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Marvelous Monsters

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Fine Arts degree in Visual Arts

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Abstract

This Master of Fine Arts (MFA) Thesis Dossier, together with the MFA Thesis Exhibition *Marvelous Monsters* (2021), presents: a Comprehensive Artist Statement; Practice Documentation; a Case Study on Canadian artist David Altmejd; a Bibliography; and my curriculum vitae. The Practice Documentation section of this dossier highlights key pieces of my creative explorations over my time in the Visual Arts Department at Western University as well as photographic documentation of *Marvelous Monsters*. Taken as a whole, this MFA Thesis Dossier explores and situates immersive digital installation studio practice with research into beauty, abjection, monstrosity, hybridity, Surrealism, and speculative worlding as guided by key thinkers and artists (including Edmund Burke, William Hogarth, Mary Shelley, André Breton, Max Ernst, Julia Kristeva, David Altmejd, Rona Pondick, and Kelly Richardson).

Keywords

abjection; Altmejd, David; automatism; beauty; the bizarre; Breton, André; bodies; Burke, Edmund; Ernst, Max; food; Frankenstein; grotesque; Hogarth, William; hybridity; Kristeva, Julia; monstrosity; perceptions of reality; Pondick, Rona; Richardson, Kelly; Shelley, Mary; speculative worlding; Surrealism.

Summary for Lay Audience

This Master of Fine Arts (MFA) Thesis Dossier, together with the MFA Thesis Exhibition *Marvelous Monsters* (2021), presents: a Comprehensive Artist Statement; Practice Documentation; a Case Study on Canadian artist David Altmejd; a Bibliography; and my curriculum vitae. The Practice Documentation section of this dossier highlights key pieces of my studio work in the Visual Arts Department at Western University as well as photographs of the *Marvelous Monsters* exhibition. Altogether, this MFA Thesis Dossier looks at ideas of beauty and ugliness through concepts of monsters, bodies, and other worlds.

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Introduction

My creative and imaginative self has always been intrigued with unconventional, strange, and eccentric aesthetics in and around dubious artwork. And I have constantly been striving to obtain an aesthetically driven dark happiness within my work and research. This journey through academia and my Master of Fine Arts degree has solidified and uncovered a more profound understanding within myself of the significance of seeking a purer sense of self-expression and creativity through objects, relationships between objects, and speculative imagery through unique worlding practices. My understanding of my work once lacked an in-depth consideration between particular oppositions that were always presenting themselves across my practice. There was a division between my perfectionist tendencies to make anything and everything neat, pretty, and tidy while still striving for dark emotions. This thesis dossier and body of work aims not to reject these qualities in my work but to appreciate this division and bridge this gap without fully closing it.

This Master of Fine Arts (MFA) thesis dossier contains three chapters in tandem with my thesis exhibition, which will take place at the Artlab Gallery at Western University from June 25th through July 16th, 2021. Three core chapters comprise this thesis dossier: a Comprehensive Artist Statement; the Practice Documentation; and a Case Study on Canadian sculptor David Altmejd. The dossier, along with my thesis exhibition, is a complete embodiment of my overall research and practice throughout the duration of my MFA candidacy here at Western University.

The first chapter is my Comprehensive Artist Statement that is broken down into three main subsections, each of which encompasses a critical exploration into my marvellously monstrous body of work, as well as a conclusion that explains why *marvelous monsters*. The first subsection, “Romantic Surrealism,” examines the influential movement of Surrealism and the

precursory Romantic art and literature that inspired the Surrealists' ideas and methodologies. The second subsection, "Beautiful Abjection," consists of a brief investigation into the seemingly oppositional forces of abjection and of beauty as well as the theoretical results that can occur between them. The third subsection, "The (Post)Human Body," touches on the human body, the posthuman body, and how human and animal hybrids function as monstrous and marvelous bodies that exemplify a complexity of dualisms and of oppositions. This first chapter ends with a Conclusion, "So, Why '*Marvelous Monsters*'?" that explains my choice of thesis work, research, and exhibition title through etymology and the cultural afterlife of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

The second chapter is my Practice Documentation, which includes photographic documentation of selected pieces throughout my MFA degree and thesis exhibition. The documented work consists of sculpture, video, and installation as well as immersive mergings of all three. My Practice Documentation is accompanied by formal information as well as a brief description of how the individual works fit and are situated within my overall concepts, themes, and research.

The third chapter is my Case Study that presents an in-depth exploration of Canadian artist David Altmejd. Titled, "Bodybuilders, Werewolves, and Giants, Oh My: David Altmejd's Bodily Transformations and the Potentiality/Infinity of the Object," this case study focuses on three key reoccurring figures within his practice—the Bodybuilder; the Werewolf; and the Giant (oh my!)—and discusses Altmejd's unapologetic creations/monsters both in and of themselves as well as via their respective similarities that inspire, push, and parallel my body of work and research. His fascination with energy and potential that he gifts to his sculptures through their unfinishedness and their saturation of infinity is how I conclude this Case Study and gesture to the menagerie of Altmejd's practice that showcases and holds the parts and pieces of humanity.

Chapter 1

Comprehensive Artist Statement

“The marvelous is not the same in every period of history: it partakes in some obscure way of a sort of general revelation only the fragments of which come down to us: they are the romantic *ruins*, the modern *mannequin*, or any other symbol capable of affecting the human sensibility for a period of time.”

-André Breton, *Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924)¹

As Romantic Period poet, painter, and visionary William Blake once wrote, “Opposition is true Friendship.”² I am interested in art objects that present aesthetics in their subtle and extreme opposites that evoke both physically and psychologically visceral feelings of tension through dynamic, antithetical relationships which may produce ambivalence or confusion. What does this say about a work that can represent in itself two distinct feelings that seek different, even opposing, sensations? And how might methods of automatism, material choices, or unknown and irresolute conceptual beginnings complexify a work of art?

My studio practice involves the creation of sculptural objects that provoke an emotional response in viewers to contrasting effects. I explore the extent to which one can relate to visual experiences that elicit an emotional and adverse continuum of sensations by investigating the (post)human body to consider a viewer’s reactions when faced with familiar—yet deconstructed—vessels in which they, too, reside. I present the viewer with a dilemma of contrasting signifiers within the work from which they consciously discern and negotiate what their relationship to the work is. Additionally, they may unconsciously succumb to their individual physical reflexes and natural bodily reactions. As the foundational core of my work

¹ André Breton, “Manifesto of Surrealism,” 1924, in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Detroit: Ann Arbor Paperbacks, The University of Michigan Press, 2008), 16 – italics original.

² William Blake, “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,” 1793, in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (New York: Anchor Books, 1988), 42.

and practice, the fragmented body always has a presence in some shape or form. And whether it is (re)enforced by teeth, hair, heads, spines, and/or limbs, the synecdoche is central, even (or especially) overtly abstracted.

The most frequent synecdoche of the human body I use in my work is the spinal column, and I investigate how it embodies perceptions of complexity, beauty, abjection, and the grotesque. I build spinal pillars by fusing together steel wire and modelling clay, and I thread the hand-crafted vertebrae and discs down the columns one by one. This process of metonymically making a (post)human body in my work is a direct reference to one of the Titans in Greek mythology: Prometheus, the trickster who makes mortal man with clay from the earth. The piecing together of these vertebrae alludes as well to another Promethean *and* Romantic Period figure, Mary Shelley, whose gothic tale *Frankenstein: or, the Modern Prometheus* (1818) has her central maker Dr. Victor Frankenstein sewing and stitching together the Creature's body from body parts found in graveyards—multiple parts fusing together to become one.

Additionally, human vertebrae evoke ideas of death, temporal decay, preservation, and abjection when isolated from the encompassing suit of skin, muscle, and organs. When their typical curvature is twisted, spiralled, and pushed into a surrealistic realm, they may not necessarily be identifiable. I create overstressed and exaggerated spinal columns that move and curl powerfully, organically, and surreally. They are recognizably human vertebrae, but the human element is confused and almost removed as the hints of a speculative evolutionary occurrence or anthropocentric reality set in. Ultimately, I view my sculptural creations as both monstrous and marvelous, as wonderfully frightening. And while I may complement and even animate my sculptures with the spark of digital technology (i.e., digital photography, projection, and/or animation) and exhibit them together, each piece exemplifies the same overall goal of my

practice. I want my work to be a mirror of what it is like to be alive. I want the viewer to connect and engage with my work to confront their understanding of their own embodiment and of their own lived experiences *as* bodies and *in* bodies.

This Comprehensive Artist Statement first explores Surrealism and its precursors in the Romantic Period and how together they influence my process and methodology. It then discusses oppositional relationships between beauty and abjection and how they show up in my practice via synecdoches of the human body. The final section engages with the posthuman body and its uncanniness, hybridity, and grotesqueness. I conclude with a brief overview of why I titled my thesis *Marvelous Monsters* which highlights how I draw from a constellation of interconnected artists, movements, writers, and philosophers across the last three-hundred years to situate my practice today.

Romantic Surrealism

Artists and writers can attach surrealist ideologies to any work that may present even mere hints of visual qualities exhibiting ideas of the bizarre, of the weird, and/or of anything to do with dream worlds. This overused catchall has become, in many ways, a default for some artists and writers to situate their work and make sense of it. This particular observation changed when I encountered André Breton's first *Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924), in which he presents an alternative way of thinking about our perceptions of reality and respective imaginations.

Surrealism is not an escape from reality, and it certainly does not just exist in dream worlds, but rather surrealism is a progressive force within reality as we know it. It reveals an enhanced reality that aims at nothing less than the total transformation of the way people think by shattering barriers between inner and outer worlds. Surrealism is a fusion of consciousness and

unconsciousness in order to be freed of logic and reason.³ Although Breton's first manifesto concentrates on literature and poetry in particular, it is how he defines the movement that resonates with me, my process, and my work. Breton asserts that surrealism is:

Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express—verbally, by means of the written word, *or in any other manner*—the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.⁴

This methodology of automatism has transformed my objects and practice, for it has liberated me from my perfectionist and self-restrictive tendencies. I entered my MFA at Western University firmly as a digital media artist working with animation, experimental video, and photography. Digital media, for me, was an immediate passion and vessel for my work. However, the repetitious nature of this medium inadvertently produced practices within my creation process that fostered tendencies to overcorrect, overthink, and fix any and all unwanted missteps. During my two-year programme at Western, my media focus shifted to the creation of physical sculptural objects that exist in our material world, which has resulted in work that has natural and at times unfixable flaws. There are no spot-healing-brush tools nor video editing options for real-world physical sculptures. The expected blemishes within the work became accepted blemishes, and, consequently, my deep-rooted perfectionisms began to collapse.

My sculptural objects have progressed from preconceived ideas of their outcomes to visualized forms of my unmitigated imagination. This process permits my chosen materials to speak for themselves while enriching and empowering the works with limited or minimal influence and direction. For example, a series of sculptures in my body of work relies strictly on the pouring of epoxy resin, mixed in no precise tint, which ultimately leaves the final smothered

³ Amy Dempsey, *Styles, Schools, and Movements: The Essential Encyclopaedic Guide to Modern Art*, 2002 (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004), 153.

