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## Reruns

Devann Donovan Gardner

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May, 2022

To the Dean of the Graduate School:

We are submitting a thesis written by Devann Donovan Gardner entitled “Reruns”.

We recommend acceptance in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Studio Art.

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RERUNS

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty

Of the

College of Visual and Performing Arts

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the

Requirements for the Degree

Of

Master of Fine Arts

In Studio Art

Winthrop University

May 2022

By

Devann Donovan Gardner

## Abstract

My thesis explores memory from the perspectives of both the adolescent and the adult. I find there are a multiplicity of truths that live within each memory. I am a visual artist who creates immersive installations and artworks that explore the plurality of truths held within memory. I offer a childlike whimsy in my visual aesthetic to invite the viewer in and pose a question for their adult side to consider. I question where the line is drawn between the child's memory and the adult's knowledge, and allow the viewer to decide which of those to believe. Imaginary landscapes and ambiguous figures are constructed in my installation to tease a sense of confusion and fear. The deeper one dives into a memory, the closer they get to recognizing that all perspectives can be true and coexist.

As a daughter of an addict father and narcissistic mother, I use my artwork and research to process my childhood and help my younger brothers navigate theirs. My thesis exhibition *Replays* is the culminating work illustrating how I navigate my roles as a big sister, daughter, and artist in combination with processing my own memories and narratives. Through the use of installation, video, performance, and interactive art practices, the gallery room becomes a safe space to explore, reminisce and re-experience the wonder and levity of childhood. This exhibition is the product of searching for identity, inviting viewers to explore their own memory narratives in collaboration with my personal experiences on display.

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## Reruns

### **Identity**

Individual identities are formed through the experiences each person has and those experiences inevitably become memories. As we choose our character, interests, and identity, we source from what we have learned about ourselves. Psychologist, Meg Jay, states, “The stories we tell about ourselves become facets of our identity. They reveal our unique complexity” (108). We trust our memories to be the concrete truth, however, memory is but a malleable construct. The malleability of memory distorts our perception of what was real, but it does not invalidate the real and what we think is real from both being true (Genova, 104). My work analyzes the truth of memory and character through the lenses of both the adolescent and the adult’s perspective. I bring forth the element of choice to the viewer with ambiguous and contradictory images to allow unlimited opportunities of personal reflection to be experienced. By pushing aspects of whimsy into the realm of fear, I question where the line is drawn and use this to illustrate the relationship to the ambiguous nature of memory. These whimsical aspects are represented in their most extreme form, for example, representations of play pushed to violence, mundane to disgust and safety to dangerous. The deeper one dives into a memory, the closer they get to the reality and the distinction becomes blurry.

An event from adolescence is viewed with the haze of the child’s perspective without knowing the full context of the situation. For example, while you were watching your favorite cartoon or focusing all of your excited attention on a new toy, maybe you missed the details of a family argument or a darker hidden secret. When you mourn the



loss of a loved one, you reminisce on the highlights and nostalgic memories you have of that person to remember their character. You experience thousands of moments each day, and it is nearly impossible to remember them all in full detail, so the human brain discards what it does not find meaningful. (Genova, 5). When a “memorable” moment occurs, it is because it has disrupted our norm, but only fragments are remembered as the mind has a tendency to pay attention to the abnormal. According to neuroscientist, Lisa Genova, “our memories for what happened are particularly vulnerable to omissions and unintentional editing” (3). When we recall that memory, we do not realize the details we did not notice the first time, they simply did not exist to us, but that does not mean they did not exist at all.

This collection of memory, accurate or not, is the foundation to our identity. “The significant facts and moments of your life strung together create your life’s narrative and identity. Memory allows you to have a sense of who you are and who you’ve been” (Genova, 2). Ironically, the final product we call “ourselves” is the summation of what we remember and what we have forgotten. This not only describes our perception of ourselves, but also an actual biological change in our neurology. It quite literally writes our autobiographies within our chemical makeup. “Every memory you have is a result of a lasting physical alteration in your brain in response to what you have experienced”, which is first triggered by your sensory and emotional elements, and this explains why smells, tastes, etc. are so closely linked to triggering a “flashback.” This is also a change in the “neural architecture and connectivity” in the brain that later becomes the pathway for the memory to be re-experienced, or remembered (Genova, 14-16). Because memory

is created through these neural pathways, our brains pair these associations to one another. Memory is not stored together in an assigned place in the brain, but it is a network of associations created at the time when the original event took place. When remembering, your brain experiences an “associative scavenger hunt” (Genova, 20-23). As Genova puts it, “Retrieval of a memory happens when one part of the memory is stimulated, triggering activation of the linked memory circuit” (24). So, memory is not an organized filing system, but rather a domino effect of triggers, senses, and emotions that lead back to the origin of the memory.

