

# **Stony Brook University**



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**Pro-Creation**

A Thesis Presented

by

**Nicole Hixon**

to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements

for the Degree of

**Master of Fine Arts**

in

**Studio Art**

Stony Brook University

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The Graduate School

**Nicole Hixon**

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Abstract of the Thesis

**Pro-Creation**

by

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**2015**

This thesis is the introspection of an artistic evolution and growth across my three years of graduate school. It follows my exploration of material and my global response to the importance of community in my work. I am an environmentally based artist whose goal is dialogue. My experience at graduate school has strengthened my dedication to responsibility of self. The thesis considers my personal history and the connection of its content to my work.

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## I. Introduction: Personal History

Six months after graduating with my Bachelors degree from California State University at San Bernardino I found out I was pregnant. I had full intention of attending Graduate School without a break in between studies to further my education and network but upon receiving the news of subsequent motherhood I realized my plan had changed.

Gestation for the pregnancy ran its full course of 40 weeks and I delivered my son Henry James Hixon on February 27, 2011 at 5:22pm. Thirty eight minutes later at 6:00pm Henry was pronounced dead weighing in at 7 lbs and measuring 22". No one knew what to say or what to tell my husband and me. Monitored by modern medicine's close watch for 9 months this was unexpected.

The autopsy reviewed Henry's cause of death was due to Primary Pulmonary Hyperplasia. This meant that his right lung was not fully developed. At just shy of a gram of the weight it should have been for his body weight it was the reason my baby could not survive outside my womb. It could not have been seen on a sonogram or been indicated by a test, it is something that happens rarely without another condition to indicate its presence. In that moment my life was changed forever.

Stunted by grief for a year, I spent much time alone. During this time I realized that my life needed to continue as I was not the one who died that day. Henry would have wanted me to have a rich and full life. I applied to local Graduate programs and in the spring of 2012 began my path towards my Masters in Fine Art in Studio Art.

Arriving to graduate school I had always imagined that I would pursue my artwork as I had left it off in undergraduate studies. However arriving at Stony Brook University to begin my MFA I realized too much had changed and I could not simply pick up where I had left off. I was not the same person.

I was still attracted to the recycled steel belted tires as media I had pursued, but the intention became more focused on the lifespan of the material, the lifespan of the planet and the lifespan of the viewer. Comparing the materials and their time on this planet to our own. I have been exploring these ideas during the last three years of studies here at Stony Brook University and this thesis is the culmination to date.



Figure 1, Henry James Hixon, 2011



## II. Philosophies

*I believe we are all put on this planet for a purpose, and we all have a different purpose. When you connect with that love and that compassion, that's when everything unfolds. Ellen*

*DeGeneres*

With relentless technological progress especially since the industrial revolution, we as a society have steadily eroded the link between humankind and the natural world. With the existence of disposable materials, our society has changed how we assign value to objects. One can now purchase expendable items for singular use and never think of them as having more than an unaccountable existence. Art has also evolved and often conveys a detached modernism that further alienates people from the cycles and resources of the earth.

I strongly believe that we are all pieces of Conceptual Art. Regarding that things are all relative and even cyclical, one small thing or act can influence positive counteraction in the world. My sculpture and installations are ways of creating and communicating my thoughts and ideas as three dimensional works to be interacted with by the viewer. Creating work that is inspired by my time here and personal experiences as inspiration for my art making comes from a need to communicate and to connect to others to combat the loneliness in the world.

I strive to communicate the issues of consumption on our planet, and nurture what I consider to be the important aspects of life. Relationships are a vital piece of our existence; we need others and interactions in our lives. Currently, my art production centers on public art;

installation art which requires hands-on activity and the help of others to create works that are larger than human scale. Having assistance while I work is crucial to my process not only due to the large scale of the works but as a matter of human connection. The informal conversations that happen in my studio during creation of the work are a significant part of my practice. Working in a community, and listening to what people think and say, is important to me. The community coming together with the arts and learning, listening, sharing, encouraging and inspiring is what my practice is all about.

Observing and living, I often look around at the world to figure out the inspiration for my next project then spend extensive amounts of time working out the logistics. Working in non-traditional materials always poses a challenge. There is much to be learned and many trial and error efforts take place. Once I figure out the process for a particular project, the creation begins. I tend to work best with an assembly line type method. There is something about the repetition that helps me to mediate on the concept. It reminds me of an image in art history that I studied of a monk sweeping. It was said that all day long he spent sweeping seeking enlightenment in the mundane task. This is often how I see myself working.

