

Leann Vincent Bigelow Thesis Deck:

Artist Statement: My name is Leann Vincent Bigelow (she/her/data corrupted), and I'm a queer artist and video maker. Having studied Animated Arts at the Pacific Northwest College of Art, I learned to approach animation and video production with a level of experimentation, and naivety. I particularly enjoy the aesthetics of the grotesque. Which I use to represent my intersectional feelings of queerness, femininity, monstrosity, and disability. Using penetrative animation, what I want most is for my viewers to be confronted by the things they may be accustomed to neglecting.

Proposal: How can I engender the feelings of PTSD onto a psychical space? How can I make content for survivors with Post-traumatic stress disorder?

Abstract:

For my thesis defense, I wanted to create a new kind of coding for people living with symptoms of post-traumatic stress. Limited to the experiences of soldiers, I didn't see myself or my experience of disability reflected in what I saw online, in history, or in other sources of media. So for that reason, I made my thesis defense with the goal of creating a more androgynous experience of those symptoms to stray away from previously male-centered representations. So by utilizing the aesthetics of the grotto-esque, and the destruction method of Paul Mccarthy, I was able to reappropriate symbols and memes associated with PTSD. It was also through my collaborative use of video, animation, and sound that I was able to translate the visceral feelings of my symptoms to audiences of all bodies and abilities. Finally, by partially disassociating from my own experience and triggers, I feel I've made something almost anyone can approach: A panic attack in a little box. Enjoy.

Midterm Creative Brief: (PART 1)

Project Vision: An internet video installation that plays with and crushes negative social discourse and stereotypes surrounding non-male experiences of trauma and mental illness. I want to create a project with a more androgynous view of post-traumatic symptoms.

Audience: 18+ only, Mature online spaces. Vimeo.

Materials and Methods: Digital and stop motion animation, psychical fabrications, found objects, video compositing, appropriated footage, internet memes, original live-action, and animated video interventions.

Midterm Creative Brief: (PART 2)

Comparative Media:

Ryan Trecartin in reference to futuristic, queer internet spaces, campy, theatrical video production, and drag adornment.

Nathalie Djuberg in her use of unmoving stop motion puppets, and expressions of feminine disgust. Unmoving stop motion puppets paired with animated video and sound production.

Paul McCarthy for his theories on “grotesque” statues and imagery. Calling back to an ancient decorative style called “grotto-esque,” where scrapped statues were stitched together. Now referring to a magnificent and disgusting style. Paul Mccarthy also uses a process of destruction that I am inspired by.

Oliver Laric’s video essay “Versions,” and the concept of “Same, Same but Different.” In relation to the appropriation of art, and individual artist interpretation. Endless interpretations are possible. Especially now, brought on by the internet.

Midterm Creative Brief: (PART 3)

Comparative Media:

Donato Totaro's essay with Off : Screen "The Final Girl: A Few Thoughts on Feminism and Horror." Twisting previously white male-serving sadistic voyeurism into masochistic voyeurism.

Concepts of pain-food in "Johnny the Homicidal Maniac" by Jhonen Vasquez. Marketplace Application Adult animation on the internet, music video for a collaborating artist. Free to watch online.

Marketplace Application: Adult animation on the internet, music video for a collaborating artist. Free to watch online.

Thesis Speech:

Hi everybody, thanks for coming to my thesis defense. My name is Leann Vincent Bigelow and I'm a queer animator, illustrator, and video artist. I also go through everyday life with high levels of Post-Traumatic Stress symptoms. I want to take this time to say I'm forever grateful to the chosen family in my life, as well as the healthcare providers that support me every day. But I will not say my journey with disability has been a smooth one. Nay, the road to healing has been a treacherous one. So for that reason, I'm presenting my thesis defense today in hopes of reshaping the way we look at Post-traumatic stress disorder.

PTSD as a diagnosis is really new in terms of history, that name for the condition is only about 40 years old, and it comes from a place stricken by binaries: western psychology. It's important to note that before 1980, we didn't know post-traumatic stress as we do today. In its earliest references, The V.A. states that it went by the

Thesis Speech:

name “Soldier’s Heart” in 1761. In 1919, it was dubbed “shell shock,” to refer to the visceral response many soldiers had to the sound of artillery shells after fighting in World War 1. And it’s not that human beings hadn’t felt these ways before, we just hadn’t conceptually pinned it down yet. It has been widely identified with soldiers and military combat. It went by many names until 1952, and do notice the skew towards battle trauma. “Railway Spine” ,” Battlefield Exhaustion,” and “Combat Stress Reaction,” were all names for the condition at some point in time. The only time we really see it skew from combat and soldier-coding is with the aforementioned “Railway Spine.” Which apparently occurred because a substantial amount of people were getting into Railway Accidents quite suddenly.

