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Tensegrity

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Tensegrity

By

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Iowa State University

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2015

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DEDICATION

To Alivia, my little artist in training, the world is waiting for you to conquer.
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ABSTRACT

Tensegrity is an architectural term to describe a building technique that utilizes alternating compression members and continuous tension members. This term is appropriated by feminist artist, Heather Whittlesey to describe the socio-political concerns of third wave feminism today.

This thesis supplements a body of art work, categorized into three sections, sculpture, installation and ceramics with subsequent themes, reality, fantasy and origin. The major goal of Tensegrity is to give the third wave of feminism, a new and confident ideology that everyone can stand by.
CHAPTER 1

Tensegrity (Introduction)

Tensegrity is a word coined by the architect Buckminster Fuller in the 1960’s. The term was developed to describe continuous tension and alternating compression in infrastructure in a way that maximizes strength and efficiency.

This cell is a simple example of how tensegrity is employed to create mechanical equilibrium. Some well known examples of tensegrity are manifested in Geodesic domes (also created by Fuller), boat sails, and even DNA.

(Jonas: Mosby's Dictionary of Complementary and Alternative Medicine)

Buckminster Fuller’s intention for tensegrity was creating architecture that seemed to be designed by nature instead of the human hand. He envisioned unconventional structures that maintained their integrity through tensile forces, hence the word tensegrity.

While Fuller developed the research for tensegrity during the first half of the 20th century, it wasn’t until 1949 when his student Kenneth Snelson, a sculptor had executed the first structure/sculpture to be labeled as tensegrity. ([www.scholarpedia.org](http://www.scholarpedia.org))
As an artist I am appropriating the idea of tensegrity because it describes so beautifully the nature of tension, compression and the balance that is achieved through both. While the context of tensegrity lies in architecture I am going to translate this phenomena into a socio-political context about gender, race and class through the medium of sculpture.

Tensegrity is an intermodal carrier for thoughts, feelings and information about our cultural inequities. While in the architectural sense equilibrium can be achieved and is clearly visible when it does, in a social and cultural sense the idea of equilibrium is the goal. This ideology of socially leveling the playing field by identifying societal mechanisms that bottleneck and prevent growth or potential in people is collecting momentum but is still far from maturity. This momentum is best demonstrated by feminist scholarship. Buckminster Fuller and Kenneth Snelson established and brought forth the physical manifestation of tensegrity. Bringing an identity to the wave of feminism we live in today and bringing about awareness of prescribed prejudice in our interactions is my Tensegrity.
This body of work consists of ceramic sculpture, mixed media sculpture, and installation. I am an artist that emphasizes multiple avenues of creation, and it would be only natural to address multiple materials and paths to communicate and articulate multifaceted ideas in an impactful way.

My ceramic work delves into the sacred space of dwellings, the homes in which we live and are influenced by. There is also symbolism in eggs and their place within the dwelling as living, growing, yet unidentified things yet to become. These eggs are always outgrowing the openings of their dwellings. There is also an unreconciled state of balance. These sculptures are in motion and are in a state of situating themselves, which can be compared to sitting on a sofa the moment before you are comfortable. These dwellings and eggs also exhibit a quirky and droll attitude unlike any other elements of Tensegrity. The curls and ribbons that coincide within the dwellings are celebratory elements that express happiness and weightlessness. Their presence is also a challenge of craft and exposing them to high fire treatments. There is a conversation that is present about the tendencies of clay and how far the material is willing to go without warping, sagging and ripping.

Title: Two of a Kind
Artist: Heather Whittlesey
Media: Stoneware
Year:2015
The small mixed media sculptures of Tensegrity freeze frame ironies of contemporary American culture. There is metaphorical information that causes tension, whether in subject matter or the materials used, as well as the analytical information in this thesis that proves these concerns, but is also accompanied by physical restraints such as stretching, piercing and bounding of the materials.

The last element of this thesis, the installation is the invitation into the actual space of Tensegrity. The first two elements act as the reserved and theoretical links of the exhibition. The installation of Tensegrity is the connecting chain link and where all the fragments and symbols unite to create the environment in which you exist momentarily.
CHAPTER 2

Personal Background

*Tensegrity* is a culmination of my personal experiences, not just an artist but as a member of generation Y. It is also my overwhelming desire is to start a conversation about social awareness and how we treat ourselves and each other is an indicator of personal esteem, value, and happiness. I have always had this desire but could not put it into words until very recently. The more I have become aware of the surrounding influences of our social environment the more I have noticed invisible constraints that exist. In my everyday life, the battles that I see my family and friends go through, (being no exception myself), are fraught with limits. The most serious are caused by class constraints, unavailable resources necessary for self improvement, such as access to transportation, internet access, or getting more education. These inadequacies lead to low wage jobs and living from paycheck to paycheck. The lack of resource results in an absence of self esteem and the will to make change happen. This behavior and conduct becomes normal for the next generation. I have noticed this poverty cycle is conveniently connected to sexism and racism. The disconnection between education and information leads to ignorance and above all compliance.

