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## Plexus Being

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I would like to offer a critical intervention into international politics by invoking a feminist interpretation of the body and the ways in which it is used to produce and reproduce political boundaries. The language of international relations is inward facing, operating on binaries of war and peace, good and bad, us versus you, her vs him, civilized vs barbarian, win vs losing, freedom vs tyranny, etc. What is the individual's role? Who gets to live and die? How can one articulate that feeling of “it just feels right”? The personal as political can begin to illuminate our choices; our body acts as the site of entry for regulation and control. Body as metaphor for the state- inherently politicized. A critical component of how social order is viewed within a society centers around our conception of gender and its regulation.

Art offers a generative response that accesses the emotions produced from politics in ways that words fail or even constrict and bound. Visual methodology can invoke the erotic, as *eros*, creative power and harmony.<sup>1</sup> Thereby playing with the fluidity with boundaries; questioning their naturalness. Perhaps art may “fail” in message, yet “succeeds” in provoking a change in what the boundaries of political discourses are. Art can unsettle one’s ontological security, producing a range of emotions; thereby evoking the untranslatable into politics. Thus, queering what we know as natural by playing with the boundaries to show that they are there. After all the point of art is to show people that life is worth living by showing that it isn't.<sup>2</sup>

Materially, the use of collage reveals the relationships between one another, disrupting the linear mode of conduction and transmission. To collage, I am avoiding exclusionary mechanisms, working with gaps, holes, layering and lapsing of meaning. I am queering by obscuring rather than clarifying. Not only am I queering the intimate, but the International too. I am physically unsettling the state boundaries, revealing where one state and society ends and

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<sup>1</sup> Audre Lorde, *The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.*

<sup>2</sup> Howe Fanny. *The Wedding Dress: Meditations on Word and Life.* Berkeley: U of California P, 2003.

another begins. There is a tactile, crafty, interaction happening when I collage; bridging the spiritual and the political. The bridge that connects these two is made up of the erotic- the sensual- those physical, emotional, intuitive expressions of the deepest parts of myself. Not only is the work a collage of material, but a collage of many individuals' ideas and political discourses in which I am consumed by. The checkered occurs in most of the work as a literal translation of order into good and bad. Operating as a binary, yet has a quality of everything being connected through a balance of good vs bad. Yet again, I am queering this ancient masonic symbol by dispuring and abstracting the chequers throughout the painting.<sup>3</sup> The floor the figures are situated on, remain checkered but in an irregular spatial pretense. What if the order that grounds us, began to be unsettled? What if the order that grounds us is already unsettled? There are tensions within the figures that are made up of the obscured chequer -as the chequer moves in and out of the body, boundaries seem to be dissolved by the very structure they are formed by. To weave the checkered into existence, brought me closer to the construction that is our bodies, while simultaneously connecting me with textiles. Textiles operate as a public and private; collaging textiles subverts notions of craft for me. Creating a new kind of culture, linking the heritage of women, thereby transforming images of the female body. To paint the body, is to activate its relationship to itself; building it with color next to color. To render a body within space, is to activate the very space it takes up. There is reclaiming of power as I paint a feminine figure into existence- a redirection of narrative as well. Bodies subjected not only to weight and categories of the physical world but also to the pleasures and power dynamics of the social world. Our body is a vessel for deep complexities, power, eroticism and therefore something feared and oppressed. Femininity, working for and against women, is a source of power. Our bodies are a

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<sup>3</sup> Johnston, John. "The Mosaic Pavement - Hamiltondistrictmasons.org." Accessed April 30, 2023. [https://www.hamiltondistrictmasons.org/upload/lecture\\_file87.pdf](https://www.hamiltondistrictmasons.org/upload/lecture_file87.pdf).

site of the feminine, but also our hair. The inherent limitations on the power available to women through their hair- styles raise the question of why women continue to seek power in this way (or, more generally, through their appearance). As we have seen, women consciously use culturally mandated appearance norms to achieve their personal ends. To say that women consciously use these norms, however, does not mean that they are free to ignore them. No matter what a woman does or doesn't do with her hair-dyeing or not dyeing, curling or not curling, covering with a bandana or leaving uncovered- her hair will affect how others respond to her, and her power will increase or decrease accordingly. Consequently, women use their hair to improve their position because they recognize that not doing so can imperil their position. Of course, the power and any other gains achieved through hair or other aspects of appearance are circumscribed, fragile, bittersweet, and limiting. Yet, the power achieved in this way is no less real. Moreover, for many women, appearance remains a more accessible route to power than does career success, financial independence, political achievement, and so on.<sup>4</sup> My hair has acted as a source of privilege, and freedom, consequently facilitating competition between women. Red hair is sexualized, and embedded with meaning of passion and boldness. While operating against me in the way it was constructed too, I have found power by embracing the femininity of long red hair. So when cutting my hair, I initially saved it, with intentions to subvert its inscribed meaning.

