

Florida State University Libraries

2021

A Slice of Life: A Study of Self Portraiture through Inflatable Sculpture

Morgan Ann Wegner



THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS

A SLICE OF LIFE:

A STUDY OF SELF PORTRAITURE THROUGH INFLATABLE SCULPTURE

By

MORGAN WEGNER

A Thesis submitted to the Department of
Fine Arts
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with
Honors in the Major

Degree Awarded:
Spring, 2021

The members of the Defense Committee approve the thesis of Morgan Wegner defended on April 5, 2021.

Lilian Garcia-Roig

Thesis Director

Dr. Sara Shields

Outside Committee Member

Judith Rushin

Committee Member

Signatures are on file with the Honors Program office

Table of Contents

<u>Introduction</u>	3
<u>Intention and Significance</u>	3
<u>Inflatable Sculpture History and Artists</u>	5
<u>Additional Artists</u>	8
<u>Conception and Evolution</u>	10
<u>Conclusion</u>	12
<u>Figures</u>	14
<u>Works Cited</u>	28

A Slice Of Life: A Study of Self Portraiture through Inflatable Sculpture

Introduction

Although my artistic practice for the last four years has focused on food waste and overconsumption in America, for my Honors In The Major Project I have stretched out of my comfort zone to focus specifically on my own relationship with food. In this project, I explore self-identity through contrasting sculptural objects that act as stand-ins for my body; two slices of pizza. One is an inflatable the other is constructed from cardboard and paper mache. The comparison of the two sculptures reveals my personal insecurities and the journey of becoming comfortable in my body.

Intention and Significance

To begin this project, I had to find the food I identify with most. I have a connection with pizza, and it has become something of a personal icon. I tattooed a slice of pizza on my arm based on a linoleum print I made. (figure 1 and 2). Friends began giving me pizza-themed gifts. In essence, pizza became my brand.

To bring this brand iconography into my art practice I created an inflatable sculpture in the style of Claes Oldenburg. I had never made an inflatable sculpture before and wanted to challenge myself with a new medium. This inflatable sculpture would be made out of clear vinyl and be a direct index of my own body, at five feet and 3 inches long. I chose to make this piece out of clear vinyl to represent my feelings about trying not to take up space and trying to be invisible to the public eye.

As a fat woman, my body image issues often come into play while I am making art about food and allow myself to express these feelings freely through materials, volume, and gesture. The cheapness of the vinyl correlates to my lowered self-worth. While inflated, the slice of pizza

looks bloated and fat, directly relating to how I feel in life, like a bloated object in the way of other people (Figure 3). When deflated, the pizza slice takes up much less space and can be folded away, relating to my feelings of insignificance. In this clear vinyl inflatable sculpture, I show that although I take up space, I try to be unimposing by using a flexible, transparent, inexpensive material. I painted the crust and the pepperoni of the inflatable slice of pizza to ground the sculpture in space and to show a painterly quality I find important in my practice. However, I applied the paint as simply as possible to fit in, appear normal, and essentially disappear.

While making the pattern for the inflatable sculpture, I made a cardboard model that is also five feet and three inches long. This model turned into a sculpture itself after I decided it was important to the project. This piece stands in direct contrast to the inflatable sculpture. Rather than trying to disappear in space, this pizza slice confidently takes up space with an opaque, inflexible, brightly colored material (Figure 4). In addition, I used a thicker, more gestural approach to painting this time. These qualities represent my newfound body confidence and comfort occupying space.

However, my use of cheap materials also shows that my struggle continues. (Figure 5). At first I was going to make the second sculpture much larger and brighter, but in the end decided against it. Although my confidence has grown, keeping the sculpture the same size as my height is important conceptually as I have not changed in actual size. Also, keeping the sculptures equal in size draws a direct comparison between the two.

I documented the two pieces separately because they mean two different things to me,, but I also documented them together to show the direct contrast between the two pieces. I documented the second, brighter sculpture with myself to show that I am confident enough with

my size to be shown with my artwork, and I documented the inflatable sculpture in my bed as an homage to Tracey Emin and to show my vulnerability in taking up my personal space (Figure 3, Figure 4, Figure 6, Figure 7, and Figure 8 respectively).