1952 was notable for its semi-universal diagnosis of “Gross Stress Disorder.” This was an important point because they were beginning to recognize ordinary people’s symptoms. Non-male bodied people within the experience of gross stress.

Thesis Speech:

However, it still didn't recognize symptoms after 6 months from the inciting incident. That is until 1980, where through a study with Vietnam War Veterans, Holocaust Survivors, and sexual trauma victims, the American Psychiatric Association landed on the commonized "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder." Which recognized the condition as relatively common. Another important inclusion in DSM 5, was that it differed from Anxiety Disorder and was more in line with Mood Disorders like Depression. It formed its own unique category, as a trauma-and-stress-disorder, due to its distinct features.

The V.A. claims that to be diagnosed with the disorder four types of symptoms need to be present for longer than 6 months after the incident. The symptoms are as follows: reliving the traumatic event; avoiding situations that are reminders of the event; negative changes in beliefs and feelings; and feelings of hyperarousal and over-reactivity.

Thesis Speech:

So then why do we have memes like this? Why so male vs. female? Why are they so gendered? Experiences of PTSD are relatively the same across the board. So why do we find memes like this? I believe it may be a result of our limited sample pool in the early days of “Soldier Heart,” and “Shell Shock.” I think all other experiences of post-trauma have been shaped and dehumanized under that male/female binary.

Basically, It took us so long to acknowledge any other kind of pain or trauma other than that from the battlefield, that it’s hard to be recognized under that condition. It reflects in the representations in media, as well as PTSD resources and treatment found online. It’s skewed to represent the few, and disregard all else. This is what I got when I googled “PTSD” “Meme,” and something I noticed was that it tended to go half-and-half. Some are really unsympathetic to the wider net the diagnosis tends to cast. Usually vilifying the experiences of heroized Soldiers, and putting down the experiences of all else.

Thesis Speech:

Imagine how that must feel to experience post-traumatic stress outside of that norm? What of PTSD from police brutality, natural disasters? Domestic violence? I certainly didn't see myself there. Thankfully, in equal numbers were sympathetic memes like these ones. Ones I would presume are made by people with the disability, to actively combat the binary, and apathetic view people have developed for non-male bodied people with the disorder.

Both the language of unsympathetic and sympathetic memes played a large role in the project I'm making today. So for all these reasons, I'm trying to make a new face for representations of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder for and by people with the condition. I'm doing this to challenge the masculine-centricity I have perspectives in both medical treatment and online representations.

Thesis Speech:

In showing a multi-gendered face for post-traumatic stress symptoms, I'm hoping to open audiences to the nuanced ways it can affect many different people's lives. My goal is to also keep it vague enough so people can bring their own traumas to the table. So through penetrative character animation, video collage, appropriated memes, and grotto-esque aesthetics, I'm hoping to share a more accessible experience of PTSD with all of you here today.

Also, a fair warning. Though this is an animation project, this film is not suitable for children.

First, I'm taking us back to Junior year. When I was making my short film "Trouble" about "trouble kids" with learning disabilities. With this film, I just wanted to capture some of the frustration a lot of kids feel when sensitive situations in the classroom sour. I ended up with a lot of cut content because the film had such a large netcast.

Thesis Speech:

I needed to hone it down for clarity's sake. I wanted to show that teachers have a choice in shaping the experiences of vulnerable students. I started with students that had trouble at home, learning disabilities, the challenges of being the only Brown kid, being called the R-word. I had my hand in a lot of different topics. I had three interviews, with three main characters, but I cut it back to just one kid's experience. I ended up on a friend's story about dyslexia in the classroom, and how it isolated and discouraged him. I'm happy I did this, but I think it was my attachment to those many topics that made the short film so short.

This ended up really shaping my next project. I started on my thesis, about a year early just like my junior film. I began with an equally amorphous project surrounding how I felt PTSD impacted my life. Love, gender, queerness, family, belonging, and self were all things I wanted to cover. And, while it does affect me in all those parts of life, it was far too large of a project for me to hope to ever complete.

