

FLOPPY  
PHALLICS

E M M A J A N E C O V O D E

Stamps School of Art and Design

Integrative Project Thesis 2016

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86% of armed robberies are committed by men. 77% of aggravated assault charges are committed by men. 61 of the 62 mass shooters in the past 33 years are men. Gun violence is happening more in our homes, schools and cities with accidents, mass shootings, terror attacks and homicides. This violence has been tangled by a web of media coverage and politics around gun culture that hides the root of the issue.

Masculine norms, generated and perpetuated by a dominant class, are the root of violence against women and other

men. This class, the western white male, has instituted dominance throughout the world and heavily in the United States. Societal norms and stereotypes have produced gendered objects of violence, specifically firearms, that in their design and use, perpetuate patriarchal values.

For my IP thesis I am investigating the social construction of masculinity as manifested in the phallic design of firearms. By making silicone handguns made out of silicone that are fleshy and floppy in nature, I am asking viewers to consider; Is violence gendered? How are weap-

ons gendered? How do weapons act as extensions of our physical bodies?

To detail and address these questions, the contextual background will articulate my stance on guns in America and their connection to patriarchal values. Then I will narrate my creative process, referring also to my artistic influences and inspirations and the different lives this project has lived throughout the year.

The shapes are weapons, specifically guns. The texture and consistency are skin like, squishy to the touch, floppy and phallic. Two objects compared are the hu-

man body, and the human reflection and responsibility of the gun. Where does the skin stop and the object start, does an object become a part of you when you are holding it? How does it live otherwise? How do we worship ideas and their objects in our lives. What pedestals do we give to certain objects? This year long project has been an exploration of these questions.



## CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

### *Context of western, racial, gender roles:*

To understand how our current state of gun violence has come to be, I will dissect the constructs of the western white male, and how it is sustaining its social dominance. The rise of gun violence in the United States, is a prominent issue that has divided the nation in public opinion through the constitutional interpretation and validity of the Second Amendment. The Second Amendment, or the right to bear arms, was constituted in a time where the ruling identify was the land owning white male. The standard baseline for a powerful identity

in our culture has been for many years, white and male. Although our society has made strides in terms of equality for many different identity groups, the foundations on which our country was created are still widely implemented today. We can see this in the clear binary between male and female, man and woman. Western, white, male roles provide the 'neutral' for many norms and situations. For example, white men have held all of our nation's presidential terms, with the only exception of Barack Obama's two terms. There have been no men of any other racial group, and no

women of any racial group to hold the office. With this in mind, I aim to make the physical and social connections between a gun and a penis. It is important to point out where biological differences between the sexes become apparent in our social hemisphere. This infiltration of anatomy into social gendering of objects, norms and practices may be subconscious to many. The penis, one of the few biological differences between men and women, that has helped to generate the social and gender norms around firearms we have today.

### *Masculine Design of Weapons:*

The definition of phallic reads 'a phallus is a penis, especially when erect, an object that resembles a penis, or a mimetic image of an erect penis.' Phallic objects have been widely analyzed in art history analysis of monuments, artwork and design objects that are explicitly phallic in nature. This analysis of phallic objects and gendered objects is articulated by Pat Kirkham, in the book "The Gendered Object". The book discusses objects designed and marketed towards a certain gender. She makes that connections between the design of guns the anatomical

design of the male reproductive organs. Both guns, and the male reproductive system eject a product that was inside of them, triggering bullets and sperm, into the world. The intention of these releases differs, but the makeup and shape is inexplicably similar. Susie Mckellar, a scholar who wrote a chapter in Pat Kirkham's "The Gendered Object," details these comparisons, "When considering gender and designed objects, it is hard to conceive of something more apparently masculine than a gun - a potent symbol of masculinity in a world of calibres and carbines which has historically excluded

