

THESIS

QUEER COMFORTS AND CONDITIONALITIES

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ABSTRACT

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Concept, materials, and process are the three main factors of my thesis work. My thesis asks the questions: “why does my (queer) comfort make you uncomfortable?” And “why does my (queer) comfort come with conditionalities?” Queer comforts, things like the sheets of my wife and I, our games, our memories, our wedding, and our intimacies, are just everyday objects and moments, so why do they make people so uncomfortable? These questions are explored through the mediums of printmaking and bookmaking in my thesis. My books explore these comforts, this unfamiliar-to-some queer life that exists outside the hegemonic binary we live in, through pushing the boundary of the familiar book. My books act as their own agents, working with humans-as-agents to expand upon the canon of queer art and create a more relational world. I wish to continue to challenge and expand the canon of queer art by creating as a queer artist and showing others what a queer artist looks like today; I also want to see what printmaking and bookmaking can mean in today’s world through my books and their dissemination. My books explore the intimacy of the human experience, where gender does not matter but the connection of bodies does.

Keywords: Queer, comfort, conditionalities, printmaking, bookmaking, books, canon of art, intimacy, gender, sexuality.

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INTRODUCTION

Concept, materials, and process are the three driving factors of my thesis work. These three supports are all equally important in understanding and relating to the work. The concept is centered around the questions: “why does my comfort as a queer person make you uncomfortable?” And “why does my comfort come with conditionalities?” Both of these questions are explored through materials and the processes of creation. The materials, articulated in detail later, center around pieces of my relationship with my wife, as well as materials that blur the lines of masculine/feminine experience. The processes—printmaking, papermaking, bookmaking, letterpress, and embroidery—all act as supports to the repetition of the systemic queer experience, both that of negative experiences such as homophobia and judgement, and the positive ones such as queer solidarity and euphoric self-expression. These elements combine to expand the canon of queer art beyond the tradition. To start this journey into analyzing concepts, materials, processes and expansion, I first need to define the book and by extension the artist’s book, as well as what literacy means in my work.

RESEARCH, CONTEXT, AND INFLUENCES

What is a book? According to Merriam-Webster, there are a few definitions: “a set of written, printed, or blank sheets bound together between a front and back cover,” or “something that yields knowledge or understanding.”¹ In today’s age, there are books in digital forms through audio books. In my work as an artist, printmaker, and bookmaker I posit the question: what isn’t a book? A book is a vessel, an external container that holds or protects an interior. It is communication, literacy in its most concrete and abstract forms. Literacy, defined as “the quality or state of being literate,” with the meaning of literate ranging from “educated, cultured” to “able to read and write,” to “skill fluency” is more limited than what I believe to be literacy.² Literacy in art, and more specifically with artist’s books, is not limited to the viewer’s ability to read, write, or their level of education. Instead, literacy is about the viewer’s ability to interact with, understand, and, to use Donna Haraway’s language, ‘become-with’ the book as emergent co-agents. There is no right or wrong way to engage with an artist’s book as each individual creates their own understanding of the book as an object through their developing reciprocal relationship. Artist’s books specifically blur the lines between public and private, and open the door to a new literacy that transcends time, space, cultures, and more. The form does not have to fit into the convention of a book, with a hard or soft cover and interior pages; rather, the broader definition of book as object or body, with many things ‘counting’ as a book that are not standard. Audrey Niffenegger in “What does it mean to make a book?” within *The Book as Art*, tenderly relates the book to humans; “the book has been the body of human thought for many centuries,

¹ “Book,” Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/book>, Accessed 10 Dec. 2025.

² “Literacy,” “Literate,” Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/literate>, Accessed 10 Dec. 2025.

and when we make unusual books, artists' books, we are messing with that body. This can incite strong feelings in readers. We identify with books, and when artists transgress against books it's a serious thing."³ Books are objects, receptacles, and bodies, time travelers who "transcend time and space."⁴ The durational "space of a book is intimate and public at the same time; it mediates between private reflection and broad communication."⁵ As the author and book artist Johanna Drucker notes, "an artist's book is a work of art that is conceived and executed as a book and does not exist in any other form or format."⁶ They exist as active agents alongside us. A series of objects can become an artist's book through this agential becoming-with. My books as well as other artists' books, "in the highly competitive, constantly changing world of contemporary art ask for slow contemplation and yield unprecedented intellectual rewards."⁷

Now that the book and literacy have been defined, those thoughts should be kept in mind as I expand upon my concept, materials, and processes. I want to ground the book as an entity to some theory, as the author's ideas are relevant to the aforementioned elements. Some of the authors that act as a foundational base of thought are Donna Haraway, Judith Butler, Jane Bennet, Jessica L. Horton, and Catherine Berlo. Each author has their own connection to my thesis work, be it through inspiring the concept, materials, or process. Haraway's idea of staying with the trouble as well as becoming-with multispecies entities in an ever changing world are paramount to my book creation and reception. My books act as their own entities to become-with the person engaging with the book at the time and place. They stay with the trouble of being present and creating "unexpected collaborations and combinations" through reciprocal

³ Audrey Niffenegger, "What does it mean to make a book?" in *The Book as Art*, Krystyna Wasserman (Princeton Architectural Press, 2007), 13.

