Appendages

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EMILY WINTON
THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Fine Arts in Imaging Arts

Rochester Institute of Technology
School of Photographic Arts and Sciences

Committee Members

Professor Elaine O’Neil (Chair)
Professor Jessica Lieberman (Second)
Professor Tina Lent (Third)

Approved on 11/9/2010
This thesis is dedicated to every moment before this one.

Without them, I would not be who I am today.
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APPENDAGES

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ABSTRACT

Appendages explores my sexuality, identity and the concepts of heteronormativity, queer theory, and gender norms. Through the creation of sculptures called DilNO’s, I was able to engage the audience in experiencing my interpretation of my own sexuality. By mocking and bending the concept of the dildo, I was challenging the stereotypes of gender, and lesbian sexuality and intimacy. The sensations of touching and feeling played a vital role in both the creation and presentation of the pieces in my thesis exhibition. Moving from my previous photographic work into the three-dimensional realm of sculpture helped me express the physical and sensual dimensions needed for the work. The tactile experience of the objects conveyed to the viewer aspects of my sexuality as a bisexual, woman preferred woman, while helping the audience learn more about their own sexuality. Sharing this part of myself was vital to the work, as were my journey and the personal discoveries made while making the work. This thesis started out of a desire to explore my own need for comfort, and helped me to find out more about who I really am.
# Table of Contents

Dedication ................................................................. ii
Acknowledgement ..................................................... iii
Abstract ................................................................. iv
Table of Contents ...................................................... v
List of Illustrations .................................................... vi
Introduction ............................................................. 6
Strapping It On ........................................................ 12
The Bear ................................................................. 15
The Sanctuary .......................................................... 19
The DilNO’s .............................................................. 24
Process and Conceptualization ................................. 29
Influences ............................................................... 36
Conclusion .............................................................. 39
Afterward ............................................................... 41
Bibliography .......................................................... 43
List of Illustrations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Untitled, 2005</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Dressing Room Fight, 2005</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Bars and Stripes, 2006</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Untitled (Sink) from Dispositions Series, 2007</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Title Sign for Appendages Exhibition, 2009</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The Bear, 2009</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The Bear (detail interior view), 2009</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. The Bear (detail paw view), 2009</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. The Sanctuary, 2009</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Door Mat/Welcome Mat, 2009</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. The Sanctuary (detail Something New), 2009</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. The Sanctuary (detail post cards, candle), 2009</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Ribbed for Her Pleasure, 2009</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. The Tickler, 2009</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Jolly Green Giant, 2009</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Scanned Sketches, 2008-2009</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. The Hugger &amp; Pocket Rocket Fabric Swatches</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. The Hugger, 2008</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. The Bear (detail fabric)</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Display Card &amp; Swatch Installation</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Strapping “IT” On, Installation View</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Appendages Exhibition View, 2009</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Francesca Woodman, House #4 Providence, Rhode Island, 1976</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Jenny Saville, Strategy (Triptych), 1994</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Libby Rowe, Learning Feminine, Posture, and Chin Up, 2008</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Libby Rowe, Panties Portrait, Invitation, Installation, and detail view, 2008</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Appendages, RoCo Installation, 2009</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

“For a woman to explore and express the FULLNESS of her sexuality, her emotional and intellectual capacity, would entail who knows what risks and who knows what truly revolutionary alteration of the social conditions that demean and constrain her. Or she may go on trying to fit herself into the order of the world and thereby consign herself forever to the bondage of some stereotype of normal femininity– a perversion if you will”

When I began graduate school in 2006, I had a certain understanding of myself and where my life was headed. As I sit here today writing and looking back over the last three and a half years, I question whether anyone will ever fully understand themselves, or the paths that led them to where they are. My artwork has always been an attempt to evaluate myself in order to have a better understanding of who I am or was at the time, as well as an opportunity to present this understanding to my audience. This is a continuous process of internal discovery, and outward expression and communication, and while my art has helped in this process, I feel it will never be done.

My previous work dealt with identity and gender roles, and more specifically, it dealt with being overweight and my struggles with my identity as an obese woman. This body of work began in my undergraduate studies, and originated from the statement of a professor that “all great art needs to be shocking, or hard to look at.” Combined with my own belief that all art should be personal, this led

1 Kaplan, Female Perversions: the temptations of Madame Bovary, 528.
to a series of self-portraits where I explored the struggles I underwent as an overweight person (Figure 1), from trying on clothing (Figure 2), to eating with friends, dating, and exercising.