I grew up in the Midwest in a traditional, blue collar household, ultimately associated with inequalities and stereotypes that limited people of this class. My dad worked nights while my mother was a homemaker. I wasn't aware that I was growing up poor until my classmates made me painfully aware in late grade school. So early on I was very conscious about how the money my parents made would be equally
correlated to who I could be friends with, what kind of clothes I could wear and my general status among my peers.

My awareness of gender discrimination did not emerge until my teenage years and slowly grew until my mother’s death acted as catalyst for such development. I was blissfully unaware of just about everything up until that moment.

Everything about my mother’s death was slow and painful, from the diagnosis of throat cancer to the alterations the doctors made on her body; the removal of her voice box and her hair and then the unmistakable characteristics of dying; shrinking, weathering, memory loss and silence. After my mother’s death, I watched everything about my family fall to pieces. I ultimately realized my mother’s role in our family as our keystone. It was like watching a cog fall out of a machine and with every moment the machine was ripping itself apart until it stopped moving.

Her death not only magnified the implications of gender discrimination but also brought into spotlight how poverty is an evil all consuming downward spiral. Her medical bills and funeral were friendly reminders of what the world thought she left behind and a steadfast ticket to poverty for life for my dad.

Throughout the rest of my high school years I attended therapy and grief counseling. I can't say much about the therapists but I did work with a group of invested women in my counseling sessions, the most important thing I learned with them was that death creates anger with an entourage of other associated feelings. These feelings are a source of energy and it is up to us individually to use that energy as we see fit.

I decided to use that energy to my advantage, I started making art. Followed by another strong figure in my life, my high school art teacher began to notice and fueled
my ambition to succeed. She made it clear that she had high expectations and expected progress.

These kinds of discipline lead me to college. My experience with higher education has been the best tool I could have outfitted myself with. As an artist I have all my ammunition available and readily accessed through my memories. School has allowed me a weapon of choice, art and my education allows me to act in an intricate, detailed, and informed manner, such as the person who brings the gun to the knife show.

So my ultimate goal with *Tensegrity* is to create art that calls out cultural behaviors that have classist and sexist undertones and overtones. Sharing these insights so people become aware of how often they are affected, so that when they find themselves in a situation where they might be discriminated against or marginalized they are more likely to address the issue. *Tensegrity* is my contribution to help define the third wave of feminism. There is still great discord caused by the term feminism within the general populace, I believe it results from the media interpretations of it. Feminism in the last century has made great strides in civil rights and services especially for women. Feminism today is still morphing in its definition. It does not confine concerns only to gender, it encompasses and addresses the concerns of the marginalized, associated with class, gender, race, religion, and other affiliations.
Feminism has roots in ancient times with many important visionaries. Sappho the poet (d. 570 BCE), Hildegard of Bingen, a religious visionary (d.1179), Artemisia Gentileschi, a painter (d.1656) Christine de Pisan (d.1434), Mary Wollstonecraft (d.1797), and Jane Austen, all writers (d.1817). (Martha Rampton) These women, just to name a few, are great predecessors of the modern feminist movements.

The modern feminist movement begins in the late 19th century and ends at the 21st. The first feminist movement in the US sprouted from the age of industrialism at the turn of the 19th century and was supported by a liberal and socialist agenda. The major goal of this movement was for women to obtain the right to vote.

On July 19th and 20th 1848 there was a women’s rights convention that took place at Seneca Falls, New York where the organizers presented a Declaration of Sentiments (based on the US Declaration of Independence) that expressed inalienable rights given to men but not women. This petition set forth the precedence to fight for the right to vote. On August 18th 1920, over 72 years later the 19th amendment passed and women’s right to vote was secured, ending the first wave of modern feminism.

The second wave of feminism developed in context of growing opposition for the Vietnam war in the 1960’s, the civil rights movement and an increasing self awareness of sexuality. This wave introduces protesting techniques that were radical, such as “bra burning”, (which never happened, but the second wave is ultimately associated with this
trope) (Feminism has a Bra Burning Myth Problem) beauty pageant protesting and man hating. The exploration of sexuality and birth control methods were driving forces in this era. While the first wave was driven by middle class, educated white women, the second was propelled by women of color.

