

University of Cape Town

Masters, Master, Masturbate
(A master's debate)

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Date:

Masters, Master, Masturbate

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Relooking at the Home, Body and Self through
Seventeenth Century Dutch Still Life Painting

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LBSEMI001

A minor dissertation submitted in *partial*
fulfilment of the requirements for the award of
the degree of a Masters in Fine Art

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First.

Sit,

Ladies First

I think I am a painter because I am a good student

The accompanying texts

I waited for you again to come home from your painting class.

That day they made you stand in a circle while you explained why you think you are a painter.

“What do you mean?”

I think I am a painter because I really enjoy painting. I think I am a painter because I am a good student and really enjoy painting.

“Dumb fuck,” said the guy next to him.

“Dumb fuck,” said the guy on the other side of him.

“I, sir, am a painter because my father taught me how to paint and there is no one greater than my father.”

The collection of essays included in this document accompanies my Masters in Fine Art exhibition titled *Masters, Master, Masturbate (A master's debate): Relooking at the Home, Body and Self through Seventeenth Century Dutch Still Life Painting*.

The introductory essays of this document titled *The table is a funny thing, on the other hand* and *Do you understand why I think I am a painter?* provide a brief overview of the project and my practice, respectively. Thereafter, two short essays present the major theoretical concepts that have informed the development of this project. The first

of these two essays, *I did not mind because I was a woman* explores the relationship between the female painter and the home through the lens of seventeenth century Dutch still life painting. The second, titled *I guess you can call yourself anything* draws on the works of Flemish still life painter Clara Peeters (c.1590-c.1659) to consider how this genre provides a means to reflect on contemporary ideas of the body and the self. While the lesser status of still life painting in art academies has limited the number of contemporary critical writings on the genre, I specifically refer in both essays to the writing of art historian Norman Bryson. Bryson's book titled *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* written in 1990 arguably remains the most comprehensive theoretical text on still life painting to date.

Building on these two essays, the section titled *If we tie them together, we will have four*, analyses a selection of works by four women artists exploring female ideologies with specific reference to the home and kitchen. Thereafter drawing on the concepts introduced in this analysis the essay, *But there will be no painting*, presents a thematic reading of selected works from my exhibition.

The essays are followed by two texts presented in both written and visual form drawn from various events, discussions and situations that occurred throughout the project. I refer to the first text, *Our Father, who art in Heaven (Hollowed be my name)* as a 'rolling text'; an uninter-

rupted dialogue that merges real and imagined characters and events. The veracity of these characters and the ideas they express are deliberately withheld from the reader. I regard this text as an accurate reflection of the thinking process engaged within and throughout the project. The second text, titled *The Pits of Painting's Piss (We were both soaking wet)* is a compilation of images, created throughout my project, that exist in visual dialogue with each other, suggesting correlations and relationships contextually created by virtue of the curation of each page. In both of these documents, meaning is unfixed and plural, and interpretation is elusive. These two texts suggest that none of the works presented in the exhibition possess a singular reading but rather exist in circular conversations with one another.

The table is a funny thing, on the other hand.

An introduction to the project

By now, everyone in the room was tired of what I had to say,

And all you could ask is, “Why am I still calling myself a painter?”

*She just stared back, fingering the piece of sinew between her teeth,
wondering what to say next.*

Anything more to say? “The table is a funny thing, on the other hand.”

*“Ours has four legs. Like a dog it waits to be fed, to feed the chairs - her
litter. A sit a tit a little bit, bit by bit she feeds.”*

The cucumber sandwich that he made was not that bad,

besides for the spoiled milk. Spoilt brat!

Economic growth and the related rise of trade and consumerism in the Netherlands during the seventeenth century fueled an interest in both mundane and valuable objects in Dutch culture and society. Known as the Dutch Golden Age, the century is viewed as “a key period in the birth of consumer society” (Hochstrasser, 2007: 1). A specific interest in domestic objects spurred by an increasingly consumerist mindset contributed to the emergence of Dutch still life painting as a genre in and of itself (Hochstrasser, 2007: 1). As the name suggests, these paintings freeze moments of seemingly quotidian domestic life, as they depict objects arranged on table surfaces according to the preferences of the painter. The genre is known for its skilled, detailed rendering of the

objects as truthful depictions of optical reality. It is noted that painters working in this genre celebrated the visual and aesthetic qualities of their subject matter as well as their own “special artistic abilities” and “skillful brushstroke” (Sander, 2008: 14). Unlike history and religious paintings of a similar period, which heavily rely on the depiction of the human form and in doing so present anthropocentric – or human-centric – perspectives of reality, still life painting is altogether devoid of the human figure (Bryson, 1990: 60). Bryson (Ibid.) notes that the exclusion of the human form “is the founding move of still life”, and that this negation of the body has contributed to the perception of the genre as the lowest form of painting in Western art history (Bryson, 1990: 8).

The still life genre seeks inspiration from the private sphere; the home in which the objects depicted existed and were used, cared for, and admired. In the Netherlands during the seventeenth century, women were similarly limited to maintaining everyday mundanities in the private domestic sphere; the home. In his book *Paragons of Virtue: Women and Domesticity in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art* Wayne Franits (1995: 68), art historian and author, notes that “the husband’s principle duty was to acquire goods for his family, goods that his wife was expected to preserve and administer.” This confinement to the home and its associated domestic roles limited women’s prospects as artists. If an education in an art were to be encouraged, it was most

frequently taught by a male family member (Parker & Pollock, 1981: 20). The exclusion of women from European art academies prior to the nineteenth century meant that they lacked access to the study of history and human anatomy formally only taught to their male counterparts through the live nude model. In *Old Mistresses, Women Art and Ideology*, feminist theorists and art historians, Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock (1981: 35) note that “[t]he simple fact of women’s exclusion from the studying of the nude constrained many of them to practice exclusively in the genres of still life and portraiture.”

Resonances of these ideologies regarding the role of women in the home and their prospects as artists are still evident in contemporary South Africa. As settlement by the Dutch in South Africa during the seventeenth century formed the core of Afrikaner culture, strains of Dutch heritage remain prevalent today. As a white Afrikaner woman and female painter in contemporary South Africa, I propose that the process of re-viewing seventeenth century Dutch still life painting may provide insight into contemporary ideas related to social and historic constructs of gender, the definition of the body, and the exploration of the self. This project furthermore explores how the aesthetic and contextual qualities of contemporary household objects may be reconsidered through the lens of seventeenth century Dutch still life painting in terms of how they perpetuate female responsibilities in the home.

Since gender roles that restrict women to the domestic space can be understood as a form of patriarchal control; women have fought for liberation from predetermined roles in the home. This was specifically forefronted by the second-wave feminist movement during the 1960s – 1980s¹. I would argue that this process, rather than liberating women, ironically placed further constraints on contemporary women working from or within the home, both in and outside of the field of fine art. A radical rejection of the idea of the domestic woman during this time (1960s - 1980s) fundamentally contributed to a denial of the possible pleasures experienced within the home and from its associated products.

Through the use and depiction of contemporary household objects, this project encourages a relook at the still life genre of the seventeenth century. The works that comprise the exhibition explore the layered and conflicting expectations imposed on my own position as a woman, female painter and body, by a continuation of patriarchy and by the resolutions of second-wave feminism. Through these, I hope to suggest that the process of re-engaging with familiar objects in present day may prompt a reconsideration of the complexities of still life painting previously disregarded.

¹ First-wave feminism, approximately between the mid nineteenth century-1950s, refers to the reviewing of historical laws that have previously

been regarded as only acceptable for men in society. Here women typically contest their exclusion from society.

Second-wave feminism, approximately between the 1960s-1980s, is regarded as the movement where women reject idealised roles and responsibilities produced and projected on them throughout history and society, specifically within the domestic realm. These roles are closely linked to the singular position of the white middle-class heterosexual woman. In addition, within the Western art feminist movement and the feminist movement outside of the arts, female artists rejected and criticised the male dominated artworld, and worked towards reclaiming their bodies from the previous “construction as a passive object of male desire” (Chadwick, 2012: 9).

Third-wave feminism, approximately between 1980s and the early twenty first century, critiques the exclusion of previously marginalised groups outside the realm of the white middle-class, heterosexual, female identity and shifts its focus to broader issues such as “race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation” (Chadwick, 2012: 13). Whilst third-wave feminism seeks to expand equalities between race, gender, as well as sexual and cultural identities, it recognises the need to “critic[ise] and deconstruct those same discourses in order to expose ideological assumptions in systems of domination and difference” (Chadwick, 2012: 11).

Fourth-wave feminism, approximately from 2005 until the present day, is informed by the ideas of the previous movements which had already “witnessed expanded discussions of race, ethnicity, and sexuality in the formation of identity [...]” (Chadwick, 2012: 507). Today however, attention is paid to the perpetual violence against women. Through the internet and social media, the movement of the fourth wave is highly informed by movements on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube, better known as ‘hashtag feminism’ (Baer, 2016: 17).

Do you understand why I think I am a painter?

A brief overview of my practice

Panting with an I, as I like to call it; this silly conversation we have about what painting is, what this is, what that is, what I am, what you are, what does this mean, what do you mean?

“What do you mean?”

“What do you mean ‘only one finger’?”

She giggled again. But painting, I mean, it taught me how to sit. It taught me how to throw

One afternoon I got sick and threw up everything I ate that morning. I had to wait until you came back from your first painting class.

No, I am lying, fool.

I ate three quarters of a milk tart, drank three quarts of milk.

I went to the bathroom on the second floor and tried to make myself throw up. I only managed to throw up one slice of milk tart.

It made me think about when I had to flush my fish down the toilet.

You teach me how to wait, bait, wait, painting does not hurt.

Do you understand why I think I am a painter?

My practice is informed by my perceptions of what surrounds me in my everyday environment. It is guided by objects that exist in close proximity to myself as body, as woman and as female artist; three separate positions that I hold that concurrently and individually in-

form how I view myself in the present. The objects I refer to are food, beauty and hygiene products acquired from local pharmacies and/or convenience stores. I engage with these products as a means to critically consider my position as a painter in a hyper-consumerist society. As a consumer, I have become familiar with the presence of specific products in my domestic environment from my childhood to the present. In the chapter titled *Still life and ‘Feminine Space’*, Bryson (1990: 138) writes:

[...] the forms of still life have enormous force. As human time flows around the forms, smoothing them and tending them through countless acts of attention across countless centuries, time secretes a priceless product: familiarity.

My familiarity with these products renders them unnoticed. In contrast painting by nature, calls one to notice, see, look, and relook at every surrounding thing that has been muted by familiarity. Through my practice, I aim to reimagine the perception of quotidian objects as mundane, in the minds of the viewer as consumer.

In his text *Perception and its Objects*, philosopher Bill Brewer (2007: 87), writes:

[...] physical objects are such things as stones, tables, trees,

people and other animals: the persisting macroscopic constituents of the world we live in. For the entities of a given kind to be mind-independent is for them to exist and be intrinsically as they are, independently of anyone's thought or experience of them.

Examples of objects I engage with in my practice include tablecloths, plates, plastic cups, saucers, serviettes, forks, *Blue Ribbon* sliced white bread, hot dog rolls, *Spar* butter, *Sunshine D* margarine, cheddar cheese, *Enterprise* sausages, pork bangers, chicken skin, liver spread, sliced ham, tinned peas, tinned chickpeas, *waterblommetjies*, bananas, *Golden Delicious* apples, lemons, naartjies, *finger biscuits*, *Marie Biscuits*, *Fizzers*, *Angel Kisses*, *Marshmallows*, milk tarts, *Spar* long-life milk, body cream, body roll on, *Protex* body washes, facial tissues, earbuds, t-shirts, underwear, one-ply toilet paper, soap, bathroom towels, kitchen towels, *Sunlight* dishwashing liquid, sponges, *all purpose* cleaning cloths, rubber cleaning gloves, hangers, sewing cloths, string, *swing balls*, tennis balls, rubber balls, plastic balls, *body balls*, *hula-hoops*, gift packaging and ribbons.

My creative processes for physically and conceptually interrogating these objects vary according to the context, materiality, form and colour of each: Milk is white. A white plastic fork is plastic. A red plastic ball is round. A round naartjie is orange. A tennis ball can be thrown, and so

can a lemon. Lemon juice is sour. A lolly pop is sweet. Peas are green and piss is yellow. If you squeeze an orange, you get orange juice. A kitchen sponge absorbs liquid; so does a face cloth and a roll of toilet paper. A ripe banana is yellow. A green banana is unripe. A cucumber is hard. Melted butter is soft.

As I am aware of the tactile qualities, the performance abilities and inherent functions these objects hold in reality, the process of interrogation is often driven by the actions inherent in the objects from a consumer's perspective: a ball is intended to be thrown, an apple is intended to be eaten, a ribbon is intended to be tied. I throw the ball. I eat the apple. I tie the ribbon. By enacting the objects' intended purposes, I am aware of the ways in which the objects speak of something other or greater than the intrinsic mundanity we *think* they possess.

I also seek to understand how perceptions of an object may change by 'misusing' it or by enacting a process for which it is not intended, but it is intended for a different object. I splinter a bar of soap with my fingers. I throw lemons towards a nail in the wall. I sit on a block of butter. I am curious to see what these actions may unveil and amused by the playful, humorous and somewhat absurd qualities objects project. This process reveals that even in their ordinary existence objects are not dull but reveal complex information about how we engage with the

“macroscopic constituents of the world we live in”. (Brewer, 2007: 87).

My practice is not limited to each object in isolation. I am interested in their correlations and co-existence. I am drawn to the silent yet consistent discourses they project without notice, mired in and muzzled by their perceived triviality. The work presented in this exhibition seeks to unveil these co-existences, conversations, tensions and juxtapositions between one thing and another, between this and that. I generate activities informed by the existing visual dialogues between objects. As a painter, I am the conveyor of these conversations, sensitive to their existing relationships and purposes in reality. In some instances, I place two objects or actions together that may initially seem incongruent. Here, I am the influencer of their ‘conversations’, sensitive to my understanding of them in relation to the place they fill in my own reality. I encourage various ways of encountering objects that are placed or forced together, challenge their inherent contexts and functions, and prompt reconsideration of how they communicate with one another. By amplifying the quiet conversations between everyday objects, I seek to consider what the dialogues mean to us as consumers who interact and cohabit with these objects outside the realm of fine art.

Discerning the dialogues between objects involves an interest in the relationships between text, language, image and colour. I explore the complex interactions between what products are, what they are called

and how they look. Take an orange, for example. What is an orange? An orange is a fruit. An orange is also orange; the colour that lies between yellow and red on the colour spectrum. Should I place an *orange* orange next to a green banana, both the greenness and ‘*greenness*’ of the banana compared to an imaginary ripe yellow banana are made noticeable. Through such exercises, I aim to remind myself and the viewer of the work that objects are not only things, but carriers of information that structure our reading of everything else we encounter around them. When placed together, objects can be read as imaginary paintings of reality. Anything and everything is a possible painting.

But what is a painting? “*Why are you a painter?*” you ask. My works presented in this exhibition are paintings as much as they are not. Through the lens of painting, I review contemporary products. I do not constrain my ‘paintings’ within the boundaries of traditional Western forms of oil on board or canvas.

I subscribe to Bryson’s (1990: 10) understanding of painting as

[...] an art made not only of pigment on a surface, but signs in semantic space. The meaning of a picture is never inscribed on its surface as brushstrokes are; meaning arises in the collaboration between signs (visual and verbal) and interpreters.

My 'paintings' draw on various forms of artistic production including video, photography, installation, sculpture, documented and undocumented performances, and I consider each work a still life painting that effectively embodies an immediate depiction of reality, reminiscent of the distinctive visual qualities of seventeenth century Dutch still life paintings. Anything and everything is a possible still life painting.

Aware of my position as an Afrikaner woman within contemporary South Africa, I interrogate and place these products through a review of seventeenth century Dutch still life painting. Considering the careful attention this genre pays to mundane domestic objects and their association with the marginalisation of women in a continuing patriarchal social structure, within and outside of fine art, I see an opportunity to relook at contemporary objects in association with the continuing disregard for the role of women in the home.

The complexities of the still life painting genre raise significant questions and tensions in this project. Considered to be one of the lowest forms of painting in Western art history (Bryson, 1990: 8), still life was one of the first painting genres to be regarded as acceptable for female painters according to male practitioners in the art academies; the masters. As such, this project does not simply focus on the triviality of domestic objects. The genre directed me towards questioning my position as a 'female painter'; a topic largely explored within the

history of feminist art, and arguably, in the works of many female painters prior to what is commonly regarded as the 'beginning' of feminism per se. Questions such as "*What is painting?*", "*What is a painting?*" and "*What is a painter?*" became "*What is a female painter?*", "*What is a painting made by a female painter?*" and "*What is a still life painting made by a female painter?*". This process of self-engagement has closely aligned still life painting with self-portraiture. Along with the still life, the self-portrait has for centuries been regarded as the painting genre used by female artists to question, evaluate and elevate their position within art and society. In the introduction to *Seeing Ourselves: Women Self-Portraits*, art historian and feminist critic Frances Borzello (1998: 19) writes that "self-portraits are not innocent reflections of what artists see when they look in the mirror. They are part of a language painters use to make a point, from the simple 'this is what I look like' to the more complicated 'this is what I believe in'."

In this body of work, the relationships between language, image and object are presented with a recognition of myself as both a woman and a female body, both a subject and an object; the painter, the painted and the painting. By creating parameters for interactions between myself and an object, I seek ways to better understand my body in my contemporary context. I set myself various challenges that are as seemingly absurd or mundane as the objects I review. I stuff my mouth with plastic white forks. I strap a block of butter around my waist. I do

push-ups with my face in milk tart. I lick a hole in a lolly pop. Through these interactions as challenges or games, I aim to reconsider how my body functions and exists as an object amongst various other objects; one that breaths, sits, licks, sucks, chews, spits, shits, moves, throws, throws up, sweats, falls, fails, feels, sees and paints. These interactions may be seen as humorous or witty reminders of the potential for mundane objects to delight. The intrinsic actions of the objects may entail and unveil personal amusements, pleasures or small giggles. However, they also demonstrate my limitations and failures as both a body and a painter which fundamentally recall the still lives in the ongoing history of women's existence *as* objects, and *with* objects in the space of the home.

“Wit has its limits, and so does fun” (Jamal, 2018: 100).



1. A yellow lemon and a *Golden Delicious* apple placed on a plastic tablecloth with lemons.

2. Two yellow tennis balls hanging beside a board with *lemon yellow* paint.



3. Two orange naartjies.

4. A round object wrapped with a green ribbon.



5. Three cross-section cuts of a swimming pool foam 'noodle' positioned next to a hotplate on a blue cloth.



6. Green and pink dishwashing sponges.



7. Approximately 15 plastic fork stems placed within the mouth.

8. A bunch of ripening bananas in a plastic *Ziploc* bag.



9. A block of butter strapped around the waist with yellow *masking tape*.

10. A blue ribbon pulled around a slice of white *Blue Ribbon* bread.



11. A green bucket, an orange tub and a striped blue and white kitchen cloth.

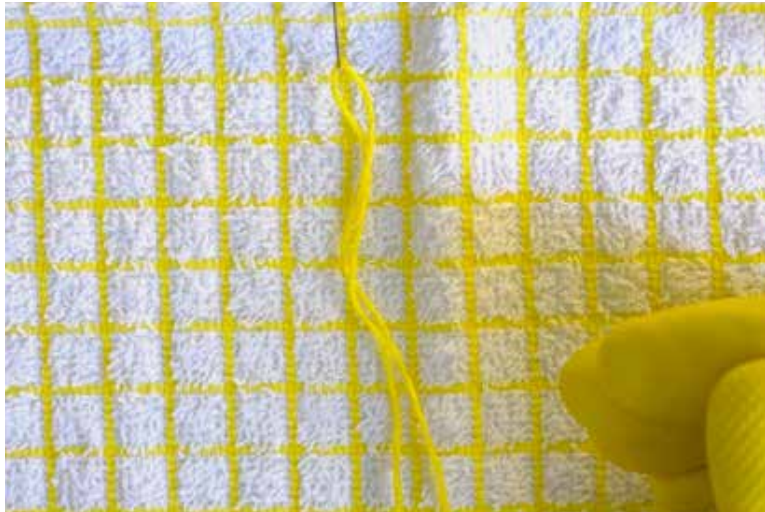
12. An unused roll of half-wet toilet paper.



13. A sliced blue kitchen sponge on an orange surface.



14. A piece of apple placed upon a plastic tablecloth with fruit.



15. A kitchen cloth, embroidery thread and a rubber glove.

16. A block of whitened *Margarine* pushed through the head of a yellow plastic tennis racket.

I did not mind because I was a woman

The still life painter

I stayed home and fed the fish. I fed the fish fish and smelt like one too.

I did not mind because I was a woman.

I fed the orange orange and yellow lemons I threw away. They made me sick anyway. You fool, they were beautiful. I kept them for you to paint too.

I thought that you could include them in your flower paintings. You came first and I was so proud of you.

I came home and fed the dog.

I fed the cat. I made supper.

We had our last supper together and you left crumbs all over the table.

I cleaned the table and pushed the chairs under the table. Never sat like ladies. Bad manners. Man, hers. Ham her. Like master, my father who art in Heaven.

“The still life of the woman is the embodiment of everything that this system of political value refuses: domesticity, routine, repair” (Bryson, 1990: 157).

In the introduction to his text titled *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting*, art historian and theorist Norman Bryson (1990: 8) indicates that still life painting

[...] has always been the least theorised of the genres, and when the academies that launched the first theoretical accounts of painting came to mention it at all, they did so disparagingly: still life was always at the bottom of the hierarchy, unworthy of the kind superior attention reserved for history painting or *the grande manière* [...]

He continues, noting that still life is “[...] not quite the province of the serious and ambitious student; not really the most recommendable topic for a dissertation that would wish to show its professional mettle.”

In the seventeenth century, still life painting was regarded as a less intellectual painting genre, seeing that knowledge of human anatomy and history was not required (Greer, 2001: 227). In the catalogue essay for the exhibition titled *The Magic of Things, Still Life Painting 1500-1800*, presented in the Städel Museum Frankfurt (2008) and Kunstmuseum Basel (2009), art historian and author Jochen Sander (2008: 13), notes that “[a]fter its emancipation from the religious painting of the late Middle Ages, the ‘still life’ initially served as a means of recording and interpreting the stationary objects found in the viewer’s everyday surroundings.” Contributing to its lesser status in the academies, the still life genre is reminiscent of the “small scale, trivial, forgettable acts of bodily survival, and self-maintenance” (Bryson, 1990: 14).

The lack of human form in the still life genre, as well as its rank as “the lowest form of artistic life,” contributed to the perception of its appropriateness for female painters (Bryson, 1990: 175). This was supported by female painters’ practical access to the subject matter of the domestic environment. The secondary social position of women, and thus of female painters in the seventeenth century meant that ‘greatness’ was absent from the still life genre (Bryson, 1990: 14).

In *Seeing Ourselves: Women Self-Portraits*, art historian and feminist critic Frances Borzello (1998: 28) notes that

[t]he problem for women was that from medieval times, femininity was understood in terms of permissible behavior, necessary duties and admired accomplishments. This construction of femininity was legitimized by religion, medicine, philosophy and convention, and legalized through concepts of marriage, property and rights. Women were trained to put themselves second, be supportive to a husband, serve their families. It was not seemly for them to put themselves forward, let alone compete or excel, nor proper for them to go about the world alone. Their sphere was private while men’s was public.

Bryson (1990: 178) echoes Borzello in his discussion of the *megalographic*

lives of ‘men’ and *rhopographic* lives of ‘women’ in the context of the still life genre:

Megalography seeks an image of human life that exalts the exceptional event and individual, magnifies personal distinction and achievement, and raises existence to the level of the gods. Against that, what we have been calling rhopography finds the truth of human life in those things which greatness overlooks, the ordinary of the daily routine and the anonymous, creatural life of the table [...] In the societies which produced still life, the opposition seemed naturally to parallel the construction of gender, with men leading to speak megalographic, and women rhopographic, lives.

Borzello (1998: 27) continues and asks: “What is an artist?”. In response, she writes: “If the answer were simply a practitioner of art, women artists would have no problems. But from recorded history, the artist is always assumed to be male. A female artist is an exception, a prodigy.”

This habitual disregard for the artistic integrity and intellectual pursuits of the woman within a male dominated artworld perseveres. In response, I quote Rebecca Morrill in the introductory text to *Great Women Artists* (2019: 12):

In the twenty-first century, it might seem irrelevant to talk about artists in terms of gender at all. Women artists today are certainly no longer limited to making art about ‘suitable’ subject (the domestic sphere, flowers, motherhood, etc.) [...] However, while artworks themselves might not reveal whether their maker was male or female, [...] male artists are still likely to be more successful by any number of measures.

She continues: “[...] men artists continue to enjoy crucial institutional advantages, with their work more likely to be collected by – and actually put on display in – public museums, the ultimate destination for artists looking to secure their place in history” (Morrill. 2019: 12).

The perception of my position as a ‘woman within the home’ is, of course, heightened by my position within the academic institution even whilst studying towards a Masters in Fine Art. From my predominantly female undergraduate in Fine Art peer group, I moved into a Masters peer group as the only female student in my intake year. I note that the term “master” (both noun and verb) celebrates the European male artist and painter prior to the nineteenth century. From the perspective of a female Masters painting student, the term interests me as the contemporary academic title, *Masters in Fine Art*, may struggle to rid itself of its perpetual patriarchal resonances. I am amused by my working towards an academic qualification that, respective of its pleasures, mutely

continues to celebrate the greatness of the (male) Master of Fine Art. Morrill (2019: 11) however proposes that

[...] the ‘greatness’ in art could shift in time and space, rather than being fixed in perpetuity, and there could be multiple definitions of greatness in existence at once. What is considered great in one era may not be valued in another [...]. If greatness is not inherent to art itself, but rather imposed upon it – in the eye of the beholder and through its institutions – then, rather than getting caught up in debates about whether any historical women[sic] artist can ever be as ‘great’ as the Old Masters, perhaps it is more meaningful to put aside the idea of a single, fixed standard and consider that there is a multiplicity of ways in which art can be appreciated and valued, depending in particular who is looking.

And yet, the still life “is unimpressed by the categories of achievement, grandeur or the unique” as Bryson writes (1990: 60). In response to the ostensible triviality present in still life paintings, the perceived lower status of the female painter and *rhopographic* lives of women in the home, I am interested in how the domestic mundanity represented in the still life genre allows a reconsideration of my practice as a female painter within the home; a space discredited by men and then, in turn, by feminists in their attempt to escape the perceived lesser status of the

domestic realm. The space that holds the woman and that she is beholden to.

The term ‘feminist’ introduced by French philosopher Charles Fourier in the early nineteenth century (Leslie, 1982: 92), refers to a proponent of ‘feminism’, defined as a “system of ideas and political practices based on the principle that women are human beings equal to men” (Lengermann & Niebrugge, 2010: 223). It has been explored as an ideology by women in a myriad of fields, including the arts:

But feminism is after all a matrix of political positions [...] In this instance, the struggle is against the patriarchy of the art world. By this I mean the structures within visual culture which use markers of gender, race and nation above all else in maintaining hierarchies of forms of production and consumption, of categories of artists, and of representation. (Robinson, 2015: 7).