When I arrived at RIT, I wanted to continue with this body of work but I knew it needed to evolve. During my first quarter I completed a series that dealt with my weight and society’s beliefs about what a heavy

fig. 1 Untitled, 2005

fig. 2 Dressing Room Fight, 2005
fig. 3 Bars and Stripes, 2006

fig. 4 Untitled (Sink) from Dispositions Series, 2007
person should and shouldn’t wear (Figure 3). During our first quarter review, Elaine O’Neil (now the chair of my thesis committee), made the statement that the work dealt less with my weight, and more with, “Where do I fit in?” This became my question, my statement per se, throughout my work at RIT (Figure 4). What is my role as a woman, as someone with weight issues, as a queer person, and how do I fit into the norms society has established?

My thesis is an exploration of identity, sexuality and gender roles. A combination of socialization and predetermined gender roles, help develop our identities and sometimes our gender is decided for us before we are even born. It then takes the remainder of our lives to break out of the roles and, if we are lucky, discover who we really are. Breaking through the limitations of these predefined roles, one is often faced with a constant battle against labels and stereotypes. Gender is something that I find hard to define; yet it is usually defined by patriarchal cultures as the binary system of male and female, masculine and feminine. There is no room in this arrangement for anything other than the norms, and anything that sneaks in is seen as a threat to the very foundation of our culture, and so is condemned and banished. Similarly, human sexuality is defined by a similar binary system, gay or straight, and in my opinion bisexuality or pansexuality is considered waffling and associated with an inability to commit.

This negative label of bisexuality is something that I have struggled with for

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2 Based on our sex we are given colors to identify with and told whether to play with dolls or trucks. Chanter, 3
3 Butler, Undoing Gender, 47
4 “The Norm is a measurement and a means of producing a common standard, to become an instance of the norm is not fully to exhaust the norm, but rather to become subjected to an abstraction of commonality.” Butler, Undoing Gender, 50
5 pansexual, adj. That encompasses all kinds of sexuality; not limited or inhibited in sexual choice with regards to gender or practice, Oxford English Dictionary
most of my “out” life. Oftentimes I found myself changing my label. Ashamed to say I was bisexual, when I was with a woman for a long period of time I found it was easier to say I was a lesbian rather than to explain. When I was with a man I found the term bisexual to be an unwanted turn-on for him. It was often assumed that I would have a threesome with another women and his male chauvinist fantasies about “having” two women at once would come true.

It wasn’t until recently that I started to take back the word bisexual as my own. I had to fight the system which tried to put me in one category or another. Now I blend the lines and I am who I am, without the label or concern about it. I look to strip the power from the words. I am interested in breaking the mold, creating a new one, or working without one altogether. I am investigating my own life to see where I fall. Am I normal? Abnormal? Which do I prefer? Which one is right? Right by whose standards? What are my own standards? How can I change them? Be them? Be me? How has my childhood affected me for the entirety of my life? What are my preferences? How did they develop? Am I gay, straight, bisexual, homosexual, pansexual, or just plain sexual?

Why do we feel the need to label others and ourselves? Can we exist without the labels? What do these labels say about me? What does my resistance against labels say about me? Why can’t we posses both masculine and feminine qualities? Or can we? I always liked the nerdy quiet guys, does that mean I considered them to be more like women than men? And if most of the women I
liked were more “masculine,” does that mean I am more attracted to men? Or do I just like people who possess both qualities? If so, what gender are they? What gender am I? Being a woman who prefers other women, what are the things I miss about being with men? Is it the Appendage? Is it wrong if I use a strap-on? What does it mean to use a fake penis? What would my ideal dildo be? Do I, or my partner, take on the masculine or feminine roles either sexually or mentally? In this work I look at my life as a bisexual woman, one who prefers women, and question how the role of masculinity fits into my life.

From these questions came Appendages. Born out of necessity, the objects in Appendages explore sexual experiences in my relationships, examine my personal ideals of marriage and the role of heteronormativity in these ideals; Appendages also considers gender bending, stereotypes, and gender roles. Through this work I question the supposed need for a binary “system” of gender roles and learned more about my roles in my own sexual identity.