The episteme is not a form of knowledge or type of rationality which, crossing the boundaries of the most varied sciences, manifests the sovereign unity of a subject, a spirit, or a period; it is the totality of relations that can be discovered, for a given period, between the sciences when one analyzes them at the level of discursive regularities. This different discursive

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<sup>4</sup> WEITZ, R. (2001). WOMEN AND THEIR HAIR: Seeking Power through Resistance and Accommodation. *Gender & Society*, 15(5), 667–686. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089124301015005003>

practice, embodied by the techniques and effects of the painted representation, is what gives painting a theoretical shape unlike the sciences and philosophy. In this sense, the painting is not a pure vision that must be transcribed into the materiality of space; nor is it a naked gesture whose silent and eternally empty meanings must be freed from subsequent interpretations. It is shot through – and independently of scientific knowledge and philosophical themes – with the positivity of a knowledge.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Foucault, *Genealogy of Morals*,

***ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:***

As with any long-term labor of love, many people have helped this project come to fruition. Thank you to the many contributors who taught me, supported me, believed in me, and even questioned me over the years. Thank you to the viewers who will come see my work, it is with you that these emotions, invoking conversations, have a site to live and flourish.

I would like to thank my classmates that have facilitated many of these conversations, and been by my side through my artistic endeavors, and academic pursuits. It is a true joy to share in creation, and knowledge, developing our passions alongside one another. I have found my peers in both departments to be collaborative and curious, unfolding endless conversations that have grounded much of my project. To be inspired by your peers, so much so that I must create, is perhaps the erotic that Lorde speaks of. I am filled with gratitude to be surrounded by my passionate, curious and empowered classmates.

To my many professors, I have the utmost gratitude and respect for each one of you. The community that the Studio Art department offered me in my time at Bard is truly unmeasurable, and I am filled with gratitude for each member. Both Daniella Dooling and Naylnad Blake, co directors of the department, give so much of their time and patience to the program. I want to thank Ken Buhler, an artist that introduced painting to me as a love of color and endless pursuit of all that it can do. Ken is a mentor to me, constantly showing me the importance of art making, and accessibility to that. He provided me with countless materials my first few years into the program, allowing for me to learn the techniques of painting. His kindness and belief in me lives

in each piece, physically through the actual paint he has provided me and spiritually, through his belief in me to pursue the arts and the international together. I owe much of my technical understanding of the figure to Joseph Santore, a legend of the Bard art community, and many others. I came into his class heavy handed and undisciplined, and left with his voice still in my head everytime I paint, "color next to color, Hannah." A final thanks to my committee of advisers for this senior project. I am humbled to have met Lothar Osterburg on this journey; his playful nature, combined with his artistic pursuit of exploration and discipline brought a steady structure to my practice this year. An endless thanks to Michelle Murray who has been a field guide to many of my academic pursuits all four years of college. Michelle has advocated and supported me in times others did not; her commitment to the subject as well as her students is remarkable, and powerful. Christopher McIntosh, thank you for your collaboration this past semester, and for disrupting order with me. This critical questioning of what we know as natural, can bring raw truths to the surface that unsettle- Chris has encouraged me to continue this exploration despite this.

We often take for granted the parts that make up this whole. The community of Bard Studio Arts program is held together by these parts. I would like to acknowledge Roman Hrab, director of operations at Fisher, an artist, an avid skier, runner, and lover of hats. Roman is well of knowledge and is the man to find in times of artistic crisis. With that being said, I have an overwhelming amount of gratitude for him, and all the help he has graciously supplied me with this year in particular. From Start to finish, we built two large stretcher bars, ultimately stretching the painting together too. There is such a joy in making and sharing this process with him, conquering my wood shop fears and empowering me- thank you Roman. Paige Mead, a woman of incredible talent, kindness, and strength; I have had the pleasure of working with this year.