Whilst this project reviews the still life genre in association with the role of the woman in the home, it is specifically interested in the second-wave feminist movement of the mid-twentieth century; a period marked by women’s rebellion “from [the] traditional, sex-based division of labour *within* the family” (Leslie, 1982: 92) with the hopes of “bettering the position of women inside and outside art” (Meyer, 2006: 317). Along with the second-wave feminist movement’s liberation of women

from the home and into the traditionally masculine public realm, came ideologies that deny the pleasures that many women, and men, may find in the domestic environment.

In my study of how to rediscover these pleasures, I refer to the writing of French novelist and filmmaker Georges Perec. In his text *The Infra-Ordinary*, Perec (1997: 205–207) writes:

How should we take account of, question, describe what happens every day and recurs everyday: the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the habitual? To question the habitual. But that’s just it, we’re habituated to it. We don’t question it, it doesn’t question us, it doesn’t seem to pose a problem, we live it without thinking, as if it carried within it neither question nor answers, as if it weren’t the bearer of any information. This is no longer even conditioning, it’s anaesthesia. We sleep through our lives in a dreamless sleep. But where is our life? Where is our body? Where is our space?

How are we to speak of these common things, how to track them down, how to flush them out, wrest them from the dross in which they are mired, how to give them meaning, a tongue, to let them, finally speak of what it is, who we are.

While Perec does not speak from a woman's position, he calls for a re-look at familiar environments. Although the home has traditionally been viewed by feminists as a space of patriarchal oppression, there are other potential readings given that "the house and the home are frequently perceived as symbols of the self, the psyche, and the body" (Briganti & Mezei, 2005: 8). In her text titled *House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme*, political and feminist theorist Iris Marion Young (2012: 190) advocates a reconsideration of the home, noting:

[...] if house and home mean the confinement of women for the sake of nourishing male projects, then feminists have good reason to reject home as a value. But it is difficult even for feminists to exorcise a positive valence to the idea of home [...] Despite the oppressions and privileges the idea historically carries, the idea of the home also carries critical liberating potential because it expresses uniquely human values.

Bryson (1990: 137) similarly states that

[e]very one of us lives a life in the orbit of basic routines of self-maintenance [...] Such activities are objectively necessary for our welfare and respond to inescapable conditions of human life. But how these activities are viewed and appraised – what value is *placed* on the life of creaturely routine – is very much a

matter of culture and of history. Whether these are respected or dismissed, valued or despised, depends on the work of ideology.

Furthering Young and Bryson's ideas, I note that the home is not solely occupied by women but is the mundane everyday space shared by many individuals. However, as Bryson concludes, ideologies inform how we perceive these activities. The tension presented today is that these mundanities have traditionally been maintained by women and therefore lack currency. If a man should engage within the realm of the woman, or "women's work", his 'masculinity' becomes defused and devalues his position as a 'real man'. In addition, during the seventeenth century Dutch culture, "[...] theological views of marriage and family life both confirmed and justified their gender status" (Franits, 1995: 66).

Insofar as the still life genre is linked to the domestic space, the disorder of the table recalls "the peril of a household losing its moral grip" (Bryson, 1990: 122). And in the chapter *Still Life and 'Feminine' Space*, Bryson points out that the orderliness, cleanliness, good management, and moral and physical purity of the house was and largely still is regarded as the responsibility of women (Bryson, 1990: 160). While I review products associated with my domestic environment, I acknowledge that such responsibilities are furthermore

informed by what is found in the contemporary domestic setting. As an experiment, I searched my home for objects related to food, hygiene, beauty and the cleanliness of the domestic space. The text used in contemporary advertisements for such products drew my interest, relative to the position they might hold as objects in Dutch still life paintings. The texts read as follows:

For the Good Health of your Skin, Feel Good Food, Extra Body, Cleans, rinses, disinfects, Refresh and Restore, Fresh, Daily fresh, Feel the Freshness, Purifying, Uplifting Fragrance, Mild and Gentle, Soft and Comfortable, Crisp and Calm, Clear, Multi Care, 24 Care, Complete Care, Nourishing, Intense nourishment, Comfort, Comfort Confidence, Our Soft Promise, Comfort Protect Promise, 24/7 Protection, Complete Protection, Advanced control, Trusted Relief, Hides imperfections, Almost invisible, Invisible.

Drawn from a contemporary setting, these objects may present a dichotomy in and of themselves. The messaging perpetuates inherited ideologies of ordered, clean, and ‘moral’ feminine domestic space, within the context of ‘immoral’ masculine public space of consumerism. In his essay *The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process*, Igor Kopytoff (1986: 76) writes:

What these mundane examples show is that, in any society,

the individual is often caught between the cultural structure of commoditization and his [/her/their] own personal attempts to bring a value order to the universe of things.

I am aware of the potential threat of objects, as even ‘trivial’ and overlooked household items persist in nurturing preconceived identities and ideologies to which women and men are still expected to conform. As an agent and target of this cultural phenomena, I consider the power of ordinary objects to reveal the problematic ideologies of gender embedded in them. These objects, mundane as they appear, serve as reminders that gender is still a “social or cultural condition [...] it is not something that the individual constructs, but a pre-existing pattern of behaviour to which they adhere” (O’Reilly, 2009: 82).

As an artist, or ‘rhyparographer’ defined by Bryson (1990: 136) as a “painter of *rhyparos*, literally of waste or filth; the association is with the things that are physically and morally unclean”, I seek ways to overturn the intrinsic gender associations that objects carry, to reflect on how they may speak of self instead. A reconsideration of objects within the home is helpful as this ‘traditional realm of women’ offers a platform from which I participate in a ‘self-reflexive’ discussion to better understand my position as female artist and body within the space of the home.

However, the problem arises of how today's feminist voices are moulded by the resolutions of previous generations of feminists. Their activities were necessary and honourable, but display a conflicting repressive quality as the home may propose a potential re-view of oneself by oneself, instead of by another. Whilst re-assessing seventeenth century Dutch painting in association with the ideologies both defused and created by the second-wave feminist movement within the present day, this project proposes that past and future do not exist as severed dichotomies but as bound synchronicities in this moment.

In the spirit of self-reflexivity, immersed in a system rooted in the past while aware of the contradictions inherent in being both an Afrikaner woman and a Fine Art Masters student critiquing the continuation of yesterday's constructs, I propose the necessity of acknowledging one's own creative engagement as a constituent of gender constructs and the resulting ideologies. Griselda Pollock (1988: 43) indicates that

[...] art is constitutive of ideology; it is not merely an illustration of it. It is one of the social practices through which particular views of the world, definitions and identities for us to live are constructed, reproduced, and even redefined.

Through our present bodies as contemporary female artists working with or against the remnants of the past, ideologies with their own

constraints may be created anew. The remnants of models of liberation inscribe constraints, albeit of a different nature.

On one end of an imagined conceptual spectrum of feminism, the home sits in a perceived space of discomfort and oppression; liberation and pleasure lie beyond its walls. Bryson notes the coexistence of both the anxieties and pleasures of the home on the tables depicted in seventeenth century Dutch still life paintings. He states that the "[s]till life of the table is structured around the same anxious polarity, with vice and pleasure beckoning at one end, virtue and abstention admonishing at another" (Bryson, 1990: 112). This observation may propose a means for the metaphorical turning of the tables on the enclave of the domestic as purely either good or bad. While the domestic space is still regarded by many contemporary women as a space that reflects the 'lower' position of the woman, I suggest that it should not be solely rejected or despised but through rhyparography be revealed as a space that may involve, contain, and unveil personal and artistic development.

I guess you can call yourself anything.

The still life of a self-portrait

“What do you think will be the best way to describe how you feel?”

she asked. “Feel about what?”

“About how you think you are a painter?”

“Oh, but I don’t think I am a painter.”

“What! What are you then?”

“Do I need to be something?”

“Anything, you need to be anything!”

*A painter, a feminist, a bitch, a woman, a man, an artist, an examiner,
an invalidator. An ejaculator?*

*“Can I pretend to be something? Can I call myself a painter even
though I am not?” “I guess so,” she thought. I guess you can call
yourself anything. If you don’t call yourself anything, then it means
that you are nothing.*

I begin with an M and end with an R, I contain no U, but can tell who
you are. What am I?

In the previous essay, I considered the still life painting genre with its
specific representation of household products. I propose that this genre,
though historically regarded as the lowest form of painting, holds
potentially liberating qualities related to the historical and ongoing

roles and responsibilities of women in the private sphere of the home.
Aware of the conflicting contemporary messages and associations
related to consumerist objects, I consider still life ‘painting’ as an
instrument that allows one to speak of the self, by oneself.

I consider the validity of Bryson’s previously mentioned recommenda-
tion to steer clear of the still life genre as a dissertation topic. However,
I am attracted to the genre’s preconceived lack of value and the celebra-
tion of rhopography. I propose that objects presented in the home may
in fact present greater complexities than anticipated and are thus worthy
of study.

In his text titled *Objects Define Us* author and curator, Antony Hudek
(2014: 14, 15) explores the importance of the ‘ordinary’, stating:

The world of objects, however ‘ordinary’, is a trove of disguis-
es, concealments, subterfuges, provocations and triggers that
no singular, embodied and knowledgeable subject can exhaust
[...] Do objects define us by catering to our needs as users,
consumers or collectors, and by limiting our movements by
their physical properties? This interpretation assumes the
primacy of the object’s function in a world dependent on the
human capacity to define her or his environment. But this

‘define’ can equally mean the opposite: objects define us because they come first, by commanding our attention, even respect; they exist before us, possibly without us.

Critical theorist Bill Brown (2001: 4), similarly states in his text *Thing Theory* that “as they [objects] circulate through our lives, we look *through* objects, (to see what they disclose about history, society, nature, or culture – above all, what they disclose about *us*), but we only see a glimpse of things.” It seems that the still life genre exists more closely to the personal than art theorists and academics of the past have suggested.

In *The Cultural Biography of Objects*, Chris Gosden and Yvonne Marshall (1999: 169) write, “as people and objects gather time, movement and change, they are constantly transformed, and these transformations of person and object are tied up with each other.” Whilst aware of the traditionally negated body within the still life genre, I am interested in how the process of revisiting the genre may in fact lead to a potential re-emerging of the body and own identity. In her catalogue essay titled *A Thing Like You and Me*, filmmaker and writer Hito Steyerl (2010) writes:

But first of all: why should anybody want to become this thing—an object—in the first place? [...] Traditionally,

emancipatory practice has been tied to a desire to become a subject. Emancipation was conceived as becoming a subject of history, of representation, or of politics. To become a subject carried with it the promise of autonomy, sovereignty, agency. To be a subject was good; to be an object was bad. But, as we all know, being a subject can be tricky. The subject is always already subjected. Though the position of the subject suggests a degree of control, its reality is rather one of being subjected to power relations. Nevertheless, generations of feminists - including myself - have strived to get rid of patriarchal objectification in order to become subjects. The feminist movement, until quite recently (and for a number of reasons), worked towards claiming autonomy and full subjecthood.

But as the struggle to become a subject became mired in its own contradictions, a different possibility emerged. How about siding with the object for a change? Why not affirm it? Why *not* be a thing? An object without a subject? A thing among other things?

My research and practice echo Steyerl’s idea of being object over subject, noting and accepting that my body is merely a “thing among other things” within the larger field of still life painting. This may

however, contradict Bryson's (1990: 60) stance on the physical negation of the human body in still life. I regard it necessary to return to Bryson's text in the chapter titled *Rhopography*:

But in still life we never see the human form at all. Still life negates the whole process of constructing and asserting human beings as the primary focus of depiction. Opposing the anthropocentrism of the 'higher' genres, it assaults the centrality, value, prestige of the human subject. Physical exclusion is only the first in a series of negations of the kinds of human-centred dignity we are used to finding in the other genres. Removal of the human body is the founding move of still life.

This removal of the human body as the founding move of still life is noted by Borzello (1998: 26) as the justification for the appropriateness of the genre for female painters:

The biggest barrier against their full development was the taboo against women drawing from the nude male model. This mattered because artists were judged on the mastery of the figure. There was a hierarchy of subject matter in which portraits and still-life, the areas most women worked in, carried far less status than scenes

from the Bible, mythology and history which was based on the figure.

And yet, writer and critic Sally O'Reilly opposes this binary perspective of the human subject versus the inanimate object. In her text titled *The Body in Contemporary Art* (2009: 7) she asserts:

[...] it seems improbable that there is any art that does not involve the body, since making art and relating to it are rooted in the material world of encounter. And if we take the mind to be the seat of intellect, the body is our interface with the world, and our senses its line of communication, so that even the most dematerialised, conceptual work must take the body into account in some way.

I consider the work of Clara Peeters (c.1590-c.1659, Antwerp) in response to Bryson and O'Reilly's arguments. As a pioneer artist of the still life genre in northern Europe, she encouraged the development and popularisation of still life painting in the seventeenth century (Chadwick, 2012: 132). And yet, her work and life remain largely under-researched (Morrill, 2019: 315).

Most of her paintings depict food objects or household/kitchen items on tables and do not depict the human figure, as is typical of the still

life genre. However, some paintings include reflections of the artist in hyper-realistic painted objects, constituting self-portraits or ‘hidden portraits’ (Decoteau, 1992: 11). I refer to the flagons and/or gilt-cups in her paintings titled *Dainties* (1611), *Wunderkamer* (1612), *Still Life with Fruit and Flower* (c.1620) and *Herring, Cherries and Artichoke* (1612). While Peeters “may have been the artist who popularised” this manner of portraiture within still life objects, it was frequently employed by other female and male artists in the seventeenth century to represent their “skill and their visage”, including William van Aelst, Abraham van Beyeren, Maria van Oosterwijck, Rachael Ruysch and Johannes Torrentius (Decoteau, 1992: 7–11).

This mode of portraiture of course contradicts the perceived lack of the human form in the still life genre which ultimately contributed to its lesser status in Western art history. It may also call for a relook at the relationship between still life painting by women painters and female self-portraits through the use of objects. In *Old Mistresses, Women Art and Ideology*, Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock (1981:158) write that artworks made by women “engage hidden aspects of women’s lives and their experiences as women from their own point of view.” Art historian Marsha Meskimmon similarly states in the introduction to her book *The Art of Reflection, Women Artists’ Self-portraiture in the Twentieth Century* (1998: xv) that the self-portrait

[...] is a way of coming into the representation for women, in which the artist is both subject and object and conceives of how she looks in the sense of how she sees rather than how she appears. She presents an embodied subject.

The objects in Peeters’ works act as imaginary reflective/non-reflective surfaces. As objects existing within her reality, they mirror the painter as an embodied subject. As suggested in the painting of Peeters, a domestic object may similarly be considered a ‘mirror’, a “visual instrument for obtaining an authentic reflection of the self” (Cheney, Faxon & Russo, 2000: xxii, 1). This idea echoes that of Bill Brown (2001: 4) as earlier introduced:

As they [objects] circulate through our lives, we look *through* objects, (to see what they disclose about history, society, nature, or culture – above all, what they disclose about us), but we only see a glimpse of things.

Clara Peeters also depicts herself as an embodied object amongst the rest in her distinct *Self-portrait with Still Life* (1612), “[a] thing among other things” (Steyerl, 2010). Contrary to the multiple, vague and half-hidden self-portraits found in her other paintings, she is clearly defined in this painting. While holding a magnifying glass in her left hand, she is “inviting the viewer to gaze into the intangible

and unreachable, like the painted still-life objects displayed in this picture” (Cheney, Faxon & Russo, 2000: 89). She is merely a thing amongst things depicted by herself as painter, reminiscent of the words by art historian Christine Ross (2006: 368) in *The Paradoxical Bodies of Contemporary Art*:

While the body is everywhere in its various enactments as bodies, and while it has become a subject of great debate in art discourse, it easily evaporates despite its solidarity and mass. Bodiliness is evoked but disclaimed, denied or put into brackets; it is desired but defused, and is still thus very much in a *terra incognita*.

Similarly, Borzello (2016: 230) notes that “[t]he self-portrait is a strange thing. In some cases, it is not even obvious that is what it is.” In her previous edition of the same text, she writes that self-portraiture

[...] is in the throes of producing new themes which are informed by past and expressive of the present [...] the feminist innovation of the presentation of abstract issues through the artist’s own body has complicated the whole idea of the self-portrait” (Borzello, 1998: 199).

The exploration of the female body in the body-orientated feminist art movement of the twentieth century is celebrated for its major contribution to contemporary ideas of the body in art; “[w]ithout it identity based art, crafts-derived art, performance art, and much political art would not exist in the form it does, if it existed at all. Much of what we call post-modern art has feminist art at its source” (Cotter, 2010 in Chadwick, 2012: 498).

In *Self-Portraits by Women Artists* (Cheney, Faxon & Russo, 2000: 209) we read that:

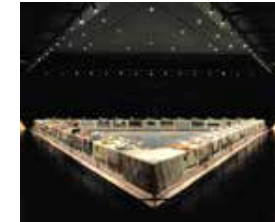
[...] a female concern with the self-portrait has been constant, from the earliest recorded instances. To the viewing public, it is the self-portraitist who seeks the closest connection between art, medium and artist... [I]n the beginning, the mirror in which the artist reflected herself included primarily the attributes through which she established herself in society. By the end of the twentieth century, her work has come to reflect the realities of her society at large, as she perceives it.

The irony presented here is that the renowned work of the feminist movement of the twentieth century has the works of female painters of seven

teenth century, such as Clara Peeters', at its source. What constitutes the 'body', the 'still life painting', the 'self-portrait' or the 'object' in Peeters' work seems unclear.

Reviewing the interaction between these elements in the present day may reveal how the still life genre may contribute to the vast and complex contemporary definitions and ongoing complications around how the 'body' is defined by and within the home. This also suggests a need to reassess how contemporary objects in the home may present and re-present the self. Whilst the still life genre depicts real objects, quite literally those objects which surround the painter, I suggest that it may also exist as self-portraits.

Through the still life painting genre, I am reminded of the agency objects hold to reflect the realities of one's society and cultural heritage and the persisting traditional ideologies related to women and the home. Even though it was previously regarded as a genre that negates the body, I propose that it should be reconsidered for its potential to inform what the body may mean to the self, as artist.



17. Clara Peeters
1611
Dainties
Oil on board
52 cm x 73 cm
Museo del Prado

18. Judy Chicago
1974-1979
The Dinner Party
Ceramic, textile and porcelain
1460 cm x 1280 cm x 900 cm
Brooklyn Museum



19. Clara Peeters
1612
Self-portrait
Oil on board
37.2 cm x 50.2 cm
Private Collection

20. Barbara Kruger
1981
Untitled (Your Gaze Hits the Side of my Face),
Photograph and type on
paperboard
47.9 cm x 39.1 cm
National Gallery of Art
Washington D.C



21. Clara Peeters
1611
Fish
Oil on board
50 cm x 72 cm.
Museo del Prado

22. Sarah Lucas
1997
Got a Salmon #3.
Digital print on paper
37,9 cm x 49,6 cm
Tate Collection



23. Maria van Oosterwijk
c. 1673
Still Life with Flowers in a Decorative Vase
Oil on board
64 cm x 47.5 cm
Mauritshuis

24. Georgie O'Keeffe
1932
Jimson Weed/ White flower no. 1
Oil on canvas
121.9 cm x 101.6 cm
Museum of American Art



25. Rachel Ruysch
1710 or 1716
Still Life with Fruit, Bird's Nest and Insects
Oil on canvas
62.2 cm x 57.1 cm
National Trust, Dudmaston

26. Hannah Wilke
1974 - 1982
S.O.S. - Starification Object Series
Single image, Gelatine Silver prints
Dimension varies
Museum of Modern art



27. Judith Leyster
c. 1630
Self-portrait
Oil on canvas
75 cm x 67 cm
National Gallery of Art
Washington D.C

28. Cindy Sherman
1980
Untitled Film Still #58
Gelatine silver print
20.3 cm x 25.4 cm
Guggenheim Museum

If we tie them together, we will have four

A selective reading of four works by women artists

Stuffed up, Buttered up, Fed up.

She fed the kids, She fed the dogs, She fed the fish.

She fed the fish fish.

The reason why she didn't paint anymore was because she had children. Two of them.

"I have two feet," she said.

If we tie them together, we will have four. Like the dog.

Like the table. Like the bed. Like the chairs.

Like the chairs under the table.

The head of the table.

He only had two.

While the subject of the home has been debated in the recorded history of feminism, contemporary female artists are deliberately returning to the home and its associated qualities, critical of the persisting homemaking roles that many women are still obligated to fulfil (Battista: 2013, 65). In the following section I provide a selective reading of works in which women have explored ideologies regarding the female artist and the home through the lens of self, the body and/or domestic product. I specifically consider the way in which the works challenge constructs of femininity and subvert preconceived notions of gender identity in both art and broader society.

Martha Rosler's (b.1943) video and performance work titled *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975) is a good starting point. Embodying the qualities of the second-wave feminist period, she contests the confinement of (specifically white, heterosexual, middle class) women to the home. In this single-point, black and white video piece, she demonstrates a collection of kitchenware. She announces: "Apron, bowl, chopper, dish, egg beater, fork, grater, hamburger press, ice pick, juicer, knife, ladle, measuring implements, nutcracker, opener, pan, quart bottle, rolling pin, spoon, tenderiser, U, V, W, X, Y, Z." (Rosler, 1975). She demonstrates each object to the viewer by performing actions and movements with them. These movements or interactions between herself and the objects are somewhat reminiscent of the actions associated with the objects in the context of the home.

By scraping the fork on a grater, thrusting the rolling pin towards the viewer, or banging the table surface with the tenderiser, she creates a sense of unease. In the text titled "*I'm sort of sliding around in place...mmm...*": *Art in the 1970s* Sam Gathercole (2006: 73) notes that Rosler's interactions with the objects "indicates a growing sense of hardly repressed violence." This representation of repressed violence or frustration contests the traditional role of the woman as seemingly homemaker and forces a reconsideration of female identity in relation to concepts of femininity. Gathercole (2006: 73) also notes that Rosler's work casts femininity and the 'female' "as a social and political construct, and one that, because

defined through patriarchal, masculine language, had to be rejected.”

Multi-disciplinary artist and activist Bobby Baker (b.1950) proposes a different view from Rosler. While Rosler’s work is an assertive rejection of the domestic role of women – reminiscent of other mid-twentieth century feminist artists such as Chantal Akerman (1950-2015), Brigit Jurgensen (1949-2003) and Laurie Simmons (b.1949) – Baker’s video work titled *Kitchen Show* (1991) presents a humorous illustration of the confinement of the homemaker, and suggests that this role may in fact be one of inspiration, personal gratification and pleasure. The video comprises Baker performing various actions in a kitchen space which she refers to, along with the rest of her home, as a site of ‘exhibition’ (Battista, 2013: 17).

Through the use of wit, humour and sarcasm, she provides suggestions for bettering of one’s position in and experience of the kitchen: keep a pear in the breast pocket and throw it when feeling frustrated, let the water run while washing or preparing vegetables to experience the soothing sound of moving water; splash water in your face to feel relieved and refreshed, consider the beauty of the bright orange colour of a carrot. In the voiceover narration Baker (1991) says: “When I’m doing things like this, I am sort of shot through with joy, really, it sounds silly, but it’s true.” Whilst sitting between truth and falsehood, ridicule and seriousness, Baker nevertheless reminds the viewer of the small,

overlooked significances and pleasures embedded in the actions of the home. This work sits between the rejected patriarchal ideology of the woman’s role in the home and a celebration of the potentially liberating qualities the domestic environment may hold.

Drawing on the work of Rosler and Baker, Elzbieta Jabłońska’s (b.1970) performance piece titled *Through the Stomach to the Heart* (2001) also relies on a re-enactment or re-embodiment of actions performed in the kitchen. However, in this performance the artist occupies the (historically male) gallery to prepare and serve food to guests. As she performs the role of ‘hostess’, ‘housewife’ and ‘cook’ within the public exhibition space, Jabłońska reasserts her position as ‘female’ within both the private and social terrain and interrogates the role of the woman as the one who cooks and feeds (Chadwick, 2017: 506). As a result this work merges the domestic “*rhopographic* lives of women” (Bryson, 1990: 178) with the public “*megalographic* lives of men,” (Bryson, 1990: 178). Post-feminist, Jabłońska (Chadwick, 2017: 506) does not reject the role of the woman as one who feeds but prompts a reconsideration of how such roles could unsettle patriarchal ideologies if taken upon oneself by oneself as a woman (Chadwick, 2017: 506). As a mother and artist, the work of Jabłońska suggests that even though definitions of what it is to be ‘woman’ continue to be imposed by society, it is possible for a woman to “perform each of her roles as best she can and still derive satisfaction from them” (Culture.pl, 2004).

Baker's *Kitchen Show* (1991), produced in the late-twentieth century and Jabłońska's *Through the Stomach to the Heart* (2001), produced in the early twenty-first century, both reflect third-wave feminist perspectives which critically expand second-wave conceptions in the 60s-80s of women's roles and the home.

Here, it is fitting to recall the canonical work of Judy Chicago (b.1939), a forerunner of the feminist art movement of the twentieth century. Her work titled *The Dinner Party* (1974-1979), also referred to as an "icon of feminist art" (Robinson, 2015: 38), consists of 39 hand painted plates placed on embroidered cloths laid out on a triangular table set for thirty-nine female 'guests' (Gathercole, 2006: 72). The selection of 'invited' women is informed by their historical and mythological prominence. The names of 999 other 'important' women are installed on tiles placed on the floor (Gathercole, 2006: 71). The plates, as "renditions of female sexual organs" (Gathercole, 2006: 72), the hand embroidered cloths and the triangular shape of the table, contribute to Chicago's celebration of women and womanhood throughout history (Robinson, 2015: 38). She does so within the megalographic sphere of the male artist. I reintroduce Bryson (1990: 178):

Megalography seeks an image of human life that exalts the exceptional event and individual, magnifies personal distinction and achievement, and raises existence to the level of the gods.

Against that, what we have been calling rhopography find the truth of human life in those things which greatness overlooks, the ordinary of the daily routine and the anonymous, creatureal life of the table [...]

By merging megalography with rhopography, Chicago's work seeks to honour the disregarded megalographic lives of women inside and outside the discipline of fine art. Although it is debated in feminist discourse whether *The Dinner Party* (1974-1979) has contributed to the liberation of women outside of the white, heterosexual, middle-class cohort. I note the role of the table in the work; the object that is used to 'hold' another who aspires to relook at the role of a woman throughout history. I recall, however, that the artistic strategy of reusing the table surface in order to review the role of the woman is not a recent one. This is proven by the of works of Clara Peeters, produced over 300 years before the renowned work of Chicago.

Since the work that positioned Chicago as one of the most renowned feminist artists has "changed contemporary art practice", (according to Butler, 2007 in Robinson, 2015: 28), I consider how still life paintings produced in the seventeenth century by female painters such as Clara Peeters' could, similar to *The Dinner Party* (1974-1979), propose a possible reconsideration of how we define the term 'feminist art' in the contemporary moment.