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6 Heteronormativity was coined in 1991 by Michael Warner, referring to the “perceived reinforcement of certain beliefs about sexuality within social institutions and policies.” Clarke, Lesbians Gay Bisexual Trans and Queer Psychology: An Introduction 120.
Strapping It On

The assumption about many female homosexual relationships is often that sex, without the proper necessities, must be more difficult or lacking in areas. This is also where, in my opinion, a lot of fear comes from when dealing with a homosexual relationship. The removal or replacement of one sex altogether is frightening, and threatening and is seen as unnatural and implausible. There is an assumption by some heterosexuals that a solution or an answer is needed to the obvious missing piece.

The idea of a “missing” member or object is odd to me. I have never felt the need for “toys” or a penis when in a sexual relationship with a woman. The video *Strapping “IT” On* is a documentation of my first experience trying on a strap-on dildo. In the video the viewer watches me as I try to figure out how to put on a strap-on for the first time, as well as my reaction to it once it is on my body (Figure 6). A prominently placed mirror both captures the full view of me and my new appendage, as well as shows my expressions and reactions to the audience. It was important to capture my expression in a completely candid and unplanned way to share my “virginal” experience as a woman, wearing what is considered to be a standard in lesbian sex.

The supplemental phallus is something that I have often rejected. This is because of the assumption that sex is not complete between two women without “it.”

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7 Wilchins, *Queer Theory, Gender Theory*, 7
God made Adam and Eve to fit together, and therefore “how do two women fit together?” In my experience with various partners I have chosen to allow my partner to wear a strap-on, but I have never worn one myself. It could be seen as a double standard, but I was against the use of one because I did not want to feel as if a “male part” was necessary or that there was something lacking in sex with women. In the past when a strap-on was used, it was for the partner that I shared it with more than for myself. The dildo carries a weight of strength and power with it, that comes from the history of the patriarchy and the power of the man over woman, as well as someone being in control of an object of arousal or stimulation.

The piece *Strapping “IT” On*, is a video document; the real piece is the experience itself. The reactions I have, as well as the audience’s personal reaction, come together to address issues of gender bending, stereotypes of gender roles, and personal insecurity. Mixing the roles of female and male, are issues with which the general public is not comfortable. The uncommon view of a woman with a penis in this video has caused a range of reactions. The first being laughter. Examples of this laughter are seen both in

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8 “…the phallus as the prototype or idealized property of the penis…” Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 62.
my role in the video as one who is making myself vulnerable and insecure with a new experience and the viewers’ discomfort with the voyeuristic view of a semi-sexual act. Even though there is no actual sex act being performed, there is the assumed action of sex after trying on the strap-on which is anticipated throughout the experience.

I believe everyone has a natural sexuality or urge, but our patriarchal system has socialized us in a way to see only the binary relationships as “valid” sexual experiences. Thus, there is still vulnerability in the unknown of homosexuality and its transgressions against heterosexuality. Sex between two women is deviant from the gender role norms and standards. To replace the role of the male altogether is threatening to the very understanding of the sexual binary system and the patriarchy in which we live.

“Others devote time and energy regulating our gender, and we spend an even greater amount learning, rehearsing, exploring, and perfecting our gender. By adulthood, our role is inhabited so completely that it feels inevitable. And should the experimentation of childhood inadvertently re-emerge, we find it awkward, embarrassing, and even threatening. Threatening, but not departed. For although it looks like something we are, gender is always a doing rather than a being. In this sense, all gender is drag.”

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10 Wilchins, *GenderQueer*, 12.
The Bear

Growing up, one of my favorite things was getting a really great big bear hug from my father. It was a hug that squeezed me so tightly that I could almost feel the love come into me. When he held me it took my breath away. As we get older, we receive fewer and fewer of these. Being an overweight woman, my experience has been that it is rare to be with someone who is larger than me, and smaller people are usually not able to hug me “properly.” Being a women-preferred bisexual though, this causes some problems. I find that I am with women more often than men, and this usually means I am the larger of the two. Men are often taller than me and are able to wrap their arms around me in a near-bear experience. Sometimes men are shorter or smaller than me as well and both men and women with smaller body types make it difficult to be held to my liking in the full bear hug—to be enclosed in someone’s arms and have that feeling of warmth, love, and security surge through you as they squeeze you, and hold you without hurting you.