### III. Influences

*Recycling may be the most wasteful activity in modern America, a waste in time and money and a waste of human and natural resources. Americans have embraced recycling as a transcendental experience, an act of moral redemption. We're not just reusing our garbage; we're performing a rite of atonement for the sin of excess. (Tierney "Recycling Is Garbage")*

Many people automatically assume, by my work, that I am an “environmental artist.” On one hand I am, and on the other hand, I am not. I have struggled with this since I began using recyclable materials in my work. I do care about our environment and our earth, most people do. But what I really hope to focus on is our consumption and the decisions we make in our daily lives.

Growing up in the 1980’s gave me a real perspective on what life was like before the “recycling craze.” Recycling and sorting of disposable materials was a major change in society and a pivotal point in my life. I remember the gravity that everyone placed on recycling.

Recycling mania started in 1987 with a garbage barge, “the Mobro 4000.” Someone bought space in a Louisiana landfill for New York garbage for less money than it would have cost to dump it locally. They tried to dump it in North Carolina because it was closer, but North Carolina did not want it, so the barge spent six weeks going up and down the coast looking for a place to dump the New York garbage. The media took the story and ran with it. People were shocked by the story and bought the propaganda that there we were running out of room for our detritus.

*As Newsweek noted, the Mobro's saga was "to the trash crisis what the sinking of the Lusitania was to World War I." The magazine's cover story, titled "Buried Alive," warned: "With rare exceptions during wartime, Americans have not been adept at making individual sacrifices for the common good. That mentality will have to change. Otherwise, the dumps will cover the country coast to coast and the trucks will stop in everybody's backyard." (Tierney "Recycling Is Garbage")*

I have mixed feelings about the above statement. Yes, an overall consciousness about our consumption could make a world of difference but will threats of trash in our own back yards really be what it comes to? So maybe the answer is not to recycle these materials, perhaps the answer is to repurpose them while inspiring a dialogue about why someone would use used discarded tires to create a nest for humans.

Fueling the act of the “recycling craze” was the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) who came out with a widely read paper in 1989 called *The Solid Waste Dilemma: an Agenda for Action*. The paper written by J. Winston Porter the assistant EPA administrator wrote “recycling is absolutely vital” and the national guidelines for recycling were born.

*Municipalities followed the waste hierarchy by building waste-to-energy incinerators and starting thousands of curbside recycling programs -- all in the belief that it would be cheaper than landfilling. But the incinerators turned out to be disastrously expensive, and the recycling programs produced a glut of paper, glass and plastic that no one wanted to buy. More expensive to recycle than to*

*create new products. Taxes take out about 8 billion dollars a year for recycling. There are not many more materials in garbage that are worth recycling. Porter has been advising cities and states to abandon their unrealistic goals, but politicians are terrified of coming out against recycling. How could they explain it to the voters? How could they explain it to their children?*

(Tierney "Recycling Is Garbage")

Recycling is often an effort that we all make and it is an effort that is not yet confirmed to be the answer to assisting the future of our planet. In a book written by William Rathje and Cullen Murphy *Rubbish! The Archaeology of Garbage What our Garbage Tells Us About Ourselves*, the authors examine studies conducted over recent history of what can be seen from the excavation of our trash overtime.

Growing up in Queens the New York City Sanitation Department took the sorting of trash very seriously when they began recycling. If waste was not sorted properly the workers would cut the trash bag with a razor blade and dump the garbage on the curb exposing all of the contents for the neighborhood to see and trying to prove a point. If this happened more than twice you would get slapped with a hefty fine. Maybe the goals set upon us were the culprit:

*Porter recalls, "I sat down with some engineers in my office to estimate how much municipal waste could be recycled. At that time, about 10 percent was being recycled. We looked at the components of waste, made a few quick calculations and figured that it was reasonable to reach a level of 25 percent*

*within five years. It wasn't a highly quantified thing. Some of the staff didn't even want me to mention a figure. But I thought it would be good to set a target, as long as it was strictly voluntary and didn't involve a lot of regulations."*

*Politicians across the country had bigger ideas. State and city officials enacted laws mandating recycling and setting arbitrary goals even higher than the E.P.A.'s. Most states set rigid quotas, typically requiring that at least 40 percent of trash be recycled, often even more -- 50 percent in New York and California, 60 percent in New Jersey, 70 percent in Rhode Island. Industries were pressured to set their own goals. (Tierney "Recycling Is Garbage")*

Not knowing what to believe- The Catch 22 of it all

I believe recycling is a catch- 22 and only certain products benefit from being recycled. Which is the lesser of two evils? Is it natural food waste or is it plastic packaging to protect our food source? According to Rathje and Murphy “Plastic virtually does not biodegrade or otherwise change after burial, except to break apart, the same amount of it ought to be present after ten years as on the day it was dumped.” (Rathje 114) They go on and speak of organic waste (food and yard waste). “The evidence from excavations indicates that even after two decades of burial about one-third to one-half of these vulnerable organic remains in recognizable condition. This portion continues to experience biodegradation thereafter, but probably at a snail’s pace” (Rathje 115) Noting this and referring back to Tierney’s article, I continue to question which is the best choice.

