

Hello everyone. My name is Emelia Mary Mae Whiteside, I'm a BFA printmaking major here at PNCA, and today I will be sharing with you my thesis project: Permanence, Impermanence.

I would like to begin with a land acknowledgement. Portland, Oregon lies within the traditional homelands of the Multnomah, Oregon City Tumwater, Watlala, and Clackamas Chinooks and the Tualatin Kalapuya Peoples who were relocated to the Grand Ronde Reservation under the Kalapuya etc., 1855, ratified treaty (also known as the Willamette Valley Treaty, 1855). Today, these Tribes are a part of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. The Grand Ronde people continue to maintain a connection to their ancestral homelands and maintain their traditional cultural practices.

I grew up in Austin, Texas before moving to Portland to attend PNCA. As a young child, I spent a lot of time in nature, hiking with my mom and aunt, and spending time in my parents' backyard and on my family's land in Texas. I always enjoyed creating, and was lucky enough to attend a fine arts middle school and high school that fostered space for me to explore my artistic practice in many ways. In high school, I began integrating craft techniques, such as embroidery, into my paintings and began exploring other craft practices as well. As I continued to explore new mediums, I began to wonder if every piece of my art has been created through the practice of craft.

Craft is defined by the Merriam Webster dictionary as a verb: to make or produce with care, skill, or ingenuity. Art is defined as the conscious use of skill and creative imagination especially in the production of aesthetic objects. By these definitions, art and craft must have a symbiotic relationship with each other to exist.

For my thesis project, I created a quilt that combines four different craft practices: natural dyeing, printmaking, quilting, and tattooing. The quilt has two layers, with individual imagery taking up each of the 35 dyed squares on the front, and abstractly and intuitively placed silks on the back. I wanted to evoke feelings of nostalgia for myself that are expressed through simple yet personally meaningful imagery. On the

front of the quilt, I screen printed illustrations related to my childhood memories and experiences of Texas with a border of barbed wire and insects surrounding them. The front layer has been dyed with materials common to Texas, while the back combines Texan materials and Oregon materials, to represent the present: my reconnection with the land.

I began focusing many of my projects around learning to dye ethically with natural materials this past year. Until synthetic dyes became popular in the 19th century, all pigments came from natural sources for thousands of years across the globe.

Working with the land has become a sacred practice for me. My mentor, Sara Siestrem, has helped me reconnect with my Indigenous Mexican heritage, and she has helped me learn to take time to create a relationship with the Earth. I am learning to talk to the trees and ask the plants for their permissions.

I chose to utilize dye plants that were overall common to Texas rather than native to Texas not only because I did not want to limit my options, but also because I wanted to utilize plants that would benefit the environment by removing them if aggressive non-native, also known as invasive species. When gathering native species, it is important to take small amounts of material from multiple areas so each plant will not be over gathered.

I used the book *Edible and Useful Plants of the Southwest* to guide much of my gathering and dyeing, as this book contains information on each plant that is useful as a dye and what mordants will create different colors. However, since natural dyes often carry surprises, I did not plan the colors of my dyes. Rather, it was a very experimental process, and I did not want to fight with the materials. I let the dyes become whichever colors they wished to create.

When gathering the dye materials, I wanted to connect to the land I grew up in, and collaborate with my environment. I gathered on my family's private land in both Austin and Brenham in Texas. Both of these places hold memories of my childhood that I drew

inspiration from and reflected on as I returned to gather dye materials. My great aunt helped me find plants on her land in Brenham, since she knows her land very well. My mom also came to Brenham to help gather and document the process. In my parents' backyard in Austin, I gathered mostly on my own. It reminded me of playing in the backyard when I was a child, spending time with the plants, and the heat of the sun, and the thoughts circulating in my mind.

I utilized silks to make up the squares and layers of the quilt. Silk is a protein based fiber, and natural dyes tend to take much better to this kind of material than cellulose fibers. Silk, however, is more challenging of a fabric to sew with, so this piece required lots of time and patience.

