



PETRI DISH

NATALIE NELSON

INTEGRATIVE PROJECT

2022

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ARTIST STATEMENT

Beginning with a focus on food memories, I worked with recycled to-go containers, interested in what is left behind after a meal is finished; uncovering mold as a subject. Understanding that mold acts as a visual representation of the passage of time or distancing of memory. Connections I discovered between the life cycle of mold's regenerative nature with that of the human body brought crucial insights into how I began to approach changes that come with the aging body. Each new mold spore that grows comes directly from one already established; similar to the process of learning or understanding new experiences as we grow. These themes of growth pushed the creative experimentation with materials; Embroidery Thread, Glass and Stone Beads, Poly-Fil, and Chicken Wire. As a mixed media artist, I challenge myself to take the experiments and find connections within a question; can oil paintings depicting mold microorganisms, exaggerated in scale, act as a self portrait that comments on the decay and subsequent rebuilding of one's identity through the new life that rises from the old? Adding or Subtracting materials and methods as I go. This portrait expresses my process of continuous recycling—breaking the frame of the traditional canvas.



FIG. 01; *PETRI DISH*, DETAIL.

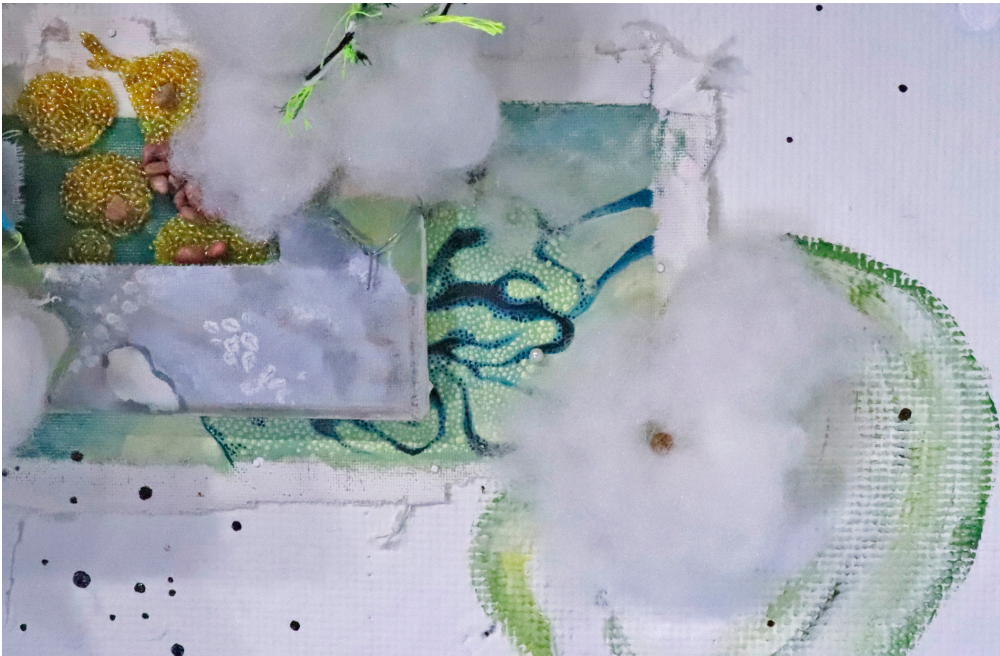


FIG. 02; *PETRI DISH*, DETAIL.



FIG. 03; *PETRI DISH*, DETAIL.

EXHIBITION MATERIALS

Introduction

When it came to installing the physical works within my exhibition space I wanted to use each painting and sculptural element in a way in which they interacted together; creating a larger piece out of a combination of smaller components. Themes of regeneration, growth and decay were constantly in the forefront while installing the work. The decision to paint directly onto the gallery wall using acrylic paint helped to blur some of the harsher edges the canvases would create. Changing the shape of the overall work from geometric to organic.