⁴ Niffenegger, "What Does It Mean to Make a Book?" 13.

⁵ Johanna Drucker, "Intimate Authority: Women, Books, and the Public-Private Paradox," in *The Book as Art*, Krystyna Wasserman (Princeton Architectural Press, 2007), 14.

⁶ Drucker, "Intimate Authority," 16.

⁷ Krystyna Wasserman, "The Brightest Heaven of Invention," in *The Book as Art*, Krystyna Wasserman (Princeton Architectural Press, 2007), 25.

interactions.⁸ Haraway reminds us this is a balancing act, and “we need stories (and theories) that are just big enough to gather up the complexities and keep the edges open and greedy for surprising new and old connections.”⁹ Haraway’s tentacularity and community interactions also relate to the development of the canon of queer art. When I reference the canon of queer art, I mean those artists who are referenced to me when I relate my own queerness: Félix González-Torres, Andy Warhol, Frida Kahlo, and Claude Cahun. The one most commonly mentioned to me is the American artist Felix Gonzalez Torres and his *Portrait of Ross in L.A.* done in 1991 (fig. 1). Torres, a Cuban born, gay male, passed at the beginning of 1996 and I, a white lesbian female, was born at the end of that year in Florida. These artists, while still valid in the historical queer canon, are not creating today or going through the things queer people are facing now. The expansion of the canon of queer art comes from the desire to help others learn of today’s queer artists, and the work they are making that reference the past and grow from it.

The historical development of the canon of queer art can be analyzed through the lens of Haraway: “No species...acts alone; assemblages of organic species and of abiotic factors make history.”¹⁰ The canon of art, and by extension the canon of queer art, is not this independent entity acting alone or auto-generated, but something that is *made* over time, through a wide variety of factors including but not limited to the opinions of the masses or collective at the time. In the historical queer canon, González-Torres is an amazing artist who was seminal in the acceptance of queer artists into the mainstream, but there are many artists today relating their own experiences that should be part of the conversation.

An example of this would be the mixed-media artist Mickalene Thomas. Mickalene is an African-American, lesbian identifying artist born in New Jersey, living and working in New

⁸ Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Duke University Press, 2016), 4.

⁹ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 101.

¹⁰ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 100.

York. Her elaborate works show her desire to create and claim a space for the black female body, to “command...[and] occupy eloquently while dissecting the intersecting complexities of black and female identity within the Western canon.”¹¹ Her 2014 solo installation, *I was born to great things* (fig. 2), done in the Kavi Gupta gallery in Chicago, Illinois, celebrated her late mother and her life through this space creation. In the installation, the “objects have their own life cycles that are distinct but not separate from our own,” allowing them to act as agents who become-with the viewer.¹² In her work to expand the Western canon, she states: “to see yourself and for others to see you is a form of validation, and I’m interested in that very mysterious, mystical line that is how we relate to each other in the world.”¹³ This is something that relates to my own work as well, but in expanding the queer canon of Western art, which is “made of up ongoing multispecies stories and practices of becoming-with in times that remain at stake, in precarious times, in which the world is not finished and the sky has not fallen—yet.”¹⁴

The connections in Jane Bennett’s *Vibrant Matter* is another inspiration, where the book is a body and “all bodies are kin in the sense of being inextricably enmeshed in a dense network of relations.”¹⁵ The materials, concepts, and processes of the books I create all are made up of a vibrant matter, where they “act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own...that run[s] alongside and inside humans.”¹⁶ This materiality also relates to Butler’s material performance, where the materials and objects’ construction produces and destabilizes regulatory norms. My books question the norm of what a book is and then by extension, creates a new possibility for what a book can be. The “matter” that makes up the

¹¹ Mickalene Thomas, Artist Website, About, Accessed 2/2/2026, <https://mickalene.herokuapp.com/about>.

¹² Ann Meisinger, “Mickalene Thomas: I was born to do great things,” *The Seen*, review, September, 20th 2014, <https://theseenjournal.org/mickalene-thomas-born-great-things/>.

¹³ Thomas, Artist Website, About.

¹⁴ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 55.

¹⁵ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things*, (Duke University Press, 2010), 13.

¹⁶ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, VIII.

books “has a history,” but it also has a present and a future that will be determined by the interactions and engagements other bodies have in relation to the bodies of the books.¹⁷ In the work to expand the queer canon, Butler reminds us “that the history of matter is in part determined by the negotiation of sexual difference.”¹⁸ The materiality of the books I create is genderless, using elements like linen bed sheets, but also has moments of fixed gender such as the historicity of letterpress and print as a male-dominated field or the connection of femininity to fiber crafts such as embroidery. The books’ creation as well as their reception “is neither a single act nor a causal process initiated by a subject and culminating in a set of fixed effects...[it] not only takes place in time, but is itself a temporal process which” responds to the interactions. Each person is going to form their own understanding of the materiality of the books based on their own historicity.¹⁹ This is similar to Horton and Berlo’s conceptualization of “human and non-human entities as agents in a mutually affecting relationship.”²⁰ The books-as-agents work with humans-as-agents to expand upon the canon of art and create “a profoundly relational world.”²¹ Those are the foundations of the theory that bound my thesis.

