

Georgia State University

ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University

Art and Design Theses

Ernest G. Welch School of Art and Design

Spring 4-24-2024

The Blue Horizon

Shir Bassa

Georgia State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/art_design_theses

Recommended Citation

Bassa, Shir, "The Blue Horizon." Thesis, Georgia State University, 2024.

doi: <https://doi.org/10.57709/36973189>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Ernest G. Welch School of Art and Design at ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Art and Design Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gsu.edu.

THE BLUE HORIZON

by

SHIR BASSA

Under the Direction of Serena Perrone, MFA

ABSTRACT

Unlike American Jews, I don't let religion define me. Unlike Israeli Jews, I don't believe I should do anything for a land. This exhibition explores the viewpoint of an appropriating parasite in search of a welcoming host. This exhibition will lead viewers through the myriad roles an artist can assume for herself. The use of repetitions and instructions are essential to my artistic practice and allows me to challenge and define my own belief systems for both oppression and liberation. *The Blue Horizon* is an exhibition made of printmaking, video and textile.

INDEX WORDS: Printmaking, Boxing, Video, Textile, Artist

THE BLUE HORIZON

by

SHIR BASSA

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

2024

Copyright by
Shir Bassa
2024

THE BLUE HORIZON

by

SHIR BASSA

Committee Chair: Serena Perrone

Committee: Craig Drennen

Jill Frank

Jeasy Sehgal

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Academic Assistance

College of the Arts

Georgia State University

May 2024

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	VII
1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
2 THE RABBI- EARTH.....	2
2.1 The Character	2
2.2 Instruction	3
2.3 The Rabbi Artwork.....	10
3 BRUCE LEE- WATER.....	12
3.1 The Character	12
3.2 Love	12
3.3 Bruce Lee Artwork	19
4 FRANZ KAFKA- AIR.....	21
4.1 The Character	21
4.2 Freedom	21
4.3 Kafka Artwork	28
5 EMMA GOLDMAN- FIRE	31
5.1 The Character	31
5.2 Hate	32
5.3 Emma Goldman artwork	38
6 EXHIBITION.....	41

7 CONCLUSION 49

REFERENCES..... 50

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1 Paul Pfeiffer, John 3:16, 2000, Standard-definition video (color, silent; 2:07 min.), 5.6-inch monitor, and metal armature, 6 x 7 x 36", The MOMA collection.	5
Figure 2.2 Lee Lozano, Pages from Private Notebook 8, 1970. © The Estate of Lee Lozano. Courtesy of Hauser & Wirth.	6
Figure 2.3 Jason Musson, ART THOUGHTZ: How To Be A Successful Artist, YouTube, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hNXL0SYJ2eU&t=11s	9
Figure 2.4 Shir Bassa, Untitled (Rabbi's cloak), fabric, 47 x 20 Inches, 2024.....	11
Figure 3.1 Joseph Beuys, I Like America and America Likes Me, 1974, New York.	15
Figure 3.2 Sanford Biggers, Nunchucks, 2003, Plexiglas, brass and chain, 30 x 1 x 1 inch.....	16
Figure 3.3 Patty Chang, Death of Game, 2000, video, 2 minutes.	17
Figure 3.4 Shir Bassa, Conversation, video, 5:05 minute, 2022.....	20
Figure 4.1 Eleanor Antin, Georgia de Meir, 1969, Table, chairs, dominoes, sweater, bowl, California grapes. Image courtesy of the artist and Diane Rosenstein, Los Angeles.	23
Figure 4.2 Mike Kelley, Catholic Birdhouse, 1978, Wood, paint, and composite shingles, 22 x 18 1/2 x 18 1/2 inch.	24
Figure 4.3 Eleanor Antin, Ballerina and the Bum, 1974, Photographs, black and white photograph, 16 x 20 inch, Ronald Feldman Gallery.	26
Figure 4.4 Shir Bassa, Untitled (Kafka's sailor suit), silkscreen print on fabric, 20 x 17 inches, 2024.....	30
Figure 5.1 Guerrilla Girls Demand A Return To Traditional Values On Abortion, march on Washington DC, 1992.....	33

Figure 5.2 Barbara Kruger, Untitled (Your body is a battleground), photographic silkscreen on vinyl, 112 x 112 Inches, 1989.....	34
Figure 5.3 Installation view of “Kinetics of Violence: Alexander Calder + Cady Noland,” with Gibbet (left), 1993–94, and Corral Gates (detail), 1989, at Venus Over Manhattan, 2017.	36
Figure 5.4 Cady Noland, Oozewald, silkscreen ink on aluminum plate and two flags, 72 x 36 x 7 inches, 1989. Photo: Axel Schneider.	37
Figure 5.5 Shir Bassa, Cleaning Job, Performance at The Philadelphia City Hall courtyard, 10 minute, July 25th, 2022.....	41
Figure 6.1 Shir Bassa, The Blue Horizon, Ernest G. Welch gallery exhibition overview, 2024, photo: Ross Landenberger.	43
Figure 6.2 Shir Bassa, The Blue Horizon, 3-D arena created in Unreal Engine, 2023.	44
Figure 6.3 Bandage instruction, Photograph shows a class at the Metropolitan Hospital Training School for Nurses on Blackwell's Island (now Roosevelt Island), New York City, between ca. 1915 and ca. 1920.	45
Figure 6.4 Shir Bassa, The Blue Horizon, Ernest G. Welch gallery exhibition overview, 2024, photo: Ross Landenberger.	47
Figure 6.5 Shir Bassa, Shark Defense, video, 1:58 minute, 2024.....	48

1 INTRODUCTION

The beginning of this exhibition starts with thinking about the parallels between the life of an artist and the life of a boxer. Boxers, like many famous artists, have intimidating larger than life personas. The greatest fighters and artists share a common, mythical origin story: they were difficult kids who grew up in difficult surroundings, did things that landed them in difficult situations. One miraculous day, they met a person who turned their sad lives around by teaching them how to channel and control their energies in order to reach their full potential.

Origin stories and personal mythologies aside, many other commonalities exist between art and “the sweet science.” Boxing, like any medium in art, has a set of rules that must be followed. Having a designated place for engagement is another common element: The arena is where people watch a boxing match, just as art galleries and museums are where we go to see art. Boxing and art are also both solitary activities. There are coaches and mentors, but when the artist or the boxer “steps into the ring” it’s just the person and their opponent duking it out. For the boxer, the opponent is another boxer; for the artist, the opponent is their own questions, ideas, and limitations. Audiences consume both boxing and art as forms of entertainment, even though both are built on the struggles of real people.

This idea of boxing and art as innately parallel solidified during a search for something in Philadelphia over summer 2023. I settled my mind on “The Blue Horizon”, the self-proclaimed “#1 boxing arena in the United States” located on Broad Street. I opened the abandoned arena’s door, and wondered: If the boxing ring is a metaphor for my life, who would be my fighters?

In this thesis, I present my four fighters. All are real historic figures, who represent personality traits that exist in me, or that I wish existed in me. Each fighter’s persona also aligns with one of the four elements: earth, water, air and fire. According to ancient Greek philosophy,

the four elements make up everything around us. Therefore, I decided that this thesis should examine what I, as an artist am made of. All the characters I have chosen were good people in their way, and I look up to them. However, their lives all involved some type of tragedy, some flaws or mistakes that resulted in change and, eventually, wisdom. In looking at the tragedy in each of their lives, I explore myself as I explore my fighters.

2 THE RABBI- EARTH

2.1 The Character

Abraham Joseph Rice (1800-1862) was born in Gochsheim, Germany, and grew up in a small Jewish community in rural Bavaria. When he was about a year old, he fell and injured his leg. This injury resulted in a limp that he had for the rest of his life. Rice began studying the Torah from an early age with prominent teachers. Rice received the title Rabbi and continued his education in a yeshiva, a school for Talmudic studies, and later became a Talmud instructor himself.¹

Rabbi Rice sailed from Hamburg, Germany, and arrived in New York on July 25, 1840. Rice's arrival in New York was significant because he was the first ordained Rabbi in the US. In August of the same year, Rabbi Rice assumed the role of the spiritual leader at the congregation Nidchi Yisroel in Baltimore. He was an uncompromising leader regarding the practice of Judaism. At the same time, most of the immigrant Jews at the time were not fully observant and wanted to be more assimilated with the Christians.

The Rabbi's firmness paved the path for the spokespeople of Reform Judaism. Eventually, Rice realized he could not be Rabbi if his congregation refused to listen. He resigned from Nidchi

¹ Moshe D Sherman, *Orthodox Judaism in America*, p.173.