I alternated methods of dyeing for different plant materials. For some plants I used the simmer method, where you add the materials to boiling water, and simmer them until the water turns colors, and add the silk with the materials to soak up the pigments. Other plants I gathered in jars, and added water with the materials and silk sealed inside. These would sit for much longer. Some plant materials needed both methods combined. The timing of the dyeing process was mostly intuitive; I listened to what the dyes wanted rather than strictly following recipes. If something did not work, it was not meant to happen, and a lesson was learned. Failure was never a waste, because it yielded knowledge.

I have also been creating my own iron mordants from discarded rusty objects, which change the colors of the dyes and deepen them. A mordant is mainly used to help the dye pigment adhere to the fabric. The word mordant comes from Latin *mordere*, meaning "to bite." To make iron mordants, I walk around my neighborhood and collect discarded rusted objects I find. I put these materials into glass jars and add a mixture of white vinegar and water. Time is the only other ingredient. The mixture must sit for around a month before it turns orange and can be added to dye mixtures. When dyeing the silk materials for this quilt, I experimented with adding iron and mixing plant dyes together as well to attain as vast a variety of colors as possible.

-Yaupon leaves and twigs yielded a light tan with darker tan spots, while the berries turned the silk a warm light pink. When I added my iron mordant to the yaupon berries, the silk turned a warm gray with black variations.

-Oak gall powder turned a golden tan, and with the iron, a light periwinkle with a quick dip or a dark gray, almost black, if I allowed it to sit longer.

-Blackberries turned the silk a dull fuschia.

-Pomegranates turned it to a dusty pink, or with iron, slightly more brown toned.

-Greenbriar berries yielded a cooler pink. I added iron to two different batches, one turned tan with green and gray variation, and another turned dusty blue.

- The bedstraw plants turned a very light mint green, and black walnuts turned a warm dark brown.

-Jack-O-Lantern mushrooms, the only fungi I experimented with, turned the silk a green toned tan.

The natural dyes will fade with time and exposure to the sun, but the printed images should remain. Certain parts of this quilt are more permanent, while others are ephemeral.

I began my journey of printmaking practices my first year here at PNCA. I quickly learned that printmaking requires only two things: a matrix and a substrate, so the possibilities of mediums are quite vast. Print can be as experimental as you would like to make it, and allows for different crafts to be integrated into the medium. I enjoy printing on fabrics and the possibilities that come with sewing and construction when the crafts are combined.

For this project, I created 42 screen printing negatives in total. I first drew the images digitally on Procreate, then printed them out and traced the lines with opaque markers onto frosted duralar. I added shading with pencil to add texture and depth to each illustration. I exposed these negatives onto my screens, and printed each image onto a dyed silk square or a longer silk border. I used black water-based ink with lots of transparent base to make it less opaque and lay thinner on the silk fabrics. Although this quilt will probably never be washed, I added a catalyst to the ink to prolong the lives of the images as much as possible. I matched the imagery with the colors of the dyed silks based on my memories of each image, and chronologically ordered them. The order is not exact, some images are attached to multiple moments, or a pet that I had for many years, or objects that still reside in my parents house. These images exist in my memories then and now.

- The birdhouse that hung outside my first home in Austin
- One of my first childhood pets, a blue Betta Fish named Mr. Blue Fish
- Shells seen on walks on the beach
- A Peacock from a Park in Austin where many reside, which I called "The Peacock House" as a child
- A curled up cat to resemble my many childhood pet cats
- A Rose from the garden of my first home, where deceased cats were put to rest
- A small brass rocking horse, an object of my mother's
- A bat to represent the millions that live in Austin, that I became fascinated with at a young age
- Blackberries to remember the pies my aunt and I would make together, and the cobbles my grandmother would make for me
- Horseshoes to remember my Great Aunt's horses that I got to ride as a young child
- Acorns with faces drawn on them that my aunt and I would collect and bring to life together
- A Centipede that instilled my fear of bugs
- My childhood dog, Bonnie
- A kissing hand from a favorite childhood book