⁴ Breton, 26 – emphasis added.

objects to the force of chance. It is a fortuitous method of creation that alleviates a complete sense of control, and my work then embodies more of a sense of individuality and of my imagination. It is an intuitive process that relies on the relationship and fusion between rational and irrational thought without a strict focus on intent. The material creates pathways, mixings, and intersections that can never be recreated in its totality, for the multi-coloured resin flows and mingles in a truly one-time-only assemblage. My once conceptual and premeditated objects surrender now to an unorganized and chaotic system that resists self-doubt and assigns a view of equality onto the dichotomy of my inner and outer conscious states. Breton declares, “Imagination alone offers me some intimation of what can be, and this is enough to remove to some slight degree the terrible injunction; enough, too, to allow me to devote myself to it without fear of making a mistake.”⁵ In this exact sense, my resolved sculptures are creations of my lived experiences through my consciousness and repressed experiences that hide within my unconscious. It is in this liminal space between two worlds that my work exists and flourishes. It is not one state or the other, but rather two sides of one single entity, of one single perception.

A key influence in my work is the work of Max Ernst, a German Surrealist artist who, along with Breton, recognized the Romantic Period as a precursor to Surrealism.⁶ “One theme that runs through Ernst’s entire oeuvre is the forest,” Ingo Borges in their essay on Romanticism and Surrealism writes, “the epitome and atmospheric space of German Romanticism.”⁷ Specifically influential for me and my work is the perception of the forest, which Ernst recognizes as powerful and as having the potential of exposing dualistic and expressive cues of oppositional effects on an individual. Moreover, he connects the hallucinatory qualities a forest

⁵ Breton, 5.

⁶ Ingo Borges, “The Omnipotence of the Dream: Romanticism and Surrealism,” in *Dark Romanticism: From Goya to Max Ernst*, ed. Felix Krämer (Frankfurt: Städel Museum, 2012), 224.

⁷ Borges, 225.

may embody through its dark, busy, and chaotic visual nature to deceptive illusions of the recognizable body, exemplified in his work *They Have Stayed Too Long in the Forest* (1927) and *The Horde* (1927). In these works, the forest and imagination open up a *terra incognita* that presents us with a fusion and hybridity of nature and the body—of creatures that afford angst and wonder and are at once both marvellous and monstrous.

The forest also has a force and intensity (just as an ocean, canyon, mountain, or any magnificent natural space) that exemplifies the aesthetic philosophies of Edmund Burke (1729-1797), a writer and thinker whose work *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) had a profound impact on the Romantic Period. Burke asserts that the sublime is one of the strongest emotions that our minds are capable of feeling. A feeling that operates analogously to terror. But when we view this terror from a distance (i.e., when there is no immediate threat of death), a sense of delight can exist parallel to that fear—intense oppositional sensations that exist synchronously.⁸ In Ernst's work, the forest epitomizes Burke's theory and often appears in Ernst's practice. Examples of such work are *The Forest* (1927) and *Forest and Dove* (1927), both depict a tall wall of trees that seems inviting yet suspicious, terrifying yet intriguingly complex, and harsh yet attractive. Ernst developed and utilized the Surrealist's *grattage* technique for these works, which transfers the rough texture of the trees and natural landscape to his oil paintings.⁹ The grattage method in this work is also a form of Breton's automatism, for the textures are unexpected and produced without conscious thought. In *Forest and Dove*, Ernst depicts a small bird (which represents himself) engulfed in trees of a

⁸ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 1757, ed. David Womersley (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 86.

⁹ "Forest and Dove," Tate, accessed December 8, 2020, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/ernst-forest-and-dove-t00548>.

forest (which for Surrealists inspired by the Romantics represents the imagination) and illuminates the binary impressions of enchantment and terror.

I explore and experiment within my research and practice how I can deliver such similar dualisms within one object/installation—one that can be at once handsome and grotesque, beautiful and abject, charming and bizarre. A subsequent approach I take is to complement them with digital media. This multi-media methodology amplifies the dualistic potentials of my objects by allowing them to move and animate within speculative, surreal, and digital environments—environments that also at once feel reminiscent of the past yet imaginative of the future. Working in this same space of a kind of future anterior, contemporary Canadian artist Kelly Richardson, who is interested in the Anthropocene, works with digital technologies to create hyper-real landscapes that illuminate our impact on the environment. An inspiration and influence since the early days of my practice, Richardson creates immersive installations that engulf viewers in her uncanny multi-channel projections of landscapes. Richardson’s “landscape, often associated with Romantic poets and Painters, is pure Nature, seemingly without a trace of humanity,” and is “at once engaging and disturbing.”¹⁰ Engaging and disturbing, like the enchantment and terror of Ernst’s forests, which are also akin to the Romantic “pure Nature” in Richardson’s work.

Richardson’s digital installations guide her viewers into an experience that delivers a multiple sensory response. The use and addition of digital technology complements my sculptures through the documentation of the original object, its animation, and the digital manipulation, multiplication, and projection into the gallery space. This way of exhibiting work situates viewers directly into a digitally-visualized (un)consciousness and provides an

¹⁰ Kelly Gordon, *The Cinema Effect: Illusion, Reality, and the Moving Image* (Washington: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, 2008), 76.

overwhelming sense of the Burkean sublime. This sensibility draws parallels to Ernst and his feelings about the forest. Borges writes on Ernst and the “[m]ixed feelings” of “delight and consternation” Ernst had “the first time he entered a forest” and

what the Romantics termed “the Nature feeling.” The wonderful sense of breathing free in the great outdoors and yet the oppressive sense of being surrounded on all sides by hostile trees. Of simultaneously being outside and in, free and imprisoned. Freighted with fairy tales, myths, dangers, and mysteries, the forest fascinated Ernst as a dream landscape.¹¹

For Ernst, the physical presence of stepping into a forest embodies the same type of experience that I offer viewers. Just as Richardson’s installation work engulfs her viewers, I construct a space of open potential and transcendence. This metaphysical experience unlocks doors into an unreal, surreal landscape with sensibilities that proposes an intrusive type of astonishment—a feeling of being welcomed yet simultaneously of trespassing in this (un)familiar space.

Beautiful Abjection

Fragments of the body can represent ideas of the human body as a whole and can portray both abjection and beauty. Body parts such as bones, hair, teeth, heads, tongues, and nipples each make their own statements and have their own symbolisms. They are, as I employ them in my sculptures and practice, iconographic of William Hogarth’s viewpoints on beauty and of Julia Kristeva’s philosophies on abjection. They are at once beautiful and abject, and it is through these two affective embodiments that I am exploring what it means when oppositional forces exist simultaneously in a singular object/installation. To what extent can they exist simultaneously in a singular object? If we stray too far away from the abject by attaching beauty signifiers, then is the abject dissolved and absent? And if we stray too far away from the beautiful by attaching abject signifiers, then is the beauty dissolved and absent?

¹¹ Borges, 225.

In the mid-eighteenth century, in work that was anthropocentrism *avant la lettre*, artist and writer William Hogarth (1697-1764) theorized, visualized, and published a book on beauty—*The Analysis of Beauty* (1753)—and examined how the human body epitomizes the highest degree of beauty and grace in our natural world. Hogarth highlights that the human skeleton is magnificent, for it is rich in lines that emanate variety and complexity.¹² Although he does find that a straight line has a certain beauty, it is in the “waving line” that Hogarth is most interested as he asserts that it is “a line more productive of beauty than any of the former, as in flowers, and other forms of the ornamental kind: for which reason we shall call it the line of beauty.”¹³ This *line of beauty* that Hogarth coins is the serpentine line or the S-curve (as he also terms it), and he suggests that it lets the viewer follow its movement in an enjoyable, effortless, and organic way.¹⁴ The human body, for Hogarth, is mostly made up of these serpentine lines—especially when the skin is removed and its muscle “parts are too distinctly traced by the eye, for that intricate delicacy which is necessary to the utmost beauty.”¹⁵ My spinal work displays this type of beauty by presenting an enhanced visual complexity through anatomically exaggerated sizes with a higher volume of waving, serpentine, S-curve lines and a surfeit of vertebrae. This familiar and relatively symmetrical (but asymmetrical by nature) form is expanded further from familiarity and, *à la* Hogarth, begs the viewer to become more engaged.

But it is not just in *beauty* that these vertebrae are attractive; it is also in *grace* that I intuitively place and secure them. Burke—a contemporary of Hogarth—defines *gracefulness*:

an idea not very different from beauty; it consists in much of the same things. Gracefulness is an idea belonging to *posture* and *motion*. In both these, to be graceful, it is requisite that there be no appearance of difficulty; there is required a small inflexion of

¹² William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty*, 1753, ed. Richard Woodfield (Yorkshire: The Scolar Press, 1971), 55.

¹³ Hogarth, 38.

¹⁴ Hogarth, 55.

¹⁵ Hogarth, 56.

the body; and a composure of the parts, in such a manner, as not to incumber each other, nor to appear divided by sharp and sudden angles.¹⁶

The organic motion and graceful twists and bows of the spinal work and epoxy resin pours embellish the element of beauty as the eye can follow its vertebral path with ease and satisfaction. *Ease* and *satisfaction*, in a very literal Burkean sense¹⁷, equal *beauty*. Not lost on me is the natural flowing path of the S-curve that Hogarth finds seemingly eternal—he notes that this eye-catching curvature even precedes his own writing in 1753, going back to Michelangelo himself who “in an oracle-like manner” delivered¹⁸ and even recommended this line.¹⁹

The spinal column is also “regarded as being virtually a second brain serving most of the organs below the head,”²⁰ and the “backbone provides a path and a protective rampart” that our bodies need regardless of shape, size, or curvature.²¹ It is a fundamental internal highway of signals and a foundational structure that allows our bodies to live. The corporeal existence of a spinal cord absent of the temporal body is a blatant representation of death and signifier of the Kristevan abject. A once existing body that has succumbed to time, accident, violence, or disease. This realization might incite that inner (visceral) emotive response of abjection that, for Kristeva, is “[a] massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathesome.”²² She states that “[t]he abject has only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to *I*,”²³ and that “‘I’ am in the process of becoming an other at the expense of my own death. During the course

¹⁶ Burke, 153 – italics original.

¹⁷ Burke, 153 – italics original.

¹⁸ Hogarth, vii.

¹⁹ Hogarth, xvii.

²⁰ Andreas Vesalius, *On the Fabric of the Human Body*, 1543, trans. William Frank Richardson in collaboration with John Burd Carman (San Francisco: Norman Publishing, 1998), 140.

²¹ Vesalius, 140.

²² Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, 1980, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 2.

²³ Kristeva, 1 – italics original.

in which ‘I’ become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit.”²⁴ I understand the abject as an uncontrolled human reaction such as fear, terror, or vomit, and anything that is cast away once used, used up, or no longer needed—i.e., vomit, spit, and shit. The abject creates tension or a dilemma that threatens our understanding of reality, unlike the expanded reality the Surrealists emphasize. However, just as Surrealism straddles the two worlds of the conscious and unconscious, abjection also situates itself in an in-between state or liminal space (i.e., life and death, or health and decay). And just as a corpse (meta)physically exists on the border of life and death, my art objects exist in the liminal spaces between abject and beauty, the grotesque and the beautiful, and the bizarre and the beautiful.

Two dichotomous (beautiful/abject) synecdoches of the human body I play with in my *Cuisine* series (2020) are hair and nipples. Hair can mark beauty by distinct aesthetic choices, hairstyles, haircuts, healthy, shiny, youthful colour, etc. Yet, it can also create visceral feelings of repulsion and disgust if found absent of the body and in places and spaces uncanny to it (i.e., in our food, or in bathtub drains). And, if that hair is used for a wig or brush, it once again becomes beautiful. I position all of my sculptures in this continuum of abject and beauty with a little more openness of the abject to include notions of the grotesque and the bizarre.²⁵ A more unnatural separation of the body fragment from the body (unlike cut hair) within my body of work are disunited or isolated nipples which introduce and induce vastly and viscerally different connotations of merely just cutting. The severed body part is another conceit in my work that consistently presents itself in unconventional ways that form my surreal work and situate it in the

²⁴ Kristeva, 3.