The third wave, born in the 1990’s has adopted the postmodern ideology current of its time and broke apart ideas of universal woman hood and the binary notion of men vs. women. (The Three Waves of Feminism)  The third wave identity consists of fragmenting diversity and minority concerns. Gender lines that were once clearly defined have been disassembled and obscured. Some topics of discussion include empowering objectification and legitimizing sexuality as a tool for both sexes as seen in many advertisements and marketing techniques today. The roles of the sexes are challenged by diverse family dynamics. Mr. mom is a popular term for men who decide to take a more domestic role as a homemaker and having both parents work is becoming the social expectation for the upper middle class. The likelihood for single parents with children are on the rise. There is a disparity that exists for employment between single mothers and fathers. “The mother was employed in 68.2 percent of families maintained by women with no spouse present in 2013, and the father was employed in 81.2 percent of families maintained by men with no spouse present. Among married-couple families with children, 96.3 percent had at least one employed parent in 2013. The share of married-couple families with children where both parents worked was 59.1 percent.” (Bureau of Labor Statistics).

Intersectionality is another facet of the third wave. It accounts for those who have multiple identities that are considered a minority. These characteristics provide insight on perspectives that aren’t as easy to decipher. It is now seen as qualifying attribute instead of a
defeating one. The third wave exists as an ambiguous movement that now has the tools of the internet, social and digital media to reach people. It applies to everyone without prejudice, even those benefiting from the current hegemony.
CHAPTER 4

**Tensegrity (Body)**

Conceptually *Tensegrity* is driven by my experience of the cultural inequities that are alive today. Some of the issues addressed here include imbalances in pay scale related to gender, race, and marital status. Despite race, all women made less than their male counterparts. “On average in 2012, women made about 81 percent of the median earnings of male full-time wage and salary workers.” (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics).

![Median usual weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers by sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, 2012 annual averages](image)

*Note: Persons whose ethnicity is identified as Hispanic or Latino may be of any race.*

Race is a defining factor, reflecting current stereotypes in our nation. Hispanics, Latinos, and blacks are often employed as low wage, unskilled laborers, and Asians often earn higher wages associated with the STEM fields, the higher the wage, the larger the gender gap.

Another issue is that of reproductive rights. Abortion was made legal in the U.S in 1972 in *Roe v. Wade*. “The Court ruled that the states were forbidden from outlawing or regulating any aspect of abortion performed during the first trimester of pregnancy, could only enact abortion regulations reasonably related to maternal health in the second and third trimesters, and could enact abortion laws protecting the life of the fetus only in the third trimester.”(www.pbs.org) Abortion has moral and religious consequences, and *Roe v. Wade* made it legal under reasonable regulations, it is used as a political tactic to control women’s reproductive rights.

Reproductive rights take a spotlight in the dynamics of *Tensegrity*. This is so because of my personal experience with birth control. As a young woman I have become acquainted with many methods of hormonal birth control. This includes being a recipient of hormone birth control pills, low hormone birth control pills, the patch, the shot, the morning after pill, the ring, and finally the IUD. I have found that I am very sensitive to all of these methods and they all have serious side effects. I experienced moderate nausea, rashes, weight gain, suppressed immune system, severe eye twitching and irritation, blood clots in the eyes, and debilitating pain.

This is an experience that I do not stand alone on. And while choosing a non hormonal method of control was best for me is still not without sacrifices
“Twenty-two percent of women receiving pill prescriptions called their provider at least once about symptoms related to pill use, and 9% visited their provider at least once for this reason.” (Guttmacher Institute)

Percentage of women who called or visited their provider because of pill-related side effects, by symptom. (Guttmacher Institute)

The development of the first birth control pill in 20th century revolutionized sexuality but has substantial backlash to its users. Every woman’s battle with finding an effective birth control is still apparently everyone else’s business what kind of access we have to it. I say this because I have been denied on three different occasions access to birth control. The first times I tried to call doctors to fill an emergency contraception prescription in which I was denied by two different doctors because it conflicted with their morals. The third time I got my prescription filled but when I tried to retrieve it from the pharmacist, he denied that my prescription was called in. I left for a
few moments and returned when another pharmacist was at the counter, I asked her for prescription which she gave to me immediately.

I was a teenager when the three incidents happened, I was more annoyed than anything else, but when I became more aware of my rights, and informed on the stigma and history of birth control, I became enraged about other people's morals controlling my life, my choices, and trumping the privacy of the patient/doctor relationship.