Beyond the theory, there are other sources that act as inspiration around my concepts, materials, and processes. One of these is a small pocket book *Beyond the Gender Binary* by Alok Vaid-Menon. This book, full of queer solidarity, reminds “conditional acceptance isn’t freedom—we shouldn’t have to erase our differences in order to be accepted.”²² This is both for my concept, but my materials as they and the form of the book are outside of the stereotypical standard of how materials are used as well as how the book comes together as a unique agent.

¹⁷ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (Taylor and Francis Group, 1993), 5.

¹⁸ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 5.

¹⁹ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, XIX.

²⁰ Jessica L. Horton and Janet Catherine Berlo, “Beyond the Mirror: Indigenous Ecologies and ‘New Materialisms’ in Contemporary Art,” *Third Text* 27 no. 1 (2013): 28, doi:10.1080/09528822.2013.753190.

²¹ Horton and Berlo, “Beyond the Mirror,” 18.

²² Alok Vaid-Menon, *Beyond the Gender Binary* (Penguin Random House LLC, 2020), 34.

The processes as well embrace the slower analog in a digital, fast paced world, with the time it takes to relate with a book in contrast to today's instant gratification. Vaid-Menon reminds us, in our art interpretation and creation, "we do not need to be universal to be valid."²³ Another book that embraces this queer validity is *Queer Threads: Crafting Identity and Community*. In it, artist Pierre Fouché was interviewed by author John Chaich stating "what a revelation it was to realize that I was not alone, to feel represented. It became [his] mission to make works that can have the same effect on others... The idea that [his] work can potentially give solace to even one person fills [him] with pride."²⁴ My work explores the experiences of queer solidarity, and if only one person is moved by my work, then much like Fouché, I am full of pride.

A few other inspirations remain, with one of them being the book I got for my undergraduate degree program, *Art and Queer Culture*, which showcases a multitude of artists, and discusses how "homosexuality is...conceived as not simply as an identity possessed by particular subjects but as a site of sexual meaning and symbolic investment under continual negotiation, both by those who name themselves as gay or lesbian and by those who do not."²⁵ To be queer is to live an experience outside the set standard, it is to queer something, and my books explore that experience as well as how we define ourselves. The last book that acts as a reference is *The Book as Art*. This book is full of female bookmaking artists who push the boundary of what a book is and what it can be in the future. These sources compounded allow me to tell the complete story of my thesis and the journey I have taken to get here.

²³ Vaid-Menon, *Beyond the Gender Binary*, 60.

²⁴ John Chaich and Todd Oldham, *Queer Threads: crafting identity and community* (Ammo Books, 2017), 128.

²⁵ Catherine Lord and Richard Meyer, *Art and Queer Culture* (Phaidon Press Limited, 2013), 9.

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

My concepts, materials, and processes have evolved greatly through my time in school up to the creation of my thesis. My undergraduate concepts were similar, but more influenced by my own experience with homophobia and a hate crime as a queer person growing up and living in Northern Florida. The first conceptual question I began to ponder for my thesis came to me on an unknown day. I have a small scrap of paper with the question hurriedly scrawled onto it in a charcoal pencil. I was wondering why mine and my wife's existence was so taboo when our "perverted queer lifestyle" is just every day creature comforts, things that every human experiences, does, uses, and feels. My extended, conservative family that lived in Colorado Springs had finally welcomed my wife to the family, after almost eight years of us dating and two years of marriage. She was finally welcomed as the kids were grown up, my Grandpa had passed, and my Aunt, Uncle, and Grandma had slightly loosened up on their judgement of queer people. My Grandma was shocked that we were just normal people. We worked, we played, we learned, we felt, we created, we had successes and failures, we simply existed as human beings in this crazy fucked-up world. We lived a life much like theirs, but one unlike theirs in ways they would never understand nor experience. "In truth, [the barrier between them] was higher, broader, and firmer; because for [them] there were perils, not known, or imagined, by those others who had no such secrets to alarm or endanger them."²⁶ Our comforts, things like our sheets, our games, our memories, our wedding, our intimacies, are just everyday objects and moments, so why do they make people so uncomfortable? Alok Vaid-Menon explained it beautifully, saying "society's inability to place us in boxes makes them uncomfortable; the

²⁶ Nella Larsen, *Passing* (Penguin Random House LLC, 2021), 72.

unfamiliar becomes a threat and not an opportunity. The unknown calls into question everything that we thought we knew about ourselves and the world.”²⁷ My books explore these comforts, this unfamiliar-to-some queer life that exists outside the hegemonic binary we live in, through pushing the boundary of the familiar book. They explore the intimacy of the human experience, where gender does not matter but the connection of bodies does. My books seek that same intimate touch and reciprocal relationship we seek with other bodies, human and non-human.

