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ETERNAL SUMMER

by

CHRISTINA TERUEL

Under the Direction of Christina A. West, MFA

ABSTRACT

Eternal Summer invites viewers into multisensory installations and video that simulate the tourist experience and provoke questions about the passage of time, memory, and decadence. The project is rooted in my background; growing up in a tourist community, I experienced a culture built upon grotesque excesses of artificial happiness manufactured through tourism industry workers' grueling and repetitive physical labor. I examine these practices and how they combine to create a glittering façade of synthetic pleasure for visitors but dissolve into a lonely, monotonous setting for natives. The work compresses time and space through dreamlike surreality in order to demonstrate the perceived grandeur of tourist destinations from a worker's perspective. These illusions distort our sense of truth and reality. The installation's sensory elements further emphasize the vacation industry's unvarying, illusory nature.

INDEX WORDS: Tourism, The south, Time, Reality, Installation, Found-objects

ETERNAL SUMMER

by

CHRISTINA TERUEL

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts

in the College of the Arts

Georgia State University

2021

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2021

ETERNAL SUMMER

by

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Georgia State University

May 2021

DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my mom- your years of hard work and sacrifice inspire me to always keep going.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to my committee, Christina, Jeremy, and Jill, for all of your advice and mentorship not only during this past year, but for my entire time at GSU. Thank you, Sculpture Faculty, Nimer, Ruth, and Jane, for your generosity, guidance, and assistance. Thank you, Nedda, for your time, patience, and gracious edits. Thank you to my studio mates, Jess and Kylie, for your endless support. And most of all, thank you to my family, mom, Maria, Kat, Maria, and Mitchell, who will forever be the reason why I am here today.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	V
LIST OF FIGURES	VII
1 INTRODUCTION: THE MINIATURE GOLF CAPITAL OF THE WORLD. 1	
2 A LAND OF MAKE-BELIEVE	1
3 THE ENDLESS SOUTHERN SUMMER	5
4 LABOR AND PERFORMANCE	14
5 ETERNAL SUMMER.....	29
6 CONCLUSION	38
REFERENCES.....	39

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Hard Rock Cafe, Myrtle Beach, SC.	3
Figure 2. Christina Teruel. Continually. Brass fixture, Waffle Cone, Vanilla Ice Cream. 2019. Photography by Kylie Reece Little.....	6
Figure 3. Christina Teruel. Continually detail. Brass fixture, Waffle Cone, Vanilla Ice Cream. 2019.....	7
Figure 4. Christina Teruel. Summertime. Installation at Temporary Arts Center, Atlanta. Aluminum cast cones, vanilla ice cream, chocolate ice cream, strawberry ice cream, mint ice cream. 2019. Photography by Madeline Pieschel and Coorain.	10
Figure 5. Christina Teruel. Summertime detail 1. Installation at Temporary Arts Center, Atlanta. Aluminum cast cones, vanilla ice cream, chocolate ice cream, strawberry ice cream, mint ice cream. 2019. Photography by Madeline Pieschel and Coorain.	11
Figure 6. Christina Teruel. Summertime detail 2. Installation at Temporary Arts Center, Atlanta. Aluminum cast cones, vanilla ice cream, chocolate ice cream, strawberry ice cream, mint ice cream. 2019. Photography by Madeline Pieschel and Coorain.	12
Figure 7. Christina Teruel. Happy. Video Still. 2019.....	13
Figure 8. Prole. Abolish Restaurants: A Worker's Critique of the Food Service Industry Illustration, 2010.....	15
Figure 9. Prole. Abolish Restaurants: A Worker's Critique of the Food Service Industry Illustration, 2010.....	16
Figure 10. Prole. Abolish Restaurants: A Worker's Critique of the Food Service Industry Illustration, 2010.....	17
Figure 11. Photograph of the National House of Pancakes sign. 2012.....	19

Figure 12. Rirkrit Tiravanija. Untitled (Free). Performance. 1992. (https://www.moma.org/collection/works/147206).....	21
Figure 13. Christina Teruel. Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. Performance Still. 2020.	22
Figure 14. Sean Baker, The Florida Project Movie Still, 2017.....	24
Figure 15. Yoko Ono. Grapefruit page excerpt. 2000.	26
Figure 16. Photograph of Scan n Sniff Sticker. 2020.	27
Figure 17. Christina Teruel. Scan n Sniff Video Still. Sticker and Video. 2020.....	28
Figure 18. Christina Teruel. Scan n Sniff Video Still. Sticker and Video. 2020.....	28
Figure 19. Eternal Summer Exhibition view. 2021. Photography by Coorain.	30
Figure 20. Rolling Waves, Rolling Silverware installation view. 2021. Photography by Coorain.	31
Figure 21. Dining installation view. Booth, Found Audio Collage, Pendant light, Bus Tub, 2021. Photography by Coorain.	32
Figure 22. Ice Cream Parlor installation view, Rubbermaid Commercial Garbage Can, Plastic Ice Cream Drips, Fragrance, Vintage Ice Cream Parlor Chair, 2021. Photography by Coorain.....	33
Figure 23. Souvenir Shop installation view, Palm Tree Souvenir Mugs, Souvenir Bottles of Sand, Oscillating Fan, Shopping Basket. 2021. Photography by Coorain.	34
Figure 24. Detail of Ice Cream Parlor Installation. 2021. Photography by Coorain.	36
Figure 25. Detail of Souvenir Shop Installation. 2021. Photography by Coorain.	37

1 INTRODUCTION: THE MINIATURE GOLF CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

I was born and raised in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. A tourist town. Being surrounded by artificial nature, knock-off wax museums, and low budget entertainment was part of my normal, everyday life. Obnoxious neon billboard advertisements, kitschy souvenir shops and endless amounts of food populated my environment. Everything was designed to tantalize the tourist dollar, an aesthetic best summarized as over the top and the bigger the better: vivid colors, gigantic helpings of food, larger-than-life attractions. Everything also remained the same year after year with the arrival of the same noisy tourists prompting the same, long summer work day for locals. This was home to me. It wasn't until I moved away that I began to comprehend just how artificial my surroundings had been. I relocated to Georgia in 2018 to begin graduate school; this geographical shift sharply contrasted my hometown with the "real" world. The noticeable lack of the touristy aesthetic made it readily apparent that I had been living in a bizarre simulation of space and time.

