

~~30 going on 13~~ like like or just a “like”?

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Abstract

This paper, written to my BFF, supports my thesis exhibition, ~~30 going on 13~~ *like like or just a "like"?* at York University's Gales Gallery. Using screenprinting, fluorescent acrylic sheets, found objects, projection, and dollar store scented trash bags my thesis is a bold and immersive assemblage of surface and abstract imagery. Guided by a playful exploration of material, my work is influenced by my own anxious and disembodied search for identity and connection in my online and "away from keyboard" (AFK) life as an urban millennial. Failing normative expectations of adulthood and gender, screen obsessed, and using humor as a coping mechanism, my work takes place within a contemporary global framework, where interpersonal relationships are more isolated and digitally focused than ever in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. What does it mean to transmute feelings evoked digitally into material we can physically be with and touch? Embodying a Postdigital aesthetic, one fusing digital and analog means of making and utilizing the immersive characteristics of installation art, my thesis uses materiality, abstraction, and text to center and de-center the viewer. This exhibition calls on viewers to participate in an assemblage of simultaneously comforting and awkwardly disorienting material fragments within an all-encompassing atmosphere. Abstracted, fragmented and limitless, my assemblages are unfixed and undetermined, shifting and expanding. Fermenting, until play, that sweet ecstasy, hits.

Dedication

To all my fallen, present, and future

friends

family

situationships

relationships

and

followers

Acknowledgments

Thank you to my committee, David Armstrong, Brandon Vickard, and Natasha P. Bissonauth for their insightful feedback and kind encouragement.

My incredibly generous cohort, the studio kitchen couch, and the box wine.

And Brianna, my muse <3

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Part 1. Hey girl - Introduction

This paper, written to my BFF, supports my thesis exhibition, ~~30-going-on-13 like~~ *like or just a "like"?* at York University's Gales Gallery. Using screenprinting, fluorescent acrylic sheets, found objects, projection, and dollar store scented trash bags my thesis is a bold and immersive assemblage of surfaces, text and abstract imagery. Guided by a playful exploration of materials, my work is influenced by my own anxious search for identity and connection (both embodied and interpersonal) in my online and "away from keyboard" (AFK) life as an urban millennial. Failing expectations of adulthood and gender, screen obsessed, and using humor as a coping mechanism: my work takes place within a contemporary global framework, where interpersonal relationships are more isolated and digitally focused than ever in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. This "Postdigital" context describes an age in which the digital is no longer new, but rather irreversibly intertwined within our society. Encompassing an expanding field of discourse and theory, Postdigital, explores the interplay between human and digital. Embodying this Postdigital aesthetic by fusing digital and analog means of making and utilizing the immersive characteristics of installation art, my thesis uses materiality, abstraction, and text to center and de-center the viewer, calling on them to participate in an assemblage of simultaneously comforting and awkwardly disorienting material fragments within an all-encompassing atmosphere. Through an artistic process of play, failure, and fermentation, I contend with themes of anxiety and expectation, gender and identity, and love and connection.

Like my artwork, this support paper is an assemblage of theory-informed analysis, reflective diary entries, and novice comedy writing interspersed with digital conversations between my best friend (don't tell her though) and me. I begin, firstly, by outlining the origin of my research and providing relevance for my BFF's inclusion in this paper. Secondly, I explore the significance of assemblage and nostalgia within my work before, finally, concluding with insights into my process of play, failure, and fermentation. It's a little bit of everything, too much at times, all at once, and yet never quite enough.

Do you think I should start my thesis paper with a photo of me holding a fish with the caption "fishing for your approval :)"

Or maybe a sex and the city reference? Problematic. But still relatable?

Hahahah I mean I love and miss the Rachael with fish era

But a good SATC quote always has my heart

"...as I was sitting in a pile of scraps of material I collected from the dollar store I couldn't help but wonder, what happened to just painting, to traditional art materials? Are we so caught up in theory that we've lost joy in making? Is there really any art left to make?" I'm getting...carried away....

You should 100% write the whole thing like that it's incredible

This is all going in btw

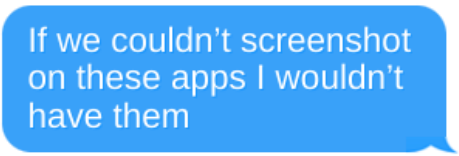
Part 2. I'm so vain, you probably think this art is about me - *affect*

I write this as a white, anxious, straight passing, queer cis woman.

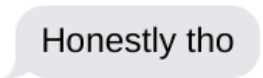
Cut to me in 2021:

Drowning in despair and adorned in adult cystic acne, let go from my dream job in a bedroom decorated by my mother, in a house in the middle of nowhere, in a global pandemic - I lay in bed, scrolling on my phone. My printmaking studio closed, my art supplies in boxes, a decade-long romantic relationship in the trash, and friends spread across the province in their own COVID comas.

I download Tik Tok and Tinder. And I laughed.



If we couldn't screenshot
on these apps I wouldn't
have them



Honestly tho

Sending screenshots of questionable tattoos and pick-up lines to my best friend while watching a never ending stream of jaded singles, self-proclaimed dating coaches, and

humorous memes provided me with some sense of community, albeit toxic, during an isolated time.

The feeling of comfort gained through consuming digital content relatable to me was the origin of my research in digital affect and the lexicon utilized within my thesis exhibition and support paper. However, this comfort simultaneously brought deep frustration and dissatisfaction as virtual interaction became the standard replacement for AFK, embodied connection. My material practice rooted in my joy for embodied making, was both rebellion and reverence.

