

Embodied Colour: Material Moves

by
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abstract: EXPRESSION

My sense of what it means to be a human in the universe at this time, an artist working with materials is most closely aligned with theories from Post-humanism and New Materialism. Borrowing freely and mostly from scholars Karen Barad, Elizabeth Grosz, and Rosi Braidotti, because they were influenced by the work of Deleuze and Guattari, and know so much more about what I did not know I knew as an artist. This paper is an expression of how events, that included many people, materials and machines coalesced to become new art objects with embedded and embodied meanings. Without abandoning the enduring themes of sexuality, the body and colour in my work, I studied the events of making new work in a new material with a new methodology in a new context with new experiences and new knowledge. Difference was made and mattered.

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introduction: UNFOLDING

I did not intend to get personal, to expose myself, open myself wide like a gaping hole to peer into. Yet, the artist is present, the work comes from that (w)hole, it springs, slips, or trickles out, sometimes it has to be tricked, teased or cajoled but it comes out, born and part of the wider world. The fine art of resisting the nakedness of scrutiny was a skill as important to me as knowing how to mix a complex colour. So out of the (w)hole will flow my story which is never so separate from my practice, that is not divorced from process, which is never so independent from theory.

The peculiarity of my childhood was that I was exposed to the naked body in all its diversity from a very young age because my parents were nudists. Daring, doing, fleeting flesh against verdant walls of trees and turquoise pools filled my days there; a stark contrast to my grey urban world in 1960's Toronto. Particularly enamoured with the female body I drew it from memory over and over in my sketchbooks trying to make a drawing that satisfied me with some sort of fidelity and beauty. Not surprisingly a fascination with the body flowed into my practice as a serious artist, and alongside developed a genuine interest in all living matter, especially flowers, fish and animals, and in human bodies as naturally sexual and sensuous material. I was trying to figure out how life happens.

Always in awe of colour, it inscribed, codified and categorized my world. Wet bright red blood from a cut, turned an ugly oxide-red when it dried. This is akin to colour shift with acrylic paints, something as an artist I hate and the reason I started painting in oil in art school. I noticed that

cast shadows where not merely dark grey, but had a myriad of colours reflected in them. I have an aversion to earthy colours. Seeing the original *Dr. Doolittle* (1967) movie, my first, opened up an alternative reality in saturated technicolour, as I had not yet witnessed the black and white world of television turn to colour in our home. The bright bold colours in Dr. Seuss books, turquoise blue with red, orange and green found their way into my own work. Covering my hands in front of my face and looking through my closed fingers toward the sun to see the most beautiful glowing orange-red became an addiction. Memory happened by colour first and then other visuals, and then other senses, tactility being last. Regular routes of walking to school, or along Lake Ontario with its surface of blue-green mutability, or to swimming lessons, or Brownies; each had a different coloured line associated with them. The walk to school was a yellow line.

The lines of experiences accumulated, layered, entangled and rearranged themselves inside the black (w)hole from which sensations of the sensual body and colour emerged and inscribed my life and art. It was a decisive wanting to shake up my too comfortable art practice as a painter that led me to the *Interdisciplinary Master's in Art, Media and Design*. I have been quaking since. Completely new discoveries on multiple levels, critical theories, deeper understandings, new relationships, and material studio explorations, have paradoxically, also revealed the consistency and endurance in my research and work of trying to figure out how life happens through the fleshy sensuousness of the human body, pleasure of sexuality and excitement of colour. Vanguard artist Louise Bourgeois, whose work and philosophy I very much admire, once said that artists repeatedly investigate the same theme throughout their art practice, "There is a development. The repeating of one image and another image... You have to repeat and repeat; otherwise people

don't understand what you are talking about" (Kedmey 2017, par. 12). Most fortunately during the time and space of this program, a gift; a reconsideration of the relationship between practice and theory, brought the two themes of sexuality and colour so close that they became entangled in my work in ways that I could not have foreseen.

I am addicted to colour but not sex, because I need to have a profound and sustained emotional connection to a person for any sexual encounter to even happen. Each sexual experience, however, has a unique colour sensation associated with it that permeates my *bodymindmatter*, a term that I have chosen to denote that there is no split of the human mind and body, that the human body is one affective material organism. I dream in technicolour, with acid overtones. Bliss and excitement fill my *bodymindmatter* each time I squish the buttery bodies of favourite colours like *Coral Orange*, *Rose Dore Madder Lake Extra*, *King's Blue Deep*, *Old Holland Green Light*, and *Flesh Ochre* onto a palette of endless possibilities. The bokeh effect of brightly coloured lights in photographs, the saturated glow of neon light, the new LED billboards that fill a deep cerulean night sky with megawatt brilliance, the colour range and depth of sparkling crystals, quartz and gemstones, and all the millions of subtle tints and shades contained within, always arrest my attention. The iridescent pink plastic cladding on the *Urban Mode* building, affected by the quality of atmospheric light and affecting its surroundings, and the close by Frank Gehry staircase jutting out of the metallic azure blue back wall of the *Art Gallery of Ontario* are colour fixes in Toronto, a city awash in sophisticated greyness. Colour – ubiquitous, easy to forget, easy to remember, immaterial yet forcefully present, scientific and psychophysical, mysterious and obvious, complex and simple, colour – appeals to all my senses. Colour for me is a world unto itself

– colour sensations wash over me, envelope me, alter my mood and my being. Colour affects my *bodymindmatter*. I am a chromophiliac.

As a white beyond middle aged female demi-sexual material body – replete with the effects of gravitational pull, that works with materials and embeds or affects them to make meaning, I am interested in exploring the intra-actions (Barad 2003, 810-814), the events (O’Sullivan 2001, 128) between the (w)hole of my *bodymindmatter* and the matter of plastic plexiglas sheets and paint: life work. Artists are uniquely equipped to research, understand and propose new possible becomings, for considering relationships between all matter, organic, inorganic, human and non-human bodies (Deleuze 1987, 187). Unlike the linear and logical modalities of science and philosophy, artists are in the habit of trying to evoke what does not make sense, in an effort to affect both the material and the viewer’s *bodymindmatter*. My artworks invite viewer/participants to reconsider what they know and think and feel about colour, about materiality of different bodies, about the sexuality spectrum (Savin-Williams 2016), about their own sexuality and relationships, to open up to the possibility of new ways of relating to and understanding each other, including the materialization of the art object matter. This may lead to new revelations and understandings between all living bodies, human and non-human, to new ways of being in the world.

literature review: VALUING MATERIAL

Artists invested in colour have always drawn my attention. Nineteenth century artists such as Van Gogh, Matisse, Hockney, Minimalists Dan Flavin and Frank Stella, and James Turrell,

the more contemporary work of Ivan Navarro, Regine Schumann and Canadian artists Robert Youds, Thrush Holmes and Julia Dault have all influenced my work on some level, and I have been fortunate to have seen in person works by each of them. The phenomenal colour and light works of Turrell, however, have had a lasting hold and fascination, for their arresting beauty, which is not really an apt word, because there are no existing words to describe how I process his works. Ever since the first time I stepped through an unassuming wooden door in a pedestrian hallway of a former public school into *Meeting* (Turrell 1980), at Moma PS1, and experienced something indescribable, but akin to a transformative interchange of body-mind-matter-space-time-light, I have been hooked. A meeting with *Meeting* is always one of the very first stops on my dozen or so trips to New York over the years. The Turrell high-light-chroma, however, was my experience of the atrium piece *Aten Reign* (2013), at the Guggenheim in New York. So often, here in Toronto, I find myself walking to the Bay/Adelaide Centre to get a Turrell hit from *Straight Flush* (2009). Why is it that I never tire of looking at or experiencing his works? Is it because Turrell's light works create a reality more real than the real out of "...perceptual volumes that are wholly immaterial ..." (Adcock 1990, 36) and "... involve viewers in an awareness that perception is basic to the art experience"(41)? It's complicated because light and colour occupy many territories and as yet there is no consensus of the ontology of colour by any discipline. Is colour purely psychophysical or neurobiological or as philosophers have maintained, an unanalyzable quality of either the mind or the physical world? Patrick Beveridge in his discussion of *Colour Perception and the Art of James Turrell* (2000), provides one plausible position about the ontology of colour, it is "... an internal need that we share with all other creatures for a sense of orientation in both space and time"(Beveridge 2000, 312). I like the link between non-human bodies, human bodies

and colour that Beveridge makes here. The words space and time also resonate as they remind me of Karen Barad's concept of *spacetime mattering*. Barad (2012, 77) gave us the concept of the agency of non-human bodies to affect human bodies in ways not predictable. Agency is not what someone or something has; agency according to Barad is enacted, through the intra-action between phenomenal bodies, and "It is through specific agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of 'individuals' within the phenomenon become determinate and particular material articulations of the world become meaningful"(Barad 2012,77). With her methodology of diffraction (a term she borrows from physics describing the redistribution of energy patterns of waves) Barad re-read traditional structuralist theories, through contemporary queer and feminist critical theory, and concluded that there is "No fixed ground or place or even time, space, or matter ..." because "... diffractively (re)reading insights from different theories through one another has the potential to materialize remarkably insightful and productive patterns that dynamically shift, not over time, but in the making of *spacetime mattering*" (80). Barad's concept has made me re-think completely how and why I use materials, and how they matter, shaking to the core my art practice, identity and beliefs. Barad has turned me inside out – instead of just controlling materials to make art objects, perhaps an ignorant assumption, I am now considering that the materialization of matter as art is a re-configuring of "spacetime matter" that is making something happen. What this means to me and my work is that my body not separate from my mind is also not separate from the material matter, in this case sheet plastics. The intra-actions within and the interactions between all matter is an event, and thus making art is not so much an individual pursuit as it is a research assemblage (Fox and Alldred 2017). I have discovered through my reading research that post-humanism and new materialism are very closely aligned and that both

