunity to study and create what I wanted and that was incredibly empowering. It was academic, but it was *my* syllabus or game plan, that was exciting and nerve racking.

LB: Thesis gave me the unique opportunity to step out of a taught environment and allow myself to actually apply the methodologies and principles that had been instilled in me since the Survey class. In doing so I began to realize that my thesis was less about historical context but an analysis on the gendered roles of women in the art world.

HG: It was really insightful to learn more about the best practitioners within the sport of bodybuilding and the way that they view their lifestyle as an artistic expression of their own beliefs. Kai Greene is probably the most artistic-minded of the contemporary athletes at the top today. These athletes have a lot to offer beyond the 'I pick things up and put them down' attitude that you see on TV. To dedicate your life from sun-up to sun-down to a single purpose comes down to a lot more than looking a certain way - it's striving to push yourself towards something greater. Greene often says "the mind is everything," and that applies to everything you do whether you're a world-class athlete or a college art student.

PK: The first time I walked into Santa Sabina was the most incredible experience. As soon as I walked through the church doors, I was amazed and filled with wonder. I didn't immediately analyze or take notes, but gave myself the time to experience the space and it was absolutely breathtaking.

KM: An exhibition allows the producer to play with the full sensory scope of a viewer. I grappled with incorporating elements that might transport the viewer somewhere outside the confines of the gallery. The experience of a recent family dinner, during which I listened to simultaneous yet incongruent conversations, propelled me to somehow integrate those muddling of sounds.

JL: Everything I did, saw, read, or heard related back to my work. Most of my experience really was academic; discussing the research with friends and family outside of the studio was the most informal time I had with my work. Perhaps, taking trips to buy supplies was the least academic of all of the experiences I had working this semester. The project never left my thoughts.

CC: My thesis actually began as a formal interpretation of the space I live in, with relatively straightforward use of material and mixed media, and minimal underlying messaging and theme. As I started to physically create my wall-sized drawings, I began to consider the experience of the viewer as he or she observes my work. This change in perspective allowed me to step outside the academic view I had been observing my work in, and view it in a more experiential light. Contemplating how a viewer would experience these wall drawings helped me to narrow the message I wanted to send and the emotion I hoped to evoke in a viewer.

What challenges did you encounter along the way?

JL: The most difficult part of making was the emotional tax of spending long hours in the studio. Although giving so much of my time to research and conducting experiments took from me sleep and time spent with friends, the long hours I spent physically with my work allowed me to fully understand the creative decisions I was making. It was incredibly helpful to be able to talk about this emotional tax with my studio friends, so that I could keep working with a clear head.

LB: The abstracts gave me the most trouble because at that point my topic was very broad. I also ran into the issues of general information that was taking away from the specifics of my research.

HG: My topic doesn't have much of a precedent in art historical research material of this nature, so the process of bringing together academic source material and information from contemporary media sources like Youtube and other social sites within the sport of bodybuilding proved to be challenging. The research process was a balancing act of grounding popular, casual sources with an academic foundation.

AH: I was dealing with complex and layered subjects. It made some of my work appear disjointed. I wanted to make sure what I was presenting was accurate and culturally relevant with the most current issues/subjects.

CC: I dealt with both physical and emotional challenges in creating my work. Finding the combination of paper and graphite that resulted in the aesthetic I was looking for was certainly a process; working with new material on enormous lengths of paper was also a learning experience. On an emotional level, I based my work around the chaos and constant motion of my life. Being in the studio was very solitary and quiet. While at times it was refreshing to be alone, it was also challenge for me to be in the studio and make my work in a rather isolated environment.

KM: Allowing myself to make the art was the difficult part. I found comfort staying in research. Stepping beyond the supposed and into the realized provoked unnecessary anxiety.

PK: Attempting to balance all of the aspects of my work was very challenging, as I was dealing with many different facets of information. It was also difficult to find translations for the primary sources I was using.

Did you have a class/outside experience that was a surprising influence on your work?