Unfortunately the doctors and the pharmacist have a right to deny my prescription. In 2007 the Iowa Pharmacy Group proposed a conscience clause to protect pharmacists' morals to not dispense prescriptions. It became a concern when pharmacists in other states were being terminated for their refusal to dispense the morning after pill. After complaints from pro choice groups the board dismissed the proposal voting 5-0. (Lifenews.com)

Recently in the 2013 supreme court ruling of Burwell vs. Hobby Lobby Inc, the cofounders of Hobby Lobby explicitly denied funding for certain methods of birth control. This undermines the Affordable Care Act because “Employment-based group health care plans must provide certain types of preventative care, such as FDA-approved contraceptive methods. While there are exemptions available for religious employers and non-profit religious institutions, there are no exemptions available for for-profit institutions such as Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc.” Hobby Lobby exempted two methods of birth control, the morning after pill and the IUD because they would “Provide and facilitate four potentially life-terminating drugs and devices, against their religious convictions, or pay severe fines.”(Hobby Lobby)
The media portrayed this situation as an all or nothing ruling, with closer examination I believe Hobby Lobby was able to compromise on birth control methods, although this precedence could make other acceptable methods vulnerable attack. My personal opinion on this matter is that a company should have rights to implement ideologies as long as it is not at the expense of others. Agreeing to offer certain types of birth controls and not others is compromise between conflicting parties. But there are most certainly situations in which the status quo does not address, my personal experiences being one of them. Many women have issues with hormonal birth control and seek non hormonal methods and those should continue to be available to them. It’s a woman’s right to have control over her own body. The debate over abortion is a very complex one, and something I have mulled over with people from different backgrounds and opinions. My conclusion for late term abortion is that it is not a birth control method. It is an emergency procedure that should be sought out by those with dire situations. The media portrayal of abortion is incredibly misrepresented. The negativity and focus only surrounds late term abortion, the shock value of relatively formed dead fetuses keeps people from using their common sense about such a serious subject. 89% of abortions that take place are early term and within the first twelve weeks. (Guttmacher) The types of abortion available during the first twelve weeks are the abortion pill and vacuum aspiration. The abortion pill induces miscarriage and can be used up until the 10th week. And aspiration can be done up to 16 weeks. (Our Bodies Ourselves)
When women have abortions.

In 2011 Texas state law makers passed a two year $73 million budget cut to family planning facilities aka Planned Parenthood. This cut would have unforeseen consequences of unintended pregnancies by low income women who could not afford birth control. The Health and Human Services Commission predicted that low income women in 2014 and 2015 will have 23,760 more infants because of reduced access to subsidized birth control under the new policy. The expected rise in births will cost taxpayers $273 million and account for $103 million to $108 million of the state's general revenue budget, the majority of which will be spent on caring for the infants through Medicaid. (Women’s Health and Policy Report)
Placebo is a part of the Tensegrity sculpture series that plays on this principle. If aid is removed from preventive services such as Planned Parenthood the overall welfare of the people will be worse. The cost for the taxpayers will almost be 4 times as high. In Placebo there is heteronormative, white pair of arms, one, the man holds a white baby with the active birth control pill on its stomach. The woman holds a non white baby with a placebo pill. The arms are tied together to remind ourselves that children are the responsibility of both parties. If one parent walks away the other is going to suffer for it.

The flowers, which are made from panty liners, tampon applicators, needles and birth control is about the intricacies of the menstrual cycle and how our manmade products and prescriptions can wreak havoc on our internal cycles. So there is an internal and biological balance that has to be maintained, as well as a social one.
Tensegrity’s intention is to challenge where we are today with social interactions and how they are dictated by gender, class and race and to raise consciousness and confront the indirect prejudices that directly affect us, and to be aware about our own biases and eradicate our own ignorance and to invite alternative views.

The Stork addresses the nostalgic origin of babies. Storks bring babies in bundles to the expecting parents. There are no complications or pain or chance of death involved.

I was playing Monopoly one day and noticed the colors that codify the worth of each bill. Consequently a five dollar bill is pink while the ten dollar bill is blue. I felt that this was not a coincidence because the five hundred dollar bill is gold and expresses
the relationship of worth when gold is considered to have the highest monetary worth. Although I will admit that it was interesting to see that the one dollar bill was white. *The Stork* carries two babies, one white, one black. Their gender is implied by the color. The little black girl and white boy signify the opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of gender, race, (and stereotypically) class.

![Image of The Stork artwork](image)

**Eggs and Dwellings** (ceramic)

The ceramic trajectory of *Tensegrity* is about the understated stress of balancing life with career and the flamboyancy of sexuality. The eggs are symbolic of the inherited weights women bear as those biologically responsible for producing children. As the age of feminist scholarship, and technology, has progressed, the obligation of parenthood and career has intensified and has diverged into pressuring these idyllic standards on both parents and dumping it on single parents. Fathers today are starting
to have to have the ability to nurture, communicate, and sympathize while also maintaining their masculinity so as not to be perceived as effeminate or weak. Women have to maintain the role as superwoman, rearing children and a career while also maintaining her sexual prowess.