*We're a wicked throwaway society. Plastic packaging and fast-food containers may seem wasteful, but they actually save resources and reduce trash. The typical household in Mexico City buys fewer packaged goods than an American household, but it produces one-third more garbage, chiefly because Mexicans buy fresh foods in bulk and throw away large portions that are unused, spoiled or stale. Those apples in Dittersdorf's slide, protected by plastic wrap and foam, are less likely to spoil. The lightweight plastic packaging requires much less energy to manufacture and transport than traditional alternatives like cardboard or paper. Food companies have switched to plastic packaging because they make money by using resources efficiently. A typical McDonald's discards less than two ounces of*

*garbage for each customer served -- less than what's generated by a typical meal at home.*

*Plastic packaging is routinely criticized because it doesn't decay in landfills, but neither does most other packaging, as William Rathje, an archaeologist at the University of Arizona, has discovered from his excavations of landfills. Rathje found that paper, cardboard and other organic materials -- while technically biodegradable -- tend to remain intact in the airless confines of a landfill. These mummified materials actually use much more landfill space than plastic packaging, which has steadily been getting smaller as manufacturers develop stronger, thinner materials. Juice cartons take up half the landfill space occupied by the glass bottles they replaced; 12 plastic grocery bags fit in the space occupied by one paper bag. (Tierney "Recycling Is Garbage")*

In was in fourth grade I was part of a collective who wrote letters to McDonalds to cease use of Poly Styrofoam Clam Shells for packaging their food. I was ten years old and this was my first campaign. The teachers had led us to believe that McDonalds knew what they were doing was wrong and that they had no intention to stop producing packaging that could not decompose and that was harmful to our planet. Not until I recalled back on this memory for the purpose of writing this thesis had I thought of that event. Upon investigation it seems that McDonalds was trying to comply the whole time by being aware of our rubbish and recycling.



It was in the late 1980's that McDonald's was bullied by burgeoning environmental groups (who were concerned about "how many trees it takes to make paper" ) into switching from paper packaging to Styrofoam containers. These containers are what McDonald's soon came to call (apparently without irony) "clam shells."

This wasn't good enough, however. The clam shell came under fire again, this time for other things: It doesn't "biodegrade" in landfills, environmental groups said — though, in fact, next to nothing, no matter how "organic," biodegrades in landfills, because biodegrading requires oxygen, which compressed trash does *not* have. Pressed, however, by the Environmental Defense Fund, McDonald's, in the autumn of 1990, abandoned the clam shell altogether and supplanted it with a so-called quilt-wrap, which is paper coated in a thin layer of plastic.

So it was back to paper after all, back where it began. It soon transpired, as you would perhaps suspect, that, according to environmentalists, the quilt-wrap was "too difficult to recycle," whereas polystyrene was not. Also, polystyrene accounted for only four percent of all McDonald's solid waste in the past, which was much less than with the quilt-wrap. So McDonald's was yet again asked to switch. And so it goes.... (Harvey)

## Artists

Inspired by all types of media I will look to many sources to support my thesis. A primary point of art historical reference will examine the works of Tara Donovan and Chakaia Booker. I was first introduced to Donovan's works in 2008. She recontextualizes mundane objects into fine art, making the large scale sculpture installations created by accumulation of vast amounts of objects and materials. Booker's art changed my way of creating, realizing fine art could be so much more than traditional materials and could extend to recycled materials.

In 2004 my passion for using nontraditional materials began. Visiting Storm King Art Center, in upstate New York, I was confronted by Chakaia Booker's exhibit. Up until that point I had been using clay as my medium. Finding art as an outlet for my creativity just two years earlier, I never experienced nontraditional media as an option.

Seeing Booker's work that day proved pivotal in how I would continue my work and how I would see materials. I approached a work titled *Industrial Perpetuosity* placed on the 500 acre sculpture garden. Stumped by its origin and size, its scale was massive and was much larger than my own, which I only realized as I approached the work. The work resembled fallen tree logs that were caught in a specific moment of time, fanning out as fingers of a hand. The work was dense and dark and I thought it was made of aged wood from a dock. Reaching it I realized that the work was comprised of recycled car tires. From that moment everything became possible as a medium. Chakaia Booker had forever changed the way I would view the possibilities for materials in my work.

Tara Donovan converts an extensive quantum of everyday objects into an ornate sculptural network that appears to have a life of its own in the natural biological world. For over a decade Donovan has transformed huge volumes of common place everyday items into stunning works with a phenomenal impact. Layered, piled, or clustered with an almost viral repetition, these works with known products assume forms that both evoke natural systems and seem to defy the laws of nature. My research has not confirmed that fact that Donovan purchases materials for her work but does not refute this either.