Phaidon's latest publication on female artists titled *Great Women Artists* released in 2019, provides a collection of over 400 female artists from the last 500 years (Morrill, 2019), and successfully challenges Linda Nochlin's prominent essay written in 1971, *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?* (Morrill, 2019: 11). Whilst I acknowledge the necessity of the book's content, I am intrigued by the glossary of art terms provided on pages 446 to 452 (Morrill, 2019: 446). Here, the term 'feminist art' is defined as follows:

Feminism rejects the notion that the heterosexual, white male view of the world is a universal one. The term 'feminist art' emerged in the 1960s as part of the second-wave feminism, but has roots in women artists' fight for increased visibility since the early twentieth century. Artists today continue to make feminist work. In a move away from the male-dominated traditions of painting and conventional sculpture (carved marble and cast bronze), feminist artists often utilized the materials and processes of the crafts, as well as film, video, body art, performance, installation and Conceptual art. By changing the rules of how art is made, and perceived, feminism questions the way in which women are represented by male artists. Feminist theorists and art historians have also challenged the orthodoxies of the main-stream canon of art history and initiated research into overlooked female artists.

While the publication asserts that feminist art "has roots in women artists' fight for increased visibility since the early twentieth century," I note that the works of Peeters produced in the seventeenth century may challenge such a statement; as again, "self-portraits are part of a language used to increase visibility of the self, from the simple 'this is what I look like' to the more complicated 'this is what I believe in'" (Borzello, 1998: 19). As the plates of Chicago, or "reclaimed 'cunts'" (Gathercole, 2006: 73), have been the "most controversial aspect of the piece" (Gathercole, 2006: 73), the use of the female self-portrait in the still life painting as presented by Peeters, may similarly have been considered as controversial during its time.

Feminist theorist and art historian Whitney Chadwick writes in the preface to the latest edition of *Women, Art, and Society* (Chadwick, 2017: 16) that "[t]he feminist rhetoric of the 1970s may no longer be relevant to the global realities of the twenty-first century, but feminism as a political ideology and a call to action continues to leave its mark on art and art history." While the works of Rosler, Baker, Jabłońska and Chicago have contributed to the definitions of feminist art, I suggest that the works produced by women such as Peeters practising in the seventeenth century still life genre not be discredited. Instead, I propose that the significant 'mark' or impression made on and through the still life genre is fundamental, and should be re-explored with regards to how the history of feminist art is told, re-told and

taught today. To do so echoes Bryson's (1990: 7, 8) desire to "move the discussion [of defining still life painting] into our own time and to ask what still life might mean, for us now" and that doing so "may in fact be a matter of some urgency."



29- 37. Martha Rosler
1975
Semiotics of the Kitchen
Video Film
6 minutes
Video screenshots of *Introduction*, *Dish*, *Egg Beater*,
Knife, *Ladle*, *Rolling pin*,
Spoon, *Tenderiser* and *Y.*
Museum of Modern Art



38- 41. Bobby Baker
1991

Kitchen Show

Video Film

2 minutes 33 seconds

Video stills of Baker throwing a pear, having a pear in her breast pocket, washing carrots and splashing water on her face.



42. Elzbieta Jabłońska
2001 - 2003
Through the Stomach to the Heart.
Performance and installation



43. Elzbieta Jabłońska
2003
Kitchen in part of series, *Through the Stomach to the Heart.*
Performance and installation



44. Judy Chicago
1974 -1979
The Dinner Party
Ceramic, textile and
porcelain.
1460 cm x 1280 cm x 900 cm.
Brooklyn Museum

45. Judy Chicago
1974 - 1979
The Dinner Party
Close view of the plate
attributed to American poet,
Emily Elizabeth Dickinson
(1830-1886)
Brooklyn Museum

But there will be no painting

A thematical reading of my work

Boring as hell

Hell? Oh hell. Oh, fuck no.

But there will be no painting.

Painting taught me a lot of things.

Sometimes I sat in the room on the top floor and stared at all the nonsense I have accumulated.

All the crap.

“Beautiful, isn’t she? Lovely, aren’t they?” she said. I agreed.

In the following essay, drawing on the concepts raised in the previous sections, I present ten themes explored in my practice that deal with the home, the body and the self - by which I suggest that the objects we encounter and the actions they elicit should not be confined to the disregarded space of the home. Through engagement with my choice of various media and processes, I consider how objects, as artworks, can be shifted around and removed from inherent positions in the home as well as in the minds of their consumers.

1. Silly me (A female painter)

What is painting? What is a painting? What is a painter? What is a female

painter? What is a painting made by a female painter?

Drawn to these ongoing questions raised throughout the discourse of art produced by women, I review my own position in association with the banalities presented in the home. In addition, I consider what it means to be an Afrikaner female ‘still life painter’ in contemporary South Africa. As I review the processes, functions and visual qualities held by an object, I reconsider how it may speak of the inherited artistic traits projected on a ‘stereotypical’ white middle-class female painter from both a cultural heritage perspective and the resolutions of second-wave feminism in the present day.

While the self-portrait remains an underlying theme embedded in many of my works presented in this exhibition, I refer to a work that strongly reflects the theme. In the documented performance work titled *Flower Paintings* (2019), I quite literally suggest a ‘flower painting’ while reviewing the self-portrait (a portrait of a flower). The process requires a conservative-sized unprimed canvas placed on an easel. In the canvas is a hole, cut approximately where the mouth would be if I were to paint a self-portrait. Instead of standing in front of the easel as expected, I sit in-between the legs of the standing easel. As positioned behind the canvas, I wrap my arms around the sides of the canvas and place my mouth at the hole in the canvas. From a pile of facial tissues removed from a store-bought tissue box, I

feed myself tissues from the front through the hole in the canvas into my mouth. The stuffing of the tissues forms a flower-like structure on the front side of the canvas in the place where my imaginary portrait would be. While this work is both a recorded performance work and a sculptural painting of sorts, I consider how the painting can exist outside of its canvas; an object used as a tool by which to depict the painting, while the easel speaks of the confinement of the painter within the painting.

2. A thing amongst things (The Body)

The ongoing exploration of the meaning of the body in art and society has caused me to question how I define my own in the present moment. By reviewing everyday objects, I seek to better understand what it means to be a physical entity that is both hyper-dependent upon as well as separate from various items and consumer culture products. Aware of the tension of my dependency on these objects and my agency over them, I seek ways to explore how objects as products may exist as proxies of my body and how my own body is perceived. The *Flower Painting* (2019), as previously discussed, proposes how the objects involved (the easel, canvas and tissues) may speak of own identity in the context of a performance where 'identity' is performed through the craft of 'painting'. Yet the use of the facial tissues embedded with the intended action of wiping one's nose, establishes a relationship

between the body and the object. What is a face? What is facial tissue? What is a face made with facial tissues?

In my work titled *But, Butt, Butter; Butt her; But her* (2018–2020), inspired by the block of butter present in the painting by Peeters titled *Still Life with Cheeses, Artichoke, and Cherries* (1625), I initiate a dialogue between the familiarity and estrangement of the body, object, matter, materiality and language. This sculptural installation consists of seven blocks of 'Spar' butter placed on seven yellow plastic children's chairs. On the back of each chair is a branding that reads "Junior Sunny". I sit/squat on the blocks of butter for 6 minutes and 4 seconds each, a translation of the 6,4 grams of fat in each block of butter. My own body weight melts and sculpts the butter, making an impression of my buttocks, genitals and groin area. The butter acts as an object that embodies the female anatomy without it having to be body at all.

This process allows the softening butter to move within and around my body and become a buttered body, alluding to both body fat and 'body butter'; a decadent, often scented body moisturizer.

The butter normally used for cooking, baking and ingestion is in direct external contact with the body. The traces presented on the blocks of butter become an invaluable yet disposable 'image' of the self; a particularised, indexical, self-portrait. While the work proposes that

there are various other ways of ‘looking’ at oneself as body, the scale of the chair with its specific associations with childhood suggests a lack of experience and knowing myself as a female body and painter. Similarly embedded in this study of the self, this work asks: What does it mean to have a female body? Furthermore, it suggests an outsider’s view, bringing to mind derogatory terms such as ‘baby’, ‘girly’, ‘baby girl’, ‘babe’ and ‘chick’ used by someone other than oneself. As an extension to the butter performance, I produce butter biscuits from previously used blocks of butter on which I sat. Approximately 150 butter biscuits are made from a single block of butter. The biscuits, better known as *botter koekies* (a traditional Afrikaner recipe that I made as a child) evoke the word *koekie*, a slang term in Afrikaans used for ‘vagina’. Here, the ‘butt’ is buttered, the biscuits are the buttered vagina, the butter is the body and yet, the body is never clearly visible - a hidden self-portrait.

3. Nothing much (The home)

In this body of work I review the relationship between the materiality and purposes of mundane domestic objects. The purposes or actions these objects hold within the context of the home, as useless and effortless as they seem, are fundamentally necessary. In my work, I aim to make their disregarded necessity conspicuous by engaging with seemingly pointless and time-consuming processes.

In the work titled *It’s Great* (2018), I propose to myself a useless process that I follow: I count strands of pre-bought grated cheese, the total being 683 strands. After counting the contents of the packet, I place the gratings on a slice of toast. I place the object in the microwave for 7 minute and 23 seconds, a somewhat illogical translation of the number of cheese strands originally provided (660 strands = 7 minutes, 23 strands = 23 seconds). The object extracted from the microwave, which could have initially served as material to be consumed, now exists as an inedible object since it has become a solid, uniform hard mass. It embodies a collapsing accomplishment, which in turn reflects the habitual and overlooked activities required by the home. This may however only seem to be the case. Counting the cheese strands also provides an illusion of achievement and gratification.

4. For I am what they ate (Food)

Allied to the still life genre, I seek relationships between food, home, the self and my body. I do so with specific reference to the writing of academic and author, Elspeth Probyn. In her book titled *Carnal Appetites: Food, Sex, Identities* (2000), she explores the relationship between food, body, sex, sexuality and personal and/or cultural identity. She writes that “[e]ating, of course, is initially involved with the bodies, and in fact can question what

we think we know of the body” (Probyn, 2000: 3). As I use food products in many of my works, I search for how it could exist outside of its function to feed in order to prompt a reconsideration of the body that feeds.

The work titled *Napkins and Knick Knacks (Such useless little things)* (2020) provides an example. In this sculptural installation piece I consider the relationship between two familiar objects: a single packet of 55g ‘Nik Naks’ and collection of napkins gathered throughout the duration of the project. The process I enact is simple. I extract a ‘Nik Nak’ from the packet and place it in my mouth. Instead of swallowing the food product after it is chewed, I spit it out on a napkin. The orange substance initially intended to be consumed, is gently expelled from my mouth and neatly placed on a hand-washed and ironed napkin. This process stems from the original purpose of the napkins, namely to wipe one’s face or hands while eating a meal; a rule typical in the homes of the middle-class white Afrikaner. The napkins holding the remnants of the original ‘Nik Nak’ are placed open with the intention to be seen, looked at and admired. These seemingly futile objects are not hidden under a plate, on a lap or under the table, but are laid out and presented on the floor of the gallery; a space historically reserved for valued sculptural forms depicting the human figure.

In seventeenth century Dutch still life paintings, the physical depiction

of the human body is not visible. However, in some still life paintings small suggestions such as napkins, crumbs or pips are painted to allude to the presence of someone or some-body, most frequently suggesting the presence of the painter (see Clara Peeters’ *Herring, Cherries and Artichoke* (1612); Jan Jansz. Den Uyl’s *Still Life with a Pewter Jug* (c.1632) or Pieter Claesz’s *A Herring Breakfast* (1636). These small suggestions, often unnoticed, point to the presence of the negated body. As knick-knacks (a term referring to useless small things), the ‘Nik Naks’ and napkins no longer speak of the expected triviality they share, but represents my own body within a still life painting.

5. It’s all fun and games (Good girl, bad dog)

Brought up as a girl within Afrikaner culture, I noticed the continuing conservative outlook on nudity, sexuality, and sex within the homes of many young individuals. In this context fundamental exploration of the self as woman and body is restricted. Through language, play and interaction between one object and another, I seek to understand why and how such a phenomenon may remain, even as an adult.

In the sculptural work titled *Hanger Banger* (2018 - 2020), I quite literally review the interchange (intercourse) between the imaginary ‘heterosexual’ hangers and bangers: A clothes hanger is used to suspend

and arrange clothing items within a closet or dresser. It is most frequently associated with the female realm of the home: arranging, cleaning, ironing. While most hangers are made of plastic or wood, some have hand-knitted casings to make them more aesthetically pleasing. These casings are made of wool and are mostly handmade by women. On the other hand, a pork banger (sausage) is most commonly mass produced in the predominantly male meat industry. The ground meat, made from various cuts of pork, is densely stuffed in a sausage casing made from sheep intestines, echoing the woollen casing covering the hanger. This work acknowledges the potential interaction between the meat sausage and the woollen casing. I remove the casing of the hanger and detach it from its rigid structure. I place the meat sausages in the woollen hanger casing, presenting a hanger that no longer functions as intended. While the two objects lose their initial purpose and are rendered useless, a new singular object is produced: a *Hanger Banger*.

6. Express, Excess, Extract and Expel (Too much is never enough)

Bryson (1990: 98) states in the third chapter of *Abundance* that from 1608 until the late 1660s the “first European society to experience the problem of massive oversupply is that of the Netherlands [...] During this period the Netherlands became the richest nation the Western world had yet seen before.” In the introduction to Hochstrasser’s *Still Life and Trade in the*

Dutch Golden Age (2007) she writes that “paintings in the newly independent genre of still life were produced and bought in ever greater numbers, peaking in the same decade [of the 1660s]”. As a result Dutch paintings of the Golden Age, including the still life genre, “fed a market hungry for pictures” (Carman, 1994: 11); between 5-10 million paintings were made (Ibid.).

In this body of work, I consider the prominent role of the development which the consumerist culture had on the still life genre of the seventeenth century. Typical to the conceptual reading of seventeenth century Dutch still life paintings as well as the time period in which they were produced, I also seek to understand the inter-relations between consumption, bodily routine and possible pleasures such products offer within the rhopographic sphere of the home. On the other hand, I aim to understand how these elements may erupt; how these enjoyments may move beyond the experience of pleasure due to overconsumption, bodily strain and embarrassment resulting from mass-production. In my own still life paintings, the tension between enjoyment and an abundance of such embodies a metamorphosis of collapsed pleasures rooted in the space of the home. This evokes Bryson (1990: 113) who says that “[t]he implications is that any excess beyond basic thresholds of need, any swerving at the table towards display of indulgence, would disrupt harmonies that may be elicited only from simple things”.

In this spirit, I propose that products with a positive affiliation to the home may evoke physical discomfort or unease; consequently denuding them of their initial associations of enjoyment. The process denies any pleasure initially attributed to the product, challenging the intertwined relationships between time, process and the failure of fulfilment.

The work I regard as fitting with regard to the theme presented above, manifests as a set of two activities that exist in dialogue. Both activities engage with a pre-made 'milk tart', a traditional confectionery baked tart introduced to South Africa by the Dutch settlers of the seventeenth century; made from milk, eggs, flour and sugar.

In the first, titled *Push Up (Milk tart)* (2020, originally produced in 2019), I place the milk tart on the floor of the exhibition space where other works of the exhibition are to be viewed, and I do a set of 'push-ups' - an exercise intended to build and improve upper body strength. I engage with the 'female' version of these exercises known as 'ladies' push-ups - because of women's 'weaker' upper body strength. The original (male) versions of the exercises require lowering and raising one's upper body weight by using one's arms. 'Ladies push-ups', on the other hand, are made easier by using the knees as a point of support. For each push-up I do, I drop my head in the tart,

positioned beneath my face.

The second work titled *Throw up (Tart Milk)* (2020, originally produced in 2019) similarly exists as an 'push up' activity of sorts. Here I slice a pre-bought milk tart in eight slices. The slices of the tart are consumed to the point of generating nausea, and I attempt to re-expel the product from my body. The milk tart is consequently pushed up from the stomach through the oesophagus and out the mouth. The thrown-up milk tart becomes 'tart' milk; a humorous overturn of the original product. The remnants of the unconsumed product become the painting. The residue of the material expelled from the body becomes the painter's paint. The paint, painter and painting are co-dependent.

Both these activities involve discomfort and bodily strain: the act of performing the 'ladies' push-ups are challenged by the milk tart as it restricts respiration during the performance of the exercise. In the second activity, excess ingestion may seem the case. The challenge however is to successfully remove the product from the body through the mouth since a forced regurgitation cannot always be achieved.

7. Home Sweet Home (Mother fucker)

Similar to the work presented in the theme above, I seek to understand the pressures presented when positive affiliations attributed to mass produced products are overturned. Informed by the theme of quiet pleasures presented in the home, discussed in the third point within this essay, I frequently use items that contain a high sugar level. I find their associated qualities with the naivety of a child of interest, as it exists as a possible reflection of the preconceived lack of grandeur presented in the still life genre itself. As a point of potential conflict, I note the chapter titled “*Moeder*” (Dutch and Afrikaans for ‘mother’) in Franits’ *Paragons of Virtue, Women and Domesticity in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art* (1995: 112). Here, he notes that “[a] universally held belief during the seventeenth century, which crossed all religious boundaries, was that children were gifts from the Almighty” (Franits, 1995: 112).

In the work presented in this exam, I frequently allude to the exploration of the tensions presented in the relationship between the continuing and expected positions of a woman as mother, in contradiction to the one of female artist - especially in the white Afrikaner culture. A work that potentially speaks of this concern would be *Lovely Lolly* (2020, originally produced in 2018). This work comprises the simple yet meticulous action of licking of a single cherry flavoured lollypop; a sweet often given to children as a reward for good behaviour. The process

however is challenged as the product is not to be consumed to completion. By using only the tip of the tongue, a single hole is made in the centre of the lollypop, made possible by repetition and fine attention paid to the action of licking. The desired result is also made possible by the original flat form of the store-bought product.

On the one hand this work, like the work presented in the previous theme, challenges the expected positive affiliations of a product (and action) - not necessarily by over-consumption, but by a physical limitation and/or personal constraint imposed by oneself on oneself instead of another. On the other hand, it proposes how the careful act of licking a hole in a lolly pop may be suggestive of the intense care paid towards the activities presented in the home and the child, both formed and informed by the duties of a ‘good mother’ – a role that has for centuries restricted the development and continuation of the practice of female artists.

8. Hollowed be my name (Mouth).

The use of my mouth in the development of my work has for long been ambiguous. Elspeth Probyn (2000: 139) states that “disgust forces upon us a tangible sense of the closeness of others: we feel the proximities of objects and people that we fear will invade our bodies through our mouths.”

In response, I refer to a study titled *Research into the mouthing behaviour of children up to 5 years old* (Morris & Smith, 2003: 38) where it is noted that “the urge to suck and mouth by young children is a natural developmental phase” and that “[...] it is thought to be adopted by infants as a response to frustration, or as a need for contact, or as a part of the child’s psychological development in exploring the world around them [...]”. As a response to the words of Probyn, in association with the text by Morris and Smith, I regard the use of my mouth in my work as a physical mediator between myself and the world around me - between my own body and the object I review. A hole from which we learn to expel ideas; a hollow in which we seek comfort.

In conjunction with still life painting, I relook at flower paintings in association with the stereotypical quality and a characteristic attributed to a woman and her body; as bearer of life. While this use of my mouth as tool is evident in various instances in this exhibition, the video piece titled *In Full Bloom* (2019) provides a useful example. In conversation with *Flower Paintings* (2019) where I place tissues in the hollow of my mouth through a hole made in the canvas, this work engages with the act of ejecting pink and blue plastic gift wrapping bows from within my mouth. This work recalls two specific flower paintings: Georgia O’Keefe’s *Pink and Blue I* (1918) and Judy Chicago’s *Through the Flower* (1973). As the bows move outward from inside, they resemble

blue and pink flowers are blooming or birthing from and through the hollow of my mouth: God’s gift to mankind.

Perhaps surprisingly, although the still life painting genre was considered ‘appropriate’ for female artists due to its exclusion of the depiction of the body, it was predominantly male artists who painted genre scenes of food and the kitchen. Female still life painters, other than Peeters, such as Maria van Oosterwijk (1630-1693) and Rachel Ruysch (1664-1750) predominantly painted flowers. Exemplifying the patriarchal stereotypes of female abilities, art theorist M.H Grant explains that “flower painting demands no genius of a mental or spiritual kind, but only the genius of taking pains and supreme craftsmanship” (Grant, 1952 in Parker & Pollock, 1981: 54). In addition, as Parker and Pollock (1981: 13) note, a text found in a journal *Gazette des Baux-Arts* (1860) indicates that women should “[...] occupy themselves with those kinds of art they have always preferred...the painting of flowers, those prodigies of grace and freshness which alone can compete with the grace and freshness of women themselves”. Bryson on the other hand, asks, “[w]hat could be more useless than flowers, or flower paintings?” He responds by saying that “[...] there is no shortage of good reasons for the paintings’ existence: the intrinsic value of depicted objects, their worth of specimens, the value of the painter’s labour”.

9. Just leave it (Only time will tell)

The house is the place where order is protected and restored when things start wandering around or haphazardly mix, without rules. It is a place that is 'cleaned' every day, where 'symbolic labour' is done in clearing away the mess and the dirt so that everything can start anew and life can go on, so that life is passed on to the next day (Verschaffel, 2012: 153).

While I explore products of the home, as I know them, I also suggest a relook at products that are set aside to spoil. These are products that would normally be discarded lest they contribute to the disorder of a contained, healthy, clean and socially 'acceptable' home. Since as time promotes decay and change, I review how the objects transform, in form, colour and shape. The focus in these works is not to capture the process of transformation but to draw attention to how the object loses its familiarity through structural disintegration caused by the natural process of decay - otherwise known as vanitas painting in the genre of still life.

In the work titled *The Still Life of a Cucumber* (2018) a cucumber bought from a local convenience store in mid-2018 is placed in packaging originally used for a roll of cling wrap, printed with branding and an image of another cucumber. This is placed within a plastic Ziploc bag; a

product used to preserve and contain. On a conceptual level, the work could speak of the passing of time, the yearning to contain, maintain and preserve, or death as the inevitable result of life. It could speak humorously of the perceived greatness of the male painter, the ejaculator, the creator, referenced by the cucumber now limp; it may similarly speak of the disregard of the woman confined to the home while she makes cucumber sandwiches and biscuits for Sunday afternoon teas. It is however, at the end of the day, nothing more than a rotten cucumber in a plastic bag.

10. Accepting the hard truth (Potential failure)

As indicated in the introduction to my practice, my work seeks to find a relationship between body and object. I do so by engaging with physical activities as presented in most of the works discussed above. These activities, silly and meaningless as they seem, exist as reminders of my body as physical entity; an object. They effectively also indicate the limitations of my physical skill and strength. In choosing which activities to perform, I often set myself up for failure, which humorously undermines my ability to successfully 'master' the skill required of obtaining a Masters in Fine Art. On the other hand, it questions my position as a 'successful' female painter.

While specific elements of the still life genre, like the painted lemon and

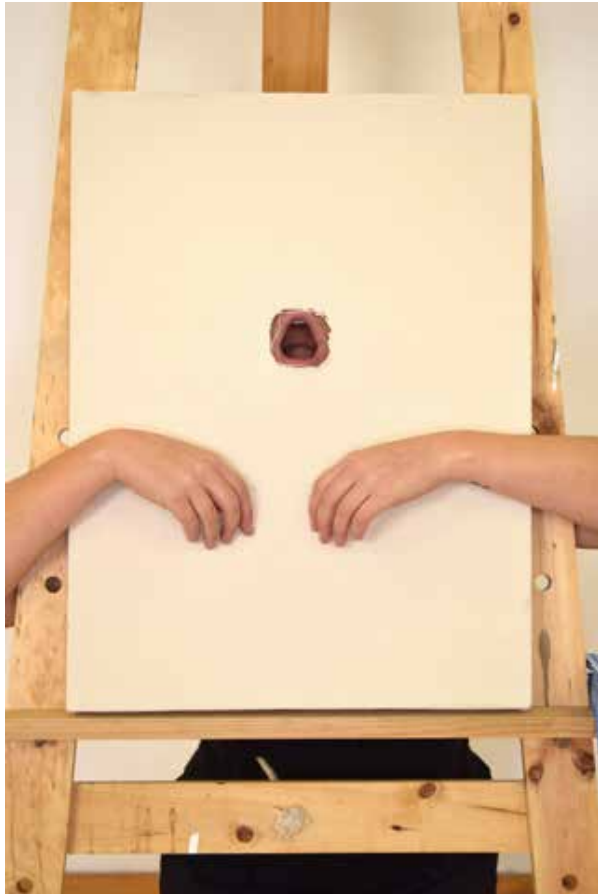
lemon peel, were a “display of artistic prowess”, or “virtuoso pieces - tests of the painter’s power to delight” (Chong & Kloek, 1999: 32) the lemon became a classical motif of seventeenth century still life paintings, and a popular display of the masters’ painterly skill (Chong & Kloek, 1999: 32).

Here, I refer to the paintings of Abraham van Beyeren, Cornelius de Heem, Isaac Bosschaert, Peter Claesz, Alexander Coosemans, Jacob van Es, Johannes Hannot, David de Heem, Jan Davidsz de Heem and Willem Kalf. The process I regard fitting and follow in this exhibition in order to review my own position as a Fine Art Masters student working within the realm of Old Dutch Masters, is as follows:

1. I buy a bag of lemons, preferably Cape Rough Skin Lemons.
2. I buy the same number of masonry nails as the number of lemons in the bag. The nails should preferably not have heads with diameters of more than 55 mm each.
3. I use a hammer to nail the nails into the wall 150–170 cm from the floor and 40–80 cm apart.
4. On the floor, I measure 4 m ahead of each nail and mark it with a piece of masking tape.
5. I open the bag and remove a lemon. I place the bag to the side.
6. I position myself at the first marker from the left and face the wall.

7. I throw a lemon towards the nail, taking the distance and strength of the throw into consideration.
8. If the lemon falls to the ground, I collect the lemon, return to the marker and repeat Step 7.
9. If the nail penetrates the skin of the lemon, I have successfully rendered a lemon painting.

Nailed It, the title of this work, stems from a slang term for having successfully achieved something. In this work, however, the accuracy of the painted lemon depends on the number of lemons I manage to place on the wall which, contradicting the title, is nearly impossible. The outcome, namely whether I paint like a master or throw like a girl, is uncertain.



46, 47. Stills from *Flower Paintings* series
2019
Facial tissues, wooden easel
and canvas.

48. Judith Leyster
c. 1630
Self-Portrait
Oil on canvas
74.6 cm x 65.1 cm
National Gallery of Art
Washington D.C

Opposite:
49. Detail of *Self-Portrait*
(Judith Leyster, c.1630)

Painting is painting a green orange (Images of selected works)





50. *But, Butt, Butter, Butt her, But her*
2018
Spar butter on a *Junior Sunny* yellow chair.

51. Clara Peeters
c. 1625
Still life with Cheeses, Artichokes and Cherries
Oil on board
33.3 cm x 46.6 cm
LA County Museum of Art

Opposite:
52. Detail of *Still life with Cheeses, Artichokes and Cherries* (Peeters, c.1625).





53. Buttered groin

54. *Butter biscuits with cherries*
2019-

55. Gustave Courbet.
1866
The Origin of the World
Oil on Canvas
46 cm x 55 cm
Musée d'Orsay



56. Joseph Beuys
1964 – 1985
Fat Chair
Wood and fat.
94,5 cm x 41,6 cm
Tate Collection

Opposite:
57. Detail of *Still life with Cheeses, Artichokes and Cherries* (Peeters, c.1625).







