

For One, In A Shared Room

By

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ABSTRACT

For One, In A Shared Room is a thesis exhibition of works on paper, sculpture, video and installation visualizing the site and form of intimacy. The works collectively describe intimacy in context to the ordinary and how memory and feeling become embedded in the objects and spaces of home. Intimacy is present not just in the familiar, but also in the processes and actions we perform. Engagement with the physical and mental textures of the ordinary provides a world of fantasy and potential to reconsider contact between two people.

“Potential” in normative, familiar spaces can lead to inclusivity for queer bodies and feelings with no defined shape or space. With stores such as IKEA providing possibilities for dream homes, this thesis looks for potential to transform the ordinary and expand queer intimacy. Queer intimacy is thus a thing to be worked on.

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INTRODUCTION: YOU AND ME

The architecture of the apartment he and I live in will be of no surprise to guests and in fact, is very ordinary. With its open "just off white," roughly textured walls and the knotted weaves of the warm-hued carpet brushing their feet, the space comes off affordable; quaint and roomy enough for a nice seating arrangement perfect for hosting. For my partner Derek and me, the apartment is an open plan inviting us to fill it with objects to make it uniquely our own space.

Homes are filled with objects. Ordinary "stuff." The objects in our home carry with them stains of our stories. Actions and rituals are carried out mindlessly and performed with banal gestures and unaware grace and then slip immediately into past tense. "I cleaned the apartment. I did the dishes. I got ready for the day." Things are done and over, but in these domestic narratives and objects are triggers for new potentials. Our most intimate memories can exist in the ordinary.

For One, In A Shared Room suspends these intimate moments and objects in time to give consideration to the site of intimacy. In the context of this thesis, intimacy refers to the ordinary that is familiar and close to us, physically, emotionally, and mentally. It is a place where worlds of feelings and memories inhabit and just begin to bubble up to the surface. We consume objects and in turn, we become consumed by an affective turn towards them. We feel completed by them or triggered to an emotional state. We feel ways about the objects in our home and the space of the home itself. The exhibition allows for not just self-reflection, but self-confrontation with its themes and worlds of feelings. Its purpose is to be affective.

In her book *Ordinary Affects*, Kathleen Stewart focuses on narratives of the every day for discovering new possibilities to social issues. She writes in vignettes as an experiment to

speculate how the ordinary around us may potentially hold the answer to something not known or felt before.

Ordinary affects are public feelings that begin and end in broad circulation, but they're also the stuff that seemingly intimate lives are made of. [...] They work not through "meanings" per se, but rather in the way that they pick up density and texture as they move through bodies, dreams, dramas, and social worldings of all kinds. Their significance lies in the intensities they build and in what thoughts and feelings they make possible. The question they beg is not what they might mean in an order of representations, or whether they are good or bad in an overarching scheme of things, but where they might go and what potential modes of knowing, relating, and attending to things are already somehow present in them in a state of potentiality and resonance. (Stewart, 2007, 2-3)

Informed by Stewarts' idea of ordinary affects, I make work where an ordinary space is the subject and the objects inhabiting these spaces are the trigger for feeling and potential. I create clean images but embrace the mess of the natural scratches and wear-and-tear of life; minimal yet rich, open yet quiet. My work is a personal labor of love. I want to make people slow down and appreciate a slow, deep kind of love. My thesis presents potentials in texture, feeling, domestic spaces, and intimacy that provide images of my own ordinary narratives. From these autobiographical works come new stories of queer life to share. At its simplest, the work is about contact between "you" and "me."

FOR ONE, IN A SHARED ROOM: AN EXHIBITION

For One, In A Shared Room provides, and needs, space. Each component of the exhibition uses familiar standards of picture-viewing in a museum or gallery and is informed by my own interests in narrative linearity, poetics, and intimacy. Each area of the gallery provides space for the viewer to engage intimately with the images on the wall as separate components of the whole. They are worlds, or alternatively, portfolios of feeling and they intend to envelope the viewer.



Figure 1: Installation view of *Pillow Talk*

The first of these portfolios is titled *Pillow Talk* [fig. 1]. It is a suite of ten small soft ground etchings on paper, arranged in pairs in a single line with a break in the middle and meeting in one of the gallery's corners. Each print is an impression of a cotton pillowcase and fingers grazing its surface. The title is a reference to a colloquial phrase suggesting an intimate conversation occurring in bed, post-coital and naked in its honesty. These impressions are the honest, literal things themselves. They are both fabric and touch suspended in a moment and paired together.

The pairing is indicative of pillows on a bed – your side and my side – but also of the bodies engaged in communication – you and me. Positioning the prints in a corner, where space begins to narrow and be more confined is meant to heighten the intimacy of experiencing these prints. This confinement and linearity forces the viewer to follow this liminal narrative,

suspended from a beginning or an end and circular. These are the most visually abstracted images in the exhibition and at the same time they are literally the materials they suggest.



Figure 2: Installation View of *Our Pillows*

The second set of prints is a grouping of three large etchings, each titled *Our Pillows* [fig. 2]. These works occupy their own wall and reference each other in content, style, and composition. The prints present themselves as images of the after. They are after the sex. After the morning. After the action. After the feeling. After the talk. These images came from my practice of photographing mine and my partner's pillows after we had both awoken, with each image being differentiated by the time they were documented (one at 2:33 PM [fig. 3], one at 7:35 AM, and one at 10:34 AM [fig. 4]). Each uses careful drawing, embracing the sensitivity of cross-contour, texture, line, space, form, and value.



Figure 3: *Our Pillows (at 2:33 PM)*



Figure 4: *Our Pillows (at 10:34 AM)*



Figure 5: Installation view of *Drawing of Our Closet (Love Notes)*

The sculptural component of the installation is itself a dimensional image of the closet titled, *Drawing of Our Closet (Love Notes)* [fig. 5]. The work features multiple components: bi-fold closet doors, orange-peel wall texture, a wooden dowel rod, metal brackets, shirts hanging from wooden hangers, a shelf, a pair of drawings pinned inside the doors, and rich amounts of powdered graphite. The entirety of this arrangement is both an encapsulation of external and internal—it is both the outside of the closet and the inside of the closet, the exterior walls around the interiors of the home, and a façade concealing a private secret. The work is framed by two sets of freestanding bi-fold closet doors positioned on either side of the hanging bar.