Donovan's work is associated with utilitarian materials. She exhibits principles of phenomenology with a concern for disposable artifacts expelled by the frenzied machinations of capitalism with sheer accumulation alone. In stretching the contextual boundaries of the gallery to accommodate the rebirth of common manufactured objects in a conceptually biological way, she highlights the relationship of art to everyday life.

Donovan takes these materials and "grows" them through accumulation. The results are large-scale abstract floor and wall works suggestive of landscapes, clouds, cellular structures and even mold or fungus. She considers patterning, configuration, and the play of light when determining the structure of her works but the final form evolves from the innate properties and structures of the material itself. In her words, "it is not like I'm trying to simulate nature. It's more of a mimicking of the way of nature, the way things actually grow" (Hammer).

Most people perceive styrofoam cups, plastic drinking straws and buttons as throw away items. Utilizing them once, maybe twice and disposing of them. But not Tara Donovan, she implores these materials into convoluted units imitating natural structures. She is an unorthodox artist whose work brings astonishment to most viewers. In each of her works of art she selects one item and then uses it in vast multiples. Experimenting in assemblage she creates different configurations that often simulates geological or biological forms either consciously or subconsciously. What interests her is “exploiting the physical characteristics of the thing that have nothing to do with what it’s used for.” (Wmagazine)

What she looks for is "a phenomenon" -- an arrangement or configuration that transforms something dull and disposable into something numinous. In Donovan’s *Untitled* work from 2003 she has taken thousands of styrofoam cups and hot glued them together to create complex topography above the viewer in nebulous like forms. Even though the form is static there is a sense of flow. The configuration of the work seems to move as shadows from the light source changes its shape and color as one gazes and moves around the massive work. The light of the room hits the cloistered piece as an ethereal and brilliant billow. The dripping, curving shapes protruding from the ceiling give one the idea of abundance as the viewer strive for interpretations. Is it a statement on consumption or is it simply an organic form created from the utmost inorganic material?

#### IV. Artworks

The materiality of my work is essential. Following the exploration of my chosen media of recycled steel belted radial tires, recycled bicycle inner tubes and recycled plastic water bottles, I have produced familiar objects with atypical materials. My work frequently mimics organic cell growth as I use repetition in an unconventional narrative form. I am jealous of the longevity of rubber and plastics. Their life span will far outlive my own. My goal is to use recycled materials as symbols that represent human cell growth and mimic the human experience of the creation of life, in is the comparison to the human body and our longevity.

Being confronted with imagery that may seem recognizable produced with materials that are not typically used (or reused) for art or creation will hopefully internalize an emotional response for the viewer, that can be carried with them to digest on. I wish for my conceptions to gestate and promote change.

A pivotal work of public art I had completed during my Undergraduate Studies is titled *RT-6A89*. The work is modeled after a life size Queen Anne palm tree. The tree stands 18.5' tall and has a canopy of approximately 8' wide. The palm fronds were created with two recycled steel belted radial tires for each branch. On the base of the trunk I wove EPDM (a recycled rubber material) to simulate pattern and texture. The concept of the work was inspired by my fantasy: *a beam of life struck a pile of disregarded tires from the universe and suddenly the inorganic would become organic.*

A primary concern of mine is the future of this planet. My body of work has been predominantly focused on conspicuous consumption. Everywhere one looks the world is being littered by disposable plastics being delivered on rubber tires. Feeling helpless and caught in this sick cycle I began to explore the use of recycled plastic bottles in my work. Through this study I began to question where this concern came from in the development of my life as it seems that so many pay no mind to it.



Figure 2, *RT-6A89*, 2007



Figure 3, detail *RT-6A89*, 2007



Figure 4, detail *RT-6A89*, 2007

## *All That is Solid Melts Into the Air*

In my second year of my MFA I transitioned to working with recycled plastic water bottles. The maturation of the process was slow but I ultimately created a body of work that was far more primitive than a tree based form while still simulating new life. For my solo show at the Lawrence Alloway Memorial Gallery I created *All That is Solid Melts Into the Air*. My show was inspired by a book titled All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity by Marshall Berman. As I read Berman's analysis of Carl Marx's Communist Manifesto in comparison to the Industrial Revolution and the self destructive nature of Modernization I began to think about how we became a world trying to make things easier with the use of technology and development. This brought me to a personal place examining the links between plastic materials disposable nature and our own human existence. How even if things are disregarded they still linger; whether that be a memory or person or the memory of trash. I started to compare human life to that of the "life span" of plastics.