women." She crafts the gun as a symbol of masculinity that further institutes the binary between men and women in gun culture. She reiterates that gun ownership is a male construct, "Discussions about gender and firearms frequently make reference to psychoanalysis; indeed the so-called 'priapic theory of gun ownership' has been used. They argue that 'weapons are phallic symbols representing male dominance and masculine power' and regard 'the need for a gun as serving libidinal purposes... to enhance or repair a damaged self-image... and involving narcissism... passivity and insecure-

ity” (McKellar, 71). This point, delves into the idea that guns are used and created to keep males in power. By defining guns as masculine, it does not exclude women from gun culture, but creates a binary between the two identities. When women use guns, they are masculinized and seen as unfeminine. McKellar illustrates this point by profiling the Smith and Wesson Model 3913 handgun and its redesign in 1990, the “LadySmith” 9mm semi-automatic handgun. The redesigned gun came with smaller grip, pink accessories and a “LadySmith” engraving on the barrel. It was essentially the same gun, but

with slight gendered design changes. The design changes also brought attention to different marketing efforts of Smith and Wesson and the research behind why women are arming themselves, and why gun ownership for women has increased. McKellar argues that “The majority of American women who are arming themselves for self-defence, are scared, and are doing so reluctantly. Gun ownership amongst women is not considered an American birthright as it is for men and, consequently, does not hold the same significant that it does for men.” (McKellar, 78). This American birthright, sancti-

fied by the Second Amendment, is incessantly debated in the current discourse about gun violence in this country. McKellar argues that women were not considered when the Second Amendment was constituted, and therefore is not a platform for which to debate the equality for men and women. “Under the rose-wood and black rubber, the ‘female’ and ‘male’ guns discussed are equal as functional objects, but women’s guns do not represent the last frontier on the road to equality. This is because, although they can kill, they are bought for different reasons. These guns are designed and

sold as objects of defense to women who ‘value growth and preservation’, not as objects of aggression and violence for ‘death and destruction’ (McKellar, 78). The proposition that men and women use guns for inherently different reasons speaks to the gendering of violence, that women are using guns predominantly for self-defense and not in the aggressive nature they were constructed for men. In marketing efforts for advertising by Smith and Wesson and lobbying material showed “ . . . representations of women by gun manufactures and handgun control lobbyists as the caring and re-

sponsible members of society underline how “unnatural” armed women are, and how the gun has been exclusively coded as ‘male.’” (Kirkham, 78). This ‘code’ is a key component in the gendering of objects we all adhere to, we consciously or subconsciously understand the gender language. The design of the “LadySmith” is one example of a gendered objects that in its feminization, contributes to the masculine attributes of violence.

