Deconstructing Abject Complacency of Ascribed Gender

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Deconstructing Abject Complacency of Ascribed Gender

by

Kyle Hooten

(Under the Direction of Jessica Burke)

Abstract

My life has been dedicated to the relentless pursuit of masculinity throughout my transition from female to male. While originally focusing on the physical transition, my attention is now focused on the social aspects of transition. For me, this involved coming out, managing legal name/gender change paperwork, and understanding a newfound, cultural privilege. This is where I draw inspiration to create my work. My process and techniques are informed by Drag Kings and Queens as well as contemporary culture and art. After performing as a Drag King for a year I developed a sense of gender that differed from what I was taught as a female child. Because of this I started to reinterpret traditionally feminine crafts as a way to perform masculinity for the visual consumption of an audience. From that I took artists like Felix Gonzalez-Torres and Ai WeiWei as contemporary art influences. I have also referenced Drag Kings and Drag Queens as influences. With these inspirations in mind I have developed a body of work based on the concept of correlation between gender expression and adornment in addition to how these are influenced by contemporary culture.

Index Words: Drag, Drag queen, Drag king, Masculinity, Femininity, Culture, Transgender, Ai Weiwei, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Trixie Mattel, Bianca Del Rio, Landon Cider, Spikey Van Dykey.
DECONSTRUCTING ABJET COMPLACENy OF
ASCRIBED GENDER
by
KYLE Hooten
B.F.A., Columbus State University, 2014
A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
MASTER OF FINE ARTS
STATESBORO, GEORGIA
DECONSTRUCTING ABJECT COMPLACENCY OF ASCRIBED GENDER

by

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Electronic Version Approved:
May 2018
DEDICATION

In deciding how I should choose how I should dedicate this thesis I could not bring myself to choose one person when so many have helped me on this journey. With that in mind I would like to dedicate this thesis to my entire Drag family including Dreema, Ashleigh, Devon, Adara, Tiffany Nicole, Imberli, Lotus, Cotaliya, Mindy, Dahlia, Owen, Jordan, Chase, Nina, Issac, Viktor, AnnaTomical, Euphoria, Kendall, and Layla. Throughout my career as an artist they have never failed to support, encourage, and inspire me. There is not enough room to write why each of you has been such an enormous impact on my artistic career, but I could not end this dedication without at least mentioning their names.

I would like to specifically thank a few people. First my Drag mother (though she won’t admit it) Candy O’Hara for her advice over the years and teaching me what the art of Drag meant beyond just cross-dressing. I’d also like to thank Destiny Myklz of Club One in Savannah, Georgia. Destiny always answered my questions and made me feel as if I had a second home at Club One even on my worst days. She never failed to cheer me up during my struggles with this thesis. I also want to thank my biological mother Martha for enduring this process with a smile. I can only imagine what it took as a parent to be open-minded enough to watch me go through this journey.

Finally, I want to thank Brian Firkus who performs as the Drag Queen Trixie Mattel. Seeing Trixie Mattel at Club One in Savannah, Georgia is what inspired me to pursue this as a research topic. Without her performance I may never have made the connection between Drag and Fine Art which culminated in this thesis.

For those reasons and innumerable others, I dedicate this thesis to each and every one of you with my sincerest gratitude. Thank you.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to take time to thank my committee for their support and encouragement throughout this process. My entire Graduate School experience has been incredibly stressful in a somewhat unconventional way but JB, Julie, and Kelly were always there for support and encouragement. I wish I could write more to encompass how much I appreciate each one of you, but words cannot describe how sincerely grateful I am for your involvement in my graduate career over the past three years.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

My work focuses on the correlation between gender expression and adornment in addition to how these are influenced by contemporary culture. I was originally born with a female body but have never conformed to stereotypical gender ideals. In 2013 I was introduced to Drag Kings through a college dorm pageant. That was my first experience with a female individual altering their appearance to appear masculine. From then on, I decided to use Drag to focus my experience, so it could become a part of my art.