### Innovative Self-Destruction

The bourgeoisie and its ideologists have never been known for their humility or modesty, yet they seem strangely determined to hide much of their light under a bushel. The reason, I think is that there is a dark side to this light that they cannot blot out. They are dimly aware of this and deeply embarrassed and frightened by



it, to the point that they will ignore or deny their own strength and creativity rather than look they virtues in the face and live with them. (Berman 98-99)

*All That is Solid Melts Into the Air* was an installation placed in the center of the Lawrence Alloway Memorial Gallery. The gallery is a basic “white cube” shape. By placing the work in the center of the room, I created a space within a space. Viewers could walk around the massive work and were constrained by the gallery walls. The large scale work simulated a huge womb comprised of several hundred recycled plastic water bottles which I had cut and reassembled into a cocoon- like shape. Inside the 10’ tall by 8’ wide cocoon was an ambiguous, slightly mysterious figure comprised of plastic bags. The form resonated a life whose “heartbeat” you could hear pulsating in the gallery. A sensation of the figure breathing was simulated by light that was rising and falling with illuminated intensity. The work was meant to simulate life in gestation. I think it is important to note that this show was produced while I was preparing for the emotional impact of Henry’s, my deceased son, memorial day. In addition to the thoughts of our own consumption and what the collective ‘we’ create as a society, I was also preparing to mark another difficult anniversary.

The work was received with mixed reviews. Some read it immediately as a womb or a baby. Others did not understand it at all. Some could see the material for the plastic it was, while others could not figure it out. Ultimately the work generated the conversations I had hoped for. People spoke about material, mass production and consumption, and why I had chosen plastics as the material to simulate life.