When it comes down to which memories we solidify in our mind and use to define ourselves, the majority stems from adolescence, young adulthood, and a few from early childhood. According to psychologist, Meg Jay, these times “are not only the time we have our most self-defining experiences, study after study shows they are also the time we have our most self-defining *memories*” (107-108). Young adulthood and adolescence are times of many firsts, as well as new experiences, which is one of the reasons they become signposts for your narratives.

For me, one of the most interesting aspects of what we remember is exactly what event, story, or moment we recall and why - these emotion-filled narratives that define us, versus our memories for knowing how to write our name, ride a bike, or do daily tasks. What separates the mundane how-to muscle memories from the life-defining *memory*? To answer this question, I look to Genova’s comparison of semantic versus episodic memory:

The stuff you know, so called *semantic memory*, is memory for the knowledge you’ve learned, the facts you know about your life and the

world -- the Wikipedia of your brain. And you can recall this information without remembering the details of learning it. Semantic memory is knowledge disconnected from any specific life experience. Memories for what happened, for information that *is* attached to a where and when are called *episodic*. You *remember* episodic memories. Episodic is personal and always about the past.

Genova (64)

## Memory

As we move into adulthood, we begin to understand the underlying narratives and it changes our perspective of the original event in some cases. But we also understand the responsibility of maintaining a childhood sense of wonder for the next generation. In my case, that being my youngest brother, Darren. I encourage his childlike desires and support his wonder. While we no longer believe in Santa Claus because we know the truth, it does not stop us from recreating it for the children in our lives and letting them create their own personal memories. This duality of truth exists in both forms, and I create works that let us experience both simultaneously.

In a writing about the importance of record keeping, there is a passage that perfectly explains the importance (or lack thereof) of accuracy in memory. Author Joan Didion writes:

In fact I have abandoned altogether that kind of pointless entry; instead I tell what some would call lies. "That's simply not true," the members of my family frequently tell me when they come up against my memory of a shared event. "The party was not for you, the spider was not a black widow, it wasn't that way at all." Very likely they are right, for not only have I always had trouble distinguishing between what happened and what merely might have happened, but I remain unconvinced that the distinction, for my purposes, matters.

Didion, *On Keeping a Notebook* pg 3

When I began directing the focus of my art practice and deciding what avenue of research I would explore, I looked at my own experiences. All of my work's origin stems from my adolescence and its defining moments because those moments drove the vehicle that defined my identity. My father has and continues to struggle with alcoholism and addiction, while my mother has narcissistic and manipulative qualities. As a teenager, I learned of a significant event that redirected my perspective of my parents and upbringing. This shattered the idolization of my parents and my position in the familial unit. My father's infidelity led to the existence of my youngest brother, and my mother began to treat me as more of a confidant, rather than a daughter, in some circumstances. As the eldest child, I hold a self-assigned responsibility to protect my two brothers from simple growing pains, as well as the traumatizing information of our situation (Figure 1). I guided my eldest brother through the learning and acceptance process, and supported my youngest brother through his childhood as he grew and learned of the complexities of our family.

Despite the complexities inherent to the situation, my youngest brother is just as much loved and worthy of a normal childhood as we all were, however confusing it may seem to him at times. I want to protect his innocence and provide him with a sense of safety and happiness – true to my role in this family as mediator. Together, we create memories specific to our own unique family and I hold these memories dear as I simultaneously negotiate the recurring “adult” issues. I am finding this balance occurs universally among many families and relationships through my lived experiences, and this informs my current work. As a visual artist, I take on the same roles of balancer,

provider, and equal with my audience, by reminding them of simpler times and hardships, letting them choose to indulge in the good without letting the persistent negativity weigh them down.