Yisroel in 1849. Rice opened a dry goods store in Baltimore to support himself and his family. A few years later, he opened a small shul, a study room, where he continued teaching the "right" way of worshipping God. Rabbi Rice died at the age of 62 and was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Baltimore.

2.2 Instruction

This section explores Rabbi Rice's virtues, including his strict adherence to Judaic structure and rules; I will analyze the Rabbi by focusing on religion and art rather than focusing on Jewish law. I will discuss instructions and belief systems that artists incorporate and follow as part of the artistic process. Rabbi Rice represents a set of rules that might shed light on a sweet spot between strictness and humanity.

Rice's character is rooted in the Ten Commandments and the additional 613 rules in the Torah. Initially, God gave his laws to the Jewish people in middle of the desert. The opposite of rules is freedom: "...every man did that which was right in his own eyes."² However, another word for freedom is chaos, which would have led to the extinction of the Jewish people. Without these laws we might have eaten pork, killed or raped each other.

Humans are not born with knowledge or ethical skills and therefore require consistent help to maintain a safe society. As a result, there are different types of governments in place today. It is important to obey the rules, while also limiting and criticizing the actions of those in power. Religion, on the other hand, holds a different status. Orthodox Judaism, for instance, is no longer vital for the survival of its people, but rather for the preservation of the Jewish identity and culture. You could describe art in a similar way: not necessary for our literal survival, but essential to preserving our identity and humanity.

² The Torah, Judges 21:25

The most noticeable rules in art are the rules of the mediums and techniques. Art and religion are similar to studying the Torah and practicing rituals, like studying art and mastering a skill through repetitive training. The artist and the Rabbi do not determine these rules and limitations but choose to accept them. They represent a matter of expertise; to make better decisions, break the rules, or make judgments, one needs to know a field in its entirety. Therefore, the Rabbi and the artist have similar powers of belief and interpretation. The idea of having structure and repetitive rituals helps create a routine. In a Jewish sense, these rituals kept the Jew segregated for over two thousand years. In a secular sense, art rituals link us historically all the way to the early cave paintings.

Paul Pfeiffer (b.1966, Honolulu, Hawaii) became well known for his few-second loop video works, made of heavily manipulated pop culture found footage. In the work titled *John 3:16*, 2000, a basketball frenetically appears in the air taken from 5,000 video stills of 1995–96 NBA playoffs—the work is displayed on a 5.6-inch monitor, held on metal armature from the wall. The title of the piece refers to a Biblical passage from the New Testament that says, "...whoever believes in him [Jesus] shall not perish but have eternal life."³ By bringing in this Biblical reference Pfeiffer compares the idea of Christian salvation and "the eternal life and the promise of digital media that never break down and literally can live forever...that can always be copied endlessly. In a way, the medium itself represents a kind of promise that almost has spiritual overtones."⁴

Pfeiffer is an example of a Rabbi; his technique includes the use of repetition; in his video, the loop is repetition and in his artistic practice, it is the repetitive action of erasing. In another of his works, *The Long Count*, 2001, Pfeiffer shows an image of a fight between Muhammad Ali and

³ The New Testament, John, 3:16

⁴ https://ubu.com/film/pfeiffer_john.html

George Foreman, from which the two fighters have been digitally removed. According to Pfeiffer, the repetitive actions in the artwork and the art making are a meditation. There are sorts of things people do that require repetitive action: erasing and praying. These are both practices people do to achieve something larger than themselves: spiritual enlightenment or artistic realization. These actions can be tedious or inconvenient, but people still do it.



Figure 2.1 Paul Pfeiffer, John 3:16, 2000, Standard-definition video (color, silent; 2:07 min.), 5.6-inch monitor, and metal armature, 6 x 7 x 36", The MOMA collection.

The other aspect of Rabbi Rice I will explore through art is rule-making and rule-following. Artists, unlike Rabbis, determine their own rules. For example, Lee Lozano's (b.1930, New Jersey)

works are experimental investigations that are strictly bound to the rules she created in order to make art happen. Lozano's works are a culmination of life and art, a self-exploration that raises the issue of life as a function of art. Her most radical investigations are *The Strike Piece*, *The Boycott Women Piece*, 1971, and *The Dropout Piece*, April 1970, in which Lozano gradually removed herself from the art world.

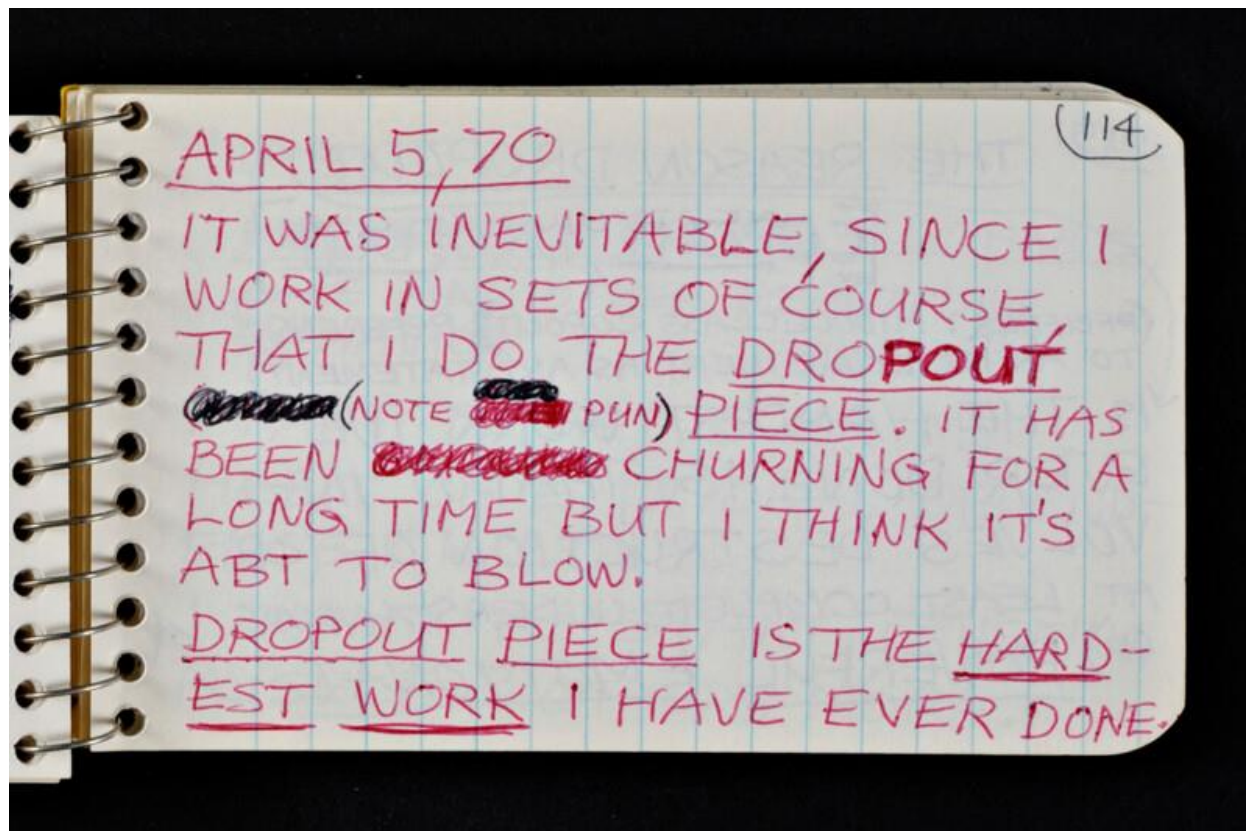


Figure 2.2 Lee Lozano, Pages from Private Notebook 8, 1970. © The Estate of Lee Lozano. Courtesy of Hauser & Wirth.

Lozano and Rabbi Rice employ a set of rules in their lives in a literal sense. Both demonstrate how sticking to the rules can result in painful and devastating circumstances. Rice and Lozano first withdrew from social relationships. In *Strike Piece* and *Boycott Women Piece*

Lozano's intention was to strengthen her ties with the people she had stopped talking to: "...after [the art], the communication will be better than ever."⁵

Lozano's conceptual pieces highlight her refusal to work and engage with the art world. On one hand, she actively sought out radical experimentation: "seek the extremes, that's where all the action is at."⁶ On the other hand, her decision to remove herself from institutional success expressed her dissatisfaction with the art world and her desire to liberate herself from the pressure to constantly produce new work. The *Dropout Piece* resulted in Lozano losing her Grand Street studio loft. In 1971 was the last year she took an active interest in exhibiting her work. In 1974, she eventually left New York for good. "*Dropout Piece* is the hardest work I have ever done... it involved destruction of (or at least complete understanding of) powerful emotional habits."⁷

Rabbi Rice also wanted to reform his followers so he took the drastic step of resigning his congregation. In *The Occident*, he voiced his opinions about reform Judaism, "...the character of religious life in this land is on the lowest level; most of the people are eating non-Kosher food, are violating the Shabbos in public. . . and there are thousands who have been assimilated among the non-Jewish population, and have married non-Jewish women."⁸

Rabbi Rice first became a hated man in his community. His congregation demanded liberal innovations in Orthodox practices, which later developed as the Reform movement. Rabbi Rice denounced any tendency to maintain a less observant life. The conflict between Reform and Orthodox ideologies in the synagogue led to a separation: In 1842, some members of his congregation left and founded Har Sinai, the first lasting Reform congregation in the US. In 1849, Rice resigned from his rabbinical position and opened a dry goods store.