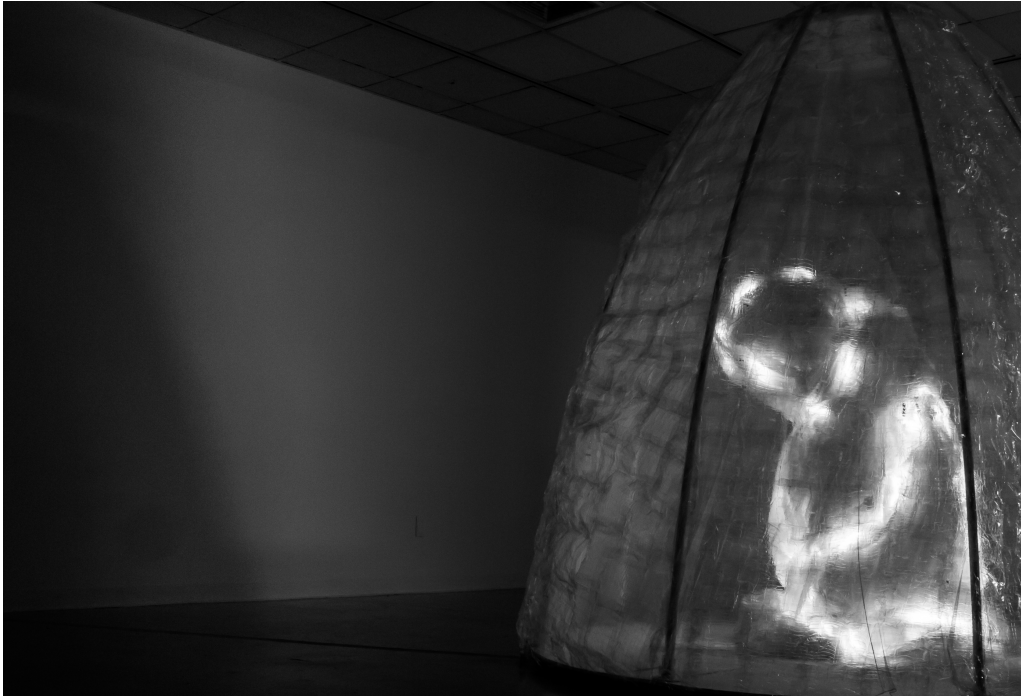


Figure 5, *All That is Solid Melts Into the Air*, 2014



Figure 6, People interacting with *All That is Solid Melts Into the Air*, 2014

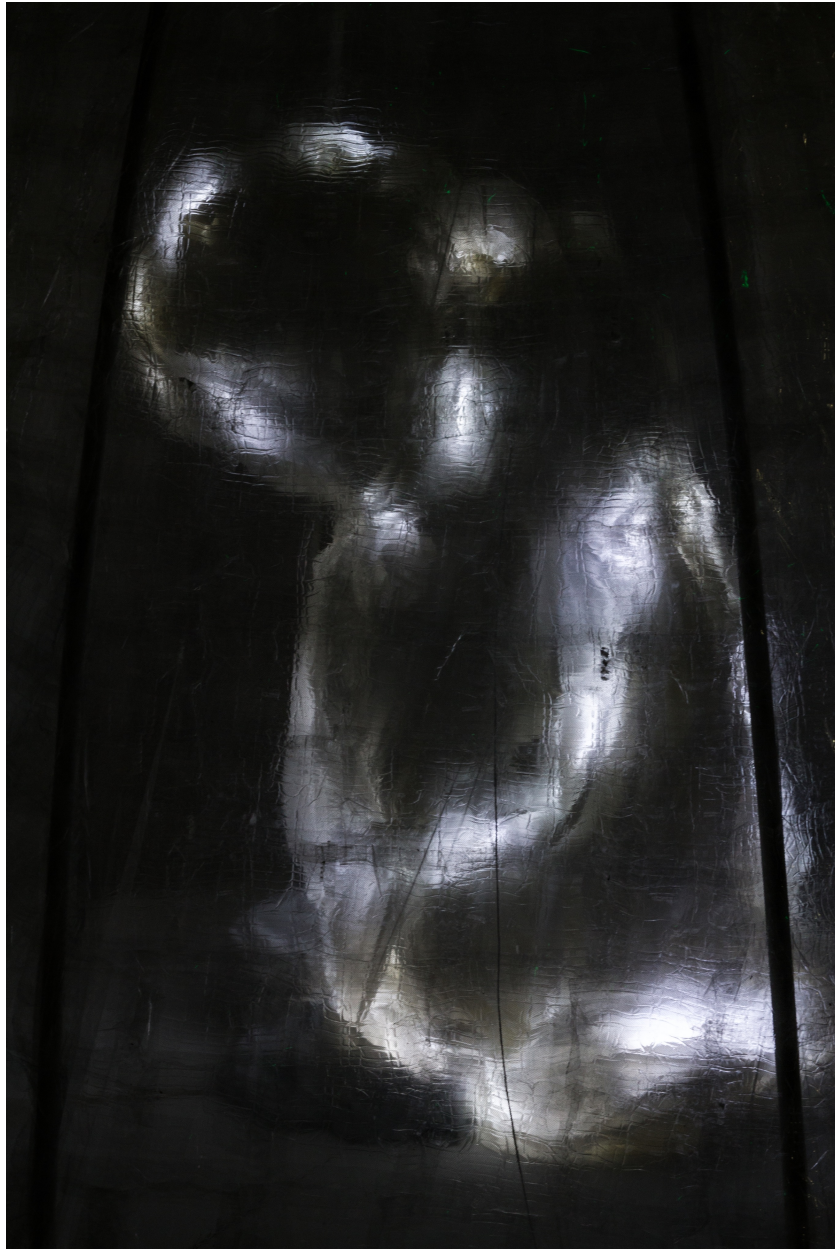


Figure 7, detail *All That is Solid Melts Into the Air*, 2014

## Pro-Creation

For my second solo show in the Lawrence Alloway Memorial gallery, in the fall of 2014, I once again transformed the space for *Pro-Creation*. The installation changed the usual view of the gallery where the walls are the point of interest and instead led the viewer down the “birth canal” and into another womb like shape- only this time you could re-enter. The viewer entered the gallery space and had to access the work through a black mesh veil that was suspended from the ceiling. As you first entered the installation, the mesh curtain touched your body and you needed to physically push through the soft material seeking the light at the end of the tunnel. The interior space bathed in a warm red light glowing from two chandelier-like forms constructed from reconfigured recycled plastic water bottles. The new shapes were meant to simulate ovaries and acted as chandeliers in this domestic-item filled space. Fiberoptic lights were illuminating the plastic forms acting as fallopian tubes. For this work I had deliberately changed direction in my use of media from the usual recycled materials and did quite the opposite. I went out and shopped for all new domestic materials. The installation was comprised of curtains, sheets, table cloths, pillow cases, blankets and rugs that were all red, luscious, plush textures invitingly tactile and soft to the touch. (A note on materials: I spent many days shopping at stores to find just the right products, I would later return all the goods I used.) The walls of the womb were covered in the soft materials with a visual topography of organic cell growth. The floor has plush red carpet that was cosy and soft. Whether alone or with others, many people choose to lay down in the work and felt comfortable in the installation. Others felt claustrophobic and wanted to leave immediately. The majority of viewers found the space safe and comforting. The air inside the

constructed space was warm as all the ventilation was constricted by the shape of the materials.  
There was a continual hidden white noise which was meant to soothe.