of those theoretical frameworks are greatly influenced by the work of Deleuze and Guattari, particularly Deleuze. It is important then to attempt to understand the origins of key terms that get tossed around and used by so many post-human, new materialist scholars. I think something gets lost in the translations of their works. Deleuze was influenced as he studied the philosophy of Spinoza and his idea of the common notion, which is a representation of “an independent unity” when a relationship is formed between two or more bodies, which “... has a very precise correspondence to the notions of event, becoming and sense...” (Phillips 2006, 109), in that the bodies although linked by the connecting event are still independent in their becoming something else. These concepts are linked to the French word *agencement*, which implies a specific “arrangement” of “connections”, and “For Deleuze and Guattari, a philosophical concept never operates in isolation but comes to its sense in connection with other senses in specific yet creative and often unpredictable ways” (2006,108). The word *agencement* was translated in English to *assemblage* in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). The meaning of the word *assemblage* is not only spelled the same in both English and French, but also has a similar meaning generally – a collection or assembly of things. Therefore, it is easy to misinterpret the meaning, however, Deleuze and Guattari would never use the French word *assemblage* philosophically to mean the much more complex and shifting concept of *agencement*, as Phillips explains, “ *Agencement* designates the priority of neither the state of affairs nor the statement but their connection, which implies the production of a sense that exceeds them and of which, transformed, they now form parts” (Phillips 2006, 108). Even though Barad was specifically influenced by the works of Niels Bohr, Judith Butler, Michel Foucault, and Donna Haraway (Juelskjaer and Schwennesen 2012, 10), there is in the statement above a distant cousin

relationship to her concept of agential realism:

On an agential realist account, it is once again possible to acknowledge nature, the body, and materiality in the fullness of their becoming without resorting to the optics of transparency or opacity, the geometries of absolute exteriority or interiority, and the theoretization of the human as either pure cause or pure effect while at the same time remaining resolutely accountable for the role “we” play in the intertwined practices of knowing and becoming. (Barad 2003, 812)

With my art practice turned around and reconsidered as materialist production, I turned to colour for comfort.

So naturally the discovery of a contemporary practicing artist, who has worked with coloured plastic and light and who has also written theoretically about colour, was a major key in hot coral magenta for my study! David Batchelor, has written several books about colour, however, *Chromophobia* is the most interesting and useful for my work. His main argument is that there has been an historical and persistent fear of colour, “... colour has been the object of extreme prejudice in Western culture, and ...this prejudice has remained unchecked and unnoticed” (Batchelor 2000, 22). The implications of such a fear lie in how colour is perceived. Seen as irrational, emotional, superficial, superfluous, and even dangerous, colour has been associated with the feminine, the female, other, the feared other that does not fit the normativity of a Western culture that is masculine, rational, intelligent, scientific, theoretical – hu(man). Batchelor suggests that “ ‘Normality’ is clothed in black and white; colour is added and, for better or worse, it all begins to fall apart”(Batchelor 2000, 64), and to be characterized as a colourful person “...is to be distinctive and equally, to be dismissed”(2000, 67), as the undertones of the, “...’foreign’

body – usually the feminine, the oriental, the primitive, the infantile, the vulgar, the queer, or the pathological” (2000, 22), are all related to colour. Batchelor included Charles Blanc, a mid-nineteenth century colour theorist, as an extreme example of someone who “...identified colour with the ‘feminine’ in art; he asserted the need to subordinate colour to the ‘masculine’ discipline of design and drawing; ...” (2000, 23), which aligned with an argument that stretches back to Classical antiquity, *disegno versus colore*, which privileges line and casts colour as frivolous. Megan Craig (2010) asserts that in his analysis of Francis Bacon’s use of colour (1981), Deleuze overturns that argument and holds that colour is the central dynamic quality of painting, not line. This debate is similar to the Italian Renaissance argument *paragone*, that pits sculpture against painting, which arose with the discovery of classical sculptures, that were assumed to be intentionally unpainted marble. Kim Hart quotes Renaissance artist and collector Vincenzo Borghini, “The power and virtue of the sculptor lie in the effects of the chisel...If some clumsy oaf in this field uses colors, it denies the very nature of that art” (Hart 2018). Colour, even in painting during the Renaissance was restrained, the flesh of painted figures was not far from the marble turned white flesh. Cosmetics associated with women, and “if colour is a cosmetic, it is also – again – coded as feminine” and “cosmetics make flesh more appealing, flesh that may be tired or old, or flesh that may be diseased, disfigured, decayed or even dead” (Batchelor 2000, 52). It is not difficult to associate the colours of cosmetics with the idea of either enhancing female flesh or hiding the abject, and flesh in all its states is sexual. Roland Barthes makes an interesting observation that links sexuality and colour, “Current opinion always holds sexuality to be aggressive. Hence the notion of a happy, gentle, sensual, jubilant sexuality is never to be found in any text. Where are we to read it then? In painting, or better still: in color. If I were a painter, I should paint only

colors ...' (Barthes 1975,143). Barthes wrote that in 1975, however, the belief that sexuality is aggressive is still around today, especially in light of the spate of recent sexual aggression charges against powerful men, and the *MeToo* movement. One layer of my work considered this problem of male sexual transgression. How can sexual relationships between all human bodies become spaces of trust and respect? Following Barthes then, where are we to find a happier or more joyful sexuality that is based on mutual understanding, acceptance of difference, and kindness? I am not sure how serious Barthes was, however, my work is a serious attempt to embed materials with a sense of delightful colour and joyful sexuality celebrating difference and possibility, she, he, ze, zer, they all come in colours (a nod to The Rolling Stones song, *She's a Rainbow* 1967). In his comprehensive paper, *Weaving the Rainbow: Visions of Colour in World History* (2007), Robert Finlay, discusses at length the scientific and social of colour throughout history, and sums up perfectly the weighty prejudice of chromophobia, that he asserts was not *only* found in Western societies.

In most societies, the elite displayed pronounced chromophobia. In their eyes, bright color was the province of barbarians, children, the rabble, and the ignorant; it exemplified the superficial, subjective, irrational, self-indulgent, sensual, disorderly, and deceptive. As an integral part of this sweeping defamation, color was despised inasmuch as it was seen to be cherished by women, who were (all men agreed) vain, flighty, foolish, shallow, seductive, and driven by emotion. Shape and line in painting epitomized Apollonian self-discipline and the male; color personified Dionysian abandon and the female. (2007, 401)

Much has been written about the relationship between philosophers and art, and this path followed, leads to the intersectionality of colour, sensation, the body, and conceptual thought. Charles A. Riley, in *Colour Codes*, contends that philosophers of all stripes "...will line up to have their try at..." figuring out colour because it belongs to all disciplines (Riley 1995, 20). Jaqueline Lichtenstein (1989) asserts that ever since Plato saw the power of the picture on the wall, painting,

and colour along with it has been reduced to mere representationalism which ironically, made “...possible the constitution of philosophical discourse...”(Batchelor 2008,188), in the first place, and that, “Such representation is the illusion of an image that becomes a figure only through words” (2008,189). Painting, and colourists “...threatened the mastery of discourse as much as the favour of drawing...” (2008,190). The colourists “...defended the purely material qualities of representation. ...they praised colour ...” with no “apology for cosmetics, pleasure and seduction” (2008,190). For the painter then, there is always a connection between colour and the body, the flesh of the body, and this I know. Craig (2010) notes that philosophers have ignored the ephemeral body in favour of the lasting permanency of ideas, and the intellect of the mind, casting sensations of the flesh as primitive and irrational, however, she sets Deleuze apart, as a philosopher whose work sees a *body* as a bundle of interrelated and entangled energies, and can be persons, places, things, flora or fauna. Elisabeth Grosz extended this Deleuzian concept to speak about how art embodies “vitalities” from a post-human point of view, “The visual arts render visible forces that are themselves invisible...they extract something imperceptible from the cosmos and dress it in the sensible materials that the cosmos provides in order to create sensation, not a sensation of something, but pure intensity, a direct impact on the body’s nerves and organs” (Grosz 2006, 26). Fluorescent plastic bodies that can affect and be affected by other bodies, this is the new insight and attitude of my practice. O’Sullivan explains Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the relationship between affect and art, “Affects are moments of intensity, a reaction in/on the body at the level of matter” and “...a bloc of sensations, waiting to be reactivated by a spectator or participant” (O’Sullivan 2001,126).

art work: (ME)MORY MATERIAL MAKE

My work explores the link between sex and colour as a way to contest the structuralist Cartesian hangover of dualism. It does so on multiple levels. The material itself, transparent fluorescent acrylic (Plexiglas) is part of the working relationship; theory diffractively (Barad 2003, 823) enacted through practice and art practice. What are the possibilities when my *bodymindmatter*, and the non-human matter acrylic, its molecular properties and surface qualities, particularly the sexiness of the fluorescent colour and the sensuousness of glowing light, are considered to be performative with the capacity to affect and be affected? For humans, sexuality, the sexual act, the orgasm has always been considered from the male point of view. The male body and the penis are the prevalent measures of what constitutes a rational conscious human being. Both the feminine body and non-human matter have been marginalized and suppressed. Sex is masculine. Colour is feminine. I have discovered through critical post-humanists that the link between sex and colour is an artistic sexuality, a performativity that has produced and will continue to become an infinite variety of possible configurations of both human bodies and non-human bodies. My work then, colourful sensual materialized bodies of matter, focuses on dislocating, blurring and renegotiating the boundaries that divide on the blade of superiority the enduring binary perceptions of female/male and nature/culture, which includes untold numbers of non-human bodies and matter, to colour a different picture of how life happens. The work is important for two main reasons

- 1) With consideration of Deleuze's concept of sensations (Deleuze 1981, 39), the aim of the work and installation is to create a visual overload of colour, to provoke instinctual senses of joyful delight and sensuality in viewer/participants. The compositions whether ordered or loosely

chaotic each still contain a harmony. Harmony is important conceptually and visually as a metaphor for what remains worthwhile from humanism and what is possible from a post-human point of view. Borders are challenged, however, not with the intent of erasing difference, but rather embracing the positive aspects of difference, and celebrating that with colour, light, and transparency. 2) My practice reconsiders and recontextualizes the traditional Florentine *pietre dure* technique of cutting hard coloured stone shapes and inlaying them into a dark or black stone background to create beautiful abstract patterns, often with floral themes. Using fluorescent acrylic to create contemporary works that conceptually borrow from the traditional technique, embeds a layer of humour and irony into my works, as they embody both an homage to the artistic genius and a challenge to the phallocentrism of the Renaissance period.