These pieces are extremely important to me. First, it was a challenge to try the new medium of inflatable sculpture. But besides the technical challenge, this project was significant in my personal growth. It allowed me to process my insecurities about my body, translate them into artwork, and to display it to an audience. I usually work on pieces that deal with issues affecting American society at large, but this is one of the first times I used food iconography to take an introspective look into myself.

Inflatable Sculpture History and Artists

Inflatables did not start off as a form of artwork but for a practical use. In 1783, the first inflatable was made- the hot air balloon designed by brothers Joseph and Etienne Montgolfier, made out of paper and linen and filled with air heated from a fire below its opening (Tretkoff). This invention spurred an interest in inflatable objects for practical purposes, especially after the hot air balloon was used for travel. In WWII, the US Army used deception in their Ghost Army to fool Nazi forces, this Ghost Army used artwork such as an inflatable tank to trick enemy forces into believing there were more forces than there were (“Ghost Army”). These two innovations using inflatable technology were very practically focused, although the Ghost Army had more of a hand in artistic practice within the creation of fake tanks themselves. They spurred more inventions in 1959 such as inflatable floors, inflatable bounce houses, and inflatable slides and then moving to inflatable pool toys and furniture (“Blow Up”). These innovations led to the first more art-focused shift in the use of inflatable sculpture. In the 1960s and 1970s, a group called Ant Farm started making inflatable sculptures and even released a video called Inflatables

Illustrated that instructed people how to make inflatable sculptures out of everyday materials (Ant Farm). Their pieces were more about ephemerality and enjoyment rather than their practicality and functionality like previous inflatable innovations. These pieces were very experimental and simple in shape and design, people were excited to use cheap materials to make versatile objects.

Moving into the use of inflatables in contemporary art, in 1963, Yayoi Kusama made an installation piece called Dots Obsession including spotted inflatable sculptures to show the hallucinations Kusama reportedly suffered as a child (Kusama, figure 9). These sculptures take up the space of the room, floor to ceiling, and are covered in spots. This represents the overwhelming amount of dots that seemed to flood her in her hallucinations. My works relate to Kusama's because my works also deal with scale relating to personal trauma. Her trauma is her hallucinations, elevated through the space and lack thereof in the rooms she creates and my trauma is my body image issues and lack of self-worth elevated through the use of scale to relate my pieces to my height specifically. Kusama's pieces were a self portrait in a way, representing a part of herself in inanimate objects, which is also the same concept I am following with representing myself as slices of pizza. However, I am not making an installation, and I am comparing two sculptures together to show the before and after of my journey into self-confidence rather than using the manipulation of the environment the piece is in to show it like Kusama did in this piece.

Claes Oldenburg is an artist that usually inspires me for his pieces focusing on food and consumerism such as The Store, however, he also experimented with inflatable sculpture with his piece Ice Bag Scale B, which is an inflatable ice bag that grows and shrinks on its base (figure 10). This piece is a closer look at an everyday object, which is what Oldenburg is known for. In

that way, my pieces relate to his piece because my pieces are a closer look at an everyday food to refer to my own struggles in my life rather than it representing the sustenance that it is in life. However, the similarities stop there. Neither of my pieces represent an actual slice of pizza realistically, rather they are stylistic to show my emotions and feelings.

Claire Ashley works with inflatable sculpture in her work to serve as metaphors for the body and show humor, emotion, and nostalgia (“Blow Up”). In that way, our pieces are related since I am also using inflatable sculpture to relate the pizza slices to my human body. I am also using color and the figure to showcase my emotions about my size, where her pieces use color to show humor, happiness, and nostalgia. There is also a nostalgia factor in my pieces that relate to pop culture and cartoon imagery, like Ashley uses in her pieces. Pizza is a common pop culture food as seen in *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, which was a part of my childhood and no doubt influenced my infatuation with pizza, Ashley also uses cartoon shows to influence her pieces such as her piece *Knees Up* (Figure 11). Her pieces are inspired by cartoons, architecture, and blow up slides. Her pieces are very colorful, painterly, and figurative. The painterly aspect of her pieces relates more to my second sculpture that is bright and colorful. This piece shows more of my strength and confidence through painterly marks. Both Ashley and I use inanimate objects to relate back to the human experience and our personal experiences by elevating the shapes with form and color.