⁵ Lee Lozano, *Private Notebook*, 1 August, 1971

⁶ Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer, *Lee Lozano: Dropout Piece*, p.55

⁷ Lee Lozano, *Private Notebook*, 5 April, 1970

⁸ Israel Tabak, *Rabbi Abraham Rice of Baltimore*, p. 102

By doing this, Rabbi Rice lost the sublimity of his former role. Like Lozano, he became an ordinary man. On the one hand, their strength is based on their commitment to their belief and their willingness to lose everything. On the other hand, it is extremely absurd to quit everything and hope people will follow you. It is a toddler tantrum.

Back to the rules and structure, in real life, the artist Jason Musson (b. 1977, New York) created a series of instructional videos called *Art Thoughtz*, 2010-2012, that he published on YouTube while a grad student at University of Pennsylvania. In each video, Musson takes on the persona of Hennessey Youngman, which based on Henry "Henny" Youngman (1906-1998). The real Youngman was a Russian Jew who immigrated to New York as a child. He is known for telling simple one-liner jokes, occasionally with intervals of his violin playing.

Youngman explore different aspect of art and explains how to be a successful artist, how to be a black artist, how to make art, what to do in a studio visit, what grad school is, etc. In his work *ART THOUGHTZ: How To Be A Successful Artist*, 2010, Musson performs as Youngman, wearing a Spiderman hat, and edits related picture in between his sentences. "...be white be ambiguous, that's it, all right internet that was a short one."⁹ Humor is a tool he used to critique and say harsh truths. Another connection between Musson and a Rabbi: Musson quotes a Jay Z song, "Big Pimpin" in his YouTube comments: "I WROTE ME A MANUAL/ A STEP BY STEP BOOK TO GET YOUR GAME ON TRACK/ IMA HELP YA'LL MAKE IT IN THE ART WORLD WITH MY SIMPLE INSTRUCTION YA'LL!". The vibe of the rappers, Rabbis, and artists is messianic, and the connection between them is the ability to communicate. In the 32 comments on Musson's video, it seems he is gathering his own group of believers.

⁹ *ART THOUGHTS: How to Be A Successful Artist*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hNXL0SYJ2eU&t=11s>, 2:34



Figure 2.3 Jason Musson, ART THOUGHTZ: How To Be A Successful Artist, YouTube, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hNXLOSJ2eU&t=11s>.

In the context of the Jewish identity, American Jewish humor is something in itself. Existential bitterness is a characteristic that Jewish comedians developed. The use of humor is an answer for how to regulate things that are hard or impossible to talk about directly. Art is also a sort of escape from reality and real-world orders. Making art is breaking the rules, deconstructing to reconstruct different, crossing things that otherwise will never collide. Humor is communicating for laughter and critique.

To conclude, the comparison between Rabbi Rice and an artist can generate more questions: what is a Rabbi without its people? What is an artist without an audience? What is a rabbi without a worship place? What is an artist without a studio? What is an artwork without a space to be displayed? The comparison of a rabbi and an artist comes down to this: Art and religion

are more significant than our understanding and have to be learned and practiced throughout a lifetime, forever evolving and creating more meaning and interpretations.

2.3 The Rabbi Artwork

I began gathering ideas for the Rabbi by visiting synagogues in Philadelphia over the summer of 2023. I went to any synagogue within a 20 minutes' bicycle ride from my house. I went to services, wandered in empty synagogues, and sometimes stopped and talked with the people inside. Eventually, I found an orthodox synagogue with a sign that said, "The oldest congregation in the US." I was interested in this synagogue because I was feeling lost and wanted to explore something very stable and defined. I was not going there to find God or my Judaic belief but rather to feel some sense of connection.

Later, I went to Savannah, Georgia. The biggest group of Jewish immigrants came and settled in Savannah in 1733. When I attempted to enter the city's first synagogue, a woman refused to let me in, saying "members only." It was the only time I have ever been kicked out of a synagogue by a lady and a guard. While taking pictures outside of the building, I noticed the surveillance cameras looking back at me and thought, this is not a good time to explore synagogues. There was nothing holy in this place. I looked up at the tower; it seemed like a princess was locked inside.

These experiences at synagogues started me thinking about how a Rabbi is tied to his land or his place. Finding my place in the world is one of my central questions, and I began explore this idea through the uniform of the Rabbi: an old, traditional uniform I had never seen in Israel. It consists of a black cloak, a hat that reminds me of a Turkish tarbush, and a white ribbon around the neck. I created a similar cloak based on my future graduation gown, and instead of a hat, I wanted a beard. The Rabbi is the element of earth because he is God's voice on earth, a person that

people go to for answers. A Rabbi's job is to be grounded in order to be a good leader and a father. Land is important to a Rabbi, and he needs his physical worship place and tools. Rabbi Rice had an unstable grip on the ground; both his limp and his resignation, show that his association with the earth was challenge. I think the future Rabbi artwork will be a continuous search for a place.



Figure 2.4 Shir Bassa, Untitled (Rabbi's cloak), fabric, 47 x 20 Inches, 2024

3 BRUCE LEE- WATER

3.1 The Character

Bruce Lee was born in 1940 in San Francisco to Chinese parents Grace Ho and Lee Hoi-Chuen. Lee was born in the US because his father, an opera singer, was on a yearlong tour in the US. In 1941, Lee returned to Hong Kong, where he was introduced to the Hong Kong film industry and became a child star. Besides acting in numerous films, he also studied Wing Chun under the guidance of Ip Man, a grandmaster of Wing Chun. Lee also practiced other martial arts like tai chi and boxing and participated in tournaments and street fights.

In 1959, Lee moved to Seattle and enrolled in the University of Washington in 1961, studying drama and philosophy. At that time, Lee supported himself financially by teaching martial arts classes, where he also met his wife, Linda, as his student. In 1964, Lee drew attention to his fighting skills after participating in the Long Beach International Karate Championships of California in Oakland. Afterward, Lee moved to Los Angeles and opened a martial arts school, where he trained stars like Chuck Norris, Sharon Tate, and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar.

In 1970, Lee burst into pop culture consciousness with martial arts films such as *The Big Boss*, 1971, *Fist of Fury*, 1972, *Enter the Dragon*, 1973, and *The Game of Death*, 1973. Lee is a pioneer as an Asian actor in Hollywood, having brought Kung Fu into American culture. However, Lee moved back to Hong Kong in 1970, where he was better known and had more job opportunities. In 1973, Lee suddenly died after taking a headache pill.

3.2 Love

If I ever put a bet on a fight, I would only bet on Bruce Lee because Lee is not a metaphor but an actual taught fighter. I'm intensely curious about why people love to engage in such activities, like breaking each other's faces. Lee is an example that allows us to break out of the lens

of fear and aggression and think of the different forms of love surrounding martial arts. The art of fighting, as art can be painful; however, the art of fighting is an educational process that brings people together and fosters relationships based on trust and respect. This section explores the fighter as an admired figure, as a great fighter possesses a unique heart.

Lee represents a discipline based on old Chinese philosophy of study Kung Fu, called Asceticism. The idea of mastering a skill, whether a martial art or fine art according to the Asceticism philosophy is by avoiding sorts of pleasures and desires, which can cause a distraction on the mind and the body. This method claims to lead a person to an exploration of the mind and the unknown personal potential. Lee kept himself diligent in training and performing, so by the time he passed away at 32, he had numerous acting awards and world records like the "fastest kicks ever seen by the world."¹⁰

"A good fighter should be like a swordplay but played seriously. A good martial artist does not become tense but ready. Not thinking, yet not dreaming; ready for whatever may come. When your opponent expands, I contract. When there is an opportunity, I don't hit; it hits by itself"¹⁰. This quote is taken from the dialogue between Lee and the monk in *Enter the Dragon*.