***Sexualized Guns in Popular Culture and its Affect on Violence in America:***

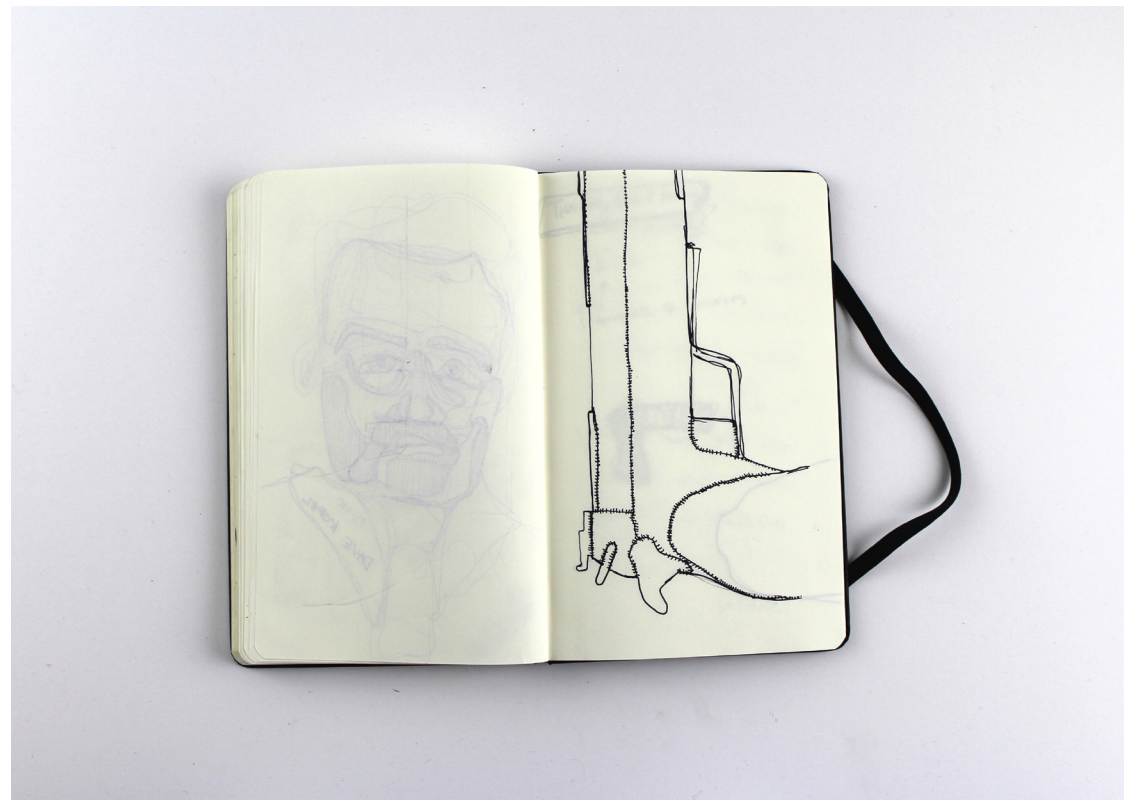
In American popular culture there are many examples of sexualized guns and

violence that contributes to the cycle of violence against women by reinforcing gender roles and stereotypes. In the 2012 movie “Spring Breakers” with James Franco, he is seen in several sex scenes with young women giving oral sex to a handgun. A kitschy, avant-garde film that is criticizing the western concept of “spring breaking”, shows young women on a quest for an adventure. The women in this scene, find themselves in a position of power by taking his gun and putting it in his mouth, sexualized the guns and created a reverse gender dynamic. This scene shows both the sexualization

of guns and helps define sexual norms by showing its opposite. The women become an extreme, a fetish, so far from the social norm that it is praised as art. This may be a domination fantasy, two objects they thought were theirs - the gun and the woman - and turn them against them in a sexual act. Guns used in sexual acts show their phallic design as well as their masculine characteristics. In a more streamline example of gendered violence, the documentary “Tough Guise II” by Jackson Katz details the media coverage of violence against women and how news outlets systemat-

ically refrain from discussing men when they are the perpetrators. He proposes that violence against women is a “men’s issue”, as opposed to the common theme of female based terminology around sexual assault, and should be spoke about as such in the media. He focuses overwhelming statistics of crimes committed by men. As I said in the opening paragraph of this paper, Jackson Katz reports that 86% of armed robberies are committed by men, 77% of aggravated assault charges are committed by men and 61 of the 62 mass shooters in the past 33 years are men. But this is not





represented in the media. He purports that the media is an example of a western white male construct that aims to displace blame for violence against women away from that identity group of the white male. The media industry is a tool used to sway public opinion and perception by hiding the prevalence of white male crimes. Both of these examples of gendered contribute to the underlying foundation of gendered violence in America. Guns are explicitly masculine in their design and use, but when they are used by white males for a mass shooting

- they are nothing but a troubled shooter, lacking gender specification and accountability. Phallic firearms are an easy target for making the comparison between the origins of violence in our culture and masculine norms that it produces. There are plenty of other examples of this, and even prior to the invention of guns, violence was gendered. Swords are arguably phallic in design and technical purpose, and the bow and arrow are the origin of the modern gun. Poison is a weapon that is not as masculine and perhaps that

is why we see women associated with death by poison as opposed to guns and knives. Even today, suicide for women is associated in literature and reality with non-masculine weapons. It is important to understand the origins of different types of violence, and the prevalence of certain types over others. Whether we see it in the design of firearms, the sexualization of violence in pop culture or the biases of the news media industry, violence has roots in both biological and social constructions - and should be treated as such.