58. *It's Great*
2019
683 strands of cheese and
toasted brown bread

59. 683 cheese strands in a
plastic container placed on
a table surface

60. Clara Peeters
c. 1615
Cheesestack
Oil on board
35 cm x 49 cm
Location unknown



61. A packet of 55g
Original Cheese Flavour
Nik Naks



62. A pile of napkins

63. Frans Hals
1644
Portrait of a Lady
Oil on Canvas
75.9 cm x 62.5 cm
Michaelis Collection

64. Napkins placed on floor

Opposite:
65. Detail of pile of napkins





66. *Hanger Bangers*
2018 – 2020
Wooden hangers, woollen
hanger casings and stuffed
hanger casings with pork
sausages

67, 68. Carolee Schneemann
1964
Meat Joy
Stills from film
5 minutes
Museum of Modern Art



69. A variety of collected woollen hanger casings.



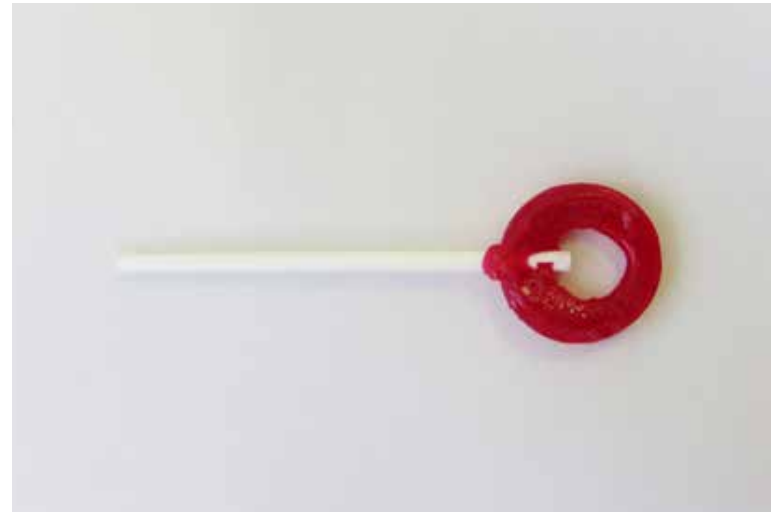
70 -73. Carolee Schneemann
1964 - 1967
Fuses
Stills from 16 mm film
18 minutes
Museum of Modern Art

74. A store-bought milk tart

Opposite:
75 - 78. *Push up (Milk Tart)*
2019
Stills from video





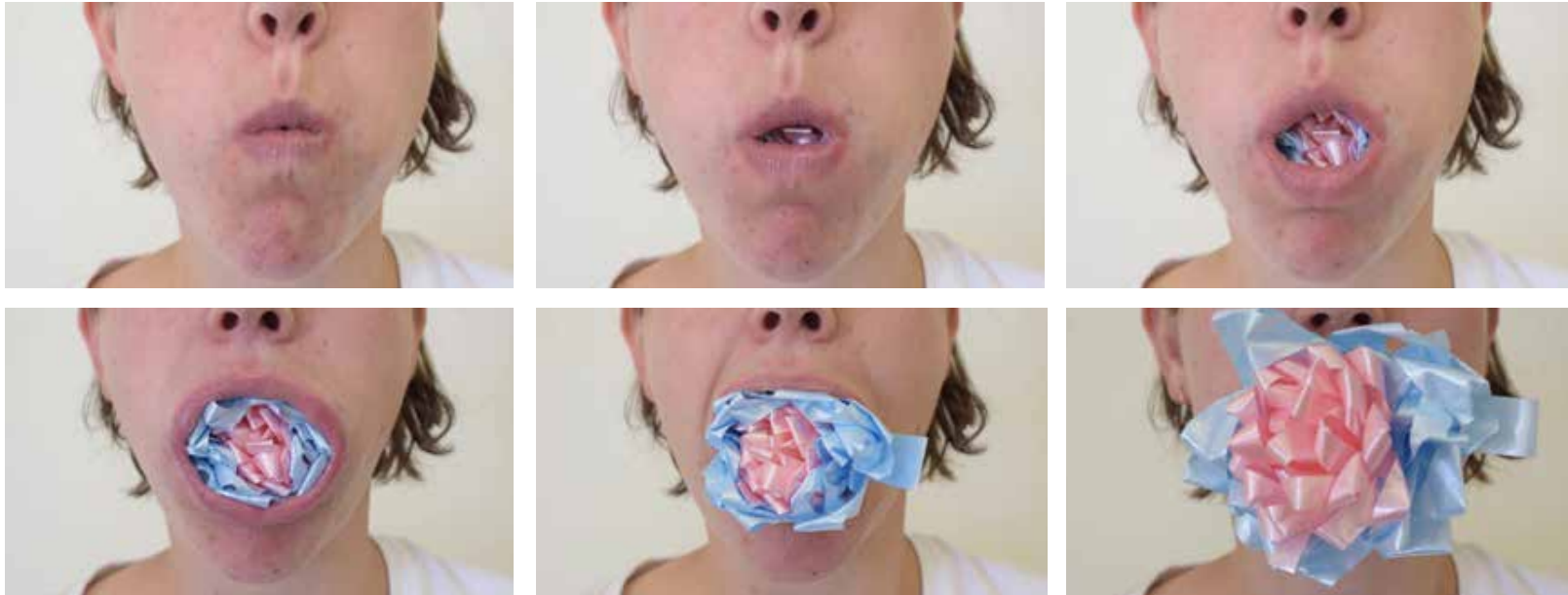


79. Store-bought *Lovely lollies* packaging.

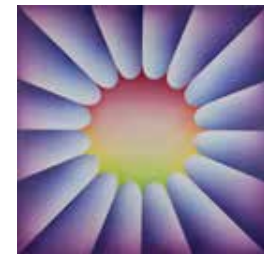
80. *Lovely lolly*
2019
Cherry flavoured lolly pop

Opposite:
81. Detail of the product packaging





82 – 87. *In full Bloom*
2019
Stills from video



88. Still from *In Full Bloom*

89. Georgie O'Keeffe
1918
Pink and Blue I
Oil on canvas
88.9 cm x 73.3 cm
Collection Barney A.
Ebsworth

90. Judy Chicago
1973
Through the Flower
Sprayed acrylic on canvas
152.4 cm x 152.4 cm
Location unknown

91. Maria van Oosterwijk
c. 1950
*A swag of roses, poppies,
other flowers and berries
held by a blue ribbon
suspended from a nail with
a butterfly*
Oil on board
34 cm x 27 cm
Collection of Christie's
Contemporary Art



92. Maria van Oosterwijk
Roses and Butterfly
Nd.
Oil on board
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Previous page:
93. Detail of a painting
(Untitled)
2019
Oil on canvas

94. Packaging depicting a
sliced cucumber



95. *A still life of a
cucumber*
2019
Cucumber and plastic
packaging



96, 97. *Nailed it*
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98. Cornelius de Heem
Still Life with Glass
c. 1650
Oil on board
Collection unknown

99. Rembrandt van Rijn
1631
Christ on the Cross
Oil on canvas mounted on
board
99.9 cm x 72.6 cm
Church of St Vincent

Opposite:
100. Detail image of *Still
Life with Glass* (Cornelius
de Heem, c.1650).



It is complementary

Conclusion

Piles,

Ply,

One ply,

Two ply, Comply.

It is complicated

It is complimentary

It is complementary

It is compulsory

Painting is common sense.

Painting is comprehensive.

You fool, I don't even know what that word means.

Comprehensive,

Comprehension.

Painting is an English comprehension test. I failed.

On 16th May 1914, a collection of more than 60 Dutch and Flemish paintings was donated to the Union Government of South Africa (Carman, 1994: 12). Today this collection of over 100 paintings is known as the Michaelis Collection. The bulk of the paintings were originally obtained by art connoisseur and collector, Sir Hugh Lane, who acquired them from Europe in the early twentieth century

(Bax, 1981: 67) by order of General Smuts: “[...]so that the people could appreciate the heritage of their forbears” (Carman, 1994: 12). In 1913 it was bought by German-born mine magnate and philanthropist, Sir Maximilian Michaelis, who later donated the collection to South Africa (Bax, 1981: 67).

The reasons for Michaelis’ donation are manifold. It is often regarded as a ‘gift’ towards South Africa for the “many happy and prosperous years” he had spent in South Africa (Cape Times, 1919 in Bax, 1981: 67). It is also suggested that the Dutch and Flemish paintings were donated towards the celebration of the Dutch settlement and prosperity of the Dutch settlers in the seventeenth century or “as a reminder of their roots in the Netherlands.” (Carman, 1994: 16). Michaelis’ intentions have also been referred to as “essentially self-serving” (Van Haute, 2006: 2), and as a means to obtain baronetcy – “because a title was considered an essential public symbol of social advancement” (Van Haute, 2006: 2) – which he successfully acquired in 1924. Another reason, which appeals to me, is that, Michaelis himself notes, he donated it “for the purpose of giving students of art the opportunity of studying old masters in their own country...” (Cape Times, 1919 in Bax, 1981: 67).

As a student registered for the Masters in Fine Art degree in an academic institution named after Sir Max Michaelis, I am amused

by how his words may be received today, and aim to understand to what extent they may still be relevant. It is ironic, however, that the works I present in this exam are viewed in the gallery space named after no one else but Sir Max Michaelis himself, formally known as the Michaelis Galleries.

Aware of this position I note that there are seemingly, according to the Michaelis Collection Catalogue (Bax. 1981), no still life painting, nor flower painting or any other painting for that matter made by a woman in this collection except for one. This painting, a duplication of a painting made by the artist herself, is known as “one of the earliest examples in art history of an artist depicting themselves in the act of painting [...]” (Morrill, 2019:181). It was painted by Catherina van Hemessen (1528-1588, Flemish) in 1548, over 30 years before the birth of Clara Peeters (c1590). In the painting, van Hemessen portrays herself as the painter painting another self-portrait. As she holds the paint brush in her right hand, leaning on the mahlstick and holding what seems to be five brushes as well as a palette in her left, she stares back at the viewer. On the dark ‘background’ surface left from her head one reads, roughly translated from Latin: “I Catherina van Hemessen painted myself. 1548. Her age 20” (Morrill, 2019: 181). While this is not a true ‘still life’ painting I note the significant value it holds, not only within the history of female self-portraiture, but also the history of the female painter at work.

Whilst this project interrogates the still life genre, I am aware of how the use of the self-portrait in- and outside of the still life genre has closely informed and formed how work by female painters have for centuries been studied, valued, celebrated, and criticised by art historians, feminist critics and fellow women artists. Although I explore the home, body and the self in Dutch still life painting of the seventeenth century, I hope to have indicated that the genre of still life painting may present the same opportunity.

In the spirit of the continued necessity of acknowledging art produced by women, this single painting by van Hemessen in the Michaelis collection may have had the potential to influence the continued exploration of still life, self-portraiture, the disregarded megalographic realm of the woman, the home, the flower, the mother, the cunt, the body, sex, sexuality and constructs of gender and female roles which have for centuries been explored and re-explored by work in- and outside of fine art.

Still life painting has been and arguably still is regarded as the lowest form of painting in Western fine art history. Even though it was thought that the absence of the human figure in still life painting allowed these paintings to be created without any knowledge of human anatomy or history, I argue that the still life may have been a way of creating self-presentation for female painters during the seventeenth century and

that knowledge of the body and history, especially of the woman, is in fact both present and required while studied in a contemporary setting. I suggest that re-examining seventeenth century Dutch still life painting with its close connections to the home, in association with the self-portrait, may be of considerable value for further investigation.

*I was tired of talking about colour that day.
I was tired of trying to explain to you what
I meant.*

*I was tired of washing your paint brushes.
He came home and made a cucumber
sandwich. The cucumber was green too.*

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List of Images

All images that have not been credited to an artist, are my own works.

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2. Two yellow tennis balls hanging beside a board with *lemon yellow* paint.
3. Two orange naartjies.
4. A round object wrapped with a green ribbon.
5. Three cross-section cuts of a swimming pool foam 'noodle' positioned next to a hotplate on a blue cloth.
6. Green and pink dishwashing sponges.
7. Approximately 15 plastic fork stems placed within the mouth.
8. A bunch of ripening bananas in a plastic *Ziploc* bag.
9. A block of butter strapped around a waist with yellow *masking* tape.
10. A blue ribbon pulled around a slice of white *Blue Ribbon* bread.
11. A green bucket, an orange tub and a striped blue and white kitchen cloth.
12. An unused roll of half-wet toilet paper.
13. A sliced blue kitchen sponge on an orange surface.
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99. Rembrandt van Rijn. 1631. *Christ on the Cross*. Oil on canvas mounted on
board. 99.9 cm x 72.6 cm. Church of St Vincent.
100. Detail of *Still Life with Glass* (Cornelius de Heem, c.1650).

Our Father, who art in Heaven
(Hollowed be my name)

In the beginning, she giggled and asked: "If you had only one finger, what would you do with it?"

What do you mean?

They all kept quiet while you spoke.

"Why are you a painter?" you asked.

You asked me why I am a painter. You brought it up, pointed it out

I am a painter because you ask me why I am a painter. I spat it out.

They listened carefully to our conversation and as you told me these things I realised that painting is to me what I mean to you.

But first, how do you like your fish, sir?

"What type of beverage would you like with your supper, sir?" or "Would you like anything else to eat, sir?"

We often made it with butter, but her, no she, but they never liked her.

Panting with an I, as I like to call it; this silly conversation we have about what painting is, what this is, what that is, what I am, what you are, what does this mean, what do you mean?

"What do you mean?"

"What do you mean 'only one finger'?"

She giggled again.

But painting, I mean, it taught me how to sit.

It taught me how to throw.

One afternoon I got sick and threw up everything I ate that morning. I had to wait until you came back from your first painting class.

No, I am lying, fool.

I ate three quarters of a milk tart, drank three quarts of milk. I went to the bathroom on the second floor and tried to make myself throw up. I only managed to throw up one slice of milk tart. It made me think about when I had to flush my fish down the toilet.

You teach me how to wait,

bait,

wait, painting does not hurt.

Do you understand why I think I am a painter?

I am a painter because I know how to pray.

Painting teaches me how to pray:

“My Father who art in Heaven”.

Up in Heaven.

What is Heaven?

Painting is Heaven.

Painting makes me want to throw up my arms.

Painting is throwing up milk, tart milk, fish tart, fish cakes.

Cake

Sponge cake

My grandmother made us sponge cakes with pink and green icing.

Painting is tart milk, you mad cow.

I laughed and yelled: “You dog! You Pig! Pork! Belly! Waist!”

What a waste. What a waste of time.

That afternoon, she also giggled when the priest said “You may now kiss the bride”.

What a waste. What a silly thing to say in the first place, someone else giving him the right to kiss her. She gives him her left hand.

I gave you my finger. It slipped through my fingers. I waited until you got back from painting class and took the dog for a walk.

But my arms hurt when I push up, or when your dog pulls.

Painting can also be your dog. Painting can be my digging dog panting, searching.

But I do not have a dog. I am my own dog.

(“You may now kiss the bride”)

And you? Yes, plaster, master, one with the long neck, long tail, long tongue and short hair.

“Do you smell that?”

She paints because she is a woman.

I paint because I am a girl, a ‘bitch’ as they say these days.

So proud,

So pleased.

“I am a strong woman! I am a good feminist! I am a great painter!” they proclaim.

They all giggled. So pleased.

Please, I’m telling you, when they teach you how to paint, you must pay attention.

Painting does not concentrate. It does not pay.

“Children?” he asked.

“Yes, Father?” they responded.

Please pick up the balls you left outside on the yard.

“Yes, Father”.

You came home and opened the fridge, took out the cucumber and made yourself a sandwich. In a small cup you poured some milk.

You spat it out.

“Stop with this painting nonsense, would you?”

“Yes, Father.”

This silly conversation we constantly have about what painting is, what this is, what that is, what I am, what you are, what does this mean.

What do you mean? What do you mean when it hurts? It’s not supposed to hurt. It hurts my eyes, the hues, the eyes.

Almost like you and I, like *I&J*.

Love? No.

“Do you smell that?” she asked again, this time much more serious.

“Like cat piss” (painting’s piss rather, I thought).
She giggled. They all giggled
Painting smells like fish, like *I&J* fingering fish fingers lingering in the dark.
I am a painter because,
I smell like fish.
No, I too paint because I am a woman.
“A woman! What do you mean ‘woman’?”
They all giggled.
So, what is this I? There was a riddle on the fridge:
“Where does it go? Where does it run to?
Does it linger? Does it stride?”
Linger
Finger
She asked, again: “If you had only one finger, what would you do with it?”
I looked at her finger and said: “Why do you ask me what I am?”
You point it out. Blew it up.
She chewed on bubblegum and stuck it all over her face while the dog just kept on pulling.
With butter? Yes master, plaster, long tongued boy.
He looked up and said: “I really like the way you sit, you know.
Why? Its elegant, its fresh, its chaste.”
Chased?
We ran around the house while you chased us.
You first.

Sit?

Ladies first.

First,

First class,

My first painting class.

Shit, I don't care who goes first. I just need to sit down.

Painting teaches you a lot of things. It teaches you how to sit.

"Would you like to sit?" she asks.

So, I went and sat on the yellow chairs.

"Close it please," she whispers.

I closed it.

I need to tell you a secret.

"Not so loud! You will give it away!"

But you spat it out. You said it first. You spat it out like a fish bone. Bone. Boner.

But. Butt. Butter.

But painting is a whisper. It is a dog whisperer. A dog searching for its bone.

Tristan is the dog's name.

A bitch with a long tail,

we all have stories to tell,

a bitch with a long tale.

She giggled because she is not allowed to say that word.

A bitch? No, I think it is a he, a pig.

A babe, a pork.

Banger?

Bang her? No, I meant ham her, like hammer.

Like mast her. Master? With butter?

“I found it! I found it!”

Spit it out Tristan!

“Serviette, sir?”

“Yes please. Isn’t she beautiful?”

On the cover of the book there is a painting by Hals. He was her teacher.

Master.

Leyster.

Luister.

You need to listen when they speak about painting.

She sat like the men, like Hals.

Painting teaches you how to sit.

“I think I would get her some flowers.”

Pink, yes pink. So, I took the flowers home and placed them in an orange vase.

“Are you hollow?” she asks peeping inside the vase.

Oh, my hollow, my hole. “I’d say so, yes, like a wasted hollow.”

A pink marshmallow.

She giggles.

“Yellow? Alright I’ll have the yellow ones rather.”

So, I took the flowers home and placed them in an orange vase.

She started painting flowers.

Would you like me to wear the pearls now? I will hang it around my neck, and pretend it is my collar.

“Don’t be silly you crazy bitch, you are not a fucking dog!” she yelled and they both started laughing.

One day, we went to a small shop where my mother bought me a string of pearls.

“Size double A” I said at the fitting rooms.

A, that’s how it all starts, with your hands inside

A Sit. Sat.

Painting taught me how to sit. I sat.

I sat on my chair on my first week of painting, she walked up to me and repainted my vase. “You need to be brave,” she said.

It was almost the same orange as the vase I used a few days earlier.

“You mean a lot to me, you do” another said before he left.

Or came.

She looked at his throat. Sometimes it bounces off when you throw it. “Can you believe it? An apple that bounces!” the girl said.

He swallows, it bounces. Adam's apple they call it, ironic, because it was she who did it first.

“Ladies first”

“Oh, thank you sir”

“Come, let’s go”

We can go for lunch. A date?

Her eyes are green, but they barely look at me anymore.

“They are beautiful”

Oh, thank you sir, how kind.

“Sorry, I meant her eyes, the one that starts with an E”

I would like to order A,

Be? A c. C for cake. No, not cunt. D for dick and E. Yes, her name starts with an E.

We are never allowed to say those words.

Please sit up straight and let us all turn to page number 48.

Painting teaches you a lot of things.

This and that, not much. And you?

Head of this, head of that.

Anyway, let's move on.

On?

You asked me once already.

"Are you ready?"

"Ready or not, here I come!"

I hid under the table and my sisters hid in the closet closest to the bedroom door.

We played a trick on one another. I hid in her room while she was out. Behind the curtain or behind the door. She got me back. While I was in the bathroom she sat behind the red chair. I would be in my room for a long time before I realised that she was hiding behind the red chair. She was quiet.

Only when I saw her foot, I would get a fright and realise that she was behind the red chair.

"Painting teaches me a lot of things" she whispered.

Sometimes I think about what you said that day. Do you even know what that means?

Painting shows you what you want even though I do not know what it means.

Painting teaches you how to sit.

Sit. Tit. Title. Little.

I sit and wait and listen to how you count till 48. Over the table hangs a cloth, cunt, kant.

She giggles because she is not allowed to say that word.

A real man. A girl with manners. Man, hers.

All this crap. All this crap. I mean, what does it even mean to be a real man, and more so, what is a real woman. A Feminist?

“A feminist!” she proclaims

Proud and pleased.

She giggles, they all giggle.

Painting teaches you to be smart, you are smart.

Men are smart too. Fancy strong pants

pamper pants, panty paint.

Don’t panic, pamper pants.

“She is beautiful, isn’t she? You may now kiss the bride.”

I found you! I found you! My one and only.

It was my turn to close my eyes and count from one till 48.

“I heard you don’t like them, the flowers.”

“It’s not that I do not like them, it’s just that they remind me of something that happened to me during class. You see, one day during class, I went to my friend’s table and asked her if I may borrow her ruler. It was pink. I accidentally forgot to give it back and took it home. My sister used it and broke it in half, not knowing that it was not my ruler. I went back to class the next day and gave her another one. I remade it from cardboard, measured out every millimeter. I hoped that she would not spot the difference.”

I’m telling you, listen when they talk, remember what they say,

Because painting teaches you a lot of things,

It teaches you to wait. You waited behind the chair.

Just hold on, “please could you repeat what you just said?”

“It’s not that I do not like them, it’s just that they remind me of something that happened to me during class. You see, one day during class, I went to my friend’s table and asked her if I may borrow her ruler. It was pink. I accidentally forgot to give it back and took it home. My sister used it and broke it in half, not knowing that it was not my ruler. I went back to class the next day and gave her another one. I remade it from cardboard, measured out every millimeter, hoping that she would not see the difference.”

“Catch” she yawns, prays. “Catch!” she screams.

Painting teaches you how to be quiet. It teaches you how to pray.

She threw the ruler back at me, not falling for my tromp l’oeil. What a fool I was that day.

Can I tell you a secret, a whisper?

I once heard this girl talking to herself,

She said: “Please will you tell me what side the sun sets?”

Why

She told me to come inside.

“Ladies first.”

I walked inside and saw the blue tiles on the kitchen floor.

The door was left open, and the bed was unmade.

She picked up the flower and shoved it into her mouth.

“Spit it out!”

She closed her eyes and mumbled: “If you had a blue ribbon, what would you do with it?”

I looked at the wall. It had a stain on it like the stain in my room on the top floor of the building. In front of the window facing the west was a picture frame with a photograph of her in it. She wore a white t-shirt and her hair was tied up. On the table below the windowsill was a round bowl with a fish inside swimming around and around like the shape of her lips covering the flower inside it.

“I’d tie it to a yellow ribbon” she said after pushing out the flower, as if she was giving birth to a piece of plastic through her mouth.

God’s gift to man.

Why would you do that?

Give birth?

No. Tie it to a yellow ribbon.

“Because then it will turn into an even longer green ribbon.”

So, I went back to my room on the top floor of the building thinking about her mouth giving birth to the plastic petals cut from the ribbon, the umbilical cord.

You see, the umbilical cord of painting stays attached;
stays sucking on you like a vacuum cleaner.

It stays feeding you like a hosepipe,
dangling like a naked tail attached to the wrong side of the animal's waist.

"Painting is a mother who lost her second child after she had me.

Painting is the green leaves of the dying Dutch lilies I got her for her birthday

Painting is giving birth through your mouth

Painting is flossing your teeth with sinew after giving birth through your mouth

Painting is pulling on a rubber band until it snaps

Painting is painting a green orange

Painting is measuring a ruler

Painting is being born in 1994

Painting is washing a washing line

Painting is covering up a roll of masking tape

Painting is being told by your painting teacher what to paint."

"Would you please stop that!" he yelled.

By now, everyone in the room was tired of what I had to say,

And all you could ask is "why am I still calling myself a painter?"

She just stared back, fingering the piece of sinew between her teeth, wondering what to say next.

Anything more to say?

"The table is a funny thing, on the other hand"

Ours has four legs

Like a dog it waits to be fed, to feed the chairs - her litter.

A sit a tit a little bit, bit by bit she feeds.

The cucumber sandwich that he made was not that bad,
besides for the spoilt milk.

Spoilt brat!

The girl with the flower in her mouth asked me a strange question again:

“What would you do if you had two balls?”

I was not sure what she meant and found the question rather funny.

“Do you know what I would do with it?” She giggled.

“Eat them?” I said sarcastically.

“Yes! My mother told me if I eat two balls then I would turn into a man for one day,” she said and tried to shove a yellow tennis ball in her mouth.

I tried. It didn’t work.

On the table was a pair of yellow rubber cleaning gloves I remember seeing under our sink.

The fish was no longer in the round bowl.

Back in her room on the third floor of the building she sat thinking about the girl eating two tennis balls and turning into a man.

“I’m coming! I’m coming!” she yelled.

She hid under the lampshade and remembered the lost secrets her mother told her while she brushed her hair.

After she lost her second child, she lost her fertility too and

the doctor said that the only way to get it back was to drink a lot of milk,

cups upon cups of milk.

I waited for you again to come home from your painting class.

That day they made you stand in a circle while you explained why you think you are a painter.

“What do you mean?”

I think I am a painter because I really enjoy painting. I think I am a painter because I am a good student and really enjoy painting.

“Dumb fuck” said the guy next to him

“Dumb fuck” said the guy on the other side of him

“I, sir, am a painter because my father taught me how to paint and there is no one greater than my father.”

You came, they all came. You came home with a fresh cucumber that evening and made a sandwich even though I prepared dinner.

There was a stain on the lampshade

He slipped, spilt

Spoilt milk

Spoilt brat!

He spilt his glass of milk all over the lampshade.

Two days later you asked me why I am a painter. I went back to the room with the painting of a man lying on the floor,

I lay on the floor pretending to be the man in the painting.

I had to lie under the table so that no one would see me.

She looked and asked: “What are boys made of?”

She was eating an apple this time.

What do you mean?

“What do you mean what are boys made of?”

I read somewhere that they are made of snips and snails and baby dogs.

“How can a boy be made of snails?”

I remember I kept two snails in my bathroom. I found them outside three days after I threw pellets out. I gave them leaves and put them on a plate and kept them on the corner of the sink. They did not move, and I thought they were dead from the poison. I accidentally forgot to unplug the sink. My boyfriend came to my room and asked me where the second snail was.

“How can a boy be made of snails? Why can't they be made of fish instead?”

Because women are made of fish.

Don't you see? We carry fish around with us the whole time.

There was a photo of her carrying the fish. She stood in front of the men's bathroom. Painting's piss.

“Oh! Well would you want to swap your finger for a fish one day when you are older?”

They all listened carefully.

“If you get the skin of a fish, then you pull it over your finger and pretend it is a fish!”

Painting teaches you a lot of things,

Painting smells like fish, like *I&J* fingering fish fingers lingering in the dark.

Do you understand why you think I am a painter?

They all giggled and I was glad to see that the girl was happy with my answer.

Tonight, you had your third painting class. You came home from school where they made you stand in a circle again.

They asked you questions about paintbrushes. You said you liked the round one because it reminded you of the time you asked your friend to tickle your face with the brush until you fell asleep.