My process stems from my own memories and lived experiences and I extend this exploration into my creative process. When I find a memory that captivates my attention, I dissect it into its imagery, meaning, and themes and put the pieces back together in a new form. I pursue readings and research artists, which combined with my memories, allows inspiration to form in the back of my mind and influence my art making. Each work explores a different aspect of these stories and I let the experience of discovery inform the work as it is being made. Similar to the way a child becomes captivated with a new toy or milestone, I find that same joy in my artistic discoveries. The exploration and discovery of trying a new medium or new concept allows for many attempts and failures that I can use as reference in my work later.

## **Practice**

In order to begin a new thread of ideas, I try multiple tactics, such as reminiscing old memories and searching through old photos and videos and chatting with family members. I talk with both of my brothers to compare their experiences with my own. I also allow myself to indulge in my interests, however silly they might seem, in order to let my inner child explore the moments of my adulthood. These include novelties of my childhood collections, drawings, cartoons, etc. When I become fascinated with a topic or theme, I sketch, record, paint or sculpt to find out how the idea can best be expressed. I

often think about the aspects of my brothers' lives that I wish to preserve and how I can recreate them for myself or my viewer.

I also cope with anxiety and depression. When those clouds loom, I am tempted to evoke the darker themes that I incorporate into the work. To combat those themes, and process the stress, I deliberately focus on childhood distractions. I use my work to do this and I have since made this the goal of my art making. I began my graduate studies with a focus on painting because I was determined to build my abilities in that medium and as I have advanced, I have become curious about other mediums like sculpture, video, and performance. As previously stated, I enjoy the adventure of learning new skills which reminds me of the childlike process of discovery. I have grown my studio practice to include these new abilities in order to let the multitude of stories live in their best form. Each artwork tackles multiple perspectives and cannot live as a single work. It is best represented as a multi-part installation or series.

I come from a painting background, and since exploring the sculptural realm, I have struggled to adapt my creative process from a two-dimensional form into a three-dimensional space. I often look back at my painting series and sketches for inspiration or sketch a new concept on the two-dimensional plane so that I can analyze and translate them into a three-dimensional form (Figure 6). By this, I mean I create imaginary landscapes and ideals inspired by an episodic memory and, when translated into a real space, I bring these constructions to life. These installations ask viewers to walk around, walk through and interact with the work.

Art creates the bridge between object and experience, and I use it to manipulate perspective. I begin by reaching into my personal inventory of memories and attempt to dissect them into multiple parts: how I remember them and how I felt in the moment, how I reflect on the situation now as an adult, and how those perspectives overlap and contradict.

Very purposefully, my installation uses contradictions to disrupt the viewer's expectations. Within this disruption, the viewer is given the option to choose which version of the memory corresponds to the truth, while leading them to the conclusion that they are both true.

Video art and the screen can mirror the action of remembering and exhibit the many layers of how the memory has been altered. (*Joan Jonas*) I leave space for the viewer to insert their individual narratives. Through the collapse and intersection of multiple media like performance, sculpture, installation and video, ambiguity exists and allows for multiple narratives to take place. I remember many similar moments from my childhood, and I look back on them now in times of stress or moments of reminiscing. The familiar experience is recognized by many as *nostalgia*. However specific the experience I describe, human tendency makes us create connections to our own stories. I investigate what we trust most; ourselves. Our identities are constructed on the experiences and memories attached to them. I am interested in pushing these notions to the extreme, to a level of absurdity. By using simple acts or imagery and manipulating them out of context or emphasizing them, like the act of eating, but portrayed by an adult who is eating in the same manner a toddler would, catches viewers off guard. This shifts

the expectations of the viewer with my work. The entire gallery space becomes an immersive experience where the viewer is now a participant with the work.

### **MFA Thesis Exhibition**

Much of my work is inspired by my personal narrative and perspective as a big sister, daughter, and artist and many viewers question the aspects of feminism and gender binaries in my color palette and content. My work is not about the existence of these elements, but more about making the viewer question why these elements are perceivable. As a child, we are not yet implicated in the expectations society places upon us; these learned impositions are not vital to engaging in our experiences. We do not need to follow the “rules” of society in order to find contentment. In fact, I believe the opposite is required. This is the revelation I guide viewers through as they interact with my work – to remove the expectations of learned behaviors, experiences and rules and to view the space from the child’s unburdened perspective. The gallery is no longer a formal white cube with restrictions. Viewers are encouraged to play with the work and play with notions of their own boundaries, questioning why they exist, deconstructing their identity and challenging the seriousness of it all.