*The Bear* (Figure 7) is meant to look at the aspects of security in physical contact—being held by a lover, rather than the psychological aspects of safety and security of self. This is not to say that I cannot and have not felt secure with women, nor is it a subconscious attempt at questioning my security in my sexuality. This feeling of security is emotional. After all, most people like to held by another, or else we wouldn’t seek physical relationships.
The Bear is a special shirt/suit that I have created to supplement this sometimes-missing aspect in my relationships with people of a smaller size than me. It has a foam core with padding in all the right places to add height and width to my partner but with a soft and comforting outer shell. The Bear is adjustable with Velcro closures on the backside and is made to fit women or men who are smaller than myself (Figure 8). I, myself, do not fit into The Bear. The color and textures are meant to be comforting and sleep compatible. Sex, as well as cuddling, before bed are some of the most important moments to feel secure and loved. Therefore the color white was chosen as the ideal expression of serenity and peace. The texture is one of the softest I have personally ever experienced in a fabric and I thought it only appropriate to use it for such an intimate experience.

The arms of the shirt are left foamless so that the actual arms of the person can be felt and experienced. Though they are still covered in the fabric, you are still able to feel the shape of the arms just with an added textural encounter from the supple material shell. The hands of the shirt mimic an old children’s toy (I
believe I had a monkey) with paws that have Velcro pads that lock onto each other (Figure 9). It makes the hug a semi-permanent experience, and only through the pulling away of the hands can the Velcro be separated. This is important to the act of the hug, the hold, and being held securely by someone you care about.

Though *The Bear* acts as a costume for my partner, it is not meant to change who they are, only the shape of them. I have left a space for the face and legs so that they are still able to move, speak, talk, kiss, etc. This is important because I am not looking to replace or change them but only “improve,” or enhance my experience with them. Ultimately it is about the physical experience.

*The Bear* is not gendered. It has an ambiguous shape, with no breasts, no pectoral muscles, no curves other than the form it will obtain from the wearer. It is not meant for one sex more than another, only for “size-inhibited” persons. I find comfort in the fact that *The Bear* has no gender. It is meant for woman
and men. It is simply our socialization and biological knowledge of men
normally being larger, and “stronger” than women, which gives gender bias to
the piece and characterizes *The Bear* as masculine.\(^\text{11}\)

Those same standards of gender roles and stereotypes may be applied to the
exterior cover of *The Bear*, where the more womanly or feminine, soft sensual
exterior lies. This blend of genders is a true example of my own preferences for a
life partner, as well as an expression of my own sexuality and sensuality. *The Bear*
puts my partner at an equal level to my own– same size or closer to the same
size. This equality and exchange of roles is something that is very important in
my relationships.

\(^{11}\) Wilchins, *Queer Theory, Gender Theory*, 15.
The Sanctuary

Marriage is something that every little girl is supposed to grow up thinking and dreaming about. As a little girl I mimicked the roles my mother and father played with my Barbie and Ken dolls. I grew up thinking that I needed to be a certain way and do certain things in order to have a fulfilled life. Recently a friend asked me what I wanted to be “when I grew up” when I was younger. I replied “a mom.” That was the only career choice I could think of as a child. I had the diaper bag for my dolls and planned out when I was going to get married (at 22), have kids (at 25), how many (2), boys or girls (one of each), etc. Those years have passed and when I think about where I was supposed to be, I laugh. I laugh because, I don’t want kids, and the thought of being a mother is one of the most frightening things to me ever.

So what do I do with these left over “dreams” I had as a child? Faced with the reality of same-sex marriage being illegal contrasted against the preconceived notions that I would one day get married brought me to a crossroads. The Sanctuary is a collection of found objects and hand-made items that deal with my issues of confusion, rebellion, and the ideals that heteronormativity have placed within my own thinking (Figure 10). The urge to place heterosexual roles into my homosexual relationships come from an ingrained need to fit in, a societal need for conformity, and fear of the unknown\textsuperscript{12}.

\textsuperscript{12} Wilchins talks about how Gay rights activists have taken on the stance of “stressing the normality of the homosexuals. We’re just like the straight people, we just sleep with the same sex.” Quer Theory, Gender Theory, 17.
So what is it about marriage that keeps us wanting it? Is it an institution or an ideal? I know that I can’t picture my wedding, but does that mean that I shouldn’t have one? Does it matter anyway since I am not allowed to marry the person of my choosing? If it were a woman, would we both wear dresses? Would/Could it be in a church? All of these things, I face on a daily basis. The ideals of marriage have been laid out for centuries, but do I want to come into that stereotypical world? I do (I think). But would my marriage would be far from typical?