Each door is coated in orange-peel texture and off-white latex paint, referencing the texture of the walls of an apartment. The doors are free-standing at a halfway open, right-angle position, itself creating a corner. Inside these doors are two drawings, crudely pinned to the walls with clear push-pins. [fig. 6] Both drawings are carefully copied one-to-one re-creations of other

earlier drawings made by my partner, Derek and me. The first is a silverpoint drawing based on a photograph of us on paper, cut to the shape of a manila folder and suspended from a paperclip hooked on to a push-pin. The original drawing was made on a manila folder lying around in my studio by Derek and done quickly in graphite. He hung it in my studio on a shelf, suspended by just a pushpin and a paper clip. I look at this drawing every day I am in the studio. The other is a small graphite drawing copy of a gouache painting of basil I made and gave to Derek, pinned in its center to the inside of the door. He keeps it pinned on the wall on his side of the bed. The drawings are intended to be secret rewards for viewers who inspect the full installation.



Figure 6: Detail of *Drawing Of Our Closet (Love Notes)*

The second part of the sculptural work is the inside of the closet [fig. 7, 8, 9]: a wooden dowel rod and a shelf, both held up by two metal shelf-and-rod brackets screwed in to the wall. Hanging from the rod are six shirts on wooden IKEA hangers. Each of these ready-made objects underwent the same treatment, resulting in a transformation. Each object has been re-grounded

with white paint: white enamel on the wood and metal elements and white latex paint on the clothing. This white has neutralized the objects back to a “blank state” referencing the white of a blank sheet of paper, ready to accept marks.



Figure 7: Detail of *Drawing of Our Closet (Love Notes)*



Figure 8: Detail of *Drawing of Our Closet (Love Notes)*



Figure 9: Detail of *Drawing of Our Closet (Love Notes)*

In this neutral state, I stain the materials with dense amounts of graphite powder that gets buffed down to create an almost metallic sheen. These materials are also themselves drawing tools, leaving marks on the space itself. [fig. 10] The loose graphite powder dusts the wall and the floor around the installation, leaving its trace in the same ways we leave our own in private spaces.



Figure 10: Detail of *Drawing of Our Closet (Love Notes)*

The final component of the exhibition is an HD video, titled *Can Dishwashing Be Queer?* The piece is a single-channel twenty-five performance documenting my dishwashing routine in my own apartment kitchen. It is projected onto a wall in a room adjacent to the rest of the work. [fig. 11] The sounds of the water running, the dishes clanking, and the cabinets opening and closing permeate throughout the gallery, inviting curious viewers to inspect this other room. Though the work is performed silently, subtitles appear to display random thoughts occurring during this labor. These subtitles document my process for organizing the dishes, the banality of that particular day and the event itself, and in the most tedious parts of the process reveal my hopes and my dreams for the future in the form of short wishes. [fig. 12, 13, 14] Its twenty-five minute running time is intended for the piece to not be easy or exciting for an audience to watch.