## CREATIVE WORK & METHODOLOGY

I delved into my own redesign of the firearm. This time, not a new gun for women, but a gun that explores how the root of violence is masculine. I experimented with different approaches, materials and vantage points. Guns - a trigger warning triggered object that brings many preconceived notions and personal experiences that taints any experience to do with guns. I made a series of handguns out of laser cut acrylic - I was interested in the functional parts of guns, and making non-functional guns out of semi-precious materials. The acrylic guns reacted

well with light, and gave off a 'crown-jewel' effect. My first experiments with guns were unsuccessful in use of material, but helped solidify that I wanted to make commentary about the current state of gun culture in our country but with something more at the root of the problem. Thinking about repurposing this cultural object, the handgun, brought me back to the other experimentation with guns. I made a gun out of stitched together pigskin that looked as alive and real as human skin. Why not make the direct connection between the penis and a

gun? The pig skin was too precious, hand stitched and living. I wanted something more manufactured and industrialized. I made a mold of a BB gun I purchased. It's an interesting experience buying a gun on Amazon, having it show up at your house, take it to school and make silicone mold out of it. This started my experimentation with silicone guns.

Influenced by David Cronenberg's use of guns as an extension of the body, I manufactured a gun that resembles human flesh through color, texture and density. By color I mean skin color.

By texture, I mean skin attributes like wrinkles and discoloration. By density, I mean a consistency that aligns with the floppiness and elasticity of the flaccid penis. When the guns are picked up, they seem to mold in with person's hand. The immediate reaction is for them to shake the gun, wobbling it around to make it bend and reform to its original shape. I tested out different elasticities, the first gun I made with a high grade urethane that made it very hard. This was too aggressive, too erect. To reflect a more natural state of the penis that can be ma-

nipulated I used a silicone that was less hard. This created a floppy nature that I was happy with. I was also influenced by Sarah Sitkin, a Los Angeles artist I came across on Instagram who uses silicone and realistic materials like hair and teeth to create real looking sculptures. Her sometimes uncomfortably real, but abstract work showed me that you can make connections without directly defining body parts. Her self portrait series is a completely abstract departure from traditional movie set FX applications of silicone - and I fell in love with that.





The floppy nature also brought along a sexual aspect to the gun. Like a sex toy or dildo, the gun became a sexualized object. The argument can be made that guns by themselves are sexualized in popular culture that gives them a certain air of power, glamour and sexual appeal. The elasticity and aesthetics of the gun directly connected it with sex toys and ultimately genitals and sexual intercourse. The squishy and floppiness of the guns make it very fun to play with, but that makes it too easy for humans to allow their playful instincts to take over -

and miss the serious point that guns are masculine and fucking the world. These guns are specimens of evidence of the current culture we live in. Size and scale trump a kitschy sex toy, bringing back to life an internal connection to weapons and our bodies. Sexualized things, self conscious in their presentation. Shoved into a glass box, they are anatomical evidence of our time. Squished, manipulated, and moved the boxes and motors creates a new shape, and their bendability is showcased - put there by me.