The role of sexuality in women’s lives is dichotomous in their relationships regardless of their intelligence. It undermines and reinforces power dynamics. It opens doors to resources and is a tool of manipulation. Women who unapologetically use their assets are assigned open availability and those who don’t are frigid and unpopular. Men who utilize their sexuality to get what they want are usually applauded and revered and if they are not attractive they can be redeemed through their power.

These artworks take on the identity of both male and female, a hermaphrodite. They do so in a way that isn’t distinctly human, they are rather puzzling boxes full of eggs and penises. Which adds the tension and sense of unease; these feelings are accompanied by flowing ribbons reminiscent of celebration. These are metaphors for being comfortable in one’s own skin.

Title: Hermaphrodite
Artist: Heather Whittlesey
Media: Stoneware
Year: 2015

Hermaphrodite is contemplation about organisms that don’t necessarily follow a path of binary sex roles. Some that came to mind during the
creation of this piece was the clownfish, sea horses, flatworms, earthworms and gobies. In my search for animals that have alternative procreation I found that most of them live in watery environments which led to the aquatic feel of this piece. *Hermaphrodite* is a container that has a clutch of eggs located on the back shaft of the lid, there is also a hood located in front of the shaft. In front of the hood is essentially a piece of bait, a metaphorical hook for it’s suitor. There are several members located between two of the three legs as well as a randomly placed nipple.

The egg and the phallus are the two most powerful signifiers for the sexes. Because these ceramic sculptures are more about sex and survival, primal thoughts are underscored by social and political ones. The transition of train of thought is influenced by the material at hand. Clay is archaic in it’s origins and the constant contact with the material, beating it flat, rolling it out, assembling it by hand, painting it, drying it out, recycling it or firing it.

Eggs are unidentifiable individuals that have no concern over sex and least of all dividing competencies dictated by gender. The inclusion of phalluses is the projection that both sexes are involved with the third wave of feminism. Given a movement isn’t very strong without half of its counterpart. No one should feel alienated or threatened by it.

The *Dwellings* are the homestead of the eggs. It is the romantic notion that birth begins within the home. The dwelling is the first location of memories and is the sacred place of growth. The home is the central family lifeline where we invest most of our resources in making the most of our lives and continues to be the lifeline of our existence.
The *Dwellings* are off kilter to mimic how many of us feel in life. Many of us hang in lingo between paying bills, keeping our homes, getting along with our families, and building a future. Many people forfeit what they love to do to earn a steady income to maintain a house and their lifestyle. Sacrificing labors of love for labors of money takes its toll on the happiness of many people, which greatly impacts greed of power inequities.

*Sno Cone* was given its name because the effect that the white high fire glaze had on the egg clamped between the roof and the sides of the dwelling. My first impression of it was the egg looked as if it was heavily dipped in icing, similar to that of a cinnamon bun. The openings of the dwelling are also lined with this glaze and a white crackle glaze was applied to the tip of the cone that gave it a wintery feel.

It is necessary for me to give these ceramic pieces positive identifiers and associations because the topics at hand are serious, confrontational and provocative.
In terms of relating to feminism I feel it must be done in an optimistic light, not an intimidating one.

Sometimes these *Dwellings* are overfilled with eggs, which is the overburdening realities of our choices to sacrifice happiness for money that in turn is reflected on how we treat our loved ones. These choices are then repeated through tradition and ignorance. Dwellings are no longer considered the feminine domain although as men and women are likely to be duel employed, women still take most of the responsibility of the household duties.

*Two of a Kind* is filled with eggs. The viewer is unaware of the inside contents because the dwelling provides protection from view. This is a metaphor for how people try to fill their inadequacies with money. They are constantly measuring self value through financial means.

**Artist:** Heather Whittlesey  
**Title:** Two of a Kind  
**Media:** Stoneware w/underglazes  
**Year:** 2015
Single parents, especially mothers, are by far the most discriminated against, are plagued by inequities built into the system. The amount of single parent families today has doubled since the 1970’s from 3.8 million to 9.7 million and 90% of the single
households are run by women. (Who then account for the highest rate of poverty across all demographics. (Olson & Banyard 1993) The inequities exponentially grow when race and class become accounted for.

Sculptures

The sculptures of Tensegrity offer insight deep within my thoughts and psyche. I reflect the cultural inequities I have personally felt as well as cast light on what others have experienced. As a consumer I’m very close and familiar with the materials used to make these sculptures. These hand held sculptures manifest moments or irony, humor, wit, hypocrisy through tension, balance and magnetism. The effectiveness of these sculptures is bound by the cultural information we have already assigned the materials that are used to construct the work.

For example, the flowers are constructed out of panty liners and tampon applicators; these materials have a commercialized association with feminine care. The centers of the flowers are filled with different materials such as, clothing tags, doll eyes and bobby pins. These are all consumables that constitute short term use and ease of convenience for disposal, an ideology that my generation lives by.