I have never made art to look smart or clever or cool, neither I nor my art have been those things, nor will they be. Making art is always about expressing something inexpressible. It is the exteriority of an interior pain, joy, excitement, disillusion, sentiment, euphoria, confusion, or revelation that has coloured some phenomena, such as sex, birth, death, relationships, identity, place, space and colour. I make art, and I know things. This begs the question, why am I doing a prescriptive MFA, in an academic institution, where writing about my art, art practice and the theories of others in an intellectual, or at least intelligent way is obligatory? Let it be known, I hate writing in this context – so again, why the agony or capitulation?

A masochistic tendency is not the answer. I came here, honestly, out of disillusionment and fear. An overwhelming fear of my aging body, death, a feeling of is that all there is, and depression

seeped in. Some would say this was nothing more than a late development of a mid-life crises, and perhaps that cliché fits, however, I did not lose weight, go to the gym, get Botox, buy a new wardrobe (a few pairs of shoes maybe), – I went to graduate level art school, a degree that paradoxically I do not need, but needed so very much. I have come to know that artists know in different ways from philosophical and scientific epistemologies, and that an artist's way of knowing not only belongs in the academic setting, but would be a valuable asset to research if that ontology is honoured. It's complicated and I still do not know exactly why I came to OCADU, but it has something to do with wanting to make something new happen, and sharing that with the world. I am troubling myself, risking new dreams, new ways of doing, as Barad, a physicist and feminist scholar, suggests what research and experimentation is about,

This is not about solving paradoxes or synthesizing different points of view from the outside, as it were, but rather about the material intra- implication of putting 'oneself' at risk, troubling 'oneself,' one 's ideas, one 's dreams, all the different ways of touching and being in touch, and sensing the differences and entanglements from within.
(Barad 2012,77)

Research requires a stepping into the liminal spaces to find out how differences are made and matter (Barad 2003, 817). Research requires a sustained and tenacious commitment to a life's work. Research requires a willingness to get down and dirty, vulnerable and honest, to step into the messiness of life. Research requires artists.

As it happens in human lifespans, I suddenly found myself wanting more, wanting to know more about desire, sexuality, my own sexuality, about how sensuality and sensations change over time,

the materiality of my aging body and how that body is affected by and affects other material bodies, human and non-human. I wanted more colour too. The fugitiveness of neon acrylic paints and oil paints stopped me from using them, and then the serendipitous discovery of transparent fluorescent acrylic plastic, a stable material of light emitting glowing colour, changed everything.

Polymethyl methacrylate (PMMA) is the chemical name of this plastic with so much potential. Commonly known by the trademarked names Plexiglas, Lucite and Perspex, it was discovered by Rowland Hill and John Crawford, British chemists at about the same time as Otto Rohm of Rohm and Haas AG in Germany during the early 1930's. Embedded with irony from the beginning, its first use was in WWII fighter aircraft for windows and gun turret bubbles, a new material to keep safer those trying to kill the other. Acrylic plastic, like all plastics is a polymer, which comes from the Greek words poly, meaning many, and meros, meaning a part. The many elemental parts are transformed into acrylic sheets, that have completely different properties than those parts. The whole is not the sum of its parts. Barad, a quantum mechanics physicist argues that matter is not inert, and not only a substance “All bodies, not merely ‘human’ bodies, come to matter through the world's iterative intra-activity – its performativity”, and that humans and nonhumans are not “fixed”, but rather have the capacity to transgress boundaries and affect each other not only on the surface but also at a deep molecular level (Barad 2003, 823). In the case of making acrylic sheets, it seems that humans, machine apparatuses, and certain chemicals intra-act, giving transparent acrylics the capacity to keep a ray of light reflected in its surface, and emit a glowing neon coloured line of light from the edges. Further intra-activity with a human art making material body enacts another layer “...through which matter-in-the-process-of-becoming is sedimented

out and enfolded in further materializations (Barad 2003, 823). Symbolically and sensorially becoming for my purposes.

Fluorescent acrylic is the perfect material for my work because it is already embedded with molecules and properties that transform to make meaning. Fluorescent colour is often associated with attitudes of cheap commercialism, childishness, and the mark of unsophisticated taste. For me fluorescent colours have a magical quality that always excites me. Fluorescent dyes contain molecules that absorb ultra-violet light and turn that invisible light into visible light, by emitting it at a lower wavelength frequency (Glass 2012). Different material bodies become entangled and events unfold. Permission to just make in the studio with no fixed plan or direction, no content, no concepts, was not only the first experimental method, it was an investigative step into possibilities and also the first art making luxury afforded by my middle-agedness. I came to this MFA with absolutely no other agenda than to expand my practice as an artist. Batchelor has said that it takes both time and money simultaneously to be able to make art, and that it takes a lot of work to obtain those two ingredients (Batchelor, 2008). I would add that it also takes a dogged perseverance through the messiness and distractions of life to hang onto an art practice, and use both time and money for the opportunity to visually experiment, in the hopes of making something worthwhile to share. What I was looking for was a way to make sense out of the complexity and ubiquitous chaos of coloured materials. Surrounding myself with deliberately collected things – neon coloured string, fluorescent post-it-notes, cheap rhinestones and crystals, sparkly materials, saturated colour transparent sheets of film, special crystal-clear plastic bags, fluorescent acrylic paints, shimmering fibreglass cloth, Velcro, a roll of thick clear vinyl, wooden

panels, my own hair, contact lenses, and of course rectangular and square pieces of fluorescent acrylic in the five colours available, I wallowed around in the dark (w)hole for a while and tried to make something come out. Experimentation with abandon was productive and fun. Joyful moments of making and discovery, were punctuated with material intra-action failures, some promising results, and hope. However, these materialization events were not realized enough, I had not found the nuanced look of sensorial colour overload I was searching for.

A five-week working stay in Florence, Italy, this past Spring, was the place and space of a breakthrough, the jumbo jet home the setting of a eureka moment. Italian Proto-Renaissance, High Renaissance, Mannerist and Baroque art was not new to me. I had majored in this art history. I had travelled to Florence, Rome, Venice and other Italian cities several times before. By no means a scholarly expert on these periods, I did have some knowledge of the history, philosophy and especially art of the Renaissance, the kind of awareness that lets you take things for granted, in the manner of a seen that, know it attitude that precludes one from re-examining and questioning what one knows. At first, I was in danger of falling into that trap, however, being immersed in an overwhelming display of visual arts virtuosity, day after day for a much longer period of time than ever before had an immense impact on my *bodymindmatter*. I saw and sensed things differently, very differently. New revelations, new connections that happened between me and the material created an excited tension. After becoming reacquainted with Deleuze and Guattari (as an artist-teacher, doing an M.ed. in 2007, their work was key in developing a teaching philosophy) in critical theory class, and then discovering Barad, which led to a deep dive into post-humanism and new materialism and other feminist theorists who have been heavily

influenced by Deleuze and Guattari, a circle of events presented a pattern of theories that I strongly identified with. In Florence the outward blaze of humanism, the underpinning philosophy during the Renaissance and since, and the contemporary post-humanism that I was ascribing to and working with, inevitably clashed. Man, as the centre of the universe versus human as mere material in the universe. The perfect place for such a showdown. There was tension. Rosi Braidotti, a post-human critical theory feminist asserts that Leonardo Da Vinci's Vitruvius Man was the quintessential figure of the Humanist ideal. The perfect individual male body represented cultural standards and a belief "...in the unique, self-regulating and intrinsically moral powers of human reason..."(Braidotti 2013, 2). Individualism was part of human nature. However, this glorified image is male-centric, and self-centred, and anything outside of that, including woman construes as other (2013, 2). "Otherness is defined as its negative and specular counterpart: irrationality, immorality, femininity and non-westernness" (2013, 2), so the human in humanism, is essentially the rational, moral, western, white male. Devoid of colour, the ubiquitous male nude white sculpture literally loomed larger than life everywhere in Florence, culminating in the spectacular seventeen-foot David, by Michelangelo in the very centre of the city. Youthful male perfection infused with power, patience and morality. Hart's article, *Why Do People Still Think Classical Sculptures Were Meant to be White?* (2018), gave me pause for the thought of colour. She outlines how the rediscovery of antiquity during the Renaissance, has had a profound and lasting influence on Western ideas of beauty, colour, rational intelligence and masculinity. Assuming the Greeks and Romans had intentionally left their sculptures unpainted, coupled with the admiration of those ancient cultures for their advancement of the arts, mathematics, philosophy and politics; the unearthed white marble became for the Florentines the ideal