- Foxgloves from another childhood book, and they forever became my favorite flower
- A spider and their web, a memory of realizing that all beings can create beautiful things.
- My childhood pet frog, little foot
- A Crepe Myrtle branch that grew through the window of my second childhood home
- A lucky rabbit's foot charm I had as a child, that my dog Bonnie joyfully consumed as a snack almost immediately
- I remember seeing anole lizards everywhere, and they would often sneak inside our home.
- A Grackle, a common bird in Texas that emit a purple-blue glow in the sun
- A fan to represent those at my parent's wedding that kept us cool in the summer heat
- A Leopard Moth I saw on the porch of my third and final childhood home
- A Magnolia flower from the trees in the backyard of this home
- A Scorpion to represent those I would often see and fear at my grandparent's house in San Antonio
- A Pomegranate to resemble the tree in my parents' backyard that we would harvest and eat
- A Snake to represent the many I would see in Texas as well as an ode to my final childhood pet, a python named Oatmeal
- A Blue Bonnet, my grandmother's favorite flower
- An Armadillo I saw on a dark night in the headlights of the car
- a cowboy hat I remember my grandpa wearing when I was young
- Cowboy boots to signal my obsession with Western imagery as I grew older
- A Cow from my grandparents' farm in Sealy, Texas
- Scissors in the shape of a crane, that I began using when I learned to sew and embroider, sparking my love for craft
- A prickly pear cactus that used to be rampant in my parents' backyard before last year's freeze.
- An Owl, to represent those I often saw growing up in Texas, and to also represent the death of my childhood and beginning of adulthood.

The border of barbed wire reminds me of some of my family members' farms that I spent time at during my childhood. Sharpness to juxtapose the comfort of the quilt, yet barbed wire also brings me comfort in a reminder of the vast lands encased by them. Each corner is held by an insect familiar to my childhood: A mosquito, a bee, a cicada, and a lightning bug. Midway through each of the side borders resides a tree cockroach, which would often hide in my childhood homes due to the Texas climate.

The printing process of these images was very repetitive and meditative. I had four smaller screens to work with, each of which could fit two negatives, so I could print eight images in one round before having to wash out and expose the next set. The barbed wire borders were too large to fit on my smaller screens, so I used my large 44" fabric printing screen to print these negatives. As I printed each row of the front squares, I sewed them together, and the quilt began to form.

This project was my first multilayered quilted piece. In the past, I have sewn single layered patchwork pieces that resemble quilts, but this project was a very big leap for me. I enjoy the idea of a quilt. An object that is comforting, warm, and functional, yet still requires an immense amount of work and artistic skill and design. The perfect balance between art and craft, and an object that carries an immense amount of history within each stitch.

Quilting techniques originated from a multitude of cultures around the world, and quilts function both as usable blankets and decorations in the home. Collaborative quilting became a social activity for women in nineteenth century America, called quilting bees. When a woman was engaged or during special occasions, bees were held and became centers of socialization. Individual squares would be completed at the home, and during the bees the quilt would be pieced together. These bees were crucial for women because they were often the only place they were not dominated by patriarchal values, and individual political views were free to be shared.

For their thesis at PNCA in 2011, Heather Chase created quilts made from items given to them by family members, creating a topographical-like landscape of their family

history. I wanted to evoke a sense of nostalgia connecting to my childhood in my own piece, and create a self portrait through my quilt. I wanted to connect in a similar way to my past as Chase has done with their work here.

Another creative influence for me are the quilters of Gee's Bend. Gee's Bend Quilting Collective was founded in 2003 by fifty Black quilters who descended from the enslaved people of the Gee's Bend cotton plantation in Alabama established in 1816. The quilts created by the residents of Gee's Bend are unique in that many of their designs are based on the intuition of the quilter and are abstract in their patterning. Many of the materials used are upcycled clothes and fabric scraps, creating personal works of art that are also sustainable in relation to the environment. The quilts created by the people of this collective have greatly influenced modern American art and remain a crucial part of American history. They have influenced my work in that I am inspired by this group to work with my intuition rather than against it. The back of the quilt had no distinct plan for its construction. I used the leftover Texas-dyed silks combined with dyes I made from gathered materials in Oregon and began to sew pieces together until I had a surface large enough to match the front. While the front of the quilt required much more focus, the back felt much more meditative to sew.