My thesis exhibition, *Replays*, is an immersive experience for the viewer to explore and participate with the work both physically and subconsciously. Each section of work is derived from a specific episodic memory of my own and I have dissected it into multiple parts – the emotion, smells, tactility, color – and put the parts back together in a new form to trigger a response from the viewer (Figure 11). This reaction may spark an episodic memory of their own in relation to mine as the artist, or it may create a brand-



new episodic memory to be remembered after they leave the gallery. I want adult viewers to absorb the childlike play and whimsical themes in the work and be able to view their new environment with the same gaze as an unaffected child.

The installations are full of fun and interactive play, with small notes of discomfort that disrupt the space. Overstimulation becomes key for managing the discomfort. The exhibit pushes the viewer to decide how much disruption they can handle in order to indulge in the fun. The video performance pieces *Sugar Rush* and *Where Are Your Manners?* (Figures 7 and 8) are created to purposefully disrupt the viewer's comfort space visually and audibly, but being positioned next to each other in the corner of the room, they become an immersive viewing experience. This allows the viewer to focus on a single one at a time and tune out the other, eliminating the discomfort on their own. At the same time, ironically, combining the two violent, visceral videos results in them canceling each other out and makes them more manageable to process, redirecting the play towards other parts of the installation.

When first entering the gallery space (Figure 11), the viewer is greeted by the implied entryway of *The Swing* (Figure 12), which is placed in the center of the room and angled back towards the far corner. It is draped with fabric, and slopes downward as its height becomes shorter and shorter upon entering. The viewers are welcome to explore to the far back corner, entering the pillow fort style space or pause at one of the swings and sit to view the surrounding elements. To the right of the main structure, *The Swing* is the brightly fabricated piece titled *Sock Monkey* (Figure 14), two large, pink bean bags hung from the ceiling are arranged in a campfire-style circle next to the video performance

work, *Safe Spaces* projected onto the wall adjacent. Just beyond *Sock Monkey* is a standalone video performance piece titled, *The Child is Present* (Figure 10) where I stare through the camera lens to the viewer and force a confrontation. Lastly, to the far left of *The Swing* is a viewing center compiled of *SeatHearts* (Figure 13) for lounging and playing while two corner video performance projections, *Where are Your Manners?* and *Sugar Rush*, fight for the viewers' attention. The entire room is filled with soft pink lighting to change the atmosphere from bland white spaces to a warm, and visceral, space. The gallery becomes both a place of comfort and disruption as the viewer moves throughout.

The driving force in this installation is the swing set structure in the center of the room. It welcomes the viewer and encourages them to enter beneath the canopy and invites them to sit and swing on the seats (Figure A-*The Swing*). Once positioned on one of the multiple swings, the viewer is facing the outer components of the installation: the videos and plush soft sculptures. They have the choice to stay and watch the video projection closest to their specific location or continue their exploration around the room and absorb all the parts in turns. The swing set canopy slopes downward the further back it goes in space, forcing the viewer to crouch as they enter the back section of it. The swings are still available, but become less functional as they rest on the floor. The back section, therefore, transitions into a pillow fort that appears to have been constructed by a child and alludes to a safe space of comfort (Figures 16 and 17). Viewers are left to decide whether they leave the space or take a seat on the floor under the shelter.

*The Swing* is painted a light teal blue to imitate a clear sky during the day and evoke sensations of height, while swinging emphasizes the feeling of levity against the harsh metal texture chosen for structural integrity (Figure 12-*The Swing*). The structure is also strategically draped in soft, light pink tones of fabric for the same purposes, as well as to give more of an illusion to the pillow fort landscape. The color scheme for the soft sculptures around the gallery room remain light and vibrant giving nostalgic, childlike themes to ordinary and abstract shapes. The videos have been edited with an oversaturated color palette to enhance an unrealistic fantasy. The dim lighting of the room accommodates the projections, careful not to overwhelm lightness of the objects themselves.