## ARTISTIC INFLUENCES

Some creative influences that have inspired and influenced me for different reasons. This is more of a list artists who I pull little parts of their lives and work for inspiration. **Chloe Wise** for her silicone pancake handbag sculptures. I admire this series of hers for its kitschy, playful play on designer handbags. She's making fun of them, making them out of gooey pancakes and slippery syrup. **David Cronenberg** and his movies, *The Fly* and *Videodrome*. The movies influenced me to think about weapons as an extension of the body, and gave me ideas for

how to make them realistic, life-like and something out of a bizarre sci-fi film. **Sarah Sitkin's** Self Portrait series is a super weird and unsettling use of silicone and hair. It's an abstract look at how she thinks of herself, and how she connects with the material. **Noah Scalin** did a series of guns made out of resin, enamel and acrylic that look like an AK-47, for example, that has been sliced in half and its organs are showing. This was very interesting for me to see because he was making the direct connection between humans and weapons by giving them an-



Chloe Wise



Noah Scalin



David Cronenberg



Sarah Sitkin

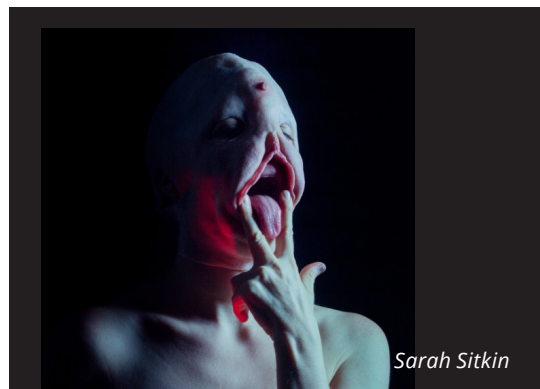




Roxy Paine



Chloe Wise



Sarah Sitkin



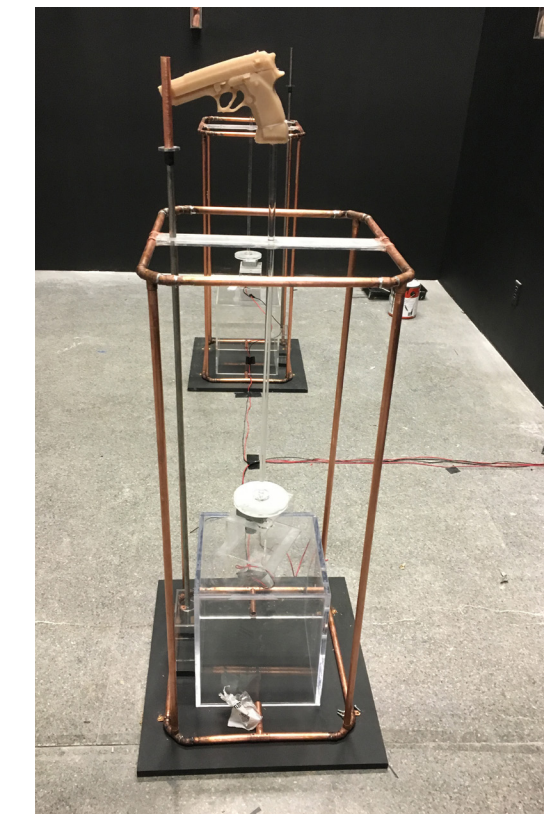
Guy Broadhurst

atomical attributes. The series is named Anatomy of War, making another connection to war and anatomy. I am making a similar comparison, and I love his use of material and text on his website. Other artists who have inspired me are Roxy Paine for his simple aesthetic of repurposed products. **Pepón Osorio** with *The Bed* (1987) that was made of mundane items of his culture creating an large bed frame along with many others.

## INSTALLATION & DIFFERENT LIVES

I am actively against standalone, basic white pedestals. In the last month of the project - the installation became more important that the floppy phallics for a little while, as I thought about how they would be presented. I have always hated when art pieces are displayed on a pedestal - and thought that this tied into my work more than I had thought before. Giving these guns a phallic pedestal of their own seemed like a good idea. I wanted to make them move- to show people in the gallery space how they can bend and flex - but I didn't just want gal

lery lookers to be holding them. I wanted them to be manipulated another time by me - sort of like with putting them in acrylic boxes. I engineered a gear and motor mechanism that also acted as a pedestal that fit in with the overall aesthetics. The guns in boxes took second stage to the slow movement and sudden floppyness of the guns on their pedestals. The copper piping stands complement the acrylic gears and boxes - and contributing to the glow of skin colored fleshy guns.





