

University of Alaska Fairbanks

Art Department

# In Spite Of

BFA Degree Thesis Exhibition Report

Presented to the BFA Degree Committee:

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## Introduction:

My work contains my feelings of worry and anger towards the negative aspects that come with existing as a woman as well as the safety and support I gain from being a daughter, niece, and friend. I grew up as an only child, raised by a single mother in Anchorage, Alaska. I've always been around strong female family members, role models, and friends. My pieces depict the frustrations of going through things like: objectification, watching rights disappear, and internalized doubts, while also appreciating how in spite of those things these women are the people I admire the most for their strength and compassion.

As an only child, whose parent wouldn't come home until hours after school ended, I would spend time outside. I loved biking around my neighborhood trails and looking at the old trees riddled with shelf fungus, the thick spikey walls of sitka rose, and spongy blanketed areas of moss. Winter would hit, and these plants would seemingly disappear under the snow and ice only to come back with a green vengeance the next spring. The resilient nature of these organisms is beautiful and powerful to me.

I've always enjoyed traditional art but I'd never tried digital art or even heard of printmaking until college. Once I had tried these mediums, I found using layers was important to the style I wanted. Printmaking and digital art allow you to create interestingly layered color combinations and also achieve uniform blocks of color that are difficult to get and replicate in other mediums. When making woodblock relief you can get a really great texture from the wood fibers. The texture lets you see the colors you printed underneath, which gives my pieces a nice tonal depth. The repetitive, calming work flow I get into when carving and hand drawing animations is also very appealing to me.

Method:

My process for making a wood block starts with having a color layer plan in my design. I then project that design onto medium-density fiberboard and trace it on with a sharpie. I would usually print out the design, from a computer, and trace it onto the block with tracing paper, however the reliefs in this exhibition were too big. For almost all of my pieces, I use the negative space of the paper to be the lightest value and for the final layer carved I end with black ink. All but one of the wood blocks are reduction prints meaning that I only used one block to carve. Carving is the most enjoyable part of the process to me because it is fairly relaxing and I can think about concept while working, or have a brain break and watch a show. I used lenox paper to print on because it is thin, which lessens the chance of shifting.

The stand alone animation, *Propagated*, was created by recording my own movements and then using about every third of a second's layer to bring into Procreate and hand draw. I exaggerated some of the movements and highly stylized my form to fit with my drawing style.

*Protective Roots* is the piece I am most technically proud of. I started with a thumbnail sketch of the general layout I wanted. I mapped out what part I wanted to be a print and where I wanted to project the animation. I started with the woodblock print so that I could make sure that the animation would be proportional to the size of the print and paper. I used a Japanese paper called kitakata, which is rather thin but strong. Originally I was going to project onto the piece from the front, but because the paper is thin I realized that if there was enough transparency in my ink, I could see the animation coming through the paper. Projecting from behind the print allowed for people to stand in front of the print and not block the animation. It also gave a softer light to the piece rather than the direct light of the projector.

Body of Work:

Art Nouveau is a style of art I've admired since learning about it but I especially love Henri de Toulouse Lautrec's posters. They are Lithographs that have the bold blocks of color with the texture you get from using limestone. The organic lines and unapologetically contrasting use of black shapes are something that I try to emulate. Lautrec's posters also speak to me because of their compositions, which are often focused on a singular or couple of subjects, often women.

Art history inspired me even more directly, which can be seen in my pieces *Modern Venus with Flyballs*, *Acknowledged*, and *My Mycorrhizal Network*. Sandro Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* focuses on Venus the goddess of beauty and love. Being the goddess of beauty, she is drawn to the specifications of what the ideal idea of beauty was in 1480's Italy, according to Botticelli. In *Modern Venus With Flyballs* I am challenging modern society's expectations of beauty based on ugly comments that have been aimed at me. This creature is what I picture when I hear unsolicited comments like "thunder thighs", "sweet heart", or any comment regarding my chest. She has become a venus fly trap/ human hybrid, emerging from a shell or leaves, who represents what would happen if these comments came to life.

*Acknowledged* is inspired by John Everett Millais's Pre-Raphaelite painting *Ophelia*. I have a very love-hate relationship with this painting because it is such a delicately and thoughtfully detailed piece but the subject matter is hopeless and depressing. My print has the subject floating comfortably in a bath *with* their internal struggles. This piece is about coming to terms with one's anxieties, imposter syndrome, and other forms of self doubt. The dark hand is the same color as her hair because the negative thing is not an outside force.

*My Mycorrhizal Network* was created after reflecting on my friends who have been there for me over the years. Whenever I looked at Henri Matisse's "Dance" I liked how the dancers' connected hands and movements seemed so free and joyful. I wanted to make a piece that would show connections like that. Instead of hands being held I intertwined the women's hair. In nature there is a network underground created by fungi that allows plant roots to connect, share information and even resources. This phenomenon creates a community that can support each other in times of need. The friends in my life have grown with me and are what I consider my community.