The lexicon utilized derives from a fragmented community of digital users exposed to me through Instagram and Tik Tok as well as my best friend, a straight, white, cis woman. Gender theorist Akane Kanai explores the concept of “spectatorial girlfriendship” in her book “Gender and Relatability in Digital Culture: managing affect, intimacy and value”. Drawing from Alison Winch’s (2013) analysis of “girlfriend culture” spectatorial girlfriendship is the concept of a friendly reader in which there is an assumption of “shared knowledge of feminine popular culture, rules, conduct, and sociality upon which feelings of relatability depend” (6, Kanai). Spectatorial girlfriendship provides a feeling of sameness for the partaker, by “getting” the joke one can feel a sense of belonging and of being “normal” — not utterly and tragically alone in the world. While the premise of a spectatorial girlfriend is “innocent enough”, and resonates with many social media users, Kanai identifies normalcy through her study of a feminist blog as “being proximate to but not quite achieving white, middle-class standards of femininity” (19). Although the content I have consumed and referenced within my

practice may also pertain to BIPOC, male and non-binary identifying folks navigating this landscape, my specific digital relationship is situated and limited to one of a cis white, able-bodied, millennial woman who moves easily between straight and queer spaces. This is the perspective from which I write and make work and relate to spectatorial girlfriendship. Influenced by my digital and AFK experience, and impacted greatly by the algorithm, my humor and work simultaneously participate in and reject “normative” femininity. While references and text attempt to create kinship enacting a sense of familiarity and therefore belonging for the viewer, my fragmented use of assemblage reflects an expansive and unrestricted view of identity and gender. Spectatorial girlfriendship is used within this paper as well as my work as a way to explore the relatability of digital affect.

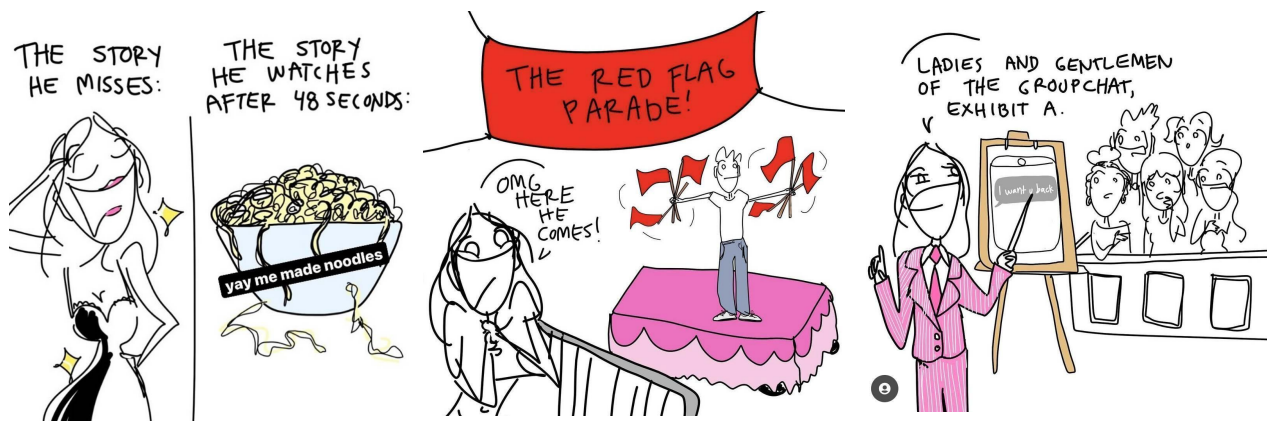


Figure 1. Arianna Margulis, Instagram screenshots of digital illustrations.

Figure 1 displays Instagram posts by illustrator and cartoonist Arianna Margulis whose personal drawings surrounding her anxiety and romantic life have become viral digital media. The digital illustrations within Figure 1 depict Margulis as a relatable, generic, protagonist in various modern “dating” situations, including her acting as a lawyer consulting her “group chat” of friends on a recent message from an ex. Her cartoon protagonist has become the catalyst for a community of two-hundred and thirty-five thousand followers. The apparent relatability of the struggles of modern courtship and the influence of these experiences on users' digital and AFK identity as seen through Margulis' cartoons and her followers' engagement is vast. Inspired, I began researching the impact of my dating app, social media, and virtual messaging use on my own interpersonal relationships and formation of my identity through personal experience and material practice.

Wait.

How do I make art again?

When was the last time?

It was the fall of 2019 when there were whispers of COVID and it didn't occur to me to worry. It was before washing Amazon packages, before Zoom hangs, when I was content in my practice and I didn't think I'd ever love any medium as much as Litho.