“Dumb fuck, that is not what paint brushes are for. They are used to paint with.”

He came. He came home and made a sandwich.

The girl asked me, “if you had only one fish, what would you call it?”

“Clownfish, you clown!” Yes, painting is quite funny if you think of it like that.

This time, she didn't have anything in her mouth,

Instead, she was wearing a lampshade.

“Can I tell you a secret?”

Yes.

“I think I will call mine Mrs. Snail.”

Why?

“Because my mother said that I will have the same name as the boy that I will marry and seeing that all boys are made of snails, it will be Mrs. Snail anyway.”

She took the two snails and made them kiss each other. “You may now kiss the bride,” she said in a deep voice, still wearing the lampshade over her head. Head. There is always one of them.

Head of this, head of that.

The table’s head, the head of the table.

“Amen”

“Amen”

“Amen”

He came home that day from his fourth painting class.

First

Ladies first

“What did you do in class today?” she asked.

They stood in a circle.

They were supposed to bring flowers.

“Aren’t they beautiful?”

He bought me flowers that evening,

yellow ones, which I put in an orange vase on the table next to the photo frame. He pointed at the flowers.

“May I borrow your flowers for painting class tomorrow evening?”

She giggled

“Why are you giggling?”

“Because, painting is funny, come to think of it.”

She was late already.

“I thought only women paint flowers”

Morning freshness. Morning sickness.

You ask me why I am a painter.

It is because I am a woman. I am fresh, sweet, kind, gentle, gentle, soft, delicate, clean.

“Can I tell you a secret?” she said with her green ribbon tied around her hair.

Yes

“I once saw this girl whispering to herself. I could not see what she was saying,

but I saw something in her hands.

She was holding a cloth with pink flowers with something inside of it, a small animal or a plant. You could not see her hands.”

She had two hands.

Do you think you could fit that in your mouth?

“Why would you want to put that in your mouth!” I yelled

“Because if you eat them, then you will turn back into a girl”.

I went back to my room in the top floor of the building wondering what I could give her for her birthday.

I went home and picked all the flowers I had in my garden.

“Mom, I brought you something”. Mary was her name.

You see

She saw

Women didn’t paint flowers because they were told to

or because they thought that is was best suited for them

or because they were pretty.

It was because it kept them from being men.

Pretty. What a frivolous word.

Painting too.

You go to a wedding. You pray.

You listen to all the crap they say:

“Amen, Amen,”

Now you may kiss the bride

They kiss

She made them kiss and spoke in a deep voice.

They get flowers

They eat dinner

They dance

She changes her name

Mr. Snail

Mrs. Snail

Stupid idea.

They go home and feed the dog called Tristan who then gives birth to eight other dogs. They all have four legs.

They feed their two children fish fingers for dinner. They feed the fish.

For our birthdays we get flowers. And each year we turn into women.

“How was your painting class?”

He came back from his sixth painting class where they painted the flowers he borrowed from her the day before.

He came, made a cucumber sandwich and went to bed.

The bed is a funny thing, on the other hand. It has four legs, on the other hand.

A head

Head of this, head of that

Head and toes we used to sleep.

One evening you slept in my bed and you slept with your head at my feet. I forgot you were sleeping in my bed and I got a very big fright when you accidentally touched my foot with your hand while you were asleep. For the rest of the night I imagined you as a monster and not my sister.

Head of this

Head of that

I have only two feet.

She asked me a question:

“Would you rather be a finger or a foot?”

At this point I was getting upset.

“I would be a foot,” I said.

“And you?”

“Me too! A foot! Maybe if we walk together, we will be able to go somewhere.”

Somewhere.

45, 46, 47, 48

“Ready or not, here I come!”

I could not find them anywhere.

Painting is like my dog digging, searching for its bone. But I do not have a dog,

I am my own dog.

This morning my dog died. I received a letter in the postbox. My sincere apologies for your loss. Yours sincerely.

“Choose your sentence wisely.”

She asked me what it meant. I do not know. This silly conversation we constantly have about what painting is, what this is, what that is, what I am, what you are, what does this mean, what do you mean?

I went home and waited for you to come back from painting class.

I did not walk the dog.

“A whisper” she said.

“It is like a whisper.”

And for the rest of the year the whisper hung on the wall in the room on the top floor of the building. The pink has faded, and I was getting tired.

I went for a run. The sun was coming from the west, my back. I thought about the girl who asked me what side the sun sets. The West. I thought about her white t-shirt and her fishbowl and her picture frame and her hair tied up in a ponytail. Naked tail dangling from the wrong side of the animal’s waist.

Waste

Chaste

Chased.

I chased my own shadow that day

A two-legged race, I say.

“Let’s strap them together and play chase-chase,” she said with the ball in her hand.

“You mean catch-catch?”

“No, chase-chase. Your foot must chase mine and my foot must chase yours all the way to there and back”

“So, you mean we must go for a run?”

She kept quiet and thought about what I said.

“A run” she whispered

A run

“A men” she whispered

A men

A man

Around the table we all sat and he sat at the head of the table. He prayed:

*“Our Father who art in Heaven,
hallowed be Thy name,
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done,
on earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread
And forgive us our debts and we forgive
our debtors,
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil,
for Thine is the kingdom and the power
and the glory, forever. Amen”*

Amen

She giggled

She whispered “my father who art in heaven,
how do you art in heaven?

Paint?”

But there will be no pain

No, I meant paint?

Painting teaches you how to pray,
it teaches you how to obey.

Children?

Yes, Father, our Father,

Our Father who art in Heaven.

She giggled again, we all giggled.

They asked you to stand in a circle this time, and to hold hands like we do when we pray before Sunday lunch,

Lamb, beans, potatoes, gravy, rice

Lamb

“Mary” was her name

She told me that her name was Mary.

We called her Marie with an ‘E,’

They all called me Miss E.

Missy

She came to our house one Sunday for lunch.

We had lamb, beans, potatoes, gravy and rice.

I giggled, because I thought about a nursery rhyme we sang at preschool.

I looked at her eating the lamb and gravy.

Mary had a little lamb.

She had a little bit of gravy on her cheek.

“Don’t say such rude thing,” she whispered.

On the table stood an orange jar,

Pansies

Small face, little face, as we called them.

They were purple, pink, orange, yellow and dark blue.

The water in the jar was dirty and smelt bad

Messy, Missy, pissy,

Pussy. Like fish. Catfish.

They wore pants and we wore dresses.

Catcall.

They made us go down on our knees and measured the heights of the skirts.

Painting teaches you a lot of things. It teaches you how to measure things.

They measure

They pray

They eat

Their prey

They come

One day I bought a bag of them. I measured each one, all wrapped up. There were twenty-four in the bag. I sucked on each one of them for twenty-four seconds and pulled as hard as I could until they broke. They stretched because they were made of sugar. Some of them broke. I placed them on a stretched canvas and showed it to them. Painting sucks, I thought. What a silly joke.

I paint because I suck. They all giggled. Silly joke.

Any other comments?

The man lay on the floor with his right hand on his breast. His finger on his left hand almost touched his lips.

“Woe to me” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty,” they read.

This week they all lay on the floor. The walls were orange, the colour of the vase.

Someone sat beside me, and you against the other wall to the right. She sat next to you and next to her sat she.

Anything you wanted to say?

No.

Any responses?

No.

I laughed when you said that you might not win. Luckily, we know by now that coming second best is alright.

I will bring you flowers nonetheless.

Calla Lilies

Ursinia

Nasturtiums

Tulips

Another nursery rhyme

“Can I ask you a question?” she said.

She was wearing a t-shirt.

One day I walked down the stairs from the top floor of the building. I had to leave for some reason. Another lady came walking up the stairs and said:

“Today you look like a girl!” She was surprised and glad to see how pretty I looked. I looked like a girl.

The dress was colourful, filled with flowers.

“Miss E, can I ask you a question? she asked again.

Yes

“What are secondary colours?”

I thought about what you asked that day.

Colours don’t really exist, you see,

You don’t see.

They exist as whispers. Hundreds and thousands of them.

“Green”

They are green, and the others are blue. I am pink.

You are green too, complementary colours.

Thank you.

That was not a compliment. Almost, but not quite.

I showed her and tied a pink ribbon to a green ribbon.

I showed her and tied a pink ribbon to a blue ribbon.

Women are green. And men are blue.

I tied the pink ribbon between both of them to explain to her what I meant.

That day in art class, you painted yourselves blue and lay on a sheet of canvas until the whole canvas was blue.

“Is that why the sky is blue?” she asked.

Full of men. Sons of God.

She didn’t like to talk about it. Colour. She didn’t want to talk about it, and I left.

Painting teaches you how to paint.

That day in painting class, you had to bring the oranges because the previous time you used blue. Complimentary. You accidently brought a lemon because you are colour blind. We all are. It was a big lemon, almost as big as the one he found in the garden. He wrote about them, the lemons and the apples and the roses. Anyway, you brought a lemon instead and asked your teacher how to make the colour orange.

The same colour as the vase we keep the flowers in.

“Dumb fuck”, the boy said, “that is not an orange, it is a lemon.”

Oranges are orange

“Oranges are orange and lemons are yellow”

Women are green and men are blue and oranges are orange.

“What if women were women and not green?” she asked and giggled.

“Boys are boys and not blue?”

Dumb fuck

“Women are pink!” he yelled.

Green. Secondary. If you mix yellow with blue, you get green.

Men are blue and lemons are yellow.

I was tired of talking about colour that day.

I was tired of trying to explain to you what I meant.

I was tired washing your paintbrushes.

He came home and made a cucumber sandwich. The cucumber was green too.

The lampshade was almost pink

The orange was orange

The vase was orange too

The lemon was yellow

The cup was blue

The chair was purple

The milk was white.

White

Colours don't really exist, you see?

You don't see.

They exist as whispers. Hundreds and thousands of them.

"A strange thing happened to me once" said the girl.

Pansy

Little face

Small girl

Tiny chair

Purple chair

“Can I tell you the story?”

Yes

“We had chicken, I laughed at the chicken because it looked like something, but I am not allowed to tell you.

I will tell you the whole story.

Before lunch I sat outside and waited for them to come, because then, they were my only friends. I did not know anyone else because I also went to a very small school when I was young. I was sitting outside and saw a hole in the wall. I poked my finger in it and then something bit me on the tip of my finger. I still do not know what it was.”

She kept on talking

“When they arrived, we played a game called ‘dead man’s finger’ you know, when you put your finger next to another person’s finger. The other person’s finger will feel dead. Like a dead man.”

She showed me.

“That is why I asked you what you would do with only one finger.”

“That is why you asked me what I would do with one finger,” I repeated.

We played a game where we repeated whatever the other one said.

“When we didn’t play dead man’s finger, we played hide and seek. I became annoyed with my friends because they kept on hiding outside. My mother always said that playing outside was for the boys. Inside was for me. I was thirteen at that stage. And I did not know any boys because I went to an all-girls school. The bathrooms were painted green and pink.”

She continued:

“When I played with my sister it was better, because we always hid amongst the things inside the house. Inside the closet, behind the chair, behind the curtain, behind the door. We had to pretend to be them too. What has four legs and two arms and a back but no face?”

She continued.

“The one afternoon, I walked home. We stayed close to the all-girls school. I walked home and saw a butterfly on the floor. It made me think of the chicken wings we ate the evening before. I always spilt on the white tablecloth. The one Sunday lunch she used the tablecloth to wipe her face.”

Spilt milk

My father also told me to never keep the closet open while I sleep, because the ghosts will come out.

Sometimes my sister pretended to be a ghost with the tablecloth over her head.

She was the table.

She looked at me and said: "Do you understand why I think I am a painter?"

"Do you understand why I am telling you these stories?"

I did not understand.

I did not understand, I repeated.

You asked me why I am a painter

You brought it up, pointed it out

I spat it out.

I spat out a lot over the last two years.

"What are you thinking?" they ask.

"What is on your mind?" they ask.

They listened carefully to our conversation and as you told me these things I realised that painting is to me what I mean to you.

"Promise not to tell anyone?"

I promise.

"Promise not to show anyone?"

I promise.

I drove home that evening and

we fought and never spoke again.

I drove home another evening. On the back seat in the car opposite me sat a girl. At the back of the front chair was a small screen.

She was watching Barbie. I promised not to tell anybody.

Any body

Barbie has a good body.

I never had one

A Barbie, not a body.

Fool

A no-body Barbie doll

Doll

Dolled up

Buttered up

Battered up

Stuffed up

Throw up

Fed up

She fed the dogs the evening before you came home from your first painting class.

She fed the children

She fed the table

She fed the fish

She fed the fish fish

She fed the oranges orange

You were fed up with painting

So, you started to count

I hated accounting

So, I started counting.

I counted cheese.

I bought pre-grated cheese from the shop that day and came home and counted the cheese gratings in the packet. I payed R8.26 for the cheese. It was not a lot. I counted each strand. Six hundred and eighty-three pieces.

I placed it all on a slice of brown toast and put it in the microwave for six hundred and eighty-three seconds.

It became as hard as rock.

Rock hard

Lard

Soft lard

Hard lad

Try a biscuit, its not that bad.

Biscuits are funny things, on the other hand.

It takes many shapes and sizes.

All he spoke about the whole weekend was the biscuits.

“What is your favorite one?” she asked, on the other hand.

Finger biscuits.

“Finger biscuits! That is what you can call your finger!” She was pleased with my suggestion.

So proud, so pleased.

With the finest touch of the baker's magic.

The baker,

The maker,

The creator,

The anticipator,

The ejaculator,

The invalidator.

I wonder if he used his fingers.

“A men” she whispered.

A men.

You came home the evening after painting class. I do not remember which one it was. You came home and I asked you how painting class was.

You did not do much, you said. You did not do much because you were told to stand in a circle and talk about your favourite colour.

Your favourite memory

Your favourite food

Your favourite fruit

Your favourite person

Your favourite animal

Dog?

You hate talking about colour.

Blue, you said.

Blue you

Blue hue

“Boo you!” everybody cried.

The flower between the pink and the yellow one was blue.

They didn’t paint flowers that month.

That time of the month

Women didn’t paint flowers because they were told to.

It was because they were already filled with it,

Stuffed up

Buttered up

Fed up

She fed the kids

She fed the dogs

She fed the fish

She fed the fish fish.

The reason why she didn't paint anymore was because she had children. Two of them.

"I have two feet" she said.

If we tie them together, we will have four.

Like the dog

Like the table

Like the bed

Like the chairs

Like the chairs under the table.

The head of the table.

He only had two.

They painted tables with food

"Fruits, flowers, fucking fish and funny flittering frogs" she said.

You fool, there were no frogs.

But the chairs also have arms.

And a back.

My arms hurt when your dog pulls.

When you got home, I was out, walking the dog.

One day I took a bag of finger biscuits. I put each one in my mouth and pushed them so far back as I could until I gagged. I took a pencil and made a mark where it touched the tip of my lip. I still have it in the room on the top floor.

“Yay to me” I cried. “I am also ruined! For I am a woman of unclean lips, and I live among people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.” I thought.

“You are no man”, she said and giggled at me.

They all giggled.

She sat on the chair on the other side of the table.

I could not see because the flowers were in the way.

Painting taught me how to sit.

You sat on the chair on the corner of the orange room

And they listened carefully to what you had to say.

Don't ask again

He asked

They listened.

A painter

I am a painter because my favourite colour is green

My favourite fruit is an apple

My favourite food is fish

My favourite memory is when you brought me flowers

My favourite flowers are Dutch lilies

My favourite memory is when we went to the shop to buy new fish.

We spoke about ourselves too often.

This is what I think

What do you think?

“What do you think will be the best way to describe how you feel?” she asked.

Feel about what?

“About how you think you are a painter?”

Oh, but I don’t think I am a painter.

“What! What are you then?”

Do I need to be something?

“Anything, you need to be anything!”

A painter, a feminist, a bitch, a woman, a man, an artist, an examiner, an invalidator. An ejaculator?

“Can I pretend to be something? Can I call myself a painter even though I am not?”

I guess so, she thought.

I guess you can call yourself anything. If you don’t call yourself anything, then it means that you are nothing.

“Alright then, then I’ll call myself a feminist just for the sake of it, just for the piss of it.”

No, that is not allowed. You need to be sincere.

My sincere apologies.

“I am strong woman! I am a good feminist! I am a great painter!” I proclaim.

My sincere condolences. My kindest regards. My utmost respect.

In the painting class that evening you discussed the truth of painting.

You did not know what you were going to paint and she sent you out to find the answers. The paintings were horrible, awful.

I called myself a painter anyway because if I called myself something then it meant that I am not nothing. That’s just what they want to hear.

What are you going to do when you are no longer a painter?

Probably have two children.

You came home from painting class and opened a new box of milk.

You kept them stacked upon one another. Stacks of milk

Stacks of chairs

Piles of them

Piles

Ply

One ply

Two ply

Comply

It is complicated

It is complimentary

It is complementary

It is compulsory

It is common sense

Painting is common sense

Painting is comprehensive

You fool, I don't even know what that word means.

Comprehensive

Comprehension

Painting is an English comprehension test. I failed.

It is complicated

Do you understand?

I understand

Do you know what I mean?

I do.

I do.

You may now kiss the bride.

What a silly thing to say in the first place.

In painting class you drew your face

You hated it,

Doing self-portraits.

You hated your face,

What a waste of time, you thought.

We played a game to see who could keep their breath for the longest period of time.

I went to the shop and bought a premade milk tart. In the room on the top floor I stood with the tart in front of my face. I decided that I would put my face in the milk tart to see how long I can hold my breath. It was forty-eight seconds. Silly me. I remember that I had to stand with it so that the tart will fall to the floor if I pass out. I did not, because I was too scared. Silly me. It reminded me of when we swam in the pool. I kept my breath under the water and pretended to be dead. Water is different to milk tart. In water you can open your eyes. The hues, the eyes. When you have your face stuffed in milk tart, you are not able to open your eyes. When we swam, we had a competition of who can do the best handstand under water. I liked it because I could never do one outside of the water. I could never do a cartwheel either. I never tried because I was too scared. Silly me. I thought of a better idea. I will do pushups. So, I went to the shop and bought a premade milk tart. In the room on the top floor I placed the milk tart on the floor. I will put my head inside the milk tart every time I go down. I think I did eleven push-ups only. Silly me. I have weak arms. I throw like a girl. Silly me.

Don't say such silly things.

Don't say anything at all.

She went home and fed the two children.

"Children?"

“Yes, Mother”

My mother who also art in Heaven.

“No, they don’t, silly.”

She giggled.

“Children?”

“Yes, Father”

My Father who art in Heaven.

Hollowed be thy name.

Hollowed be her name too.

Painting sucks on you like a vacuum cleaning. It sucks the life out of you.

“Don’t be a painter, you will waste your life.”

I giggled.

Painting sucks anyway. Painting is vacuum.

I won’t be able to have children anyway.

I don’t even know what painting is anyway.

“Painting is following the steps on a Wikihow article explaining how to follow the steps on a Wikihow article.”

How do I become a famous painter?

First, you need to do this.

Ladies first.

Oh, thank you sir.

How do I become a famous artist?

First, you need to do that.

I don’t want to be an artist, she said. “I want to be a housewife.”

What a silly thing to say! No! You are a strong woman! A good feminist! A great painter!
Alright. I will be a great painter.
She giggled.
So, I went to the orange room and lay on the floor next to the painting with the man lying on the floor.
I pretended to be the man lying on the floor.
We went back to her room with the blue tiles. Blue hue. Boo you.
We spoke about the game we played as kids. I hid under the desk and you hid behind the curtain.
Drape. Drab.
I bore you, don't I? I know I do.
You swore not to tell where I was hiding.
Hiding
I never got a hiding.
She told me where you were hiding.
You spat it out!
You gave it away.
I found you! I found you!
You came home from the painting class and I made dinner. I made fish with lemon juice and butter.
I also made homemade biscuits that you can nibble on with your milk. You did not spill the milk and I was pleased.
Nibble.
What a horrible word.
She left crumbs on the table for us to see.
So pleased, so proud.
Painting taught me many things over the last two years.

I was told not to study art because I would not be able to have children.
I would not be able to take care of my family.
I thank my mother and my father for their support
I thank my sisters for their support.
Too personal. Too private.
In painting class, you drew your own face. A self-portrait, a personal touch, a soft touch.
No, still too personal. Still too private.
She looked at his hands. You have hands like a woman.
That's alright. I throw like a girl.
Funny
On the t-shirt made for men, it says "REAL MAN"
On the t-shirt made for women, it says "REAL BASIC"
Real basic.
She is being over-emotional. Irrational.
Crazy.
"You crazy bitch! You are not a fucking dog!" I screamed and we both started laughing.
You laughed so loud that while you drank the milk it came out of your nostrils.
Nostrils, what a horrible word.
It came out your nose as if you lactated from your nose. "Express!" she yelled.
She sucked on her mother's nose.
Painting sucks.
She knows better
that milk coming from your nose will hurt.

She fed her baby as he sucked on her nose. She gave birth through her mouth. Like a Madonna and Child painting.

She giggled and said: "Do you know what would be really funny: If a mother makes a hole in a canvas. A hole big enough so that a baby can fit through it. Before she gives birth, they place the canvas between her open legs. When the baby comes out, the doctors pull it from the other side of the canvas".

"She just made a painting". She giggled.

"The Birth of Venus", she said.

I went to the room on the top floor of the building and thought about a hole in canvas through which the mother gave birth. Like a door between her and her child.

Real Basic

Real Man

Like father, like son. A face that only a mother could love.

People always say I look like my father. A face that only a mother could love. I love my mother too.

Her name was Mary, with an E.

Marie, who had a little baby boy. She gave birth to him through a hole made in a canvas.

Holy is his name.

Silly joke.

Silly joke.

We spoke nonsense the whole afternoon and we laughed.

Painting is Holy.

My Father who art in Heaven

Paint

There will be no pain.

I meant paint.

My father taught me how to paint.

We bought fish together for my fish tank I had in my room next to my bed.

She asked me: “if you had one fish, what would you call it?”

Catfish.

I had a catfish in my tank and it became very big. I had nightmares of it being cut into two halves.

I called him ‘Catcall’.

I called the catfish Cat.

You call us and they call it catcall too.

They never listen to a word they say

What did you say?

You called me by my last name.

You went last. Ladies first.

How pathetic.

Still life painting. Pathetic.

The pathetic pits of painting’s piss.

They asked you that day why you think painting is important.

“I think it is important because it teaches you many things” he said. They laughed.

“Like what?”

They looked at him.

“I think it is important because it teaches you many things” he said.

They laughed.

It reminded me how we did handstands in the swimming pool. There was a judge and we got marks out of ten. I normally got about a seven, six.

“And how does it feel to stand up for yourself?” he asked.

He did not know.

“What do you mean you do not know?”

They always asked so many questions.

How many would you like to have? How many do you already have?

How many do you think you will get? How many will I get?

“May I ask you a question?” she said.

Of course.

“How many fingers long do you think is your foot?”

It depends how long your finger is.

“Oh, of course. With what finger do you think you will measure a foot?”

Your index finger, I’d say.

“Oh, of course. Would you say that you could use your foot to measure your index finger?”

I would say so, yes.

“Oh, alright.”

She was quiet for a while. She had green eyes. She was quiet and then said: “It would be funny. You would say that your finger is a quarter of a foot long, for example. I will have to measure both my finger and my foot, of course, to be able to tell you the exact amount. But the idea is still funny, don’t you think?”

Yes.

I went back to the room on the top floor and thought about when you said you’ll keep me at arm’s length. I wondered how many fingers an arm would be and how many arms my feet would be.

Painting does not necessarily have to be about counting and measuring.

It can sometimes be about painting too. I really do love painting.

What a strong word.

I painted the kitchen sponges, or the ear buds, or the paper we stuck on the wall, or the cloth. They were so boring.

Boring as hell

Hell?

Oh hell.

Oh, fuck no.

But there will be no painting.

Painting taught me a lot of things.

Sometimes I sat in the room on the top floor and stared at all the nonsense I have accumulated.

All the crap.

“Beautiful, isn’t she? Lovely, aren’t they? she said.

I agreed.

She went for a run again. This time she had short hair. A girl on a bicycle asked her if she was a boy or a girl.

I enjoyed the question because I realised that I am outside and that a small girl just asked me what I was.

She remembered that he had to say anything. Anything to make it sound as if she was something. Because if you are not something, you are nothing.

“I am girl” she said.

The silly conversations we have about what painting is, what this is, what that is, what I am, what you are, what this means.

What do you mean?

What do you mean, “Are you a girl or are you a boy?”

I was intimidated by the young girl’s questions because, of course, I am a girl!

Silly

They all laughed.

Silly, because it was rather obvious. Painting is obvious. It is common sense. Fool, I am lying. It makes no sense.

Do you understand why I think she is a painter?

She understood. He understood.

They understood.

“Last question,” she said. She promised.

Alright, you promised.

“If you were a painter, how tall do you think you should be?”

The question did not make sense. I looked at her green eyes and her green ribbon in her hair. I looked at her left hand and her finger.

I thought about her mother, her sisters, her dog, her chairs in the kitchen, and her room with the blue kitchen tiles.

I thought about how they told me that painting is not for me. You told me that I wouldn’t like art because it will put too much pressure on me.

I thought about your question you asked me: “Why do you call yourself a painter?”

I thought about my cat that ran away when I was a young girl. I thought about the faded pink painting hanging on the wall on the top floor of the building.

She loosened her green ribbon and hung it beside her. They were the same length.

“I think you need to be as tall as something else to be a good painter,” she said.

I did not know how tall I was. I haven’t measured myself in years.

“Why do you have to be as tall as something else to be a painter?” I asked.

“Because then you do not have to be anything specific. You do not have to call yourself a painter, a woman, a feminist, an artist, a mother, a housewife, a dog, a girl. You can just call yourself something that does not really matter, like a green ribbon. Green ribbons do not matter, but because we have something in common, then I can call myself a green ribbon. If someone does not believe me then I just untie my ribbon and show it to them. Look.”

She showed me.

“And the best part about it is that no one will know how tall you or the ribbon are for sure, because it is tied up in a bow”. She continued: “It is your own secret.”

Painting has many secrets. It is like a vacuum. A hollow, a hole; a hole in the canvas. A-hole. I went up to the top floor and measured myself. I wondered what I could be. What should I call myself? Silly. Think of something silly. The silliest thing in the room. If you tell people the silliest thing then they will stop asking you silly questions.

I could not find anything So, I prayed:

*“Our Father who art in Heaven,
hallowed be Thy name,
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done,
on earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread
And forgive us our debts and we forgive
our debtors,
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil,
for Thine is the kingdom and the power
and the glory, forever. Amen”*

My Father who art in Heaven. How do you art in heaven?

Painting taught me many things. It taught me how to sit, pray, play, stand, stand up for myself, throw, throw up.

But it never taught me how to art. How do you art? How art you? Silly joke. Silly joke.

They listened to the conversations we had about school, and Sunday lunches, and cucumber and cheese sandwiches, and tables, chairs, chairs under the tables, heads of the tables. Head of this.

Head of that.

Fish. Fish cakes and sponge cakes with pink and green icing.

Tart milks and milk tart. Spilt milk, and butter. We loved butter. But she, no they, but he never liked her.

I placed your order, picked you flowers, and gave it to you for your birthday. It won't last very long, she said. You went to your last painting class. You got first place for painting that year. You came first.

You came First!