2 A LAND OF MAKE-BELIEVE

Tourist sites often imitate other environments and spaces that exist in the real, non-tourist world. These are fictionalized representations of truth, simulated closely so that visitors can immerse themselves easily within the recognizable visuals presented to them. In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Jean Baudrillard dives heavily into the concepts of reality, truth, and their signifiers. According to Baudrillard, "by crossing into a space whose curvature is no longer that of the real, nor that of truth, the era of simulation is inaugurated by a liquidation of all referentials."¹ I interpret this to mean that because the human experience is so saturated with fakery, our

¹ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations and Simulacra* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 2.

perception of the world cannot coexist with reality. Ultimately, we live solely amidst simulations and simulacra. A simulation is a direct imitation of the real world, while simulacra are imagery or visuals depicting something that does not have an original or definite origin. To Baudrillard, once the difference between representations and reality are indistinguishable, we live in a hyperreality.²

I remember reading excerpts of *Simulacra* during my undergraduate studies and relating Baudrillard's words directly to my lived reality. Myrtle Beach's Hard Rock Café is a clear demonstration of his ideas. The restaurant, located in an outdoor shopping center less than ten minutes from my family home, was built to resemble an Egyptian pyramid, complete and correct with two sphinxes installed at the base of the building. Here, on the coast of South Carolina, in the middle of an asphalt parking lot, sits an enormous manufactured pyramid selling overpriced hamburgers and t-shirts. Being surrounded by these absurd and bizarre structures disoriented my perception of reality.

² Ibid., 2-5.



Figure 1. Hard Rock Cafe, Myrtle Beach, SC.

The modern tourist industry relies on these tactics of manipulation and imitation to lure visitors. Every space must evoke a sense of novelty and grandeur. Disney's theme parks, for example, "The Most Magical Place[s] on Earth," bring in millions, if not billions, of people every year, despite high ticket prices and excruciatingly long lines. Why do so many flock to these places? Baudrillard writes:

Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real but belong to the hyperreal order and to the order of simulation. It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology) but of

concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle.³

Although Disney is not truly “real,” it’s magic reinforces the realism of our everyday lives. As we all know, Cinderella’s Castle in the Magic Kingdom is not an actual castle, but rather a simulated one aesthetically inspired by real castle architecture. When aboard *It’s a Small World*, you are not actually touring the continents, just as you are not actually in the East African savanna while on safari at Disney Animal Kingdom. These spaces successfully and convincingly fabricate an atmosphere of fantasy by layering sensory elements such as lights, sounds, and motion. Even some of the smells wafting through the park are simulated: the sweet aroma of candy, for example, bombards visitors as they enter Main Street USA. Disney pumps this tantalizing fragrance into the air⁴ to encourage people to buy treats and, therefore, spend more money.

Consistency is another way Disney successfully builds fantasy. In *Touring Cultures*, writers George Ritzer and Allan Liska note that: “Disney World is highly predictable.”⁵ They explain that no intrusion of the “real world” is tolerated, even in relation to maintenance duties. “There are teams of workers, who, among their other cleaning chores, follow the nightly parades cleaning up debris, including animal droppings so that visitors aren’t unpleasantly surprised when they take an errant step.”⁶ The parks’ cleanliness is pivotal to the entire visitor experience. Visitors will fondly remember riding Space Mountain, meeting princesses, and eating Mickey Mouse shaped food. None of their memories will be spoiled by reminders of the everyday world

³ Ibid., 12-13.

⁴ Tom Bricker, “Top 10 Disney World Scents,” *Disney Tourist* (blog), accessed April 19, 2021, <https://www.disneytouristblog.com/disney-world-scents/>.

⁵ Allan Liska and George Ritzer, *Touring Cultures: Transformations of Travel and Theory*, (London: Routledge, 1997), 97.

⁶ Ibid., 97-98.

such as littered pathways and overflowing trash bins; everything is kept magically immaculate by their employees who are referred to as, “cast members.” Visitors anticipate these experiences every time they go to a Disney park because consistency, sameness, and uniformity are all part of the brand’s marketing to create an escape from daily reality.

3 THE ENDLESS SOUTHERN SUMMER

Expectations of sameness make time stand still in tourist places. This idea of being frozen in time inspired my installation *Summertime* in the 2019 *More Upstairs* group exhibition at the Temporary Arts Center in Atlanta. In planning the work, I thought about what time feels like in Myrtle Beach. It always felt unmoving, slow, and static because every summer was the same. Nothing really ever changed: the scenery, the people, and the experiences all remained constant year-to-year. Time seemed compressed, as each day repeated without variation. I wondered what material could evoke both the excitement and decadence of a tourist attraction but also the slow unfolding of a summer day. I quickly landed on ice cream as a perfect embodiment of both ideas, since it is an ephemeral material that is nostalgic to summer and also demonstrates the passing of time by slowly melting away.

I first experimented with ice cream in a studio piece called *Continually*. To illustrate the passage of time, I emphasized the melting ice cream by strategically positioning the cone and highlighting the molten drips falling onto the floor. I fabricated a brass cone holder consisting of a rectangular plate onto which I soldered two rings arranged parallel to each other. When placed in this holder attached to the wall, the cone protruded into the space and hovered over the floor, which allowed the ice cream to drip freely. As the drip-puddle grew, so did viewers’ understanding of time elapsing. Using real ice cream also caused viewers to crave something

sweet as the scent of vanilla filled the room. After a little over an hour, the ice cream had completely melted, leaving behind only a soggy cone and a sticky puddle on the floor.