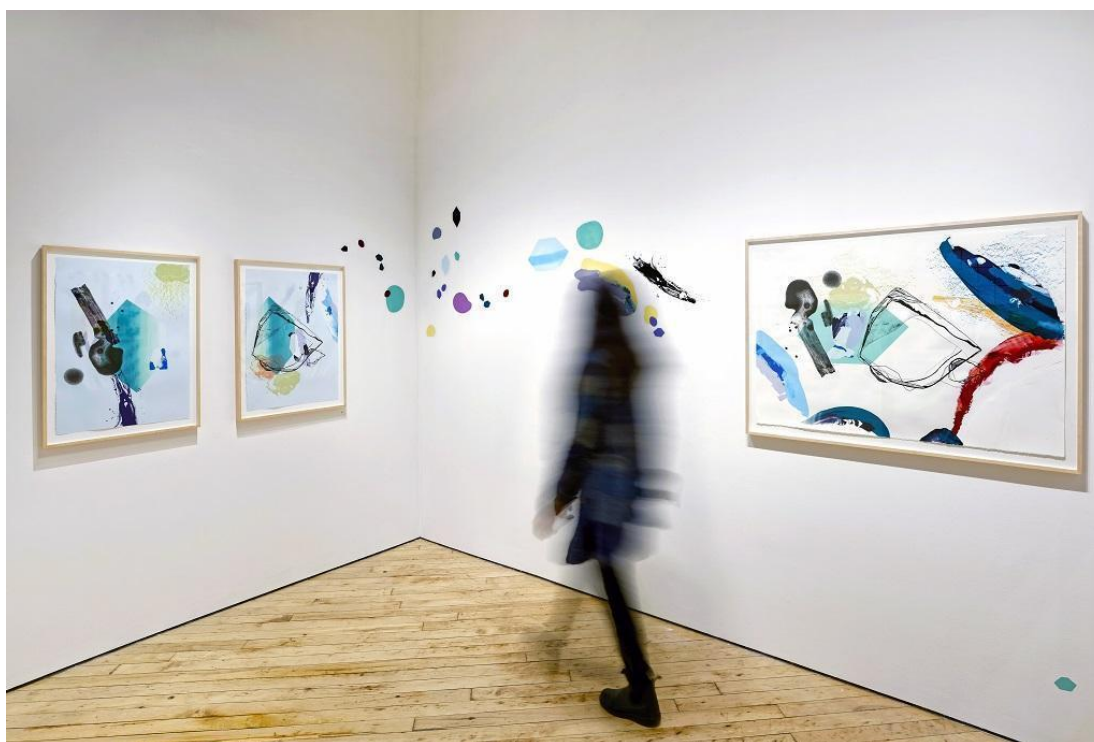


Figure 2. Rachael Dodgson, *Thank U, Next*, 2019, installation view, Open Studio Project
Space Gallery, Toronto, ON

The image in Figure 2 displays documentation of a solo exhibition at Open Studio including framed monoprints using the methods of screenprint and lithography alongside related visual elements screenprinted directly on the gallery wall. This overall series, created during my 27th year, was entirely abstract, focusing on colour, mark making and gesture.

When I stepped back into the studio,
this time masked, I couldn't connect.

Departing from using exclusively gestural and abstract imagery, I implemented humor and text, transferring digital lexicon and experience to the material-based medium of screenprinting. What does it mean to transmute feelings evoked digitally into material we can physically be with and touch? What is acceptable digitally but not AFK? As time passes digitally inflicted wounds heal, and so my emotionally charged writing, snippets of digital exchanges, and didactic lecturing distilled into singular words and phrases. My single season of dating app obsession may have come to an end, but fragments of this digital lexicon remain. Yearning to play, to engage my hand and body directly with materials, and to expand on my use of abstract methods of art making, I began to combine the opposing languages of text, non-traditional materials and gestural abstraction. What emerged was a Postdigital aesthetic rooted in the physicality of assemblage.



Figure 3. Rachael Dodgson. *Read Flag.*, Screenprint on Acrylic on wood with purple LED strip lights, 48"x 48", 2023, Gales Gallery, Toronto, ON

Read Flag. (Figure 3) is a 48"x 48" sheet of reflective red acrylic propped against the wall and elevated off the ground by a broken plinth, painted pink, and positioned on its side. On it, the word "Read." is screenprinted seven times in outlined Arial font and once in bold directly onto the smooth surface. Messages that are seen by the receiver but not replied to by the recipient are displayed as "Read." on android smartphones. My piece, *Read Flag*, playfully references viral "red flag" Tik Tok videos in which content creators list courtship "red flags" to watch out for in potential partners such as being "left on read". As the viewer approaches the reflective surface of *Read Flag*, the acrylic surface reflects their own image back at them, simultaneously mocking the significance given to perceived digital slights and over-analyzing by anonymous armchair experts, while earnestly attempting to ease anxiety regarding the modern tendency to over-examine potential friends and partners. The fluorescent pink painted within the inside of the fallen plinth reflects the iridescence of a digital screen, vibrating against the bold red and artificial baby pink. The red acrylic can be viewed as a colourful object or simply a large swatch of red paint. Scaled-down and contained, it references Jessica Stockholder's use of large-scale materials to compose bold, colourful, abstract assemblages using three-dimensional objects with a painting aesthetic. Like Stockholder's work, which transforms ordinary objects and industrial materials into a theatrical relationship between "things", *Read Flag*, cheekily exists in the in-between. It uncomfortably assembles object, surface, text, colour, and the reflection of the viewer, highlighting the awkward joints between these parts as a whole.

In Legacy Russell's cyberfeminist manifesto *Glitch Feminism* (2020), Russell explores digital "error" as an opportunity to expand ourselves into infinite identities, discussing connections between technology, gender, and the body. Russell describes a "glitch" as a non-performative error, a failure that "aims to make abstract again that which has been forced into an uncomfortable and ill-defined material" (8, Russell). *Read Flag.* is uncomfortable and puzzling, demanding the viewers contemplation and interpretation.

Is it a screenprint? But it's not on paper?

It's leaning against the wall.

The lower section is a screenprinted gesture, it looks "painterly?"

But it's not on canvas or panel.

It's an object propped on a plinth, so perhaps it's a sculpture?

A red flag is a clear warning sign, despite being the source of endless justification, especially, if the flag bearer is hot or has a corgi. Bold in colour and sharp edged, *Read Flag.*, however, is an abstract "glitch" and assemblage of media not easily defined or ignored. Unable to comfortably fit into a specific medium of art it resists an ill-fitting skin and instead uses reflection and repetition to convey expansiveness.

Hi hi! Hope you're having a good time at home! I've had no meetings added to my Friday afternoon yet so fingers crossed none come through!

Would me getting to Vaughan at like 4 work? Alsooooo was that the new bae in Liz's story yesterday?! I hope that's a sign of good news

Haha. Oh yes it was.
#softlaunch

4 should work, later equals more sitting in traffic but whatever I can finish my Sarah Sze essayyyy on my phone

Part 3. Could I interest you in everything? All of the time - assemblage

"Could I interest you in everything? All of the time?" - asks Bo Burham in his song

"Welcome to the Internet" from his disturbingly insightful Netflix special *"Inside"*.

Yawn (stretchhhhhh)

I wake up and grab my phone off the nightstand and open Instagram before I brush my teeth.