When performing in Drag, I wore costumes that did not include stereotypically feminine craft materials like rhinestones and glitter. The Drag Kings I researched also neglected to use rhinestones in favor of more masculine adornment such as metal spikes and studs. Eventually the Kings did start using rhinestones out of necessity to create costumes quickly. I realized that the stage lights at a Drag show reflected off rhinestones and spikes with equal intensity. The spikes would extend the lines of a costume, but the rhinestone’s texture attracted just as much attention as the spikes.

At the time, I was a senior in my undergraduate program making art as an art student and performing as a Drag King but was treating those two things as separate artistic expressions. After announcing my identity as a transgender man, I faced an incredible amount of discrimination. Despite this, I realized that I might be able to help my community if I incorporated Drag as a part of my artistic practice. I found that the marginalization of the trans community often came from ignorance and a lack of exposure to transgender individuals. I used that knowledge as a starting point and began exploring how I could investigate my newfound culture with my art.

My intent for this body of work is to create art that investigates the relationship between adornment and gender expression to show how much contemporary culture affects the way individuals convey their gender. Using found objects or photographs and adorning them with traditionally feminine crafting material, I began to introduce the concept of gender expression as being
more diverse than a simple binary. Sometimes the faces in photos are obscured and other times they are highlighted. For found objects, their original use might be either masked or highlighted by the adornment depending on what part of the object I am trying to conceal, reveal, or highlight. None of this work can be called subtle, but what the work is supposed to do is create a moment that challenges a viewer’s perception of gender through adornment so that when they leave the show they might notice subtle instances of gender being unfairly stereotyped whereas before they would not have noticed. For example, many stores organize their toy sections by what they believe appeals to boys or girls.

Toy sections for boys are most often blue, meaning much of packaging, signing, or advertising is blue. Inversely, toy sections for girls are predominantly pink. If a child deviates from this or a multitude of other stereotypes they are usually bullied at school or home, and in general lack a sense of belonging to their culture. My work challenges these stereotypes which makes my work significant because challenging the stereotypes through approachable artwork can help individuals better comprehend how stereotypes can affect an individual.

By challenging traditional stereotypes using historical inspiration combined with contemporary influences, I show tangible evidence of the evolution of gender expression over time and then dispel the idea that materials have an inherent gender. My favorite example is that high heeled shoes were initially invented for men, yet women are now forced to wear them to work in some countries like England. Inversely, men of England would be shamed if they wore high heels in public. Our contemporary culture has constructed such a rigid binary system that inanimate objects, meant to serve a mundane function, have become symbols that are used to discern who does not conform to contemporary ideals. Once a person has been labeled as different, then they can become the victim of relentless mental, emotional, and even physical abuse. By juxtaposing these strong historical traditions with current stereotypes in my work using Drag as a way to funnel my inspirations, experiences, and ideas, my work will contribute to a discourse that will hopefully lead to a less discriminatory culture.
CHAPTER 2
DECONSTRUCTING ABJECT COMPLACENCY OF
ASCRIBED GENDER

Since the marginalization of subcultures contributes so much to that discriminatory culture, I felt it was important for me to balance my references so that I was not marginalizing artists for not being queer. To accomplish this, I focused on researching the artist’s work before learning more about the artist as an individual which lead me to the work of five artists that have become influential to this body of work. Those artists are Liza Lou, Nick Cave, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Ai Weiwei, and Paul Yore. These artists work in sculpture and/or performance and have concepts that relate to adornment, queer identity, and/or societal influences.