Figure 11: Installation View of *Can Dishwashing Be Queer?*

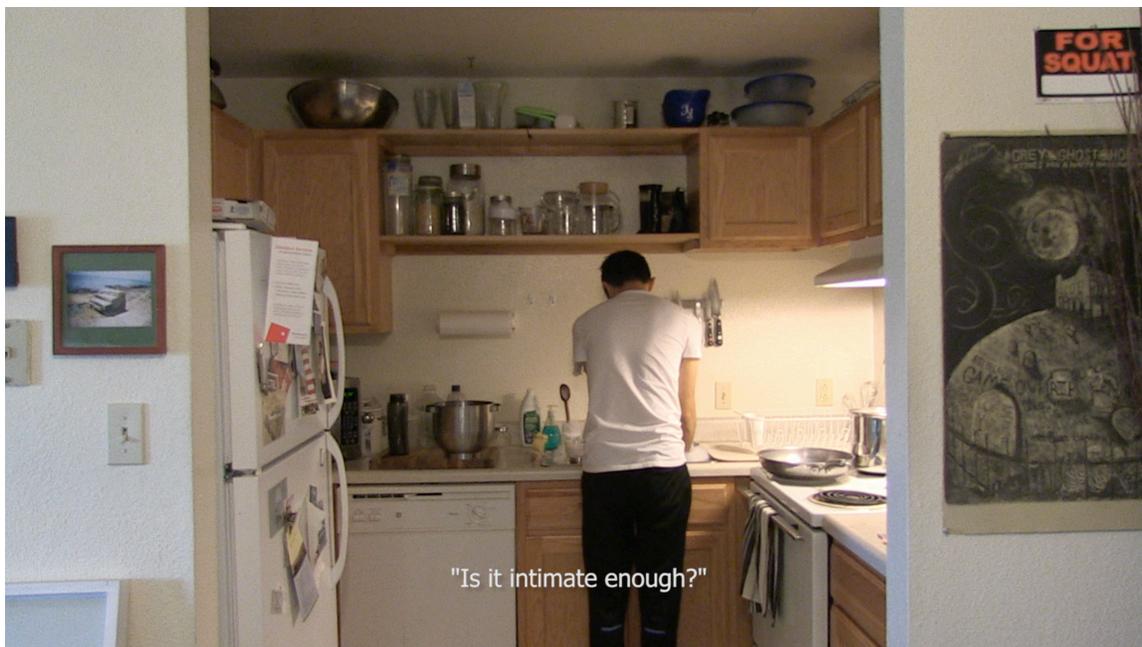


Figure 12: Still from *Can Dishwashing Be Queer?*

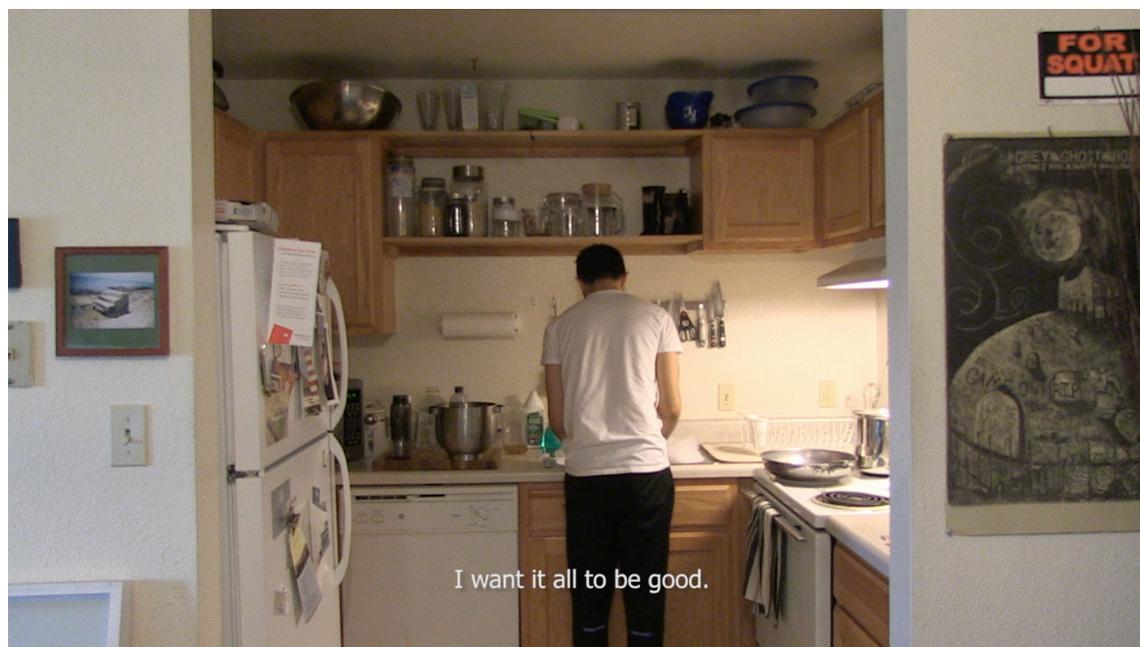


Figure 13: Still from *Can Dishwashing Be Queer?*

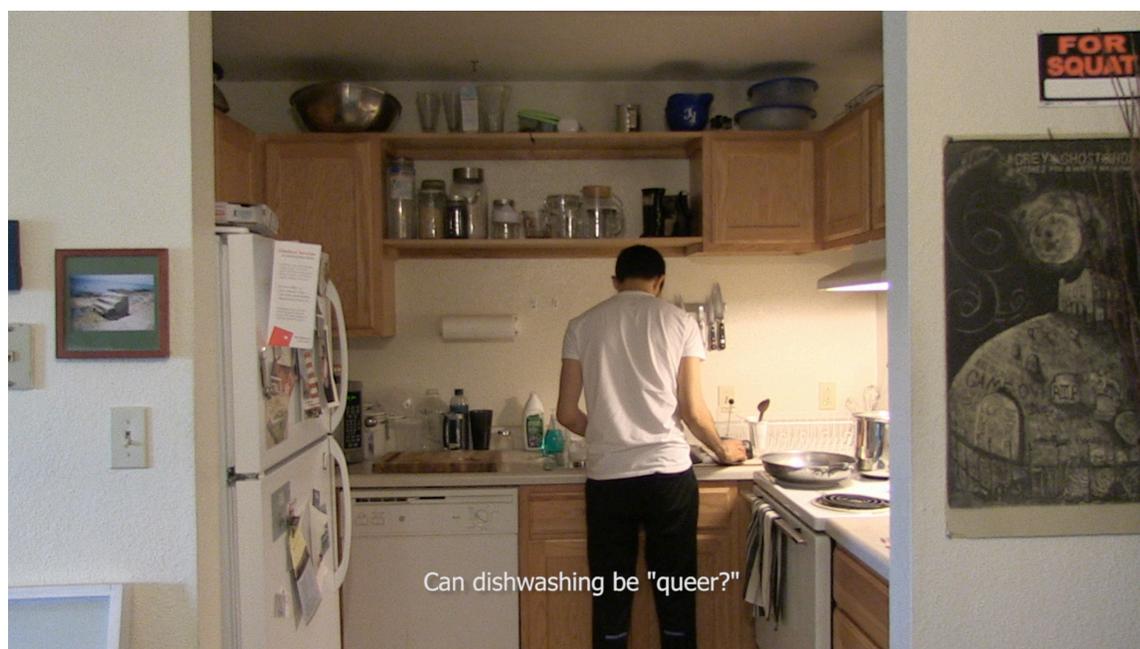


Figure 14: Still from *Can Dishwashing Be Queer?*

Each piece in *For One, In A Shared Room* suspends an intimate moment in time and invites viewers to get lost in its worlds. It is an exhibition of prints, sculpture, and video that offers impressions of intimacy centered on touch and tactility, domesticity, and speculation on what it means to be queer. The title refers to a singular body in a space meant for more than one while also quoting a commercialized idea of minimalism and comfort from the 2017 IKEA catalog.

OVERVIEW OF PROCESSES

My work is rooted aesthetically in image-making, in the broad sense of images as signs, as language, as pictures, as psychic places we inhabit and conjure up in response to nature. Perhaps more simply, an image is a potential and a trigger. WJT Mitchell lays the foundation for this approach to images contingent upon the individual and their experiences in his 1984 essay, “What Is an Image?” Images are seen not just as pictures of the world but potentials for conceiving the world. Mitchell elaborates on how images and people are inextricably linked and dependent upon one another.

If [...the] “Mind”—that is, my mind, yours, all human consciousness—were to be annihilated, we tend to assume that the physical world would continue to exist quite nicely without us. But the reverse would not be the case: if the world were annihilated, consciousness would not go on [...] If there were no more minds there would be no more images, mental or material. The world may not depend upon consciousness, but images of the world clearly do. And this is not just because it takes human hands to make a picture or a mirror or any other kind of simulacrum [...] It is because an image cannot be seen as such without a paradoxical trick of consciousness, an ability to see something as “there” and “not there” at the same time. (Mitchell, 1984, 509-10)

As an image-conscious maker, I am as concerned with pictures as I am with people. I enjoy observing people, studying them and mentally configuring how I can connect with them. Our connections result in affective exchanges that leave their impressions upon us long after the exchange itself has ended. I wish to create images that connect with people on an emotional level by providing a stillness that offers them the emotional space, or rather, “room” to feel.

“Still life” in this case may be the best descriptor for my work. Traditionally, still life pictures occupy two-dimensional surfaces depicting three-dimensional objects. These pictures tell of daily life and about the person connected to the imagery, but a still life might also refer to a pause. “A still life is a static state filled with vibratory motion, or resonance,” as Kathleen Stewart describes (Stewart, 2007, 19). My imagery typically starts as an observation or a captivation with a subject and symbolic objects related to it. Rather than appropriate imagery of the objects, I snap a photo of moment.

This snapshot is a static image of the thing itself but it may not always vibrate with the same intensity as the real object encountered. Drawing with graphite creates a new kind of smoky atmosphere, leaving a different kind of impression than the one by the photograph or the real object. It contains traces of time. There is a past and a present on the paper.