Figure 2. Christina Teruel. *Continually*. Brass fixture, Waffle Cone, Vanilla Ice Cream. 2019. Photography by Kylie Reece Little.



Figure 3. Christina Teruel. *Continually* detail. Brass fixture, Waffle Cone, Vanilla Ice Cream. 2019.

This piece was a sketch; preparatory work for the installation I created for the *More Upstairs* show. Although *Continually* activated the space, engaged viewer's sense of smell, and illustrated time elapsing, it didn't convincingly mimic an entire tourist experience. The single cone wasn't enough to sufficiently communicate such a large-scale idea. I wanted to illustrate

that nothing lasts even in our most pleasurable tourist experiences. For this installation, I wanted to transform gallery visitors to into tourists.

The *More Upstairs* show also gave me the opportunity to test ideas about using an entire space. An episode of the podcast *Nice Try!* helped me understand how space relates to and affects our concept of time. In “Disney World: Celebrating Utopia,” podcast hosts Avery Trufelman and Caity Weaver talk about Weaver’s frequent family vacations to Orlando. They discuss the planned community of Celebration, Florida as a kind of utopia.⁷ I hadn’t ever heard of Celebration before, but I learned that it is an actual town created by Disney as an experimental community of the future. Celebration still exists. The town’s official website states, “The Celebration Community was formed with the concept of building a better place and a better way to live. There’s a reason Celebration is not a town, but a community in every positive sense of the word.”⁸ In creating this idealized place, its founders sought to construct more than just a safe and beautiful environment; they also hoped to build a community-oriented state of mind.

For *Summertime*, I wanted to create another multisensory experience, as I had done in *Continually*. In this installation, viewers entered a 9’ x 13’ room painted pink and floored in marble-printed vinyl tile, visually referencing a classic ice cream parlor. Three cones cast out of aluminum hung on the back wall. During opening night, I filled the metal cones with excessive helpings of vanilla, chocolate, strawberry and mint ice cream, which began melting almost immediately in the room-temperature space.

The dripping attracted and enchanted viewers. They watched and waited as the cones dripped their sticky sweetness. As the evening passed, entire scoops of ice cream plopped to the

⁷ Avery Trufelman, Caity Weaver, “Disney World: Celebrating Utopia,” *Curbed* Podcast audio, August 15, 2019, <https://overcast.fm/+R7MivBnxc>.

⁸ Town of Celebration, Florida (website), accessed April 19, 2021, <https://celebration.fl.us/>.

floor, creating a “splash zone” for viewers standing towards the front. This element proved especially effective, as it echoed the splash zones one sees at popular tourist attractions, such as dolphin shows at Sea World.

Every hour during that night, the cones were replenished, perpetuating the nostalgic aroma of an ice cream parlor. The boundary separating viewer and tourist blurred, as an audience formed to watch and phone-record the tense moments before another scoop hit the floor. After the exhibition’s opening night, the installation remained as the sticky, swirly puddles that had hardened to the floor. A few weeks after the show’s closing, I returned to the gallery to uninstall my work. To my surprise, I found ice cream-less, clean floors. I was shocked and confused. Who had mopped up my beautiful mess? After closely examining the floor, the culprits were revealed by what they left behind: little brown pellets. Rats had licked all the ice cream off the floor. Disgust soon turned into delight as I realized the help of these tiny creatures made me feel like a real-life Disney princess.

Summertime was the first time my art took the form of a live spectacle designed to attract and engage visitors with melting ice cream as the performer. This work helped me discover how I could use food to illustrate the passage of time, a key component in my conception of tourist spaces. I used ice cream as again as a marker of slow time in a video piece titled *Happy*. The ten-minute video begins with a melted pile of ice cream that gradually returns to its original, solid and frozen state. Because the action in the video plays backward, time is disrupted and obscured. Viewers must watch in order to find out what happens to the pink puddle.



Figure 4. Christina Teruel. *Summertime*. Installation at Temporary Arts Center, Atlanta. Aluminum cast cones, vanilla ice cream, chocolate ice cream, strawberry ice cream, mint ice cream. 2019. Photography by Madeline Pieschel and Coorain.



Figure 5. Christina Teruel. *Summertime* detail 1. Installation at Temporary Arts Center, Atlanta. Aluminum cast cones, vanilla ice cream, chocolate ice cream, strawberry ice cream, mint ice cream. 2019. Photography by Madeline Pieschel and Coorain.



Figure 6. Christina Teruel. *Summertime* detail 2. Installation at Temporary Arts Center, Atlanta. Aluminum cast cones, vanilla ice cream, chocolate ice cream, strawberry ice cream, mint ice cream. 2019. Photography by Madeline Pieschel and Coorain.

In both of these food-based works, the melting (and reverse-melting) ice cream illustrates time passing at an unhurried pace. This slowness is an important aspect of the work because it represents the leisurely lifestyle found in my hometown. Growing up, the excruciatingly hot days seemed to last forever. The direct heat of the summer didn't relent until the sun set, around 8pm most days. There is no rush to do anything when it's that hot outside, especially if one knows there is plenty of daylight left. Combine that slow pace with the sandy beaches of my hometown, and it's easy to see why so many people vacation in Myrtle Beach.

The book *Souvenirs of the Old South* analyzes the history and culture surrounding tourism in the South from the early 20th century. Author Rebecca McIntyre states, "By 1910, the

South had gained the reputation as a playground for the rich and famous, a region characterized by its fine hunting, fishing, swimming, and resort areas. It was also the sunny South where the semi-tropical climate was a blessing not a curse”⁹ Warm, coastal environments attract visitors in search of a getaway. McIntyre frequently uses the word “leisure” throughout her writing to describe the South’s ambience, “...leisure as an activity--laziness as a state of mind was praised for its therapeutic qualities.”¹⁰ The slowness that I perceived in my hometown was, in fact, foundational to the South’s tourist culture.