Pat Oleszko uses inflatables, performance, and costume to make a spectacle of herself and make ironic, pun-filled artwork (Oleszko). Most of her pieces seem to be ironic pieces about American military and values. However, one of her pieces was a large inflatable sculpture of a woman’s body where Oleszko is peeking out from the vagina of the inflatable woman (figure 12). This piece is a non-subtle spectacle of self portraiture and woman-hood. Her brazen

performance of coming in and out of the woman's vagina shows an incredible bodily confidence. This piece by Oleszko is very much different than what I am doing in my work. Her piece is very obviously a woman's body and very oversized, whereas my piece is relating the body to an inanimate object and is the size of my height. However, I am still comparing myself to my sculptures kind of similarly to Oleszko comparing herself to her sculpture by continuously comparing the sculpture to my body while I was working on it. Also, her piece does not seem to be about any kind of insecurities, whereas my inflatable sculpture is about how I am trying to hide even though I take up a lot of space.

Additional Artists

Tracey Emin is an artist that works with raw emotion and deeply personal themes in her artwork. Her pieces inspired me in my artwork to have the courage to make pieces about my deep-seated insecurities about my body image and self-worth. Her piece *My Bed* made in 1998 represents her bed after a particularly bad time in her life and exposes a vulnerable part of her life (White Cube, Figure 13). Like Emin, my inflatable piece represents an extremely vulnerable part of my life where my self worth was deeply affected by my body image issues and poor self worth. Like Emin, I also am exposing my insecurities to an audience with these pieces. I also documented my inflatable sculpture in my own bed as an homage to Emin, exposing my vulnerabilities in taking up space in my own private area as well as in the public sphere. In this way, both Emin and I play with the idea of public and private issues and feelings.

Jenny Saville is a well known artist for her portrayal of bodies in a grotesque way. Her pieces are both vulnerable and grotesque in the way that she displays the human form, as shown in her piece *Propped* (Figure 14). It is vulnerable because the woman in the painting seems in agony about her oversized thighs. Although Saville's piece is a painting and my pieces are

sculptures, we both work with the idea of scale and the human body. Her exaggeration of the thighs in Propped directly correlates to the bloating that happens in my clear inflatable pizza that correlates to my insecurities to my bloating stomach. Again, Saville's piece directly works with body image issues by showing a human body where mine works with inanimate objects, but we both work with the ideas of scale, insecurities, and vulnerabilities.

Lauren Buchness is an artist that works with fat bodies in her pieces. In her piece Moss and Magnolias, she displays a fat stomach with moss and magnolias, which are natural items that the model of the stomach feels a personal connection to (Buchness, Figure 15). Her piece relates the natural items around the stomach to the naturalness of fat and being fat. My piece relates to Buchness' because my piece is also about me becoming confident in my size and my fat, but also because of the association of objects that don't directly relate to the body, especially since I do not have a direct body part included in my piece. In her piece, moss and magnolias are used to represent the model's personality whereas in my piece, slices of pizza are used to represent myself and my personality.

Amanda Kleinhans is a local artist that makes art about fatness. Her piece, Fitting X talks about how people think about fitting into things, fitting into pants, fitting into society, etc (Kleinhans, Figure 16). This piece directly relates to my inflatable pizza slice because I painted it plain and made it an inflatable so that it could be deflated and fit into a small space. However, my pieces are also like Kleinhans' because I challenge the idea of fitting into a space, like she does, in my cardboard sculpture where I am proud of the space I take up.

Conception and Evolution

For this project, I knew I wanted to work with an inflatable sculpture since I had never worked with inflatable sculpture before. I always knew I wanted it to be a slice of pizza because

I connect with the iconography of pizza very strongly. At first, I wanted to make a larger than life pizza slice that was at least ten feet long. I wanted to exaggerate the size I felt while making the piece barely seen by using a clear vinyl. Then, after a discussion with my committee, I decided to make the inflatable sculpture be the same height as me to make the connection between the slice of pizza and myself be clearer.

I began researching the beginnings of inflatable sculpture and the materials that were commonly used. I decided not to use trash bags like ANT Farm because I did not want to equate myself to trash. I drew influence from the artists that I found during my research into the history of inflatable sculpture and the contemporary inflatable art sculpture scene. I also drew upon the influence of other artists who work with body image, vulnerability, and self portraiture to inspire me during the making of my pieces.