Creating a fun and safe space to explore and play in the gallery, while adding hints of discomfort and disruption, the wobble of the swing set is completely stable and the structure has the capacity to hold multiple people at once. The color is bright and light to emulate the daytime skies and invites the viewer in. The swing seats resemble a white picket fence – a symbol of a perfect facade, and the fabric softens it both physically and conceptually to represent the pillow fort as a space of safety. But when the action of swinging begins to take place, due to the height and length of the steel beams, it wobbles the entire structure with each movement. This wobble reminds me of an old childhood toy, the figures by Hasbro Toys called “Weebles” with their slogan, “they weeble and they wobble but they don’t fall down” (Muir). The same goes for *The Swing*. When positioned facing the underside of the structure, the swaying is much more noticeable, but

when positioned outward, facing the exterior, viewers are distracted by the other aspects in the gallery and their safety is not brought into question.

The plush stools on wheels main function is to create a seating area for viewers to sit and fully immerse themselves into the corner projection videos. I have attached wheels to the bottom of the stools, which makes them mobile and interactive, as they can be sat upon, and pushed around the room. This mobile element also creates a constantly-shifting landscape and composition within the gallery space, providing a new scene for the next incoming viewer to experience. Each variable part shifts the original farther away from its origin point, but still allows the viewer to partake in the same level of fun.

The works *Sock Monkey* and *SeatHearts*, as seen in Figures 13 and 14, have their accompanying video performances. *Sock Monkey* is the large pink tube-like bean bags that are hung from the ceiling and draped along the floor with video that is projected onto the wall adjacent, covering the sculpture, wall and the floor space. The pink mesh fabric is stuffed with deconstructed stuffed animals - their various fillings, the empty fur vessels, and the novelty smell of playdoh embedded into the fabric. The shape of the sculpture is inspired by a sock, and in combination with the scale of the work, is meant to represent my father. I wanted to find a way to represent him and myself in non-figurative ways and in the process, remembered he is very particular about his socks. This is an ongoing joke and long-term memory built into our family. Also, I saw a relationship to another artist, Doris Salcedo and her works with shoes or chairs representing the absence of the person they belong to. There is a secondary, shorter but wider version of the sock form meant to represent myself and (together) present the idea of a parent - child

relationship. The video projected overlaying *Sock Monkey* is *Safe Spaces* (Figure 9) and shows myself and brother atop different housing roofs, enjoying each other's company and moving freely as it is our safe space. This is overlaid on screen with myself dangerously walking over spilled rice, increasing the anxiety of danger and imposing a sense of discomfort. These areas, which viewers know are high and dangerous, are made more complex with the video projected behind and overlaying the sculpture, where the viewer can sit upon *Sock Monkey*, thereby joining us on the rooftop comfortably.

*SeatHearts* is the other viewing experience available in the room crafted of plush stools meant to emulate the novelty candy, *Sweet Hearts*. They allow the viewer to choose any placement and move the stools around the space in an interactive element added by the wheels under the stools. Due to the impermanence of their placement, each viewer will walk into a different configuration and have the power to change it in every interaction. The videos projected into the corner on adjacent walls are in communication with another, titled *Sugar Rush* on the left and *Where Are Your Manners?* on the right. They are both endurance performance pieces for both the performer and the viewer. *Sugar Rush* shows the tradition of cake smashing on the birthday guest-of-honor, progressively escalating from playful to violent, having the performer endure and the viewer left to question when too much is too much. *Where Are Your Manners?* shows an adult behaving transgressively and eating like a child with visceral mastication and reactive audio, again forcing the viewer to endure the time-based experience and decide why an adult would disregard learned, acceptable behaviors.

The last video performance in the room is located on the back wall of the gallery, but is also one of the first to be seen in its entirety upon entry. *The Child is Present* depicts a performance where I hang upside down and stare intently into the lens of the camera. The video editing has flipped my positioning right side up and the blood rushing to my face is the only clue that I am dangling. The struggle is found in my expression and my gravity-defying hair. This act, which appears simple in comparison to the others in the gallery, is meant to highlight the endurance and unsettling gaze I aim to impose on the viewer. This is a direct reference to Marina Abramovic's *The Artist is Present* in both title and act. Within my performance, I drew inspiration from this piece in the prolonged eye-contact with the viewer to create tension. Audience members who participated in Abramovic's piece reacted in a multiplicity of ways, from self-reflection to uncontrollable emotional reactions.