Figure 7. Christina Teruel. *Happy*. Video Still. 2019.

⁹ Rebecca McIntyre, *Souvenirs of the Old South: Northern Tourism and Southern Mythology*, (Gainesville: The University Press of Florida, 2011), 140.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 144.

4 LABOR AND PERFORMANCE

In 1973, my grandfather opened the National House of Pancakes two blocks away from the ocean. From the age of 11, I spent nearly every spring break and summer working at the restaurant. I didn't see working as real work at that early age; I thought it was "cool" having my name on the schedule with all the other employees. I started out as a bus girl cleaning tables, graduated to being a host, and finally hit the big time after eighth grade, when I was promoted to being a server. (Apparently child labor laws don't matter if your family owns the place.) Because I grew up in the lumpy booth next to the cash register, I have always found restaurant culture to be comforting.

My family places a lot of value on working hard and having a strong work ethic. I waited tables all through my teens and early twenties, so I learned firsthand how mentally and physically exhausting restaurant work is. Even in places that employ a sufficient number of workers and equitably divide job duties, there is always much work to be done. Restaurant division of labor is illustrated and explained in the graphic novel *Abolish Restaurants: A Worker's Critique of the Food Service Industry*.¹¹

¹¹ Prole, *Abolish Restaurants: A Worker's Critique of the Food Service Industry* (Oakland: PM Press Pamphlet Series, 2010): 19-20.

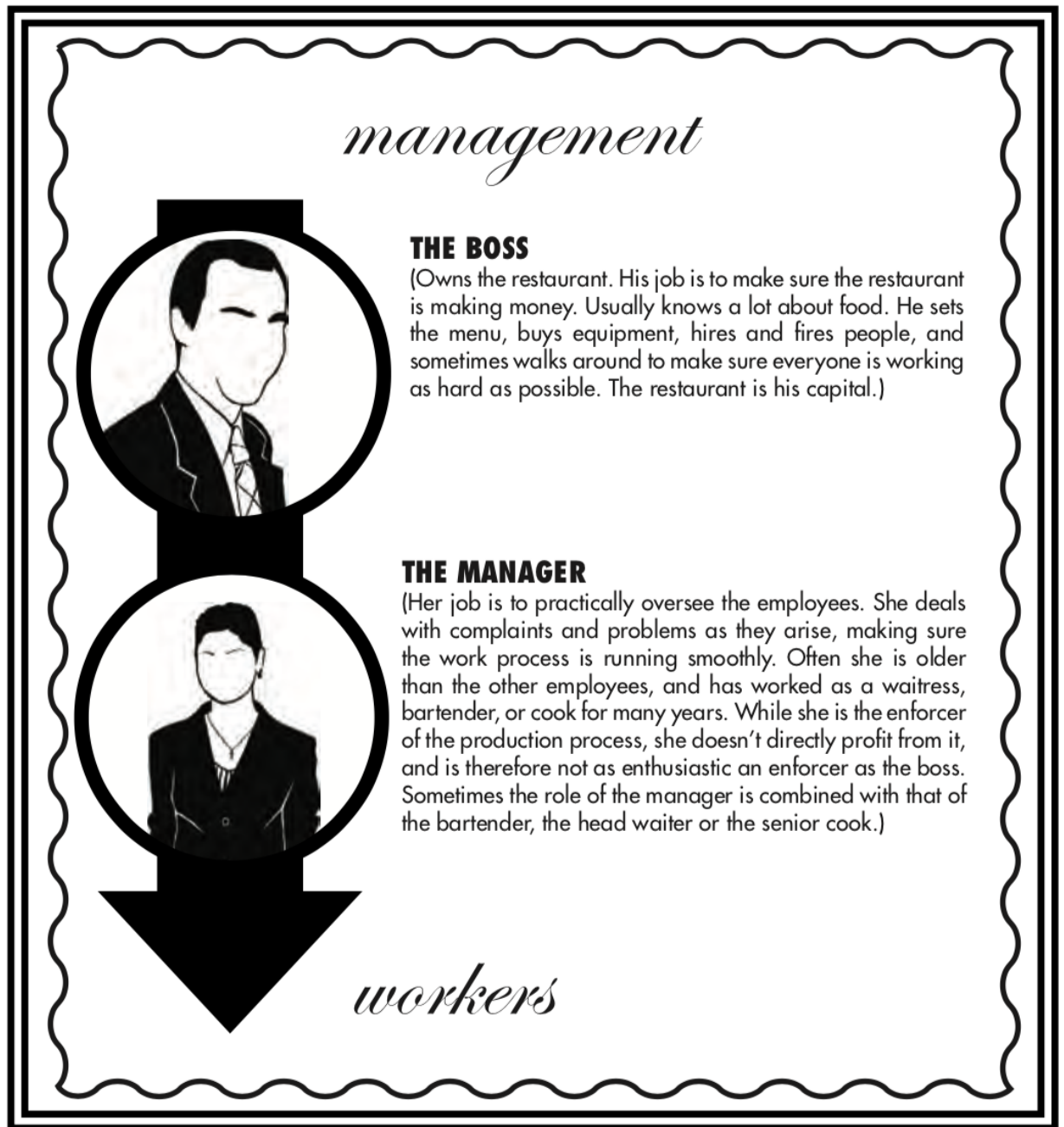


Figure 8. Prole. *Abolish Restaurants: A Worker's Critique of the Food Service Industry* Illustration, 2010



Figure 9. Prole. *Abolish Restaurants: A Worker's Critique of the Food Service Industry* Illustration, 2010.