In this installation I take pleasure in mocking the stereotypes. The image of “man and wife,” diamond rings, the white dress, the groom– these things make
me laugh. They don’t fit into my picture. The tradition is lost with me. I guess that’s where all the current cultural complaints about the “sanctity of marriage”\textsuperscript{13} come in. Showcasing your name on your towels or your rug or even a plaque on the wall, the announcement at your wedding are all part of the traditions surrounding being married within the patriarchy that I have learned. How do I fit into that? What would objects belonging to me and my partner look like?

In The Doormat/Welcome Mat (Figure 11), I look at the idea of taking my partner’s last name. This act challenges the traditional role of the woman taking on the male’s name as a sign of ownership. This coincides with the history of marriage as a business deal and the bride as a purchase prize \textsuperscript{14}. By combining

\textsuperscript{13} The Advocate, 29-31.
\textsuperscript{14} In an arranged marriage, the marital partners are chosen by parents, community elders, matchmakers, or religious leaders in an effort to guide young people through the process of finding the right person to marry. New World Encyclopaedia.com.
my last name with the first initial of my girlfriend’s last name I am creating a blend of the names. This shows the equality in the relationship as well as playing with the traditions of taking on a name.

In *Something New* (Figure 12), I play with the idea of a traditional wedding gift.

I created a hand-embroidered handkerchief with my new last name(s). The switching of pronouns and last names, is part of the challenge that I face trying to fit into the predetermined roles of “man and wife.” Also in questioning the Mr. and Mrs. and Ms. or Miss with which last name to take I am again showing how my lifestyle does not fit into these standards and how heteronormativity does not easily apply to my life.
The postcards and memorabilia (Figure 13) in *The Sanctuary* are glimpses of my humor on the subject of gay marriage. I find joy in trying to imagine my life in these drawn out ideals. I do have a desire to be a part of this world but in my own way. The picture perfect wedding is not part of this dream. Instead I want a red or black dress, I don’t want a diamond, but a ring is a nice idea and symbol.

I have a great internal struggle when it comes to marriage. It is an institution, but one which continues the gender roles along a path of sexism. Fitting a homosexual relationship into this institution is a continuance of heteronormative thought. The civil rights for heterosexual and homosexual relationships as well as transgendered, bisexual, and all other forms of sexual expression should be the same. I want the right to be married but under my own traditions. In *The Sanctuary*, I explore the beliefs I have known, abandoned, sustained, and reinterpreted. If there is no man present in my wedding, how do the ideals of the great American family change for me? Do I need a man in order to have a “family.” Do I need children? Do animals count as “children?” The manipulation of objects within *The Sanctuary* gives form to my ideals of marriage and family.
The DilNO’s

When I first heard about “lesbians” as a child, I was told a horrific story of how women would get together and use broomsticks and plungers to have sex. I was appalled. This was not a topic I felt comfortable discussing with friends and family. For a very long time I believed this story. It was not until much later that I found out it was not quite realistic.  

But there was the question of “How do two girls have sex?” I heard this question often growing up. I think this question goes further back into the idea that “a man and a women fit together” so a woman and a woman could not possibly fit together. The nature of this “unnatural” union was curious. What sorts of objects or positions were needed for such things to occur? Then of course there is the supplemental penis, the dildo, the strap-on, vibrator or “toy” that is necessary to obviously replace the lacking “piece” to achieve a connection.  

The DilNO’s were created as an opposition to this “piece.” They are both a replacement of the penis or male role in sex with two women and a representation of the emotions, reactions and enjoyment that results from two women being together. The shapes I created range from phallic to furniture-like,