The question on conditionalities came to me back in my undergraduate between 2014 and 2018. It was a sketch on the first page of a sketchbook I have been using since around 2016. This was a sketch I created after I had come out to my conservative family that lived in Colorado Springs. I was freshly twenty years old and had been dating a girl for almost a year. I was already the black sheep of the family, scaring my grandparents and aunt and uncle with a few piercings and tattoos. I determined it was time on that Thanksgiving visit, tired of pretending I was someone else. And so we sat, round table style, as I came out to my Grandma and my Aunt and Uncle. My parents were there in support, but my Grandpa was not present because he was struggling with Alzheimer’s and Dementia. There were many tears, lots of sweat and then relief on my end, and light assurances that they love me still. But there was more. “Well I’m sure you understand, but the kids can’t know.” The kids were my cousins, triplets, aged 11 at that point. Nine years of age between us and a close connection every visit. More hiding. I was also told not to tell my Grandpa. “He just won’t get it and we don’t want to upset him during this time.” My Grandpa, the man who was proud of everything I had previously told him about myself, couldn’t know the real me. More lying. Pretending that I just hadn’t found the right boy whenever he asked me. “We love you of course, but we don’t really want to see it or hear about it.”

Conditionalities. Conditional love and acceptance. I wish I could say it stopped there, that that

²⁷ Vaid-Menon, *Beyond the Gender Binary*, 26.

was the only experience I had related to conditionalities related to my queer existence, but it wasn't. "Everyone is "accepting" as long as you keep quiet and don't ask embarrassing questions," or make the family answer questions they see as embarrassing.²⁸ And it wasn't all family. It was friends, acquaintances, colleagues, strangers. It was an "I love you...but," over and over. As Butler put it,

So we are out of the closet...but into what? what new unbounded spatiality? the room, the den, the attic, the basement, the house, the bar, the university [...]? being 'out' must produce the closet again and again and again in order to maintain itself as 'out'. In this sense, outness can only produce a new opacity; and the closet produces the promise of a disclosure that can, by definition, never come.²⁹

We are reminded that the construction of the queer and straight binary "not only takes place in time, but is itself a temporal process which operates through the reiteration of norms."³⁰ It is easy to feel isolated in these negative experiences, and feel like you are alone in the struggle; but I began to talk to people, people like me, who had gone through similar experiences in this unbounded space of outness. I began to collect the conditionalities told to queer people over the course of people knowing or meeting them. As Vaid-Menon claims, "There's magic in being seen by people who understand—it gives you permission to keep going. Self-expression sometimes requires other people. Becoming ourselves is a collective journey."³¹ In a similar way to Haraway's becoming-with and staying with the trouble, finding solidarity in queer experiences is a way the queer community becomes-with each other. My books act as agents, another being in time and space that allows the reader to "learn to be truly present" either existing as a queer person or someone becoming-with queer people, and helping audiences become more literate in queer experiences.³²

²⁸ Lord and Meyer, *Art and Queer Culture*, 13.

²⁹ Lord and Meyer, *Art and Queer Culture*, 30.

³⁰ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, XIX.

³¹ Vaid-Menon, *Beyond the Gender Binary*, 25.

³² Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 1.

The materials that make up my books have their own agency, their own “distinctive capacities or efficacious powers” found in their “particular material configurations.”³³ Made up of matter, the books have “agency, and can move, act, assume volition, and even enjoy degrees of intelligence often assumed to be the unique domain of human subjectivity.”³⁴ In my undergrad I was very traditional in both my printmaking and my bookmaking. I used paper I purchased and followed a very strict system of clean printing and book construction. In my current work I have learned to explore the potential for materials and to let the material “tell its own part in the story” as well as embrace the particularities or peculiarities of each material. I have learned to embrace the agency of materials as well as use their agency to become-with them in the creation of a book. All of the materials used in the books and the thesis show relate to the idea of comfort in one way or another, with comfort existing outside of the binary.

The first material that is a theme throughout many of the books and the works are the linen sheets my wife and I used (fig. 3). Linen is the traditional material for covers in bookmaking, because of its durability and its longevity. It is also used as bedsheets for those reasons, and it is hypoallergenic and breathable. The material of linen acts as a cover, both in the traditional sense of covering cold bodies at night, but also covers for books that we hold in our homes, our heads, and our bodies. The covers usually contain an interior, whether it be a story, a body, or a time. The sheets previously used on a bed hold the memories and the records of bodies. Intimacy, love, pleasure, safety, warmth, protection, things that all bodies seek and crave and contain within their own covers. Jesse Harrod in an interview for *Queer Threads* notes, “The politics of cloth seem inescapable, and materials and technical histories are fundamental to my choices as a maker... The materials are stand-ins for political ideas, for people, for moments, for

³³ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, IX.

³⁴ Horton and Berlo, “Beyond the Mirror,” 17.

gender expression.”³⁵ They hold stains, marks, tears, repairs, and other moments that represent us specifically, but could represent anyone. They are universally intimate and the book form enhances this because “books are potent items.”³⁶

Part of the book form is the interior, what is held within the cover, the story. The materials of the interior of my previous books would best be described as antiseptic. They were made with clean, often white or a light-hued manufactured paper. The material of my current interior paper is best described as a chronicle. They capture the moment, the place, and the story of where they were created and why they were created. The paper batches were each made specifically for the book that they are in, enhancing the story of each book. The *Conditionalities* book contains twenty colorful pages containing an increasing number of shredded embroidery thread per page (figs 4 & 5). There is a white page that represents the innocence and pureness of birth, then the influx of color as identity flourishes. Each colored page represents a year in my life before I came out to my conservative family. Originally the design was colored lines increasing in presence on white paper, but I wanted something that represented more time and effort put into discovering and forming self-expression. I began to embroider the colorful lines into the paper, enjoying the material of the thread in relation to femininity, familial connections, and craft, but I still wanted more time investment to represent the love and care put into helping a person grow. That is when I started making paper and began to think about the time it takes to make a batch of paper from deconstructed materials, and how each thread has agency on the paper sheet as I pull it. From the first batch to the last batch it took me over a year to create the twenty-two batches that make up the book. The last batch was created using only grey thread, dramatically shifting from full saturation and pride to desaturation and shame; it represents

³⁵ Chaich and Oldham, *Queer Threads*, VII.