Figure 8, *Pro-Creation*, 2014

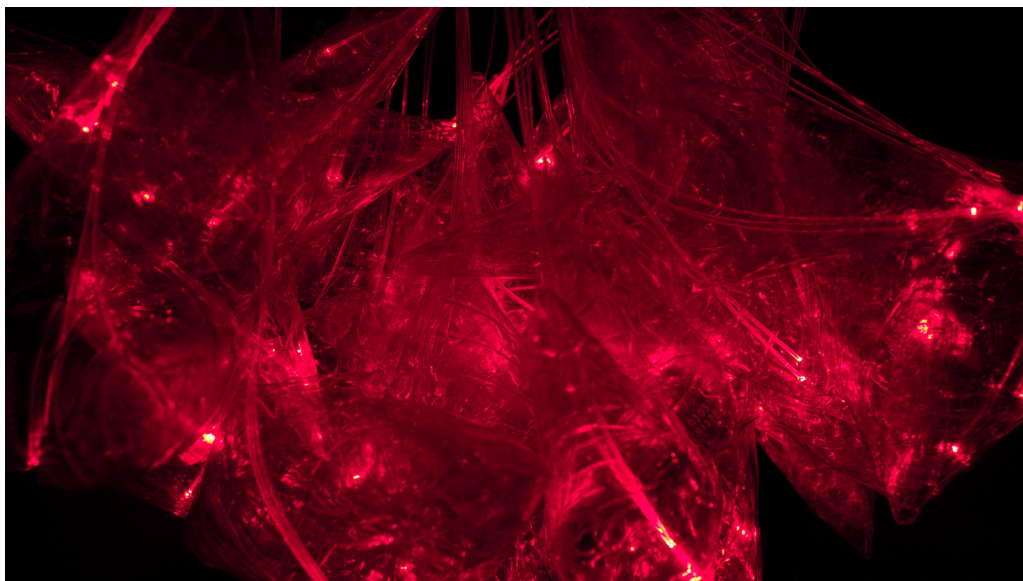


Figure 9, detail *Pro-Creation*, 2014



Figure 10, detail *Pro-Creation*, 2014

## The Nest

I was contacted by John Cino, President of the Patchogue Arts Council, in the Summer of 2014 to submit a proposal for the PACMAC (Patchogue Arts Council's Music, Art and Cinema) Festival. The committee was looking for proposals from local artists to showcase seven outdoor installations for a nine day festival. Being inspired by a small bird's nest I decided I would submit a proposal for a human scale nest. The nest would be a constructed vessel large enough to house multiple people and a place where they could come together simultaneously as a small community. I hoped that its bringing people together in close proximity would inspire conversations about life, art and love. I knew the material had to be durable and safe enough to withstand the elements. Recycled steel belted radial tires are the building blocks for the shape; cut and contorted they act as the shell. Over the base of heavy duty tires I wove discarded bicycle inner tubes. Using the premise of the a round loom, I initially constructed a maquette. My large scale work can be tricky to figure out on a small scale maquette. I started by purchasing a round loom used for weaving beanie (hats) and began to connect the black rubber hair ties to create a long "thread" that would simulate the recycled bicycle inner tubes I would later use in the large version. In September I was notified that I was one of the accepted artist to show in the event.

Working the loom on the small scale was easy but figuring out the larger format took some ingenuity. I constructed a round loom in my studio, building it on the scale that an 1"=1'. The original store bought loom was 12" in diameter and the studio-made loom is 12' in diameter. PVC pipe was used as the pegs onto which the weaving happens. Forty-two pegs were placed

evenly around the 12' circle. A large bobbin that I had rescued from the trash acted as the bobbin for attaching the inner tubes. There are well over one thousand inner tubes that were required to construct the weave.

The process of the mass weaving, was far too difficult for me alone, and required that I work with the help of others. With the help of some former students I was able to construct and weave *The Nest*. We spent weeks preparing and weaving the form. My assistants and I learned much about each other during this process. So even in the preliminary stages of *The Nest* it worked its magic of bringing people together creating a community of like-minded individuals. One of the goals of *The Nest* was to connect with people. This was accomplished in two stages, the first being the creation (weaving stage), and the second, the actual intended use of making it, in the spending time with others inside of the work. There are several experiences that were sacred for me in connecting with its audience.