²⁵ According to the *OED*, *grotesque* is “[a] kind of decorative painting or sculpture, consisting of representations of portions of human and animal forms, fantastically combined and interwoven with foliage and flowers,” while *bizarre* is anything “[a]t variance with the standard of ideal beauty or regular form; grotesque, irregular.” In my subsection “The (Post)Human Body” below, I discuss the grotesque and bizarre more in my practice and with Mary Russo’s *The Female Grotesque* (1994).

realm of the bizarre. For example, in *Aereolios* (2020), a white bowl full of detached human nipples floating in a milky, pinkish-white liquid resembles a cereal-type of meal meant for human consumption. At a distance, this may seem like a typical meal one may have once been in the presence of – titularly, it recalls General Mills’ Cheerios cereal, too. But, I want viewers to inspect more closely and spend more time with this sculpture so that they might become unsettled and even sickened at the thought of bodily harm and perhaps even cannibalism when they consider the idea of consuming severed nipples as part of their (healthy) breakfast. Or, viewers might be uncomfortably aroused, as thoughts of titillation and foreplay cross their mind. The nipple can symbolize beauty through the naked body (exposed nipples), the sexualized body (biting nipples), the maternal body (sucking nipples), or the augmented body (pierced nipples). These four bodies overlap and intersect, and out of these short-circuits, the abject emerges.

Kristeva’s abject can awaken visceral feelings within us, and it is in these feelings that we understand a fundamental sense of our own identities. For instance, if we were to encounter a corpse or anything that foregrounds the abject, it presents a predicament for our understanding of our existence and reality. We recognize the corpse as something that used to be alive. It exists in the liminal space of life and death. And we as mortal beings decidedly reject the corpse. We are alive and recognize through the fear of death which side of the edge we survive on. It is in the discarded waste that exits our bodies, too, that we understand our aliveness. Kristeva asserts that:

These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit—*cadere*, cadaver.²⁶

²⁶ Kristeva, 3.

Uncannily, Kristeva and Hogarth project completely opposing powers onto the human cadaver's form and figure. Kristeva uses the cadaver as a perfect example of abjection²⁷ while Hogarth finds its beauty to have “superior beauty to all others, and, at the same time, that its beauty proceeds from those [serpentine] lines” the muscles and bones deliver.²⁸

Similar to these two oppositional estimations of the cadaver, Surrealism sees the artificial mannequin's physicality akin to that of the lifeless body—at the same time uncanny yet beautiful. Beauty is characterized through the mannequin by advertising what stereotypically idealistic bodies are, yet its uncanny nature is conveyed through the uncertainty of the animate and the inanimate. For Surrealists, the mannequin violates the “boundaries of alive and not alive.”²⁹ It exists in the liminal space of life and death where Kristeva situates the abject, yet it invokes the idolization of the perfect body that is, for Hogarth, the most beautiful form. Through the mannequin, for Surrealism, as with the cadaver for Hogarth and Kristeva, these extreme counterparts can coexist within one object, and a viewer can experience both simultaneously. This is the tension-filled synthesis that intrigues me and drives my work and practice.

Ultimately in my work, I ask: To what extent is it possible for these visceral emotions and ideas of beauty to be experienced and realized when the materials within my sculptural work are artificial (just as the mannequin is) and only synthetically visualize depictions of abjection/grotesque and beauty? Visceral feelings are present and constantly moving across the continuum of these two opposing elements. I am interested in distinct reactions that the work produces—whether this may be repulsion, awe, an odd unification of both, or each respectively neutralized by/with its opposition or even a fluctuating, ambivalent in-between/neither. Andreas

²⁷ Kristeva, 3.

²⁸ Hogarth, 57.

²⁹ Dempsey, 154.

Vesalius, the sixteenth-century anatomist, physicist, and author of *On the Fabric of the Human Body* (1543), notes that “pictures of the parts of the body will give particular pleasure to these people who do not always have the opportunity of dissecting a human body,”³⁰ which is akin to Hogarth’s notions of beauty in the body and in my work, for my sculptures only portray synthetic representations. The artificial materiality of my work replaces Vesalius’ écorchés as the spectator is not in the presence of these corpses/cadavers and an opportunity to locate beauty (or entertainment) emerges. Vesalius also states that if these same people “do have the opportunity [to dissect a human body], [they] are by nature so squeamish.”³¹ The physical replications of body parts in my sculptures place the viewer in the presence of a three-dimensional object that pushes the object off a piece of paper in an anatomical textbook to allow moments of individual reflection of liveliness through the objects’ (un/sur)realness.

The (Post)Human Body

My work and research are influenced by and draw from contemporary artists and thinkers who reimagine the human body, such as Rona Pondick, David Altmejd, and Donna Haraway. Rona Pondick, a New York-based sculptor, in her series of hybrid work, blurs the line between human and animal as well as between human and nature. Examples of such work are *Dog (Yellow Stainless Steel)* (1998-2001) and *Monkeys* (1998-2001), which exhibit unusual mixtures of human and animal heads and body parts. Also, her *Dwarfed White Jack* (2010-12) displays a recognizable tree in which human heads replace the natural buds of leaves or flowers on the branches. When asked about the aesthetic presence of grotesque hybrids in her work, Pondick

³⁰ Vesalius, lvi.

³¹ Vesalius, lvi.

describes that she casts parts of her own body in a process she relates to death masks.³² She finds that the removal from the body is intense and much more palpable to give her work a strong physical and psychological presence.³³ Moreover, Pondick emphasizes that when she marries human and animal parts together, it makes her think of mythology (Egyptian, Greek, and Roman), the artistic work of Goya and Bosch, and the literary-filmic monsters of Dracula, Frankenstein, and cyborgs.³⁴ In a similar vein, New York-based Canadian artist David Altmejd redefines how the familiar body can create power and potential within his own sculptural work and practice. Altmejd uses and reuses the image of the werewolf, a fictional gothic monster with a body that is at once both human and wolf to us as viewers. This merging that disturbs asks viewers to question the body as monstrous otherness and puts them in a position that asks them to understand their own bodies and how they exist within them.³⁵ Both of these artists indirectly showcase an idea that Donna Haraway calls “human uniqueness,”³⁶ which she uses to expose the detrimental implications of an artificial hierarchy in which we position our species at the top—i.e., anthropocentrism.

In her essay “A Manifesto for Cyborgs” (1985), Haraway uses the posthuman body of the cyborg to represent liberation from restrictive perceptions (similar to, as I see it, the Surrealists and their deviation from society’s linear and obstructive views of reality) as well as liberation from social constructs that instill specific groupings we as human beings have been placed in

³² Margherita Artoni, “Interview with Rona Pondick,” *American Dream* (Rome: Valentina Bonomo Roma, 2011), 36, accessed December 30, 2020, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/584ec10b3e00bea87312cae9/t/594e9e7ce3df282d44a9217b/1498324612584/ronapondick_americandream2011.pdf

³³ Artoni, 36.

³⁴ Artoni, 36-38.

³⁵ Further discussion on David Altmejd and his practice is in my MFA Thesis – Dossier Stream: Case Study, “Bodybuilders, Werewolves, and Giants, Oh My: David Altmejd’s Bodily Transformations and the Potentiality/Infinity of the Object.”

³⁶ Donna Haraway, “A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s,” in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, by Donna Haraway (New York: Routledge, 1985), 68.

(and place ourselves in), such as class, gender, race, and/or religion. Haraway approaches this idea by deconstructing particular values that we have placed on our own species that create concrete barriers between us and everything else in our natural world—effectively establishing ourselves unique as humans. A fundamental characteristic in Haraway’s model is the breaking down of these barriers and/or the blurring of the regarded distinctions between human and animal—or, in other words, an expulsion of human uniqueness.³⁷ As evolution suggests, the human is not distinctly separate from the animal but rather an extension. Until we value animals just as much as we value ourselves, for example, their importance will always surrender to our own.³⁸ By merging human and animal into the same body—just as Pondick and Altmejd do, and just as Haraway discusses—I present my viewers with posthuman bodies that attribute equal worth of multiple subjects (human/animal/nature) within one.

This integrative methodology is important for my work and practice as I form sculptures of human hybridity that convey traces of either animal and nature (or both) within their compositions. In this type of chimeric body, I exemplify the embodiment of distinct elements (in this case, particular species) that become and form one entity within the continuum of abjection and beauty. Haraway’s “human uniqueness” and Pondick’s and Altmejd’s representation of this concept is how I understand my objects and how they exist in the world. In the series of sculptures titled *Spines* (2020), I erect spinal columns from sound structures (i.e., a base, the ground, a gallery wall, etc.), which encompass visual cues composed of human, animal, and nature. The spines are recognizably *human* vertebrae, while the organic shapes throughout consist of Hogarth’s serpentine lines and also allude to tentacle-like living creatures. Natural moss literally and figuratively grounds them into a plant-like organism as it surrounds the base of

³⁷ Haraway, 68.

³⁸ Haraway, 67-8.

these pillars. These surreal sculptures fuse their divisions together and create hybrid bodies that evoke a sense of the grotesque and monstrous.

Writer and critical theorist Mary Russo examines notions of the grotesque through the light of gender and feminist theory in her classic work *The Female Grotesque* (1995). For the grotesque, Russo asserts that “[t]he word itself, as almost every writer on the topic feels obliged to mention sooner or later, evokes the cave, the grotto-esque: low, hidden, earthly, dark, material, immanent, visceral.”³⁹ This definition illuminates my practice, for my work exhibits human bone representations that may be considered low, hidden, earthly, and visceral—archaeologically *unearthed*. In Russo’s studies of the cave, she refers to a historical excavation that occurred in fifteenth-century Rome that “represented one of the most significant and controversial retrievals of Roman culture in the Italian Renaissance because what was found there was nearly unrecognizable: a series of strange and mysterious drawings, combining vegetation and animal and human body parts in intricate, intermingled, and fantastical designs.”⁴⁰ These precursor drawings of hybrid-bodies are unearthed and exist in this cave of the grotesque. Russo also connects the idea of the grotesque with otherness and with the image of the monstrous body. For Russo:

The image of the uncanny, grotesque body as doubled, monstrous, deformed, excessive, and abject is not identified with materiality as such, but assumes a division or distance between the discursive fictions of the biological body and the Law. The strange image of the body which emerges in this formulation is never entirely locatable in or apart from the psyche which depends upon the body image as a “prop.”⁴¹

To place the body distinctly away from an anatomically traditional standard of the familiar body presents a posthuman figure that is frequently coupled with the monster’s body and impression—

³⁹ Mary Russo, *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 1.

⁴⁰ Russo, 3.

⁴¹ Russo, 9.

its otherness and said otherness's threat to our notion of humanity. The distorted, twisted, relatable, and marvellous forms in my work readily surrender to this strangeness and confidently marvel in their monstrous disfigurations.

Conclusion: So, Why “*Marvelous Monsters*”?