of beauty and rational intelligence. Hart believes that Renaissance artists saw themselves, their work and aesthetic as directly linked to the Golden Age of Classicism, and “...associated colored sculpture with the preceding Middle Ages, a time period they viewed as degenerate. To them, medieval sculptors weren’t intelligent enough to think to not paint their works—unlike the brilliant Greeks” (Hart 2018), and so intelligence became abruptly associated with the colourless seriousness of white. With few exceptions, artists were almost entirely male during both the Classical and Renaissance periods, so the colourless world of white form exemplified the rational, intellectual male artist, with no space for the other or colour. Hart’s article (2018) connected beautifully with Batchelor’s (2000) theory of the Western fear of colour, particularly the art world’s aversion to it. Chromophobia exists in different contexts and on many levels for a variety of reasons, however, the fear of looking stupid for liking or using colour, which is associated in Western societies with the emotional, feminine, irrational, and other is a powerful fear, and I think both the sense of joy and humour in my chromophilic works may assuage that fear. Without thinking or knowing why, my first reaction to the enclosing male whiteness around me in Florence was to begin photographing only the penises of these sculptures, almost always at eye level. Perhaps I was responding to the sensation of maleness, the sensation of lifeless white, and the sensation of the power of the penis, although in an ironic twist – proportionally Renaissance artists preferred a smaller penis to body ratio. With no vulvas in sight, very few bare breasts, and the obviousness of the man part in humanism, I began to question how I had not seen this before. Why did I miss the unapologetic male-centric look of art born from humanism? Most importantly, how could I reconcile that I greatly admired the art, of this powerhouse period of almost entirely male artists, that was created out of a milieu of humanistic beliefs in both the sacred and

secular world, that did not consider a female point of view? The answer, sensations, Deleuze's theory about what art does, that I attempt to practice. Art does not create concepts, it creates sensations, not "feelings" but "affects" (Deleuze 1981, 39). "Sensation is what determines instinct at a particular moment, just as instinct is the passage from one sensation to another, the search for the 'best' sensation (not the most agreeable sensation, but the one that fills the flesh at a particular moment of its descent, contraction, or dilation)" (1981, 39). Out of a milieu that brought philosophy, science and art together in the service of a religious politics, Renaissance artists honed a fine aesthetic sensibility and instinct. Those artists made sense out of their precarious world by creating monumental works that harnessed the structure of geometric order on which they hung with paint, and stone and metal the uncertainty of life, and coloured it with beauty.

I adored the art made by men, in a time of unbridled humanism because the best art is always firstly about sensations, "Sensation is vibration. ... a sensation is produced when the wave encounters the forces acting on the body, an 'affective athleticism,' a scream-breath" (Deleuze 1981, 45). We live in a world of colour; colour is not to be ignored for its ability to create sensations, even though ironically the smooth exquisite forms of white marble made flesh also embody titillating sensations. From sensations comes the capacity to become other, other than our conscious selves, not the transcendent otherness of humanist spirituality, that was understandably appropriate for the Renaissance period, but the otherness of post-human difference that fosters relationships between material bodies (Grosz 2008, 29). What this means is that, if the post-human concept of considering humans, as unique as we are, as just another material iteration among all the countless matter in the universe, thereby decentering us, then matter has a performative capacity too, and

that agency is entangled with the human maker's ability to affect. What I took from Florence was that as an artist, I was part of a continuum of makers humbly trying to evoke from materials – sensations. Today as a contemporary artist living in the 21st century, who is invested in new ways of understanding, I want to make something happen between materials, and between the materials and the viewer/participant.

This is what happened in the jumbo jet. Looking at the white cabin ceiling and seeing an intense pink light change to violet and transform back to pink, reignited the stored sensations of fluorescent acrylics and merged them with the recently stored sensations of stained-glass windows, glowing oil paintings, and shiny saturated coloured stone inlaid into black stone table tops. Borrowing from the concept *pietre dure*, which reached its zenith during the Renaissance, I created a body of work that transformed the historical technique into a contemporary art investigation of the opposing theoretical positions of humanism and post-humanism, my relationship to bright saturated colour and light, and the affectations between my *bodymindmatter*, abstractions of human sexual organs, and plastic acrylic materials with the overarching goal of probing the possibilities of difference, the very essence of life, through the means of colourful human sexuality. The works are an embodied and layered culmination of events (Philips 2006, 109), a plane of composition (Grosz 2008, 5) that makes "...a space, a zone..." (O'Sullivan 2013, 127) for something to happen. That something was a sensorial overload fuelled by colour and maintained by imagery, composition and rhythm, and the perceiving other.

The gallery space is part of the work, and so as an installation, there was careful planning and

consideration of the specific space of Propeller Gallery, located in the Queen West area of Toronto. Propeller is one of the longest operating co-operative artist-run galleries in the city, and I have been a member for eight years. With typical white walls, glossed concrete floor, and a high exposed industrial ceiling the gallery is divided into two spaces by a centre wall that has openings on each side creating a connected flow between the spaces. The façade is eastern facing with two floor-to-ceiling windows that give an abundance of natural light. Quite ironically, I wanted the already gallery space to resemble a total white cube to enable the best condition for fluorescent transparent acrylic to create a high chroma colour and light effect. White plastic styrene was placed over the entire floor, however, this proved to be too time consuming, hazardous, and as it turned out unnecessary. The work on the white walls had the desired effect. Carefully selected early material explorations and experiments were exhibited in the entrance half of the gallery to give the viewer an insight into the back story, before reaching the second space of the installation. Consisting of a very large horizontal rectangular triptych, five circular pieces, two large vertical rectangular works, and one site specific direct to wall work, with fluorescent transparent acrylic as the main material, the installation became a sensorial colour, shape, and space assault on the senses, not a violent assault, but one filled with joy and sensual excitement. The onslaught gave way to playfulness, irony, humour, sensuality and joy as the viewer/participant was invited into a safe space of serious sensation, a space where difference matters (Barad 2003,823). *For the Love of Colour: A Chromophilia Delight*, (fig. 1) a large triptych was the anchor piece of the installation. It consisted of three thirty-six-inch square fluorescent blue plastic background panels, each having a different composition, into which a total of 448 fluorescent acrylic abstract shapes in multiple colours were inlaid. Ironically, however, reimagining the Florentine *pietre*

dure technique presented a contemporary problem that needed solving. The laser cut acrylic shapes did not fit into the CNC cut blue background, despite experimenting with different offset sizes. The two machines perform very differently cutting acrylic plastic. There is far greater kerf with a CNC machine, it rounds out sharp corners, and the cut-out shape edges are quite rough, whereas the laser cutting machine is very accurate, with very little kerf and super smooth edges. A beautiful opportunity to work with the affective qualities of the variable apparatuses and plastic material presented itself. Embracing contemporary post-human theory made space for this event to unfold. Instead of inlaying the shapes as intended and inspired, I bonded the shapes to the outer surface of a clear sheet of acrylic and bonded the blue acrylic with the negative space shapes to the back of the clear sheet. The result was an affective performativity between materials, light and space creating a projection of coloured shapes on the gallery wall that intra-acts with the frontal plane. The two light-space-shape surfaces affected each other and simultaneously created a new space of constant possibility contingent on changing light from the windows and viewer's bodies. Inspired by the beauty and diversity of human sexual organs, original abstracted shapes became the cut-out plastic material bodies that entangled with the cut-into body of background plastic material. The positive post-human cut-out plastic shapes in this piece are bounded by the negative plastic space, but the positive shapes are thicker and sit on top of the clear sheet of acrylic, giving them a material force and colour sensation of glowing edges that reflect out into space and onto the negative space background. Sensational colour excitement happened. Through performativity, material, in this case fluorescent plastic material in space has agency, an agential realism (Barad 2003, 810) and became embodied with meaning. The varying material bodies human and non-human involved in the process of the events of making intra-acted and simultaneously became

differentiated through affect. This kind of material performativity is the agential cut, “a cutting together-apart (that is, entangling-differentiating)...” (Barad 2012, 80), of materials. Seemingly contradictory, what this means is that each time human *bodymindmatter* encounters other materials there is both a separation of the “I” as subject from the object and simultaneously also an intra-action between differing materials, differing bodies (2012, 80). When I make art, both my *bodymindmatter* as a subject, and the “other”, plastic material object maintain an autonomy of difference that simultaneously also affects to create new differences in each, as nuanced or minute as they may be.

Performativity is all about contesting and disrupting the historical Cartesian dualist binary that says we can only know and become through culture, a human conscious culture. My work promotes the always already entanglement of nature and culture, using colour, humour and joy as forms of resistance to the positive-negative structure of dualism. By challenging that polemic dichotomy, and instead embracing difference, the aim of my work is to provide an opportune space where meaning can be negotiated, and what it means to co-actively be with the other, and the nature of that relationship can be questioned and considered. *For the Love of Colour: A Chromophilia Delight* is a literal “cutting together-apart” of materials, and metaphorically “cutting together-apart” (Barad 2012, 80) of human sexual organs to create abstracts. The rigid boundaries dividing female/male, colour/line, feminine/masculine, irrational/rational, emotional/intellectual, and humour/seriousness are disputed in this work, because difference is not to be feared, erased, isolated, assimilated, magnified, romanticized, exoticized, or criminalized, no – difference is life, the positive vitality of all material. The borderlands of difference and similarity

are opened up in this work, and provide a transformative potential space where deeper and more profound mutual understanding between male *bodymindmatter*, female *bodymindmatter*, and intersex *bodymindmatter* could happen on both a macro and micro relational level.