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15 This thought is not realistic to the current time period, but during my thesis work at RIT, I actually received a book from a friend titled “The Ways Homosexuals Make Love” by Michael Bellows. It was published in the 70’s and was Volume 2 in a series detailing sex techniques of homosexuals. This particular one, was the female to female version, which included detailed descriptions and pictures. I was a little appalled to find that they actually talked about broomstick handles as an adequate replacement object of desire, along with dildos, and fruit, 300.  
16 When I was young my parent gave me the book “Asking about sex and growing up: a question-and-answer book for boys and girls” by Joanna Cole, In this book it talks about sex and our bodies and the changes people go through during puberty. It also details sexual intercourse so that children can understand the process. In the section “What is Sexual Intercourse?” it states, “A man’s body and a woman’s body are made so that they fit together.” This was one of my first understandings of heterosexual sexuality, 8.
from large to small, soft to hard. The DilNO’s represent my re-interpretation of the dildo as a “necessary” object in a lesbian relationship. It is a re-owning of the dildo, not the penis. The textures and fabrics used are references to the emotional connection as well as the sensuality shared between women. These vary in many ways, but all seem to have an overall connection of “softness” or coziness. This distinction shows the comfort that I feel and express when thinking of homosexuality, as well as the comfort of the body and the form of the woman itself.

Each DilNO acts as both a representation of a sex toy, as well as an example of the love and compassion that I feel in my relationships. The colors and shapes of each DilNO say something about each piece. The colors were sometimes chosen by my mood at the time. Either the idea for the piece came first or the fabric inspired me in some way. The colors help to represent the emotions connected with each piece. Some are bright, playful and seen as more fun or happy, while others are darker, richer representations of the close, expressive passion of sex and emotion. The experience with each object can be subjective, depending on the viewer. Since sex and sexuality are experiences as well as expressions, it is important for my audience to be able to touch The DilNO’s in order to fully appreciate and understand the work. The textures chosen, as well as the experience of touching, help communicate my personal perspective to the viewer. They can feel what I feel, indulge in the fabrics and textures, and experience my sexuality. To know what it feels like to lay down with someone
fig. 14 Ribbed for Her Pleasure, 2009

fig. 15 The Tickler, 2009
and have them wrap around you, like in Ribbed for Her Pleasure (Figure 14). Or to touch the bouncy fingers grabbing at you in all direction like with *The Tickler* (Figure 15).

In addition to the experience of sex, the pieces ask the viewer to explore his or her own sexuality. Sexual preferences are cultivated throughout one’s lifetime. Through the textural approach to the *DilNO’s* each person is able to discover a little more about their own sexuality and preferences. Both men and women are offered an opportunity to explore things they may not normally enjoy. While each *DilNO* is my own direct representation of female-to-female sensuality, gender lines bend because of the references to real dildos through the different piece’s titles and concepts. Some pieces, like the *Jolly Green Giant*, take on the phallic form to re-represent the dildo, but also have blatant rejections of masculinity (Figure 16). The hard, powerful, stiffness of the phallus has been removed from all of the *DilNO’s*; instead they are fluid, soft forms. This does not make the *DilNO’s* any less powerful. They are untraditional in the definition and understanding of the word power\(^\text{17}\) and fit into the redefining theme of the work. The *DilNO’s* gain power through the untraditional, non-gendered experience of the audience. The socio-cultural and political expression of maleness is what we are already aware of when we think of the word masculine. While the *DilNO’s* are non-gendered, they do possess masculine and feminine qualities. They are accessible and experienced by all, and therefore represent a blur in gender roles.

\(^{17}\) Oxford English Dictionary defines power as Control or authority over others; dominion, rule; government, command.
fig. 16 *Jolly Green Giant*, 2009
Process and Conceptualization

Before *Appendages*, I had primarily worked with photography and video. I created installations with large scale photographs, and did a few performance videos, but I never ventured outside of the two-dimensional realm. I did, however, begin to focus on audience interaction. The theme of shock and awe that had been such an important aspect of my work in the past as a way get people emotionally involved, joined together with audience interaction to form this new 3-dimensional experience in *Appendages*. Because this was my first sculptural experience, there was a lot of learning and planning that went into each piece with the transformation of ideas from my head into the physical forms. I often used crude drawings (Figure 17), and smaller prototypes to work through the designs of each piece, as well as the construction process. It took several tries or designs until the piece came across the way I imagined it, and began to mimic the emotion behind the idea. This process speaks in a tactile way about emotions and expression and this is crucial to the expression of sexuality.
In order to express different emotions and sensations, each object in *Appendages* had to be unique, and the fabric choices were critical to their emotive qualities. While I was selecting fabric I was looking for particular emotion that each fabric could evoke. Whether I knew what I was looking for or not, the emotion quality was the important thing. In order to preserve the work and maintain each object, I made the choice to keep touching to a minimum. While it is not the same as touching each piece, I displayed swatches next to each piece to help communicate these emotions and experiences to the audience (Figure 18). The swatches allowed the audience to feel the texture of the pieces and imagine what I might have been thinking or feeling when I selected the fabric.