Liza Lou first became known for her work *Kitchen* (Fig. 1) completed in 1996. This was a life-sized creation of a kitchen based loosely on her research of kitchen plans from different eras. Before the creation of *Kitchen*, Lou was researching how certain eras of history viewed women in a religious context partly because of her abusive albeit religious family and an earlier experience in Italy. Lou visited cathedrals throughout Italy one year and began to wonder if it was truly divine inspiration or if visitors were having visceral reactions to the incredible detail of the mosaics inside the church. Around this time Lou walked into a glass bead shop. Attracted to the obsessive monotony of applying those beads to a surface, Lou embarked on the massive task of creating *Kitchen*. Lou was criticized for her use of craft materials in her art but saw this was a way to push the boundaries of the rules to which she was forced to conform. *Kitchen* took five years of constant work to finish. Once *Kitchen* was done, it was the time invested into the application of the material that facilitated the transcendence of *Kitchen* from craft to fine art. Another artist that uses that same obsessive usage of material is Nick Cave.
Cave takes the idea of fashion being a sense of expression and turns that idea on its head by making a suit that totally conceals a person’s identity by adorning it with a range of materials that exaggerate the form. Cave does identify as a gay man and while it may be a source for him to draw inspiration for his concepts that address identity, his personal identity is not the focus of his work. The suits are made from materials that Cave obsessively collected on trips, walks, and anywhere he found a material he felt the need to pick up. Ultimately, it is the abundance of the material and how the material behaves when worn as a suit that is most prominent in his work. Titled as some variation of *Sound Suit* (Fig.4), every piece made by Cave engulfs the entirety of the performers body. Those aspects of *Sound Suits* are what inspired my utilization of rhinestones. The ability of adornment to conceal flaws and reveal truth is what I chose to portray in *Adorned Suit*. Cave covers the model in totality obscuring the face which begins to eradicate the person’s identity not only from the world but also from themselves. I was inspired by how Cave addresses adornment but am using the obsessive collection and adornment to show how someone can use these materials to reveal their identity just as much as they conceal themselves.

As I started to research how an artist could use their work to reveal hidden aspects of them self, I began to look at the work of Felix Gonzales-Torres. Gonzales-Torres also uses massive quantities of an object to illustrate his concepts. One piece I have seen in person at the SCAD museum is titled *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* (Fig. 5). This piece is made up of 175 pounds of individually wrapped candies that together represent the body of his partner Ross. Viewers are allowed to take a piece of the candy which is replaced regularly to maintain the longevity of the work. The gradual reduction in the size of the pile symbolizes how Ross’ body and mind wasted away as he suffered from AIDS. This art piece is an important influence for this body of work and my personal artistic practice because it incorporates personal experience, queer history, installation, and public perception which are all goals for my work.
While Gonzales-Torres uses his installations to illustrate his personal past, Ai Weiwei uses his installations to criticize organizations he feels act unjustly. In his installation *Remembering* (Fig. 7), Ai Weiwei used 9000 children’s backpacks to spell out a quote from the mother of a child who died in a school that collapsed from faulty construction during an earthquake in 2008. Weiwei has been able to help others through his work and portray his culture accurately without influence from government propaganda. Bringing attention to the injustice in his country is what inspired me most about Ai Weiwei’s work because it is what I ultimately want to do with my work. As an artist who happens to be a transgender man, my work has the potential to address serious issues and provide a glimpse into LGBT culture to demystify the life of transgender individuals.

Many times it is the actual backlash Ai Weiwei receives for exposing controversial issues and not necessarily the work itself that becomes controversial. Paul Yore uses the concept of something other than the finished piece being controversial purposefully. He considers the process of making art, as a self-identified gay man, culturally defiant and furthermore accepts that the true power of his work is the process of its fabrication. Paul Yore made his United States debut at the 2016 NADA art fair in Miami, Florida where I first saw his quilts in person. Yore makes outlandish quilts (Fig. 9) that address both personal experience and contemporary social issues. In interviews Yore often references the fact that simply making art that deviates from a societal standard is a revolutionary act. Beyond the process of creating these works being revolutionary, the end result shocks viewers into contemplating pertinent social issues. Watching visitors to the NADA fair in Miami pass by Yore’s display became a game to count how many people stopped mid-step to process the immense amount of information in front of them. I knew from that experience that I could not use traditional ideas if I wanted to challenge cultural stereotypes. That is what made me choose to work with materials like glitter and baseball cards juxtaposed with more traditional art practices like portrait photography and sculptural installation.
CHAPTER 3

Despite the differences in the work of Lou, Cave, Felix, Weiwei and Yore, I have used all these artists in addition to Drag influences to inform the decisions I made in this body of work. One major difference I have had to resolve is that Drag performers typically perform in low lighting on a stage where the viewer is unable to scrutinize the application of the rhinestones. Since my work will be shown in a white wall gallery the lighting presented my first technical challenge involving rhinestones.