³⁶ Niffenegger, “What Does It Mean to Make a Book?” 12.

multiple ideas, including the hiding of identity for safety, the color draining from a face at rejection, and depression from conditional acceptance and existence (fig 6). Some of the other materials the papers of the books are made out of include the dried flower petals from the wedding of my best friend of eighteen years, dried petals and herbs from the garden my wife and I tend, clothing my wife wore on some of our adventures, and spices we've gathered on travels. Each paper holds the impression of the moment: specks of my dogs' black hair, my own hair as it has grown in length over the course of my schooling, dirt from the floor of my garage or my studio, fuzz or seeds blown in on wind through doors. Incidental moments that I have come to seek in each piece of paper as it acts as an archive of where I was and who I was at that moment (fig. 7). Unexpected discoveries and frustrating failures, agency from "thing-power: the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle...[it] arises from bodies inorganic as well as organic," including book bodies.³⁷

The last material that warrants mentioning is embroidery thread. Embroidery thread as a material has its own history, one that could fill a book. When I think of embroidery in my past, I think of pillows in the grandparents' house, wall art with sentimental sayings reminding us what a family is, towels with small decor stitched onto their surface. For the purposes of this work, the material has connections to a societally feminine "craft" as well as connections to the home, comfort, family, and longevity through generations. Aubrey Langley-Cook in an interview with Jaime Chalmers put it eloquently:

Embroidery is often associated with the home, and I find narratives by subverting these domestic undertones. The breaking down and reworking of the familial framework mirrors the queer intent of my work. The repetition of the process of embroidery and the connectivity of the threads reinforce the stories and relationships I capture and marks them as essential.³⁸

³⁷ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 6.

³⁸ Chaich and Oldham, *Queer Threads*, 131.

The embroidery thread is used subversively as a material in many of my works and books as well, with one of the ways being the destruction of the long strands of threads to turn them into sheets of paper. Through the *Conditionalities* book, the thread, while broken, still represents connectivity, home, comfort, and family, but it takes on the familiar form of scrap and trimmed ends, representing a queering of the tradition of the material (fig. 8). No longer is the long unbroken thread representing linear, heteronormative continuity, but a new form of thread representing the circular continuity of queer experiences. The other use is through using the traditional, homely material to represent the queer comforts and experiences of my wife and I. Our songs we walked down the aisle to, our crystals, gemstones, and heart-shaped rocks we have collected, the bars and their bracelets from our wild college nights out, or the candles of our age when we lost a family member unexpectedly (fig. 9). It becomes a material for a different kind of story, a less traditional embroidery and needlepoint that does not follow the expected standard or a pre-planned pattern. The threads instead become a material that tells its own story as it laces in and around our linen sheets as opposed to raw linen or canvas (fig. 10). The history of the embroidery surface matters in telling the tale of our bodies and other bodies that lace themselves with their own comforts.

Embroidery, much like the processes of papermaking, letterpress, reductive and linoleum printmaking, and bookmaking, as Audrey Langley mentioned above, are repetitive actions. For my work, the repetitive nature is intentional, even necessary for the understanding of the work. A reason for this is because the queer experience, both the positive and the negative, exist in a repetitious state. Homophobia is an unfortunate repetitive experience we live with, but so is the raw joy of seeing another queer couple on the street or represented somewhere. Repetition is familiar. It creates and produces. For example, I have been coming out since the first time I came

out publicly to friends in 2010 or 2011. As a queer person, you never stop coming out. Every time you meet a new person, there is an assessment, a safety check, a determined comfort level. Are they a safe person? Will they judge me? Will they treat me differently? These thoughts run through in a matter of seconds and determine if we hold hands, if I say I have a wife, if I disclose anything at all about myself. Every stitch, every paper pull, every piece of type set, every piece carved away, every print pressed, and every page of a book attached to another echoes this repetitive existence. It becomes a place of a soothing rhythm in which to contemplate the intricacies and interstices of existence today. This is mirrored in the way each person will engage with my books, with my thesis work as a whole. There is no order but the one the viewer chooses to make for themselves. Some may find comfort and solidarity in the work while others may find discomfort and confrontation. The processes create actants and agents; “that which has efficacy, can do things, has sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of events. It is ‘any entity that modifies another entity in a trial’.”³⁹ Each person who engages with the process of ‘reading’ my work and books will have created their own understanding based on their own interpretation of my processes of creation and communication based on their own experiences.