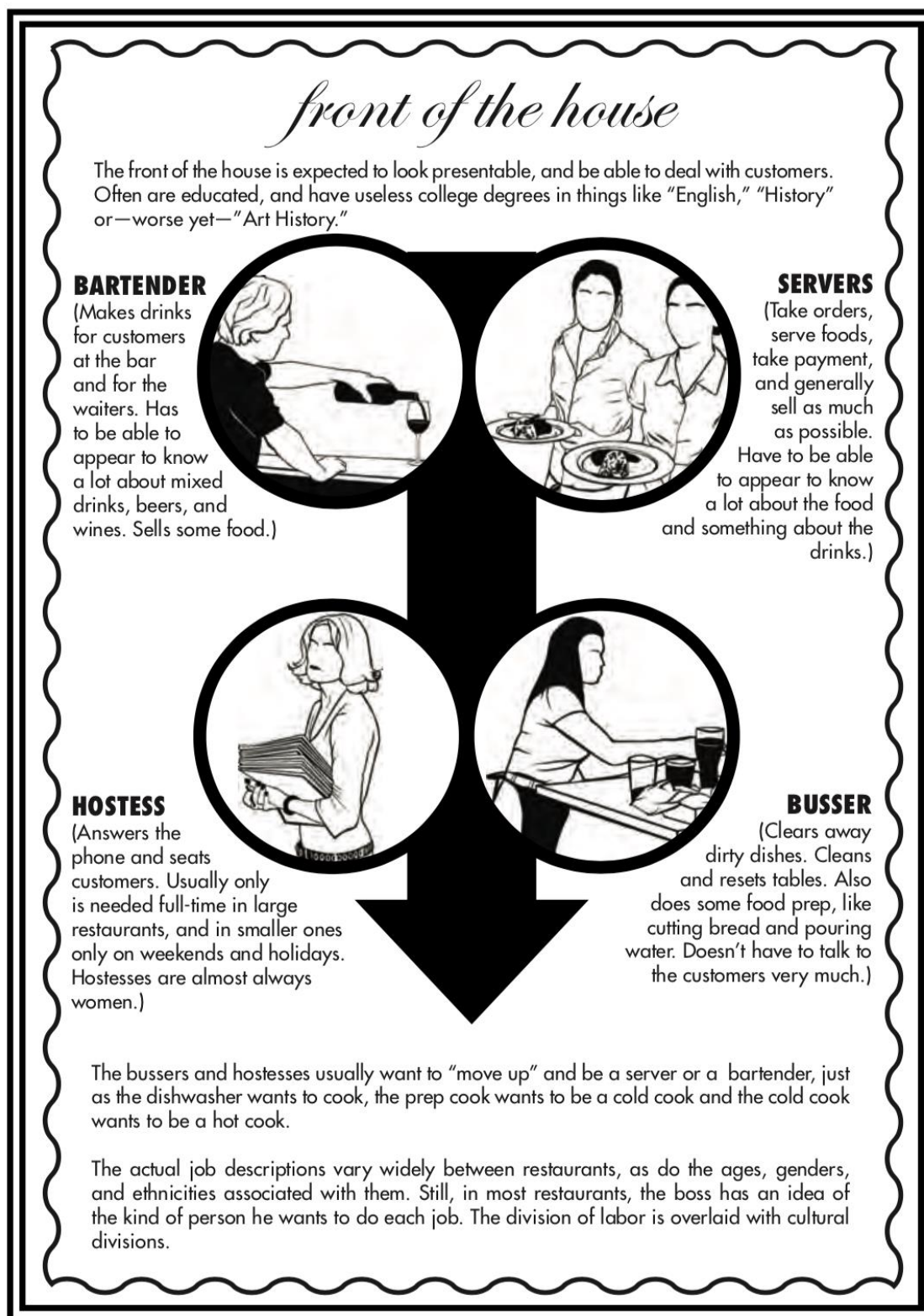


Figure 10. Prole. *Abolish Restaurants: A Worker's Critique of the Food Service Industry* Illustration, 2010.

In Figures 9-11, the typical restaurant dynamic is broken down into three departments: management, back of the house, and front of the house. The descriptions of each classification are true from my experience. The only thing that isn't highlighted is the physical demands placed on all the employees, not just the dishwashers. Within the dishwasher's section, Prole states that they have the "most physical job in the restaurant,"¹² although I do not necessarily agree. Servers lift heavy trays and bussers carry around overflowing tubs of dirty dishes and uneaten food. Almost every staff member has restocking responsibilities, which require moving exceedingly heavy boxes and products. Most of the work is incredibly taxing on the body, especially the back if these things are not lifted properly. Let's not forget that every restaurant employee is on their feet during the majority of their 6-10 hour long shift. After viewing these illustrations, I was reminded of the innumerable summer days I spent working at the "National."

My years in the family restaurant are directly linked to Myrtle Beach's tourist industry. Because the city is economically dependent on the summer season, local residents must work hard from spring break through Labor Day weekend, when the rest of the US population is enjoying its summer holidays. During the summer, Myrtle Beach becomes crowded with middle-class families and couples longing for a sunny vacation to remember. Businesses and hospitality workers make nearly 70% or more of their annual income in summertime. For me, summer was not a time to relax and unwind; from fifth grade on, no school meant time to make money.

¹² Ibid., 19.



Figure 11. *Photograph of the National House of Pancakes sign.*
2012.

I learned how to perform in my family's restaurant. Serving customers food is only one part of a waitress' job; the harder part is making customers feel happy and welcome from beginning to end. The tone in which a table is greeted "Good morning!" can impact the entire dining experience—and the size tip one receives at the end of the meal. A waitress must smile, be friendly, make customers laugh and have a good time, even if she's having a bad day. Hence, waiting tables is a performance—an emotionally exhausting one.