Printmaking provides an added process of labor to the image. A process like etching is a fusion of sculpture and drawing, being a harmonious relationship of mark-making and the material qualities of a copperplate and paper. Prints themselves are documents of time. In the same way time leaves its trace in the drawing, prints are infused with labor and gestures. The images are drawn and there is an autographic quality to the mark, yes, but the image requires its own time to be print too.

Paper has to soak in water. Plates sit in acid for several minutes, sometimes hours. The printer inks and wipes the surface of an etched copper plate until all excess ink has been removed. The plate and the paper must be cranked through a press. Each print carries these materials and time. Prints have a mysterious quality to them that can only be described by the time within each impression. A print embodies a labor of love.

I am attracted to the process of etching for its autographic and crisp, rich lines. No longer drawing with pencil on paper, I create marks with a steel needle through a waxy ground on a copper plate. These marks become etched in the metal when the plate is immersed in a bath of acid. The wax protects the metal from the bite of the acid and the part of the ground scratched off exposes a small bit of copper, becoming what is etched.

Once etched, the marks made directly to the ground plate become a permanent part of the material. The gestures and the traces left have impressed themselves onto the plate. After the wax has been removed and the plate inked up, it is run through a press. Oil-based ink is pressed into those lines, and when a wet sheet of paper is laid over this plate and run through a printing press at high pressure, those lines leave their impression on the paper.

Drawing in these various manners is comfortable and familiar to me. The choice to create sculptural and video-based work challenged and expanded my practice, tapping into. I was already engaged with the material. I was already engaged with the framed photographic image. The choice to examine these materials more fully was natural.

I choose to work with ready-made materials for their familiarity to the viewer. I consider the arrangements of my dimensional works in the same way I consider the still-life: a transformation or displacement of common materials achieving a new feeling or atmosphere. I chase after the fantasy of what I may have originally imagined when I first encountered these materials on my own. An ordinary wooden hanger, for instance, conjures a more luxurious feeling. The cheap apartment interiors around me disappear and the same affordable, cheap clothing once hanging on plastic hangers now has new life on this wider, different, more organic looking object. I've finally made it, I tell myself with my fancy new object.

In the ordinary objects of a still life, there is charged potential present if one stops to look at it, as Stewart proposes:

When a still life pops up out of the ordinary it can come as a shock or as some kind of wake-up call. Or it can be a scene of sheer pleasure—an unnamed condensation of thought and feeling. Or an alibi for all of the violence, inequality and social insanity folded into the open disguise of ordinary things. Or it can be a flight from numbing routine and all the self-destructive strategies of carrying on.

It can turn the self into a dreaming scene, if only for a minute. (Stewart, 2007, 19)

Setting the scene for such a suspended reality wading into fantasy is precisely the reason for working in video. Issues of time, bodies, performance, gesture, and image pervade the medium and its history. I treat video as I treat a photograph. I conceive of a scene, but instead of a snapshot, it is a recording or documentation of this time to that time. In previous works, I address the body and gesture and creating a still impression of an ephemeral moment. With the added possibility of the moving body, time and performance provide new affective strategies to tell stories that leave their impressions.

My choice to work with time-based subject matter and media derives from my own love of narrative story telling in film. As a child, I was lost in the wonder of films on television screens about giant monsters, medieval parables, or action/adventures of ordinary people doing extraordinary things. These moving images and their, often wild, narratives captivated me and took me to new worlds where I could dream up new possibilities. The imagery and stories were utopian, what José Esteban Muñoz describes as “an opening.” (Muñoz, 2009, 9) Even in my works on paper, I work serially as a way to reference frames of a movie.

Branching away from strictly graphic processes such as drawing and printmaking and into the time-based and dimensional situates my work into the space of the viewer. They become visceral, physical works carrying the potential to connect to a world of tangible feeling. In *Can Dishwashing Be Queer?*, my body and my thoughts are on display, presenting an action and a story to an audience. *Drawing of Our Closet (Love Notes)* rips the closets out of our apartment

into the space of the viewer. These new felt and tactile possibilities opened a conceptual space for my work.

FEELINGS/ IMPRESSIONS

Beautiful images of the home are delivered into our hands every day – ones that inspire and intimidate. But getting your dream living room doesn't have to be hard, especially with some simple steps that help turn fantasy into reality. You can use one to freshen up and personalize your space – or all of them for a true transformation.
- 2017 IKEA catalog

In IKEA's do-it-yourself attitude, the hand creates personal investment through time and labor and the objects put together feel more special to us (Norton, Mochon, Ariely, 2012). Our successes and failures have more value and impact emotionally when our own labor produces it. In these physical encounters, we develop a deeper familiarity with these domestic forms and for the textures within our homes.

Throughout my work, I am engaging with a similar kind of touch and tactility with the familiar, whether it is through actual touching or the representation of something tactile. When I assert my aim to make something meant to be felt, this is no small claim. Feeling encompasses a broad world of emotions and sensations. We feel the abstractions of emotions but we also feel the concrete sensations in touches. And somewhere in-between, we pre-feel, or rather we project all past sensations onto objects and anticipate a feeling. When we see a rich texture, we are drawn to touch and feel its surface, hoping it may feel how we have envisioned it. In projecting all past feeling, we create a mental abstraction of this object's feeling that may or may not align with the real feeling of that object's surface. Something may become tangible. (Ahmed, 2015)

Engaging with the physical materials in *Drawing of Our Closet (Love Notes)* provided tangibility for myself in the studio. The hangers and the rod portion of this installation have lingered with me since a large 2015 drawing I made titled *View of Our New Hangers*. [fig. 15]

The drawing itself was of the new IKEA hangers we had purchased to replace the old plastic ones we used to have. I set out to create a dimensional version of this same drawing with *Drawing of Our Closet (Love Notes)* and put these objects I handle every day into viewers' physical space. My hands were actively involved in the sculpture. I hammered, carved, sanded, and buffed the raw materials for the closet. I hand-dipped each shirt in the latex paint, massaging the paint into every fiber. Handling allowed me intimacy with each object.