The eye in the center of the flower gives it the power to look back at the viewer. Historically the viewer has maintained dominance over art and other visual symbols through voyeurism and Scopophilia, (the pleasure of looking). “In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects it’s fantasy on to the female figure
which is styled accordingly”. “There are circumstances in which looking itself is a
source of pleasure, just as in the reverse formation, there is pleasure in being looked
at.” (Mulvey, pg 835-837)

The body language of doll limbs imparts a sense of nostalgia for many of us. As
a child I would alter and transform dolls anywhere from a simple haircut to piercing,
dismemberment and eventual melting. This kind of behavior stems from curiosity about
material composition, changing the manicured image of dolls and exercising rebellious
acts.

The gestures of doll limbs are in one way very clear because they imitate human
body movement but there is also a sense of irony and dark humor attached because
these are dismembered, so at one time when attached to a body symbolized the best of
human perfection and now are only internalized as remnants which are far from ideal.
Wrapped around my little finger challenges the notion of women finding their identity,
self worth, power, and priority through their relationships with men. The engagement
ring is an influential signifier of a woman’s importance in the social sphere. When
women tell their social circle that they are getting married, they ask to see the ring.
*Wrapped around my little finger* is an aggressive reappropriation of the control that the ring exudes. The ring and the wire wrapped around her finger and the protruding needles from the man’s face is an act of a femme fatale. This aligns with the third wave notion that a woman’s traditional role as a wife can be an empowering one. This concept conflicts with more well known values of feminism which might be seen as hypocritical.
Installation

*Morphemes* are the installation component of *Tensegrity*. Morphemes are the smallest grammatical unit of a word. So for example *ed*, on the end of the word *seated* and *ies* on the end of *cookies* are morphemes.
Morphemes consist of fragments of thoughts and feelings that did not develop into stand alone sculptures. These ideas were developed and strengthened when combined. Morphemes create a dichotomous relationship between war and fantasy. There is a realization that being in perpetual war is a lucrative tactic for the powerful and decimating for the weak. Death is not prejudiced with whom it takes, hence the presence of babies, dinosaurs, Indians, soldiers and other animals. War on the other hand is extremely prejudiced, power driven and is aimed to wreak havoc on those who are vulnerable. War is idolized through American culture. These desires are fulfilled by watching movies and other multimedia about the perseverance, honor, and brotherhood associated with being a soldier in the line duty. Some children’s toys perpetuate the notion the violence is honorable by exposing violence and military related themes in the toys.

The toys that eternalize war are almost exclusively aimed at boys. The notion that violence is “cool” holds very well. Toy soldiers and plastic weaponry are a staple for little boys, and nostalgic for all of us. Morphemes also include materials that are not as easily accessible. Zip ties take place as infantry. Lines of guns border the flying shrapnel. Zip ties are associated with sexual deviancy and are associated with the “Don’t ask, Don’t tell policy.” That has recently been repealed.

Morphemes also contain paratroopers that drop naked from the sky. They are babies with cocktail umbrellas impaling their heads; there are jets with test tubes that serve as missiles. Babies riding dinosaurs, dinosaurs eating babies, Indians shooting soldiers, incinerated helicopters. Hair picks are strategically placed below as defense
mechanisms for ground warfare. A killer whale is stranded below, an example of the unintended consequences of war.

All of the objects in Morphemes are readily available as multiples; the underlying obsession with multiples is a learned behavior from consumer climate. But also allows for a contemplative power to be highlighted, the craft becomes second nature.

Explosive Devices was made from several rolls of paper and 400+ glue sticks. This massive wall sculpture is held in place by Styrofoam sheets and sewing pins. The construction of this piece is as important as it’s aesthetic contribution.

As a sculptor, some materials are valued more highly then others. Traditionally and hierarchically materials that are associated with metal, glass and canvas reign supremely. As a contemporary artist I feel it is a necessity to utilize materials people are very familiar with and hence open a line of connection. Not only is paper flexible, readily available and comes in different thicknesses, but interacts extremely well with a high temperature hot glue gun. Hot glue is not usually associated with valuable art. Hot glue is associated with children, afternoon crafts and femininity. Building an explosive device out of paper, hot glue, and needles was undeniable. The irony was too great.
The center of *Explosive Devices* is an explosion of other materials. There is shrapnel that explodes outward from a cow's skull. The skull is brightly painted and several strings with objects attached fly out of the nostrils and eye sockets.

The objects include razors, toothbrushes, zip ties, blood collection tubes, pig inseminators, coffee stirrers, latex gloves, vinyl tubing, plastic shards, and ping pong balls.