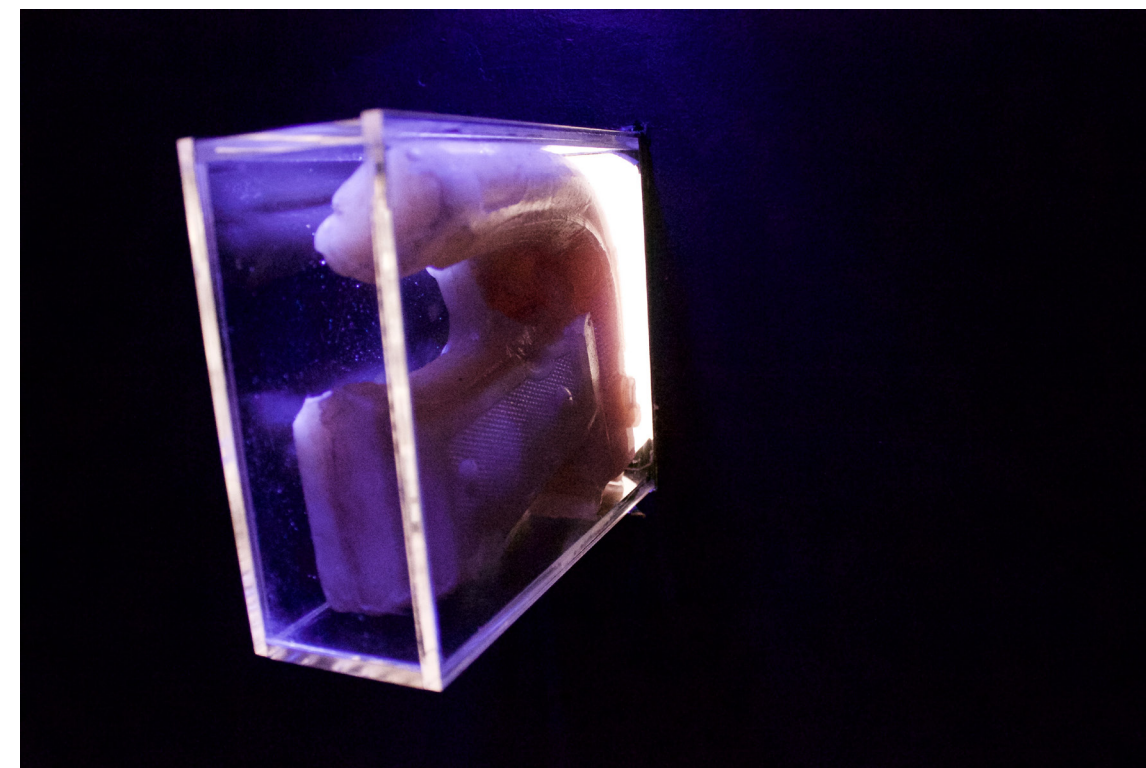


One life of this project was what happened during the making and the documentation that happened before the show. Another life was the movement and transformation applied during the gallery show. I spent a majority of the last few months of the project creating the objects that went along with the floppy guns. This was an important departure to create a larger dialogue about the pieces - and to let them live alone, without someone holding them. The shapes that they created in the acrylic boxes resemble body parts that didn't exist

before - departing even from their phallic nature into a weird, squished non human way. They also sweat from being in the boxes after a long time - further showing how they resemble the human body.

The moving guns held the spotlight during the show. They move with 2.9 volts of electricity through black and red wires into a 12 dc gear motor that moves acrylic plates and poles that the gun is stuck on top of. They move with an uncomfortable speed, just a little bit too slow. The viewer watches in anticipa-

tion as the guns move as the diameter around a circle punctuated by a copper pipe that makes the gun slide slowly across the pipe, and then eventually breaking free and flopping to the beginning of its rotation. That moment, when the gun breaks free from the copper pipe is like breathing out after a long time of being underwater - except you're looking at a phallic representation of a handgun. I am excited to see where I take them next, and where they take themselves on their own too.