All the units of this installation work alone and in tandem with one another and allow the viewer to explore with all of their senses. Audios from the videos arranged around the room entice viewers to follow the sounds and navigate around the room. Bubble gum pieces are offered at the shelves available upon entering, activating taste and becoming a remnant from the wrapper to be discarded later. Diffusers are placed within the ceiling to disperse various smells – playdoh, birthday cake, and strawberries – to drift down upon viewers as they move around to activate the olfactory system. And all parts are visual and tactile for viewers. Because memory is linked and triggered by associations through the senses, it is the most direct way to trigger many different memory analyses. This also holds true for the shock value, because as everyday, mundane acts can get

pushed out of our memory vaults, leaving more room for the grotesque, shocking, emotionally driven memories have stronger reactions and, therefore, stronger chances of being convincing and memorable – and incorrect.

## **Influences**

Much of my research on contemporary art making practices comes from contemporary artists and my explorations in multiple media. When I began working in performance art, I looked at Marina Abramovic's work and how she uses her body as a tool in many of her pieces. After creating my first performance piece, *Because I Can*, I was introduced to Abramovic's work *Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful* (Figure 2) and recognized many similarities between my work and hers. In this piece, Abramovic repeats the phrase "Art must be beautiful, Artist must be beautiful" as she progressively and aggressively brushes her hair with a coarse brush while naked. She notes in this work how "female artists used their own bodies to challenge the institution of art and the notion of beauty" (Kim). Her dialogue during this performance references the female role in society and how it is perceived by the viewer. In my performance work, I use my body as a tool within the piece to deliver the narrative or perform the action that is tied to the associated memory. For example, in my piece, *Sugar Rush*, I stand still while outside forces (represented by hands) continuously smash cake and icing onto my face, hair, and body. I withstand the impacts as they gradually become more violent and my raw, unscripted emotion as a human being, rather than an actor, peeks through as vulnerability. Abramovic, in many of her works, focuses on endurance of pain

and using her own body as a tool of message delivery. She also focuses on her femininity as part of her message, while in mine, that is only, but, a facet. As a daughter, wife, and sister, my femininity is a part of my identity and that naturally seeps into my work as well. Abramovic is much more intentional in this decision of femininity, whereas I choose to focus on the contrasting perspectives evoked by opposing elements of violence vs play. Because I am inherently female, the viewers impose their sexual or traditionally feminine associations onto my work, though I am not commenting specifically on my femininity, it is merely an effect of my interests in my artwork. Due to this similarity, I understand that a viewer with this knowledge will interpret my works in the same context. While my original intention was not in this vein, I now use this knowledge to my advantage and dissect the feminine perspective with my work, memories, and material choices. Abramovic uses her body as a material in all of her performances, so the feminist perspective is more central, whereas my work uses the body as a tool, simply influenced by my female perspective.

I also make a direct reference to Abramovic' piece, *The Artist is Present*, in the title and performance of my work *The Child is Present*, using the power of a simple act to compel a strong emotional reaction (The Artist is Present). The same way Abramovic stares directly at participants, I mimic and flip that idea on its head, quite literally. I do this as I perform by hanging upside down and staring through the camera lens, hoping to penetrate the viewer's gaze. This piece portrays the simplest act in the entire installation and perhaps the strongest reaction - both a moment of peace and deep contemplation. While Abramovic dedicated eight hours a day for nearly 3 months to endure her



performance of simply sitting and staring, my performance in comparison, is on a three-minute loop with a much more difficult action being performed (“Moma Learning”). The time spans of the two pieces can feel like an eternity while the interactions may be brief.

In contrast, I look at artists like Ann Hamilton, whose work explores the absence of the human body. My work with memory leaves emptiness for the viewer to fill in the blanks. Ann Hamilton’s work, *whitecloth*, uses the abundance of symbolic meaning as a signal of a body’s absence, a sign of surrender, and a surrogacy for the human body and its associations with rituals of birth and death (Figure 3). She also uses the viewer as a performer within the space and treats history as a reversible narrative, using this sense of erasure in many of her works (Hamilton, 54-55).

In my own practice, as I created pieces during my graduate career leading up to my thesis exhibition, I was inspired by the use of the white cloth, symbolizing the absence of the body and of the character we build in our minds. In my thesis show, I still use cloth and fabric to express the concept of home, memory or person. Rather than blankness representing the absence, I have shifted focus to the brighter color palette to connect it to the rose-colored lens through which we view childhood and adolescence.