I have titled my thesis body of work and research *Marvelous Monsters* because my physical sculptures have both marvelous and monstrous qualities—they cause astonishment and wonder as well as fright and disgust (or recoil). Breton asserts that “the marvelous is always beautiful, anything marvelous is beautiful, in fact only the marvelous is beautiful.”⁴² The bodies in my practice are also disproportionate, exaggerated, and uncanny just as Mary Shelley's original beautifully abject body of the Creature in *Frankenstein*. Dr. Frankenstein's creature embodies and symbolizes many of the aspects and endeavours I exhibit in my own creations. I take not only Shelley's visual-textual work as undergirding and illuminating but as instantiations of the very definitions in our language of *monstrosity* and of *marvelousness*. The *OED* locates the etymological roots of the word *monster* in the Old French *mostre*, which means “prodigy, marvel,” and it tracks the evolution (or, de-evolution) of *monster* to the thirteenth century when this prodigal understanding is dropped and the marvelous qualities of the term get applied instead to “disfigured person[s]” and to “misshapen being[s].”⁴³ *Disfigured Persons, or Misshapen Beings*, could also have been apt titles for my thesis research and body of studio work.

The phenomenon and cultural legacy of Frankenstein's Creature is the apex that embodies both marvelousness and monstrosity. Moreover, these two features (that over centuries have become so seemingly distinctive, even antonymous) originate from one cognate and are

⁴² Breton, 14.

⁴³ See “Etymology” for “monster, *n.*, *adv.*, and *adj.*” (*OED*)

reunited within a single body, within the Creature's body, and within my sculptural bodies. My sculptural practice is indexical to Shelley's Creature as it falls within the continuum of Hogarthian beauty and Kristevan abjection.⁴⁴ The Creature also falls in the liminal space of human and other, of life and death, and repulses viewers with its visual presence.⁴⁵ I position my work and research within a nested amalgamation of many historical interconnections, from André Breton and the Surrealists, who were inspired by the Romantic Period's artists and writers, who were in turn inspired by Hogarth's and Burke's analyses of beauty, of the sublime, and of the form and figure. Charles E. Robinson, in his Introduction to the edition of *Frankenstein* that is annotated for scientists, engineers, and creators of all kinds, specifically calls Shelley's novel a "work of art"⁴⁶ and notes that "[i]f creative perception determines existence, then it is fair to say that a novel is just as real or true as a scientific theory—both are constructs by the human imagination to give form to the chaos of our experiences."⁴⁷ My vehicle, instead of scientific theory or a novel, is my studio art and practice, and my work, with my surrealist methodology, gives form to the chaos of my experiences.

⁴⁴ Shelley writes as Victor describing the Creature: "His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful!—Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness" (42).

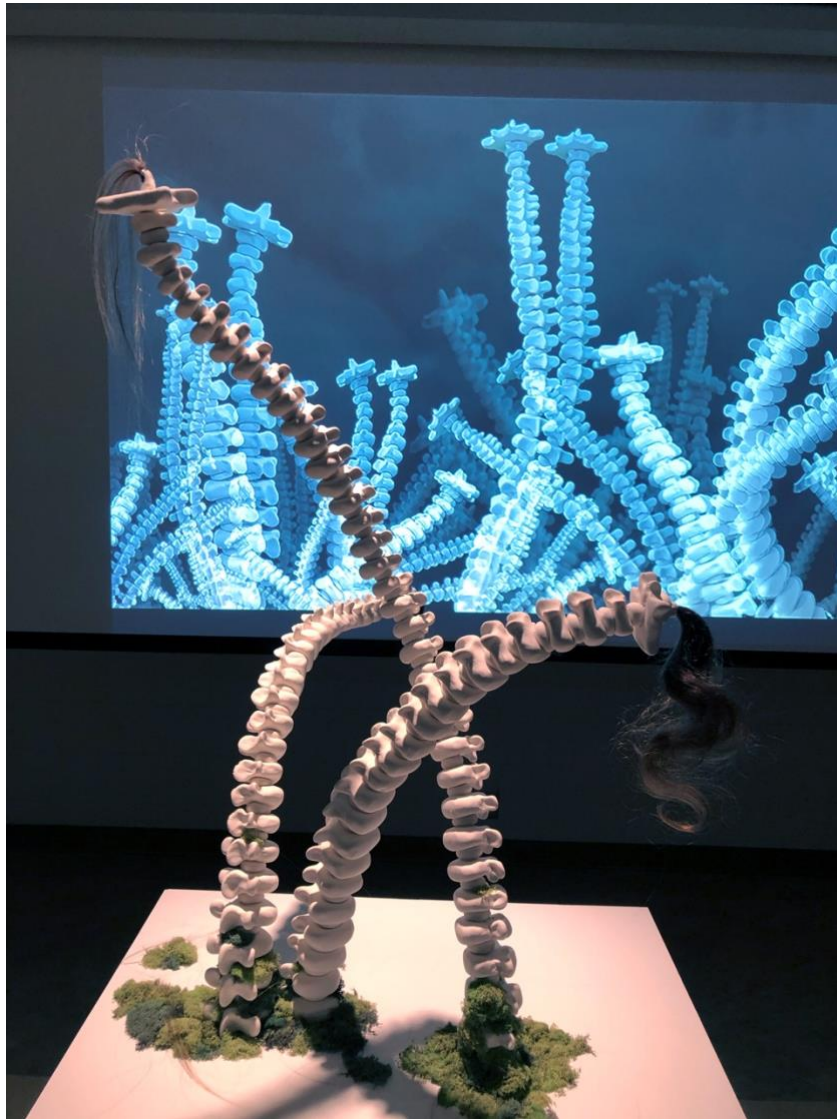
⁴⁵ Shelley writes as the Creature reflecting on how the De Lacey children reacted upon seeing him: "At that instant the cottage door was opened, and Felix, Safie, and Agatha entered. Who can describe their horror and consternation on beholding me? Agatha fainted; and Safie, unable to attend to her friend, rushed out of the cottage" (113).

⁴⁶ Charles E. Robinson, "Introduction," in *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus: Annotated for Scientists, Engineers, and Creators of All Kinds*, eds. David H. Guston, Ed Finn, and Jason Scott Robert (London: The MIT Press, 2017), xxxi.

⁴⁷ Robinson, xxxi.

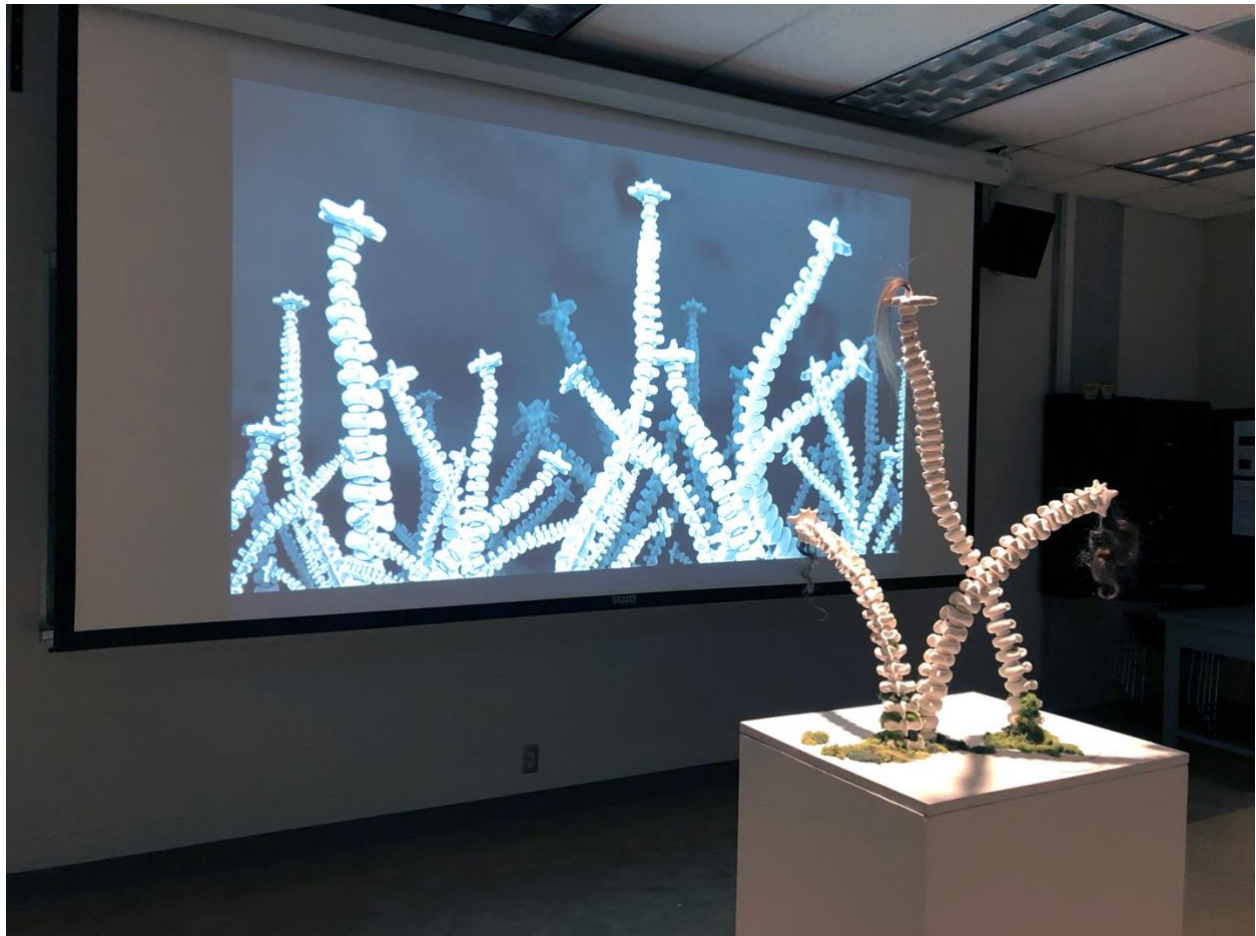
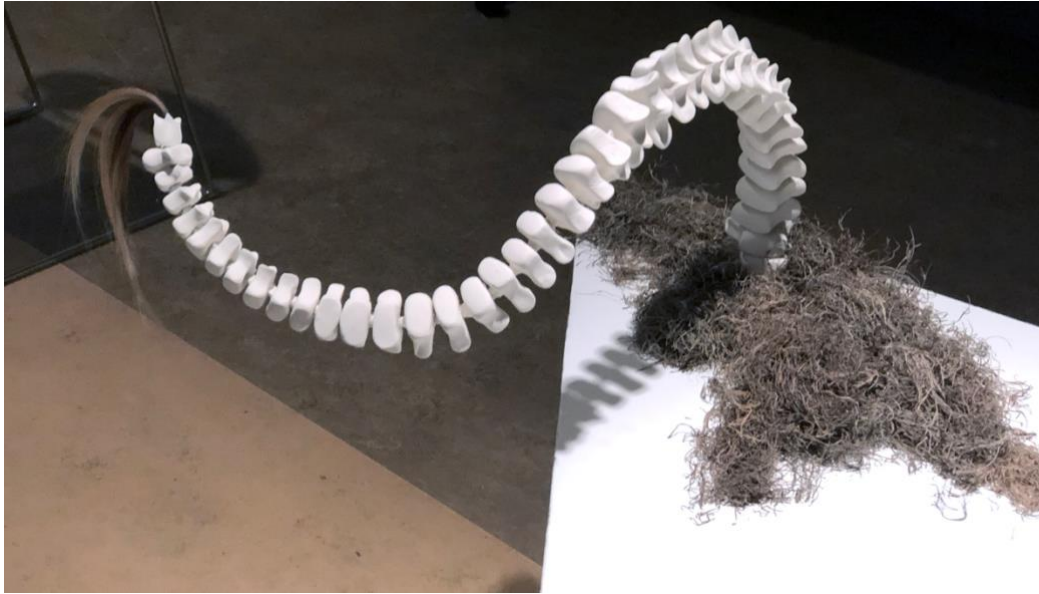
Chapter 2

Practice Documentation



Spines #1 (*Spines Series*), 2020. Clay, moss, human hair, steel wire.
Sculptural installation with digital projection. Loop.