Before starting on the large inflatable sculpture, I did a small test model to make sure that I knew how to melt the clear vinyl together and make a small inflatable sculpture. This test helped me learn how I needed to pattern the larger sculpture. Then, upon suggestion from a committee member, I made a scale model of the large inflatable sculpture out of cardboard to make a pattern out of newsprint paper from its form.

I decided that this cardboard structure shouldn't be left out of the final piece since it was significant in making the inflatable sculpture and served as a nice contrast to the clear inflatable sculpture. I used paper mache to build some more details on the form of the pizza to make it seem more like a pizza slice instead of keeping it in its basic shape. Then, I spray painted it multiple colors to display confidence and happiness. I painted pepperoni on it, since that is my favorite kind of pizza and also the kind of pizza I have branded on myself, and added some details throughout the slice.

While making the inflatable slice of pizza, I ironed together each side to seal them. While working on the project, I realized it was very difficult to see the pizza at all and decided it needed to be grounded somehow. After discussing with a committee member, we decided that to ground the piece as well as to hide the motor that pumps air into the piece, I should paint the crust of the slice of pizza. This will also help the pizza slice look like a pizza slice rather than a slice of pie. Then, since there were already painted elements, I decided that painted on pepperoni would tie in the painted elements of the piece and tie the cardboard sculpture and the inflatable sculpture even more since the pepperoni would look similar. At first, I was planning on doing separated pepperoni that had photo transfers of me growing up and growing bigger, but I decided that the photos would be too distracting from the fact that the pizza is a clear pizza.

The documentation of these pieces shifted in conception. At first, I was only going to take pictures of the pieces in places that I spend the most time. However, I decided that it was important to see these pieces in a space that is not distracting from their form and colors. I took documentation pictures of them together to show the direct contrast of them together. I took pictures of them separately to show their individual details. I decided to take documentation photos of my inflatable pizza in my bed, however, as an homage to Tracey Emin's piece *My Bed*, and to expose my vulnerabilities even further with my insecurities and issues with self worth.

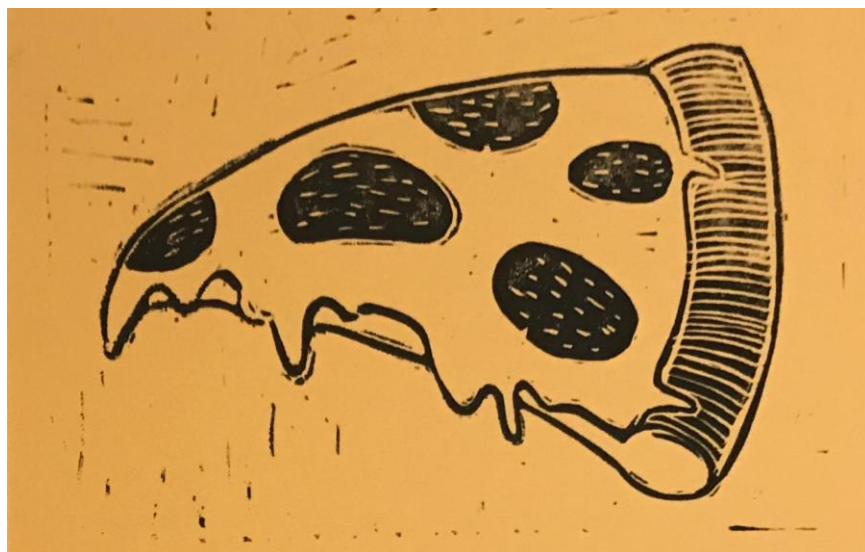
Conclusion

In conclusion, I have two pieces that are both slices of pizza that are five feet three inches long. This way, they relate to me specifically. One of the pizza slices is an inflatable sculpture with painted crust and pepperoni, and the other is a cardboard sculpture with paper mache accents that has been spray painted and also has painted pepperoni. These pieces both represent a different part of myself. The inflatable pizza slice represents the past me that is extremely

insecure about my body image and has low self worth. That is represented in this piece by the clear vinyl I used. The clear vinyl was used to show that even though I was taking up space, I was trying to blend into the background and be as invisible as possible. The cardboard sculpture is meant to represent my growth into my confidence. It is still made out of cheap materials because I am still struggling with my self worth and insecurities. However, the sculpture is opaque and painted with bold and bright colors in a way that displays my confidence in myself and my body.