Thesis Speech:

I ended up with an end product that was far from my expected result. Thank goodness I listened to everyone when they said I needed fewer puppets, and cut some of my concepts for another day. I ended with one puppet, and Zach helped me harkened back to my main concept: engendering a space with a more androgynous sense of post-traumatic stress to counter the representations I've seen up until this point.

I also learned the name for a technique I planned on using while my project was in its installation stage. Maeve and Samala helped me out with this technique in Puppet Fabrication class, they called it "in-animation." Which is the process of minimally animating your puppets. Sometimes, not at all. This is a gif I made out of one of the sources Maeve gave me. They're commercials for a hardware company, and they use the inanimate qualities of their puppets for heightened hilarity. However, the necessity of using this technique had changed in the end. In a gallery installation, this would be done out of necessity, here it was a stylistic choice.

Thesis Speech:

Due to covid-19 and my own health concerns I no longer felt comfortable doing a physical installation. I planned to document it for the thesis panel today, but I ended up being happy with where the limitations led me. I technically made a thesis film, and I wasn't trying to do that. Happy accidents I guess.

To bring it to the artists that influenced this piece, I'll first bring it first to Nathalie Djurberg. And my inspiration was in part, because of the animated and inanimate qualities of her work. Thanks to her mixing of sculpture and stop motion video projections. As well as her common collaborations with sound artist Hans Berg. I've been told here during my time at PNCA that when pairing image and sound, audiences will give liberties to the cartoon. I feel this is a major part of how Djurberg's animated figures animate themselves. It's through the conjunction of expressive inanimate sculptures, animated video projections, and Hans Berg's sound design that brings to life worlds like hers.

Thesis Speech:

My mentor Zach Rau helped me to identify a deliberate design choice I'd been using for some time. One that was written all over this project. Grotto-esque styling. This includes a process of appropriation of images, which are stitched together in a flamboyant, over-the-top, transgressive, and repulsive manner. Most commonly, it refers to repurposed sculptures that were used to make Italian grottos full of marble delights. Zach pointed me to the artist Paul McCarthy, and I feel like I immediately knew I would like this guy's mentality. He makes these grotesque amalgamations of Disney IP into these quote-on-quote depraved sculptures. He also talked about destruction in his work as a process, which I really liked. Especially in my regards to the appropriation and disidentification of visual language.

I want to call out Ryan Tercartin's body of work. Ryan's use of Queer performance and digital video collage really interested me. He also had a way of using distortion and discomfort that I was definitely interested in. His movie "I-Be Area" also played with

Thesis Speech:

queer gender roles and ideas about scientific advances with the queer body that really piqued my interest. Advances that had little to do with what was actually psychically possible in the eyes of heteronormative medicine and old ideas of family or reproduction. Sort of relevant to my reluctance here to depend on old, masculine centered psychological studies and papers. Or Freudian description. To adopt a gender nonspecific brain.

In the end I had a temporary video installation in my living room, and a little space opening up for people like me on the internet. And if you will Zach, take it from here?

Video: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1uOKk-JOSwS9kzJXAnpBbE8bDfIpfPbxY/view?usp=sharing>

Projection: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cKy4y9fKgP_Qd_qlt23h1t9cx0UV7WU1/view?usp=sharing

Thesis Speech:

I think this image capture I've taken from Madonna and Whore pretty much sums it all up. I'm repurposing internet memes to sympathize with them. I'm using my grotto-esque styling in the footage I've repurposed. Like that from survival horror games and Animal Planet's Dog Whisperer. I've added layers upon layers to my video for visual distortion like that of Ryan Trecartin to visualize symptoms. In my use of almost-unmoving puppets paired with projection and sound, I'm harkening back to Nathalie Djurberg's work in the gallery. It's important also to note that this was intended for the gallery, but due to covid is now taking a much more digital form. It is also reflected in my own work, the reliance I have on sound, and how I had to depend on Sound artist Dalton Jay Battin's interpretations of mental illness to create the feeling of this project.

The title, "Madonna and Whore" is meant as a jab at medicine influenced by the binaries of sex and gender. Such as combining symptoms of "splitting," with the very real black-and-white thinking of Sigmund Freud's "Madonna-Whore Complex" Theory.