Large amounts of rhinestones are usually applied to fabric with E6000 because it is a very strong glue. The problem is it creates a chemical reaction producing heat that melts the back of some rhinestones resulting in a cloudy appearance. One piece for this body of work uses clear acrylic rhinestones with a reflective silver paint backing so I had to find a glue that would not create a cloudy appearance. Normally a few cloudy rhinestones can be overlooked in a Drag outfit but since my work will be shown in a gallery with a spotlight it will look as though it is bad craft rather than an intentional choice.

To achieve the best result possible, I developed a system of experimentation to search for methods to adhere glitter rhinestones securely without cloudy effects to the materials. Embellish It! Fabri-Tac was the only glue to work for the rhinestones after a series of experiments with different glues. The type of glue did not matter as much as precise application for glitter application. I decided to use an extra small applicator tip to apply a standard, white craft glue which proved most effective for smaller detail. For larger sections a soft brush was used to spread the glue evenly. The project required the smallest commercially available glitter since it would be applied in such a small area. Since anything larger than extra fine glitter would cause irregularities along edges. I also purposefully bought my materials from an anti-LGBT craft store to further the concept of several pieces in my show, so my choices were limited to the selection the store had available.
When I started using this same process on my altered photos, they needed more depth where the glitter was applied. Since I was using higher value glitter of a smaller size it began to blend into the photos if I glued the glitter straight to the photo. Thinking about the nature of adornment and its conceptual potential, I found the best solution was to fabricate a miniature home plate that would be adhered to the top of the photo. This element provided a stronger sense of visual depth and helped distinguish the adornment from the original photo. The fabricated home plate became more than just a flat shape once the photos were completed. The home plate gained its own sense of identity within the composition since it occupies the space where the person’s face would otherwise be seen. Now the adornment on the photo, through its concealment of the face, became as much a part of the individual’s identity acting as their face.

In addition to the crafting aspect of rhinestones and glitter, there is one project where I needed to sew together approximately 500 plastic baseball card collector’s sheets. Hanging that many cards inside the collector’s sheets that are just sewn together resulted in the stitches ripping through the plastic. Glues failed because there is a special oil in card collecting sheets that aids in protecting the cards. That same oil makes it impossible for any glue to adhere the sheets. Fortunately, I knew that plastic sheeting could be melted together and was able to melt the plastic collector’s sheets with a wood burning tool. I have debated on whether to light Collection 3 in a way that would emphasize the glitter but ultimately proved ineffective due to the plastic sheeting.

I did feel it was important to include a light-based piece since so much of adornment is meant to reflect light to draw attention. Taking into consideration how each piece in this body of work relates to the others, I decided to incorporate the use of light with photography and my past DRAG performances through video. The video fits in with the photography since it really is a series of moving pictures. The subject matter of the video is also important since the video is my DRAG performance recorded from my perspective. This reinforces the idea that so much of the transgender experience involves the people and culture surrounding the individual. Including Perspective
Performance was integral to show the performative aspect of my work because as necessary as mastering the application of glitter and rhinestones was, it is just as important that each piece relate my concept to the viewer.

Light also became a problem within this project. Due to the reflective nature of rhinestones, smooth plastic, and glitter, I began to have trouble working on any one piece for more than an hour. I would start to see what I would call sparkles in my field of vision even if there were not reflective materials around. I learned is was a case of temporary static not dissimilar to the dots you might see after accidentally looking at a bright light. In order to be as productive as possible I devised a system of covers and glasses to aid in the process of working with such reflective material.