![The Hugger and Pocket Rocket fabric swatches.](image)

The selection of different fabrics was something I did both intuitively as well as conceptually. In some pieces, the fabrics came first, while in others the fabric choice followed the idea. One of my first fabric choices was for *The Hugger* (Figure 19). I loved the feeling of the crushed velvet, and the red color was very soothing, warm, and strong. The concept for this piece came after the purchase
of the fabric, but once I knew I wanted the piece to hug the body the warmth and softness of the crushed red velvet fit perfectly.

Alternatively, with *The Bear*, the final fabric choice came long after the concept. I had to locate a fabric to personify the specific qualities this piece required. It was very important to me that I have the softest, most comforting fabric I could find (Figure 20). One of the most important times to be held by a loved one is while sleeping, so the selection of a muted color came from the idea that a bedroom should be absent of all distractions for sleeping purposes. Whether the fabric choice was the result of a random shopping spree or an intentional trip to the fabric store, the final success of the pieces were unaffected by the order of the process.

The display cards (Figure 21) next to the DilNO’s and *The Bear* played a vital role in connecting the audience to my vision for each piece. I wanted the display cards to act as
diagrams, similar to an instruction booklet, therefore drawings or sketches seemed the appropriate choice. The use of photography and Photoshop became crucial to creating the desired drawing aesthetic. By photographing a model with each piece, I was able to show how the DilNO’s should be used or worn, and implied directive that brought the pieces to life.

In the School of Photographic Arts and Sciences (SPAS) at RIT, each graduate student is given the option of presenting their thesis exhibition on campus in the SPAS Gallery. I chose to show in an environment where I could reach a larger audience, not just the academic world, and community of RIT. I chose to have my exhibition in downtown Rochester, at The Hungerford Complex, which is made up of several buildings with various studios for rent. I planned the opening night of Appendages to coincide with the city-wide event “First Friday,” in which
galleries around the city, including studios in The Hungerford, were open to the public, and buses take people around to different openings. Perhaps most importantly, with this space it afforded me the opportunity to work in my own studio space for an entire month, so I would have the time needed to create the installation.

I chose white walls in the gallery in order to isolated each piece and bring out the shapes, colors and textures of the objects. I displayed the smaller objects on white podiums and painted large white rectangles on the grey floor for the objects that did not fit on the podiums. The large gallery space provided ample room for each podium to have its own section, allowing each piece to be isolated and thus experienced singularly. While the white space allowed each piece to stand out it was also a reference back to the idea of the bedroom being devoid of all distractions.

There were three separate rooms within the space. The use of curtains, and white tape that looked like stitching on the floor, guided the audience into the first room. The tour began with Strapping “IT” On, the inspiration behind my thesis exhibition.
(Figure 22). The viewer entered through dark purple curtains to find an enclosed room, where they were confronted with the projected performance of my first experience with a strap-on dildo. Once they viewed the video, they were then directed into the main room of the gallery. The first piece they encountered was The Tickler (Figure 23), a multicolored volcano of fingers that is both a reference to the body and the “French Tickler” Condom. I began with this piece because it was the strongest representation of the main ideas behind the DilNO’s series. When creating this installation, I had a very clear vision of how the viewer would walk through the space. It seemed quite obvious to me. But without the implied directive of the taped stitching on the floor in the large room, the audience wandered from piece to piece. Looking back, I would have preferred to have more control over the viewer’s path in this section of the installation.

Because I intended it to be the viewer’s final interaction with the work, The Sanctuary was displayed near the exit. The progression of the installation, as well
as the ongoing nature of the piece, made a corner the most appropriate location.
The objective was to end with questions about heteronormativity, and the influence of heterosexual traditions onto the homosexual lifestyle.
Influences

Throughout my career as an artist, I have always been drawn to and influenced by artwork dealing with the female form. Whether this was a cause of my sexuality or not I cannot determine, but it was the result nonetheless. The first artist I ever loved was Francesca Woodman, whose haunting images of her own moving body fitting through time and space in a ghostly fashion, sucked me into each image and made me fall in love with the self-portrait (Figure 24). Her work helped me to look into myself and see what my own space was like, and where I fit in. It helped me to become comfortable with my body through the use of photography and the self-portrait. I loved the idea of making myself into an art piece, and seeing myself as beautiful.