Five fluorescent acrylic works in a circular format, each thirty inches in diameter were also created. Naturally similar to *For the Love of Colour: A Chromophilia Delight* thematically, I decided to open up spaces for new possibilities to happen. I had planned to slump each circle into a concave shallow bowl shape that would be wall mounted. Slumping is the process of slowly melting acrylic at a low constant temperature making it pliable enough to bend and shape. While slumping the first piece, *Surging Merging Matter*, I did not foresee the occurrence of huge folds nor the bubbling of who knows which layer of acrylic, but it happened, the unexpected surprise. The new materialist concept of material agency revealed itself. Instead of reacting negatively and exerting a willful control over the material, it was a profound realization and acceptance that control, autonomy, agency is not a one directional human only right or reality. Interestingly at a moment of perceived failure, a faculty member said to me in the plastics shop, that he could always tell in galleries which artists had full control over the plastic materials they were using, implying that this was the goal of good artists making good art. It was obvious that I did not have control over the plastic or the process. My past self would fully agree with the faculty member, and I still believe in good technique, however, in the process of making this work, I learned to appreciate that even careful consideration of the materials and the machines, such as the laser cutter, computer numerical control (CNC) miller, and industrial plastics oven, does not privilege my vision or expectations over what the materials will do; and also that the action of making these objects involves

many interactions with other humans, and non-humans. To understand and accept the capacity of materials to affect and be affected is a profound shift away from the anthropocentrism of humanism toward a performative rhizomatic relationality. To work with the materials rather than against them proved to be a better attitude toward a relationship with the materials. I have heard a similar opinion from artists who work with natural materials such as wood. As an experienced and skilled painter, I exert much more control over paint. Sure, there were failures, mistakes that had to be painted over, but because I was not attuned to the evocative possibilities of paint and combining paint with other materials, I missed opportunities for other events to happen and unfold. I was using paint in a narrowly defined by tradition way, mastering the medium, which has merit, but I did not come to know the material in ways that would have opened up new intra-actions (Barad 2003, 823). However, I am becoming more attuned to, more aware of the new materialist concept of materiality and post-human concept of performativity. Creating these complex fluorescent plastic pieces involved a letting go of control, in favour of a learning and being exchange between my *bodymindmatter*, the *bodymindmatter* of others, such as technicians, advisors, and peers, various apparatuses, the acrylic plastic materials, the bonding agent and process, outer forces of heat and handling and inner forces of molecular chemical reaction. Within the elaborate events of making, art objects materialized that are far more interesting and appropriate to the themes of sexuality and colour, than I could have singularly, a presumed arrogance, planned. Meaning was made within and without the materials, interior intra-actions and interactions between different bodies. In an attempt to make objects of sensation, practice and theory came together to produce something new – a new possibility. I let the materials continue to become, and each work reached a temporary state of completeness, in anticipation for the viewer/participant.

Surging, Merging Matter (fig. 3) is made from three different thicknesses of acrylic, encompassing fluorescent coloured shapes of hybrid sex organs floating in a sea of orange and liquid looking cellular bubbles, that merged together to evoke a surging sensation of expanding movement, in a joyful entangled dance of living difference. *Surging, Merging Matter* is a layered plastic body embedded with the performative potential to affect environments and other bodies in unpredictable ways that make meaning happen. For me the meaning is made in trying to evoke a sense out of the indeterminacy of bodies of matter, colour, and light, and the indeterminacy of gender, sexual desire, biological configurations, to investigate the mystery and intensity of how life happens; through the practical doing of theoretical beliefs and desires.

Playful and humorous intersections of bodies danced to the edge. The art practice of doing sensations actually animates theory. Post-human theory that destabilizes and questions the one sidedness of human agency, and new materialist theory that proposes non-human matter embodies capacities to affect is embodied in the fluorescent plastic material to make meaning. A material performativity that questioned the logic of the concept of the female/male binary as the only distinct possibility for humans to become sexual beings.

Coming Colour: A Renaissance, (fig. 4) is a parody of the ironic disorder of humanism, which placed the human at the centre of the universe's order, compared to the new order of the de-centred human in theories such as post-humanism and new materialism. An homage to the Renaissance ideal of ordered and balanced geometric compositions, all the sexual shapes in this work point to the centre. I did, however, include a minor disruption – all the blue ovals near

the centre were intentionally left vertical in orientation instead of pointing to the centre in tune with the composition's radial balance. Irony is further played out in the colour and form of the abstracted sexual organ shapes. They are unsettling borderline hybrids of female-male genitalia and reproductive organs in transparent fluorescent acrylic plastic with glowing edges, that would have been an affront to the Renaissance ideal of restrained colour and realistic naturalism, and an impossible challenge to the binary, the boundaries of what is man, and what is woman. In contemporary western societies such as Toronto, the idea of the human sexuality spectrum (Savin-Williams 2016) is beginning to enter mainstream discourses, however, there is still a vast amount of ignorance and taboo around these discussions. During the research the discovery that my human sexuality had a conditional label – demi-sexual, and what that meant, gave me some new and profound insights into how my *bodymindmatter*; dealt with relationships of all kinds. This knowledge is affording me a new way of becoming. *Coming Colour: A Renaissance* was actually an iteration of an earlier work called *Apparently Transparent* (fig. 5), which I had slumped. Similar in design and meaning, I made the second version for two reasons. Firstly, I was not happy with the large amount of negative space in *Apparently Transparent*, particularly glaring as the background was clear plastic, and secondly because I had to heat *Apparently Transparent* three times to achieve the right shape and folds the fluorescent pink acrylic plastic faded to a very light pink. So for *Coming Colour: A Renaissance*, I added more shapes into the negative space areas and decided not to slump it in order to keep the fluorescent pink plastic from fading. I learned that the only colour effected by heat is the fluorescent pink. Not willing to relinquish the saturated colour quality of fluorescent pink plastic, I did not slump the next two circular works.

Material Organ Orgasms (fig. 6) is the most realized in terms of both materialization and meaning making, while still maintaining a visual relationship with the other two circular works. Here the sensation of flesh and bodily fluid was released into the acrylic material. How can transparent hard acrylic be made to have the sensation of fluid fleshiness and what does this mean? I ascribe to Batchelor's belief that it is impossible to talk about colour. Colour is beyond language (Batchelor 2000, 85), however, these coloured words, a humorous contesting of the black and white word world of rational reality on paper, will have to do. Despite the rigid uniformity of transparent fluorescent plastic acrylic sheets, the material can also become a fluid bold juicy and joyous combination of colours. The main sexual shapes, an abstracted vulva and penis organically flow into the negative spaces. The smooth shiny surface of neon pink, for instance, is wet sexiness, and as it magically absorbs invisible light, from the edges penetrates space and time with mutable glowing colours that have the capacity to affect and be affected, in an unfolding colour explosion and enfolding of sensations of joy, reciprocal kindness and humour. Difference is made, is embodied, the material affects and is affected. I had the most fun making this particular piece, because I lost myself in the making, in the physical sensation of working with the materials and the colours, in the sensation of joy that I was feeling because I was so grateful for the renewed relationship with my own *bodymindmatter*, trusting it, trusting the materials finally, and trusting in the knowledge and kindness of others. In the intersection of trustful making and theoretical inscription meaning was made. It is my hope that *Material Organ Orgasms*, the modern urban material that is acrylic plastic, its fluorescent colour glow will cast a long colourful light ray across time space and structuralism to beckon the collapse of borders that divide matter into hierarchies of being and instead embrace the perfection of difference (Grosz 1995, 289).

Pulsing Pinkness (fig. 7), the last of the five circular works was not planned. I had intended to make only three circular acrylic plastic works, and slumping each in a giant thirty inch diameter wok. However, after discovering the fugitiveness of the fluorescent pink plastic with the application of heat, slumping further works was left on the back burner. Initially I had wanted to show the connections and differences between humanist concepts and post-human/new materialist ideas, with three circular pieces moving from the Renaissance ideals with an ironic disruption of *Coming Colour: A Renaissance to Material Organ Orgasms*, embedded with contemporary concepts of bodies, sexualities and design. Therefore, I still wanted to make the middle ground or intermediary, indeterminate work. *Pulsing Pinkness* is that work, an awkward hybrid in both design and meaning.

Realized Materialized, (fig. 8) is a material departure from the aforementioned works. I used acrylic paint, spray paint and clear acrylic plastic together. The hand drawn linear composition of an abstracted hybrid sexual body was transferred into a vector drawing using Adobe Illustrator software and then milled using the CNC machine. On the back of the clear acrylic sheet the background was spraypainted a light mint green, and the hybrid sexual body a lemon yellow. Instead of using fluorescent acrylic plastic to inset into the shapes, fluorescent acrylic paint was squished and pushed into the open shapes and lines cut into the thirty-six inch by forty-four inch clear acrylic plastic sheet from the front. Fluorescent green paint in the background shapes, and fluorescent yellow and orange acrylic paint in the lines and shapes of the hybrid body. The aim was to let different bodies – the hardness of clear acrylic plastic, the soft but still textured surface of acrylic paint mixed with heavy body medium, and the oil based spray paint unfold and enfold.