The idea of memory being malleable and fallible led me down a path of true and false realities. If what we remember is inaccurate, is that truly what happened? Or is it true because we choose it to be true? I was inspired by the idea of real versus fake, or simulacra and simulacrum, by French sociologist Baudrillard, and the use of video allowed me to manipulate this conversation. Similar to the illusion that Disney World

portrays of their imaginary world come to life, the themes, characters, and places are imaginary, yet one can visit this space in real time and take part in the imaginary world (Baudrillard). I introduce the component of video, which allows me to control and manipulate the conversation with my viewer about what is real and what is not. The viewer is left to decide or interpret which one - my representation or their perspective - is the true original. Playing in this in-between realm, I explore the importance of this decision. I question whether it really makes a difference which narrative is true as it does not change the viewer's experience in the present, it only highlights the viewer's perspective on the scene.

As an artist, I recognized my desire to create objects and since delving into the video medium, I was missing the satisfaction of the digital object fulfilling this tangible need. I use performance, object creation, and audience participation in unison. In the book, *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object*, the author discusses how audience participation nullifies the performance's goal of object creation, and interestingly, my work bridges these notions (Ferguson and Schimmel, 17). My work attempts this through the relationship with the screen, by either condensing time or expanding it, depending on the work. In this body of work, the object plays a pivotal role as a vessel that explores the passage of time. The projector and screen expand the layers of perception and time, while the objects house the remaining fragments that continue to mutate. Viewers pass between the space of the projector and surfaces upon which the images are projected, illustrating how fragile and malleable a memory can be.

Another artist's aesthetic that inspired my own is Ernesto Neto's work (Figure 4). My work maintains the lightheartedness and whimsy of a funhouse, while embodying darker, more mature topics in its meaning and origins. I discovered Neto's work with installation and audience participation and drew many inspirations for the look of my own. "The sculptural spaces that Neto creates are places of relaxation and contemplation, places of fun, and places to forget that an art gallery is a white cube filled with art objects" (Lauson, 11). This is exactly the goal of my research, and I am expanding on Neto's notion of forgetting the space of the art gallery one step further to forgetting the seriousness of the world outside. I wish to create a place of comfort and awe where the outside world remains outside, no matter how hard it knocks on the gallery doors to enter.

My installation focuses on this more metaphorically using the juxtaposition of adult and adolescent worlds colliding. I often use opposing forces to create this dissonance with my forms, textures, and senses clashing in the space. The same applies to the calmness of the space colliding with the chaos of it. I use simple colors, performances, and shapes in chaotic ways like oversaturation, multiplying repetition, and quantity. Again, drawing inspiration from Neto's work, "Simplicity of shape does not necessarily equate with simplicity of experience. Unitary forms do not reduce relationships"; it is this clash that creates dialogue within each sector of work (11).

Every piece I create involves a multitude of layers in both meaning and material, which is another bridge to Neto's style of working. This is described as "...layers upon layers of themes and subjects informing their production, an abundance of thought that overflows the experience of them as discrete artworks and turns them into objects from

and for life” (12). The final form presented to viewers is interpreted and mutated once again. The original source is not entirely important to the viewer’s experience with it, but rather an added anecdote.

My thesis show also consists of video performances and projected imagery with saturated color and abstracted imagery. This layering of digital imagery mimics the way of remembering as Joan Jonas describes it (Vimeo interview). Jonas’ way of manipulating her videos to mimic memory is the same process I attempt in my videos and performances; layering imagery over other imagery, cutting images together and jumping from one scene to another as they fight to become the forefront. This method can be used to describe the action of remembering an event or scene (Vimeo interview). I, however, remember childhood and adolescence with rose-colored glasses, not necessarily in the metaphorical sense, but rather the color palette.

Leaning into brightly lit, oversaturated, and distorted images, I am attracted to the spaces that artist Pipilotti Rist creates in her exhibitions. Rist uses video and performances to fill galleries and intentionally creates comfortable spaces for audience members to lounge to view her works (Figure 5). Her signature color palette of bright oversaturation draws me in, and reminds me of my own palette with older paintings (Rist, 57). I pull inspiration from colors that attract me and create imaginary landscapes in the real world and my installation brings this two-dimensional painting into the three-dimensional world. Using multiple media and not just the singular painting, I create a new space within an existing space. “Beyond the screen and the wall, Rist was exploring rooms and increasingly making them environmental. Rooms as personal universes...”