And I congratulated you with homemade biscuits. You bought yourself a studio on the top floor of the building and made flower paintings.

Calla Lilies,

Ursinia,

Nasturtiums,

Tulips.

I stayed home and fed the fish. I fed the fish fish and smelt like one too.

I did not mind because I was a woman.

I fed the orange orange and the yellow lemons I threw away. They made me sick anyway. You fool, they were beautiful. I kept them for you to paint too. I thought that you could include them in your flower paintings. You came first and I was so proud of you. I came home and fed the dog. I fed the cat. I made supper. We had our last supper together and you left crumbs all over the table.

I cleaned the table and pushed the chairs under the table. Never sat like ladies. Bad manners. Man, hers. Ham her. Like master, my father who art in Heaven.

Blessed be your name.

One Sunday morning we went to church. It was only my father and I. My mother did not enjoy going and I did not blame her. We sat on the gallery. I sneezed while we prayed and horrible things came out of my nose. Bless you. I was young but I remember it very well. My father did not know what to do and I did not know what to do because I did not have a face, a facial tissue.

"Blessed be Your name."

I used my small bag I brought with me to church.

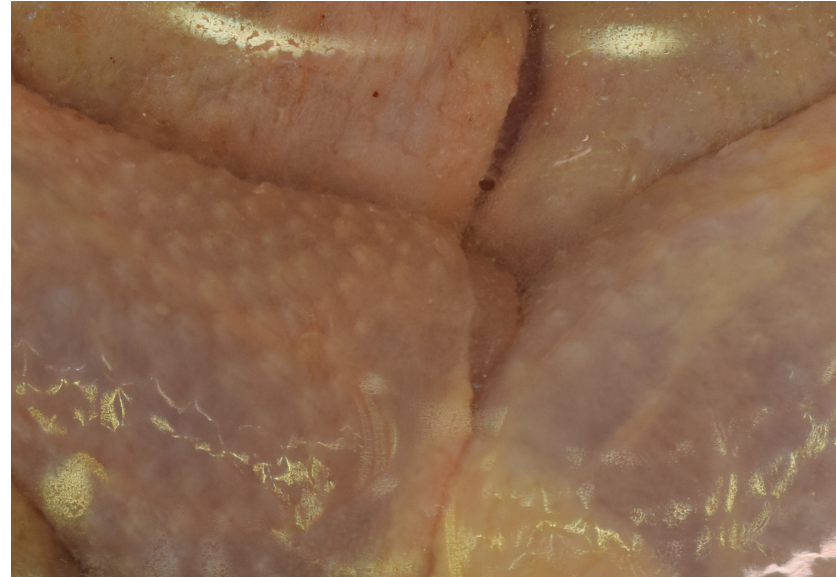
"Amen"

Amen, I whispered.

They opened their eyes and I pretended as if nothing ever happened.

The Pits of Painting's Piss
(We were both soaking wet)













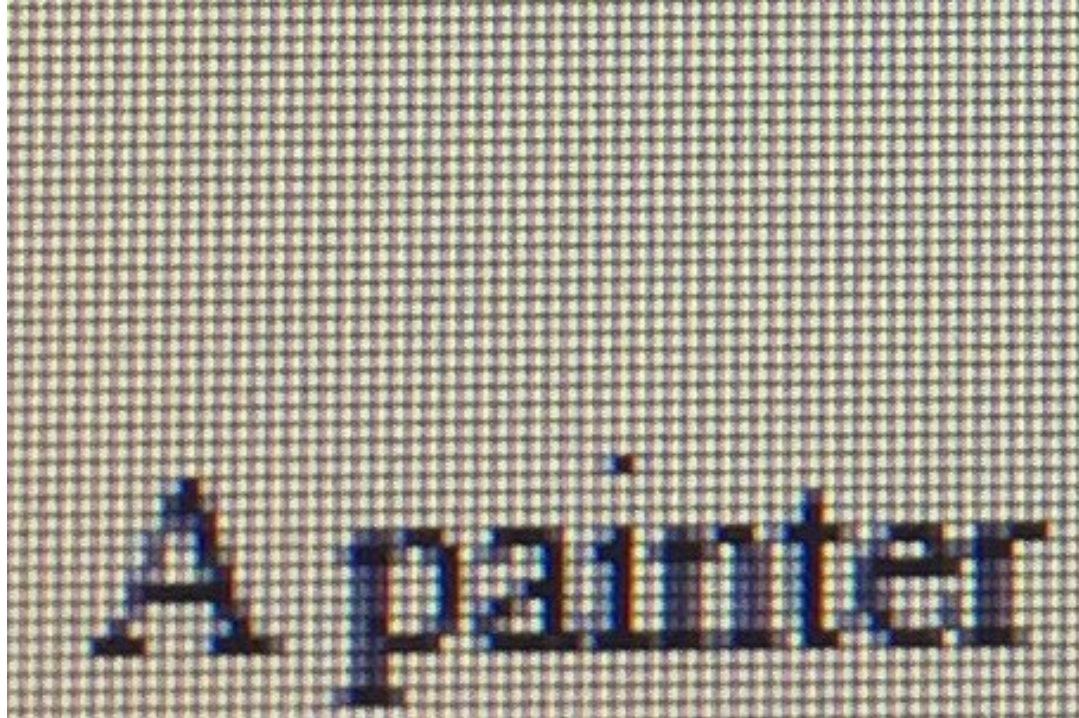


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We recommend using your regular Baby Soft® Dry Toilet Tissue alongside Baby Soft® Moist Toilet Tissue®. Leaving you feeling extra fresh and clean than just dry toilet tissue

The Baby Soft® Clean Routine



1
**USE 3-4 SHEETS
PER WIPE**



2
**WIPE FROM
FRONT TO BACK
UNTIL CLEAN**



3
**USE 1-2 Baby Soft®
Moist Toilet Tissues
TO FEEL CLEANER**



4
**PAT DRY WITH
TOILET TISSUE**



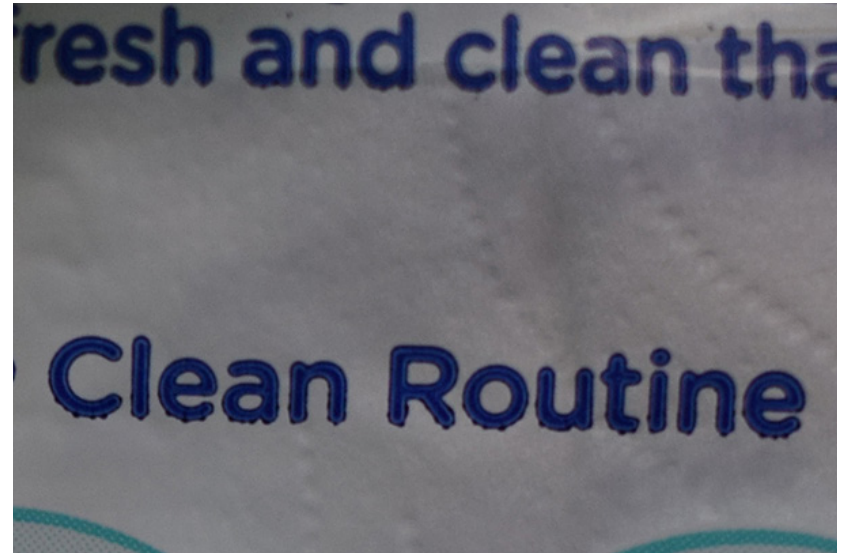
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HANDS
WITH SOAP**

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sweet sweat, home)







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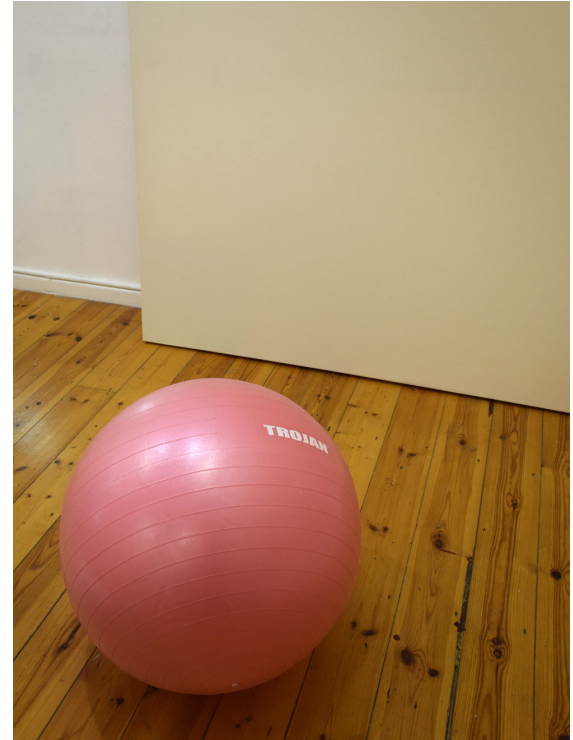
Designed for every smear,
sniff and sneeze

I'M
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INSIDE

90 2-PLY

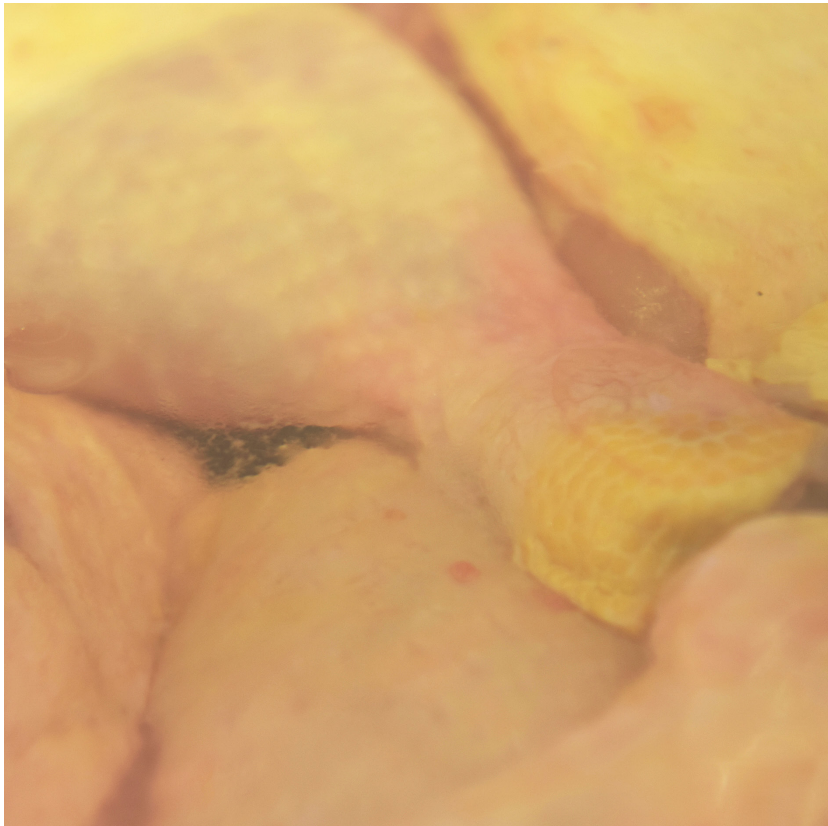








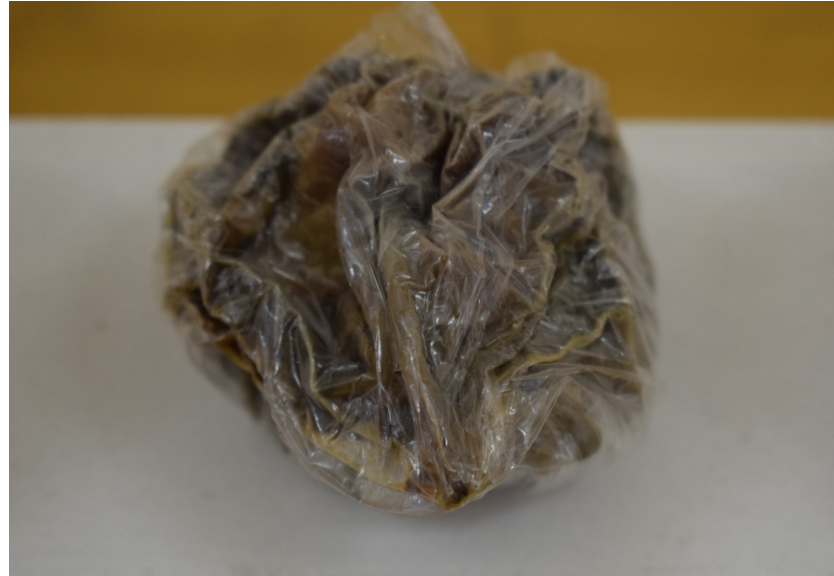


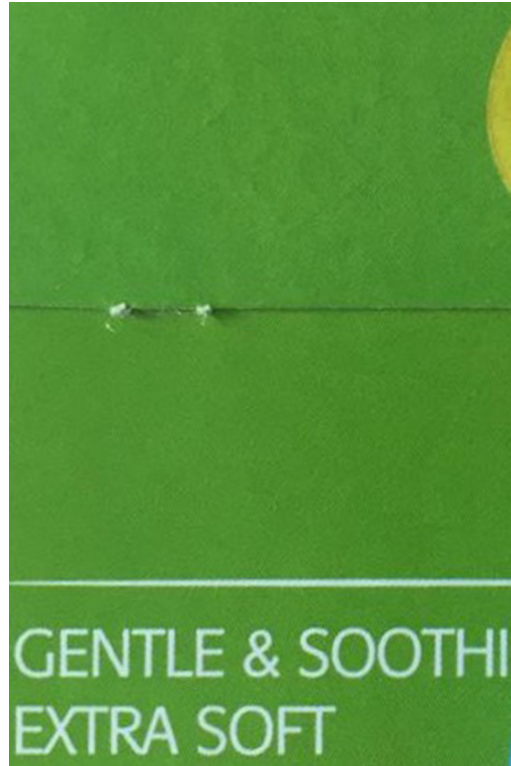


















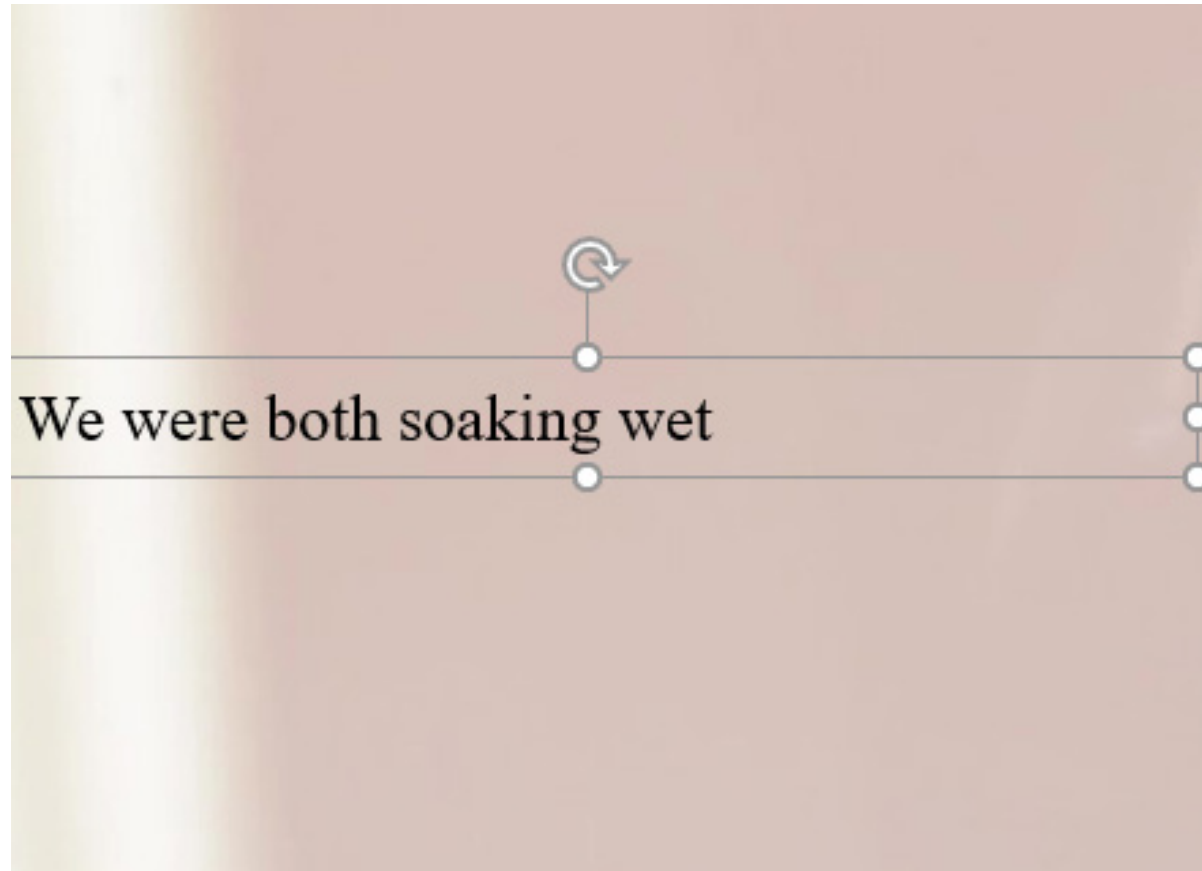




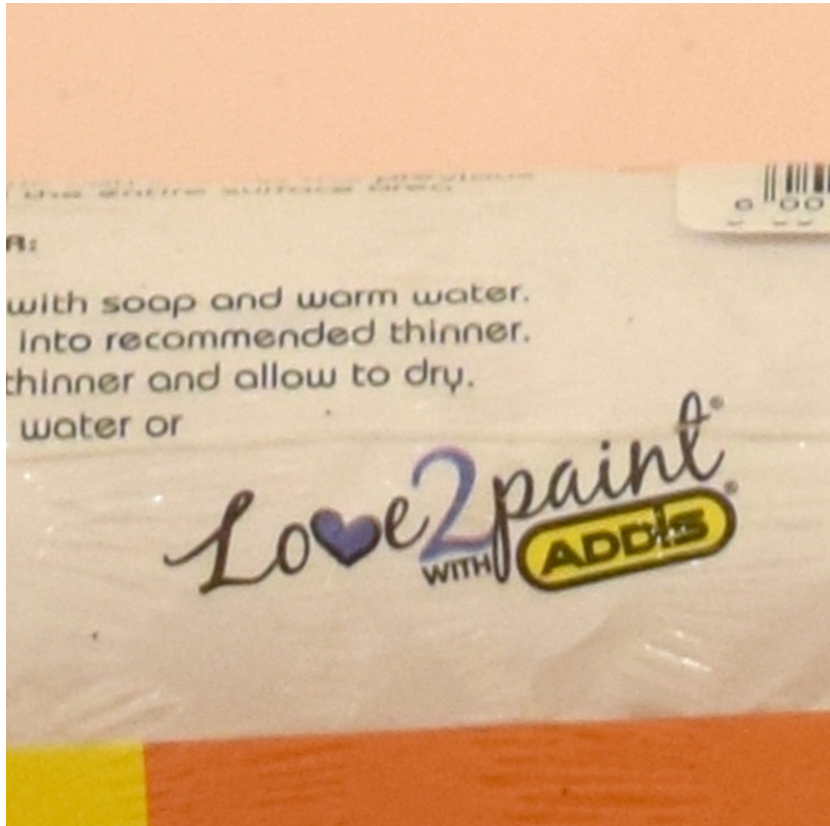






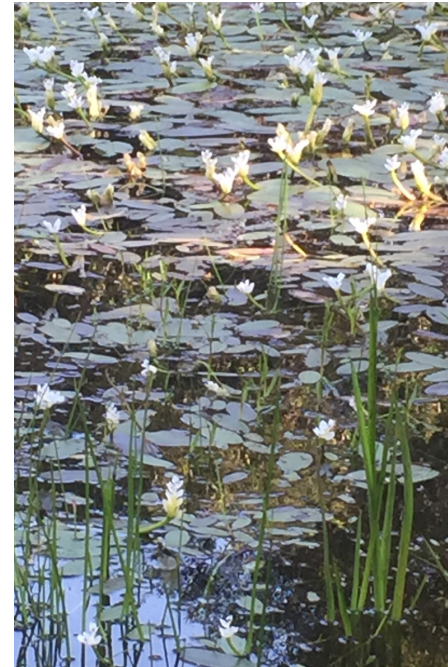


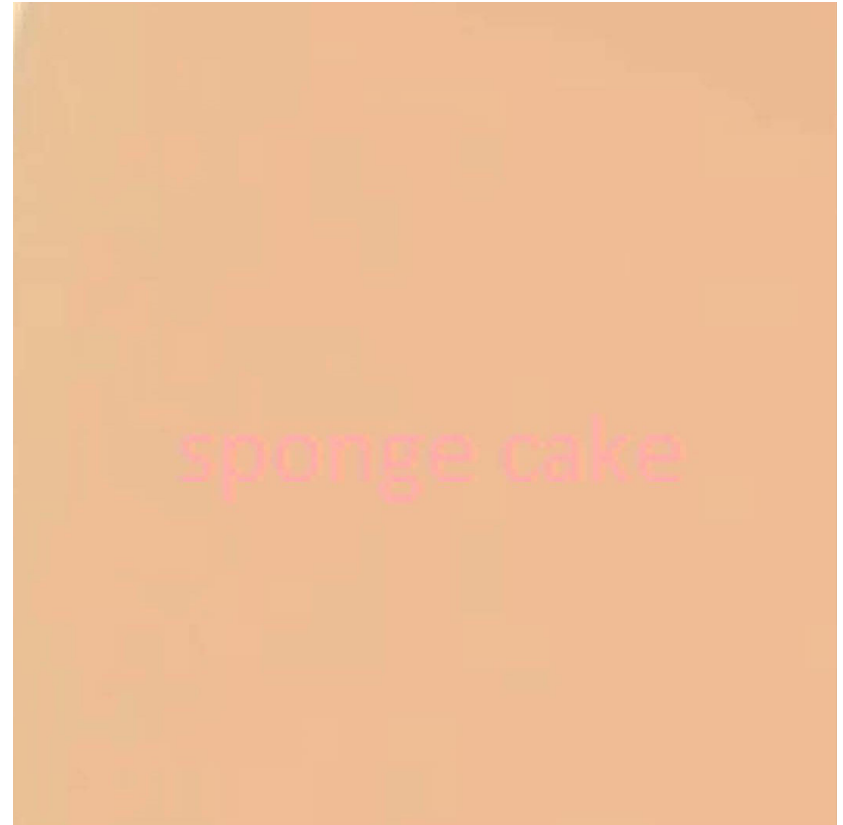
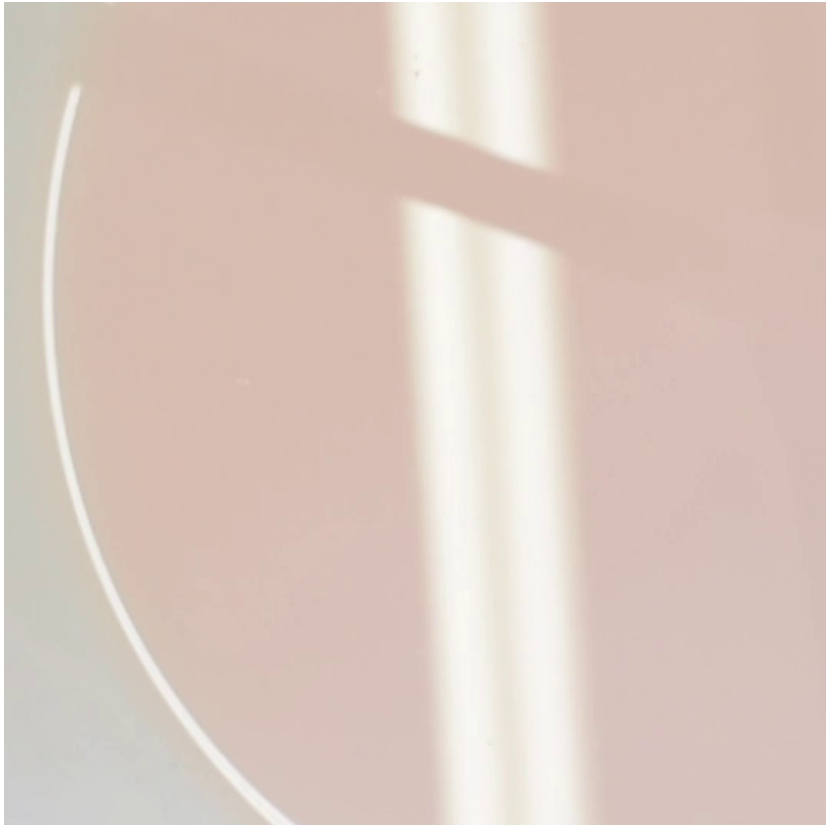




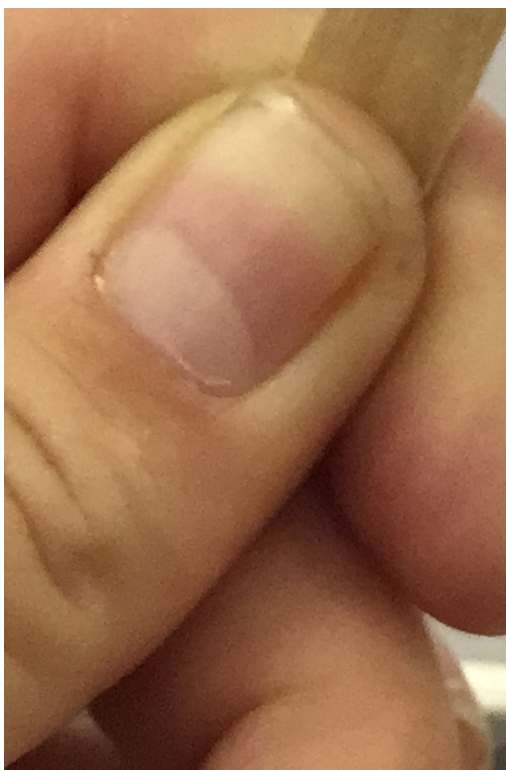
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2 Ply Rainbow Tissues