I let these materials and myself perform. Phillips helped me to understand this Deleuzian concept of event, which in this case the paint, the plastic, and my *bodymindmatter* unfolded and "...can be regarded as a state of becoming and an event which is reducible to neither ..." (Phillips 2006, 109) the various bodies of matter or the material art object. It is my hope that the materials will hold and express somehow the event of becoming other, the transparency and affective unpredictability of that in between liminal space.

Broken Matters (fig. 9), is the companion piece to *Realized Materialized*. Created with the same methods and in the same size *Broken Matters*, is another iteration of the sensuality of mixing different bodies, to arrive at new material understandings and possibilities, by breaking or at least contesting binary boundaries, and material hierarchies.

(W)hole Material (fig. 10) was the last work proposed for the exhibition space of Propeller Gallery. It was conceived as a direct to wall site specific installation that attempts to once again enact the performativity of materials. A fluorescent pink acrylic plastic circle, sixteen inches in diameter is painted with a super flat light absorbing black paint from Stuart Semple, who has made it his life's mission to give artists the world over the approximate blackness of the nano material Vanta Black, because the rights to use Vanta black were bought by artist Anish Kapoor, denying all other artists the use of this most novel material that can make things seemingly disappear. The irony is that from the front the fluorescent pink acrylic circle seemingly disappears because it was painted with the super flat black paint, however the glowing pink edge still visible from the side becomes an intra-action of light, colour, space and time. Instead of re-reading

I think I am diffractively re-doing Barad's theoretical insights through the making of the work *(W)hole Material*, which is "always already intra-actively co-constituted" allowing for new ways of knowing (Barad 2012, 80). Abstracted sexual organ shapes in various fluorescent acrylic plastic colours flow, or perhaps spew from the black circle with glowing pink edges dynamically shifting the perception of space, light and colour, not over time but in the instant of making *spacetime mattering* (Barad 2012, 80). Sexuality and colour, material bodies of light, colour, plastic, paint and *body-mindmatter* enact a performativity that is constantly becoming. All bodies, human, non-human, coming and going are continually affected by and affect space and time.

methodology: AFFECT TO EFFECT

The controversial debate of how to expand the notion of what constitutes research in art and design graduate programs across North America has been an important influence on my practice as an artist-teacher. As an artist-teacher-researcher at The University of Manitoba in 2007, I was researching the tensions between the dual identities of the artist who is teacher, who researches across disciplines to both make art and teach about art making, histories, and cultures. Influenced by the work of Deleuze and Guattari at the time, I wrote a teaching philosophy that included this overlapped way of being an artist-teacher:

A wonderfully creative endeavor, teaching is an art and the teacher an artist. Like the artist - teachers are fluid, dynamic and multifaceted beings...and...possess qualities not easily distinguished or measurable...they create a learning environment that looks like a Jackson Pollock painting – open, connected, layered, complex; where praxis, form and content are inextricable; as opposed to the structured didacticism of a Jacques Louis David work. (Vanderheyden, 2007)

Depending on the context, over the years, I have both resisted and embraced theories that position art at the centre of academic research. However, it became a personal necessity for my own practice to re-examine and fix my position in the context of completing my MFA thesis project at OCADU. The most salient question for me was, is my art, the art object a form of research? Principally I chose to work under the still contentious artistic research paradigm. In their book, *Artistic Research Methodology: Narrative, Power and the Public* (2014), Hannula, Suoranta, and Vaden, delve into the many questions swirling around the need to qualify and legitimate art practices and objects in the context of research methodologies. Their unapologetic stance that by nature the field of artistic research is ambiguous and still unfolding appealed to me. They propose a basic formula for artistic research that borrows from established traditions of social and scientific research, yet remains open-ended enough to consider different methodological approaches (Hannula et al. 2014, 16). Their positioning of the artistic researcher as an insider, whose practice is about acts of doing and making supports the often opaque and idiosyncratic creative process. Chapman and Sawchuk argue that art making is a complex activity that, "...involves the elaboration of projects where creation is required in order for research to emerge" (2015, 49). This proved to be true for my thesis project, as I was making, ongoing critical thinking naturally occurred, and that thinking fed back into further critical making, to become a dynamic helix of practice and theory. Chapman and Sawchuk conceived of four methodological processes, "research-for-creation", "research-from-creation", "creative presentations of research", and "creation-as-research" (2015, 49). This last methodology "creation-as-research" incorporates elements from all four processes to become a "...space for creative material and process-focused research-outcomes" (2015, 49). This aligns with my view of the theory-practice relationship as an intertwined

non-hierarchical way of addressing ontological questions, akin to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome (1987, 21), however, the process "research-for-creation" defined as "the gathering of materials, practices, technologies, collaborators, narratives, and theoretical frames that characterizes initial stages of creative work and occurs iteratively throughout a project" (Chapman and Sawchuk 2015, 49) was most in line with how I practice making. The entirety of my practice both inside and outside of the studio, "... is a form of directed exploration through creative processes that includes experimentation, but also analysis, critique, and a profound engagement with theory and questions of method" (Chapman and Sawchuk 2012, 19). As a practicing artist within the context of the academic art institution this proved to be the most fruitful way to work.

Methods

Colour, bodies, sexuality, sensuality, and identity have been key themes in my work throughout my practice. However, initially I had no clear plan or idea of how these interests could coalesce to become artworks that would become lines of inquiry, that would enfold into new artworks and so on. The first method fell loosely under "creation-as-research" (Chapman and Sawchuk 2015, 49), and focused on experimentation with my new-found material – fluorescent acrylic. The goal was to explore colour, saturation, luminosity, chemistry, and connotation to discover harmonies, incongruities and liminal spaces. Sensuous artist paints, oil pastels, soft malleable vinyl, plastic bags, wood, paper, string, Velcro and hair intermingled with the hard, refractive and light emitting properties of crystals, and fluorescent acrylic and simultaneously investigate the actual processes of making. the results were inconclusive. Without a focused research direction these first works

remained experimental and erratic. I turned to the “research-for-creation” (Chapman and Sawchuk 2015, 49), method to help me find some connections, directions – inspiration.

Florence exposed itself, being there brought into sharper focus, the underpinning of humanism, that through the lens of post-humanism, presented a counter-narrative. These lenses compelled me to re-evaluate my practice in terms of what I know, wanted to know and could come to know as an artist and teacher. What did I believe about the art making process and why did I believe it? What do I know about human sexuality, my own sexuality, the colour of sexuality? What did I believe about sharing knowledge? These were the central questions as I struggled to make something in the Florence studio. My art practice has always been a series of continual acts, events, driven by an ontological and epistemological searching for possibilities, however, new apprehensions of what it actually means to make art today became clearer in Florence. There I used Barad’s diffractive method, her notion that theories are intra-actively always already co-constituted (Barad 2012, 77), and re-read humanism in the context of Renaissance art through theories of post-humanism and new materialism which led to a host of new insights and culminated in a pivotal new work entitled, *Intraconnected Genitalia* (2018), a table top made from only five available fluorescent colours of transparent acrylic. The traditional technique, *pietre dure*, became a contemporary research act. Countless acts followed and intertwined and flowed, and each research act strengthened the working relationship between practice and theory. From the many readings, *Radiolab* podcasts, *YouTube* videos, my notes, musings and sketches, meetings with my advisors, discussions with peers, critiques of experimental works, researching and sourcing of fluorescent transparent acrylics, learning new software programs such as *Adobe*

Illustrator, building relationships with experts in the plastics workshop, the rapid proto-typing lab, learning the idiosyncrasies of the CNC, and laser cutting machines, my existing experience and knowledge of colour and painting, and my own desire to produce something worthwhile to share emerged *Surging, Merging, Matter*, the first of a body of works that became an installation. This work was different and unique, even the faculty and technicians that frequent the plastics shop had not seen any work and process like it. I was attempting to transform a flat thirty-inch circle which had inlaid acrylic pieces of a different thickness into an acrylic background which sat on top of another layer of acrylic into a concave sculpture using the slumping process, which is the heating of acrylic in an oven at a consistent temperature making it soft and pliable enough to reshape, inside a purchased industrial sized wok. It was a complicated and labour-intensive process that enacted "...a tangible questioning of possibilities" (Barad 2003, 821), through the intra-action of materials. It was a trial and error experiment. One of the major challenges was how to affix the inlaid shapes to the background without marking permanently the acrylic sheets. To stick acrylic to acrylic securely for heating and slumping, a bonding agent is used, that works through capillary action and melts the two acrylic surfaces together. Incorrect application leads to a kind of etching that leaves a whitish mark on the surface destroying both transparency and aesthetic. I first tried to bond the inlaid shapes to the background along the edges only, but this was precarious because the shapes did not fit exactly into the cut-out background, there were gaps. The OCADU laser cutting machines cannot cut a thirty-inch circle, so I had them milled instead on the CNC machine, however, the inlaid shapes were all cut with the laser. The two machines created two different edges, and to complicate matter(s), the CNC machine does not cut the shapes as accurately as a laser machine. The CNC machine rounds out any sharp points