The documentation of these pieces reflect the feelings I have about these pieces. Comparing the two pieces, I show the clear contrast between the past me and the present me. By displaying the inflatable pizza in my bed, I display my vulnerabilities in two ways. Both in the piece and by exposing my personal space as well. By displaying the cardboard sculpture with myself, I show that I am proud to compare myself to the size of the pizza and not insecure to show my body. Overall, I use inanimate objects to show my personal issues through a form of self portraiture. From the research I did from this project, I learned a lot about myself and about inflatable sculpture.

Figure 1



Morgan Wegner, Pizza, linoleum print

Figure 2



Morgan Wegner, Pizza, Tattooed by Michael Hall

Figure 3



Morgan Wegner, *A Slice of Life*: Inflatable, clear vinyl, acrylic paint, air mattress pump.

Figure 4



Morgan Wegner, *A Slice of Life*: Cardboard, cardboard, spray paint, paper mache, acrylic paint.

Figure 5



Morgan Wegner, A Slice of Life: Cardboard (close-up), cardboard, spray paint, paper mache, acrylic paint.

Figure 6



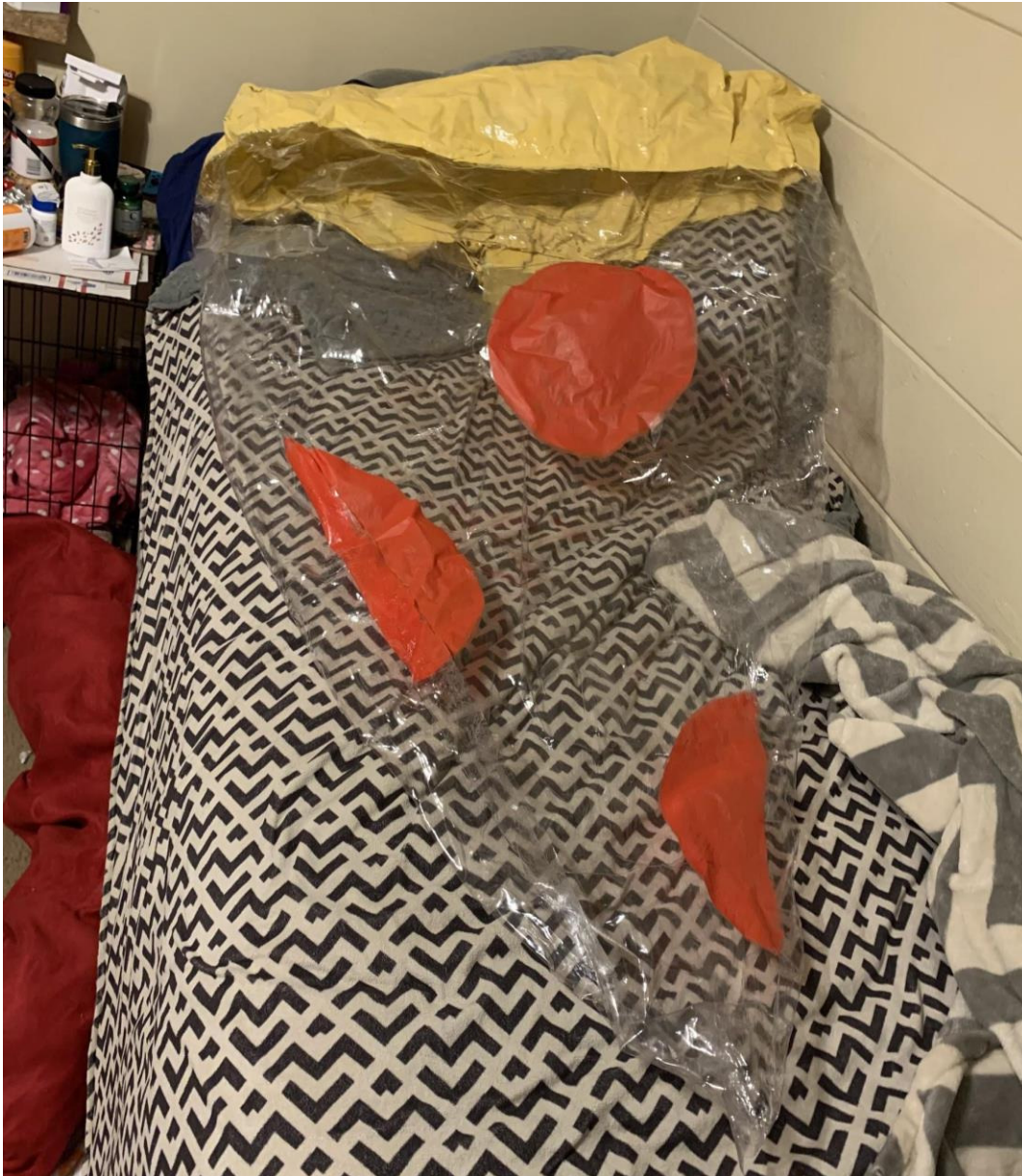
Morgan Wegner, A Slice of Life: Inflatable, and A Slice of Life: Cardboard.