Ultimately it comes down to covering any areas of the pieces that do not need to be visible with a dark cloth. Then wearing a series of glasses with varying degrees of shade in the lenses. Since I would need to mirror a consistent pattern from one side of an object to the other I would then photograph the side I was copying to use as a reference instead of having to constantly look at the reflective surface. It almost related back to my concept as I was developing methods to safely work with rhinestones and glitter for a long period of time. They seem like mundane craft materials at first glance but when put in a different context they can become a serious material that requires certain safety procedures to handle. For me it recalls the idea that materials do not have inherent associations and are simply given associations once given context.
CHAPTER 4

Much of my concept is about the transgender experience but it is also about showing that material can be used in any artistic context without having an inherent gender association. My usage of glitter and rhinestones juxtaposed with stereotypically masculine imagery is the artistic representation of how culture dictates gender expression’s relationship to adornment. Even for me it was very difficult to dissociate my preconceived ideas about glitter and rhinestones because of the associations I was taught from birth.

During my time as a masculine DRAG performer I saw rhinestones as nothing more than a technical means to create a visually appealing costume. With this body of work, I have started using the rhinestones in specific patterns on historically masculine clothing to challenge masculine stereotypes. I then expand my argument by making it clear that I am a transgender man using those materials. So, my usage of feminine materials juxtaposed with my gender identity prompts a conversation about how adornment is affected by a society’s opinion-based influence on gender and gender expression. The result is a tailcoat that is almost completely covered in rhinestones.

The tailcoat is easily identifiable as a masculine garment throughout history which is why I chose it above other garments. At its peak popularity, the tailcoat was worn only by men in a time when women would be punished for wearing masculine garments. That is precisely why I chose this style of men’s coat. Since women would not or could not wear the Tailcoat, it is much more strongly associated with masculinity than the modern tuxedo. The rhinestones I chose to put on the coat were chosen for a different story.

*Adorned Suit* (Fig. 11-12) has three different types of rhinestones. One is a clear crystal and has no color when it reflects light. The second is the AB crystal rhinestones which show the full light spectrum when it reflects light. The last is a false pearl rhinestone. The pearl rhinestones are not a
traditional rhinestone shape or finish but do provide a necessary contrast against the rest of the stones. The pearls also provide a segue to the imagery in the photography included in this body of work.

Since I was born biologically female, my family had certain expectations about how I was to dress for school portraits. One photo from the set of six (Fig. 14) features a pearl necklace (Fig. 13) which has been a family heirloom for generations that I was made to wear during my senior portraits. Despite the necklace being faux-pearls, they are a feminine status symbol in my family. Women would wear pearls during special events but with money being tight only the mother or eldest child would wear them. That is why I reclaimed them in *Adorned Suit* to remember my feminine past while embracing my masculine future and take control of my own life.

Working on the tailcoat with pearls, I was reminded of how much of my past was made up of things and objects that were ascribed to me to make me fit society’s standard for a female born person. In the photographs, I used a masculine sports symbol and covered it in glitter to use as adornment that obscured the last inherent trace of my individuality. If the glitter sat directly on the photo it would blend into the background of some photos, so the three-dimensional aspect of the home plate was more a formal choice to increase contrast between the photo and the glitter. The choice of shape is a reference to my past in sports but also how women were not allowed to play baseball but later had to form their own leagues would become softball. Since I was born female, my family would not let me play baseball, so I had to play softball instead. I still loved baseball so as a compromise, my parents would let me collect baseball cards as a hobby.

Collecting the baseball cards became more of an obsession beyond than a hobby. I placed the cards in storage during college but remembered them when I started placing six pounds of rhinestones onto *Adorned Suit*. The baseball cards alone had become an obsession just as much as applying thousands of rhinestones, so I decided to create a piece using the cards. While my original intention was to make a site-specific work, *Collection 3* (Fig. 15-16) was made in sheets that could be assembled in different arrangements for future exhibitions.
For Collection 3, I took the baseball cards from my childhood and obscured certain sections of the cards with glitter. Then I inserted the cards into plastic collector’s pages that had been assembled into a 10’x 29’ tapestry obscuring the front wall of windows in the gallery. The resulting effect changes the space from the gallery containing the art to the gallery itself acting as the art while simultaneously changing the space outside of the gallery into a part of the exhibition. It creates a sense of mystery that recalls my experiences as a transgender man. Everyone wants to know what’s “behind the curtain” similarly to the way that people inexperienced with the trans community feel entitled to ask inappropriate questions. Collection 3 does not address the questions specifically but implies the magnitude of the entitlement from those outside the queer community.