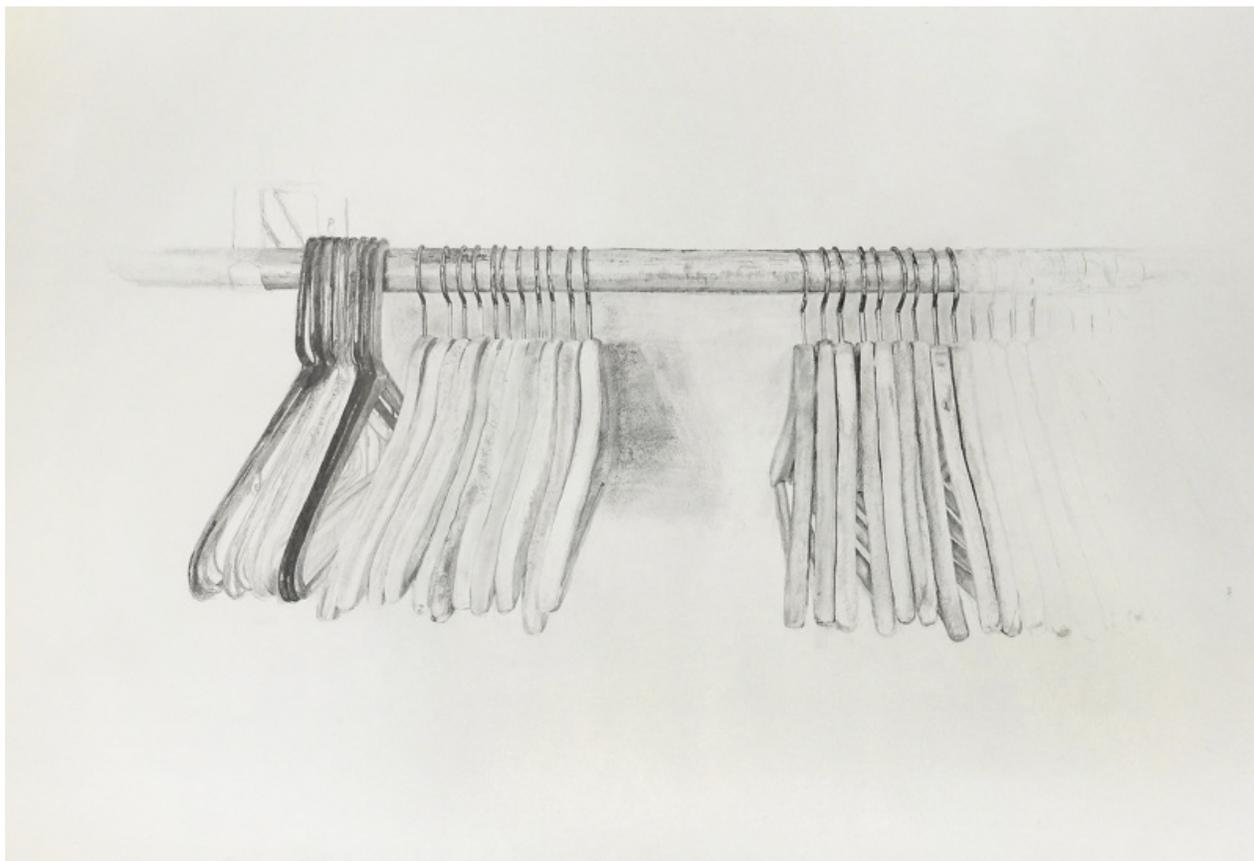


Figure 15: *View of Our New Hangers*

The texture in this piece is also a way to attract curious viewers. The free-standing bi-fold doors have a sprayed-on orange peel texture imitating the same texture of the walls in my apartment. The surfaces of the hanging hardware and clothes are covered with graphite powder

that is brushed on and buffed to a metallic sheen. These graphite objects themselves leave their trace on the physical space by marking the actual walls of the gallery space.

One of the earliest works created for this exhibition was the video piece, *Can Dishwashing Be Queer?* The video is without any edits, keeping the performance honest. While the subtitles are created in post-production, they are sincere attempts to recount actual events and feelings I had either during a particular day of dish washing or during post-production. In creating a relatable work, it becomes psychically tangible for the viewer. They too can recount the times they do dishes. They can relate to wishing they were doing something other than dishes. The gestures and the text are, in this context, felt. The world my body inhabits in the video becomes tangible.

In context with the exhibition, *Can Dishwashing Be Queer?* exists as an image in an adjacent room, but its presence goes throughout the entire gallery in the form of white noise. The video retains all the familiar sounds I would hear as a child in my bedroom adjacent to our kitchen. The running water from the faucet filling our sink. Plates, bowls, silverware, and pots and pans colliding with one another. The sounds of scrubbing being muffled by the soapy water. Cabinets opening and closing. I knew my mother was working. The sonic textures throughout the gallery are familiar and seductive, suggesting a particular kind of busyness, presence, work—something happening. The gallery is filled with a tangible sense of domesticity.

Pillow Talk is entirely about the actual touch and texture of things. [fig. 16, 17] These prints are suspended states of a moment, a gesture, a place. The soft ground method used to create these etchings is most commonly used to capture a certain kind of texture to be etched into the metal. In my past work, I would use soft ground as a way to record the texture of a pencil on paper, creating a print more closely resembling a soft pencil sketch. Those works were informed

by Mary Cassatt's own experimentations with soft ground and offered an alternative to the crisp, sharp lines commonly associated with etching. However, for these small prints, I wanted to embrace the same time-based elements from the video. Every print is not just a record of a sweet, fleeting touch, but also of the actual texture of the pillowcase.