Thesis Speech:

Because we can't just throw away old psychological discourse and act like it didn't happen. We certainly CAN make them into parody though. It affects people still today. That's why I use a technique similar to the destruction process Paul Mccarthy uses in his work. In naming this piece Madonna AND Whore, I acknowledge both of those attributes in one person. A complicated sum of parts. In some ways, by using it within my own understanding and parody, I destroy Freud's gender binary theories. I think the name in itself embodies the grotto-esque. A repulsive thing made humorous, less serious, a joke.

And in addition, this corrupted idea of "Good" and "Bad" was essential for me to communicate to my audience seamlessly. My use of angels, devils, black and white, and all or nothing thinking had a purpose.

Thesis Speech:

To stand as immediate identifiers for good, bad, moral ambiguity, and polar opposites. I needed you as an audience to identify with my symbols for good and bad behavior immediately. So you can see how these concepts are clouded and complicated further by post-traumatic thought-patterns. Something I only think could be represented to audiences quickly. Like synapses firing and assigning meaning.

An interesting thing that happened along the way was my unintentional inclusion of dogs. I think it's in part a mark of the internet meme culture present in the piece. I think it also speaks to how the actual symptoms of P.T.S.D. manifest in my representations of it. This paired with the WOLF GIRL poem builds a net of symbols to talk about the fight or flight response. A response that occurs in the innermost core of the brain, the brainstem and cerebellum. So I think my correlation from the main character to animals, and acts of anger and violence show how I unknowingly let my symptoms seep into this project.

Thesis Speech:

I think this use of internet memes rears its head also in my use of soldier and combat symbols. Or my bringing a gun to a pizza delivery.

You may also notice my liberal use of video game footage and symbolism as well. Essentially, when online or watching other forms of media, I didn't see my experience of PTSD reflected there. Videogames on the other hand showed me those stories threefold. That is a large reason why I'm reappropriating so much from the video game series Silent Hill. A lot of these moments were ones that I felt to my very core. Watching these kinds of stories put my experience in context for me, and I would like to create that feeling for the next person. I feel it also connects us back to my talks about PTSD being male and soldier coded, just as most FPS shooters are. I feel that in assuming the first-person perspective, we can easily fit into the shoes of anybody.

Thesis Speech:

There is also much to be said about my use of sculpture, puppets, and projected video. Like the works of Nathalie Djurberg and Ryan Trecartin, I used this in hopes of disturbing some and comforting others. Living with P.T.S.D., and stress on a daily basis, creating artificial feelings of discomfort felt like a control subject for me. For people without that condition, I'm sure it may make many of you uncomfortable. You might not seek something like this out, but for people with the condition, my hopes are to show them a representation I had not seen before. One where through visual and auditory dissonance, I can present some of the symptoms experienced when you have post-traumatic stress disorder.

That being said, a lot of the feelings felt in the piece depended on audio in conjunction with my abilities as a video artist. Throughout that process, it was difficult learning how to take rhythm. The song I used here was "Sly," from my collaborating artist Dalton Jay Battin. Otherwise known as "Iota." I'm not much of a musical theory guy, so I depended

Thesis Speech:

so I depended a lot on my collaborating artist to make sense of rhythm and timing. This song is a 4:4 beat, and eventually, we spoke about when major changes should occur in conjunction to sound. If used a 1 beat, Iota spoke to how I would need to follow it up with some kind of major change. He said it would make people anticipate something. It was also important for me to use a "Staccato" pacing for the video, so I depended a lot on when the song would speed up and slow down.

We've spoken about this becoming a music video, but that is up in the air for now. Ultimately, I see this on a variety of different online adult spaces, for adults to view.

For instance, I would like to put this on my website behind an 18+ marker.

Thesis Speech:

Inevitably, because of this collaboration I learned a lot about the equipment I was using. This is in part due to restrictions from the COVID 19 pandemic, and my own concerns with health. I had to do a lot of this work from home. I used a PICO 400 for a projector and captured all of this on a Canon T3i. This was back-projected onto a piece of muslin. I built the room myself and did many test screens to be sure of the size I wanted. I also marked my floor up with tape so my lighting and positioning could be recreated. I shot it over a 3 day period.

In hindsight, I probably should have been doing test photos along with those test projections I did earlier. I still think my projection area is a bit small. I did however learn a lot about cameras this semester, and I plan to keep studying them. I didn't know until filming that my high lumen projection would interfere with the stage lighting. So light and photos were quite a big learning curve for me, but I'll keep experimenting.