Some of that entitlement stems from transgender people being considered outcasts. Transgender people often hide their identities from the world to avoid being target for abuse which leads to a general lack of knowledge about the transgender community. That is why I decided to include 3 self-portraits as a triptych in this body of work. Self Portraits (Fig. 17) shows me from the waist up in clothing and a pose that best represents how I would ideally present myself to the world. I took the photo myself, flipped the image so that the viewer sees exactly what I see in a mirror, and in general controlled every aspect of the photo so that the final photographs are the true projection of me. Throughout the exhibition my artist statement was displayed in vinyl on the wall and clearly stated that I am a transgender man. The portraits in contrast to the statement reveal my identity to anyone who walked into the show. Presenting myself within that context removed any shame about my identity because so much work went into the portraits that there was an undeniable effort to reveal myself without trying to conceal my identity.

The idea of revealing myself through Self Portraits is why I decided to directly address the obsessive pursuit of masculinity. I took all the needles used to inject testosterone into my muscle and put them into a vitrine atop a piece of polished sheet metal. The method of injection is a concealed process that is not revealed to anyone beyond the individual taking the injection. Collection 2 (Fig. 18)
addresses this directly by visually quantifying the experience of taking testosterone injections with one year’s supply of used injection supplies inside a gallery vitrine. By placing the needles inside the vitrine with the vitrine existing within the gallery space, the vitrine itself has become a representation of the body. Having the needles, syringes, and empty glass vials inside the vitrine helps viewers to relate the process of internalizing these things as a part of the physical transition process. Then the quantity helps to reveal the incessant nature of the physical transition process.

Using the gallery vitrine to reference the body helped my concept in Collection 2 because of the associations people have with the vitrine and its relationship to the gallery. In Collection 1 (Fig. 19) I use this to further deconstruct the way society ascribes gender to objects. I put acrylic nails, synthetic hair, sequins, glitter, and rhinestones into scientific glassware (beakers, flasks, etc.) and then displayed them on shelves as though they were scientific specimens. Each material, including the glassware, holds a specific association. The materials I put into the glassware are seen as feminine but the glassware itself is void of gender-based connotations. The glassware is used as a non-biased measurement instrument to quantify accurately whatever it contains. The nature of the glassware’s need to be accurate within a scientific context overrides the ascribed meaning of the materials I have put into the glassware. Therefore, through this juxtaposition I have shown that if taken out of a cultural setting and viewed strictly for what an object is, that object does not have a gender but rather is ascribed a series of associations by a society. My goal for this is for my viewers to begin to question what they think about objects in everyday life being, as they may say, girly or manly. Just because they think they understand what they are looking at does not always mean they truly understand everything about what they see. That is what lead me to make the video Perspective Performance.

Part of wanting my viewers to question their preconceived ideas about certain things is also me asking my viewers through my work to metaphorically walk in another person’s shoes. As much as I would like for my viewers to understand my culture and know more about the process of transitioning, however, there is a need to conceal certain parts of that experience to maintain some sense of privacy.
as an individual. *Perspective Performance* (Fig. 20-23) shows my audience a different perspective and illustrates how they play a part in my experience one way or another. I took a GoPro camera and fixed it to the costumes of five different drag performers. I then recorded their performances and created a video of a Drag show from the performer’s perspective. I often got the critique that I needed to show what happens behind the scenes of the show and that the video was somehow incomplete because I did not show every single aspect of the performers starting to get ready and then taking off their costumes at the end of the night. That moment of viewers wanting to see more because they do not understand something about that culture is what makes the video’s content more impactful.