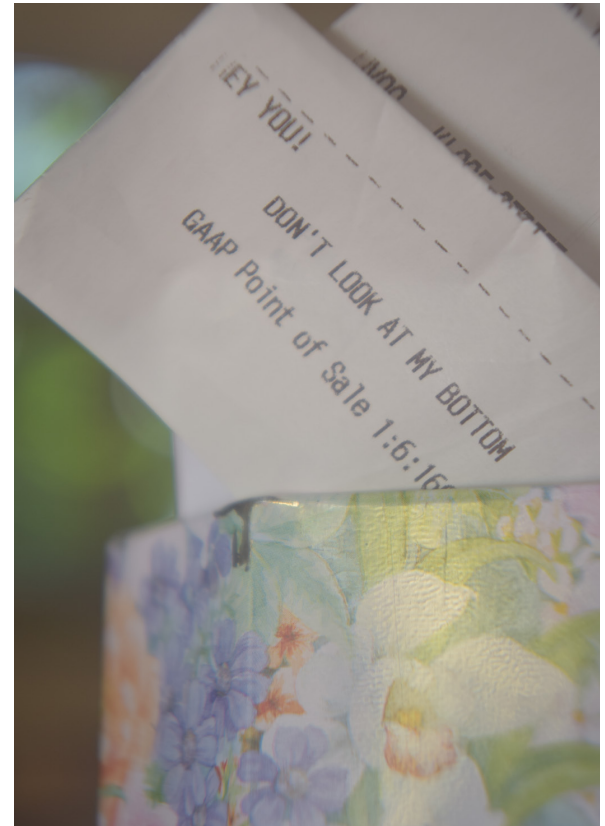


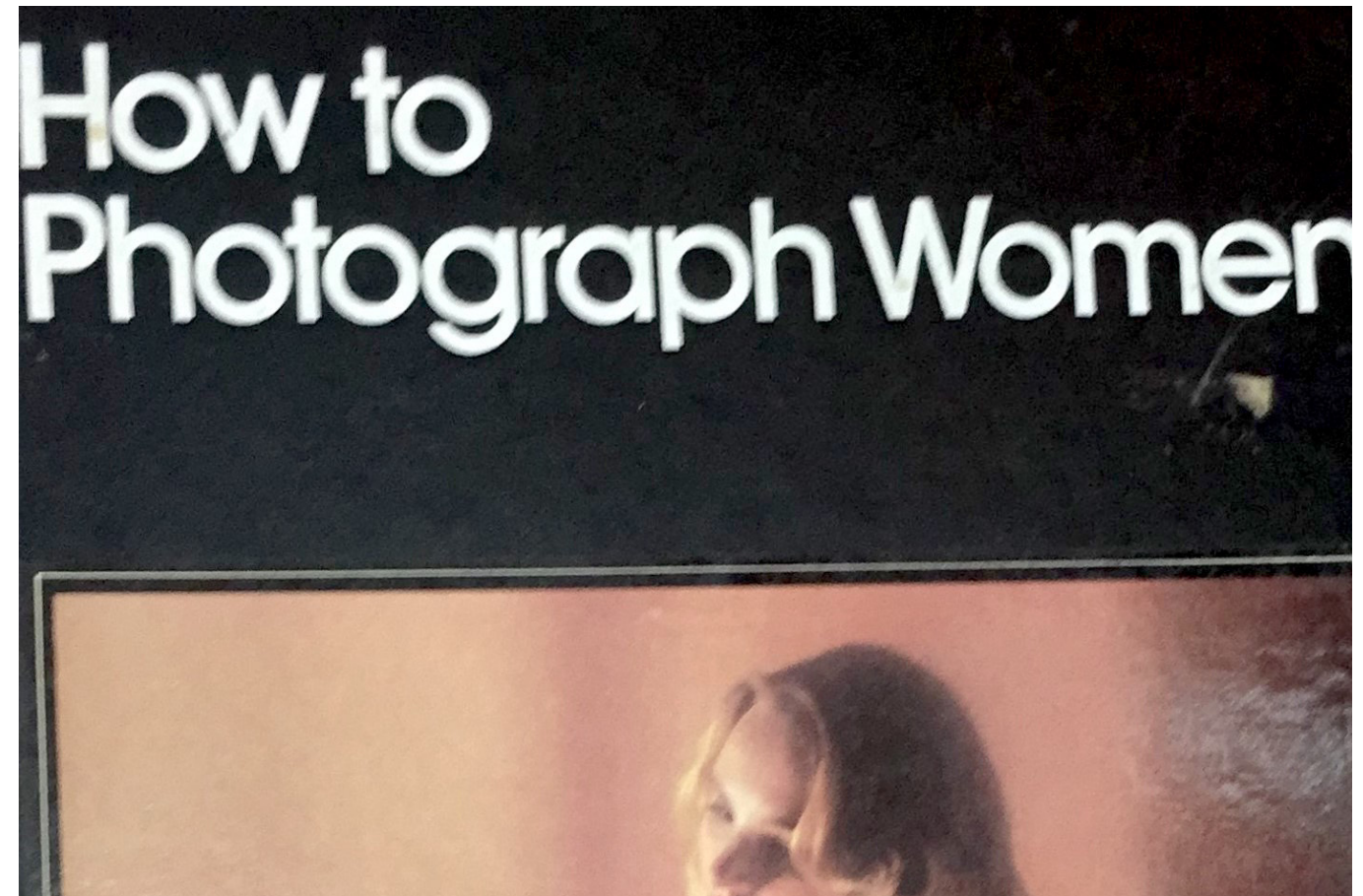


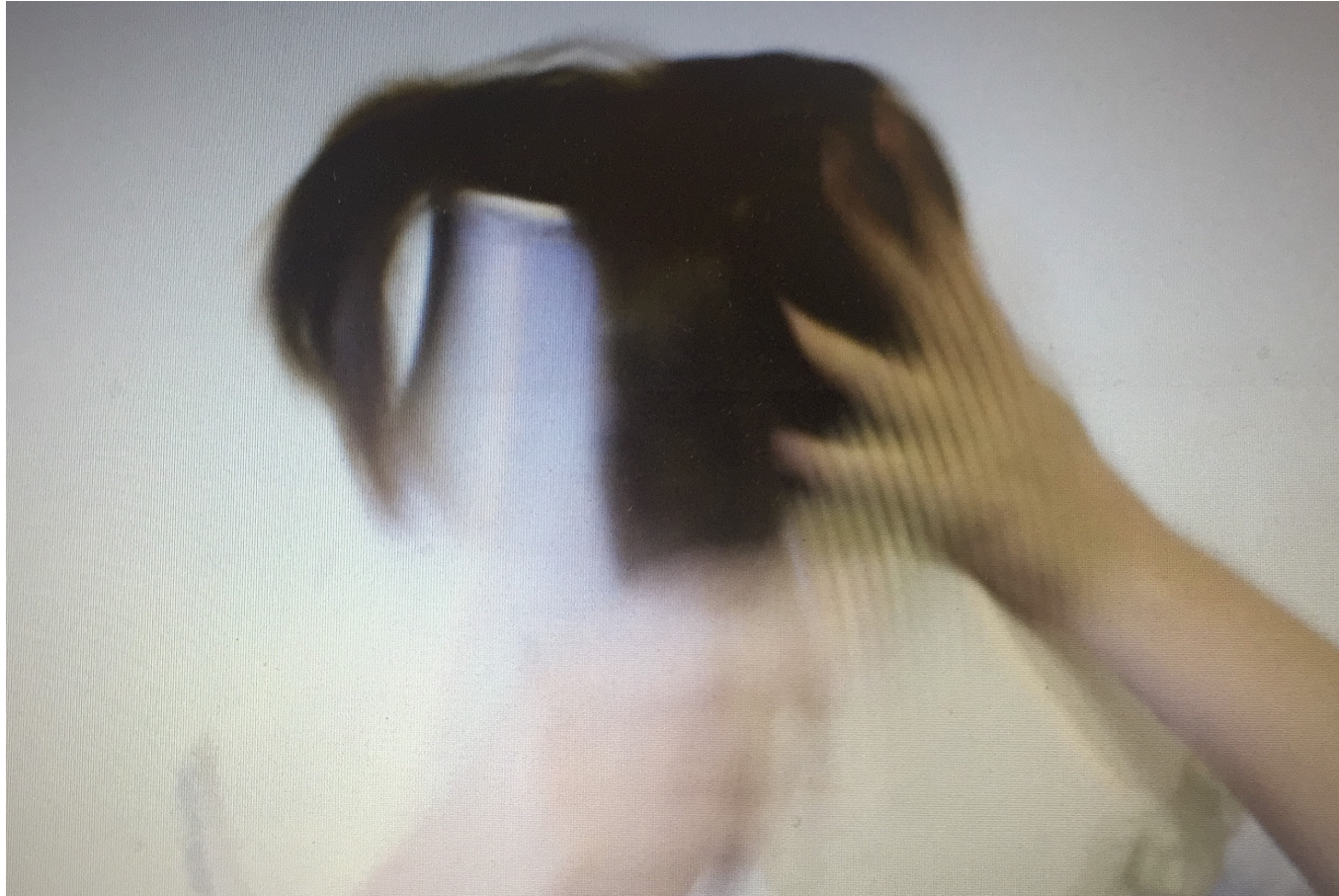








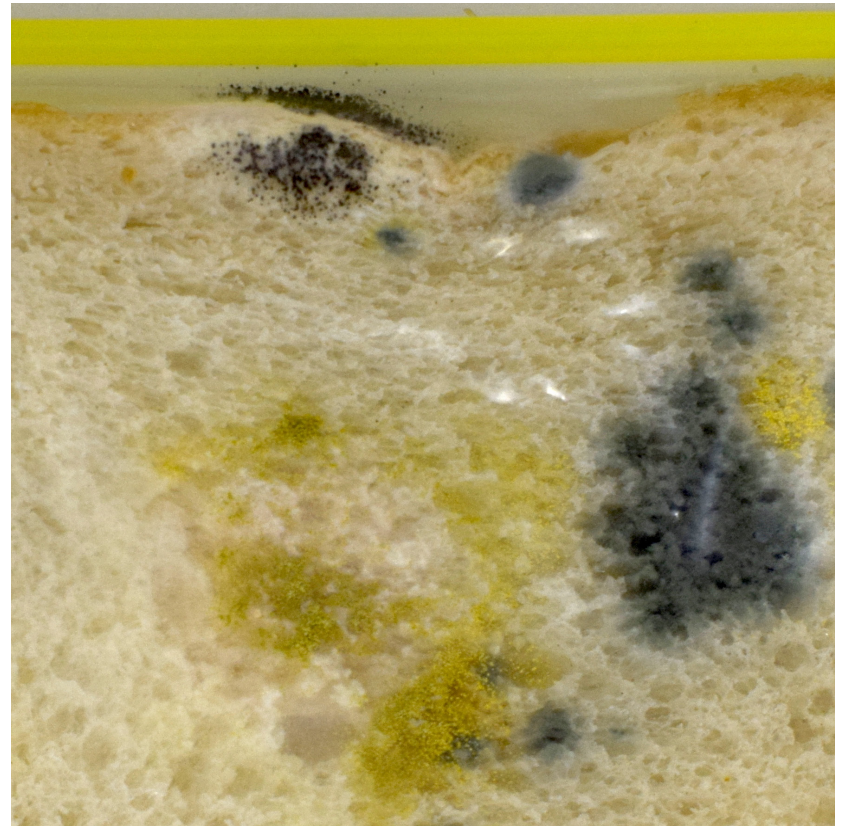


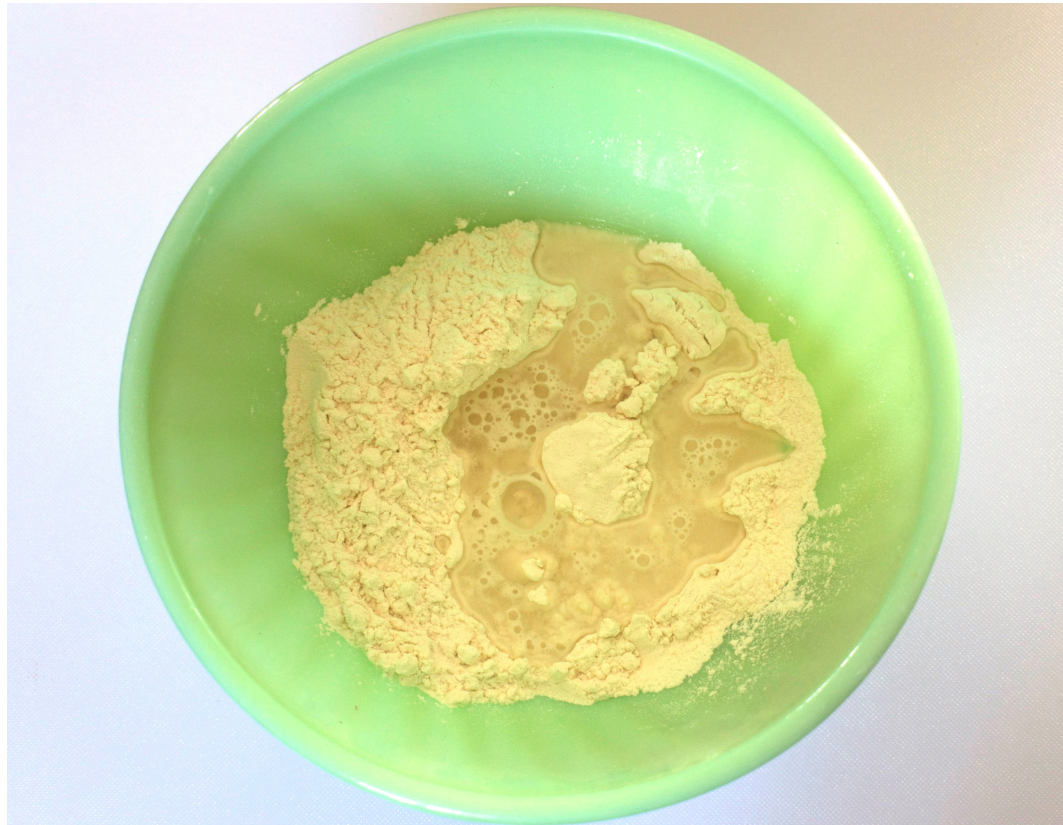
















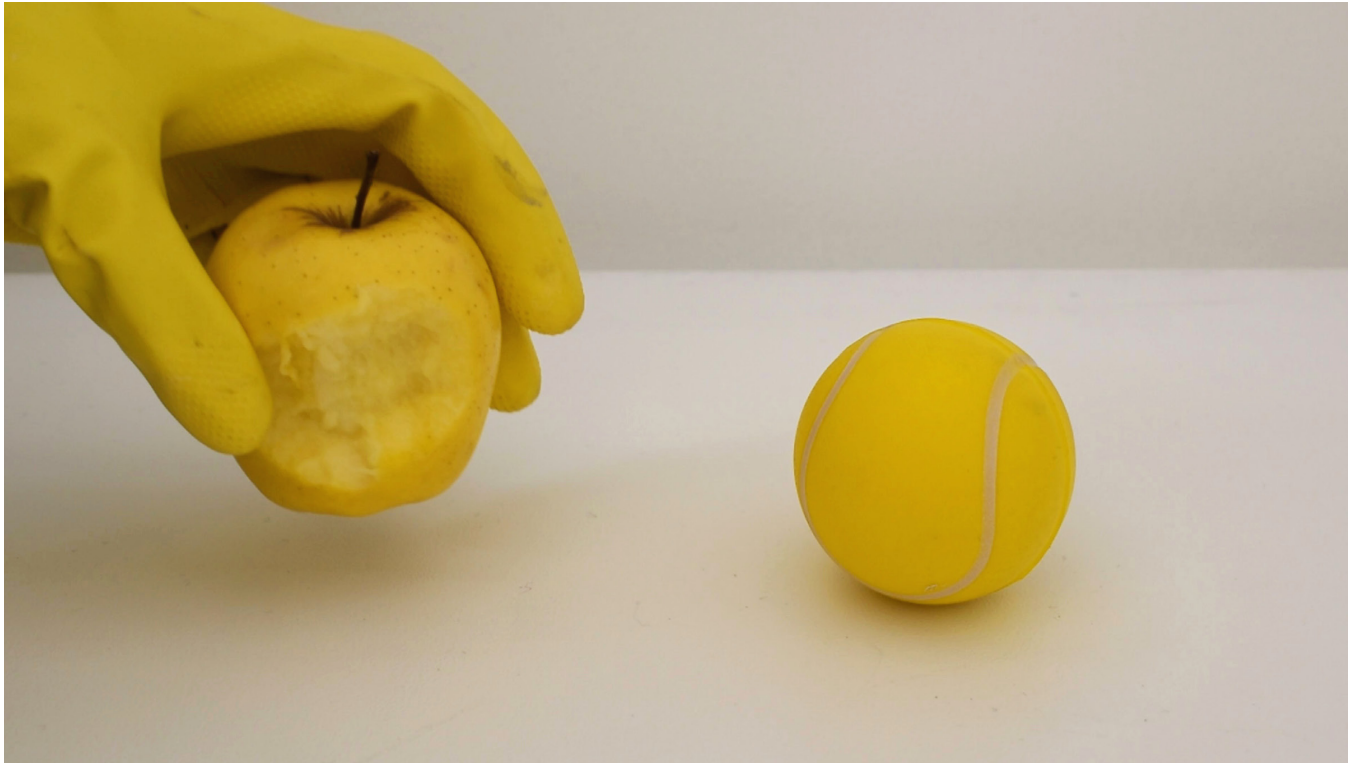






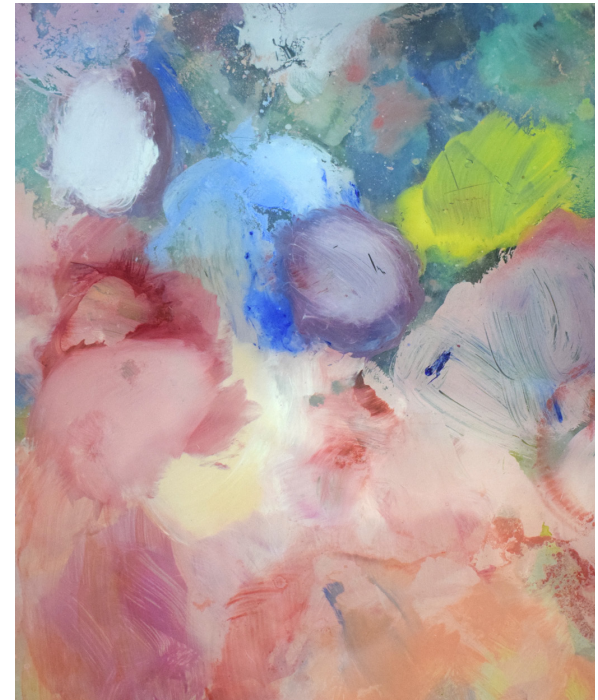
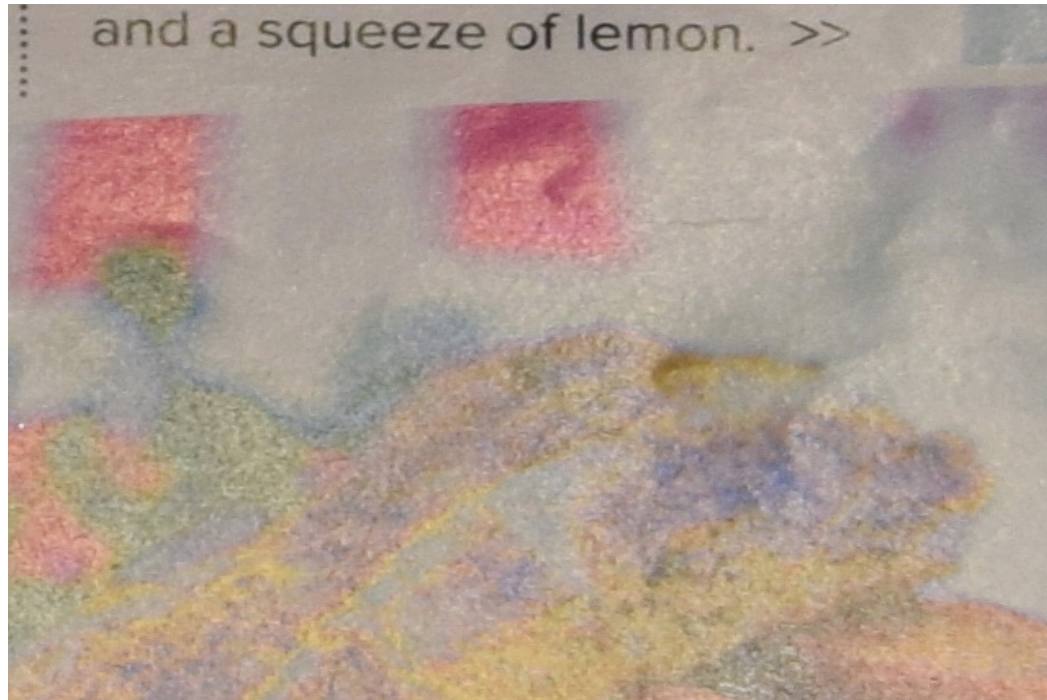