in the design, of which this initial design had many. I had to hand file the laser cut shapes to make them fit into the background, tiring and tedious work. Once I completed the precarious bonding I was eager to try slumping the piece. As I placed the wok in the plastics shop oven disaster struck. The wok slipped off the rails crashing to the bottom of the oven and most of the inlaid pieces popped out of the background. Failure, material intra and inter-action meltdown. The problem of securing all those pieces so that the slumping could go ahead had to be solved. I decided to bond the orange background circle to a clear circle first and then bond the pieces onto that clear circle instead of the edges of the orange cut-out. Time consuming and not ideal because you could see the bonding agent. Once again, I slumped it. The plastic matter was intra-acting, a performativity between materials, bonding action, heat and my *bodymindmatter* happened. It did not happen as I anticipated, however, I was for the first time understanding and appreciating the reciprocal capacity of material to affect and become affected. The theoretical concepts of the scholars I had been studying was sinking in as I manipulated the sinking folds that were not supposed to be there, searching for some kind of mutual agreement between the matter and myself. As I worked with and through the materialization of each plastic body that made up the whole of the installation, much deeper understandings and celebrations of the relationships between my *bodymindmatter*, the material matter, and the *bodymindmatter* of helping others contributed to the making of *spacetimematter* (Barad 2012, 77), where differences are made and happen as a way to resist the politics of the negative which says that we are stuck in never-ending binaries without hope for new possible becomings. These were the acts, events of a research process that was joyful, yet purposeful, punctuated with experimental making and focused intra-action, rumination, reflection, analysis and evaluation. Data accumulated through iterative processes, new

beginnings, failures, dead ends, and breakthroughs while working with the materials of matter and theory. The data was gathered and recorded in copious analogue sketchbook notes, diagrams, drawings, and in digital renderings, documents, videos and photographs on my iphone and computer. Analysing the data generated from art-practice-thinking-through-making is like being adrift in a universe filled with shooting stars, meteorites and black holes, where paradoxically everything is at once the same and different. For the artist in nature and culture sifting through that paradox, that chaos to make something happen, to evoke sensation and meaning with matter, to make a composition may result in materializations that resonate. Once again, loosely using Barad's diffractive method, the data was faithfully and continually analyzed through the lens of more post-human, new materialist scholars and their theoretical propositions.

concepts: THEORETICAL (S)MATTERING

For Deleuze, theory, or more precisely, philosophy, is not a mode of reflection but a mode of production. (Grosz 2003, 78)

Brian Massumi in the forward to *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), offers a frank exposition of Deleuze's colourful irreverence for the philosophical giants, seekers of an acceptable universal truth. However, if he was not entangled with the greats he would not have encountered the lesser known, others.

Between Lucretius, Hume, Spinoza, Nietzsche, and Bergson there exists a 'secret link constituted by the critique of negativity, the cultivation of joy, the hatred of interiority, the exteriority of forces and relations, the denunciation of power.' (Massumi 1987, x)

I bought a second-hand book by David Hume in grade eight in the school yard, wanting to know something. That something was that I knew nothing, and a beginning awareness of an awkward naïveté and arrogance. From there hard lessons began. Since then it has been an arduous and colour filled life of tripping over to get out of myself, away from the delusion of existentialism, and the humbling experience of making art was one practical way to do that. It is no coincidence, however, that as an artist and educator my research eventually led me to the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari. As difficult as their works are, especially for a slow learner like me, from the first tentative forays, I sensed the grounded positivity of the possible, and have honestly tried to remain open to it. Here and now is a good space and time to open up wide, to peer into the black (w)hole to find something that matters.

The world is getting more complex at a faster pace than any other point in history, (Harari 2015, 179) and humans even though we are unlike any other species on the planet earth, with the capacity to make machines that extend our space and abilities to know, must resolve to understand better our own materiality and how it is inter-related to all other matter on earth and beyond. This move toward understanding on a micro level the relationality of material is perhaps the only remedy for a world that is becoming so complicated, that it is already and always beyond our capacity to ever fully know it. In this context it is hard to keep up with the explosive popping up of theoretical propositions that keep pushing the post of post-structuralism and postmodernism. Post-humanism and New Materialism have taken theory to an outpost, far beyond the humanism that underpinned almost all theory from its inception. This human wanted to journey to that out post, in theory and practice.

The first line of chapter one in the book *Chaos, Territory Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth*, speaks volumes about the possibility and responsibility of art, “This small book is directed to questions about ontology, that is, the materiality and conceptual structures, of art” (Grosz 2008,1). My painting practice had evolved into an attempt to extract from colour a capacity to traverse space and time, to make space and time by carefully layering with glazed colour over a representation, in the last case, representations of rocks, to make a sensation of space-time. The colour qualities of fluorescent transparent acrylics compelled me to sense and feel my way through new bodies of hyper colourful plastic matter. That explosion of colour and light was the impetus for considering the relationship between practice and theory. In this chapter Grosz discusses how art and philosophy share many concerns, namely that both grapple with trying to make sense of the chaos of the universe. She ponders,

...what common debt do art and philosophy share to those forces, chaos, that each in their own ways must slow down, decompose, harness and develop (through the construction of the plane of immanence in philosophy and the constitution of the plane of composition in the arts)? How...do the arts and philosophy (‘theory’) create? With what resources? techniques? counterforces? And what is it that they create when they create ‘works’? (Grosz 2008, 5)

Acknowledging that the works of Deleuze and Guattari, particularly Deleuze were her guides, it is helpful to note that the concepts of chaos and plane of immanence here, as well as many others in her comparative discussion emanate from those philosophers. The multiplex and layered plane of immanence, can be thought of as a flat bedrock space and condition for thinking to happen, an inner state for concepts to be created as opposed to found, because that is what philosophy does, constitutes “intensive events” of thought (Spindler 2010, 151). Chaos is the counter to this consistent infinite moving space of immanence, and interpreted from Deleuze, “Chaos is

perpetually present, is a continuing origin, where nothing has yet taken form neither as thought nor nature, and that in the same way threatens to dissolve once again all that is formulated and wrought into form...”(Spindler 2010, 153). Similarly, art draws from chaos to create not concepts, the domain of philosophy, but sensations, expressions of the primordial perpetual (Grosz 2008, 9). Borrowing conceptually from Deleuze then, Grosz offers this parallel for art:

The plane of composition, which cuts across, and thus plunges into, filters and coheres chaos through the being of sensation is thus both an immersion in chaos, in nature and materiality, but also a mode of disruption and ordering of chaos through the extraction of that which life can glean for itself from this whirling materiality – sensations, affects, percepts, intensities – blocs of bodily becoming that always co-evolve with blocs of the becoming of matter or events. (Grosz 2008, 10)

Deleuze and Guattari, postmodernists, saw each of the disciplines of art, philosophy and science as being creative endeavours (Grosz 2008, 1). Far from a Deleuzian scholar, I nevertheless, characterize this equating between the disciplines, a positive for all three, as a way for Deleuze to see philosophy fundamentally as creative production very similar to artists. From her position as a post-humanist Grosz links philosophy and art ontologically with the aim of challenging, even blurring the border space between nature and culture. Grosz is talking about how life – all life forms of living matter, and how that matter is always evolving, proliferating, and changing to create new forms, but most importantly and interestingly these forms are “becoming-artistic in their self-transformations which exceed the bare requirements of existence” (Grosz 2008, 6). These living material forces, of non-human matter, and bodies actively coalesce to produce something new and also develop “networks, fields, territories that temporarily and provisionally slow down chaos enough to extract from it something not so much useful as intensifying, a

performance ... an organization of color or movement” (Grosz 2008, 3). This idea that non-human matter and bodies are creative only for the sake of being creative became critical to my practice with materials. It is a delightful union between nature and culture, sexual bodies, colours, art, becomings. What Grosz proposes here is that because the universe through material evolutionary forces created sexual difference, sexual selection then became the driver behind an infinite generation and continued possibility of difference, and that my mattering friends has given life colour. The fact that life itself, nature, produces and comes in colour, and a sexual rainbow of infinite possibility makes the theory proposed by Batchelor that “...in the West since Antiquity colour has been systematically marginalized, reviled, diminished and degraded (2000, 22), an interesting one. The question is why is there such a fear of colour? The answer Batchelor gives is that colour has been associated with the many iterations of the other – the feminine, the sexual, the emotional, the irrational, the flesh, and that even “To this day, there remains a belief, ... that seriousness in art and culture is a black and white issue, that depth is measured only in shades of grey” (2000, 30). Does this reflect a deliberate division of culture and nature, in order for humans to impose a distance from nature, thereby maintaining the illusion of civilized superiority? If sexual selection, this “becoming-artistic” (Grosz 2008, 28) of bodies in nature, which includes an infinite variety of colour exists, could this not be an indication of the affective becomings, the materialization of bodies? Culture is not exclusively human because humans come from nature and nature, all matter embodies a creative impulse, that is far more colourful than black and white. Humans have naturally evolved within this colourful nature and perhaps the human drive to understand nature, and our place in it, has perhaps resulted in the need to separate from nature by culturally conforming to the idea of a rational, controlling, intelligent being.