The author M.T. Kato talks in his book about Lee as representing transcendence of ego. He mentions that Lee's approach to martial art allowed him to break from fighting tropes, like the opponents superiority, or the idea of "winning," since Bruce elevated his skill, and worked in harmony with the forces of nature.¹¹

Performance art shares some similarities with martial arts in terms of detachment and dedication. This is especially true for performances that last for longer periods of time or become

¹⁰ Bruce Lee, *Fastest kicks ever seen by the world*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vVd0wLrZDJs>

¹¹ M.T. Kato, *From Kung Fu to Hip Hop*, p. 129

a lifelong practice. Or even the stereotype of a solitary artist working alone in the studio. Artists like the Flux group, Joseph Beuys, Marina Abramovic, and many others have positioned themselves as the direct tools through which their artwork is seen, and have exhibited a strong sense of commitment to the ways they execute it. As a result, a way of determining the quality of the work is due to the amount of intention they put into it.

Both Lee and these artists relate to a higher state of mind, something more focused and cleaner than everyday life. Joseph Beuys (b. 1921-1986, Germany) was a conceptual multidisciplinary artist that perceive life as creative activities and works of art as a process that always changing. In this comparison, Beuys raised similar notions of the artist as a shaman, a healer; he claimed that everyone could be an artist if they would find this internal depth.



Figure 3.1 Joseph Beuys, I Like America and America Likes Me, 1974, New York.

Simultaneously, Lee is part of Western pop culture, or even a product of it. Hollywood and Hong Kong's film industry was his way into global consciousness, with 300 Kung Fu movies produced in 1972 and hours of broadcasting TV shows and cartoons on Kung Fu.¹² Lee is a special example; he was born shortly before the war with Japan, and that impacted a lot of Asian Americans in the years to follow. Lee's appearance on the big screen was major and signifies the entry of the dragon into pop culture, which also continues to influence many artists.

¹² Paul Bowman, *Beyond Bruce Lee: Chasing the Dragon Through Film, Philosophy, and Popular Culture*, p.3

The 2003 exhibition *Black Belt*, the Studio Museum Harlem discusses this subject. It showed 40 works by 19 artists, all working on the theme of Kung Fu: "a phenomenon." The exhibition presents insight to artists' personal experiences with Kung Fu and how it affected: "...the private sphere of sexuality, gender, and personal politics."¹³ Sanford Biggers' work *Nunchucks*, 2003, from the exhibition presents gold-plated nunchucks with Plexiglas handles that light up. Biggers said the work highlights the convergence between Black and Asian youth culture: "a direct hip-hop reference by glorifying the bling-bling."¹⁴



Figure 3.2 Sanford Biggers, Nunchucks, 2003, Plexiglas, brass and chain, 30 x 1 x 1 inch.

Several artists in this exhibition wore Lee's yellow suit from the movie *Game of Death*, 1978. Patty Chang's (b. 1972, California) work, *Death of Game*, 2000, represents a video image of the artist re-enacting Lee's epic fight against Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. His reenactment has ironically reinforced the stereotypes of Blacks and Asians. However, Lee was an idol admired by the diverse

¹³ Christine Y. Kim, *Black Belt*, p. 21

¹⁴ Andrew Adam Newman, *The Golden Hour*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/12/arts/design/the-golden-hour.html>

majority, and his actions were repeated by many. For example, the artists' interviews talk about childhood memories like building cheap nunchucks and mimicking Lee's moves.



Figure 3.3 Patty Chang, Death of Game, 2000, video, 2 minutes.

In an essay featured in the *Black Belt* exhibition catalogue, Latasha Natasha Diggs writes about her love for Lee. She asks what made the Asian equation arousing: "In a phallic and nonpolitically correct mode, I am an Asiaphile who has only gone there through Hong Kong films, Anime, and Asian fiction. I am a Black girl with an Asian male fetish."¹⁵ Lee was a major Asian

¹⁵ Latasha Natasha Diggs, *The Black Asianphile*, p.89

male sex symbol in the U.S. Diggs says that Lee is erotic by the way he perfected his craft.¹⁶ One of the ways he perfected his craft was to embrace all aspects of his art.

In interviews, Lee said that he used to watch Muhammad Ali matches and practice a defense. He even put a mirror in front of the screen to practice Ali's movements "the appropriate way."¹⁷ Lee and Ali emphasized engagement with another, or with the audience, but they broke down the assumption that fighting is only about aggression and violence. Ali and Lee mentioned that a good fighter had to have humility and compassion: "...takes one tablespoon of patience, one tablespoon of generosity, one pint of kindness."¹⁸ was Ali's recipe for a successful match.

Artists engage in different ways, and sometimes art, like fighting, is about forming relationships, not winning and competing. Participatory art, such as the works of Jeremy Deller (b. 1966, Britain), *Battle of Orgreave*, 2001, which re-enacts historic confrontation, or Rirkrit Tiravanija (b. 1961, Thailand), who created *Untitled (Pad Thai)*, 1990, a cooking exhibition, aims to free art from alienation. According to art historian Claire Bishop, this art is driven by morality and implies democracy and equality.¹⁹ Physical and conceptual interaction with objects is constant, similar to love for others.

As a martial artist, Lee understood water's destructive power, and as a Hollywood actor, he learned firsthand that his fluid identity endured racist criticism both from Americans and Chinese people. Lee says that love and hate are like water. Both these emotions run deep beneath the surface, and just as water can erode the most complex material over time, love and hate also

¹⁶ Id. p. 93

¹⁷ Bruce Thomas, *Bruce Lee: Fighting Spirit*, p. 97

¹⁸ *Muhammad Ali dropping knowledge*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UQmv8nNY8yc>

¹⁹ Claire Bishop, *Artificial hell*, p. 276

have transformative powers.²⁰ Artists like Lee are constantly passionate about touching the materials, ideas, and audience.

Lee's dual life constantly flowed between two cultures: The West and the East, his wife and his lovers, public life and personal life. I claim Lee understood fluidity well; in one interview, the interviewer asked what Lee would choose, "the East or the West." Lee's respond is now famous advice to young martial artists and illustrates his wisdom: "You put water into a bottle, and it becomes the bottle. You put it in a teapot; it becomes the teapot. Now, water can flow or crash. Be water, my friend."²¹

3.3 Bruce Lee Artwork

The ideal Bruce Lee Artwork is currently a pipe dream: to clean the statue of Lee, located near where he was born in Chinatown's Chinese Hospital in San Francisco. Jeff Chin, one of the statue's creators said, "Quite a few statues have been forcefully taken down because of their racist history, and in my opinion, no one's going to touch and take down a Bruce Lee statue because Bruce Lee brought people together of all races."²²

Aesthetically, I chose the place and the action because of its visual connection to the element water. A video would appear with a shot of Lee's bronze sculpture portrays a fight position, the background depicts the city's ocean view and a horizon of skyscrapers. A woman wearing a dress steps into the image with a bucket of water and starts cleaning the statue from head to toe with a rag and bucket full of water.

In my previous works, such as *Conversation*, 2022, I copied my mother cleaning out our home in Israel. This work transforms for me the act of cleaning from one of invisible, unvalued

²⁰ *Bruce Lee: The Lost Interview*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qLXYFEa0q58&t=282s>, 7:57

²¹ Id. 12:26

²² Jasmine Garnett, *Why San Francisco needs a Bruce Lee statue now more than ever*, <https://www.sfgate.com/local/slideshow/san-francisco-bruce-lee-statue-controversial-204690.php>

feminine servitude to one of love, care, and intimacy. In cleaning Lee's memorial statue, I use the act of cleaning to express the love Lee represents in the paper, and so I could fulfill my stupid crush. By doing another cleaning work, I am also executing Lee's way, which is to practice the skill I am learning to master as an artist and a woman: cleaning.



Figure 3.4 Shir Bassa, Conversation, video, 5:05 minute, 2022

4 FRANZ KAFKA- AIR

4.1 The Character

Franz Kafka (3 July 1883 – 3 June 1924) was born in Prague, the oldest of six children. Two of his brothers died in childhood, and three sisters, Elli, Valli, and Ottla, died in the Holocaust. His father, Hermann Kafka, was raised in a small village in the Czech Republic in great poverty. His mother, Julie Lowy, was the daughter of a wealthy brewery owner. Throughout Kafka's childhood, the couple opened a men's shop, which they ran throughout their life. Kafka got his early education in German schools; later on, he attended Charles Ferdinand University in Prague, where he graduated in law. In 1907, Kafka worked for different insurance companies to support himself financially. Between 1912 and 1924, Kafka was engaged four times to three different women but never got married. In 1922, he resigned from his job because of tuberculosis.