This spinal work exemplifies the posthuman shift and also the turning point in my research and practice from a previous focus on digitally manufactured worlds into physical, sculptural objects that highlight Haraway's theoretical approach into the cyborg. It blurs boundaries between human and animal as well as between the physical and non-physical. The clay vertebrae are beaded onto structurally sound wire, and they visually and cryptically simulate simultaneously a triply-hybrid human-animal-floral figure—a body that eradicates the hierarchy of human uniqueness.





Spines #6 and #7 (Spines Series), 2020. Plywood, acrylic paint, moss, steel wire, clay. Mixed media sculptures. 48" H x 24" W x 18" D.





Carnal Cadaver (Spines Series), 2021. Clay, steel wire, moss, chicken wire.
Mixed media sculpture. 63" H x 12" W x 14" D.



Tongues #2 (*Tongues Series*), 2020. Plywood, acrylic paint, clay, gloss medium. Sculpture. 24" H x 24" W.

The tongue is an organ that exists simultaneously inside and outside of our bodies. It is that in-between state of being that parallels my work and research of the liminal space between abjection and beauty. Not only does the tongue have an association with saliva (which is abject in its own right), but the visual aesthetic creates an uncanny reaction within the viewer as it references horror and the grotesque by visualizing a wall of severed tongues with a yet-to-be-filled space above for the potential of more to come. Where are these tongues coming from? Whom did they belong to?





Bubblicious (Resin Series), 2021. Bubble gum, epoxy resin, synthetic hair, rope, plastic cutlery, aluminum can tab, synthetic pearls, clay, Styrofoam, acrylic paint, paper. Mixed media sculpture. 18" H x 23" W x 4 ½" D.

This series of resin work relies on the making-sense of an irrational process and outcome of pouring resin with no desired (and no controllable) result intended. The complete one-off outcome of this automatic technique is an initial source of meaning for me, and I rationally make choices to resolve the work through the unexpected communication between me and the work as the resin moves, thickens, and ultimately hardens. This methodology is analogous to the fundamental Surrealist technique of both Grattage and Frottage that Max Ernst developed in the early twentieth century to produce beginnings of work without conscious thought. The work and materials speak for themselves and subtly dictate what they will become.

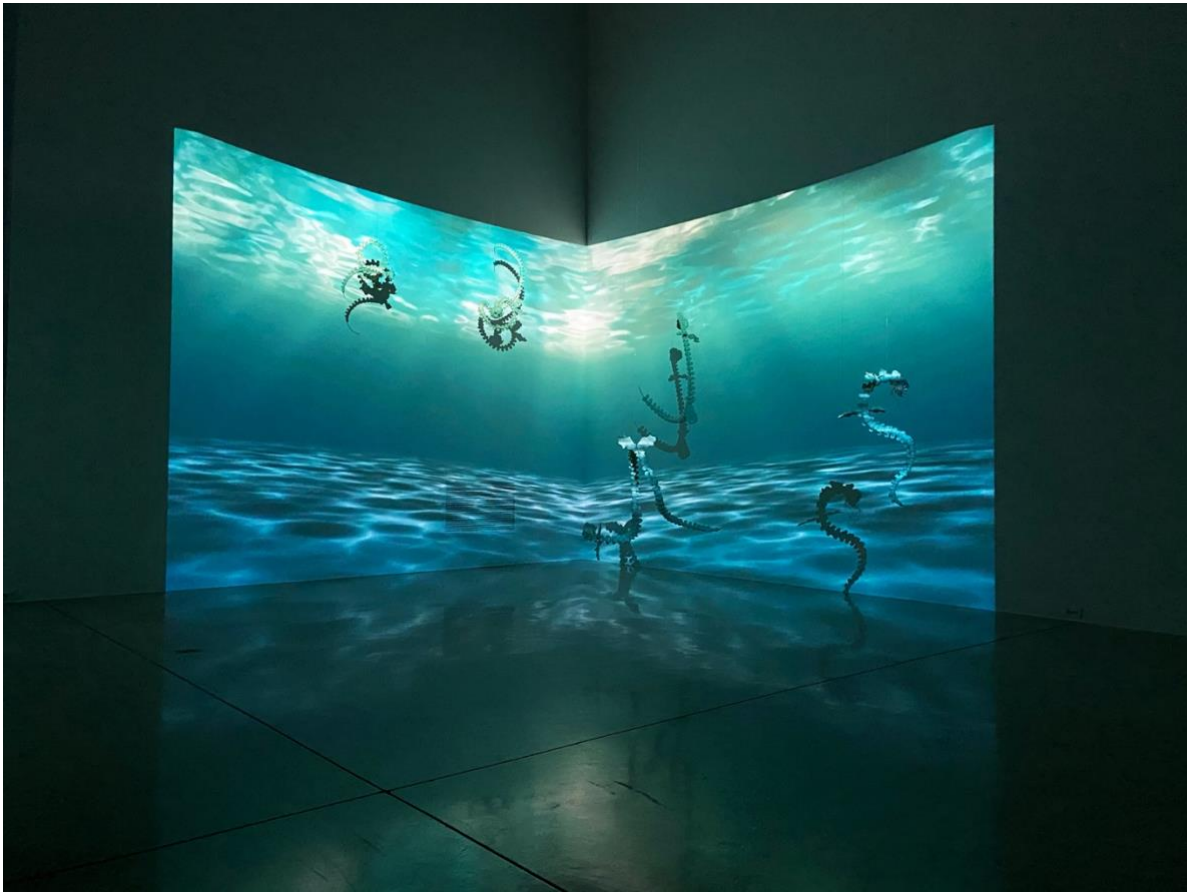


Clockwise, from top-left:

Taffy (*Resin Series*), 2020. Modeling clay, epoxy resin, acrylic paint, synthetic hair.
Mixed media sculpture. 30" H x 16" W.

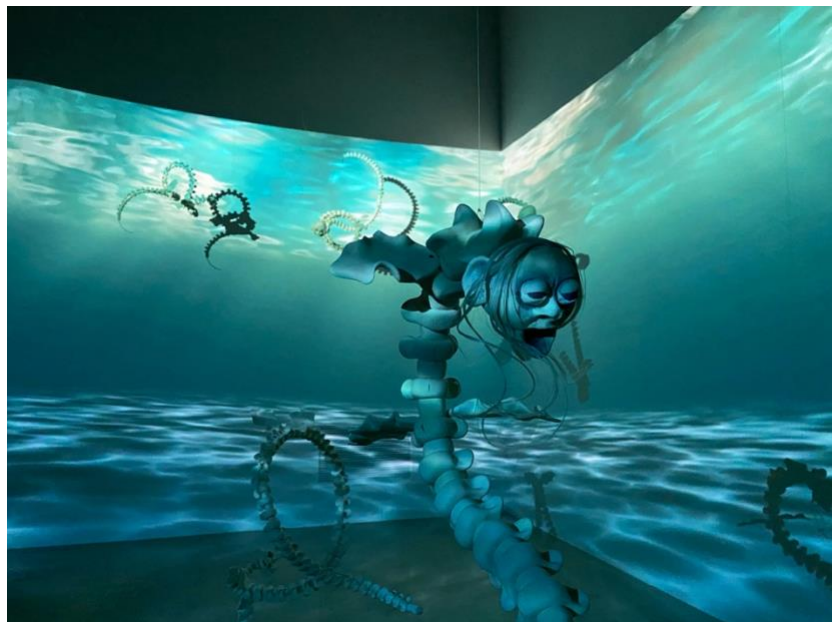
"It's a Boy!" (*Resin Series*), 2020. Modeling clay, epoxy resin, acrylic paint, synthetic hair.
Mixed media sculpture. 17" H x 14" W.

Battleground (*Resin Series*), 2020. Modeling clay, epoxy resin, acrylic paint, synthetic hair, synthetic teeth.
Mixed media sculpture. 28" H x 9 ½" W.



The Marvelous Merfolk, 2021. Clay, steel wire, synthetic hair, acrylic paint, feathers. Sculptural installation with digital projection. Loop

Mermaids and Mermen are iconic for their beauty and monstrous virtues. This animated digital/sculptural installation takes on a different vision of Mer-people (without focusing on binary constructs), which embodies Hogarthian beauty aesthetics and the Kristevan abject by emphasizing the human vertebrae. This serpent-like body/hybrid fuses human and animal relationships and forces notions of the bizarre, uncanny, human uniqueness, and intrigue. These merfolk personify signifiers of oppositions in a new-fangled depiction of the mythological monsters. They are monstrously beautiful. And, beautifully marvellous.





Appearance of the Simplest Truth, 2020-21.
Mixed media progressive sculptural installation.

This work is an ongoing structural installation that evolves and progresses through the continuous addition of objects that neither belong nor don't belong. The work as a whole takes on new meaning via the accumulation of both found objects and recycled objects that once had a presupposed purpose. The bringing together of these objects form enduring negotiations of the antithetical and unusual relationships taking place within the structure. These relationships embody excessive meaning just like the body of the monster. The malleable installation/digital projection takes on many forms and is dependent on the current state and time it is to be presented. Currently, it takes on a visual representation of an urban landscape animated and filled with unexpected visual content. The wording of the title, *Appearance of the Simplest Truth*, comes from an automatic process *à la* Breton in which I randomly opened a physical copy of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and pointed at a line of her writing. Taken completely out of context and not attributed to Shelley, this chance phrase ties together the surrealistic process and reception of this work.







Self Portrait (Son of Tom), 2021. Single-channel Projection/Animation. 6-minute loop.

This self-portrait is a surreal interpretation and digital visualization of an (in)tangible reality that I strive to grasp. A speculative reality where internal and repressed desires/experiences have no restrictions and where pure creativity might exist. The self-representation is a collage of digital photographs, animations, and physical sculptures. As a direct homage to René Magritte's painting *Son of Man* (1964), this work comments on the hidden aspects of life and respective perception. The sculpted head was documented and animated into a speculative (sur)real world of my imagination.





The Garden of Decadent Delights, 2020-21.
Digital/Sculpture installation. 10-minute short.

This installation is inspired by my ongoing personal distaste for individuals' social media posts that depict their subjective perceptions and personal attachments to prepared/staged meals. Yet, food also in and of itself sits perfectly in Kristeva's ideas of abjection—a beautifully-designed dish showcasing edible, decomposing organic material. Gorgeously presented food draws parallels to the Kristevan apple core, which, too, exists in a liminal space bordering health and decay. In this digital installation, I present the viewer with a feast of food that consists of oppositional qualities and unconventional intersections between our bodies and what we eat on a daily basis.





Menu, 2021. Digital image.

Individual works from *The Garden of Decadent Delights* installation:



Pube Soup, 2020. Clay, acrylic paint, epoxy resin, synthetic hair.
Mixed media sculpture. 3 ½" H x 11" W.