FIG. 04; *PETRI DISH*; OIL ON CANVAS, FIBER-FIL, CHICKEN WIRE, ACRYLIC PAINT, THREAD & BEADS

CORE PAINTINGS:

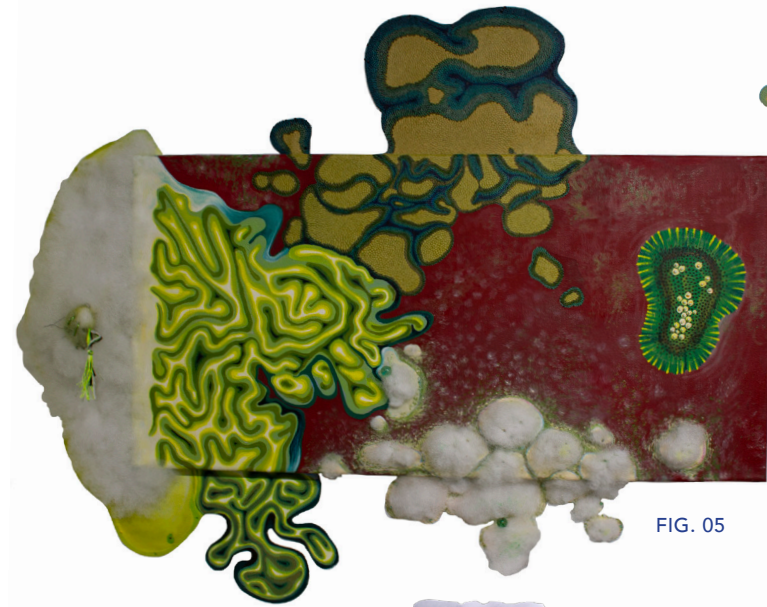


FIG. 05



FIG. 06



FIG. 07

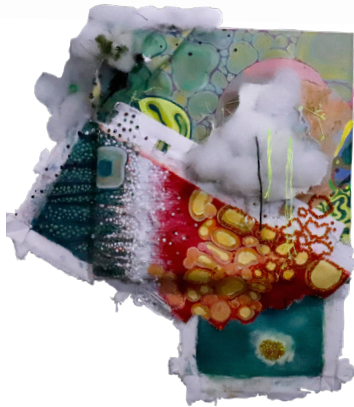


FIG. 08

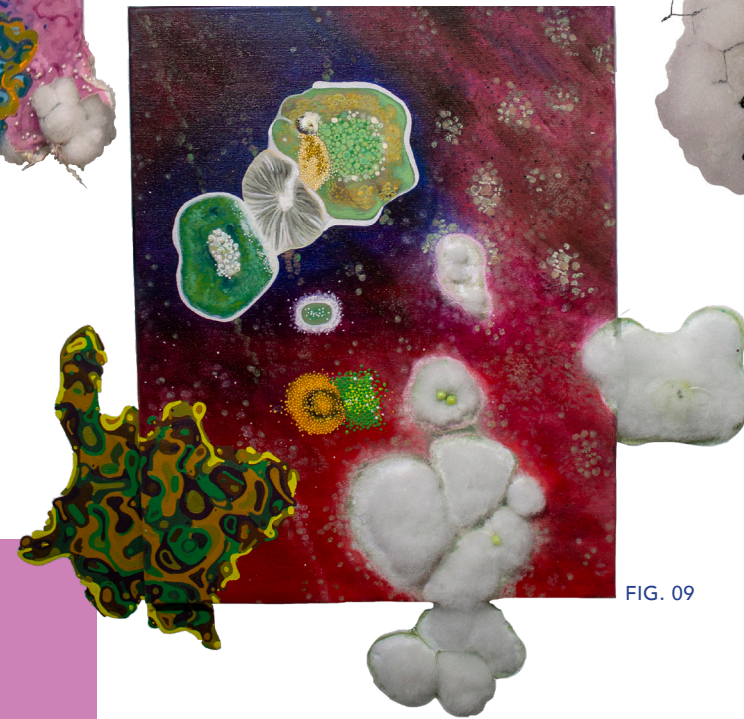


FIG. 09

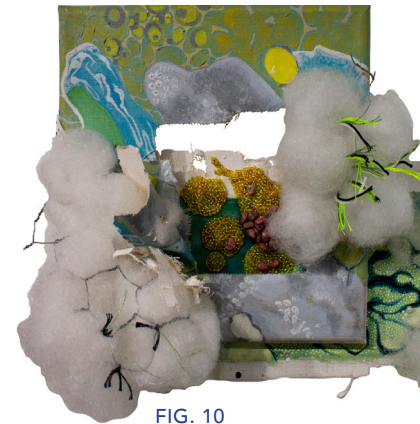


FIG. 10

FIG. 05: (10"X24"); OIL ON CANVAS, FIBER-FIL, THREAD AND BEADS.

FIG. 06: (18"X24"); OIL ON CANVAS, FIBER-FIL, CHICKEN WIRE, THREAD AND BEADS.