Kafka's passion was writing, and he made sure to have time to do that in order to feel "free." Kafka is one of the greatest writers of the 20th century; he has written a few novels, but mainly short stories. His minimalist writing combines realism with fantasy and walks the reader through a dream-like realm. Kafka's work has existentialist characteristics; the term "Kafkaesque" has come into use to describe something unnecessarily complicated, absurd, frustrating, and depressing. Kafka died in 1924 in Prague due to the disease. In his will, he asked his friend to burn all of his writing, although his friend Max Brod, who saved his works, put it all in a suitcase and fled to Israel before the Holocaust.

4.2 Freedom

This section explores the theme of freedom in the artistic practices of Eleanor Antin (b. 1935, New York) and Mike Kelley (b.1954-2012, Michigan) and how imagination takes us to the innermost world of an artist. Kafka's imaginative world, where he puts himself upon on trial

through characters and narratives, resonates with the work of Antin and Kelley, who also delve into the interplay between life and art. This section discusses the artist's freedom to embody and transform into other characters, whether real or fictional. At the same time, their art navigates themes of identity, self-exploration, and existential inquiry.

The first line that connects Kafka, Antin, and Kelley is that they see writing as a methodology. Their artworks point out sensitivity and inwardness. For Kelley, "I used writing to figure out the rationale of the structure and realized that it was push-pull theory."²³ Antin also based her practice on writing and storytelling that develop to video, film and performance works. Writing was an escape, a spiritual ritual for Kafka to express his deepest self. Writing is vital for these artists since it allows them to dwell upon feelings and extend them to words.

These three artists' identities are inseparable from their art. Understanding who they are is critical for the audience to fully understand their artworks. Hence, this is a case of artists' being more interesting than their works. For example, Antin is a multidisciplinary artist. She has come a long way from her early pursuits as a painter, writer, and actor in New York to the conceptual artist she is today.

In 1969, Antin moved to Southern California with her husband, David Antin, and their one-year-old son. In California, she was committed to reinventing herself. Early series like *California Lives*, 1969, and *Portraits of Eight New York Women*, 1970, blur reality and fiction. The audience gets to know each character through a short text, images, and objects; sometimes, there is a table with random things, a hung uniform, a hat, and a gasoline tank on the floor. According to reviewers, these two series began her genuine and fictional exploration of her different selves.

²³ Dennis Cooper, *Trauma Club*, <https://www.artforum.com/features/trauma-club-dennis-cooper-talks-with-mike-kelley-201069/>



Figure 4.1 Eleanor Antin, Georgia de Meir, 1969, Table, chairs, dominoes, sweater, bowl, California grapes. Image courtesy of the artist and Diane Rosenstein, Los Angeles.

All three also use objects to signify identity or lack of identity. Antin's mail art project, *100 Boots*, 1971-1973, pushes the boundaries of character exploration by challenging viewers with what seems to be an absence of identifiable traits.²⁴ In the gallery space, a series of photographs is shown with a chronological story of 100 boots. The shoes are installed in a humanized way like listening to a radio machine, hidden under the bed, or welcoming an audience at the door.

²⁴ Howard N. Fox, *Eleanor Antin*, p. 48

Like Kelley's Cal Art graduate show in 1978, which presents different birdhouses with the caption, "The bird is the soul, the birdhouse is the body,"²⁵ Kelley creates objects representing human conditions, such as *Catholic Birdhouse*. Meanwhile, Kafka extends his low state of mind to the point that he turns himself into a cockroach in the novel *The Metamorphosis*.



Figure 4.2 Mike Kelley, *Catholic Birdhouse*, 1978, Wood, paint, and composite shingles, 22 x 18 1/2 x 18 1/2 inch.

These artists all explore role-playing and otherness in eccentric ways. Antin's early series were the beginning of more sophisticated screenwriting and character development. Later, she pinned her selves down to three: "her political self, the King; her artist self, the Ballerina; and her caring self, the Nurse."²⁶ In works such as *A Man Without a World*, 1991, a fiction story based on her mother's origin, she portrayed herself as a gypsy in a Jewish village in Poland. By doing so,

²⁵ Elisabeth Sussman, *Catholic Tastes*, p.44

²⁶ Eleanor Antin, *An artist's life: by Eleanora Antinova*, Introduction

Antin brings the idea of "otherness". Antin also mentions in her writing what it was like growing up as a Jewish kid in New York.²⁷ However, she also asks a bigger question: What does it mean to be a woman?

Antin is part of a generation of artists who rebelled against traditional concepts of womanhood by re-creating their image. Regarding "otherness," Antin and other women artists at that time, such as Adrian Piper, Nikki S. Lee, or Anna Deavere Smith, represent in their works the act of "enactment." Whether it was their male version, imaginary persona, or the feminine ideal that they expected them to be, it had a lot to do with self-determination. In the project of Eleanora Antinova, the black ballerina, Antin darkened her face "...to reckon with the everyday facticity of racialization and to imagine a more autonomous way of being in the world through them."²⁸

²⁷ Eleanor Antin, *Conversation with Stalin*, <https://vimeo.com/463818944>

²⁸ Emily Liebert, *Multiple Occupancy: Eleanor Antin's "Selves"*, p.34



Figure 4.3 Eleanor Antin, Ballerina and the Bum, 1974, Photographs, black and white photograph, 16 x 20 inch, Ronald Feldman Gallery.

Antin embraces the exploration of several selves that she could have been or dreamed of being because she understands that we experience life in more than one way. Her simplicity is powerful and conveys complex emotions, such as childlike gestures of dressing up and make-believe, playing with cut-out paper dolls, contrasting her personas to real people, or working out the collision between art and life. For example, she is not a real ballerina and could only document ballet poses with a stool to help her stability. The stool moved aside when a picture was taken so she could hold the pose briefly before falling.²⁹

²⁹ Howard N. Fox, *Eleanor Antin*, p. 76

Kelley on the other hand, uses his actual biography and mass-cultural experiences as one. By doing this, Kelley introduces the audience to feelings like shame, guilt, fear, and innocence. Both Kelley and Kafka relate to failure. Kelley's works explore failure in various ways. For instance, the failure of handmade objects when compared to manufactured ones, working with feminine cultural clichés that are seen as failures to be masculine, and the failure of an object to meet the expectations of viewers due to the use of "low" and "high" materials in the context of museums.³⁰

Kafka fails to address his desire for happiness or the success he achieved after he died. His dreamlike stories could not correspond with reality or logical sense, leading to a loss of truth and accuracy. The philosopher Walter Benjamin defined the "beauty of failure" as Kafka's rhetoric: "The circumstances of this failure are manifold. One is tempted to say: once he was certain of eventual failure, everything worked out for him *en route* as in a dream. There is nothing more memorable than the fervor with which Kafka emphasized his failure."³¹

The work, *Day is Done*, 2005, presents 365 video installations related to the sculpture *Educational Complex*, 1995, an architectural model made up of replicas of every school Kelley had ever attended. In an interview Kelley said: "Some videotapes in the *Day Is Done* series... developed out of free-associative narratives written in response to them [Kelley's image collection]. For example, in the video *EAPR #25A (Devil: Master of Ceremonies)*, Kelley interpreted this character of Satan as a kind of "master of ceremonies". The young actor is cast as the Devil when he was a child. He enters a barbershop, where he is taunted by a barber, played by the same actor who portrays the Devil. So the Devil, in effect, abuses his own inner child. The

³⁰ Julie Sylvester, *Talking Failure*, p. 100-103.

³¹ Walter Benjamin, *illuminations*, p.145

scene was shot on location in an actual barbershop. Following it, the Devil enters the door behind him- which turns out to be a public restroom- to discover, and tempt, himself as a boy."³²

At some point in life, a person deals with existentialist questions, along with existential crises; the question of who am I? The question of purpose, etc. I like to think of Kafka as an artist because he has a similar mind to artists: we create because we must, not for any logical or reasonable outcome. Then I think perhaps Kafka is not fully an artist because he is too aware of himself, especially in the letter *My Dearest Father*, 1919: "My writing was about you."³³

In conclusion, the comparison of Kafka, Antin, and Kelley emphasizes the importance of freedom in artistic practice. Despite their varied approaches, their ability to navigate the complexities of consciousness and identity resonates deeply with audiences, offering both personal and universal insights. Why do I like Kafka, Antin and Kelley so much? Maybe because they took the deep, unknown, and vulnerable path, and this is what they give me as a viewer to connect to.

4.3 Kafka Artwork

Kafka resembles air because he creates worlds "out of thin air", he floats freely and makes his own logic. He does not and never will have a real grip on reality. The benefit of this freedom is to completely invent who you are; to invent answers. For Kafka, the answer can be not having an answer. Kafka is beyond; he is the absurd. Meaning, we will never understand him completely because he is like the wind: unknowable, untamable, undefinable.