Areolios, 2020. Clay, glass dishes, metal spoon, epoxy resin, earring.
Mixed media sculpture. 3" H x 15" W.



Ciggy Smoked Cheese, 2021. Wood, clay, stone granules, acrylic paint, plastic dish, faux garnish.
Mixed media sculpture. 2 ½" H x 12" L x 12" W.



“Bite your tongue” (*Sweet & Sour savoury tongue marinated in salty bitters*), 2021. Clay, metal serving tray, acrylic paint, acrylic clear coat, bleached moss.

Mixed media sculpture. 10” H x 10” L x 10” W



Pygmy Glazed Berunda, 2021. Clay, feathers, wire, acrylic paint, acrylic clear coat, faux leaves.

Mixed media sculpture. 14” H x 9” L x 18” W.



Steeped Teeth. 2021. Glass tea pot, synthetic teeth, dyed water.

Mixed media sculpture. 5” H x 9” W x 5” D.



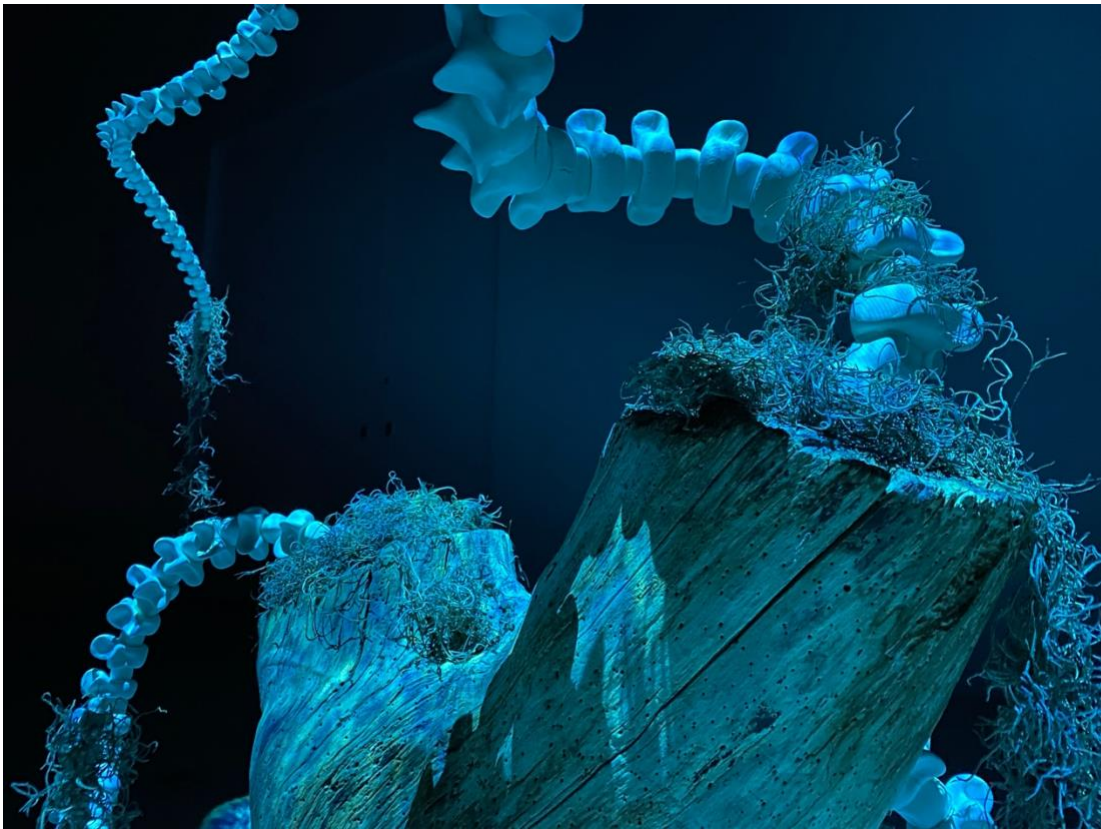
Strawberry Tongue Sundae, 2021. Glass sundae dish, clay, acrylic paint, acrylic clear coat, synthetic blood.
Mixed media sculpture. 10" H x 6" D.



Croquembush, 2021. Clay, synthetic hair, acrylic paint, epoxy resin, Styrofoam, toothpicks.
Mixed media sculpture. 15" H x 11" W x 11" D.



The Garden, 2020-21. Clay, acrylic paint, moss, leather, mannequin bust, metal base, acrylic clear coat, tissue paper.
Digital/sculptural installation. Single-channel floor projection. 24" H x 16" W x 12" D.



In nature, nothing is perfect, and everything is perfect. Trees can be contorted, bent in weird ways, and they're still beautiful. Those who contemplate the beauty of the Earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts.

Working with digital media and sculpture, this work embraces designs of nature's imperfect perfectness. The natural landscape is simultaneously beautiful, bizarre, threatening, marvelous, and uncanny. Similar to the Hogarthian S-Curve, trees consist of curves, bends, and contortions that completely add to their complexity and beauty. Through the seemingly simple and obscure openness of meaning, *The Garden* draws from the human (or posthuman hybrid) to provoke feelings of the (ir)rational and (un)recognizable that present the viewer with a reflective body and human preoccupations.



Chapter 3

Case Study

Bodybuilders, Werewolves, and Giants, Oh My: David Altmejd's Bodily Transformations and the Potentiality/Infinity of the Object

Canadian sculptor David Altmejd imbues his sculptures with a sense of agency as if they make their own decisions and create themselves. He explores their potential and how they can have the power to generate energy. Altmejd is inspired by science fiction, human anatomy, transformation, and nineteenth-century gothic fiction such as *Frankenstein* (1818) and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886). His work blurs the distinction between the gorgeous and the grotesque in his sculptures that embody an eerily beautiful characteristic to them, which he accomplishes through humorously ambiguous materials, strategically built structures, and multifaceted displays. Altmejd's work is visually complex, and his methodology focuses on building upon elements within his works and minor details that result in a high degree of intricacy driven by his intuition. He is interested in how complexity can be viewed as an object or form.⁴⁸

A viewer of Altmejd's work may only see, as Simona Rabinovitch notes in her *Macleans*'s article "David Altmejd comes full circle": "the references to fantasy or science fiction" through his choice of gothic and mythological aesthetics, objects, and creatures. Here, the popular culture references are very much present and almost gripping for the viewer, "and to them, that's all the work is about."⁴⁹ But for Altmejd, as he tells Rabinovitch, "eighty percent of what I'm preoccupied with is just my relationship to materials" and their potential of influencing the work itself.⁵⁰ Altmejd's objective is to let the work make its own choices. To let the work decide what

⁴⁸ "David Altmejd," Guggenheim, accessed July 21, 2020, <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/artist/david-altmejd>.

⁴⁹ Simona Rabinovitch, "David Altmejd comes full circle," *Macleans*'s, November 2, 2011, <https://www.macleans.ca/culture/david-altmejd-comes-full-circle/>.

⁵⁰ David Altmejd qtd. in Rabinovitch.

it will be. Altmejd insists that he is not “using sculpture as a way of illustrating meaning that already exists” but instead is “constantly looking for a loss of control” during the process of creating.⁵¹ This loss of control impulse is motivated by Altmejd’s aspiration for his sculptures to exist independently from traditional sculptures and more equal to a human being’s existence: to live in the world with the same power, energy, and potential as a human does; to be as open to interpretation as possible; to have the possibilities afforded to them just as a human body has – free for interpretation and open to growth potential. For Altmejd, the human body is a reference and anchor for most of his work, and he creates not only seemingly human bodies but also entities that are situated within liminal spaces such as those spaces between human and animal, between human and nature, and between human and architecture. It is within these liminal spaces that Altmejd positions his bodily sculptures as though they are in a static but transitional state where the viewer is presented with his similar, yet unfamiliar, infinite and uncanny worlding⁵² practice. This case study explores Altmejd’s artistic fascination with the transitional capacities that the human body can undertake through his bodybuilders and werewolves, and it investigates the relationships between nature and culture through his Giants series. All this leads to discussions of his notion of the infinite and how it plays a role in his work.

Body Transformation: Bodybuilders

One of Altmejd’s most captivating on-going series is *Bodybuilders*, which is composed of various sculptures that present both cryptic and recognizable human forms that achieve an abstracted and decidedly unfinished quality about them. Moreover, they range in numerous body positions that mimic movement and utilize media of either plaster or bronze. Altmejd’s approach

⁵¹ David Altmejd qtd. in Robert Enright, “Seductive Repulsions,” *Border Crossings* 34, no. 1 (2015): 53.

⁵² By “worlding,” I mean “creating a plausible imaginary universe, one that will generally be contemplated from the outside by readers, rather than lived within” (Lothian, 138).

for his *Bodybuilder* series is inspired by human beings' extraordinary ability to transform, shape, and reshape their bodies, and he applies a methodology that emulates these transformations when creating his individual forms. His *Untitled 7 (Bodybuilders)* (2013), a seven-foot-tall sculpture made with a plaster exterior, wood, burlap, and a foam interior (see Figure 1), conceives and embodies the transformative aspect that we see in many of Altmejd's works. In this work, an armless, not quite complete, figure descends a staircase while in mid-process of sculpting itself with numerous plaster hands that are operating akin to Gothic and Mythologic characters such as Victor Frankenstein or Prometheus.⁵³ Altmejd's interests with *Untitled 7 (Bodybuilders)* rest in, as Enright notes, "the pieces making themselves," and he asserts that "[s]urprise, transformation, serendipity, and chance are his collaborators."⁵⁴ The rigidity of the plaster shell characterizes its unfinishedness quite impactfully, for it lacks the typical smoothness or polished surface we customarily see in figurative sculpture. Altmejd also inserts static drag marks that document motion from hands and fingers. This incomplete quality of *Untitled 7 (Bodybuilders)* situates itself on the opposite side of the spectrum if we consider traditional body sculpture from the Baroque or Renaissance periods.⁵⁵ But interestingly, it reflects similar characteristics of these periods through its Baroque notions of transformative experience, light and dark shadows, motion, architecture, and Renaissance qualities of a rebirth of Humanism.

⁵³ Mary Shelley's iconic speculative fiction novel *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* (1818) tells the story of Victor Frankenstein, a young scientist who seeks to create life and does so in the form of a hideous monster who, in turn, longs to become part of the human race. The novel is infused with Gothic and Romantic elements contemporary to Shelley's time and is considered almost universally one of the first science-fiction texts. Prometheus (Greek Mythology), who was also highly regarded in the Romantic era, was a titan and trickster figure who is best known for creating humans out of clay. Shelley uses the figure of Prometheus as subtitle to her novel to allude to Victor's creation of a human.

⁵⁴ Enright, 53.

⁵⁵ Baroque sculpture emerged from the Renaissance era that took place between the early 17th and mid 18th centuries. There was a strong focus on movement and energy within the human form and a fused aspect of sculpture and architecture.