FIG. 07: (10"X24"); OIL ON CANVAS, THREAD AND BEADS.

FIG. 08: (8"X8"); OIL ON CANVAS, FIBER-FIL, CHICKEN WIRE, THREAD AND BEADS.

FIG. 09: (18"X24"); OIL ON CANVAS, FIBER-FIL, THREAD AND BEADS.

FIG. 10: (8"X8"); OIL ON CANVAS, FIBER-FIL, CHICKEN WIRE, THREAD AND BEADS.

DETAIL SHOTS:

wire sculpture and acrylic application

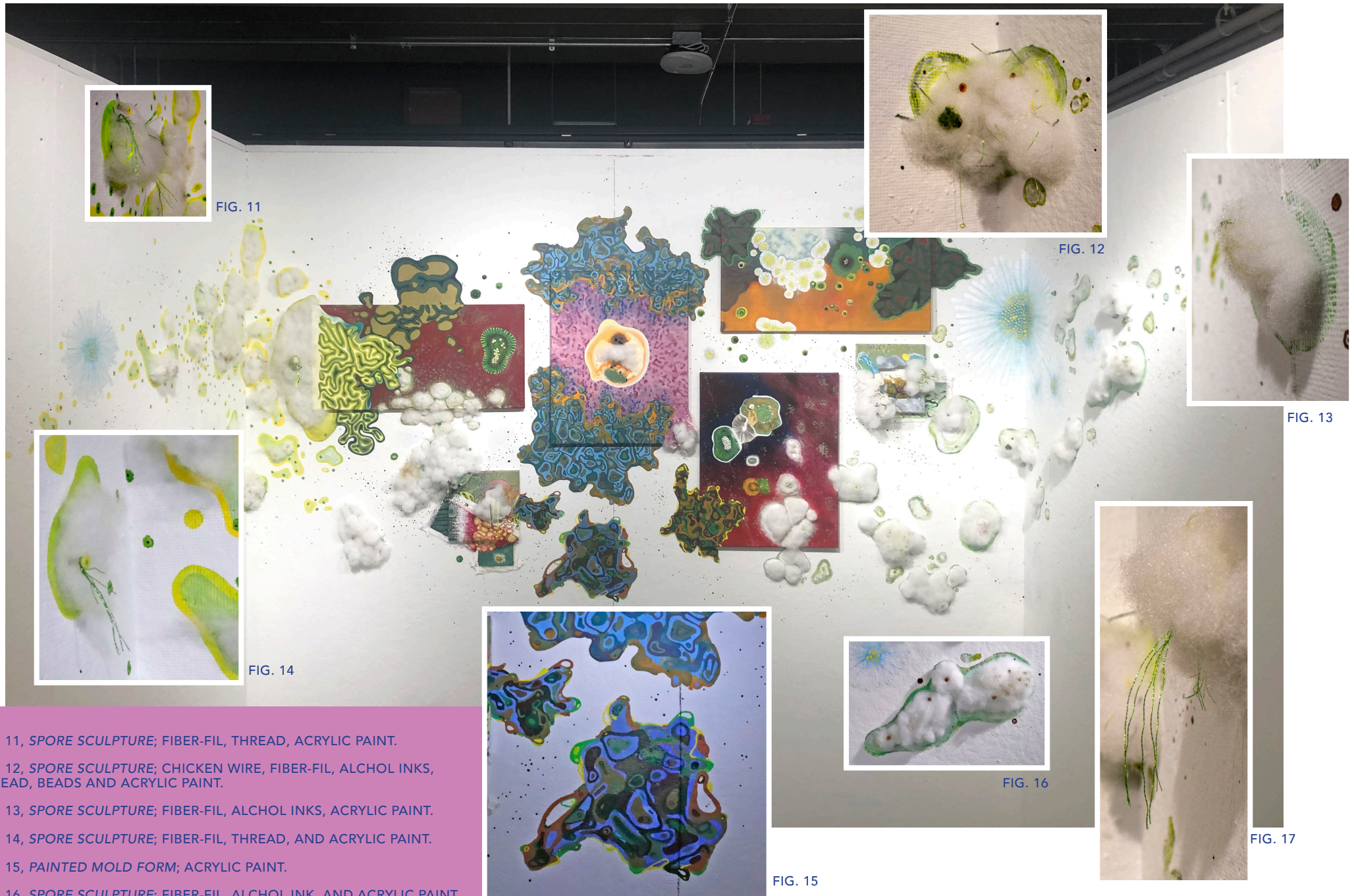


FIG. 11

FIG. 12

FIG. 13

FIG. 14

FIG. 16

FIG. 17

FIG. 15

FIG. 11, *SPORE SCULPTURE*; FIBER-FIL, THREAD, ACRYLIC PAINT.