Possibly the most important influence on my art, not just in this body of work but over my entire life, is my environment. I was raised in Eagle River, lived in Haines for a short period of time, moved to Anchorage, and now Fairbanks. Throughout all of that moving around I found that I'll never get tired of this state because of how vast and breathtakingly beautiful it is. My pieces *Hands Off*, *Mending Breath*, *The Hub*, and the *Slay* series all reference plant species that commonly grow in Alaska.

*Hands Off* was made the morning I read the news that *Roe v. Wade* was overturned. Rights to your own body should not be left up to any court to decide. I felt so much anger for those who won't have choices in their future. This piece shows the five hands of the "Justices" who overturned *Roe v. Wade* and the sitka rose depicts my and many women's anger through use of thorns. The flowers and rose hips symbolize reproductive organs, with one petal just within grasp of the hands.

In the forest you can find stumps that are enrobed in moss but still growing small trees from their tops. These instances of life growing from life make me think of all that our mothers have given for their children to be healthy and to make sure they are loved. Life is not always

kind and I have found that a mother's instincts to protect and nurture her child can be seen everywhere. This is a trait that is fascinating to me and endlessly awe-inspiring.

The *Slay* series is a look into how it feels to be watched and followed. It's a fact of life, that if you are a woman, you will be followed. I have had multiple instances where I have gone through this, one where I was chased down the railroad tracks right near my house when I was in middle school. It's an awful feeling and it is something that has made me wary of my surroundings, especially if I am walking anywhere at night time. I have a big, red, wool, coat similar to Little Red Riding Hood's, and I was walking around the university campus one night when I couldn't stop feeling the hair on the back of my neck stand up. The snow and trees were washed in blue light from the moon and the campus lights were a very contrasting pink-ish orange. No one was there that I could see, but that feeling makes you walk faster, if you've had the experience of being followed before.

The three smaller prints and one large print: *Lurking, Followed, Slay* and *Comfort* illustrate a short story about the Little Red Riding Hood character. She is first looking out of a window at a parking lot, seeing dark shadows in between the cars. In the second scene she walks down a pathway into a birch tree forest being followed by the shadows. In the forest she confronts and defeats the shadow. Finally in the last image she makes it to her cozy warm cabin. A common thread in this series is the birch trees, which stand tall and straight as her protectors, watching over her at all times with their bark patterned with eyes. I wanted to draw a connection between the original fairy tale and real life with the design of her weapon. In the original story the woods man kills the wolf with an ax. As young women, many are told to carry our keys in-between our knuckles as a form of self defense. I wanted to give my character more agency in her fate by combining the ax and the key.

A symbol prevalent in this series is the triple goddess. This is the circle with semi-circles on either side which represents the mother, maiden, and crone. You can see it in the design of her weapon as well as in the pattern of the fireplace screen. It is a symbol that has been around since the 1st century BCE. In *Comfort*, I use this symbol to show my connection to my female family members and how important their support is and was to me growing into someone who is independent.

*Propagated* is my take on the phoenix rising from the ashes. When propagating a plant you often take a piece of a dying plant and place it in water. You wait for it to grow new and healthy roots then finally you can place it back into dirt. I filmed myself interpreting how it feels to go through a period of emotional turmoil, which for me has been watching the people I care about crumble from anxieties and stresses of living in a post-Covid world and not being able to do anything. I see the vessel or space that the girl is growing back from, as time. Time allows healing and how you fill that time is different for everyone. Then I filmed a section where I acted out how it would feel to wake up with new strength having had time to either rest by yourself or spend quality time with loved ones. These videos were used to then hand draw the animation.

*Protective Roots* reflects all of these concepts and shows how all of these people can make it seem like those evils are miles away. The large scale print uses negative space to show a group of women supporting a tree whose heart is projected using a hand drawn animation. Energy is being produced from the hearts of the women, flowing up the roots to that heart. This action is causing the hands to retreat and finally fall away.

## Gallery Setup:

The most notable aspect of the exhibition setup was the fact that my long time friend and recently graduated BFA student from UAF drove up, from Anchorage to Fairbanks, to help. Not only that but her whole immediate family came as well. It really reinforced my feeling about being grateful for friends in times where you need support. The challenges of the hanging and general setup of the show included technical difficulties and installing *Protective Roots*. The projectors used were difficult to work with for a couple of reasons. First, I really wanted to hide them entirely and so I had help from family to make covers for them that made them look like part of the stands they sat on. They kept overheating so I ended up not being able to use them, but it turned out to be just fine because the projectors themselves were not horribly distracting. The other issue was that when the projectors were turned on in the mornings, the play bar would show up. This meant I had to come in every morning to exit Quicktime on my computer and restart the video. The only other main issue was that while hanging up the free hanging print, the magnets holding the paper in place slipped and fell. The paper didn't rip but it did wrinkle pretty badly. Thankfully kitkata is a very strong paper and I was able to iron out the wrinkles and I had help making the frame tighter by screwing the frame together.