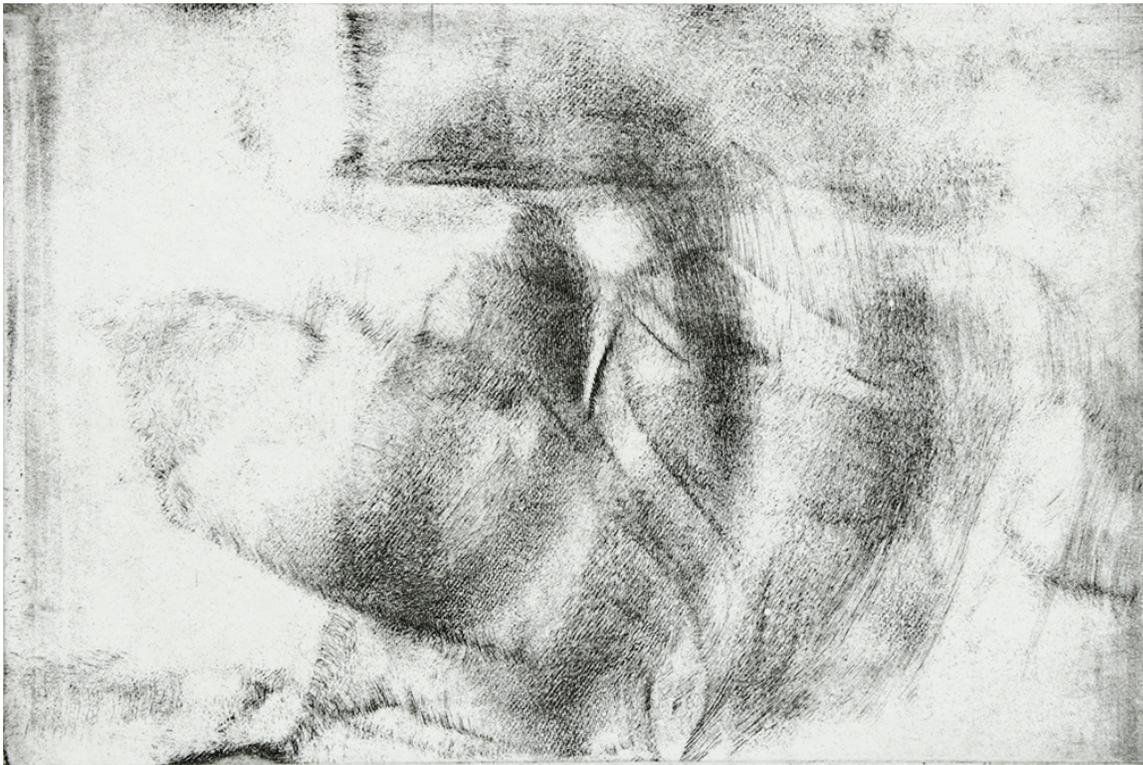


Figure 16: *Untitled* (from *Pillow Talk* portfolio)

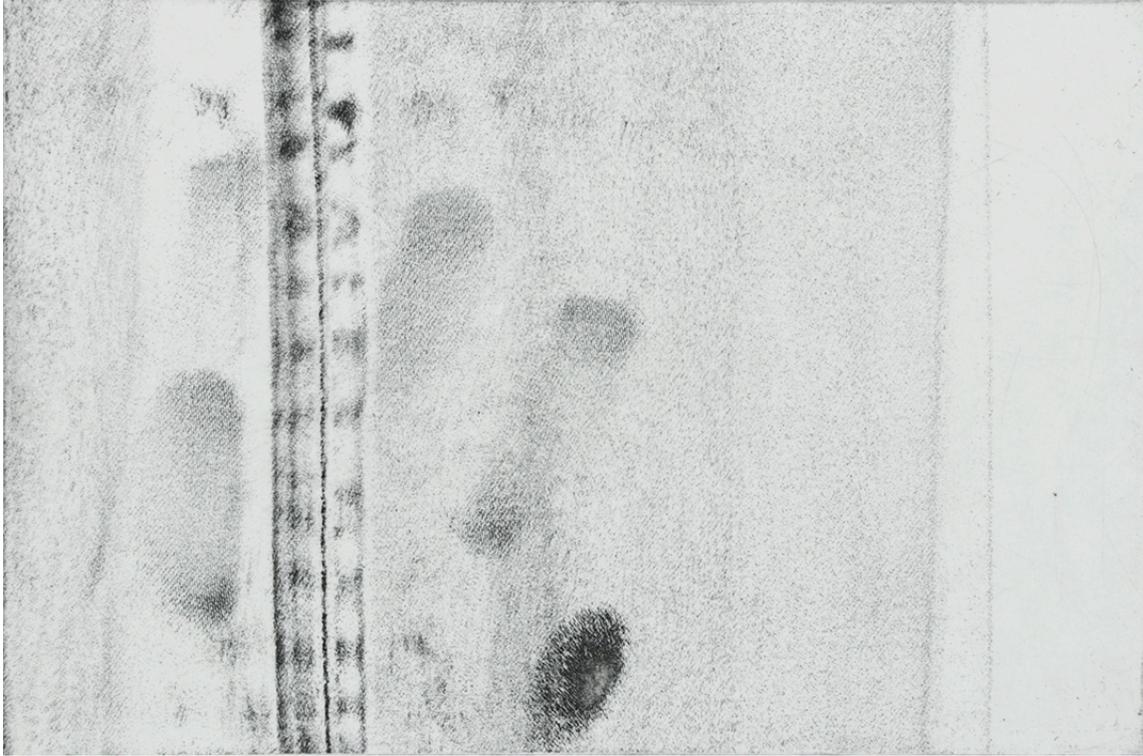


Figure 17: *Untitled* (from *Pillow Talk* portfolio)

These textures found their ways in the larger etchings. *Our Pillows* is part of an on-going documentation practice since 2013. I tasked myself with documenting the bed in the morning after my partner and I awoke, fascinated by the disheveled bed sheets and pillows. Taking the same soft ground process and pillowcase from the *Pillow Talk* portfolio, I wanted to present the drawn pillows in a dreamy textual landscape. I invite the viewer to be drawn to both the otherworldly life-size textures of the pillowcase fabric and the delicate yet crisp forms of the drawn pillows.

While the use of textures throughout the exhibition intends to give the viewer something to feel, the feeling is also psychological. These works impress upon us feelings of familiarity and comfort despite the autobiographical nature of their content. For instance, these are images of my pillows, but they are also images of pillows that could be your own. Emotion and sensation are inextricably linked to our encounters with objects. While we may consume objects, it is these

objects that come to consume us. Writing on how feeling manifests itself in the world in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed writes that we do not “experience” the abstract world of feeling, as one cannot tangibly see it. However, the feelings left by these objects (seen broadly as bodies, things, or abstractions) are "impressions."

To form an impression might involve acts of perception and cognition as well as an emotion. But forming an impression also depends on how objects impress upon us. An impression can be an effect on the subject's feelings ('she made an impression'). It can be a belief ('to be under an impression'). It can be an imitation or an image ('to create an impression'). Or it can be a mark on the surface ('to leave an impression'). We need to remember the 'press' in an impression. It allows us to associate the experience of having an emotion with the very affect of one surface upon another, an affect that leaves its mark or trace. (Ahmed, 2015, 6)

For One, In A Shared Room is thus about leaving an impression.