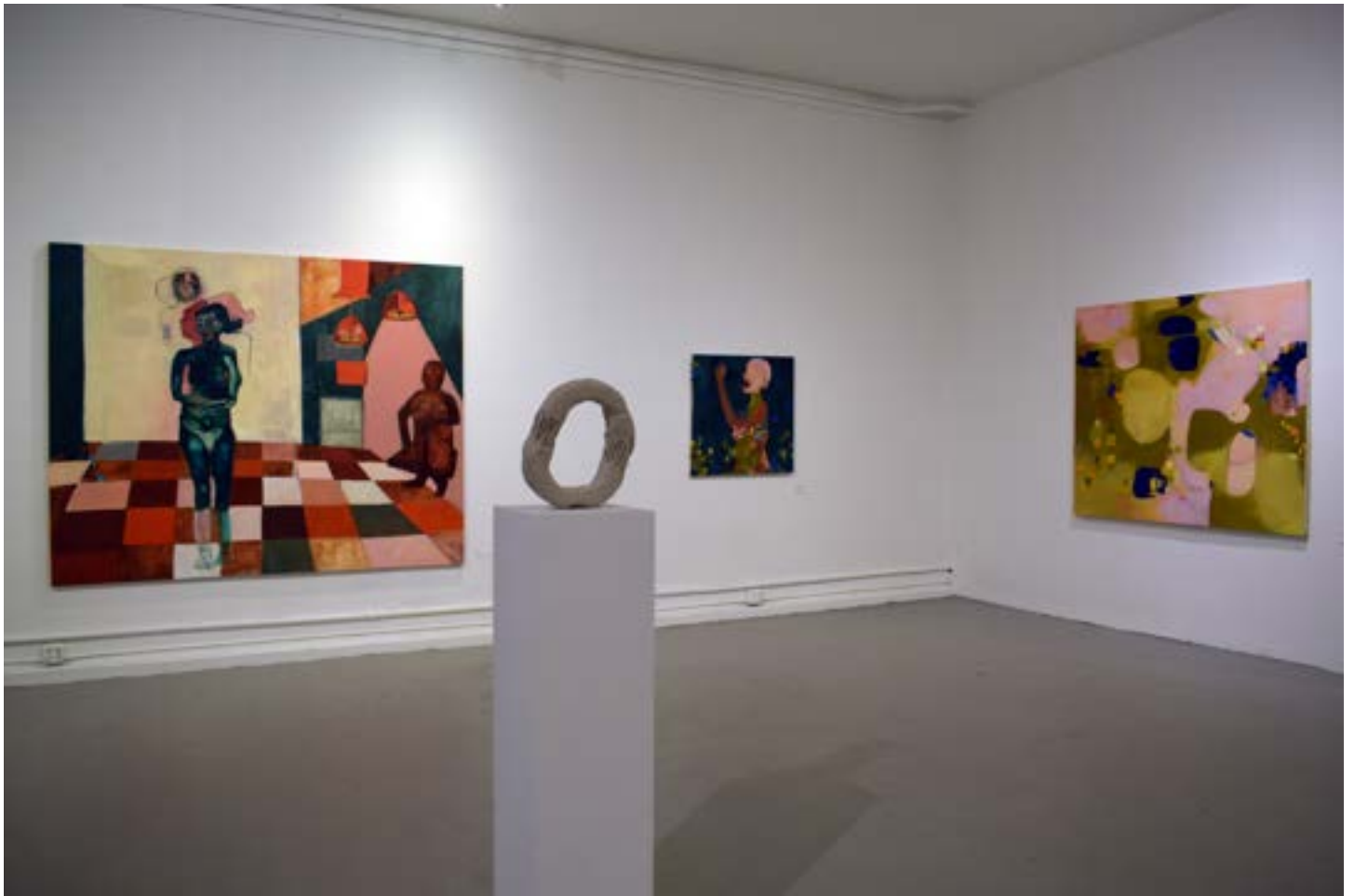
She is always an ear for my ideas and worries, but also a voice of reason and support in all areas of my life. It is my deepest pleasure to work alongside a woman of such integrity, compassion, and authenticity.

My family and friends, which are not mutually exclusive, have nurtured me into the person I am and am becoming. My Mom, a persistent fan of mine, who reminds me that *art is why we get up in the morning*, whose unconditional love sustains me everyday. This particular show is embedded with the essence of my mom, who has taught me to turn my pain into pleasure. I want to acknowledge my Dad, a coach and fan of mine despite the strikeouts. My father is a man of intensity and authenticity, reminding me that I can accomplish anything I set my mind to. My sister, a fiery complex young woman, challenges me and holds me accountable to be the best version of myself everyday. Thank you to my friends- Nik, Claire, Julia, payton, Jacob, Mia, Kaleb, and all the rest apart of this story. You have shown me compassion, sitting with me in the dark, when I needed it the most. Where one comes from, whom they come from, is essential to the whole story, the whole narrative. I like to think in everything I create lives each one of my loved ones, the ones that have seen the high highs and low lows of all that I am.

Finally thank you to Bard College, a place I most certainly came to think. The Hudson Valley will forever be a place I return to feel a sense of home, creativity, and even loss. There is a spiritual essence of nature here, each season bringing change, that I am grateful to have experienced. The Bard community is special, intimate, and held together by a mutual belief in collaboration and learning.

*Without the queer and feminist theorists this work would be less tangible- thank you to Gerda lerner, Judith Butler, Audre Lord, Luce Irguray,...*









White Mannequin  
2011  
Mixed Media  
100 x 100 cm



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Handgun  
by [unreadable]  
[unreadable]  
[unreadable]