## Conclusion:

Seeing the pieces all together was incredibly rewarding. As much as I could picture the prints spaced out on the wall I was not sure about how the two animations would fill the space and how the lighting would work out. There were a lot of challenges involved in making the exhibition look how I wanted and conceptually make sense, the way I envisioned it. In the end my show changed drastically from where I started.







*Modern Venus with Flyballs*, 18" x 24", Woodblock relief, 2023



*Acknowledged*, 18" x 24", Woodblock relief, 2023



*My Mycorrhizal Network*, 18" x 24", Woodblock relief, 2023



*Hands Off*, 18" x 24", Woodblock relief, 2023



*Mending Breath*, 18" x 24", Woodblock relief, 2023



*The Hub*, 18" x 24", Woodblock relief, 2023



*Lurking*, 6" x 9.5", Lithograph, 2023

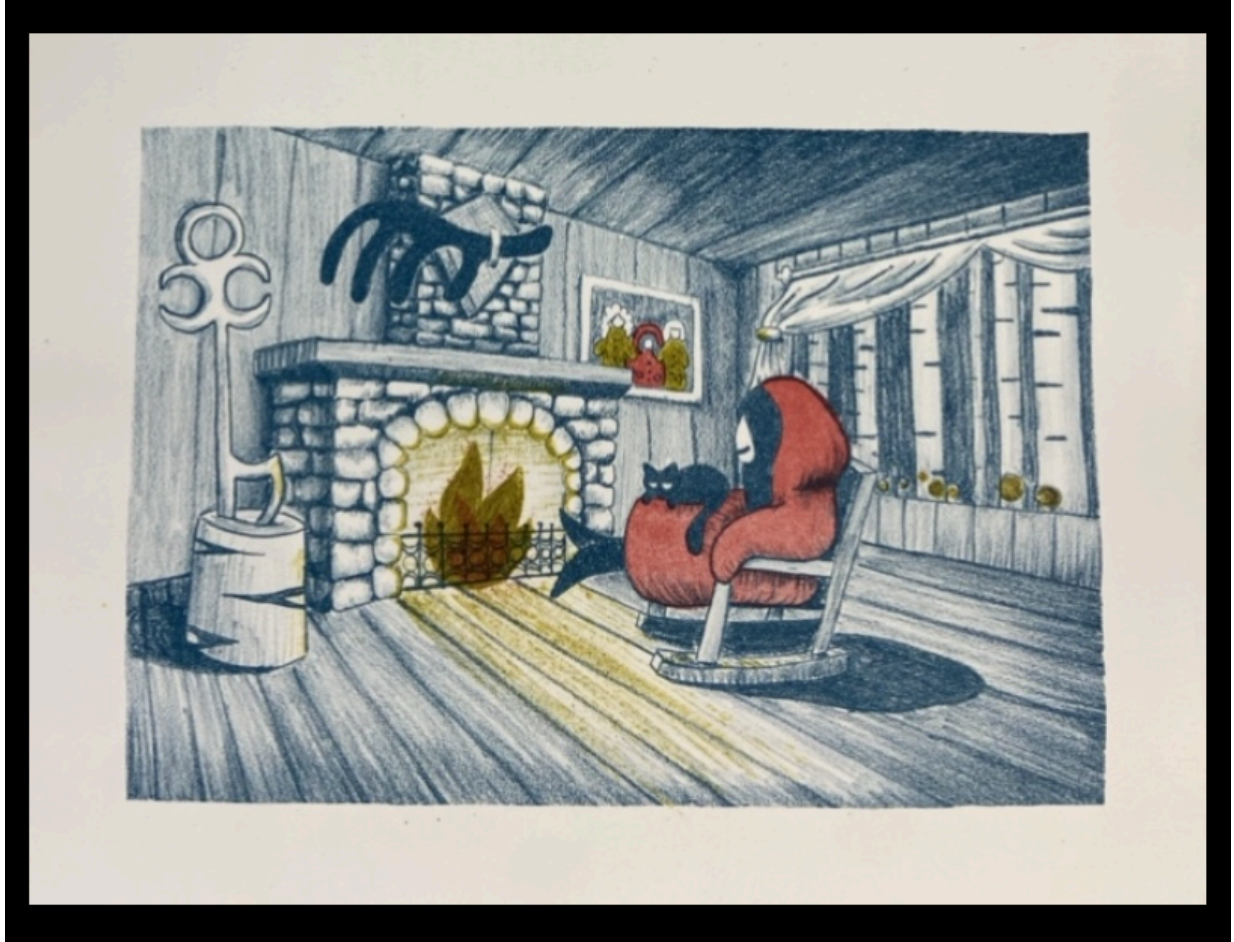




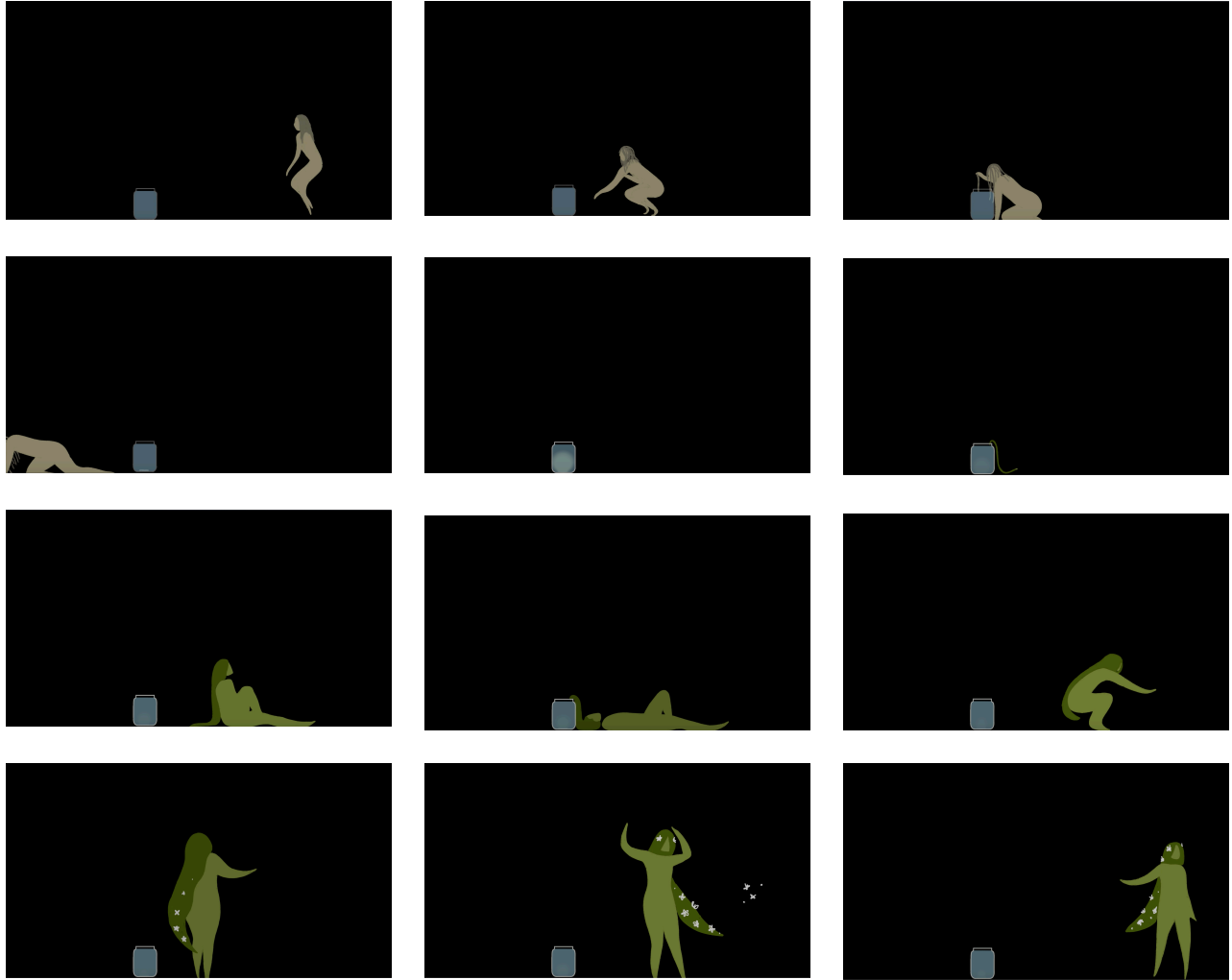
*Followed*, 6" x 9.5", Multiplate Copper Plate Intaglio, 2023



*Slay*, 18" x 24", Woodblock relief, 2023



*Comfort*, 6" x 9.5", Lithograph, 2023



*Propagated*, 1920 x 1080px, Hand Drawn Animation, 2023



*Protective Roots*, 24" x 49", Multi-media Woodblock Relief and Hand Drawn Animation, 2023