FIG. 12, *SPORE SCULPTURE*; CHICKEN WIRE, FIBER-FIL, ALCHOL INKS, THREAD, BEADS AND ACRYLIC PAINT.

FIG. 13, *SPORE SCULPTURE*; FIBER-FIL, ALCHOL INKS, ACRYLIC PAINT.

FIG. 14, *SPORE SCULPTURE*; FIBER-FIL, THREAD, AND ACRYLIC PAINT.

FIG. 15, *PAINTED MOLD FORM*; ACRYLIC PAINT.

FIG. 16, *SPORE SCULPTURE*; FIBER-FIL, ALCHOL INK, AND ACRYLIC PAINT.

FIG. 17, *SPORE SCULPTURE*; FIBER-FIL, THREAD.



FIG. 18, *PETRI DISH*; DETAIL.

CONTEXTUALIZATION

Introduction

Initially I began with a focus on food memories and more specifically what is left behind after the meal is over. However the work I was making in tandem to this research wasn't challenging. Food as the subject would evolve into Mold; the regenerative cycling evident only after the passage of time. Memory stayed consistent however changed from my initial viewpoint; I was less focused on depicting memories, and more interested in the feeling of evolving away from a memory of oneself into something of your own creation.

Memory

Understanding what psychologists refer to as the Reminiscence Bump¹; the phenomenon where memories are not as accessible in your teen to early 20s. Caused me to step back and relate it to my own understanding of myself and my current position as twenty-something that was constantly looking back at a childhood that was gone for good. I knew I needed a way to visually depict this evolution of not only thought, but understanding. This research gave psychological context for my inability to recall certain events and fed the curiosity I have surrounding the idea of the self.

Mold

Research on microorganisms that form mold was done in efforts to understand any possible links it has with human experience outside the obvious. Initially being drawn to mold because of its role in visually depicting the passage of time, once I understood its life cycle this deepened. There are four main stages of life; Hyphae Growth, Spore Production, Spore Liberation, and Spore Germination². This cycle continues on indefinitely; similarly to the cells found in our own bodily systems. This theme of regeneration became indispensable; helping to inform not only the composition of each individual painting I would go on to make, but also the use of repetition within my depiction of mold forms.

¹ Penny.o'hara. (2017, September 26). How our memory develops. Curious. Retrieved October 18, 2021,

² "The Life Cycle of Mold, and What You Need to Know." SERVPRO. Accessed December 6, 2021. <https://www.servproeasthonolulu.com/blog/post/221656/mold-removal-remediation/the-life-cycle-of-mold-and-what-you-need-to-know>.

Bio Art

After mold, I began looking into the intersection of art and science more broadly. Bio Art refers to the art practice where the artist works with live tissues, bacteria, living organisms, and life processes to either create or inform their practice¹. I made the decision to artificially depict my mold spores rather than grow my own live mold for a few reasons, but ultimately decided to use my strengths with mixed media and challenge myself to recreate these forms as I saw them.

I continued my research attempting to find specific connections between mold and the practice of painting, bringing me to a recent study at the J. Craig Venter Institute² that discovered that microbial organisms could be responsible for the decay of old paintings, sculptures, and other art forms. These microbes feast on compounds found in the artworks and slowly erode the pieces. This added a layer of irony within my project, this only added to my decision to not use live mold at this stage.

¹ "What Is Bio Art?" ARTDEX, May 3, 2021. <https://www.artdex.com/what-is-bio-art/>.

² "Biology in Art: Genetic Detectives ID Microbes Suspected of Slowly Ruining Humanity's Treasures." Science Codex, April 23, 2022. <https://www.sciencecodex.com/biology-art-genetic-detectives-id-microbes-suspected-slowly-ruining-humanitys-treasures-649980>.



FIG. 19, FUNGI 2, LIVE MOLD.

They use the live mold and bacterial fungus as their medium and subject. They let them incubate for 3-4 weeks and create naturally unique compositions¹. Using these forms as the final work, as well as photographs and timelapse videos. Plesen was the first artist I discovered that used mold in this way and it really made me look at things differently, her ability to manipulate the growths to create such vibrant compositions inspired my own work greatly. I carried with me the color pallets as well as some of the visual forms her mold made.