“Have you ever noticed the end of a McFlurry straw?” * swipe

“Hi guys this is my skincare routine that-” *swipe

(video of a butter board) *shudder gross, swipe

(video of someone lifting weights incorrectly) *swipe

“A lot of these modern women are”- *instant swipe

(video of a raccoon that is apparently a house pet), aww, wait -*swipe

I’m exhausted.

I continue scrolling through reels on Instagram, half consuming, half questioning the avalanche of content the algorithm is sending my way. It’s all fragments of images and information, sampling and referencing who knows what by who knows who.

I create fragments of imagery which are later brought together, installed, disassembled, and then re-imagined elsewhere. Rather than permanently fusing two-dimensional pieces together, such as in paper collage, I combine two and three-dimensional imagery created through different mediums to form gatherings, some of which can be deconstructed and others fixed to substrates. This practice of assemblage, and the study of artist Sarah Sze’s immersive installations and intricate assemblages of found objects, material explorations, and digital imagery were critical to the development of my thesis. In a journal article, “The Hidden Poetry of the Everyday” published by the Yale University Art gallery, Frauke V Josenhans notes Sze’s expansive interest in mediums with this quote:

“Sze’s intricate installations blur the borders between sculpture, installation, and painting; this hybridity is certainly the most distinctive aspect of her work and allows her to mix formal, spatial, compositional, and conceptual elements from these categories” (Josenhans, 17).

Similarly to Sze, assemblage is the solution for my insatiable appetite for variety, for my anxious mind. It is a “glitch” which rejects definition, creating an opportunity to play the field and delay commitment to any one medium or method of making.



Figure 4. Sarah Sze, *Night into Day*, installation view, 2020, Fondation Cartier, Paris.

Like Sze, my practice of assemblage is situated within the medium of installation. Figure 4 displays documentation of Sarah Sze's 2020, *Night into Day* installation at Fondation Cartier. Combining distinct mediums including sculpture and projection the installation focuses on the viewers' bodily and sensory experience of the work. Claire Bishop clarifies the vagueness of the term installation art in her book *Installation Art* as "a situation into which the viewer physically enters, and insists that you regard this as a singular totality", which "addresses the viewer directly"(6). Sze articulates that distinctions between the "real world" and her installation work are blurred; "viewers discover themselves at the center of the work without remembering how they got there" (17).

My art practice prior to graduate studies started moving towards breaking the pictorial frame, using the wall as a space to print and spatially combine colour and gesture. My thesis work takes this combined approach further, utilizing assemblage within a practice of installation. Inspired by *Night into Day*, my thesis uses a dimly lit gallery space in combination with expansive projection, spotlighting, and sculptural materials and printed objects to create an atmosphere for the viewer to enter and experience the work simultaneously as both a whole and also parts. This interplay between parts and wholes is a key feature of the combinatory approach of assemblage. It is also a mode, a way of seeing, thinking, and experiencing the interactive and assembled nature of the world. Canadian poet and philosopher Jan Zwicky discusses this part/whole relationship, this gestalt thinking, as "involving the spontaneous perception of structure: not analytic order..but what might be called resonant internal

relations” (The Experience of Meaning, 19). Sensing the relationship between the fragments and parts present within the installation is key to the viewer's experience of the work. An innate understanding of gestalt encourages the viewer to approach and ponder distinct items, searching for the meaning behind their grouping. In arranging and layering printed material, objects, and media, I consider what it means to situate fragments together but not fuse them. To collect, display, and juxtapose. I ask the viewer to consider and sift through a variety of materials and fragments to determine their relationships to one another.

The viewer wanders throughout the gallery space yes, but also within specific works. They find themselves within the center of the primary installation assemblage, *pick me, girl..*



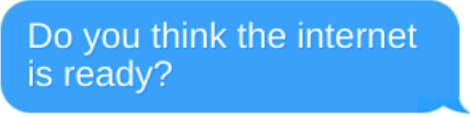
Figure 5. Rachael Dodgson, *pick me, girl.*, installation view, Screenprint on fluorescent acrylic, mirror, and paper with shadows casting on the wall, 2023, Gales Gallery, Toronto, ON

They move their feet. And twist their head.

They circle around a triangular sheet of pink acrylic, moving close to consider the fluorescent quality radiating from the words cut out.

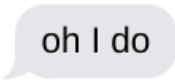
Wait. They find themselves within the piece itself, or at least they think they are.

In considering the various components of *pick me, girl*, the viewer finds themselves within the work, the division of functional space (gallery space), and the artwork itself becomes hazy. Within installation art, as explored by artist Sze and theorist Bishop, if a participant cannot ascertain when they are exiting or entering the artwork, distinctions between life and art, themselves, and the work become blurred.



Do you think the internet
is ready?

*(screenshot of my tinder profile in
which every photo is a "fish pic")*



oh I do

In *Glitch Feminism* Legacy Russell describes the internet as “an immersive institutional edifice, one that reflects and surrounds.” stating that there is “no fixed entry-point: it is everywhere, all around us.” (27) Similarly to our experience of installation art, which disrupts divisions of life and art, it is impossible to distinguish between our online and AFK lives. The internet and our online identity are ever present and tangled within our embodied self. Digital experiences can be disorienting, fragmented, and comforting all at once, encouraging us to stretch and expand ourself. Through installation my thesis oscillates between centering and decentering the viewer, allowing the viewer to participate in this divisive experience of simultaneous comfort, expansion, and overstimulation.

Russell draws connections between assemblage, abstraction, and gender, stating that the “production of gender is, at best an assemblage” (58) and how “a personal and collective dispersion towards vastness becomes consensual abstraction” (46). Digital spaces provide opportunities to expand ourselves, learn, try on new identities, hide, and multiply. My approach to assemblage is characterizing it as a nonbinary medium that refuses to be reduced to the sum of its parts or to limit itself to the rigid specifications of any one medium. I find freedom in this practice, to see my identity and my interpretation of gender as parts and fragments gathering and transforming, sometimes fitting, sometimes bending, and sometimes breaking, coming together and dispersing.