As a Drag performer I dictated what the viewer saw of the performance, denied the viewer the ability to see the performers getting ready backstage, and presented the work as a completed piece that no one else was able to alter or edit. By creating the video and presenting it as its creator, my viewers became the outsiders to my culture and I became the authority of the insiders. Drag culture has been known as an outsider’s art form since its inception because the artform itself is meant to criticize the average majority. Most of my viewers fit within the majority and have never experienced what it is like to be on the outside of a culture, so this video helps to illuminate that experience for my viewers.
CHAPTER 5

Overall, I have followed this thread of non-conformity throughout my research and life. My own need to transcend standards is what led me to focus my thesis on the relationship between gender expression and adornment as well as how culture affects that relationship. It was important for me to address this through craft materials that are stereotypically feminine and contrasting them with masculine objects to show how society incessantly ascribes gender to everything.

*Altered Photos* address how society has ascribed a gender to most objects to reinforce social stereotypes. By using adornment to cover the face in the photograph, viewers were forced to discern the person’s identity from the context clues such as the clothing, surroundings, or objects being held in the photo. I believe it was a successful way to address this concept. Using a masculine associated shape to cover the face but covering it in colored glitter to force a sense of gender ambiguity helped address the idea of gender being assigned. The only issue with this piece is that to make sure it showed ambiguity I had no choice but to use the stereotypical colors pink and blue. I would like to think there was a way to address this without using colors that have an ascribed gender but unfortunately to convey my concept to more people, using pink and blue was the best choice. The same issue appeared in the *Collection 3*.

The issue with *Collection 3* was how to find a balance of masculine and feminine elements in the presentation. Overall using the entire tapestry of cards to block a series of windows was successful way to reference a feminine craft in addition to the glitter on the individual cards. Also having one side of the *Collection 3* glittered and then the other side unaltered started to reference makeup which has been traditionally feminine. This idea of concealing and revealing was also integral in *Collection 1*.

*Collection 1* succeeded in showing the materials used for adornment as nothing more than materials used for adornment. The clear scientific glassware reveals the unbiased nature of the nails,
hair, rhinestones, glitter, and sequins. They are simply materials that, over time, have accumulated associations that have become stereotypes of femininity. Despite this piece being successful I still found it necessary to highlight the fact that society does ascribe a gender to these materials so that this piece could not be dismissed by an individual simply denying the idea that their society ascribes gender to those materials. That, in part, lead to what would become Adorned Suit.

For the suit it did not offset the balance between masculine and feminine to use an over-abundance of rhinestones because the history for this style of garment has never been associated with femininity. Because of that history, the juxtaposition of the suit with the immense amount of rhinestones creates a contextual contrast even though the work is visually cohesive. With this piece being shown in the center of the exhibition on an elevated platform, Adorned Suit helps to link the body of work together. It especially helps to inform the video Perspective Performance. When the video was displayed it was projected on a large wall. There was too much light throughout the gallery which was needed to light the other works, so it was difficult to see. Had the video been shown on video screens instead of a projection it would have been more successful since the video was shot in such low lighting. Having Adorned Suit installed next to the video did help convey the idea behind Perspective Performance enough that the concept functioned successfully in the space. When I reflect on the exhibition overall, it was not initially intended for the pieces to be so interconnected. With the content of each piece being interrelated, purposefully connecting the pieces visually to one another within the exhibition is replicative of the idea that gender and transitioning from one gender to another is a spectrum rather than a linear progression.

Overall my goal was to use my work to open discussion about my culture through the juxtaposition of masculine objects and feminine craft materials. I believe that I was successful in creating that discussion and am excited to continue pursuing activism for my community through my art in the future.
REFERENCES


Figure 1. Lou, Liza. *Kitchen*. 1996. Beads, plaster, wood and found objects.

Figure 3. Cave, Nick. *Speak Louder*. 2011. Mixed media including black mother of pearl buttons, embroidery floss, upholstery, metal armature, and mannequin.

Figure 4. Cave, Nick. *Sound Suits*. Mixed Media.

Figure 7. Weiwei, Ai. *Remembering*. 9000 children’s backpacks. 2009. Haus der Kunst, München (Germany).


Figure 21. Hooten, Kyle. *Perspective Performance*. Scene still 2. Video Projection. 2018
Figure 22. Hooten, Kyle. *Perspective Performance*. Scene still 3. Video Projection. 2018

Figure 23. Hooten, Kyle. *Perspective Performance*. Scene still 4. Video Projection. 2018