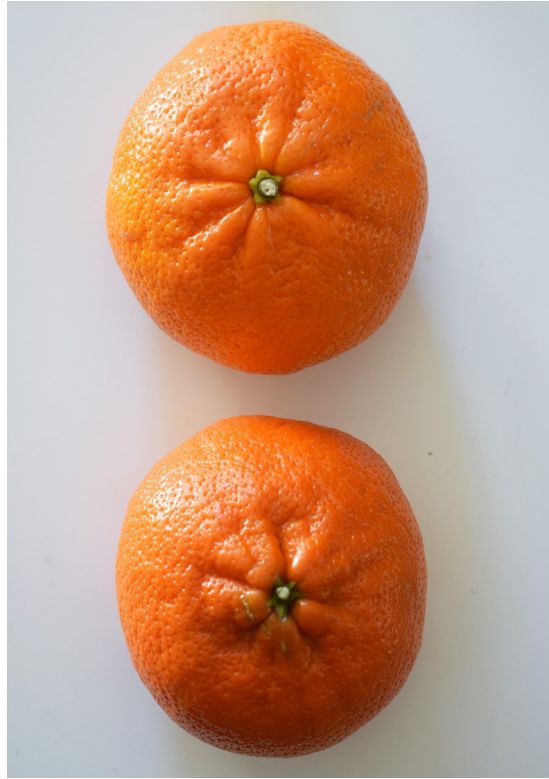


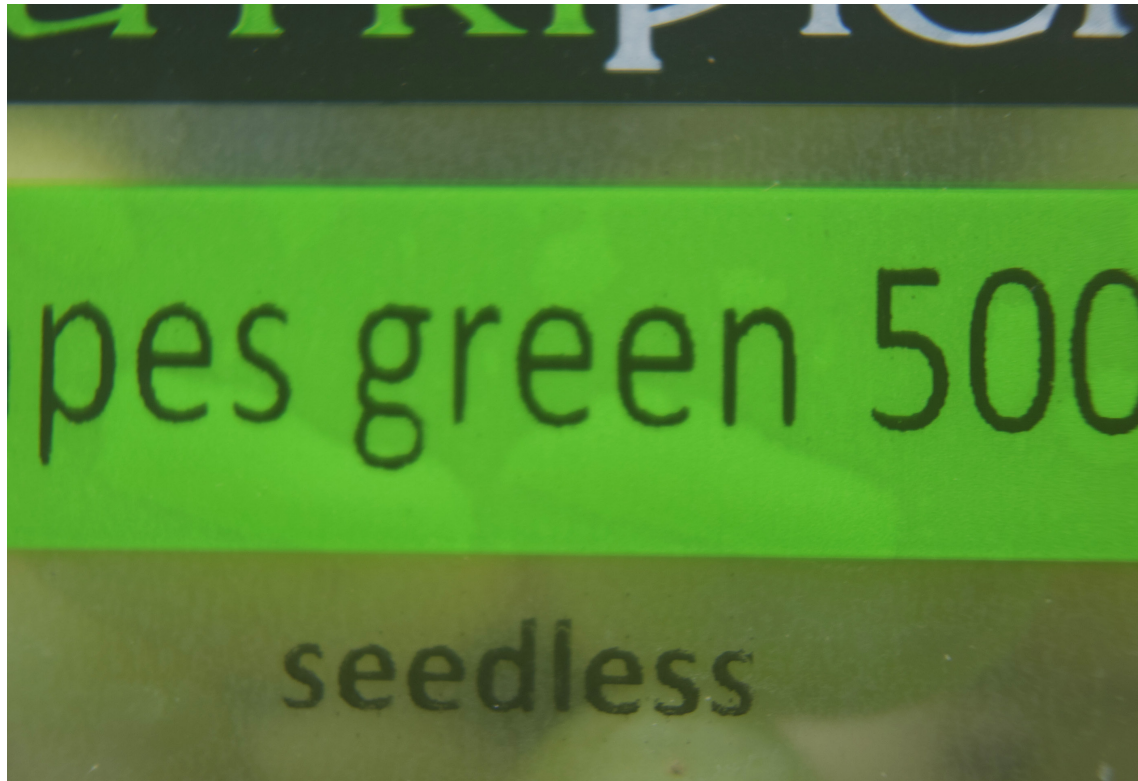


Fruit

Fruit Salad in Syrup











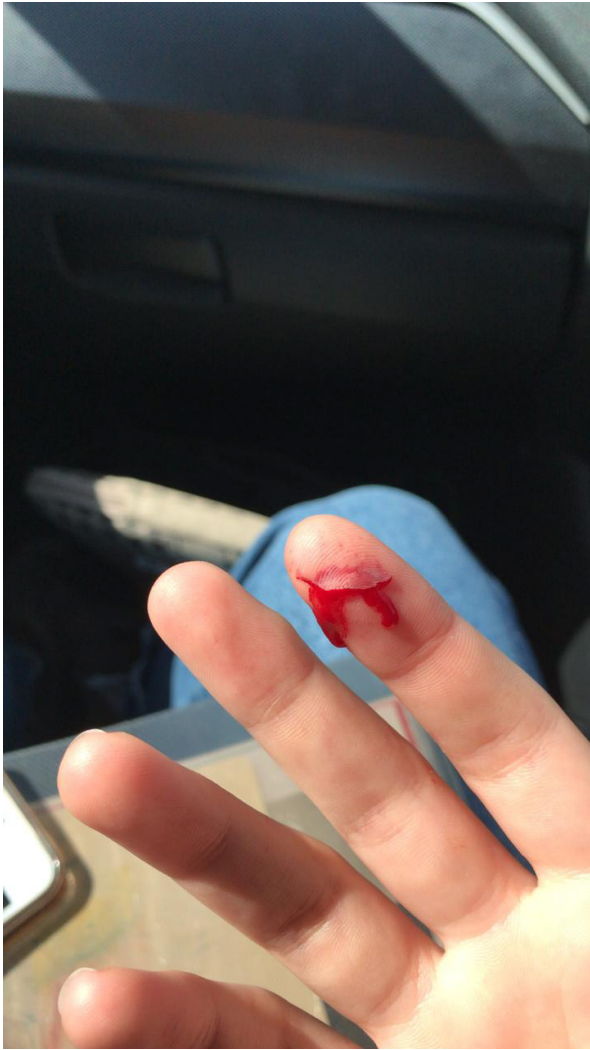














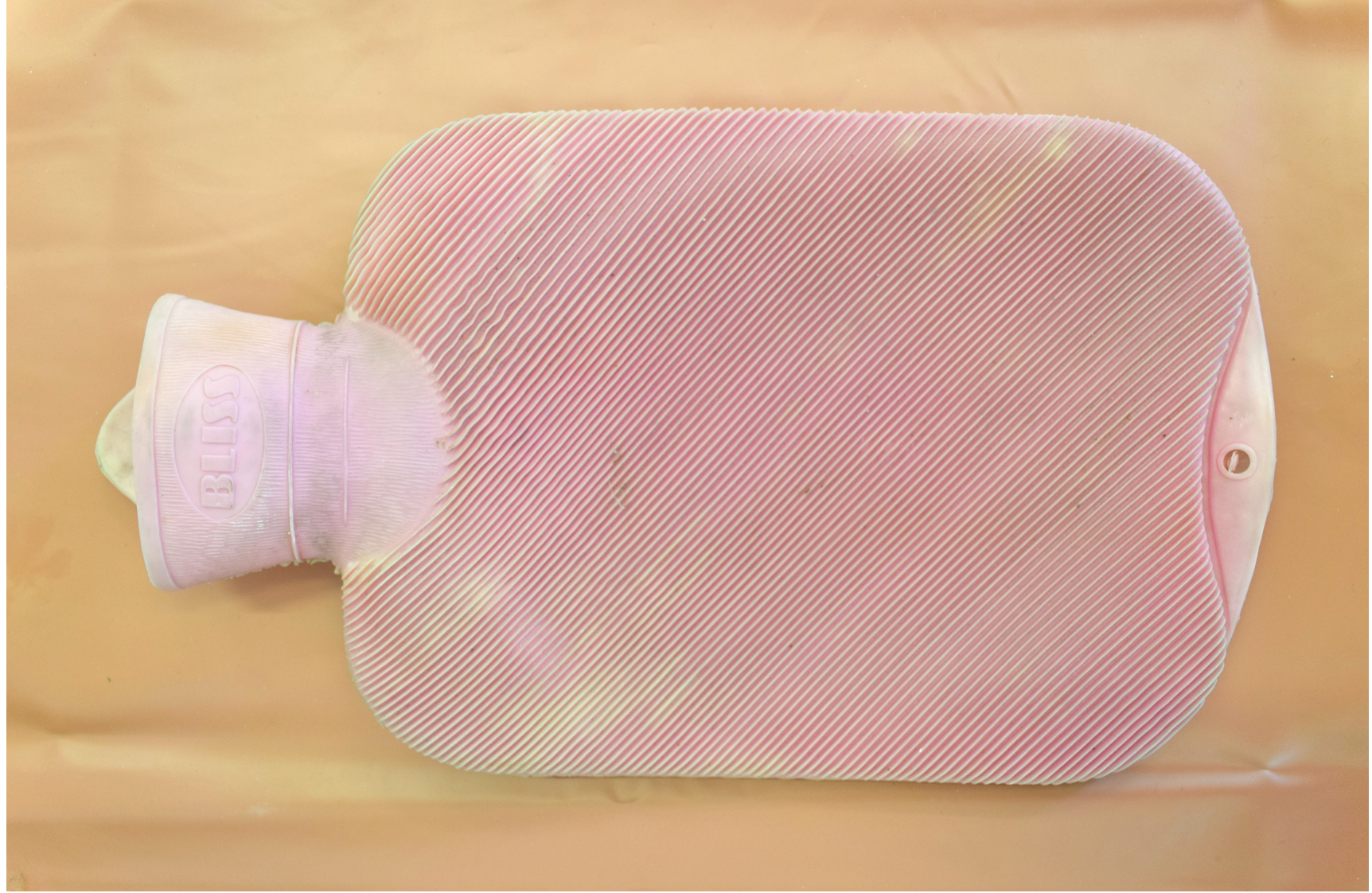




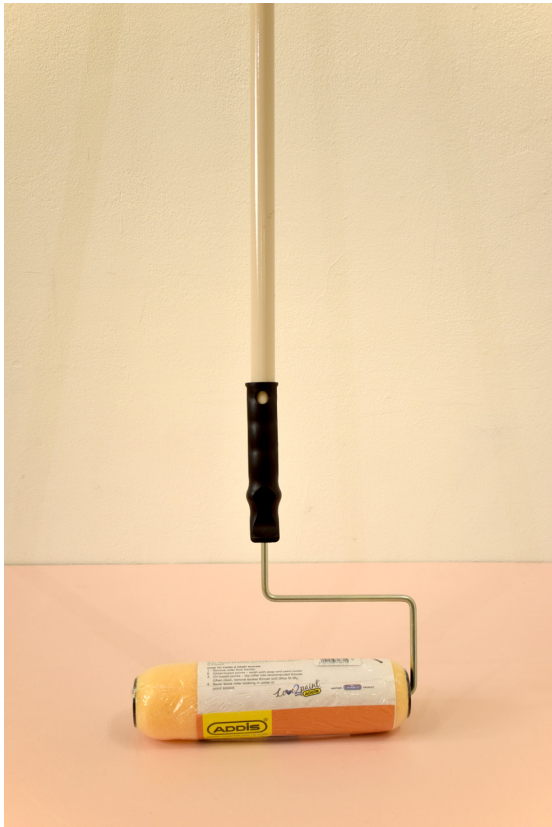








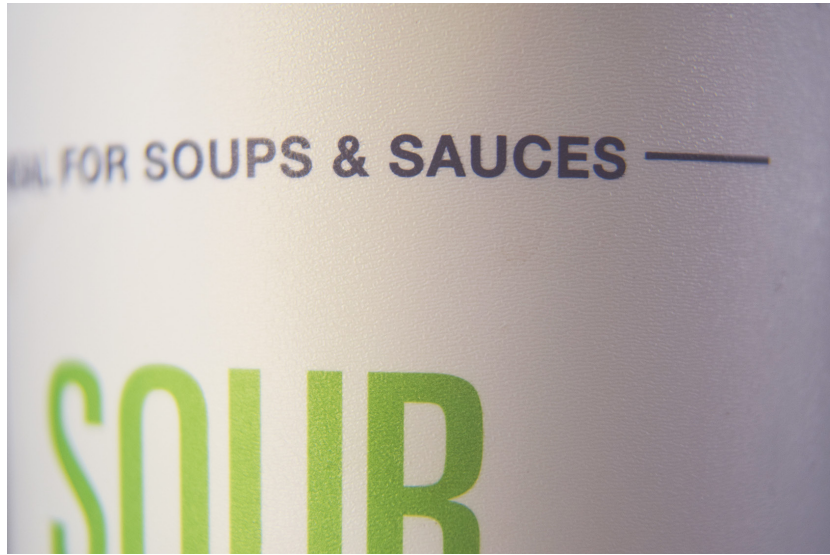


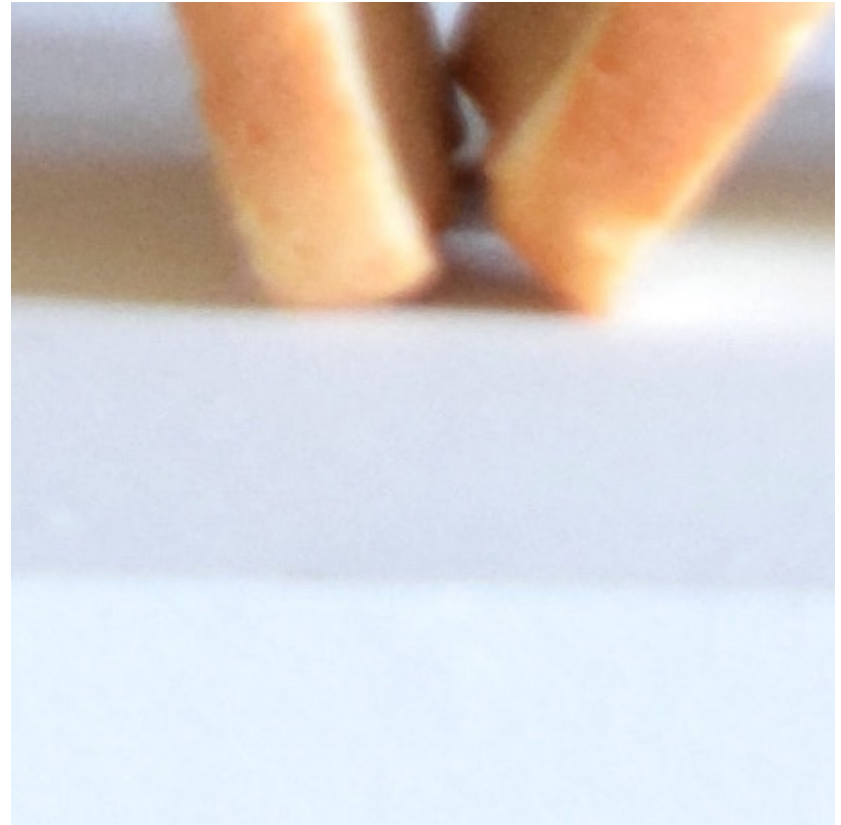


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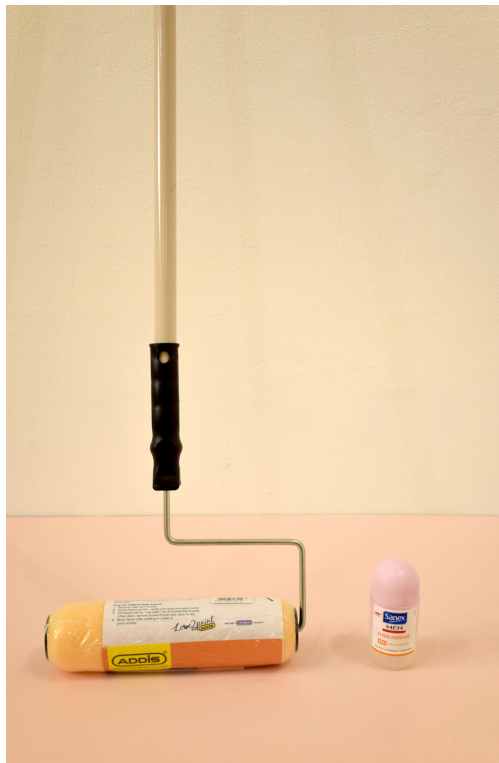




MILK TARTS

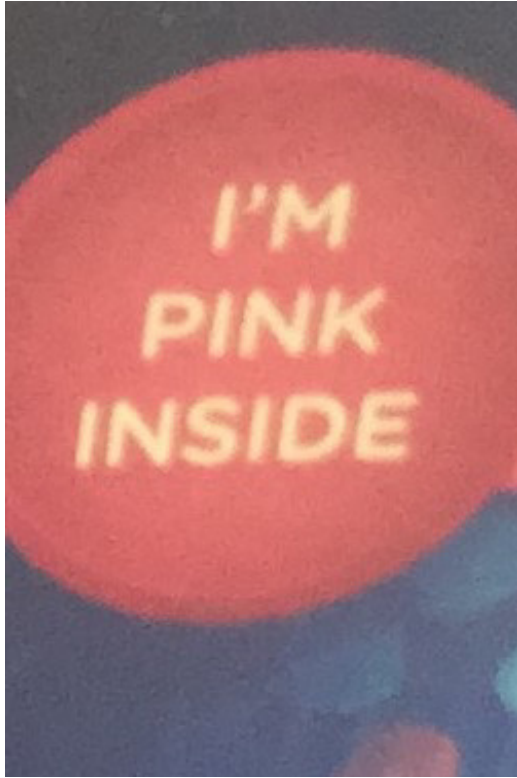










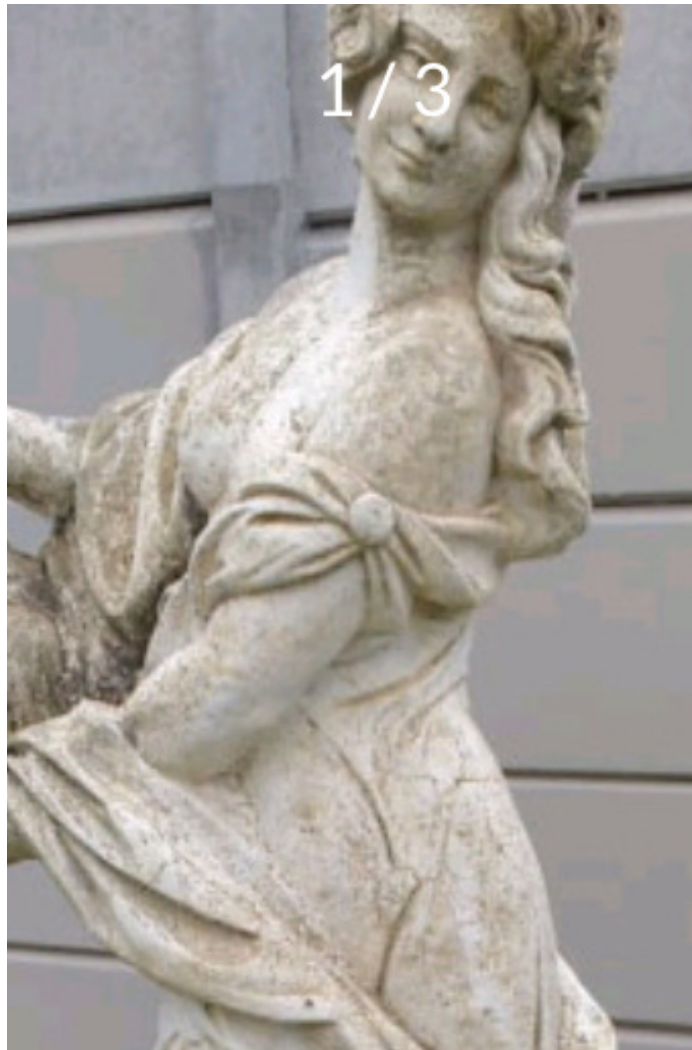


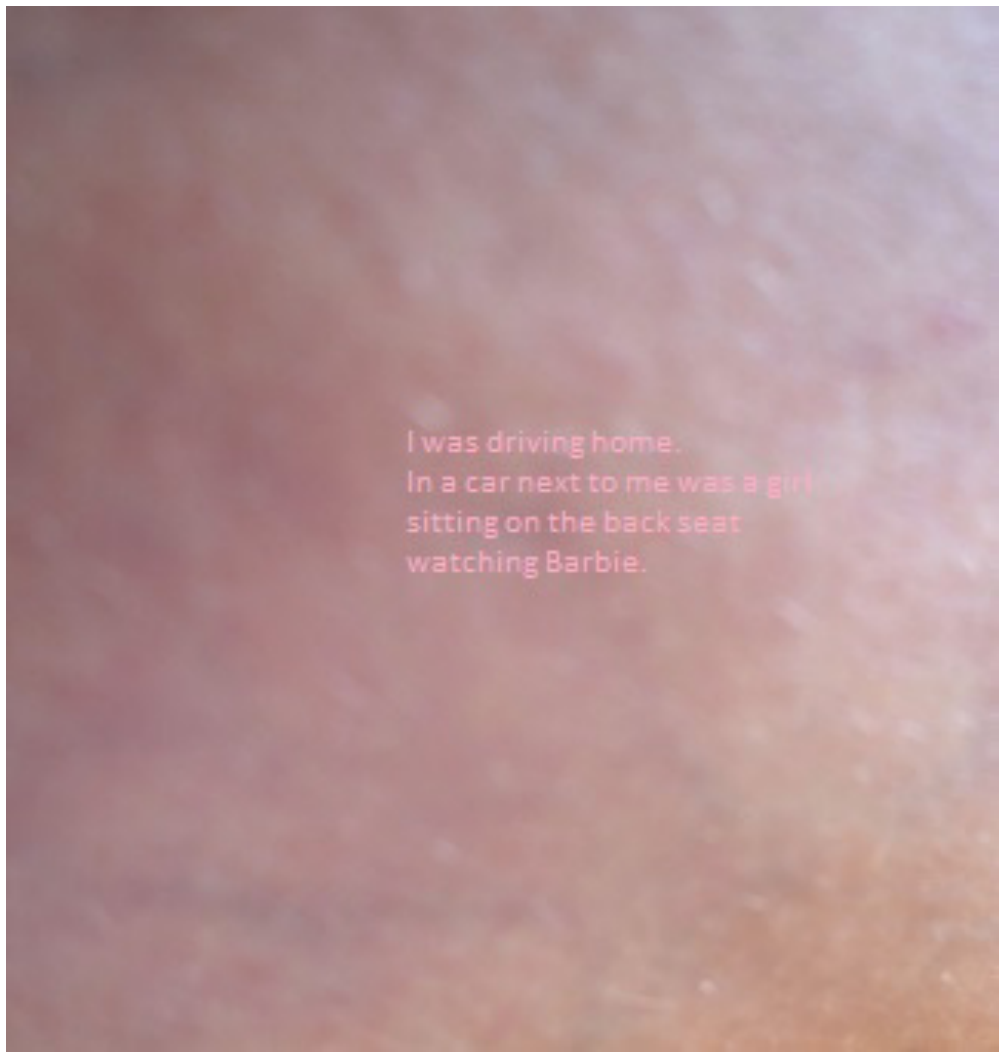
NEW/NOUVEAU

WOMEN

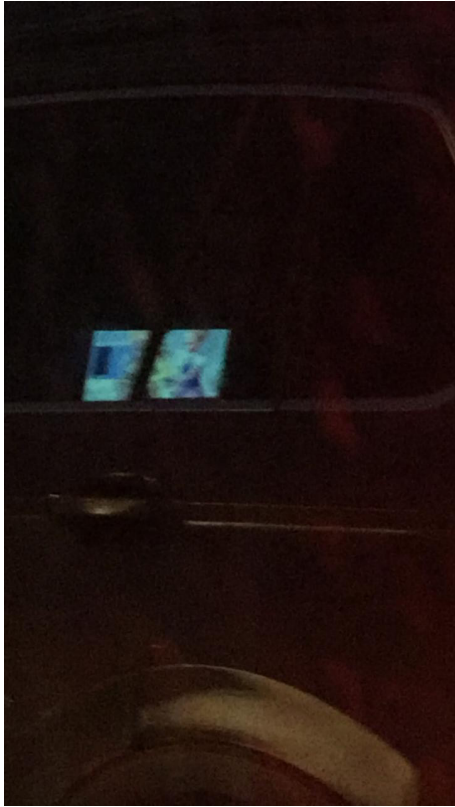
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I was driving home.
In a car next to me was a girl
sitting on the back seat
watching Barbie.







GLAD[®]
Zip Seal[®]

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Contents:

GLA
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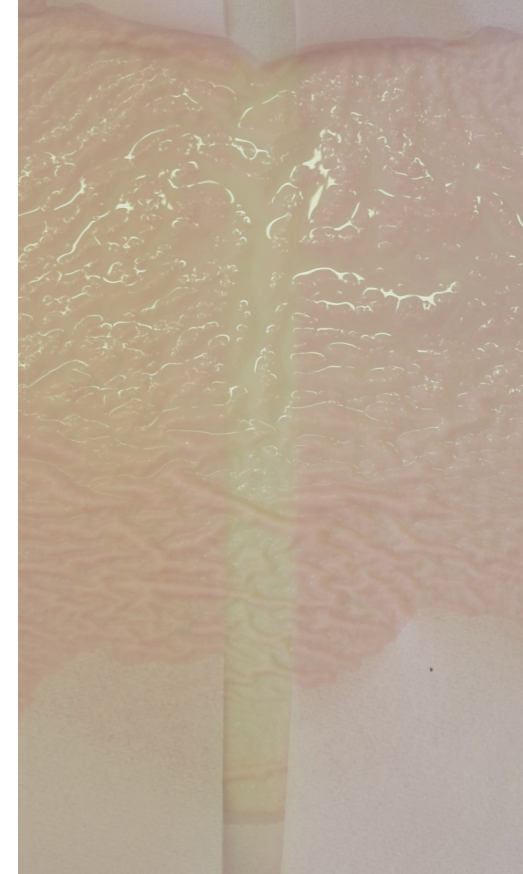
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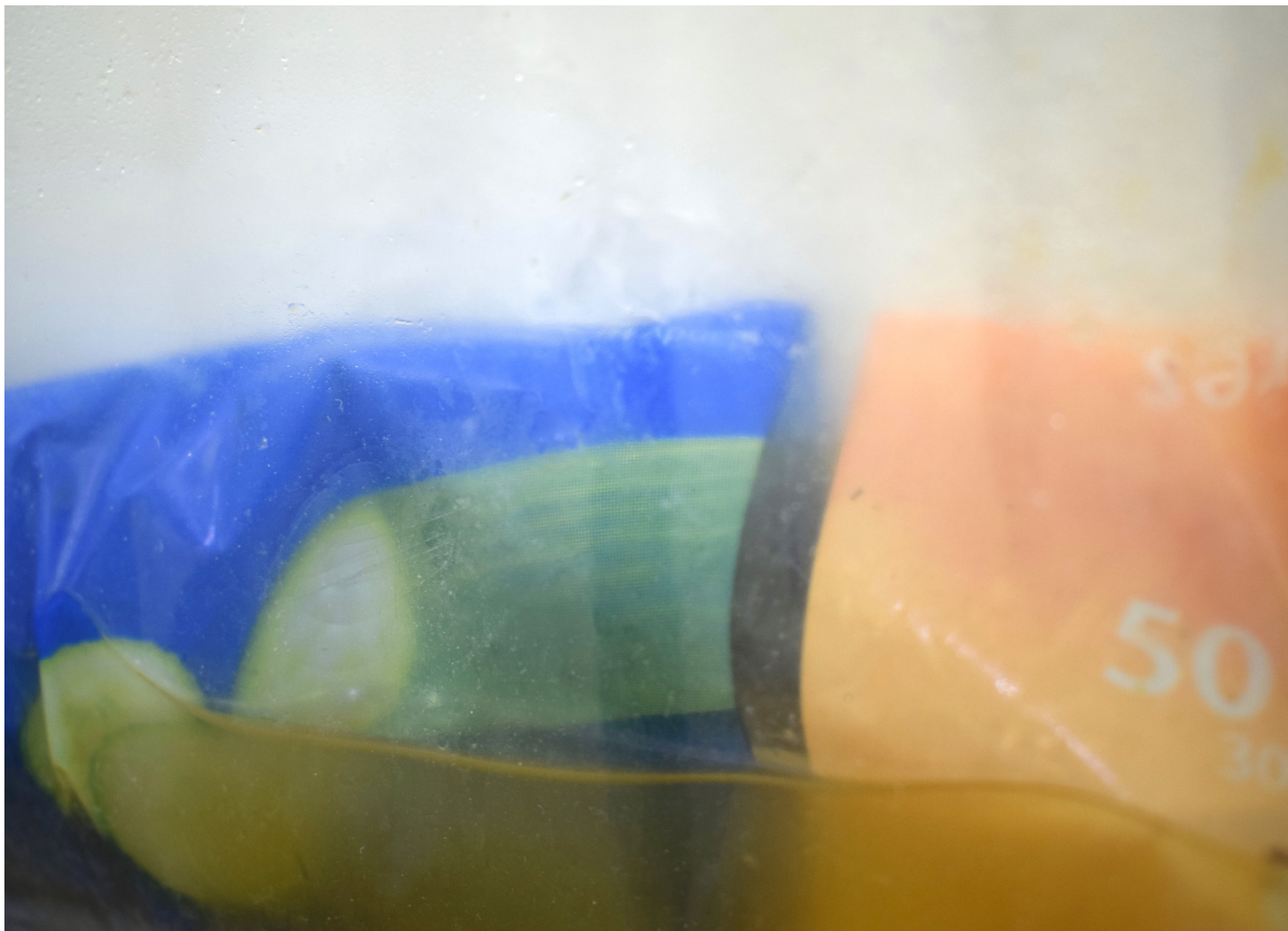
cucumber & green tea

alcohol free
anti-perspirant

























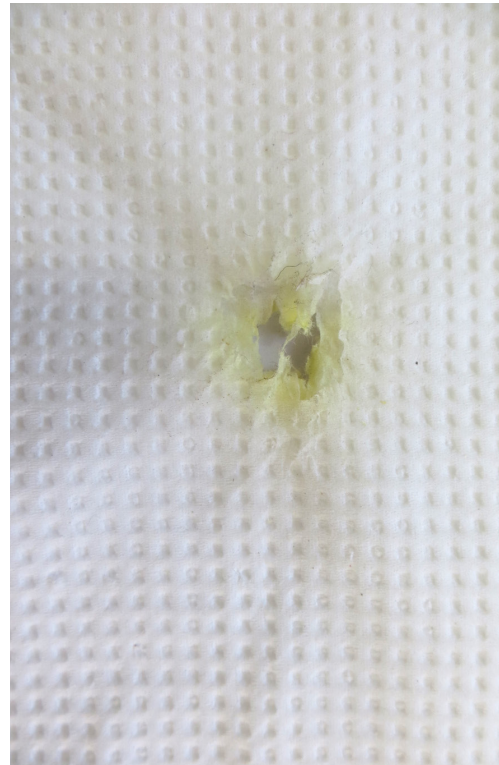
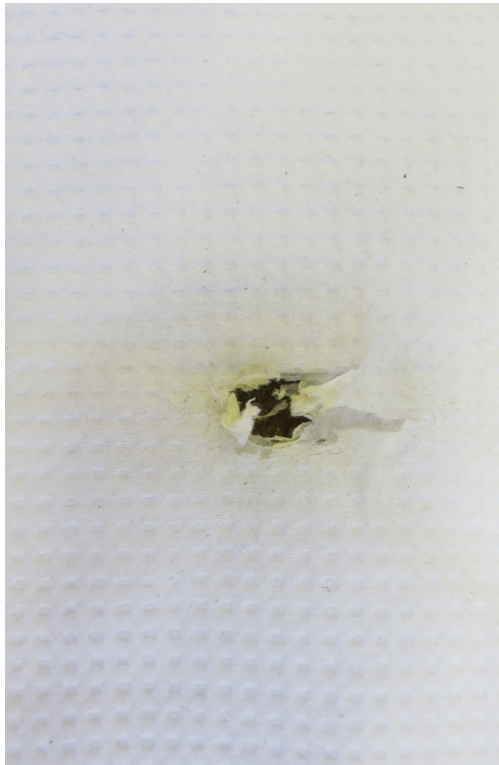






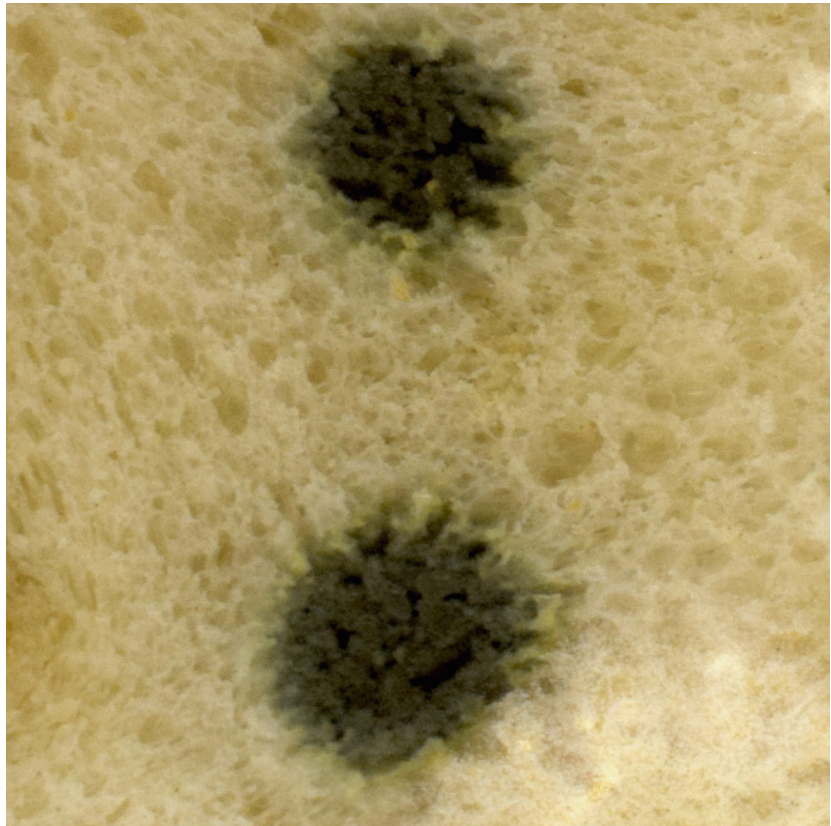
































WHAT ARE LITTLE BOYS

What are little boys made
Snips and snails and puppy
And that's what little boys