Jenny Saville, helped me to see the world in chunks of color and showed me that
the grotesque is beautiful (Figure 25). She helped me to see outside of the beauty of the photograph allowing me to see the beauty in the body instead, in my body. Her paintings, with her meaty body parts in large format helped me to learn how to display my work and to no longer hide behind the frame. Her work inspired me to print my images life-size and capture the reality of the photograph, which in turn gives the viewer a more realistic experience.

Most recently I have become obsessed with the work of Libby Rowe. She’s a brilliant young artist who has showed me how far I can go with humor, and audience participation. Seeing her work at the Society of Photographic Education Conference in Denver, in 2008, was the spark to ignite my thesis idea, and helped me to find my feet, in the world of hands on creation. Seeing
her body of work titled *Pink* and more specifically her pieces *Learning Feminine* (Figure 26), and *Panties Portraits* (Figure 27) helped me to see more in installation style as well how to achieve more audience interaction. The Audience experience really interested me in Rowe’s work. She would often have people mail her items or try on clothing as part of the work itself. The work became the audience, and the experience not only that she experienced but now how the audience could also experience it for themselves.

It would be interesting to do the show again and to allow the audience to “play” even more with the work. I know that while working with my committee I often enjoyed watching their interactions with the pieces as I brought them in to show. They giggled, and laughed and smiled, and became very childlike in their attitudes. This interaction and level of fun is something I truly enjoy in *Appendages*.
Conclusion

_Appendages_ is a critical examination of the break away from the traditional gender roles engrained in heterosexuality, a questioning of the adoptions of those traditions in homosexuality, and a closer examination of my life as a bisexual-women-preferred woman. According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, the word ‘appendage’ has a split definition. “1. Something appended to, or accompanying, a principal or greater thing, though not necessary to it.” The other definition, has a more biological sense: “2. A subordinate or subsidiary part or organ; an external organ or limb.”

Each series within _Appendages_ functions as an individual body of work while still functioning as a cohesive whole. In the past I have worked in series of photographs, as well as installations which combined video and photographs. The multi-faceted nature of the emotions I wanted to explore in _Appendages_ inspired the creation of sculpture. The installation needed to involve the audience in a tactile interactive learning experience allowing them to engage and understand the work on a deeper emotional level. The total experience of this thesis is an expansion of my concepts of what my art production could and will be in the future.

I had the special privilege to begin my thesis work in a committed, long-term relationship with a woman. The unfortunate event of ending that relationship

helped me to reevaluate all of my predisposed ideals of that relationship and take an introspective look at how the ending causes of my relationship were reflected in the work. The work grew into something more. I was able to clearly define my needs, as well as take a deeper look at my sexuality, both as a couple and later as an individual. The physical and emotional aspects that I later realized I was missing or lacking in my previous relationship had, unbeknownst to me, wound up sewn into each DilNO.

“Sometimes a normative conception of gender can undo one’s personhood, undermining the capacity to persevere in a livable life.”19

19 Butler, Undoing Gender, 1.
Afterward

While finishing my thesis paper, I had an opportunity to show part of *Appendages* at Rochester Contemporary Art Center (RoCo), a local gallery in Rochester. I was given a small space, the constraints of which allowed me to re-examine the display options for the work. At some point during the thesis exhibition planning process, I had discussed painting silhouettes or figures onto the walls to show the uses and positions of each piece. After looking at the gallery space at The Hungerford Building, I decided that not all pieces would be silhouette-ready and that the gallery space was entirely too large for that display option. During the later showing at RoCo, I chose to display only a few of the *DilNO* pieces in which I incorporated the silhouettes (Figure 28). The pieces were selected based on their functionality and wearability. The plain silhouettes on the wall created a minimalist feel that helped to isolate the objects, while showing off their uses.

At the Hungerford Exhibition of *Appendages*, viewers read the display cards as
separate objects. The silhouette installation eliminated the need for the display cards and the work could speak for itself. While not all of the pieces from *Appendages* could be displayed in this manner, the silhouettes were successful for those included in the RoCo Show and I’m looking forward to exploring similar options for future installations.
Bibliography