Figure 7



Morgan Wegner, A Slice of Life: Cardboard, cardboard, spray paint, paper mache, acrylic paint.

Figure 8



Morgan Wegner, *A Slice of Life: Inflatable*, clear vinyl, acrylic paint, air mattress pump. Homage to Tracey Emin's *My Bed*

Figure 9



Installation view of Dots Obsession 2011 as part of 'Yayoi Kusama: Look Now, See Forever',
Gallery of Modern Art, 2011 / © Yayoi Kusama, Yayoi Kusama Studio Inc. / Photograph: Mark

Sherwood

Figure 10



Claes Oldenburg, Ice Bag- Scale B, 1971, Fiberglass, Polyester Resin, Acrylic Sheet, Nylon Fabric, Metal, Wood, Pigment, Dye. Copyright Claes Oldenburg.

Figure 11



Claire Ashley, *Knees Up*, 2011, spray paint on PVC coated canvas tarpaulin and fan, 6 x 5 x 5 feet

Figure 12



Pat Oleszko, Performance and Inflatable Sculpture.

Figure 13



Installation view of Tracey Emin, *My Bed*, at the Turner Prize Exhibition, Tate Gallery, London, 1999-2000, courtesy of White Cube.

Figure 14



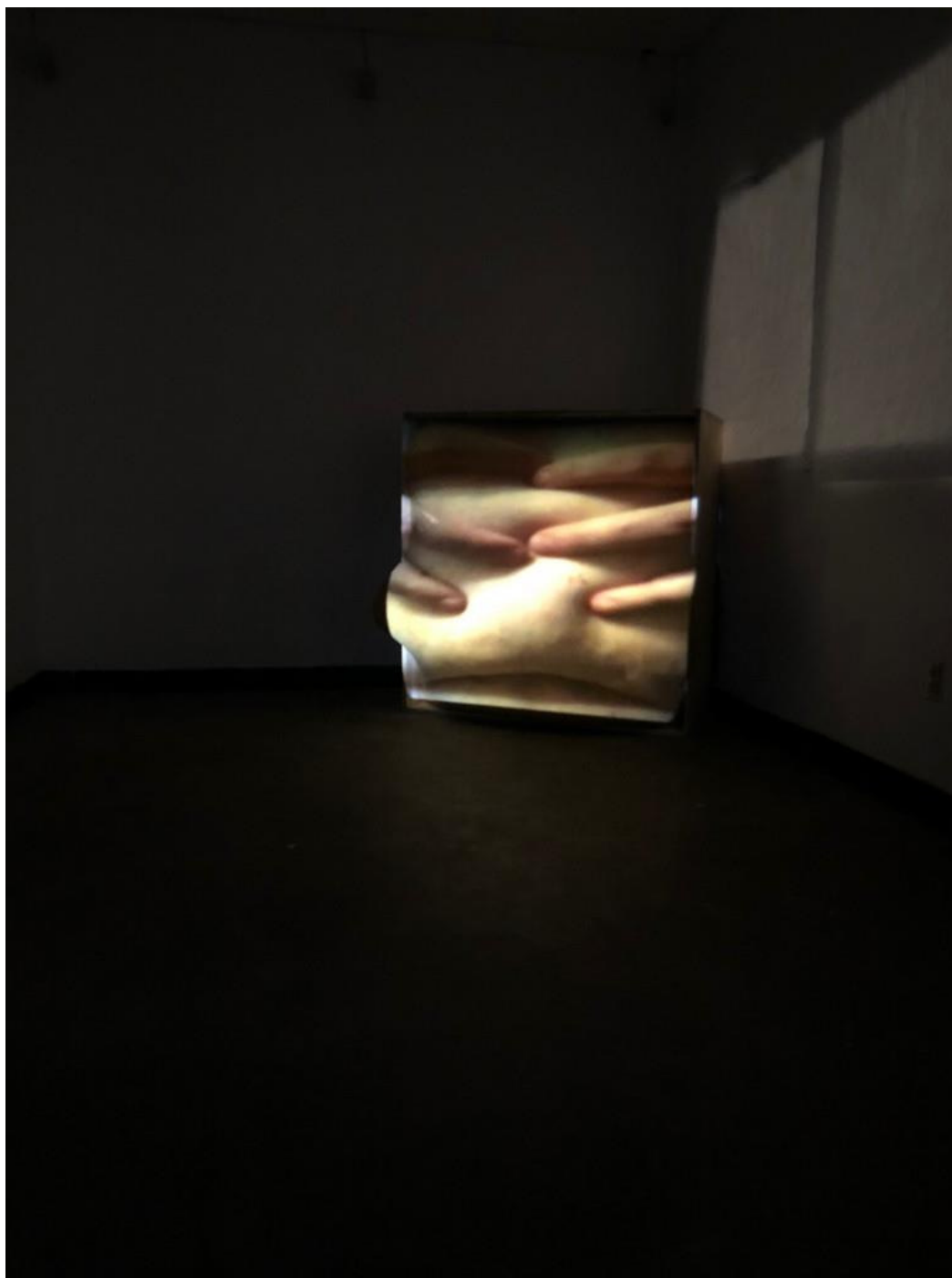
Jenny Saville, Propped, 1992, Oil on Canvas, 84 x 72 inches, copyright Jenny Saville

Figure 15



Lauren Buchness, Moss and Magnolias, watercolor and gouache.

Figure 16



Amanda Kleinhans, *Fitting X*, 2019, Rubber Foam, Wood, Video Projection, 49.5 x 49.5 x 26 in.

3:04 minutes

Works Cited

- Ant Farm. Inflatables Illustrated . Media Burn , Ant Corps, 1971,
mediaburn.org/video/inflatables-illustrated-2/.
- “Blow Up: Inflatable Contemporary Art.” UWIRE Text, 2016.