Within the digital landscape, we are no longer limited by our bodies, we can become abstract. Uprooted. Slippery. Limitless. Sliding into DMS (direct message to someone through social media) and Reddit threads, on different platforms, in multiple

conversations simultaneously, there is no containment. By disassembling and re-constructing words and phrases familiar to a spectatorial girlfriend, *pick me, girl.* expands on and abstracts a viral “female” stereotype. The pick-me girl, rejects the “basic”, focusing her attention on being perceived as different from other women and thereby special, to be “chosen”. Whereas the structure of *pick me, girl.* and the arrangement of its fragments was influenced by a “cootie catcher” (folded paper fortune teller) in which you are asked to “pick one” of the folded paper segments. Unfixed and shifting, the fragments of the *pick me, girl.* however, have the possibility of unless expansion, of opportunity, of option.

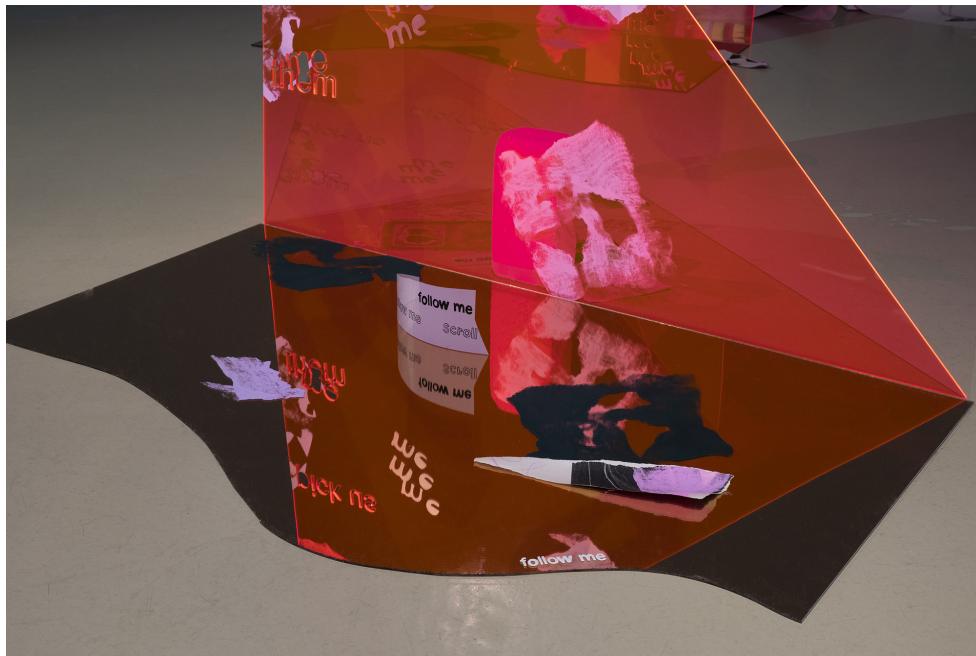
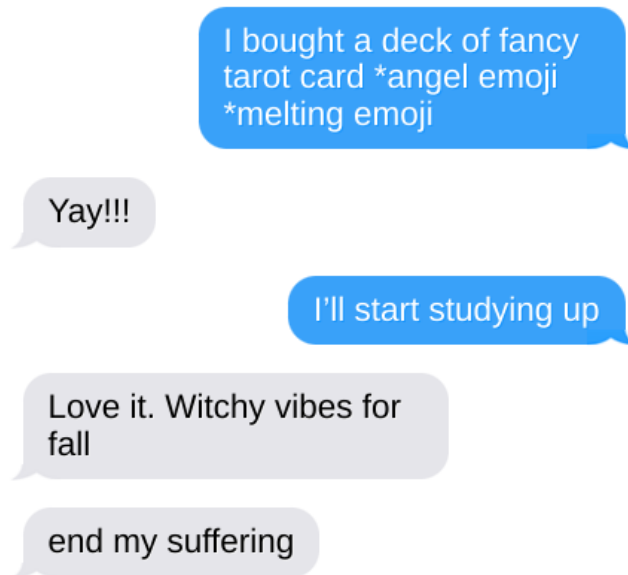


Figure 6. Rachael Dodgson. *pick me, girl.*, detail view, Screenprint on fluorescent acrylic, mirror, and paper, Gales Gallery, Toronto, ON



I remember folding the paper devices alongside childhood frenemies, asking questions, and predicting futures. Naturally, I was the most proficient at folding the device and definitely the most interested in playing the associated game of chance.

8 years old and already paralyzed by the uncertainty of my own future. Of choosing.

I wanna watch from
Justin to Kelly so bad

Yes!!! That needs to
happen

The flip phones! OMg I
can't

I will really try to hold off
so we can watch it
together

It's the hair and denim
that always get me in
that movie

All them blond streaks
and frosted tips

Her hair is very Meranda
from Lizzie McGurgire

Another classic

Still disappointed she
wasn't in the movie

Part 4. Low rise jeans are back, god help us all- *nostalgia*

There's no place like home...when you're on zoom in your pajamas eating a questionable selection of pantry items for lunch because you haven't left your apartment in two days.

Nostalgia and humor is my coping mechanism for crippling anxiety.

From the greek *nostos* meaning return and *algos*, pain, nostalgia is an ache in your heart for something we can never truly return to, a desire to feel at home. "Feeling nostalgic", especially for the decade of our childhood/youth, is not a new phenomenon nor is the desire to return to "simpler" times. However, I have personally felt and observed in others an increase in nostalgia for a pre-covid, pre-digital age.

And Twitter's search history proves it.

The article "Nostalgia: Triggers and Its Role on New Product Purchase Intentions" theorizes that this increase in nostalgia can be attributed to the effects of COVID-19:

"In response to social distancing required by COVID and the consequence of loneliness and social disconnectedness, people may activate nostalgia as a coping mechanism to restore self-continuity and life meaning" (Lan).