I decided to create the Kafka artwork based on a black and white photo of him as a six-year-old wearing a sailor suit. The multi-color costume that I have made is printed with the letter "B" in a Gutenberg font. The letter "B" in this work symbolizes Kafka's secondary and weak self-

³² Mike Kelley, *Day Is Done* (2005/2006), <https://mikekelleyfoundation.org/on-view/at-home-with-mike-kelley/day-is-done>

³³ Franz Kafka, *Dearest Father*, p.63

image, as he often compares himself to his father. Additionally, "B" represents communication through words, making it a fitting symbol for a writer. Furthermore, the letter "B" can also stand for "Bassa," which is similar to how Kafka used the letter "K" in his character names as an attempt to embody himself in his characters.

Kafka's artworks are made from thin air, and I have incorporated this quality into my video work using a green screen. The green background enables me to appear at any location and time. For instance, my piece, *Holy Mountain*, 2023, depicts me climbing a mountain and discovering a treasure inside a cave. To create this illusion, I climbed a ladder covered in a green screen while stepping in place. The original film that inspired this work is *The Blue Light*, shot in Germany in 1932, starring Leni Riefenstahl.

In contrast, wearing Lee's green suit is limiting as it forces me to focus on embodying a specific character. In this instance, I wanted to avoid assuming the role of Riefenstahl from the original movie. Instead, I wore a house dress and held a rag as my treasure, allowing me the freedom to explore any character in any surroundings.



Figure 4.4 Shir Bassa, Untitled (Kafka's sailor suit), silkscreen print on fabric, 20 x 17 inches, 2024.

5 EMMA GOLDMAN- FIRE

5.1 The Character

Emma Goldman was born in 1869 in Kaunas, Lithuania. Goldman was the oldest of three siblings. At the age of 16 years old, Goldman fled to Rochester, New York, after escaping an arranged marriage and other bad experiences. Like many others, Goldman imagined a better life in America. She worked at a textile factory and soon realized that injustice was inevitable no matter where she went.

Goldman connected with the anarchist movement in New York City and soon became an advocate for free speech, gay rights, fair salary, birth control, and more. As a result, Goldman was convicted and imprisoned several times. Goldman also worked as a nurse and midwife; her experiences and the suffering she witnessed motivated her to fight those in power and try to improve the lives of lower-class people.

Goldman gained a reputation as "one of the most dangerous women in America"³² due to her activities as a speaker for Anarchism. Goldman believed: "Anarchism is the only philosophy of peace... that values human life above everything else."³⁴ And any acts of violence committed were because of "great political injustice", and not because of Anarchism. As a speaker, Goldman was relentless; she traveled constantly and spoke in front of thousands in lecturing, and marching in demonstrations, despite the police resistance. Goldman blamed what prevented justice and peace: the government, the military, the patriarchy. She died in 1940 and was buried in Chicago, Illinois.

³⁴ Id, p. 59

5.2 Hate

Emma Goldman is the only woman I have included in the four categories of an artist. Goldman's character delves into the struggles faced by women in a male-dominated society. Throughout history, women have had to pave their way, overcoming obstacles preventing them from practicing art. Goldman represents the disadvantages and advantages of being a woman artist.

The feminist art movement emerged during the second wave of feminism, from the 1960s until the late 1980s. It was a pivotal moment for women to speak up about a range of issues, including stereotypes about women, gender, discrimination, societal expectations for women, violence against women, and more. Feminist artists use their work to address these issues.

For example, the Guerrilla Girls, an all-female collective established in 1984, works to raise public consciousness about sexism and injustice in the art world and its institutions. The group's members wear gorilla masks and black clothes named after famous dead women. The group conveys its message through direct and transparent communication, such as posters, billboard signs, protests and lectures.

Goldman and the Guerrilla Girls communicate through bad behavior: the act of putting on an angry gorilla mask and pointing a blaming finger. Anger is not violence but a reaction that can serve as a catalyst for conversation and demand changes. Anger is also another form of self-care.³⁵ For example, beside of raising awareness to women's discrimination in the art world, the Guerrilla Girls help women to look on the positive sides of their situation and make it to their advantage: "not having to choke on those big cigars or paint in Italian suits."³⁶

³⁵ Jill Pierce, *I'm Tired of Being Angry*, Heresies Vol.7 No.1, p. 27

³⁶ Guerrilla Girls, *Guerrilla Girls: The Art of Behaving Badly*, p. 20



Figure 5.1 Guerrilla Girls Demand A Return To Traditional Values On Abortion, march on Washington DC, 1992.

Anger is a temporary feeling that, after a while, passes away. However, Activism and feminist art did not pass away after the 80's. Therefore, I am using the term *hate*, in both its rational sense and emotional feeling. Hate suggests the existence of an opponent; for feminism, it has always been the patriarchy. Like the Guerrilla Girls, artists such as Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer uses large-scale texts, projections, and the visual language of propaganda to display their messages in and for public spaces. Kruger and Holzer are inspired by the power of words as words can persuade anyone, like Goldman did.



Figure 5.2 Barbara Kruger, Untitled (Your body is a battleground), photographic silkscreen on vinyl, 112 x 112 Inches, 1989.

The activism of Goldman does not only describe the feminist art movement but connects it to other minority groups that needed to fight for their rights, such as Black artists, Queer artists, poor and educated artists, and many other groups. Even though today's art world seems to embrace

minority groups, this still did not erase other forms of hate and power dynamics between the stronger and the weak.

The artist Cady Noland (b. 1956, Washington, D.C.) created sculptures and installations from everyday objects, reflecting the American dream and its fractures. Noland's works do not interest me in the context of feminist art but rather because of their aggression. Everyday objects such as beer cans, police handcuffs, walkers, the American flag, BBQ grills, chain-link fencing, and other industrial objects connect to lower-middle class, white Americana. The works display dark and evil sides society prefers to ignore, such as alcoholism, police brutality, the male psychopath, the unpatriotic, and the public's interest in violence.

In the work, *Oozewald*, 1989, an aluminum silhouette with a silkscreen print of Lee Harvey Oswald, who was shot after assassinating President John F. Kennedy in 1963, Noland appropriated an image of a man whom America wanted dead. She recreated larger-than-life bullet holes in Oswald's image, and instead of blood, the red and white of the U.S. flag stuck out. In her writing, *Toward the Metalanguage of Evil*, Noland presents the idea of "the game." The American dream is long dead, but the game makes us think it is still thriving. At the same time, the characteristics of a psychopath are similar to those of the entrepreneurial male.³⁷

³⁷ Cady Noland, *Towards A Metalanguage of Evil*, p.6

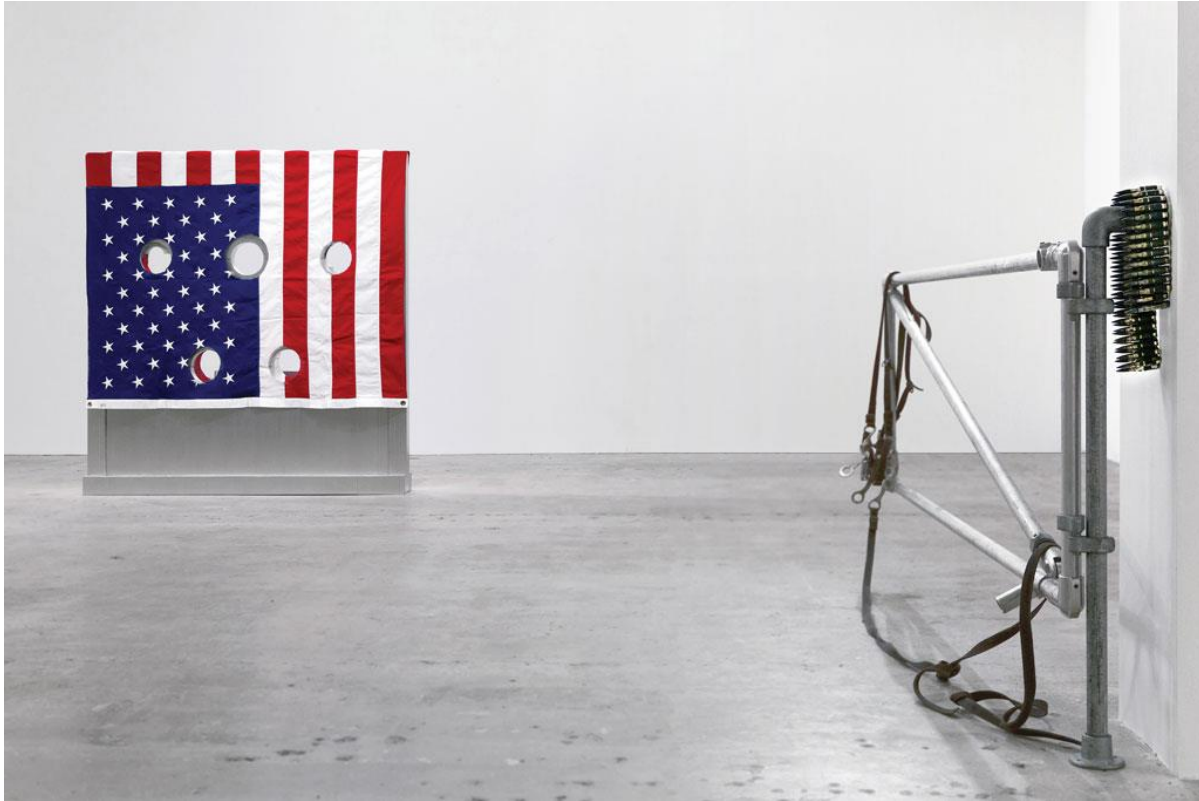


Figure 5.3 Installation view of “Kinetics of Violence: Alexander Calder + Cady Noland,” with Gibbet (left), 1993–94, and Corral Gates (detail), 1989, at Venus Over Manhattan, 2017.