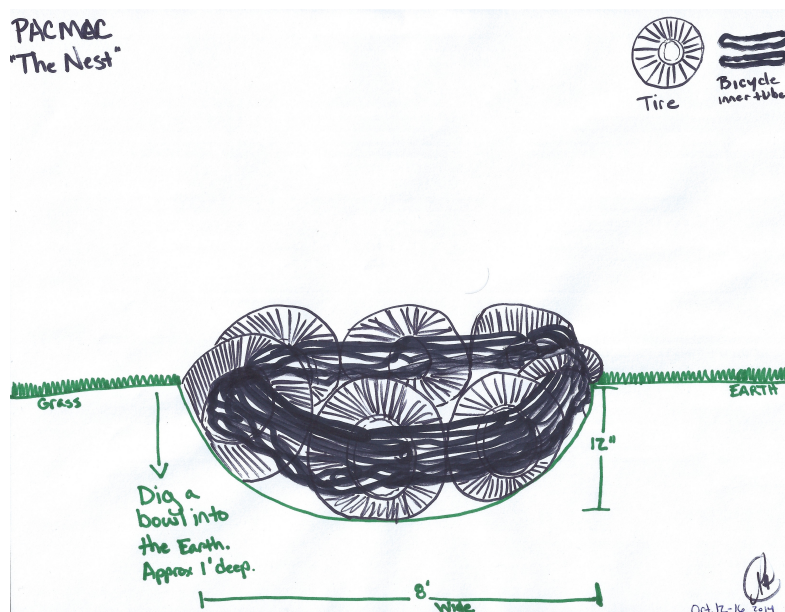


Figure 11, sketch proposed for *The Nest*, 2014





Figure 12, detail *The Nest*, 2014



Figure 13, people enjoying *The Nest*, 2014



Figure 14, children enjoying *The Nest*, 2014

## Direction and the Natural Elements

As the MFA Thesis Exhibition began to come together I had originally planned to get back to my roots and construct a life sized 20' tall Yoshiko Cherry Tree, fully in bloom, from recycled bicycle inner tubes and used plastic grocery store bags. Gathering and preparing all the information and during the preliminary stages I found out that I was again pregnant. My plan needed to change due to the scale, weight and the welding this project would require, as the process and physical nature of the work are not conducive to a healthy pregnancy. I still plan to construct the tree but at a date past August 20, 2015 when baby boy Hixon is due.

*The Nest* became the focal point for the Thesis Exhibition. At each direction of North, East, South and West, I created four stylized tire swings suspended from the 22' high gallery ceiling to emulate a watch tower, protecting what was happening in the center- *The Nest*. In many cultures the directions represent one of the four natural elements so each swing is named appropriately- *North (Earth)*, *East (Wind)*, *South (Water)*, *West (Fire)*. I believe the fifth natural element is *love* which is being guarded by all.

The swings have a trinity of support to suspend from. Placed equilaterally around the base of a recycled steel belted radial tire, chains covered in inner tubes create a unique texture. People often ask about the support of the swings as they were hung from 22' ceilings and I understand the concern but the last thing I would intend would be injury due to my art with so

much of it being about protection, care and nurturing. The weakest link in all the hardware for hanging the swings holds 3,000lbs.

I was inspired by the positive enthusiastic reaction to my work. At first most were excited to be apart of the interactive work in such an impressive gallery space. The curator was concerned at first that people would not know they could interact with the work but people entered the gallery and immediately gravitated toward the swings with child-like curiosity and delight. Often times the gallery attendant would have to act as mediator and ask participants not to swing so high. Some found a meditative quality in the comfort of the motion of swinging. I would often visit the gallery and see a spectrum of reactions, from over joyed excitement to reading quietly. Overall, the swings and *The Nest* created a community where people came together and shared, making the work a success in my eyes that exceeded my own expectations.



Figure 15, detail *North (Earth), East (Wind)*, 2015



Figure 16, detail *South (Water)*, 2015



Figure 17, Person enjoying the swing, 2015



Figure 18, MFA Thesis Exhibition installation



Figure 19, MFA Thesis Exhibition reception view, 2015

## Outcomes & Desired Outcomes

It has taken years of introspection and reflection to realize that I have been attempting to create togetherness, conversations, inspiration and dialogue through my work. The environments that I create should inspire discussions and hopefully become inspiration for change. I really want it to be an all encompassing experience.

Creating reflective spaces to motivate conversations about our civilization I want people to be aware of their consumption as part of their lives. What I hope to encourage lies within the introspection of our lives and re-prioritization of how we choose to live. I myself cannot help but be a consumer and this is a source of constant discontent with my conflicted relationship to the cycle. Though I cannot overcome this consumption, I still attempt to control my footprint in my everyday life and art work through conceptualization and visualization of material repurposing.

## Conclusion

Creating environments for conversations and communicating is my goal; a place to safely grow and learn together and learn as a community. My work frequently mimics organic cell growth as I use repetition in an unconventional narrative form. Often I setup intimate interactions and relationships between individuals to promote discussion and dialogue about these multilayered topics whether that be in how we interact with one another, our environment or how we chose to view the disposability of life. We should all be informed consumers; it takes more energy to recycle a plastic bottle than to make a new one, recycling increases energy use in transport, sorting, storing and cleaning all of these things are needed to get it back to a useful state. Because of my thoughts on consumption I have a hard time making art solely for the sense of making it. I need to know that my work is going to go somewhere, that people will see it, interact with it and possibly be changed by it. Otherwise to make it, store it and possibly add more trash to the world seems moot. It is for people to enjoy the work. Once people stop enjoying and utilizing the work it loses its meaning somehow- or its purpose. It becomes once again becomes obsolete and rubbish.



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