Thesis Speech:

My puppet also had some major malfunctions, but ultimately she survived the shooting process. There's quite a large debate with wire puppets, and whether to use straight or twisted wire. Here's my answer, both!

I also had a major movement in the way I edit my work and receive criticism. I really think I started that process in Junior Film, and ever since I would experience a tinge of guilt when I felt I wasn't being receptive to others' criticism. If I had heard one thing a few different times though, I would always compromise. Even if I was attached. I am speaking to you now knowing that this was a process every artist goes through. I also had to accept that not all the artists around me were coming from the same place as me. Some people might walk up to this piece and laugh. They might get angry. But someone out there might say to themselves, "this is it." And, that's who it is made for.

Thesis Speech:

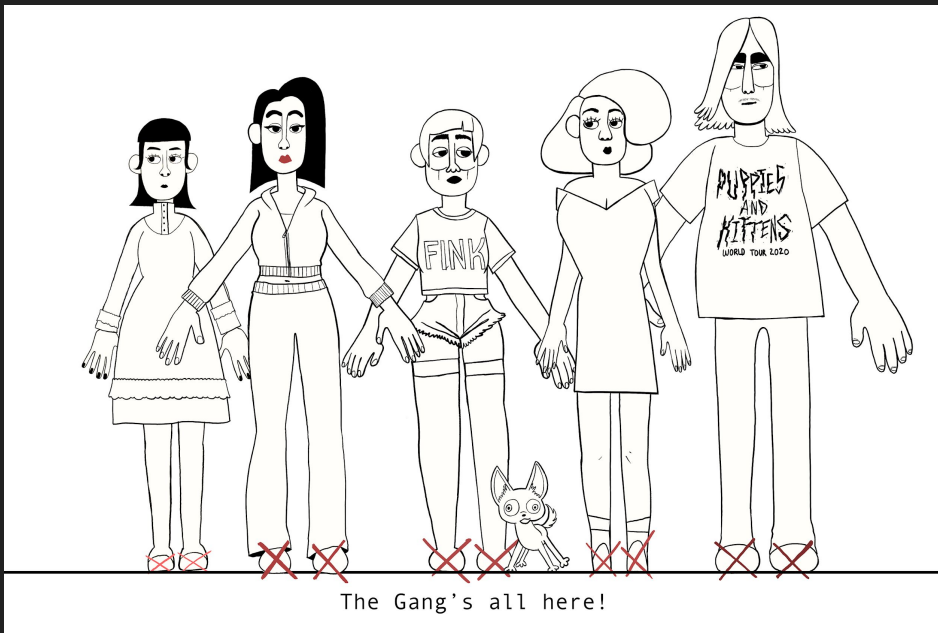
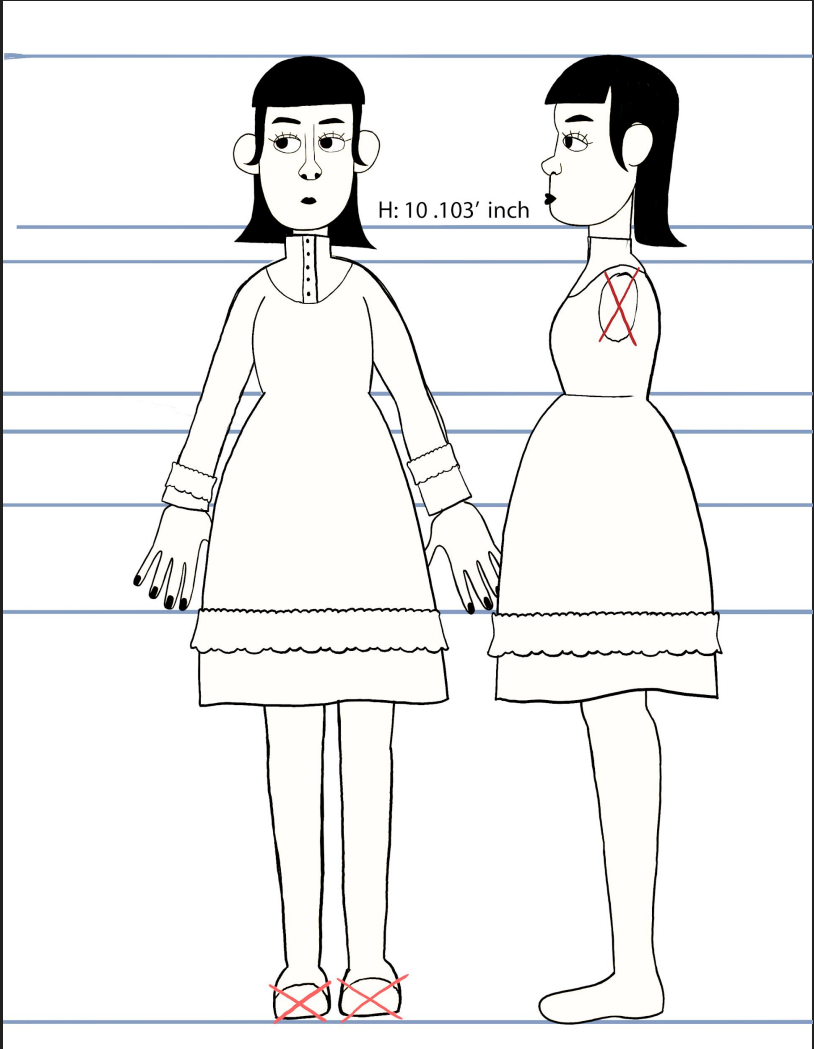
And, I feel I'll keep that with me when making the transgressive, queer art I see in my future. I want to make art reflecting my punk roots and resume my work as a queer activist. I feel that independent animation and zines are the best way for me to do that. I'll also be building a portfolio for internships and studio work, but ultimately I want to proceed making independent work to keep true to my feelings and politics.