I explored these ideas of labor and performance in the piece, *Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday*. I performed this in the GSU Sculpture Building's front gallery space for an MFA critique class. To accomplish this piece, I created a space that simulated a restaurant kitchen, complete with a stainless-steel worktable and dishwashing sink, commercial-sized garbage can, bus tubs and so on. This diner-like simulacrum symbolically transported viewers out of the gallery and into a busy diner. To simulate a real experience, I cooked and offered participants freshly made pancakes, summoning them to the counter by ringing a service bell to let them know when an order was ready. Aromas of artificial butter, pancakes, and syrup filled the room. As participants finished their food, I moved from behind the counter to take their dirty plates; I then washed them, effectively performing the jobs of cook, waitress, and dishwasher. This performance activated all the senses: touch, sight, hearing, smell, and taste.

I was initially inspired to create this work by Rirkirt Tiravanija's performance *Untitled (Free)*, in which the artist cooked and served Thai curry for gallery visitors. About this work, Tiravanija stated:

The work is a platform for people to interact with the work itself but also with each other. A lot of it is also about the kind of experiential relationship so

you actually are not really looking at something but you are within it. You are part of it. The distance between the art and the artist and the audience gets a bit blurred.¹³



Figure 12. *Rirkrit Tiravanija. Untitled (Free). Performance. 1992.* (<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/147206>).

Thinking about Tiravanija’s work informed how I planned to engage with my viewers. It was important that they become part of the piece. Face-to-face engagement transforms the audience into a group of tourists; they arrive at my work curious and maybe even hungry. Like tourists, they are seeking a pleasurable, unique, and memorable experience. Studying Tiravanija’s documentation of *Untitled (Free)* also helped me map out and construct the environment for *Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday*.

¹³ Rirkrit Tiravanija, “Untitled (Free/Still),” Museum of Modern Art video, 3:22, February 3, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0xRx2s3FpSg>.

Tiravanija's performance had two defined spaces: one for cooking and one for viewers to eat the food he had prepared. The eating space consisted of tables and chairs placed adjacent to the cooking area. The aesthetics of his makeshift kitchen did not directly suggest a commercial kitchen, but rather a home kitchen. Because I wanted to emphasize the labor aspects of the foodservice industry, I knew that it was crucial for me to fabricate an atmosphere with the proper visuals that would communicate a restaurant rather than a home.



Figure 13. Christina Teruel. *Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday*. Performance Still. 2020.

For the duration of the performance, I cooked, served, and cleaned, over and over, replicating the work involved in a typical day at the restaurant. I became a multitasking machine as I had to complete the jobs of an entire restaurant staff as one person. Sweat formed on my face and beaded down my neck as I stood over the hot griddles and scrubbed dishes. As I rolled silverware, I kept one eye on the cooking pancake batter to prevent burning. I strived to serve a

quality hot stack even though I never received verbal affirmation from those who enjoyed a meal. Occasionally, someone would softly say “thank you” as they took a plate from the counter, but there seemed to be an unspoken agreement among everyone present that they should respectfully remain quiet, as they could see I was very busy at work. The clanging sound of gathering plates and silverware, the scraping sound of the spatula flipping pancakes, and the dingy service bell were the only audible noises. I poured, flipped, served, cleaned, and rolled continuously. As Prole points out, in restaurants, “We repeat the same specialized tasks over and over again to get very good at them. At the same time, the work loses any meaning it ever had for us.”¹⁴ This piece illustrates the backbreaking and repetitive labor required to deliver pleasurable tourist experiences. But what people do not often think about are the harsh working conditions concealed behind the colorful tourist façades.

The movie *The Florida Project* follows the life of a young, single mother and her energetic daughter who live in a motel outside of Walt Disney World. The film depicts the cruel realities of this impoverished community and the financial, physical, and emotional obstacles the residents experience on a daily basis.¹⁵ Many scenes in the film capture vibrant blue skies, hyper-saturated purple buildings, and bright, yellow sunlight. These artistic choices heighten the contrast between the “Happiest Place on Earth” and the lives of the working-class natives living in Disney’s shadow. I wanted the visuals of *Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday* to illustrate the daily life of those in that shadow. While tourists spend their day reveling in the magic of the parks, the working class is hard at work. In order to create a harsh environment clearly intended for work and not play, my performance had to mimic a

¹⁴ Prole, 21.

¹⁵ *The Florida Project*, directed by Sean Baker, 2017, A24 Studios.

commercial kitchen comprised of cold stainless steel, black rubber bins, and Rubbermaid garbage cans.

Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday demonstrated the importance of audience engagement and interaction to my ideas. The vibrant exchange between me, the performer, and the audience (the tourists) yielded an experience I had not yet achieved through my object-based works. Perhaps most significantly, I performed this piece in March of 2020, just days before the COVID-19 pandemic shut down most of America. In the blink of an eye, my audience was rendered inaccessible. How could I engage with people if we couldn't be together?



Figure 14. Sean Baker, *The Florida Project Movie Still*, 2017.

The challenges presented by nationwide closures and the absence of in-person interaction led me to create *Scan n' Sniff Stickers*. Since I could no longer fabricate or simulate environments in real life, I tested ideas about how to achieve a similar result at a distance. Before designing the stickers, I revisited Yoko Ono's book *Grapefruit*. Ono's ability to engage an

audience without being physically present was especially inspiring during this time, so I knew her book could help me think through this problem. *Grapefruit*, in particular, is an Ono work that allows the viewer to participate on their own time in their own space. The book is comprised of pages with different instructions for the viewer to follow.¹⁶

¹⁶ Yoko Ono, *Grapefruit* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964).