AH: I went to a discussion panel on Islamophobia that actually inspired my Syrian print. I thought it was going to be a discussion on the current issues and situation in the Middle East, but I was shocked to find out otherwise. Students were asking questions about whether it was okay to go abroad for a semester: there was a lot of fear present that I never been aware of here on campus. I thought a lot about that fear and it resonated in me. It turned into inspiration and became important for me to engage in through art.

HG: Knowledge of the sport and the culture of such a niche community really put me in a position to evaluate bodybuilding on an artistic level from the inside. Understanding the position of the artist (or the athlete in this case) is paramount to analyzing the work through his or her own perspective. It's like researching the work of a painter; you can't fully grasp what's going on unless you understand how the work is actually made.

KM: My Public and Community Service classes consistently inform the way I think about art. Many of our conversations in PSP involve our relationship with and acknowledge of the plight of the Other. Our self-conscious identification of alienated groups helps to deepen the understanding of complicated relationships.

LB: I had the opportunity to view each of the portraits at the MET and the MoMa. This was my first time seeing the portraits after already starting my research. The mere size of the portraits struck a chord in me, but it was more the ability to experience the works firsthand and truly see the power that each woman held in there posture that became the turning point for my thesis.

CC: Prior to creating my work, I didn't realize how much I could be influenced by my environment, and how much my environment reflected my life. I was lucky enough to study abroad and travel for a semester during my junior year, and in traveling with other young people, I constantly found myself surrounded by constantly shifting living spaces with various types of co-habitants. In retrospect, this unique experience made me more aware of my living space, which I then applied to my artwork.

JL: My sociology major culminated in a Senior Capstone class, which allowed us to spend the semester researching and writing on a topic of our choosing. After attending a talk by artist Juliana Huxtable, I decided to focus on the underrepresentation of black artists in America. I found that the major popularity of Black art in America exists only where art discusses racial identity specifically. This research forced me to question why I was making work about gender identity. Did I want to make work specifically reflecting my gender identity, or was I forced to do so because of my gender?

PK: I've always been involved in church work, specifically through cantoring. Being so comfortable with a religious space, I began to drift towards questions surrounding space and how people present themselves, leading me to question how my own religion presented itself, specifically in the 4th and 5th centuries and what it chose to leave out of the conversation.

What did you learn from the other side of the department?

CC: The art history thesis presentation was right around the time when I was deciding exactly what subject I wanted to do for my thesis. I was able to relate to Henry's work in particular. He took a non-artistic subject, like body building, and put it in an art historical context. His thesis paralleled my own work, though not in content. I took a space that normally wouldn't be considered artistically inspirational and used that for my content. It really helped me to see someone else do the same thing, and so successfully at that.

PK: I learned a lot from Jenna's artwork. Observing her work in the gallery space made me ask myself the questions she was asking, specifically around gender and "femaleness." It also showed me the power of contemporary art to provoke self-reflection. I found this same level of self-reflection in Kaelynn's work and studio space, spending many afternoons in the VRC chatting about how nervous and excited we were about our projects. Her work taught me the ability to continuously transform medieval work into contemporary forms.

HG: I agree with Anna on this one - Dr. Johnson's Modern Art course was particularly helpful to me leading up to the thesis process because it introduced me to a whole spectrum of conceptual and performance art that places huge emphasis on the relationship between the artist and his or her work. Jenna's show reflected a lot of the same ideas that I was trying to expose in my work regarding gender expectations and the importance of the artist in the process of creating and presenting a finalized product.

LB: After attending the studio thesis show, I personally resonated with Chrissy's work. Being able to see part of our house displayed on the gallery walls was incredible. The strong attention to detail through the use of graphite made it all the more realistic.

AH: Modern art with Dr. Deborah Johnson was fabulous. It made me reevaluate my art and how it should function today. She taught me that art is about your ideas and how they can be communicated in a visual language. Henry's paper made me think of fitness in a new way: the artist is the athlete sculpting their own body. In the military we conduct physical readiness training (PRT), making fitness a huge component of military life. Henry's paper illuminated a niche culture that I am very much part of, and painted it in a new way for me.