The processes of cyanotype and anotypes were the areas where I allowed for spontaneity, for a release of some control of production and creation. Cyanotypes are done using a light sensitive combination of iron salts that react and turn a bright blue when they are exposed to UV, in my case, the sun. Pieces of linen bed sheets were coated in cyanotype solution and dried. After drying, they were exposed to the sun, with different comfort objects that represent the wedding of my wife and I, acting as the negatives that would be captured. These were things like my boutonniere, her bouquet, flower petals, and our vow books (fig. 11). After two to five

³⁹ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, VIII.

minutes, the images developed under the sun then rinsed off of under water, exposing the rich blue of the cyanotypes. They are archival in quality, with the same being said for our vows and relationship. Once I was comfortable with exposure times, an air mattress was covered with a bedsheet coated in cyanotype and carried outside. My wife and I lay on it for a few minutes before stripping it off and running it inside to rinse the giant cyanotype in the tub we have upstairs (fig. 12). I had no control over the imagery beyond where and when during the day I chose to place the objects. How they turned out was always a welcome surprise to me, especially our bodies.

An even more spontaneous process was the turmeric anthotypes. A process of soaking the linen pieces in a settled liquid after combining rubbing alcohol and turmeric. After drying, the turmeric sheets are exposed to the sun with something to make a negative. The difference from cyanotypes, other than color, is exposure time. It would take anywhere from an hour to two to see a change. After removing the negative materials and pulling it from the sun, the sheet is processed in a mixed bath of water and borax. The resulting image was a variegated, rich, golden hue that changes for every sheet (fig. 13). Unlike the cyanotypes, they are not archival and will thus fade over time. The negatives for this were the memories of the years we have spent together: bar bracelets and our collected gems and heart shaped rocks, our pressed garden flowers and houseplants. These memories, much like the turmeric anthotype, will fade and change over time.

Where I embraced failure the most was in my attempt to do a beet anthotype. It has the same general theory of turmeric anthotypes, but can take days to weeks. None of my tests were successful in any aspect whether with beet powder and water or rubbing alcohol, or beet juice, and over two weeks of exposure. I wanted the pink color to go with the cyanotypes and

anthotypes, representing pleasure, play, and femininity, so I ended up soaking the linen sheets in beet juice and printed with pink ink that had the same beet juice mixed into it (fig. 14). I carved elements of our life and printed them onto the sheets. The pink is also not archival, representing the fleeting or momentary quality of pleasure and play. The pink, yellow, and blue together represent the primary elements of our relationship and by extension our comfort. I let each of these processes and the resulting prints inform the embroidery as well as the book structure for those that were turned into books.

The book structures are generally informed by the content of the book itself. I enjoy the linear narrative form of the simple accordion fold book, which can be seen in many of the book forms in my thesis (fig. 15). The form of the accordion celebrates a linear narrative but can also be rearranged for circularity, and can also take various forms depending on the placement of the accordions. This is also one of the more accessible forms, as it is similar to a traditional book and less of a jump for viewers to understand the book-ness of it. However, there are plenty of forms in my books that are unconventional and challenge the viewer's perception of both a book and what it means to be literate in a topic. An example of this is *Toys* (fig. 14), where the form of the book takes on the forms of sex toys. The forms are potentially familiar to some, but not familiar as a traditional book form. However, taken together, these objects can be "read" to understand and engage with the literacy of the sex toys. We make inferences based on our life experiences, and we "read" those inferences to understand a topic or an idea. Although they do not have the traditional form of a book, they are still in the tradition of a book as a container. The exterior is made from traditional linen, and the inside of the toys are stuffed with shredded paper and fibers. The shredded papers within the forms have intimate secrets written on them, shielded and protected by the linen exterior. The interior of these books is not meant to be read in the same

way the interior of one human is not meant to be read by everyone. For those who may have “lesbian literacy,” (or even just sex toy literacy) these objects may be instantly read, as they are recognizable. On the other hand, they may also act as these unlabeled, amorphous forms that contain unknown intimacies that will be “read” and understood by whoever is viewing it based on their own experiences. These are both equally valid interpretations of reading and literacy as it relates to my artist’s books.

The process of making the book itself is a conversation I have with the materials, the concept, and what the book wants to communicate or how it wants to tell its story. In the creation of the work and the books for my thesis, I worked to challenge the tradition of what a book is through concept, materials, and process applications. In the creation of my artist’s books, it is important to remember that they are agents, they are active in becoming-with the viewer that is engaging with them. There is no right or wrong way to interact with or understand my books; “...knowledge practices that refuse both the form and the content of traditional canons may lead to unbounded forms of speculation, modes of thinking that ally not with rigor and order but with inspiration and unpredictability.”⁴⁰ I wish to continue to challenge and expand the canon of queer art by creating as a queer artist in today’s society; I also want to see what printmaking and bookmaking can mean in today’s world through my books and their dissemination. Niffenegger states: “The book is an object. The book is an idea. Books inspire and are inspired by revolutions, love affairs, religions. What does it mean to make a book?”⁴¹ Rather, I posit, what doesn’t it mean to make a book?

⁴⁰ Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Duke University Press, 2011), 10.

⁴¹ Niffenegger, “What Does It Mean to Make a Book?” 12.

FIGURES



Figure 1. *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)*. Félix González-Torres. 1991. Candies in colored wrappers, endless supply. Dimensions vary with installation. Ideal weight: 175 lbs. Original Installation on a desktop in the administrative offices of Luhring Augustine Hetzler Gallery, Los Angeles. 19 Oct.—16 Nov. 1991.