INTIMACY AND THE DOMESTIC

Home is the place where we can be ourselves – sweatpants and all. The outside world stays out with their expectations, schedules and dress codes. Inside is all about recharging and relaxing. When we imagine that room, it looks a bit like this. A soft and serene space with our sofa as the hero – a spot so inviting we never want to leave. Yours might look different – and it should. Because it can be whatever you want it to be.
- 2017 IKEA catalog

I like the quiet and private. I crave space to process feelings and my place in the world. I prefer to be surrounded by familiarity and confine my senses and dreams to one space. I am, what is referred to as, a "home body" and I like being inside. As Gaston Bachelard writes in *The Poetics of Space*, "our house is our corner of the world. [...] If we look at it intimately, the humblest dwelling has beauty." (Bachelard, 1958, 4) At home we are close to the walls, to our furniture, to our thoughts, to those who enter in our space, and to ourselves.

I chose the home as my focus for this exhibition for its ubiquitous familiarity. Growing up as someone who preferred to stay inside, family was incredibly important to me. In the space of the home, I witnessed dynamics between lovers impacting my contact with everyone else outside of it. I can talk for hours and I can also just sit with you quietly while we lay next to each other. I learned about love and failed love from watching my parents.

My home now, as well as my bed, has been shared with someone named Derek. For the five years we have been intimately connected, I have been learning what it means to love and to communicate more effectively than I knew. I am learning to appreciate the physical intimacy of waking up to a new day knowing someone is next to me.

I consciously include intimate details into my work and consider my struggles with love as a primary factor when I approach an image. However, this is an intimate connection between me and the work itself. Details are obscured by the process I choose, even when choosing to represent something faithfully such as pillows. Encountering my work has a voyeuristic feeling. You are seeing something happening in a single frozen moment that I am letting you see. You might have intimate knowledge of a recognizable object in my work. You might have to get close to my work to inspect something. You can in essence "get intimate" with me and/or my work.

My engagement with intimacy is not just in the details I choose to share, but also in the processes producing them. Drawing is central to my work because of the intimate nature between draughtsman, paper, and idea. We are in a particular space when we draw, inhabiting another world and "flowing" with it--we are "being." (Berger, 2005, 124). The imagery in my work, particularly with my prints and drawings, appears in a suspended state of animation, or "still life". When I am drawing the pillows on my bed, I am engaged in an intimate back-and-forth with the stillness of a moment or a set of objects. In the case of a print, these objects are not only drawn, they are etched, inked, wiped, and printed. These moments are pressed into the paper. Like a home, they are constructed moments.

Flipping through the pages of an IKEA catalog does not give the answers for what a home is, but it does give us an idea possible to pursue. Likewise, there is no absolute guidebook

for how to be intimate. In my work I am emotionally intimate by suggesting my love and my relationship (itself, a sexual intimacy), but make no definitive statement as to its success or failure.

But most intimately to me, my own hand passes over every part of the objects in my work. In the intimate gestures recorded in my *Pillow Talk* prints, fingerprints appear emergent like a hushed dialogue intimated to be happening. The copperplates are wiped with my palm before being printed. With *Drawing of Our Closet (Love Notes)*, I spent time touching and rubbing the graphite into all parts of the closet objects. And as documented in *Can Dishwashing Be Queer?*, I am hand-washing the dishes. The activity with my hands is indicative of a “work” I am referring to. In this exhibition, intimacy becomes the thing being worked on.

QUEERNESS

We all have a passion for something – like dancing, sketching, music. But it’s usually relegated to a corner or given a temporary spot in the living room. Well, not anymore. It’s time to shed old conventions about how this room should look, and instead furnish it around your passion. If you want your living room to be a flamenco club, then do it – fearlessly. The only rule is there are no rules.
- 2017 IKEA catalog

What does a queer intimacy look like in the home, then? IKEA sell us an affordable European style made for families or for one--they become ubiquitous with style and accessibility and are filtered towards commercial norms. What does a queer body that does not fit in do in these normative spaces? How can spaces be queered effectively?

Queerness provides broad, loose definitions reflective of the needs of individuals who identify as queer. I am particularly drawn to the definition of queerness referring to one's oddity and strangeness. Queerness is something interrupting or stopping you in your day-to-day moving. It forces you to look again and confront difference. The normativity queerness goes against is considered the heterosexual, the familiar, the white, the traditional, the everyday, the

ready-made, the standard. When a queer body walks into a space defined by normativity, it disrupts in ways felt to be big or small (Ahmed, 2006). Queer refers to the “other”, racially, sexually, or bodily to what we are used to. These bodies are not privileged.

Being attached to queer ideals that rail against normativity though, can be intimidating. I have a fear I am not queer enough to be "queer" by still being attached to the accessible and commercially normalized object of my desire, such as a home aestheticized by something like IKEA or marriage. Queer bodies remaining in proximity to heterosexual norms may not be able to easily escape these spaces but their failure to inhabit exclusively queer ones does not necessarily indicate them as improper, just "different" (Ahmed, 2004, 154). Differences in these normal spaces can be seen as potentials for transformation.

Drawing of Our Closet (Love Notes), engages with the symbology of the closet representing a metaphorical space a queer might "come out" from. The bi-fold doors are hardly able to conceal the entirety of the shelf-and-rod system on the wall. The doors are hardly doors themselves, acting more as solid, standing structures that "wall" off objects from the viewer. Furthermore, the aesthetic transformation with the doors and the graphite on the hardware inside the closet itself conceals and ruins the ready-made sheen of these commodity objects. These materials cease to function as they were originally but provide new surfaces, new possibilities, and new traces in the space they occupy. These objects are peculiar, strange, and “queer.”

But how can one be an “effective” queer? My own queer insecurity lies within my racial proximity to whiteness as a mixed race individual. Whiteness is a comfortable space to occupy. Being mixed-race has provided me a template to be white-acting. I can exist in a way that lets me easily “pass” in the world through emulation. Sara Ahmed suggests that whiteness produces a "starting point," a space we are "here" in and always subjected to (Ahmed, 2006, 121). Through

an awareness of this normative space, we become aware of what is imposed upon us every day and have sensitivity to those “others” who inhabit spaces uncomfortably and are themselves subjugated.

There is also a lot of whiteness in the exhibition, from the paper of the etchings, to the doors of the closet, to the framing, and most notably with the gallery walls. In drawing, white is a typical template we are given for our marks to inhabit on the paper. White also imposes itself in the galleries as a neutral context for viewing works of art. It is far from neutral though and asserts a certain political connotation of clean and expensive, reading as exclusive. One walks into the space of a white cube gallery keenly aware of where they are and the standards imposed upon works of art. In a white cube gallery, one might be ready to receive "art" but not queerness.