Y2K nostalgia, a term describing the return by GenZ to a 1998 - 2003 world, is a pandemic in itself, as seen through the rising popularity of low-rise jeans, baby tees, and choreographed dance moves to pop songs. The desire for nostalgia, magnified in our current post-covid Postdigital reality is in tandem with our longing for embodiment.

We are nostalgic for embodied connection, to be physically surrounded by our community. My work reflects this desire by containing and depicting references of girlhood nostalgia, for instance, the structure of *pick me, girl..*

I rejoice in the possibility of the digital, but endless depth is daunting. Inside jokes for the spectatorial girlfriend ease tension and I seek comfort in the past.

Figure 7 is an image of a collection of ceramic, screenprinted, and readymade objects, *altar of girlhood nostalgia* is both a nod to my girlhood and my current digital experience. Among the items, there is a green ceramic floppy disk titled *baby photos* from my series *flaccid tech*. Approximately 3.5" x 3.5" the scale of an actual floppy disk, the small object is labeled "NUDES -92". Ridiculous and obsolete by the late 1990s this object represents "simpler" digital participation, a naive and contained digital engagement. Bright and playful, the apple green gloss of the glazed ceramic has an artificial, plastic quality. *baby photos* and the other ceramic disks appear to be toys or three-dimensionally rendered drawings or a symbol of a floppy disk rather than the functional floppy disk itself. Beyond representations of a naive digital experience, my fellow millennials may view the humble floppy disk as a symbol of youth or childhood. Comforting, while simultaneously ironic and scandalous (that whole nudes bit), *baby photos* is a cheeky nod to the content we thoughtlessly upload and anxiously hide.

I also started watching
Legendary. I never knew
it existed and I'm in
heaven

Never seen it

Fabulous dance battles?

I'm on the most recent
season of Drag Race
and its everything and all
I ever wanted and
needed.

Part 5. Good luck, and don't fuck it up - *play and failure*

I “paint.” Well, not really. I dribble ink directly onto the silkscreen mesh so I may squeegee it through. Sometimes onto paper, sometimes onto plastic. I screenprint with painterly gestures.

Introducing immediacy into the screenprinting process I am able to capture these spontaneous and reactive gestures. Improvised and bodily, I collaborate with my materials, reacting to each new mark made, allowing automatic drawing and gesture to take the lead and my anxiety to finally take the backseat. If humor is a coping mechanism for anxiety, play and improv are the antidote.

I surrender.

Simultaneously working on various prints within a series at once, I lay all my paper out and consider their relationship to each other. I rotate my body, then the paper, then my body again, viewing the work in progress from various angles. Standing on top of stools and resting the side of my head against the table to view the work at every angle. I place fragments of paper, screenprinting films, and pieces of plexiglass on top of the paper works in progress, layering, viewing, and layering again. Moving hands, moving my body, my supplies and prints spread out across the studio.

I handle my prints, supplies, and tools more than necessary feeling each surface.

Physical touch is my love language, and COVID has been hard.

In *Free Play*, a book on improvisation in life and art, Stephen Nachmanovitch theorizes that continuous surrender is necessary to be present (21, Nachmanovitch). Play demands expansion and release. Release of expectation and radical acceptance to be and do. As I print marks and gestures each mark made leads into the next as I sample motifs from different silkscreens and arrange them in new compositions. With painterly improvisation, each imprinted mark, each choice reveals the next so quickly that there isn't time for the inevitable anxiety to set in (41, Nachmanovitch). This sense of play and improv is evident in the process and bold, colourful, and expressive aesthetic of my work.