Noland's works refer to the abusive side of humanity, like *Your Fucking Face*, 1993-94, or *Tower of Terror*, 1993-94, a series of works that display gibbet cages used to starve people to death in public. Noland's *SLA #4*, 1990, features another image from a newspaper clipping image of Patty Hearst, daughter of publishing magnate William Randolph Hearst, who became a member of the radical SLA after being kidnapped by them in 1974. Noland's use of silkscreen is another critique of the mass information in America and the transformation from a criminal to a celebrity.

In the late 1990s, Noland filed a Lawsuit against the owner of her work, Log Cabin, after the rotten wood in the sculpture was replaced without consulting the artist. First, Noland disclaimed the work, and after she lost the lawsuit, she decided to resign from the art world. The drastic act of dropping out raises questions about the treatment women artists receive in the art world. My question was why great female artists disappeared from the art world?



Figure 5.4 Cady Noland, Oozewald, silkscreen ink on aluminum plate and two flags, 72 x 36 x 7 inches, 1989. Photo: Axel Schneider.

According to Goldman, Anarchism will lead to a society based on materialism. Some artists are frustrated with the current state of the world and use their art to create alternative visions and hope. Yael Bartana (b. 1970, Israel), explores ideas related to nationalism, homeland, and displacement in her work. In her video piece *The Undertaker*, 2019, she presents a fictional world where armed soldiers participate in the burial of weapons in a cemetery in Philadelphia, the birthplace of American democracy. *Two Minutes to Midnight*, 2021, and *What If Women Ruled the World*, 2017, are two other video works that showcase an all-women government working to prevent an imminent nuclear war. Bartana's *Polish Trilogy*, 2007, invites three million Jews to return to Poland and live with the Polish people once again.

Goldman may seem intimidating at first, but she is a kind, empathetic, and loving person. She cares not only for herself but also for many other people who lack power and influence. In order to make her voice heard, she needed to become the "most dangerous woman in America." In her essay *What I Believe*, Goldman mentions that destruction is inevitable. When it does not destroy the healthful but the parasitic growth: "It is merely clearing the soil from weeds and sagebrush, that it may eventually bear healthy fruit."³⁸

5.3 Emma Goldman artwork

I chose Goldman to be the element of fire because fire eliminates everything, but it is also a basic need: a source for life. Goldman is the desire and motivation artists can wish for. Goldman can destroy anything that stand in her way and might even destroy herself as well in order to achieve her goals. Her fire is anger on what happened in the past, anger on what is happening now, and anger for what is next. However, any successful person I can think of became one because they have fire in their eyes.

³⁸ Alix Kates Shulman, *Red Emma Speaks*, p. 63

I created a nurse uniform for Goldman's artwork to balance everything I just said about her. The nurse character appears in previous video work, but in this context, she represents Goldman in a position that's hard for me to imagine her doing. Therefore, having this scary woman in the feminine role of a caregiver, office secretary, or typist is funny. However, Goldman's artwork is not merely her costume. Like the other characters, she is present in my other works, such as *Combat Firing*, 2023; *Confederate Headstone*, 2023; and *Cleaning Job*, 2022. These works depict actions I am ambivalent about and would not agree to do in real life.

For example, the work *Combat Firing* presents an edited part from a military training film where a commander teaches his soldiers to shoot a gun correctly. The artist in the studio is embodied in the film using a green screen and green suit. Through this work, I am using art to cope with an action I see as violence. Since the training film got out of its original context, shooting a gun can become a metaphor for another thing, for example, when the artist repeats the commander's words: "Practice again and again until it becomes natural as breathing."

In the work *Confederate Headstone*, I continue exploring problematic actions I can take, such as cleaning a Confederate headstone in Oakland Cemetery in Atlanta. This work also critiques what I am allowed to do as an individual. Solider headstones are government property. Therefore, I can clean any headstone I want and reflect on the kind of engagement the government creates for its people. As mentioned before, cleaning is an act of love and care, and the idea of an enemy, in this instance, becomes blurred.

In the work *Cleaning Job*, seven women of different ages, races, and classes clean together The City Hall courtyard in Philadelphia wearing house dresses and scrubbing with blue rags printed with red roses. This work developed after the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, which protected the right to an abortion. The performance presents settled actions like cleaning as

a metaphor for what needs cleaning, such as unjustified and dangerous rules like banning abortions.

I find a connection between the performance and Goldman's character. The personality of a justice warrior like Goldman is too big for me to emulate, but I experienced the power of people coming together for a shared belief. As I wanted to spread the work's message after the performance ended, I invited journalists from the Philadelphia Inquirer newspaper and WHY?Y, a local radio station, to cover the performance. During the interview, I guess anger made me say: "It is a way to put yourself in a state of mind of cleaning this mess we are in. We have hope that we can change, that women eventually clean the mess of conservative, primitive men's opinions."³⁹

³⁹ Peter Crimmins, <https://why.org/articles/performers-scrub-ground-philadelphia-city-hall-abortion-rights-protest/>, July 25, 2022



Figure 5.5 Shir Bassa, Cleaning Job, Performance at The Philadelphia City Hall courtyard, 10 minute, July 25th, 2022.

6 EXHIBITION

My exhibition, *The Blue Horizon*, developed alongside the idea of graduating with my master's degree and who I am at this moment. Because my perception of art and my studio practice keeps changing and developing in the intensity of academic systems, I became frustrated by the unfamiliar places my works took me. This thesis aims to identify four factors that contribute to the quality of my art and provide a structure for my creative process. While the research paper explores the four characteristics of an artist, the exhibition displays the visual outcomes of the research.

The artworks are made of textiles, printmaking, and video. Inside the gallery, a 10-yard white curtain with a repetitive pattern of blue flowers divides the space to the front and back. On

the front side are hung four costumes on four different walls: a white nurse' uniform, a green bodysuit, a black gown, and a multi-colored sailor suit the size of a child, printed with a pattern of the letter “B”. In the middle of the space stands a long table with a wooden base and a surface of transparent plexiglass. The table' surface is silkscreen printed to look like a crocheted tablecloth. On the table lay four different sets of boxing protective gear in colors and sizes that correlate to the costumes.

On the back side, behind the curtain, a video projects on the wall. The backspace is empty and dark, except for a mannequin standing in the corner. The mannequin wears a blazer and skirt featuring images of the artist executing defense and attack moves. The projection on the wall depicts short videos, 1 to 2 minutes long, superimposing the artist enacting motions ranging from boxing to fixation of a leg fracture, taken from instructional films sourced from YouTube, the public domain archives, and military records. The 17-minute video, in total, repeats several different boxing training techniques and, in between, displays nonrelated instructional films such as shark defense or how to type in a typing machine.



Figure 6.1 Shir Bassa, The Blue Horizon, Ernest G. Welch gallery exhibition overview, 2024, photo: Ross Landenberger.

The process that led to the final result of this exhibition started with the idea of writing a play that includes the Rabbi, Goldman, Lee, and Kafka inside the abandoned arena. Although I did not know much about boxing, nor did I want them to fight, I collaborated with students from the game design department and created a 3-D model of the arena. With this kind of replica, I can now enter a virtual space and create a motion video from any angle I want. In terms of entertainment and engagement, the language of video games is similar to that of sports. Working on this project removes many limitations as it is a virtual reality, and I find the idea of embodying myself in it intriguing.



Figure 6.2 Shir Bassa, The Blue Horizon, 3-D arena created in Unreal Engine, 2023.