My choice to include intimate details is not an easy one. Details, such as brief sexual references to a male in the subtitles of *Can Dishwashing Be Queer?* [fig. 18] and a picture of Derek and me in *Drawing of Our Closet (Love Notes)* are brief and hidden. I am a deeply private person but I cannot escape the intimacy that I myself am working on. In this exhibition, each works' embedded queerness quietly invades the space, affecting viewers and leaving its queered impression upon them. Where it is actively present, such as in *Drawing of Our Closet (Love Notes)* or *Can Dishwashing Be Queer?*, my work holds its queerness only for those who want to discover them. To those who do discover them, queer possibility makes itself known.

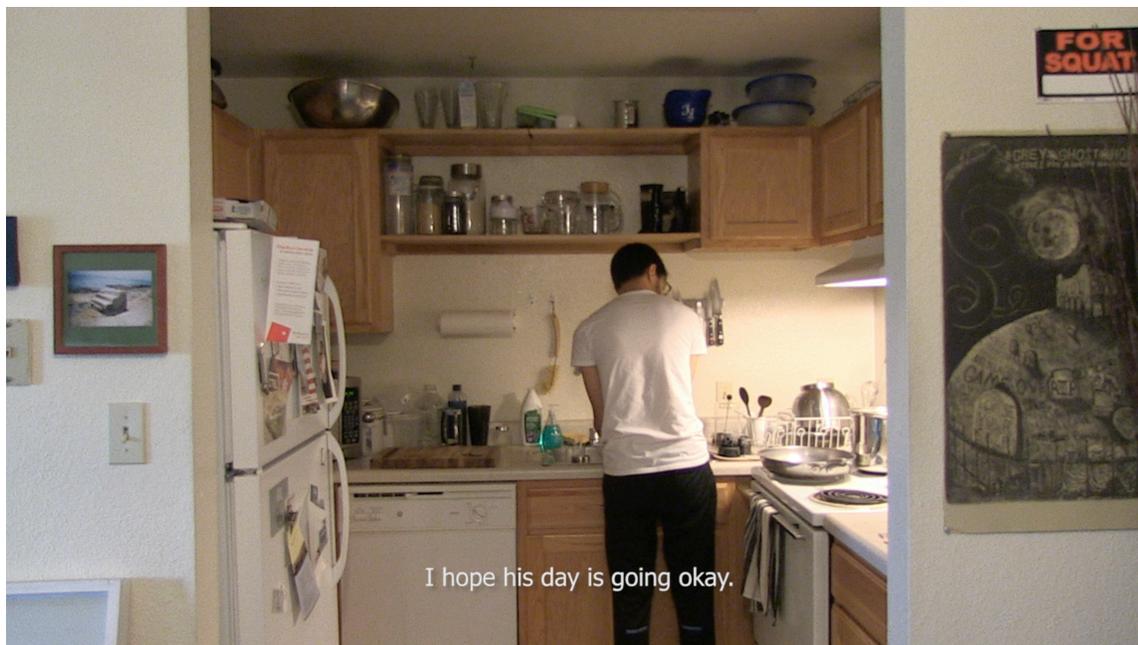


Figure 18: Still from *Can Dishwashing Be Queer?*

While the politics affecting bodies is passively a part of the work I make, I am more actively interested in how feelings can take shape by the objects we encounter. Queer for me is seen as the potential within normative spaces. My work speculates and offers up a potential to feel and conceive of new possibilities and fantasies. It is for queer people but it is also my attempt to open up a space for straight viewers to experience new feelings within the familiar.

Sara Ahmed best summarizes the possibility of queer transformation:

Queer feelings are 'affected' by the repetition of the scripts they fail to reproduce, and this 'affect' is also a sign of what queer can do, of how it can work by working on the (hetero)normative. *The failure to be non-normative is then not the failure of queer to be queer, but a sign of attachments that are the condition of possibility for queer.* Queer feelings may embrace a sense of discomfort, a lack of ease with the available scripts for living and loving, along with an excitement in the face of the uncertainty of where the discomfort may take us. (Ahmed, 2004, 155, emphasis mine)

While there may be no guide for queer intimacy and no definitive shape for these feelings to take, possibilities are right in front of us in the stories of the ordinary, the familiar, and the every day.

CONCLUSION

The day starts and ends here, among a mess of soft covers and plush pillows. And, with a bit of dreaming, it can be elevated beyond a simple place to snooze. It could feel like a hotel in a far-flung city. Or an enveloping space high up in the clouds. It could be a private island for one in a shared room. Or a stylish sanctuary that blends the personalities of two. Whatever mood you create, your bedroom will be a peaceful and personal place to spend way more than just eight hours.

-2017 IKEA Catalog

For One, In A Shared Room takes its name from the above quote found in the 2017 IKEA catalog. Flipping through its pages and seeing all the new products this company has designed, I was sold an idea of a better home. I had a moment of pause by the intimacy possible in the dream of buying a new bed or rearranging my room to be similar to the European designs. The furniture may never be bought, but nevertheless, it is utopian in its ideal. The queer intimacy that this thesis proposes to investigate is utopian. It is not yet here, but it may present itself to you.

(Muñoz, 2009) The title of this thesis is a sentiment for me and also for the viewer: I make quiet work about my attempts at intimacy that I hope connects with a “you,” the person viewing this work.

When I connect with a person, I expect the exchange of feeling to be sincere and meaningful. I view the utopian potentiality of queerness as a way to embrace being and bodies and life. “What we need to know is that queerness is not yet here but it approaches like a crashing wave of potentiality.” (Muñoz, 2009, 185) While I can provide no definitive answer for change, I look to art for its ability to transform. Art does not just represent reality, it shows the possibilities within the every day. Clare Colebrook asserts art can never be ready-made but rather it must address its own state of being. It presents reality as well as the “radically external, alien, and unreadable matters.” (Colebrook, 2011, 38-9).

The works collected here create a space for future inquiry in my practice. There are no definitive answers, only speculation. They are utopian ideas my art can provide an

approximation to. My work is about the contact between “you” and “me.” As I stay turned on to the everyday, I may find something new to share with you.

When you see my prints, sculptures, videos, or drawings, I ask you to reflect upon your own positions on intimacy and what you feel in hopes you may share these positions with someone else. My still life images show transformative potentials within the ordinary, but it is our contact with others that leave the impressions that change us. The affective potential for transformation in the world exists in “you” and “me.”

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