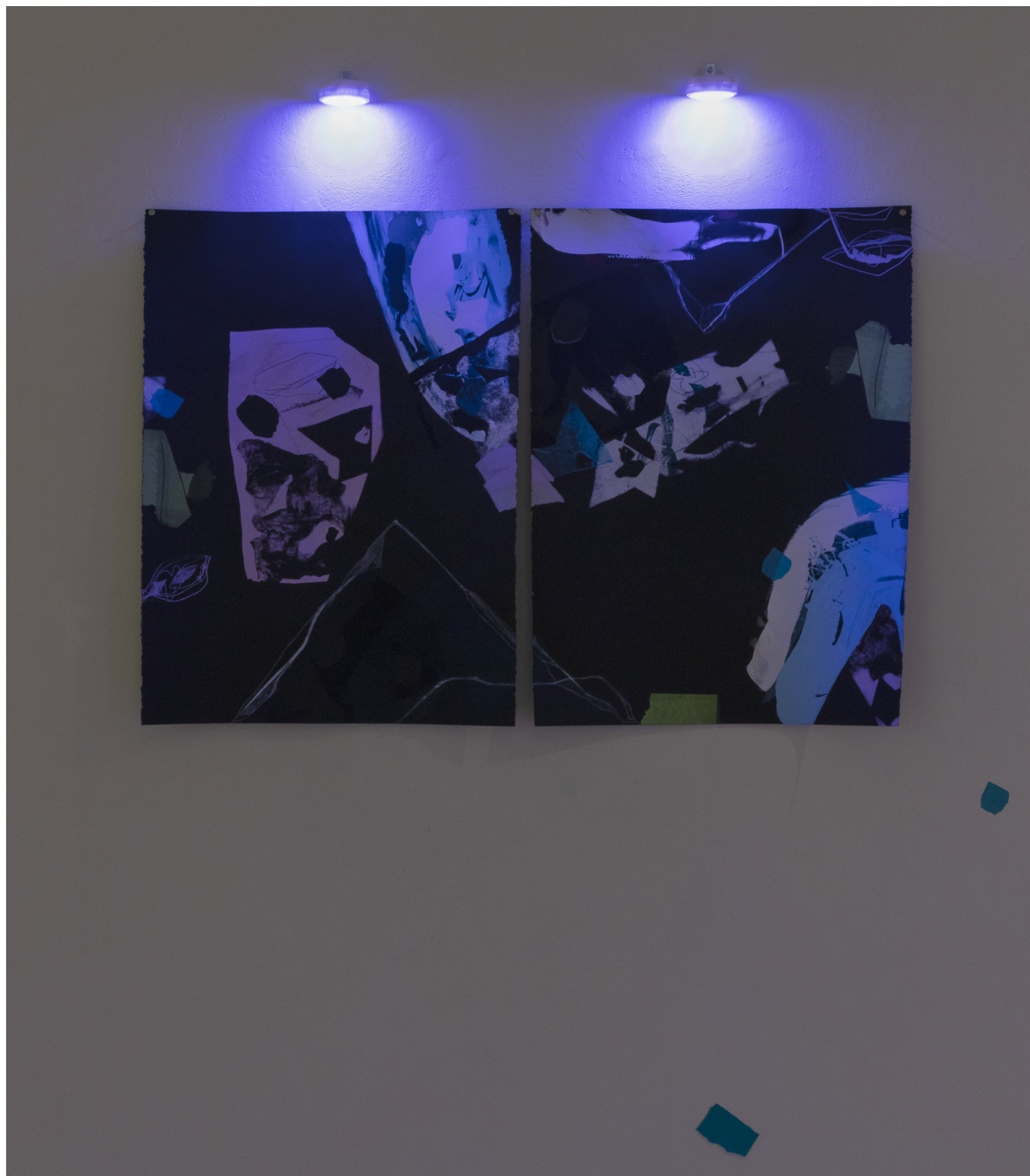


Figure 8. Rachael Dodgson. *night babe <3 I*, Screenprint diptych on paper with blue puck lights, 22" x 30" each, 1/1, 2023, Gales Gallery, Toronto, ON

Echoes of gestural abstraction informed by artists such as Lee Krasner and Helen Frankenthaler and my formative printmaking education at Queen's University with Otis Tamasauskas inform my artistic sensibility. How is gesture and embodied presence translated through a Postdigital aesthetic? Opaque flats of colour are juxtaposed with faint ghost prints and areas of transparent pigment. Loose spirals of ink, hand drawn films, and direct to screen drawing with watercolour crayons are used to capture intuitive mark making. Utilizing different silkscreens, I draw attention to their fibers and fragmentation by printing flats of colour through loose and tight mesh counts.

Experimenting.

How will each screen filter the content I have applied? Or rather how does my screen collaborate in my experience of play?

J. Huizinga in his foundational book on play, *Homo Ludens* 11s 86 (1938) suggests that to truly play one must release their grip on the technical and the conventions of their medium (166). My play requires using materials and tools in unconventional and perhaps even forbidden ways, exposing my process to risk in search of the new. Printmaking has a history of formal standards of technical excellence and distinct conventions that define it. Within the framework of print I take risks and defy conventions in order to develop my own rules. I apply ink directly to the silkscreen without a matrix and place colours directly beside each other instead of in distinct layers. Trash bags, plastic tablecloths, glossy paper, and various non-traditional media are often used instead of rag paper. Dollar store scented trash bags certainly aren't archival, and the ink doesn't always adhere. Concerns of the technical need to be set

aside to play, to discover new methods and ways of working and to push the boundaries and limits of mediums.

Outside of the studio during installation I surrender to play and respond to my environment. Bringing fragments and work into the gallery space, I toss a roll of green scented garbage bags over the red standing wall.

Interesting.

I throw another.

And another.

Climbing on a stool around the back of the wall I pull the rolls down to create the desired length on the other side. I move around the front of the standing wall. What if I open a bag? It's ok if they rip. I open one of the bags and stuff it with leftover plastic wrapping paper from another project. My two-dimensional print on plastic is now an object with screenprinted text, I don't linger on that thought. Hm. Something is missing. Each choice leads to the next. It all happens quickly. I run upstairs to my studio and grab a component of a previously installed work.

I lay it down on the ground.

It will get dirty.

It's ok.

I stand back.

Done.

That was fun.

Blissful and euphoric the play state doesn't last. Play inevitably results in failure and anxiety creeps in.

How do I submit a file for laser cutting?

I try and fail.

And fail again.

Each time I return to illustrator to "fix" whatever the practical issue is I inevitably change the text. The size, the placement, and the words.

Is this too didactic?

Is this fucking lame?

Perhaps the text should overlap? I can't simply correct the file, or redo anything, it has to evolve into something else each time I'm forced to return to it.

Well, it's not a failure if the work becomes something else entirely, right?

I don't know if you care to know this.... But it appears Dino is still on bumble

he's right beside me It's ok, we haven't had the talk yet

(GIF of Robert De Niro making a gesture like "I'm watching you")

I'M WATCHING YOU
DINO!!!!

Part 6. Something smells fishy here - fermentation

Start. Stop. Think. Be Anxious. Come back.

Each time I step into my studio I adjust the pieces and fragments of prints and materials. I stare at the iridescent plastic print I've hung from the metal beam. Anxiety breeds procrastination. Implementing new methods and materials into my practice is daunting. I do the bare minimum to keep my projects alive, like feeding a sourdough starter, it's a daily practice until I'm desperately hungry and just bake the fucking bread already.

Slow processes like fermentation allow one to become intimately familiar with their subject or materials. Gabriel Levine in the book *Art and Tradition in a Time of Uprisings* quotes Eliot Katz, who states that if you desire “perfectly uniform, predictable food” his book on fermentation was not ideal (54). The act of fermentation, the act of making, introduces many variables and collaborators. It is uncertain. If your ultimate goal is to eat tasty sourdough you head to *Emmer* on Harbord (seriously you should go) however, if your goal is to make sourdough and enjoy eating it along the way, you endeavor to bake it yourself. Why do I continue to use slow, analog processes and tools when there are efficient digital processes available to me? Or why make tangible objects in general? Opportunity for uncertainty lies in slow process, in fermentation, and in executing projects ourselves.