The figure in *Untitled 7 (Bodybuilders)* is, as Altmejd puts it, not only “self-generating,”⁵⁶ but it is transforming from architecture to human as it acquires material from the staircase it stands on. The plaster hands extract the plaster from the stairs and pull the content upwards to form and build the figure. This static interaction of architecture and human allows the viewer to visualize a conversion taking place (as the figure descends) of a depletion of material from the architectural staircase to the completion of material in the shape of the anticipated human body. The entirety of this transformational timeline, from the distortion of the body to the unconventional nude body, alludes to Cubism and even Futurism. There are hints and parallels to the painting *Nude Descending a Staircase, No.2*, 1912, by Marcel Duchamp.⁵⁷ Although Altmejd’s *Untitled 7 (Bodybuilders)* does not display a frame-by-frame capturing of movement, it does convey a convincing sense of motion similar to Duchamp’s – and in a similar vein – for the figure is positioned at the top of the staircase with each foot on a separate stair. Altmejd’s *Untitled 7 (Bodybuilders)* focuses on a transformative phase of the body and a transformation of the material itself. Is the material progressing from one state of unfamiliarity to a recognizable and familiar form? Or is Altmejd further suggesting that this work/body is fixed in a transitional state, advocating that our bodies are always in a constant state of flux? The static presence of this work can be read as one frame of an ongoing animation/process of human growth.

Body Transformation: Werewolves

Altmejd maintains that the human body is one of the most powerful things in the world, and he uses the appreciation of the body as a literal model in most of his works. He

⁵⁶ David Altmejd qtd. in Enright, 60.

⁵⁷ Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) – French-American artist known for his association with Cubism, Dada, and conceptual art. He painted *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* in 1912, which depicts a fragmented motion of a nude figure walking down a staircase.

communicates that the body is an object with the uppermost amount of potential that is continuously growing and transforming as he strives to, as he states, “make a sculpture that can exist in space, in the world, the same way a body does.”⁵⁸ One prominent figure that continues to resurface in many of Altmejd’s works is that of the werewolf, and it is in this fictional uncanny body that Altmejd creates an underlining connection and intrigue with his viewer. He uses the werewolf body to avoid the “human body [which],” as he says, “had become a sort of commonplace in contemporary art.”⁵⁹ Altmejd’s *Second Werewolf* (2000) is a large sculptural installation with objects rested inside a boxed enclosure (see Figure 2). Altmejd presents to his viewer a decapitated, crystalized, and mutilated partial werewolf body encased in a plexiglass container that conveys a museum-esque feel to the entire installation. He first assembles the body, then disassembles it, and lastly, builds a structure to exhibit a few of the monster’s body parts for the viewer. Instead of decay, the body parts are crystallizing, and there are individual minerals arranged and displayed throughout the case. Altmejd emphasizes, through this crystallization, a system of rebirth after death—a type of reincarnation or metempsychosis development. The werewolf’s body should be in a state of decomposition; yet, it sprouts crystals from its surface instead of a reduction or loss of the body. The body’s relationship with time continues and its being is reforming from its previous self. There is an ever-pressing tone of death throughout this work; however, “outside of the abject guts and gore, the crystals represent a reflective optimism. From the death and decay that the werewolf’s permeating presence signifies comes new life, rebirth, and regeneration.”⁶⁰ Ultimately, this regeneration suggests at an

⁵⁸ Randy Gladman, “21st Century Werewolf Aesthetics – An Interview with David Altmejd,” *C: International Contemporary Art* 82 (2004).

⁵⁹ “OCAD University Faculty of Art Speaker Series 2014 David Altmejd,” OCAD University, April 1, 2014, video, 1:22:52, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RI8rhyjcHxg>.

⁶⁰ “David Altmejd,” Guggenheim.

abstract continuity of life in the form of transformation from one object to another (i.e., human-beast-mineral).

The werewolf, or “humanoid monster,” as Altmejd refers to it,⁶¹ is an alternate human body that is particularly uncanny, grotesque, and that invites the viewer to relate to the human body’s likenesses while rejecting the abject qualities offered in front of them. Altmejd asserts that “if I made a monster body part that looks like a human, then it would be just as powerful because you can identify it, but it would be weird instead of the familiar.”⁶² And although Altmejd affirms that he is “really not interested in gore” and that what he makes “has to be positive and seductive,”⁶³ one cannot help but feel this tension here that undoubtedly elicits emotions and parallels Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytical theory of the uncanny. The uncanny positions the viewer in a liminal space between the recognizable and the strange. Freud defines the uncanny as “undoubtedly related to what is frightening—to what arouses dread and horror.”⁶⁴ The uncanny duality of humans and animals in Altmejd’s *Second Werewolf* is certainly present and possible even pushed into the realm of abjection, for the body parts are disjointed and displayed alienated from each other. For example, at first glance, viewers may see a crystalizing foot on its own off to the corner of the display case, which resembles a human foot. However, when taking the whole piece in, one can slowly piece the body together and realize that this recognizable body is instead that of a werewolf. The debate between human and beast will be decided for the viewer once they look into the hole in the base of the structure only to find a severed werewolf’s head gazing at them through multiple mirrored reflective surfaces. There are,

⁶¹ “OCAD University Faculty of Art Speaker Series 2014 David Altmejd.”

⁶² “OCAD University Faculty of Art Speaker Series 2014 David Altmejd.”

⁶³ Gladman.

⁶⁴ Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XVII, 1917-1919, trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1919), 219.

as Freud says, “many connections which the ‘double’ has with reflections in mirrors, with shadows, with guardian spirits, with the belief in the soul and with the fear of death.”⁶⁵ These reflections/doublings create several dimensions and depth in Altmejd’s work, and his use of these mirrors to infinitely double the werewolf’s head demonstrates this perfectly.

Giants, Oh My!

Twelve feet tall and five feet wide, Altmejd’s *The Giant* (2007) stands over its viewer and demands their attention while announcing its superiority over them, for they have no choice but to gaze up to take in the entirety of the massive body (see Figure 3). This complex sculpture illustrates a goliath-sized man whose seemingly unsympathetic posture (arms crossed, eyes closed, pinched lips, head tilted up and turned sideways) radiates a holier-than-thou boldness. This work suggests the Giant is better than us. Naked and shaped from foam, epoxy clay, paint, fake hair, wood, glass, decorative acorns, and taxidermy squirrels,⁶⁶ Altmejd exercises his interest in diverse materials and implements their potential into a multi-material titan. Although this giant’s scale is grand, it is the intricate details within the work and how Altmejd uses the various materials that determine the work’s complexity and girth. Characteristics such as a hirsute body, gouged out cavities weaving in and out of the body, and mirrored glass jutting out of the figure’s neck all encompass a convoluted landscape of components in and throughout this work. “It’s important for me,” Altmejd says, “that one sculpture is just a combination of a lot of small moments,”⁶⁷ and it is in these small moments that *The Giant* communicates a dialogue between a landscape body (or nature) and the body of a human.

⁶⁵ Freud, 235.

⁶⁶ David Altmejd, “The Giant, 2007,” *David Altmejd*, davidaltmejd.com, accessed July 20, 2020, <http://www.davidaltmejd.com/the-giant>.

⁶⁷ David Altmejd qtd. in Rabinovitch.

A viewer of Altmejd's *The Giant* may uncover hints and postural parallels between Altmejd's giant and Michelangelo Buonarroti's Renaissance sculpture *David* from the early 16th century. Buonarroti's *David* represents the biblical story of David and Goliath, and interestingly, Altmejd's figure visually embodies both characters from the story, for it stands like David but is a giant like Goliath – Altmejd even deliberately titles this sculpture as such, i.e. *The Giant*. Renaissance sculptural works like *David* are typically made from one single medium: large slabs of marble. In contrast, Altmejd uses anything and everything but one single medium for his sculpture since he does not intend to create a perfect adaptation nor a verisimilar representation of the body. He instead plans on establishing an anti-hierarchical correlation between humanity and nature while interconnecting and stressing many opposites such as life and death, peace and chaos, health and decay, human and landscape, and human and the other/monster.

Another opposition within this work is temporal allusions to past and speculative futures. The unclothed figure of Altmejd's *The Giant* carries an impression of a pre-human ancestor or mythological figure—a being whose existence precedes our now anatomically-correct human bodies of today. A genus whose body-type came before Man and Woman, and for Altmejd, he views his Giants as symbolic metaphors that are “meant to represent nature or the landscape,”⁶⁸ and which predate our species as well. In some of Altmejd's previous work, such as *Second Werewolf* (2000), *The Swarm* (2011), and *The Flux and the Puddle* (2014), Altmejd's process is to build an architectural structure to only then view that structure as a body. For *The Giant*, Altmejd works in a reverse manner by first constructing the body and only after, due to its size and complexity, consider it as architecture.⁶⁹ “[T]he giant not being a body but being a

⁶⁸ “OCAD University Faculty of Art Speaker Series 2014 David Altmejd.”

⁶⁹ Rabinovitch.

space”⁷⁰ or a landscape, he says, allows for an equilibrium to be born that consists of nature and culture. This balance, in Altmejd’s *The Giant*, resonates with Shelley’s monstrous creation in *Frankenstein*, for the giant monster is created by Victor’s appropriation of nature’s maternal capacities to create a new species with, as Victor says, the goal of having an entire “new species bless me as its creator and source.”⁷¹ Jack Halberstam, in his *Skin Shows*, refers to Frankenstein’s monster in a way that rhymes with Altmejd’s treatments and goals with it, as being “the body that produces the natural and the human as power relations and [it] is the body that uses up natural and human remains in order to recycle flesh into scientific invention.”⁷² Although the materials Altmejd uses in *The Giant* are artificial, the important exception of the taxidermy squirrels in Altmejd’s work embodies this idea of “recycled flesh” toward creation of life by constructing a physical and metaphorical idea of the everlasting, the eternal, or the infinite.

The Infinite, and the Unfinished

With a strong focus on the human body and its power and potential of growth and transformative qualities, Altmejd believes that his works are never fully complete nor finished but instead can hold enough presentable assets to be put out into the world and exhibited. He always considers his works to be in a perfect state of possibility, just like the human body. His interest in the body is that it sustains infinite characteristics of progression, and similarly, he interprets his work as having that same continuous potential for growth. Altmejd asserts that “[m]aybe the most defining thing in my work is that it represents the fetishization of potential.”⁷³

⁷⁰ “OCAD University Faculty of Art Speaker Series 2014 David Altmejd.”

⁷¹ Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus*, 1818, ed. D.L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2012), 80.

⁷² Jack Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), 36.

⁷³ David Altmejd qtd. in Enright, 63.

His sculptures grow during the process of creating them, and, as Altmejd says, they begin to “make [their] own choices” and by the end of his creation process, the work “is always completely different from the first sketch that I made.”⁷⁴ If the work does not have an end purpose in mind, Altmejd seems to be saying, then it can never be finished, and therefore it is infinite. Altmejd’s lack of a decided, finite goal orientation allows his work to open up and resonate with Umberto Eco’s exploration of the “open work.” Eco upholds that “[e]very work of art, even if it is explicitly or implicitly the result of a poetics of necessity, remains liable to be interpreted according to a virtually infinite series of readings.”⁷⁵ With this in mind, Altmejd not only opens his work up to an infinity of potentiality but also endless interpretations from its viewers. The aesthetic and appeal to his unfinished work broaden as the viewer can now interpret not only what is presented in front of them but also what the work can become. For Altmejd, the work is presentable. But for the enlightened viewer, the potentiality and beauty of the work can exceed any first impression they might have. Edmund Burke especially claims that “[i]n unfinished sketches of drawing [or artwork], I have often seen something which pleased me beyond the best finishing.”⁷⁶

In the work *Second Werewolf* (2000), Altmejd applies another facet of the infinite by his treatment of the werewolf’s severed head and the mirrored panels surrounding it. The detached werewolf’s head is placed around a corner in an “L” shaped cavity within the base of the structure (see Figure 4). The walls of this cavity are mirrored surfaces, which allow the viewer to indirectly see the werewolf’s head. Thus, we are only looking at a representation, a reflection, of

⁷⁴ David Altmejd qtd. in Enright, 56.