KM: I learned from Patricia's close visual analysis of religious mosaics in Santa Sabina the importance of looking at visual symbolism in conjunction with textual research. I think sometimes we get over invested or stimulated by reading that we forget to analyze what is presented in front of our eyes. The way Patricia so carefully (and fruitfully) observed elements of the mosaic in Santa Sabina prompted me to pour over elements of The Book of Kells I might have overlooked.

JL: I took Modern Art with Henry and Anna, and the class also pushed me to extend beyond my title as a "painter" and experiment with performance, video, projection, and installation. Further, Lily's work regarding the role of women in identity formation was incredible.

What is your favorite piece/phrase of your work?

HG: I appreciated the quote I used from Schwarzenegger in the section of my paper that discussed the bodybuilder's presentation in comparison to a well-displayed painting. It says a lot about the importance of how the artist chooses to present his or her work - the work itself isn't worth much unless you know how to 'use' it.

JL: My favorite piece was the performance I gave to accompany my book at the Research Review in October. The positive reception from the piece gave me the confidence to continue researching and working diligently. The critical feedback I received, and continued encouragement from Amy, forced me to believe that I could really make something remarkable for the thesis exhibition. Showing my work publicly this year allowed me to take myself seriously as an artist.

KM: The items we were calling "Christmas cards" (or Tidings) were fortuitous. Not to say they were not carefully physically designed but they were not the ideal manifestation of this family photo collage project. Yet, I give them importance because they are the catalyst for my next project. I'm excited that they've presented the opportunity to revisist and revise.

PK: The last paragraph of my introduction is my favorite part of my thesis. I take all of my ideas and bring them together, presenting my thesis statement. Once I had written this paragraph I immediately felt in control and ready to tackle the rest of the paper. It made me feel confident about my work.

CC: I think it would be hard to choose any one favorite piece because all of my drawings work best in context of the others. If I had to choose though, it would probably be my living room drawing. I was happiest with the final product and that happens to be my favorite room in my house, so I had the most fun drawing that one too.

AH: The pieces that have been collaborative.

LB: Toward the end of my paper I come back to the central question, “Thus, while the evolution of these two artists seems to confirm the standard view of them having total command over the manner of presentation and the artistic process, the depictions of these two women in their portraits were embodiments of a visualized expression of a new paradigm in femininity.” I think that phrase fully expresses the conclusion of my research. The roles of women, not just in art, but in other disciplines, held an expression of the current culture.

What is your next project?

AH: I plan on creating more socially engaged art. I'm in the stages of creating a piece in the Ruane that provides an opportunity for students to write their story and is related to racial issues on campus. Later in the military, I want to use art as a way to rebuild, engage, and redefine spaces in the Middle East. It's complicated and improbable, but I know something is there to unite people through a visual language. I read recently about a Syrian refugee camp. Syrian children painted on the wall surrounding the camp, reclaiming the space and uniting to create something beautiful (in Arabic, around the camp it reads "My house is your house"). I have been researching Candy Chang who has an upcoming community Mural project in Philly (she's the artist who created the "Before I Die" chalk wall). I'm so interested in public art and how it affects a community positively.

HG: I'll certainly be taking the skills I learned throughout this project for whatever works I take on in the future. This whole thesis project has been a tremendous learning opportunity for me, and I do believe that this will serve as a great springboard for further research or preparation for graduate programs!

LB: I am interested in continuing my research of the Vienna Secession as well as studying other artists besides Klimt.

KM: As I alluded to previously, I will expand upon the idea and forms presented in my collaged cards. The tactile nature of hand collaging these elements was a great beginning point, but I'm excited to test new iterations. Working with digital programs I'm hoping to use the collages of chopped family photos to create more streamlined digital prints. Working digitally is something relatively new to me and allows for the production of a larger volume of these collages.

PK: I want to continue researching and exploring artworks that bring into question interfaith relationships.