This project fell away, but I kept playing with the idea of my characters as boxers. The next step was to make clothes that fit a general idea for the character. Previous works such as *Conversation*, *Holy Mountain* and *Cleaning Job* present "The Housewife" character through several house dresses printed in different patterns. After the dress is made, the housewife can go anywhere and do anything as long she is wearing the dress. She can do any action at all and still identify as a housewife. She is not trying to be something she is not, even though she is attempting new things and exploring new realms.

Significant parts of the character's lives inspire the decision for their clothes. For example, the nurse uniform is based on Goldman working as a nurse in Blackwell's Island Penitentiary after being arrested in Philadelphia in 1893. The image of the nurse holds a symbolic meaning of care and safety that feels necessary for the boxing narrative as well. The "Nurse Emma" contradicts common assumptions about her as an anarchist, "the most dangerous woman in America," even

opposes my idea of her identity. However, Goldman's motivation stems from the suffering she saw as a nurse, which was a compelling starting point.



Figure 6.3 Bandage instruction, Photograph shows a class at the Metropolitan Hospital Training School for Nurses on Blackwell's Island (now Roosevelt Island), New York City, between ca. 1915 and ca. 1920.

Other costumes have less to do with the actual person and more with a personal interpretation of the characters. For example, Lee likes bodysuits. The rabbinic garment represents wisdom and authority, like that of a judge or king. While affiliated with a higher status, like that of a king, it might also be associated with righteousness. Kafka wears a costume the size of a child because he engages in the absurd. I had a similar idea and made a costume I could not wear, which was also absurd. Initially, my research on the characters' costumes was aimed at understanding and developing my characters and exploring what I would do while wearing their costumes.

Therefore, it is essential to note that the costumes are not the final result for my characters but rather the first step in their development.

Making their costumes was my way of creating physical evidence of my characters' existence. However, the project also opens doors to thinking of these people as feelings, philosophies, or situations; expressly in the paper, they also correspond to the four elements. However, If the clothes were an attempt to understand a character's psychology, this was not successful enough. Therefore, I moved on with creating something more personal and intimate: their protective gear.

The desire to create defensive gear was exciting since it required me to keep cutting and sewing, skills I felt urged to do. I thought about the four imaginative figures in my head, searching for the correct pattern, fabric type, and matching color. However, the protectors turned out to be not quite intimidating; they had a clownish, touchable look. Despite their cute appearance, the protective gear function was to protect the characters from an unknown script I could not write.



Figure 6.4 Shir Bassa, The Blue Horizon, Ernest G. Welch gallery exhibition overview, 2024, photo: Ross Landenberger.

The textile works are displayed again in the video, with figures acting as boxing trainers wearing them. The trainers briefly cover boxing workouts, such as footwork drills, ducking, and how to move with the punching bag. The video is shot on a green screen, and the characters mimic the original YouTube video they see. Later, the YouTube video will be displayed on the green screen while the real trainer will be removed or hidden behind my characters.

Initially, each character could perform a different boxing workout. The more successful attempts were the ones that were fast and clumsy, when the boxing gear was too big to wear, or where I edited out what made sense in the original videos. It was not always comfortable to perform

boxing. The better videos are the ones that have nothing to do with boxing and I had hard time understanding how it can still work with the four sets of my protective gear.



Figure 6.5 Shir Bassa, Shark Defense, video, 1:58 minute, 2024.

The video *Shark Defense*, for example, depicts a Navy soldier stuck in the middle of the ocean on a floating boat. Lee, wearing a green bodysuit and a mask, superimposed onto the soldier, and they both act out the same actions as the voice of the narrator explains what to do. When creating this video, there is little to do other than take it seriously but not take it too seriously.

The idea behind an instructional video is to give a sense of safety in a moment that is not safe. It also forces everyone who watches it, whether in practice or theoretically, to know what they must do in the event of calamity. As an artwork, the instructions changed from the original purpose to a new method: I could perform repetitive movements to explore my own fears. I could

cause doubt or become a joke about what seems right and logical. Sometimes, it is just comforting to be two people in the same boat.

7 CONCLUSION

The four categories, Instruction, Love, Freedom, and Hate, help use arrive at a universal understanding of not just art, but also the dominant forces in life. In finding and shaping these four characters, I built a methodology for myself as an artist. The combination of the four is not meant to create the best piece of work I can imagine but to focus on what is important. The categories oppose each other, which creates challenges but more room to play and find new ways they can work together.

The research on my characters opens a door for different paths I can explore and develop in future work because I still have a lot to learn from them. As an initial thought, I can limp my way to Rice's synagogue in Baltimore; practice martial arts after I clean one of Lee's statues; see myself walking and talking in my nurse uniform like Goldman, or I can keep playing with my green screen and create short imaginary videos.

I see this work more as a process rather than a final work. The process is my attempt to create a synthesis between materials and ideas that grab my attention and interest. By bringing myself closer to the characters or vice versa, I am already creating something more whole that allows me to reflect on. By wearing someone's else shoes, I am pushing any boundary in my head about what I can do or be as an artist. Eventually, I hope these four categories will work in harmony and lead me to unexpected places in my art and life. To conclude, I believe my artistic practice is a bottomless pit similar to the unstoppable characters I chose for this work.

REFERENCES

- Sherman, D. Moshe. *Orthodox Judaism in America: A Biographical Dictionary and Sourcebook*. Greenwood Press. 1996.
- Kafka, Franz. *My Dearest Father*. Translated by Hannah and Richard Stokes. ALMA CLASSICS press. 2008.
- Kim, Y. Christine. *Black Belt*. The Studio Museum in Harlem. 2004.
- Lehrer-Graiwer, Sarah. *Lee Lozano: Dropout Piece*. MIT Press. 2014.
- Smith, Cherise. *Enacting Others: Politics of Identity in Eleanor Antin, Nikki S. Lee, Adrian Piper, and Anna Deavere Smith*. Duke University Press. London. 2011.
- Kato, M.T. *From Kung Fu to Hip Hop*. State university of New York press. 2007.
- Antin, Eleanor. *An Artist's Life by Eleanora Antinova*. Hirmer Publishers. Germany. 2016.
- Sussman, Elizabeth. *Mike Kelley: Catholic tastes*. Whitney Museum of American Art. 1993.
- Bishop, Claire. *Artificial hells: participatory Art and The Politics of Spectatorship*. London. 2012.
- Fox, N. Howard. *Eleanor Antin*. Los Angeles County Museum of Art. 1999.
- Liebert, Emily. *Multiple Occupancy: Eleanor Antin's "Selves"*. The Wallach Art Gallery. Columbia University. 2014.
- Shulman, Kates, Alix. *Red Emma Speaker: An Emma Goldman Reader*. Humanities Press. New Jersey. 1996.
- Tabak, Israel. *Rabbi Abraham Rice of Baltimore: Pioneer of Orthodox Judaism in America*. Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought. Vol. 7, No. 2 (SUMMER 1965). pp. 100-120.

- Lehrer-Graiwer, Sarah. *Lee Lozano: Dropout Piece*. Afterall Book Press. 2014.
- Bowman, Paul. *Beyond Bruce Lee: Chasing The Dragon Through Film, Philosophy, and Popular Culture*. Wallflower Press. 2013.
- Thomas, Bruce. *Bruce Lee: Fighting Spirit*. Blue Snake Books. 1994.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Illumination: Essays and Reflections*. Schocken Books. 1969.
- Guerrilla Girls. *Guerrilla girls: The Art of Behaving Badly*. Chronicle Books LLC. 2020.
- Pierce, Jill. *I'm Tired of Being Angry*, Heresies Magazine. Vol.7. No.1. Issue 25. 1990.
- Noland, Cady. *Towards A Metalanguage of Evil*. Balcon No. 4. 1989.
- Garnett, Jasmine. *Why San Francisco Need A Bruce Lee Statue Now More Than Ever*. July 1. 2020. <https://www.sfgate.com/local/slideshow/san-francisco-bruce-lee-statue-controversial-204690.php>
- Cooper, Dennis. *Trauma Club: Dennis Cooper Talks with Mike Kelley*. October 200. Vol.39. No. 2020.
- Sylvester, Julie. *Talking Failure: Mike Kelley And Julie Sylvester*. Parkett-Verlag Zürich. No. 31. 1992. pp. 100-103.
- Kelley, Mike. *Day Is Done (2005/2006)*. Mike Kelley foundation For the Arts. <https://mikekelleyfoundation.org/on-view/at-home-with-mike-kelley/day-is-done>.
- Crimmins, Peter. *Performers Scrub the Ground at City Hall to Protest the Overturning of Roe v. Wade*. July 25. 2022. <https://whyy.org/articles/performers-scrub-ground-philadelphia-city-hall-abortion-rights-protest/>.