Another practice that feels extremely meditative to me is tattooing. Tattooing is a craft that has been an important part of many cultures around the world for thousands of years. The earliest tattoos discovered date back to the Neolithic period. Tattoos have had many functions historically in different cultures, but a few examples are for identification, self expression, forms of protest, and rites of passage. Native American groups throughout the American Southwest and northern Mexico traditionally used the spines of a prickly pear cactus for tattooing. The spines were attached to sticks or other tools and bound together, with more than one spine often grouped together similar to modern tattoo needles.

In post-colonial American traditional tattooing, flash sheets are a collection of pre-drawn illustrations available to be tattooed by anyone, on anyone. The purpose of these sheets is to provide a fast tattoo service, "in a flash." In tattoo shops, the walls are usually



covered with flash sheets for clients to pick their desired design from. Flash sheets have also evolved within contemporary tattooing, and many artists will now create digital designs posted on social media, for their clients to choose from. These designs are specific to the artist, and can be claimed before the appointment or during. Although there is still negative social stigma attached to tattoos, they are becoming more acceptable in modern day American culture. Viewing the craft of tattooing as an art form broadens the concepts of fine art and increases possibilities for artistic mediums.

I began to learn hand poke tattooing nine months ago to adorn my own body as well as close friends. Hand poke relies on the hand of the artist and a needle rather than a machine, and the image of the tattoo is created from hundreds to thousands of tiny dots. I quickly had a large demand from others in Portland to tattoo them as well, and began my journey as a tattooist. I found the practice to be so enjoyable that it doesn't feel like work to me. It is such an honor to have others wear my art for the rest of their lives. Each session is a collaborative effort between me and my client, to create a permanent jewelry delicately poked into their skin. I allow my friends and clients to choose from my pre-drawn flash, or we can work together to create a custom piece.

I enjoy using recognizable symbols that people are able to relate their own experiences to as well within my work. The imagery I chose to include reflects symbols of my childhood in Texas. However, these images, although I drew them, do not solely belong to me. Memories can have dualities that are shared among people. One image to me will have a different memory to another. Tattoo flash reflects these ideas in that many people will share the same flash tattoo, but will have a completely separate memory, or the imagery repeated may have a different meaning. Perhaps one or more of these images you see here today resonates with a memory of yours. This quilt will eventually hang in my future tattoo studio in New York, where the images will be shared with others through tattooing as a flash sheet. These images will live permanently and impermanently on the bodies of those who they resonate with enough to adorn themselves with, for the rest of their lives, as living art. Their bodies one day will return to the earth, as we all will. Nothing is permanent, except time.

Time has been one of my most crucial materials for this project. I wanted to slow down as much as possible in an environment that feels so fast paced and demanding. There are easier ways I could have gone about creating this quilt, however, reflecting on my past while making this object is very important to me, so I created a slow, meditative practice that would still allow me to finish this project in time to present to you today. If I had more time, I would have liked to hand sew the quilt, but I used mostly a sewing machine with some smaller details hand-stitched. I also originally planned to monotype screen print the imagery, but since this method is a much longer and more tedious one, I had to choose between drawing the print negatives by hand or monotype printing, and I wanted to spend more time with the imagery. However, the life of this project is far from over. This quilt, created from craft, time, and meditation, acts as an symbolic self portrait that holds my past, present, and future memories, and it will become a part of the memories and bodies of others through the practice of tattooing. Overall, this quilt will be a living object, continuously evolving through time.

I would like to acknowledge those who helped me on my journey of creating this work.

I would like to thank the land for gifting me a never ending source of colors, and each and every material used.

My mom, for helping me gather materials in Texas and documenting the process.

My great aunt Kathy, for guiding me through her land and helping me gather materials.

My grandmother Sue for bringing me many, many jars to store and ship materials in and to begin the dyeing process.

And lastly, my thesis mentor and chosen family, Sara Siestreem, who helped guide me through the entire process of creating this quilt as well as helped guide me in reconnecting with my indigenous ancestry.

Thank you for your everlasting support, and thank you all for showing up to see this work today.

I can take questions now.