When the collection of items first started I searched for gender charged materials, which lead me to personal hygiene. After collecting items with binary notions,
I became aware of my habit and began to procure items that pertained to everyone, hence the toothbrushes and razors.

As I was purchasing hygienic products I noticed a vast difference between what was available for genders. Women’s products have a tendency to be available in different colors and sizes and readily available at cheap prices. Hygienic products for men are usually labeled neutrally and limited in size, color, and style and were available at a much higher price. (www.amazon.com) This experience reiterated the different roles men and women take in terms of importance of image for women and accessibility of money for men.

The five hanging elements of Explosive Devices are informally coined as alien egg sacks. At first glance they satisfy the viewer as hanging baubles but at a closer look they become sharp and defensive and they have egg sacks hanging below them.
Clutch is paper sculpture that exemplifies the power of the female reproductive system. This sculpture illustrates ovulation from five different fallopian tubes and some tubes with multiple eggs.

Cream colored paper was incorporated into this piece to create soft definition. Ping pong balls were the perfect choice for expressing the form of human eggs. Sometimes when expressing thoughts of reproduction a chicken egg comes to mind, because that is the type of egg I am most familiar with. But notions of consumption also come attached.
CHAPTER 5

Influences

My work is influenced by contemporary art. Art today is about taking already established imagery and materials and reassigning meaning. Art is not created in a vacuum, there is always some kind of reference point or historical element that is borrowed.

The context of contemporary art is becoming increasingly important as well as conceptual development. We are in a nation full of stuff. What if our perception and opinions could be changed depending on the context or the ideas behind the stuff?

Historical art is readily palatable because it has stood the test of time. Its validity is official because art historians, critics, anthropologists etc have branded them genuine and artifacts of culture. Contemporary art invites viewers to have an active role in experiencing the art and it can be at odds with public taste. It is vulnerable because it is subjected to the opinion of the viewer, and it could be completely rejected. Expressing ideas and thoughts through contemporary art captures a spirituality that is untamed.

Contemporary art is influenced by Postmodernism. Postmodernism is an ideology that counteracts influence from modernism. Modernism valued industrialization and the political, technological, and cultural advances that came with mass production. Modernism manifested itself in culture through abstract art, especially paintings and then sculpture. Imagery no longer had to render perspective or realism to be considered good works of art.
Postmodernism is reactionary because it emphasizes ephemerality. Modernist art was created from robust materials such as metal, glass, wood, clay, and canvas. Postmodernism introduces work that can have a fairly short life span and questions tangibility, such as installation, site specific art, land art, and digital art.

Postmodernism encourages conceptual work, in which the aesthetic is not easily readable or even available. This philosophy bloomed out of human technological advancement. The internet has become the main game changer, the availability of an almost unlimited access to information has created a fragmentary experience for many of us. These fragments consist of class, race, gender, sexuality, and any other experience not readily accessible to us before the age of the internet.

Before the internet, experiencing culture that was different from our own was exotic or alien and a part of the unknown. Now that we have access to a variety of information and imagery about people and cultural expressions that are different from ourselves, we can develop sensitivity to those that are not like us. Instead of stereotyping and grouping people based on limited experience, negative or positive we can have a more informed opinion on how we interact with each other. This informed opinion is enhanced by the information we collect from the internet, media and interacting with people from different backgrounds.

Tensegritys’ manifestation as contemporary art is placed within the context of postmodernism because of the issues it addresses in the interest of third wave feminism. Third wave feminism is a platform for all perspectives that are unheard and
marginalized. Feminism is no longer about the notion that inequality only affects one gender or race.

Because contemporary art has no limitations, it can be easy to get lost. I incorporate some kind of characteristic or objects that are highly visible or recognizable in *Tensegrity* in order to maintain a message and to keep it clear there must be some symbol that is relatable.

Some artists that have influenced my work include E.V. Day.

Her work incorporates feminine subject matter such as dresses, lingerie, pantyhose, flowers and cats. The biggest differences between our work is the political agenda infused in *Tensegrity*. The recognizable items she uses in her work are highly relatable to female sexuality, while many of the items I use have double entendres. While her work is explosive with visual tension and aesthetic her conceptual underpinnings of female sexuality are fairly stereotypical.
Julie Mehretu is another artist I look to for inspiration, especially in terms of color. Her work is 2-d renderings of highly visible networks. They are reminiscent of architectural blueprints and urban grid patterns. Her imagery has great impact on me and I find myself translating similar work in a 3-d fashion.

Another artist of influence is Matthew Barney. His avant-garde series *The Cremaster Cycle* is of particular interest to me. His cinematography is accompanied by his photography, drawings, sculpture, and installation. This work is particularly bizarre because he reiterates masculinity through athleticism while alienating us in the process. *Cremaster* refers to a muscle in the groin that is able to lift and lower testicles. His video assemblages have high and low points, there are moments where I begin to
understand the work and twice as many moments where I have no idea what is going on. The handling of the work is also interesting because the films are not readily available to the public.