Levine succinctly states that “our perfection lies in our imperfection” (Levine, 54). Within any process, there is the possibility of failure. Processes involving fermentation, analog methods, and unscripted play increase this danger. I seek imperfections and the undesirable through my process of fermentation and failure - the medium of printmaking introduces endless opportunities to fail and adjust throughout the process. I fail every time I begin making as I never achieve exactly what I set out to do. I’m thrilled and relieved by failure in the studio, the worst happens, and it’s not that bad.

I carefully bring out the freshly screenprinted dollar store green apple scented trash bags into the summer sun. How lovely. I lay them down and spray them with a fixative, hmm, sticky, I am glad I weighed them down. Moments later a vindictive windy gust comes by. A massacre. Stuck together, text peeling, and bags ripped I throw what would

be accurately described as a hissy fit, kicking a bucket and slumping to the ground dramatically. “Are you ok?” I’m better now knowing my fit about trash bags was apparently louder than this group of construction workers’ jackhammers.

I’m out.



Figure 9. Rachael Dodgson. *Pretty trashy green apple*, in process and installation experiments, 2022, Goldfarb Study Centre, Toronto, ON

Some snacks and self-soothing screen time later I gather and dispose of my failure. Is this usable for something else? On another day, in my next attempt, I change the colour, matching it closely to the shade of the bag. Since I'm going to all this effort, I print 6 rolls

of bags instead of two, and the scale of my project grows. After they're finished printing I fold them and stack them in my studio, they sit untouched for two months. I try to install them in a grid as I envisioned.

I hate it. I throw them over the red standing wall, I like it. I stuff the bag, I like that more.

I deinstall and fold up the bags, and place them in my studio. They sit untouched for two months. I buy battery-operated lights from Amazon. I open multiple bags on a roll and light them from within. The light glows below the thin translucent plastic of the bag, it's almost fluorescent like the pink acrylic I've ordered. I accidentally tear a bag from the roll.

Well, that's not ideal.

Failure interrupts play but fermentation revives it. Perhaps failure wasn't failure at all?

A glitch within the digital is often considered an error or failure of technology, however Russell identifies a "glitch" as a paradox. Prompting and preventing (30) a "glitch becomes a catalyst, opening up new pathways, allowing us to seize on new directions" (30, Russell). Failure and the anticipation of failure prevents progression and creates barriers but it also generates opportunities to imagine new solutions, ways of being, and in my case ways of making. Fermentation gifts opportunities between play and failure to pause.

To breathe.

To consider.

Perhaps I'm the kombucha mother within my own practice, slurping up all that's around me, turning raw experiences and bitter emotions into something both sour and sweet through the process of time.

Video or phone call??

Phone!! It's so on trend
90s

okiee

If only I had a landline
then absolutely no
screen disruption

Part 7 - Screen obsessed anonymous - conclusion

I pull my squeegee over the generous and playful ink application on my silkscreen and onto the paper below. Placing the inky squeegee down and grabbing a wooden block from the table beside my station littered with open containers of different coloured inks, I prop the block under the silkscreen. Carefully dragging the freshly-inked paper out I place it on a nearby table to study it.

Hm.

I return to my silkscreen.

Ugh so much to clean.

I ask myself why I'm using screenprinting as a monoprinting method again, wouldn't painting make more sense? I noticed the ghost image of the ink remaining on the mesh.

Cool.

I take a photo.

Using my phone to edit photos of my silkscreen during my subway commute becomes a daily practice. Screenshotting sections, digitally making marks, and using erase features I blend and adjust the content of each photo.

I turn on the sink light before power washing it. It backlights the ghost image on my silkscreen.

The mesh glows like my phone screen.

I take another photo.



Figure 10. Rachael Dodgson. *Screen Obsessed*, Digital Image, 2023.

I'm considering ending my thesis with this but perhaps its a bit too scandalous

(Screenshot of an earlier conversation in which we discussed an acquaintance who got her labia trimmed and concerns about our current society)

Hahah pretty scandalous

Well it has the word conclusion at the end and my thesis committee said I need to make my conclusion more obvious to the reader

I just searched for the word "conclusion" in our chat

This was the only time

Hahah no way!

I can pretend to have some great epiphany and send you more conclusive statements about something lol

I love you

In *Glitch Feminism* Russell encourages the reader to embrace the digital, embodying it as “an aesthetic blurring the line between body and machine further” (47, Russell). Plastic, reflective, iridescent, and projected ~~30-going-on-13~~ like like or just a “like”? reflects a Postdigital aesthetic in its method and material exploring the interplay between digital and embodied experience by fusing digital and analog means of making. Transmuting feelings evoked digitally into material, situating them within our embodied AFK lives, I contemplate the significance of my digital experience and relationships in the formation of my identity.

The fluorescent pink acrylic used in *Pick me, girl.* or an image of a silkscreen backlit in the washout sink, glow. Luminous, these materials seem to vibrate sending undetectable reverberations toward the viewer, engulfing them. Wandering and wading through a dimly lit assemblage of fragments the viewer is centered and de-centered, comforted and disoriented all at once. My screenprinting practice and digital image making inform the other and become irreversibly intertwined like our digital and AFK lives. Abstract and limitless, my assemblages of surface and fragments of imagery are unfixed and undetermined, shifting and expanding. Fermenting, until play, that sweet ecstasy hits.

Although it catches the eye, it's definitely a bit too much.

Laying in bed in complete darkness I stare at the glowing screen of my phone.

I know it's bad for me, but I just can't stop.

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Appendix A - Documentation of Exhibition

Rachael Dodgson, ~~30 going on 13~~ like like or just a "like"?, Gales Gallery, Toronto, ON,
April 20, 2023