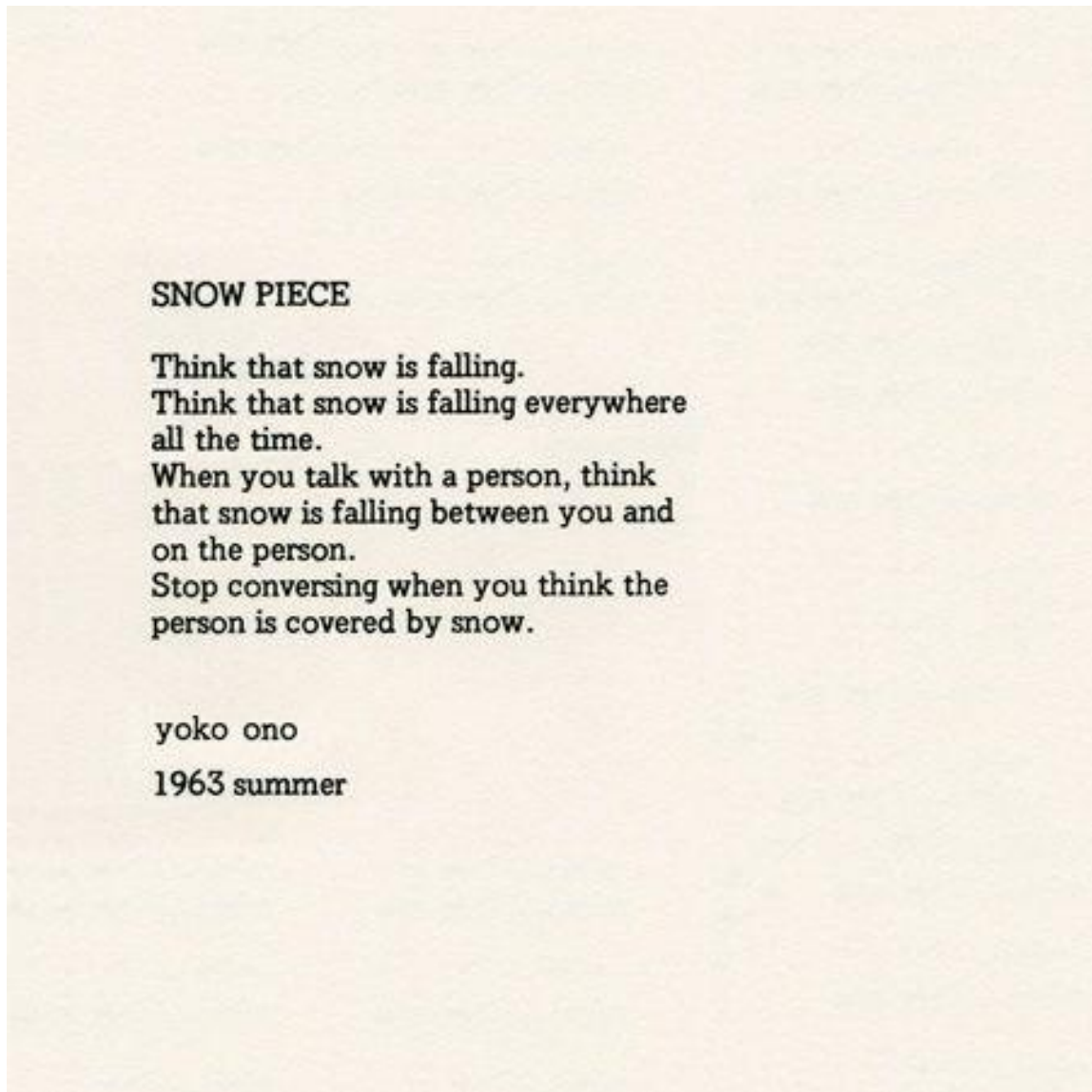


Figure 15. Yoko Ono. *Grapefruit page excerpt*. 2000.

Thinking about these works and Ono's involvement with the Fluxus movement, I designed a small (1") circular sticker printed with a QR code. Using a smartphone to scan the QR code virtually transports the viewer to a short video that begins with set of directions. I infused the stickers with the scents of berries, maple brownies and cigarette butts. The sweet notes immediately capture your attention but the bitter smell of burnt ashes halts the desire for more. After the directions fade, a video plays which follows the typical day of a restaurant worker.

“September” by Earth, Wind, and Fire plays quietly in the video’s background. I chose this song for several reasons: first, the song lyrics suggest the passage of time and seasons, which echoes the endlessly repetitive nature of this worker’s existence. The song is also upbeat and cheery, exactly the sort of generically popular tune you’d expect to hear in a diner; in this way, the song helps set the scene. Engaging people at a distance through directed actions, video, scent, and sound supported my exploration into shifting the participant’s state of mind through sensory manipulation.



Figure 16. *Photograph of Scan n Sniff Sticker. 2020.*



Figure 17. Christina Teruel. *Scan n Sniff Video Still*. Sticker and Video. 2020.



Figure 18. Christina Teruel. *Scan n Sniff Video Still*. Sticker and Video. 2020

During my exploration with these pieces, I focused on the concept of time in tourist towns and the labor of their workers. It was important to make performative and time-based

work because of my personal memories of Myrtle Beach. I recalled the contrast of a visitor's leisurely summer day to my fast-paced, never ending shift. I remembered how I always had to smile for guests even though my feet and back ached. This work was about my first-hand experience. *Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday* and the *Scan n Sniff* stickers were the last pieces I made before developing my thesis exhibition. Both works were inspired by my restaurant experience and directly emphasized labor with the presence of a physical body. I knew that in my final graduate show, however, I wanted to shift the focus. There was no need for physical human presence. I no longer wanted the work to concentrate on my specific memories, but rather on the experience of existing day to day in a tourist place as a whole, of feeling that day in, day out sameness and monotony.

5 ETERNAL SUMMER

In the exhibition *Eternal Summer*, the strange realities of living in a beach vacation town emerge from multisensory installations and video. The work embodies how the environment is frozen in time and illustrates the lonely feelings of workers and residents. Found objects, audio, and fragrances communicate specific sites endemic to tourist towns. The combination of sights, sound, and smell aid viewers in arriving at these locations through memory and nostalgia. The installations are vignettes, clearly identifiable by paint and flooring choices. Each piece contains a slice of reality that slowly reveals itself, as if it's something unpleasant lurking just under the surface. The absence of any human presence is a key factor in conveying the perspectives of tourism workers: this void signifies how it feels to live and work in a place that is filled with people joyously escaping their everyday lives while on vacation. I distilled each installation to its subjects' most fundamental objects and signifiers.