¹ Life, Art Featured Still, and 2021 TL Team-September 22. "When Mold Is Looking Fabulous! The Microorganism Studies of Daria Fedorova." TRENDLAND, September 22, 2021.



FIG. 20, CORONAVIRUS, 2020.

Goodsell creates paintings and illustrations of different molecular structures. His process begins with making an outline, that he then carefully fills in with traditional watercolor techniques. Once the main imagery is done, he freehands the background. This inspired me due to his specific combination of science with

painting¹. As I learned about his methodology I began to use my own imagination to fill in certain areas of my own paintings.

¹ Goodsell, David S. "Painting a Portrait of SARS-CoV-2: Art can be a tool for understanding the inner workings of cells." *American Scientist* 109, no. 2 (2021): 88+. Gale Academic OneFile (accessed December 2, 2021).



FIG. 21, PLEASURES KNOWN, 2019.

Ryan's work with mold in the collection, *Bad Fruit* 2020¹ acted as precedent for my experimentation with beading and embroidery within my paintings. These sculptures depict larger than life molding and decaying fruits out of semi-precious stones; they have been described as "tongue-in-cheek allegories for sexuality, decadence, and the cycle of life"². The conversation she is having lives on the thin line between beauty and the grotesque. My goal through *Petri Dish*, was to comment on this as well, to create something referencing something disgusting but made from traditionally beautiful materials.

¹ "19 - Bad Fruit." KATHLEEN RYAN. Accessed October 28, 2021. <https://www.kathleen-ryan.com/bad-fruit>.

² Staugaitis, Laura. "Moldy Fruit Sculptures Formed from Precious Gemstones Challenge Perceptions of Decoration and Decay." *Colossal*, April 15, 2020. <https://www.thisiscolossal.com/2019/10/kathleen-ryan-moldy-fruit/>.



FIG. 22, *PETRI DISH*; IN-PROGRESS DETAIL SHOT.

CREATIVE PROCESS

Introduction

Over the course of the past year much of my process work could be described as material explorations; I challenged myself to use a mixture of paints and recycled materials to create illustrations, sculptures, and paintings that eventually informed my final work with oils within Petri Dish. As mentioned above my focus started in memories associated with food, then to aging food containers, which then triggered my switch towards mold.

Food & To-Go Containers

These explorations, while unused in the final works influenced my decision to switch to mold. There was something compelling about food being present just in an accelerated stage of aging to the point of abstraction.



FIG. 23

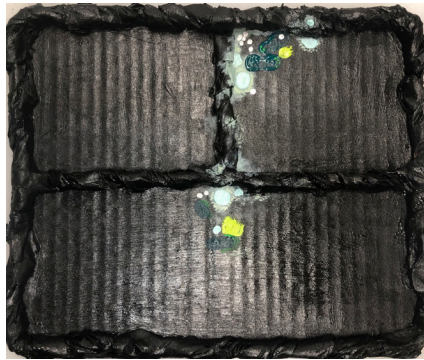


FIG. 24

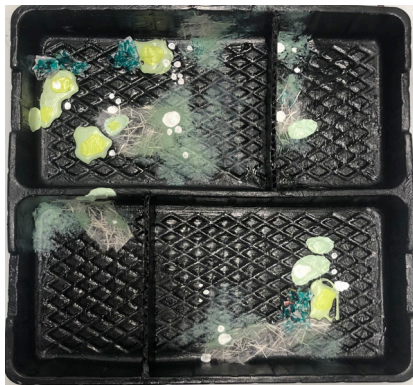


FIG. 26



FIG. 25

FIG. 23, LUNCH TRAY; STYROFOAM, RECYCLED MATERIALS, AND ACRYLIC PAINT.

FIG. 24, MOLD TRAY 1; CARDBOARD, PAPER, AND ACRYLIC PAINT.

FIG. 25, MOLD TRAY 2; RECYCLED MATERIALS, GLUE, PAPER, AND ACRYLIC PAINT.

FIG. 26, MOLD TRAY 3; CARDBOARD, CLAY, AND ACRYLIC PAINT.