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5203ff5ce4b0cbada7130140/t/5abbffd82b6a28c8f42764ac/1522270173128/Blow+Up+Sculpture+Info.pdf>
- Buchness, Lauren. “Lauren Buchness.” Queer Art Brunch Club, 2 Aug. 2019,
queerartbrunch.club/artists/lauren-buchness/.
- “Ghost Army: The Combat Con Artists of World War II: The National WWII Museum: New Orleans.” The National WWII Museum | New Orleans, E. L. Wiegand Foundation,
www.nationalww2museum.org/visit/museum-campus-guide/hall-democracy/senator-john-alario-jr-special-exhibition-hall/ghost-army.
- Kleinhans, Amanda. “Fitting X.” "Fitting X" by Amanda Kleinhans | ArtFields Art Competition,
www.artfieldssc.org/galleries/art/2019/fitting-x/191498.
- Kusama, Yayoi. “DOTS OBSESSION.” Dots Obsession, Gallery of Modern Art
play.qagoma.qld.gov.au/looknowseeforever/works/dots/.
- Oldenburg, Claes. “Ice Bag- Scale B.” Search the Collections , Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco , 1971, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco art.famsf.org/claes-oldenburg/ice-bag—scale-b-199674354.
- Oleszko, Pat. Pat Oleszko, Performance, Multi-Media, Filmmaker and Fool Who Takes on the World at Large, www.patoleszko.com/bio.
- Tretkoff, Ernie. “This Month in Physics History November 1783: Intrepid Physicist Is First to Fly.” American Physical Society News , Nov. 2006.

White Cube. "Artists - Tracey Emin." White Cube, whitecube.com/artists/artist/tracey_emin.