Figure 19. *Eternal Summer Exhibition* view. 2021. Photography by Coorain.

Although the installations and video are viewed as individual pieces, they all work together to generate a sterile yet inviting atmosphere. As viewers enter *Eternal Summer*, the aroma of sweet vanilla and waffle cones activate their sense of smell. Audio of a restaurant dining room and service bell play softly through the pink booth. The quiet hum of the oscillating fan mixes with the sounds of the ocean and silverware playing through the video. As viewers watch the television, a sunscreen-scented cold breeze created by the fan hits their back. All these elements work together to stimulate the viewer and provoke questions about the passage of time.



Figure 20. *Rolling Waves, Rolling Silverware installation view*. 2021. Photography by Coorain.

The employment of full-scale installations was a necessity in communicating my ideas. I wanted viewers to slip out of reality for a moment, to envision themselves in these vignettes, whether in the present or in a past memory. A diner, ice cream parlor, and souvenir shop were the perfect tourist places to replicate because most viewers will have past experience with each type of place. Within each installation, a pink object sits on the floor. Each object is specific to its setting and represents functional objects that are touched and/or used by both tourists and workers: a bus tub, a metal chair, a shopping basket. The pink surface is visually inviting and freezes the objects in time, rendering them static within the installations.



Figure 21. *Dining installation view*. Booth, Found Audio Collage, Pendant light, Bus Tub, 2021. Photography by Coorain.



Figure 22. *Ice Cream Parlor installation view*, Rubbermaid Commercial Garbage Can, Plastic Ice Cream Drips, Fragrance, Vintage Ice Cream Parlor Chair, 2021. Photography by Coorain.



Figure 23. *Souvenir Shop installation view*, Palm Tree Souvenir Mugs, Souvenir Bottles of Sand, Oscillating Fan, Shopping Basket. 2021. Photography by Coorain.

While developing each vignette, capturing the precise details of each place, like the flooring and objects, was critically important. The booth for the piece *Diner* was already in my possession. I had used it in past work and knew it needed to be included in the show. Although the booth on its own communicates “restaurant” quite effortlessly, the addition of the pendant light, audio collage, and flooring brings the set to life. The light’s warm illumination obscures time, confusing viewers between night and day. Similarly, in the piece *Ice Cream Parlor* I already owned the chair and flooring from the *Summertime* installation. Instead of using real ice cream, however, I used pouring plastic to mimic melted ice cream. This method was more gallery friendly (no rats!) and the material’s permanent nature paired perfectly with the idea of being frozen in time. I tinted the plastic to represent a Neapolitan blend of ice cream—a classic combination full of nostalgia. Each puddle on the marble vinyl floor swirls captivatingly, leaving viewers unsure of the “ice cream’s” origins source.



Figure 24. *Detail of Ice Cream Parlor Installation*. 2021. Photography by Coorain.

In contrast to *Diner* and *Ice Cream Parlor*, I had to source every detail in *Souvenir Shop* from scratch. I struggled in deciding what items to display on the shelves. While trying to understand why souvenirs are often tiny versions of real things, I came across the book *Our Aesthetic Categories*. Author Sianne Ngai writes,

Whether in response to socks or large-scale, mass mediated spectacles of public intimacy, cuteness solicits a regard of the commodity as an anthropomorphic being less powerful than the aesthetic subject, appealing specifically to us for protection and care.¹⁷

In other words, an object's physicality affects how humans respond to it. We respond to the cute and handheld size of souvenirs because they are smaller in scale to us; they seem to need

¹⁷ Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 60.

our care, so they attract our desire to purchase to them. Keeping these ideas in mind, I also wanted the objects on the shelves to connect to beach culture. In the end, mini glass bottles filled with sand and palm tree decorated mugs stocked the shelves. These two novelties are clear signifiers of a beach town.



Figure 25. *Detail of Souvenir Shop Installation. 2021.* Photography by Coorain.

The three installations illustrated and captured how time feels still and unmoving in these places. The absence of any physical human presence, combined with noticeable movement, left one portion of the gallery nearly motionless and feeling somewhat empty. To disrupt the visual quietness, I installed a video with sound and moving images to contrast the other works. *Rolling Waves*, *Rolling Silverware* is a split screen video of the ocean and of someone's hands rolling silverware. The two scenes coupled together emphasize the similarities of motion. Ocean waves

flowing back and forth on the sand remind me of the rhythm of rolling silverware. The never-ending feeling of working on a summer day and performing the same movements over and over is echoed by the waves rolling in and out unceasingly. In this video, the only human presence is my hands; my identity is obscured. This piece is not about my personal experience but the common experience among those who are employed in tourist towns.

6 CONCLUSION

I did not originally plan for *Eternal Summer* to be a series object-based installations. Prior to the pandemic, I intended to present a performance and have the work be heavily focused on viewer engagement. Losing access to an audience completely reframed how I think about my art. What I once considered a setback actually benefited my practice and research. It forced me to think in new, slightly uncomfortable ways and to express my ideas without including my physical body in the work.

As I embraced this new mindset, I began to think about how COVID-19 had ravaged my home town's economy. I thought about the empty restaurants, the motionless amusement park rides, and all the little souvenirs collecting dust. Everything stopped for once. This stillness inspired *Eternal Summer*. With the mental image of a quiet, lifeless tourist town, I realized just how lonely and stuck these places can feel.

My goal for the show was to provide an experience: something viewers could remember not only through sight and images, but through their senses of smell, hearing, and touch. These experiences provoke questions of guilt, ephemerality and complicity, gently spoiling the beautiful perception of the tourist vacation fantasy.

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