<https://www.felixgonzalez-torresfoundation.org/works/untitled-portrait-of-ross-in-l-a>



Figure 2. *I was born to do great things*. Mickalene Thomas. 2014. Installation honoring Sandra Bush, the artist's mother. Dimensions vary with installation. Original Installation at Kavi Gupta in Chicago, Illinois. 19 Sept. 2014 — 31 Jan. 2015.
<https://mickalene.herokuapp.com/works/filter/installation>



Figure 3. Linen sheets scraps turned into cyanotypes, anthotypes, and beet juice prints with embroidery details and stitched together. Del Sandlin. 2025-2026



Figures 4 & 5. *Conditionalities (colored paper details)*. Del Sandlin. Handmade paper done in twenty batches over a year. The early batches (fig. 5) have a minimal amount of thread mixed into the pulp where the later batches (fig. 6) have an excessive amount of thread mixed into them, changing the base color of the pulp and paper. July 2024 - September 2025.



Figure 6. *Conditionalities (colored to grey paper details)*. Del Sandlin. Handmade paper done by mixing shredded grey embroidery thread into the paper pulp. Resulted in a grey-toned paper. November, 2025.



Figure 7. Handmade sage paper detail showing incidental elements added to the paper like hair, dirt, or fuzz. Del Sandlin. Fall 2025.



Figure 8. Handmade *Conditionalities* paper detail showing the broken/shredded embroidery thread. Del Sandlin. Summer 2025.



Figure 9. Embroidery detail, from *Grief*, part of the Comfort series of books. Del Sandlin. Summer 2025



Figure 10. *Comfort* print with embroidery details. This print, part of the *Comfort* series, was a six-color reductive print done on linen sheets. The last, seventh (blue) and eighth (lilac) layers were embroidered on instead of printed. The thread was tapered from six strands all the way down to one strand so the finer details could be captured. Del Sandlin. Spring 2025-Spring 2026.



Figure 11. Cyanotype from the book *Grief*. A solar exposure using linen sheets coated in cyanotype liquid, a solar reactive, archival material, with dead and dried orchid petals blocking out the sun to act as a negative. After the sun exposure of around 4 minutes, the fabric is processed in water to produce the standard Prussian blue image. Del Sandlin. Summer 2025.



Figure 12. *Comfort*, cyanotype on a full sized fitted sheet of a bed. Negative was the form of my wife and I's bodies. It was done with a solar exposure in the Spring of 2025. It only took a few minutes to expose. To coat the entire sheet, it took about two gallons of cyanotype material. Del Sandlin.