Sarah Sze is a prolific sculptor who works with multiples of common objects and she works extensively with proportion. Her installations can occupy a small corner and a hallway or the entire room. She utilizes mundane objects and composes them in such a way that the installation creates a mesmerizing impact on the space it occupies. The composition with everyday objects leads the viewer to reinterpret the use of the items as well as their value. Some of the objects I have reconsidered the value and
meaning of because of her work include cotton swabs, matches, bubble gum, aspirin, houseplants, tape measurers and mattress foam. All of these items are readily available to us but their innovation and genius are renewed by the context in which they exist.

Her work is disorienting, insightful and gravity defying. The first impression from her sculptures is that they capture an ever fleeting sense of imagination and movement. I identify with her scrupulous techniques of choosing what objects to incorporate. The visionary aesthetic of her work is complimented by the architectural nature behind her work. The conceptual backdrop is coded by the daily objects she chooses.

Artist: Sarah Sze
Title: Hidden Relief
Media: Mixed
Year: 2001
CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

The conception of Tensegrity would not exist without it’s three branches of work. The work manifests the condensed thoughts that provoke, anger, and motivate me. The Dwellings delve into instinctual capacities about origin that are meditative and challenge my skills the most out of the three mediums. The sculptures pinpoint the ideas and concerns of our exposure to the media, consumerism and gender politics that we witness and passively absorb today. The installation Morphemes captures desire, fantasy, and domination. The war scenes are the reality of human greed and insatiable thirst for power. The paper landscape Explosive Devices and Clutch is directly reinvented from my dreams about building the impossible. There is an inevitable feel of a defense mechanism in the work, being a woman and speaking about issues that are traditionally female. But it no longer just about my personal experience, but belongs to everyone.

Feminism tends to leave a bad taste in peoples mouths, especially those who are misinformed about the subject. I am tackling this issue head on and utilizing the negative assumptions about feminism to create humor and disgust. My natural ability to make people uncomfortable is perfect for creating dialogue about something people try to ignore.

Tensegrity exists to educate people on how to confront their own prejudices and stereotyping tendencies and then be able to laugh about it. Also to recognize how we
limit ourselves and each other through preconceived expectations. We should not be passive consumers driven by short lived goals but instead take control of our destinies and not define our limits by shortcomings but rather use our faults and weaknesses as the driving force to make inequities disappear. We may never be able to change someone else’s perception or attitude towards difference, but our reactions to prejudice can take control of the situation.
## GLAZE APPENDIX

### Underglazes cone 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredient</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ferro frit 3124</td>
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<tr>
<td>EPK</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stain</td>
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<tr>
<td>Starch (liquid) 1 cup</td>
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<td>Vinegar 1 tbs</td>
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### Turquoise cone 10

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<tr>
<td>Nepheline Syenite</td>
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<td>Strontium Carbonate</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Lithium Carbonate</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Frit 3134</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dolomite</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talc</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kaolin</td>
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<td>Silica</td>
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### Shino cone 10

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nepheline Syenite</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kona F4 Feldspar</td>
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<td>Spodumene</td>
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<td>Tenn. Ball Clay</td>
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<td>Edgar Plastic Kaolin</td>
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<td>Soda Ash</td>
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### Shige Black cone 10

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<td>Dolomite</td>
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<tr>
<td>Whiting</td>
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<td>Kaolin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Silica</td>
<td>17</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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### Honey Luster cone 10
Custer Fledspar 40.98
Ball Clay 7.18
Gertsley Borate 11.48
Dolomite 7.34
Talc 14.04
Silica 18.98
Total 100

**Temmoku**
cone 10

(g)
Custer Feldspar 45.45
Whiting 17.17
Silica 27.27
Kaolin 10.1
Total 100

**Crackle Glaze** cone 9

(g)
Magnesium Carbonate 65
Ball Clay 5
Nepheline Syenite 30
Total: 100
## CLAY APPENDIX

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stoneware</th>
<th>Porcelain</th>
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<tr>
<td>7.5 gallons water</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 cup vinegar</td>
<td>1 cup vinegar</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 cup bentonite</td>
<td>1 cup bentonite</td>
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<tr>
<td>100 lbs. fireclay</td>
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<td>15 lbs. grog</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 lbs. silica</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 lbs sand</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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Bibliography


Olson, S. L., & Banyard, V. (1993). "Stop the world so I can get off for a while: Sources of daily stress in the lives low-income single mothers of young children." Family Relations, 42, 50-56