Grosz goes on to link sexual selection in nature, with sexual attraction and that endeavour is not only artistic but excessively so, with elaborate courtship dances, displays of colour, scents and songs (Grosz 2008, 29). All superfluous to survival. Animals do not need to expend time and energy on these often-risky sexual attraction ventures and humans do not need to make art. Indeed, sex and art which for me must include colour, come together, material biological forces of nature and cultural production in bed together, instead of rationalized apart. This is a challenge to the long-held notion of survival of the fittest, an assumed Darwinian concept (Radiolab podcast 2019). It is not survival of the fittest, it is survival of the sexiest in terms of colourful cultural production. “Art is the sexualization of survival...”, as Grosz puts it, “... or equally sexuality is the rendering artistic the exploration of the excessiveness of nature” (Grosz 2008, 12). In another book, *Sexy Bodies: The strange carnalities of feminism* (Grosz and Probyn 1995), Grosz uses the work of Alphonso Lingis an American philosopher, who, also influenced by Deleuze and Guattari, and Lyotard, analysed sexual desire through a materialist lens with a boldly coloured filter. What Grosz finds important in the work by Lingis, and subsequently important to me and my art work, is that he never connects sexual desire to death, the Freudian concept of the death drive in his essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), that links the sexual act, in particular the male ejaculatory orgasm, but also the female orgasm to the concept of bodily release, which Grosz explains as “The fantasy that binds sex to death so intimately, is the fantasy of a hydraulic sexuality, ... a compulsion, urge or mode of bodily release...” (Grosz 1995, 293). The most salient quality, however, of Lingis’ work for Grosz is that it disrupts the enduring vision of female sexuality as a death trap. I can’t remember who said this to me, but I do remember that it struck me as quite odd so many years ago, “when the man orgasms, he experiences a little death”.

As for Grosz,

The fantasy of the vagina dentata, of the non-human status of woman as android, vampire or animal, the identification of female sexuality as voracious, insatiable, enigmatic, invisible and unknowable, cold, calculating, instrumental, castrator/ decapitator of the male, dissimulatrix or fake, predatory, engulfing mother, preying on male weakness, are all consequences of the ways in which male orgasm has functioned as the measure and representative of all sexualities and all modes of erotic encounter. (Grosz 1995, 293)

conclusions: BECOMING POSSIBILITIES

I am a demi-sexual, a person who must have a deep emotional connection for sex to happen, which accounts for many of my relationship problems and pleasures; I am a chromophilic which gives me delight and insecurity; I am an artist and I need to be excited about what and why I am making, and the philosophies of post-humanism and new materialism have reignited that excitement. Decentering my bodymindmatter and becoming aware that I am always already affected by other bodies human and non-human while in the process of making art to affect has made all the difference. Difference is a positive for me not a negative. Difference is both natural and cultural. Difference – demands a performativity, an intra-action between female, male and intersex bodies regardless of sexual orientations, or gender identity that shifts the boundaries of what has been constructed as masculine and feminine to open up a space of mutual honesty and a genuine willingness to move into new relational possibilities. That difference – must be accepted, respected, and even celebrated. The results are embedded in the materials, both I and my work are transformed bodies.

It has taken me a lifetime to learn that joy, kindness and humour, in particular self-deprecating humour are the resistances to the constant pull of power and individualism. Seemingly simple and innocent practices, the sensation of joy, action of kindness, and performance of humour are not easy to do, but worth attempting over and over to get to the other side – positive hopefulness. It is my hope to provide a transformative potential space where a deeper and more profound understanding between all gender identities happens on both a macro and micro relational level; and that these art works, because they were made with an openness to possibility and actions of kindness between bodies, co-constituted, embodied a combination of joyful energy, a vitality, a sensation that evokes the complexities of how life happens.

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Figure 1

For the Love of Colour: A Chromophilia Delight Triptych, 2019
36 x 36 inches each



Figure 2

For the Love of Colour: A Chromophilia Delight, Right Panel detail, 2019
36 x 36 inches



Figure 3
Surging, Merging, Matter
30 inches in diameter



Figure 4
Coming Colour: A Renaissance
30 inches in diameter

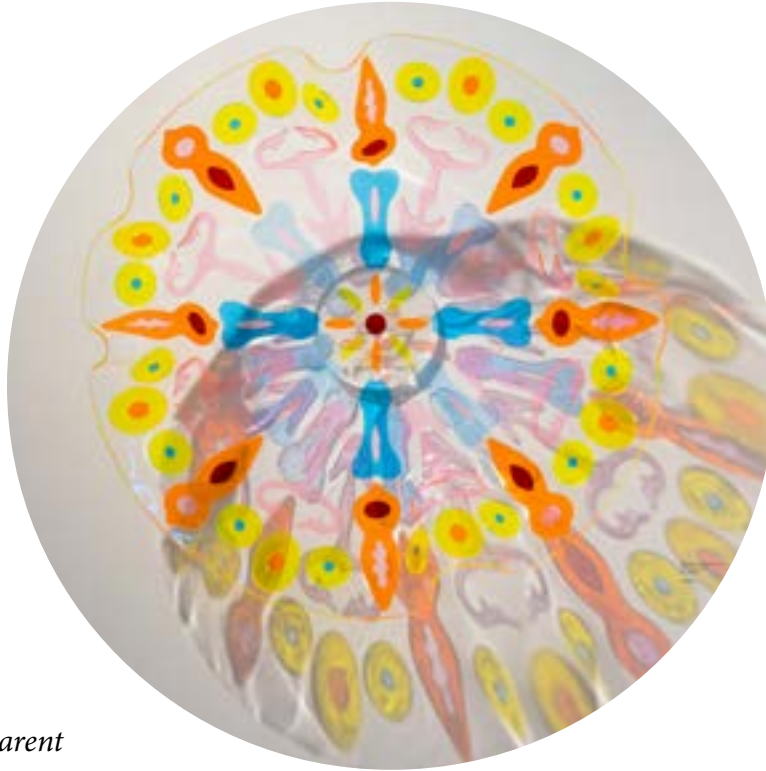


Figure 5
Apparently Transparent
30 inches in diameter



Figure 6
Material Organ Orgasms
30 inches in diameter



Figure 7
Pulsing Pinkness
30 inches in diameter



Figure 8
Realized Materialized
36 x 44 inches



Figure 9
Broken Matters
36 x 44 inches



Figure 10
(W)hole Material

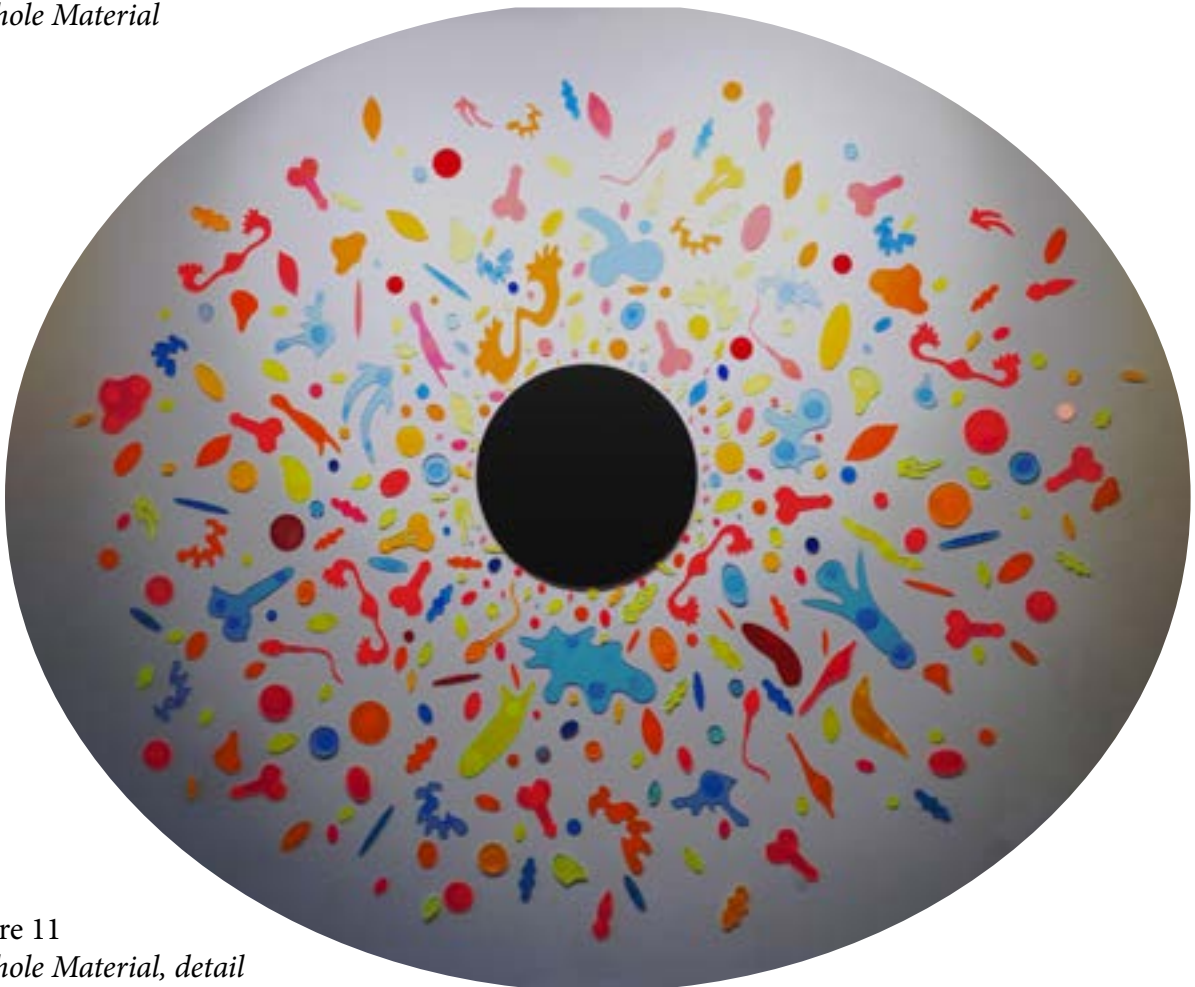


Figure 11
(W)hole Material, detail

Please see the link to view a video of the work at Propeller Gallery