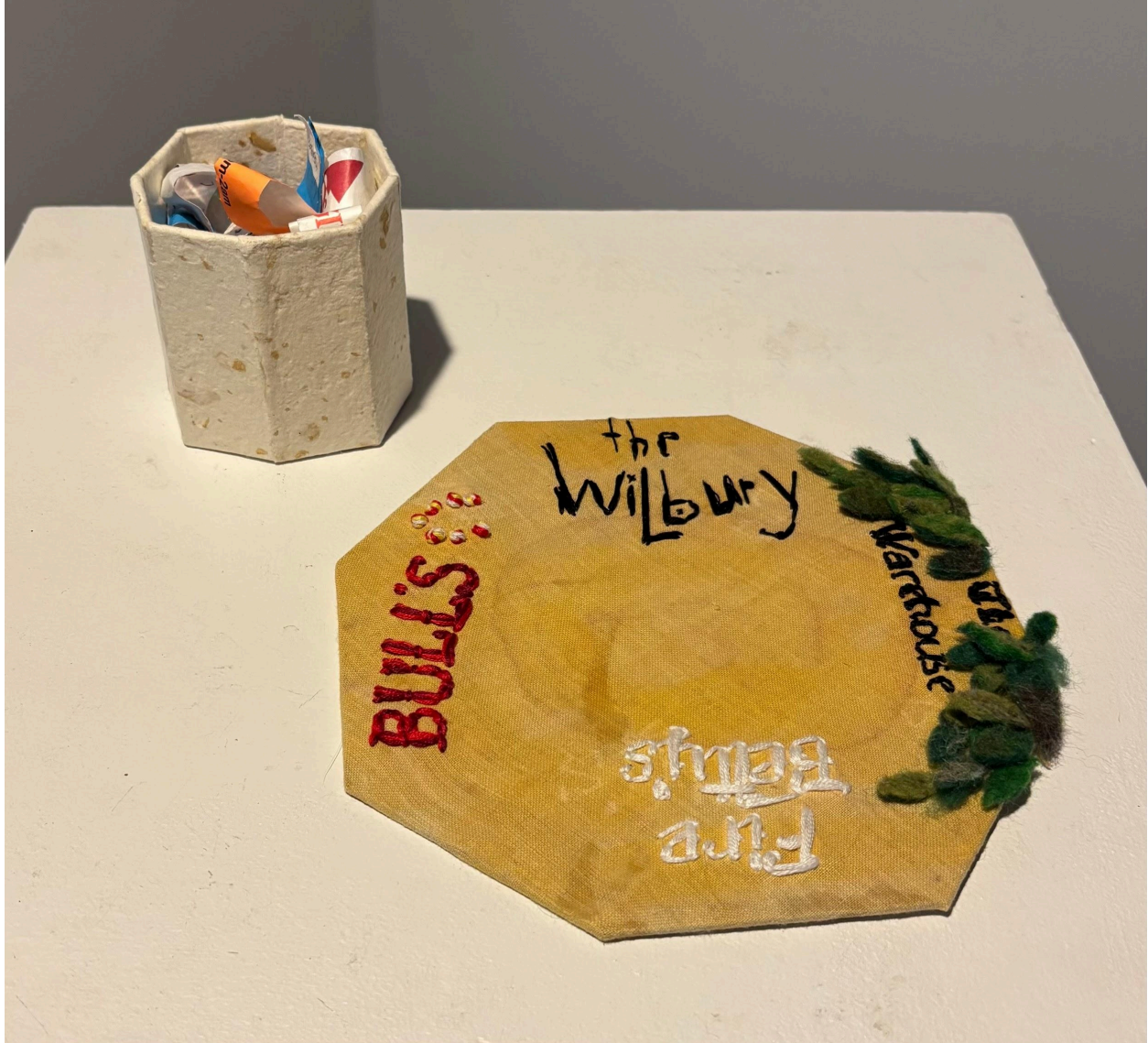


Figure 13. Turmeric Anotype from the book *Bottoms Up*. A solar exposure using linen sheets coated in turmeric anotype liquid (turmeric and rubbing alcohol supernatant). The book contains a glass that holds bar bracelets as well as a coaster underneath. The text of the bars on the coaster matches the text of the original bars, with the felt representing the closed down and overgrown Warehouse that closed while we were still in school. The negative for this piece was done using paper bar bracelets. The exposure time for this was around 1.5 hours on a fully sunny day in Spring 2025, with a clear glass over it to compress the bracelets. After it is exposed, it is rinsed in a solution of Borax and water to produce the golden hue. Del Sandlin.



Figure 14. Attempted Beet Anthotype, from the book *Toys*, linen sheets scraps soaked in beet juice and linoleum prints on the surface done with ink that had beet juice mixed into it. The book forms are stuffed sex toys, with the interior being shredded fabric and shredded paper scraps. Sewn into soft sculptures, each one is still a book. Del Sandlin. Spring 2025.

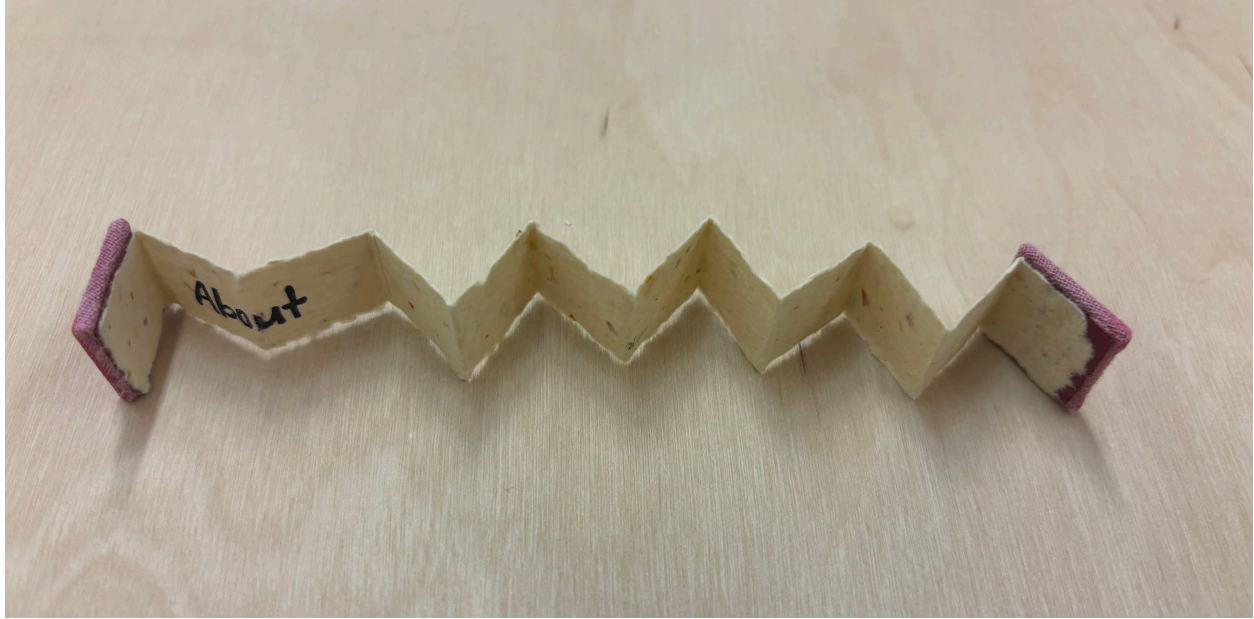


Figure 15. Detail of Accordion fold in *About You* book. The accordion fold allows for a very traditional exploration of a linear narrative. Beet dyed linen covers with an “A” stitched in thread and handmade paper interior with a linoleum print on the inside that says the word “About”. Finished in the Spring of 2026. Del Sandlin

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