Digital Collages

Early explorations on potential reference images for my paintings included images of myself ranging in age, with mold spores exaggerated in scale layered on top of the portrait. However after much discussion I opted to remove any tangible representation of the human form; allowing mold to truly be the sole subject. I used a combination of found and personal images that I then manipulated further within photoshop; all mold used in *Petri Dish* referenced molded foods.



FIG. 27



FIG. 28

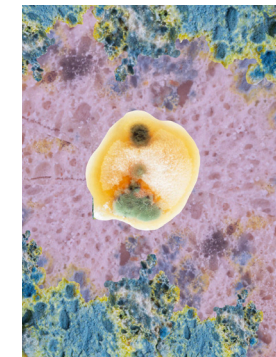


FIG. 29

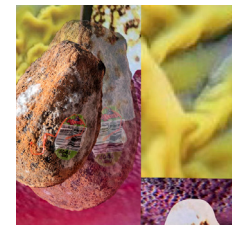


FIG. 30

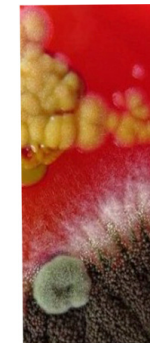


FIG. 31

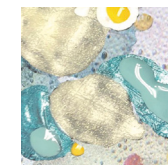


FIG. 32

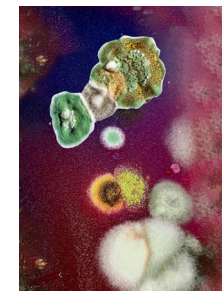


FIG. 33

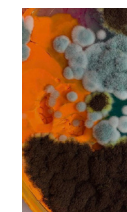


FIG. 34



FIG. 35

FIG. 27, DIGITAL COLLAGE REFERENCE; UNUSED IN PETRI DISH.

FIG. 28, DIGITAL COLLAGE REFERENCE; UNUSED IN PETRI DISH.

FIG. 29 - 35, DIGITAL COLLAGE REFERENCE; USED IN PETRI DISH

Painting my Petri Dish

The goal with the stretched canvases was to have each painting stand on their own but subtly connect to the others either through color or form. I used oil paint exclusively on these pieces; using a range of techniques including stippling.



FIG. 35



FIG. 36

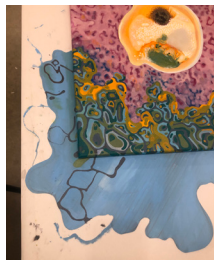


FIG. 37



FIG. 38

FIG. 35-38, *PETRI DISH*; PROGRESS SHOTS, OIL ON CANVAS

Growing off Canvas

To create the textural 3D spores I used chicken wire as a frame and pushed fiber-fil through the gaps; using embroidery thread and beads in random placement to add color and more texture. I decided to also embroider and apply beads to the actual fabric of the canvas. The canvas itself then acted as a part of the structure of the mold as I intentionally left the raw ripped edge exposed. All in an attempt to continue the growths.



FIG. 39



FIG. 40

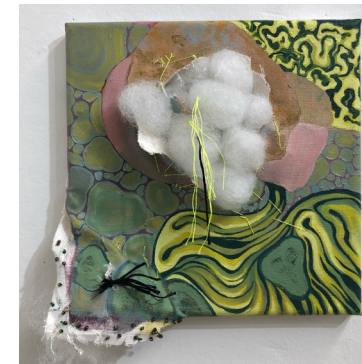


FIG. 41

FIG. 39, *PETRI DISH*, PROGRESS SHOT; DECONSTRUCTED CANVAS, OIL PAINT, THREAD & BEADS.

FIG. 40, *PETRI DISH*, PROGRESS SHOT; DECONSTRUCTED CANVAS, OIL PAINT, THREAD & BEADS.

FIG. 41, *PETRI DISH*, PROGRESS SHOT; OIL ON CANVAS, FIBER-FIL CHICKEN WIRE, THREAD & BEADS.

FIG. 42, *PETRI DISH*, PROGRESS SHOT; FIBER-FIL, CHICKEN WIRE, ALCHOL INKS, THREAD & BEADS.



FIG. 42



FIG. 43, *PETRI DISH*; DETAIL.

REFLECTION

As this work has come to a close I feel a deep sense of accomplishment. I began this experience with very little idea of what I would eventually produce. It was uncomfortable being so unsure; leaning hard into my research and material explorations helped to work through it. With each spore of mold a different experience that evolves or decays is recorded. This collection of paintings and sculptures act as a reflection of a self portrait; where there lacks the human form makes up for strong mark making.