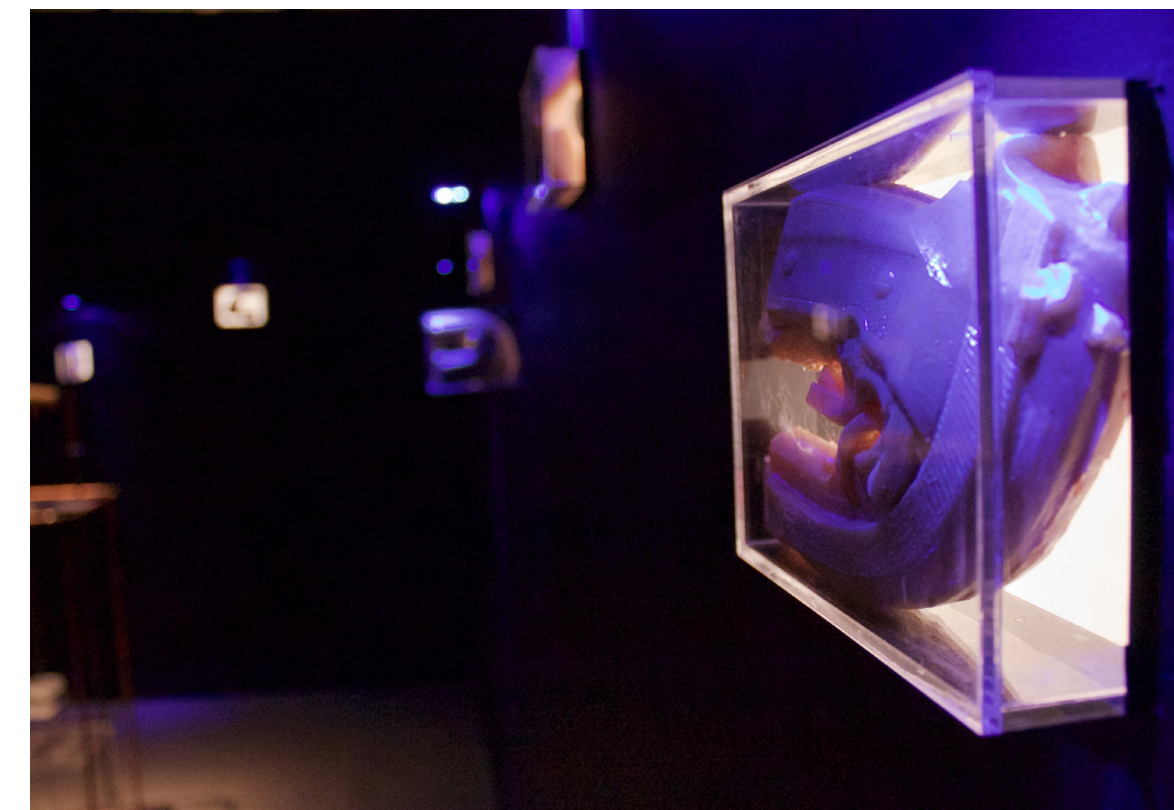
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CONCLUSION  
& ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The final product of this project represents a years worth of reading, brainstorming, making and thinking that couldn't have been possible without my mentors and peers giving me feedback, critiques and advice. It has taken many hours of mine and my cohorts time to complete this project. Thanks to all the artists out there making weird art and inspiring me to make weird stuff too.

Thank you to my IP professors Adrian Deva and Matt Kenyon, my peers in my IP section and at Stamps in general, Matt Beidl the sculpture studio coordinator, all the professors i've had: especially Franc Nunoo-Quarcoo, Hannah Smotrich, Sophia Brueckner, and my parents for supporting me.