⁷⁵ Umberto Eco qtd. in Guy de Mallac, “The Poetics of the Open Form: (Umberto Eco’s Notion of ‘Opera Aperta’),” *Books Abroad* 45, no. 1 (1971): 32.

⁷⁶ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 1757, ed. David Womersley (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 118.

the werewolf and not at the physical body of the werewolf. The reflecting surfaces create a *mise-en-abîme* effect,⁷⁷ which bounces the reflection of the head into an infinite abyss of space, depth, and darkness. Burke insists that if the human eye is not “able to perceive the bounds of many things, they seem to be infinite,” and that “[i]nfinity has a tendency to fill the mind with that sort of delightful horror, which is the most genuine effect, and truest test of the sublime.”⁷⁸ There is something about the placement of this head around the corner that undeniably intensifies the overall eeriness to the creature’s facial expression. And this infinity of space, although simulated, forms a visceral feeling of the sublime and the uncanny within the viewer and ultimately enhances the seduction and repulsion of the werewolf’s head. This tension between the seductive and repulsive plays a substantial role in all of Altmejd’s menagerie. A menagerie that, to the viewer looking in, showcases all parts and pieces of humanity, whether they want to acknowledge, embrace, or reject them themselves.

⁷⁷ *mise-en-abîme*: from the French for “placing into the abyss” – “The double-mirroring effect created by placing an image within an image and so on, repeating infinitely” (Oxford Reference).

⁷⁸ Burke, 115.

Figures

Figure 1. *Untitled 7 (Bodybuilders)* (David Altmejd, 2013)

Plaster, wood, burlap, foam, 219.71 cm x 91.44 cm x 121.92 cm (86.5 in x 36 in x 48 in).



Figure 2. *Second Werewolf* (David Altmejd, 2000)

Glass, mirror, wood, lighting system, acetate, mylar, Plexiglas, foam, plaster, paint, epoxy clay, synthetic hair, quartz, rhinestones, silk flowers, 205 cm x 122 cm x 179 cm (80.71 in x 48.03 in x 70.47 in).



Figure 3. *The Giant* (David Altmejd, 2007)

Foam, epoxy clay, paint, fake hair, wood, glass, decorative acorns, taxidermy squirrels (3 fox squirrels and 4 gray squirrels), 365.76 cm x 152.4 cm x 111.76 cm (144 in x 60 in x 44 in).



Figure 4. *Second Werewolf* (David Altmejd, 2000). Detail.

Glass, mirror, wood, lighting system, acetate, mylar, Plexiglas, foam, plaster, paint, epoxy clay, synthetic hair, quartz, rhinestones, silk flowers, 205 cm x 122 cm x 179 cm (80.71 in x 48.03 in x 70.47 in).



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Pondick, Rona. *Monkeys*. 1998-2001. Stainless steel, 104.77cm x 167.64cm x 217.17 cm (41.25 in x 66 in x 85.5 in). Artist’s website, <https://www.ronapondick.com/animal-human-hybrids/monkeys>

Pondick, Rona. *Dwarfed White Jack*. 2010-2012. Painted bronze, 46.99 cm x 88.9 cm x 59.69 cm (18.5 in x 35 in x 23.5 in). Artist’s website, <https://www.ronapondick.com/tree-human-hybrids/dwarfed-white-jack>

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Curriculum Vitae

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EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

- 2021 MFA, Visual Arts
Western University, London, Ontario, Canada
Thesis Exhibition: “Marvelous Monsters”
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Awards: SSHRC Canada Graduate Scholarship – Master’s (CGS-M)
- 2017 Hons. BA, Fine Arts: Studio Specialization
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SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2021 *Marvelous Monsters*. ArtLAB, London, ON.
- 2018 *We Already Are*. Campfire Nights. Video Installation and Digital Images (printed ink on paper and aluminum prints). Waterloo Town Square, Waterloo, ON.
- 2018 *I’m (Going/Coming) Home*. Student Art Innovation Lab (SAIL) Airstream Trailer, Fine Arts Department, University of Waterloo. Waterloo, ON.
- 2017 *Horizons*. Video Installation. Waterloo Region Museum, Curatorial Centre, Kitchener, ON.
- 2017 *Horizons*. Video Installation. Waterloo Region Public Health and Social Services Building, Waterloo, ON.
- 2017 *Horizons*. Video Installation. Region of Waterloo Joint Arts and Culture Advisory Committees Event, City Hall, Kitchener, ON.
- 2017 *Horizons*. Video Installation. Waterloo Region Public Health and Social Services Building, Waterloo, ON.
- 2017 *Horizons*. Video Installation. Waterloo Region Administrative Headquarters, Kitchener, ON.
- 2016 *Frankenscape*. Video Installation and Projection. East Campus Hall, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, ON.
- 2016 *Identity Code*. Multi-screen Video Installation. East Campus Hall, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, ON.

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2020 *http://store.tongue.beautiful.goods.temporary.feet.web*. ArtLAB, London, ON.
- 2019 *MFA Year End Review Show*. ArtLAB, London, ON.
- 2019 *SHOW.19*. Idea | Exchange, Cambridge Art Galleries, Cambridge, ON.
Piece: “Sway.” Video Installation.
- 2017 *Ignite: 43rd Annual Senior Undergraduate Exhibition*. University of Waterloo Art Gallery, Waterloo, ON.
Piece: “Horizons.” Video Installation.
- 2017 *Globe Studios Spring 2017 Invitational Art Show and Open House*. Globe Studios, Kitchener, ON.
Piece: “Horizons.” Video Installation.
- 2017 *Popular Culture Association of Canada (PCAC) 7th Annual Conference*, Crowne Plaza, Niagara Falls, ON.
Piece: “The Garden of Eden’s First Drag Queen.” Digital Image and Performative Documentation (with Tommy Mayberry).
- 2016 *This Could Be The Place*. University of Waterloo Arts Quad, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, ON.
Piece: Performer and Volunteer (with Lori Blondeau, Adrian Stimson, Francisco-Fernando Granados, Nahed Mansour, Andrew McPhail, and Vessna Perunovich).
- 2016 *Contrast: Transition II*. The Artery Gallery. Waterloo, ON.
Piece: “Stories.” Video Installation.
- 2016 *Third-Year Studio Exhibition*. The Artery Gallery. Waterloo, ON.
Piece: “Performance of an Hour.” Video Documentation of Site-specific Performative Interventions.
- 2015 *Chairs*. The Artery Gallery. Waterloo, ON.
Piece: “Stefan.” Sculpture.

PUBLICATIONS

Major publications already in print or formally accepted for publication

- I. Artwork in Refereed Journals
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Artist and Photography. Ignite: 43rd Annual Senior Undergraduate Exhibition (2017), University of Waterloo Art Gallery, Waterloo, ON.
- III. Conference Papers and Presentations

2021. “Beautiful Abjection: Surrealist Posthuman Bodies.” NeMLA (Northeast Modern Language Association) 52nd Annual Convention. University of Pennsylvania and SUNY Buffalo. Philadelphia, PA. [Paper]
2021. “Speculative Figures and Futures: Our Uncanny Postapocalypse (Part 1: Sights and Sounds).” Creative Session at NeMLA (Northeast Modern Language Association) 52nd Annual Convention. University of Pennsylvania and SUNY Buffalo. Philadelphia, PA. [Creative Session: co-chaired with Tommy Mayberry]
2021. “Speculative Figures and Futures: Our Uncanny Postapocalypse (Part 2: Critical Self/-ves).” Creative Session at NeMLA (Northeast Modern Language Association) 52nd Annual Convention. University of Pennsylvania and SUNY Buffalo. Philadelphia, PA. [Creative Session: co-chaired with Tommy Mayberry]
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UNIVERSITY TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Teaching Assistant, Faculty of Arts & Humanities

Department of Visual Arts, 2019-2021

- Studio Art 4605: “Practicum,” Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) – January-April 2021
TA Supervisor: Professor Anna Madelska
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- Studio Art 2660: “Introduction to Time-Based Media Art: Sound and Performance,” Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) – March-April 2020
TA Supervisor: Professor Ellen Moffat
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AWARDS, GRANTS, AND DISTINCTIONS

Fine Art Awards

- 2017 Mayor’s Choice Award, Region of Waterloo Public Art Program (awarded by Mayor Dave Jaworsky, City of Waterloo)
- 2017 Curator’s Choice Award (Curator Ivan Jurakic, University of Waterloo Art Gallery, University of Waterloo)
- 2017 Vern Hacking Fine Arts Memorial Award (Fine Arts Department, University of Waterloo)

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Scholarships and Grants

- 2020 SSHRC Canada Graduate Scholarship – Master’s (CGS-M), Department of Visual Arts, Western University. September.
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- 2019 Conference Presentation/Research Travel Fund, Department of Visual Arts, Western University. September-December.
- 2017 Isobel Mackay Upper-Year Scholarship (Department of Fine Arts, University of Waterloo)
- 2017 The MacDonald-Young Scholarship (St. Jerome’s University, in the University of Waterloo)
- 2017 WCGS International Opportunities uWaterloo Travel Grant, Waterloo Centre for German Studies, University of Waterloo
- 2017 St. Jerome’s Upper Year Scholarship (St. Jerome’s University, in the University of Waterloo)
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Teaching Certificates

- 2020 The Advanced Teaching Program (ATP), Centre for Teaching and Learning, Western University.
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PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITY

International Collaborations

- I. Associate Director (Art, Design, and Research), The Žižekian Institute for Research, Inquiry, and Pedagogy, United States. 2017 – 2020.

Conference Attendance

- I. 18th Annual Hawaii International Conference on Education (HICE), Hilton Hawaiian Village Waikiki Beach Resort, Honolulu, Hawaii. 2020.

- II. 7th Annual Popular Culture Association of Canada (PCAC) Conference, Crowne Royal Hotel, Niagara Falls, Ontario. 2017.
- III. 5th Annual Popular Culture Association of Canada (PCAC) Conference, Sheraton on the Falls Hotel, Niagara Falls, Ontario. 2015.
- IV. “Romantic Connections: A North American Society for the Study of Romanticism (NASSR) Supernumerary Conference.” University of Tokyo, Bunkyo, Tokyo, Japan. 2014.
- V. Canadian Society for the Study of Rhetoric (CSSE)/Société Canadienne pour l’étude de la rhétorique (SCÉR) 2014 Conference/Congrès 2014. Brock University, St. Catherines, Ontario. 2014.
- VI. 2nd Annual Žižek Studies Conference: “Parallax Future(s) in Art and Design, Ideology, and Philosophy.” University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio. 2014.

Volunteer Work

- I. Assistant Director (Art, Design, and Research), promotion posters and conference name badge design. 4th Biennial Žižek Studies Conference: “Beyond the Aether: Music, Film/Media, Art.” 2018.
- II. Student Volunteer, The Student Art Innovation Lab (SAIL), Department of Fine Arts, Faculty of Arts, University of Waterloo. 2017.

GALLERY AND STUDIO EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE

- 2018 Assistant to the Manager, Media and Studios, Department of Fine Arts, Faculty of Arts, University of Waterloo
- 2017 Studio Monitor/Student Workshop Assistant, Department of Fine Arts, Faculty of Arts, University of Waterloo
- 2016 Exhibition Assistant, University of Waterloo Art Gallery, University of Waterloo

LANGUAGES

English, written and spoken