(Rist, 36). Other than the walls and floors being filled with lights and projections, I construct oversized, over textured objects for the viewer to explore and force them to have the perspective of a child. The environment becomes larger in some areas, and tighter in others, to create a sense of safety and comfort in contrast to the overwhelming vastness. As Rist states, “using the miniature and the gigantic is not only about objects for [me], but also about the temporality and the phenomenological. People experience time differently in altered space...” (Rist, 36). I, too, am manipulating the time and space experienced by the viewer.

Discussing the context of memory as foundations of identity was something I found myself interested in during my MFA career because of my interest in nostalgia, conversations with peers, and relatable hobbies. When looking at popular culture, the current generations are engrossed in social media, tv and streaming around the topics of nostalgia and memory. A 2019 docuseries on the streaming service Netflix titled, *The Mind Explained*, produced an episode discussing the neurological explanation and popular interest in how our memories “become” inaccurate and what that could mean for our identity. The narrator opens the episode by stating, “Even our most significant memories, the ones that form the foundation of our life story aren’t perfect recordings...” and closes it with saying, “you switch back and forth between remembering and imagining...it weaves together memories of the past and dreams of the future to create your sense of self” (Vox Media).

## Recap

The foundations to our identities are intrinsically linked to our memories of ourselves. What we remember, both semantic and episodic types, define our abilities to operate and describe our character. The emotionally-charged memories are the ones that are actively “remembered” and can be re-lived. My thesis show, *Replays*, opens the floor for the dialogue between past, present, and future selves and invites viewers to remove the separation between adult versus adolescent. The adult is welcome to experience wonder, even though intrusive elements are still present. Looking through the disruptions, whimsy can still shine through.

My work is inherently inspired by my own personal lived experiences and episodic memories, however through the ambiguity and the complexity of the work, the viewer is able to focus on their own experiences within each part of the installation. I break down the stereotypes of a traditional, white-box art gallery and create an immersive multimedia installation, or rather, an adult playground. Children are also free to explore in this safe space without limitations of an otherwise “proper” space.

My identity is wrapped around the roles of big sister, daughter, and artist, and with the help of my younger brothers, my episodic memories are the foundation to this exhibition. I analyze memories from the perspective of both the adolescent and the adult to emphasize the inaccuracies of childhood memory. Knowing that memory creates the blueprint for identity, I question the consequence of knowing these truths and its effect on who we have chosen to become as adults. A plurality of truths lie within individual

memories, but that does not change the person who created them. As an artist, I create spaces and experiences to relive, remember, and create new memories.



Figure 1. Brothers, Dylan (upper) and Darren (lower) Donovan (2019).



Figure 2. *Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful*, Marina Abramovic, 1975.

(Moma.org)





Figure 3. *whitecloth*, Ann Hamilton, 1999 (“Ann Hamilton Studio”)



Figure 4. *Simple and light as a dream...the gravity don't lie...just loves the time,*  
Ernesto Neto, 2006 (Fiberartgallery)



Figure 5. *Corner Projections*, Pipilotti Rist 2021 (Chun)



Figure 6. Previous Series of Oil Paintings, Gardner 2020-2021.



Figure 7. *Sugar Rush*, Performance and Video, cake, candle and icing, 2021.



Figure 8. *Where Are Your Manners?* Performance and Video, apples, strawberries, blueberries, peach and watermelon, 2021.



Figure 9. *Safe Spaces*, Performance and Video with Darren, shingle and metal roof and rice, 2021.



Figure 10. *The Child Is Present*, Performance and Video, 2022





Figure 11. MFA Thesis Exhibition: *Replays*



Figure 12. *The Swing*, steel, fabric, wood, and coated wire, 2022



Figure 13. *SeatHearts*, crushed velvet, wood, foam and lace trim, 2022



Figure 14. *Sock Monkey*, mesh spandex, and found stuffed animals, 2022



Figure 15. *The Swing Detail*



Figure 16. *The Swing Detail 2*



Figure 17. *SeatHearts* Detail



Figure 18. *Sock Monkey Detail*





Figure 19. *Sock Monkey* Detail 2

Figure 20.

Link to *Sugar Rush*: <https://youtu.be/YnNQwV64jk8>

Link to *Where Are Your Manners?*: <https://youtu.be/UdADJys-XQk>

Link to *Safe Spaces*: <https://youtu.be/d0fVZoDXNwY>

Link to *The Child Is Present*: <https://youtu.be/BflcAwSGhZM>

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