Lastly, I want to take the time to thank the people in my department. The friends I've made over the years. Rose Bond, Laura Heit, Teressa Drilling, Marilyn Zornado, Maeve Callahan, Charlie Miller, Zach Rau, Lori Damiano. As well as the Many people who helped with this project, My Mom, My Partner, and the couple Brooke and Will Swain. To all these people, I really want to provide a special thanks.

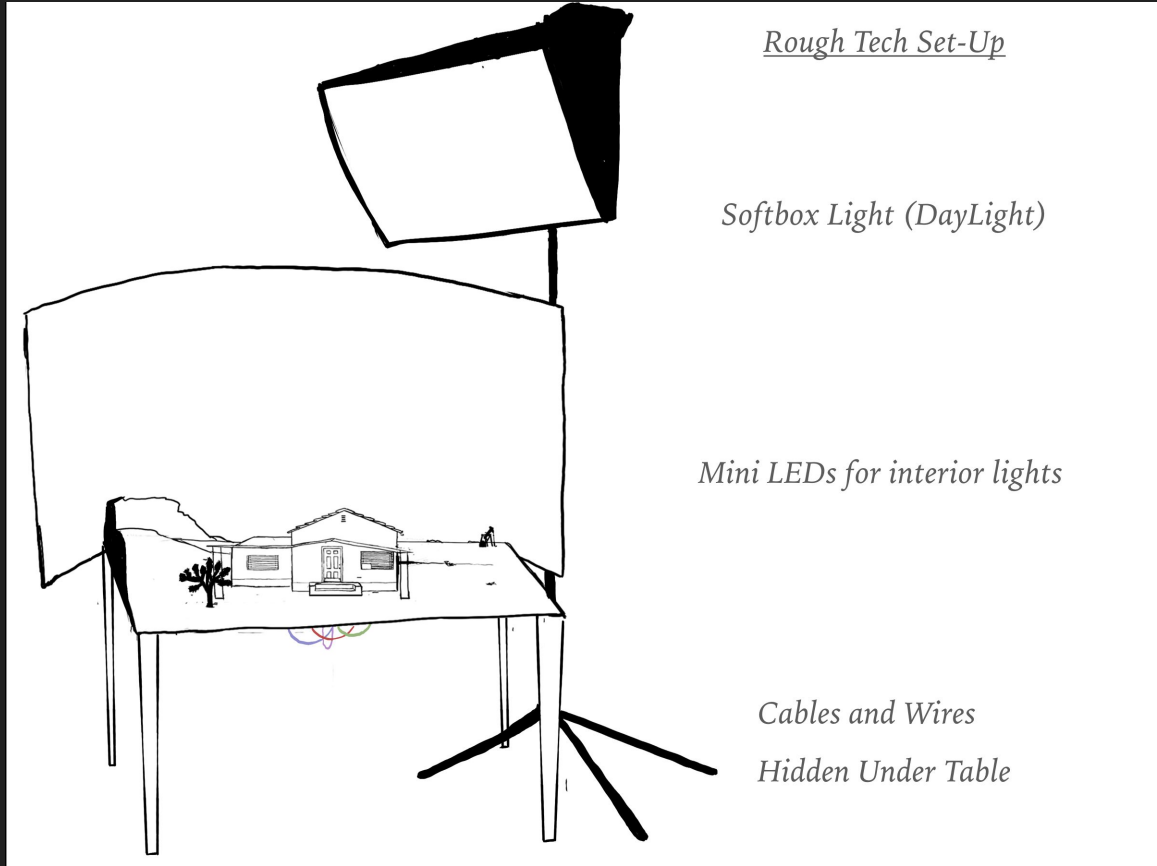
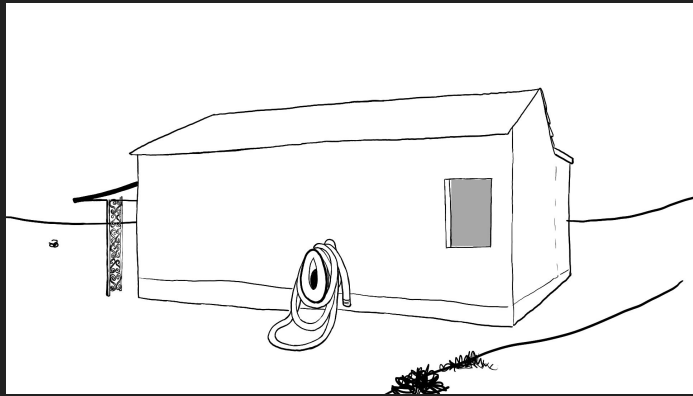
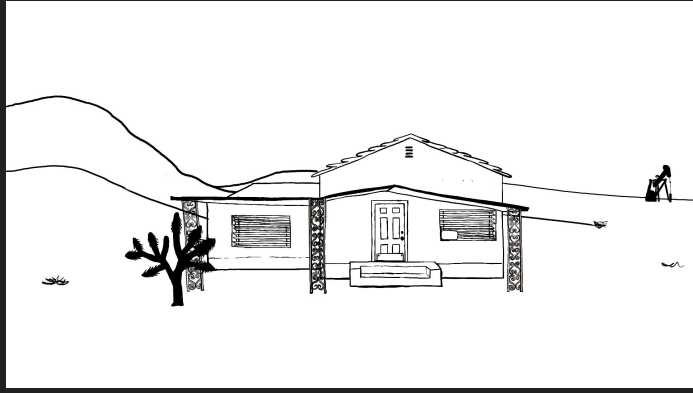
Thesis Speech:

Just a reminder, before we get to questions. This video is meant as an internet installation. I would likely host the video on my website, behind an adults-only warning. In this piece, I've used grotto-esque editing in hopes of re-codifying the male-coding surrounding post-traumatic stress disorder. I've also used layers of video and sound to cause a sense of discomfort similar to P.T.S.D. symptoms. My hopes are that by misusing the internet language surrounding soldiers and post-traumatic stress disorder, I can open audiences up to the many different ways the disorder affects people's lives.

Thank you for coming to my thesis defense, and I will now open for questions.



PROPOSAL ASSETS



Rough Tech Set-Up

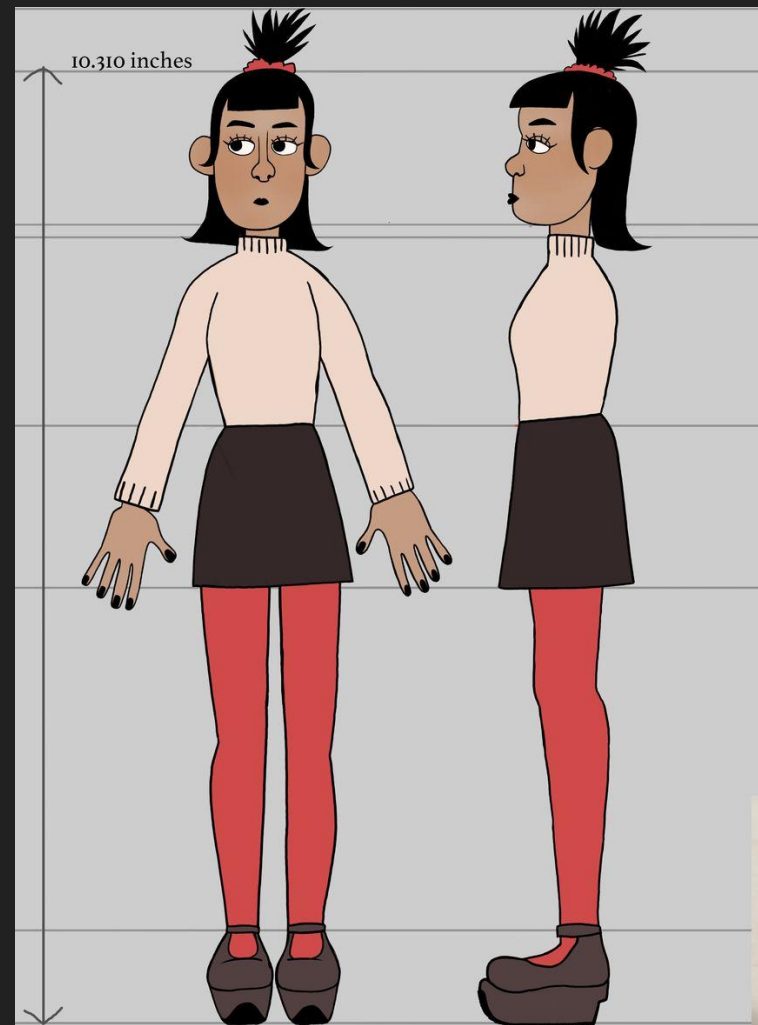
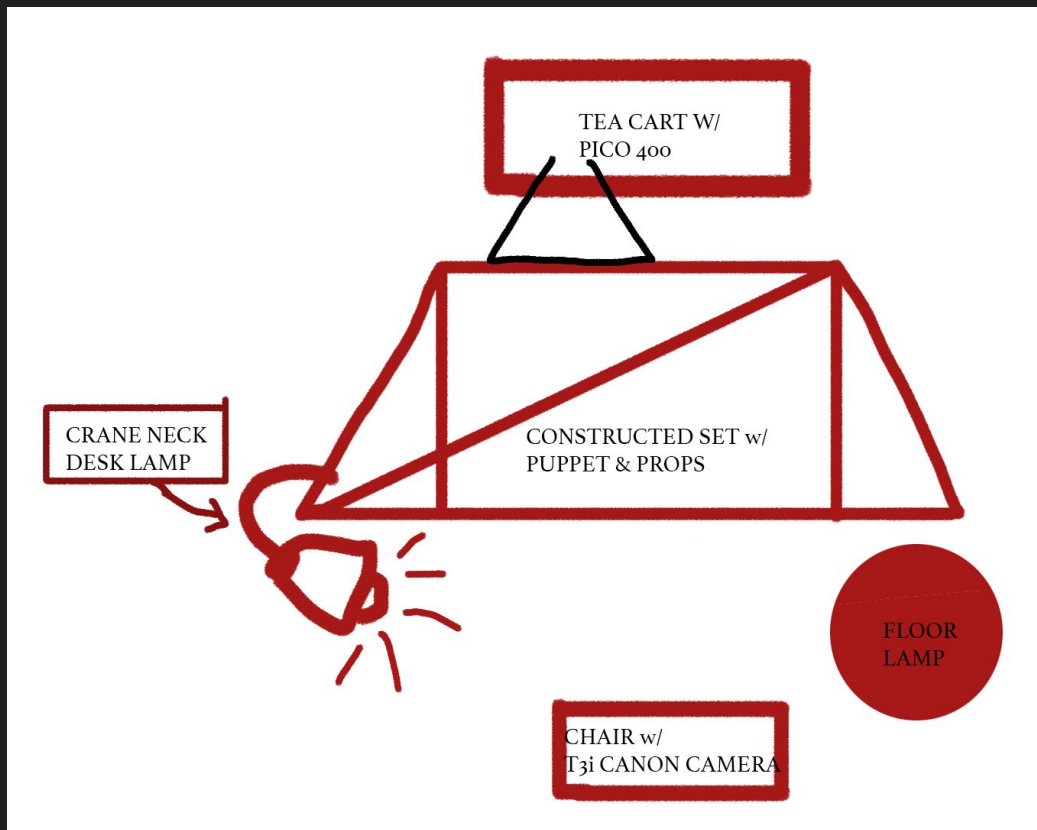
Softbox Light (DayLight)

Mini LEDs for interior lights

Cables and Wires

Hidden Under Table

Installation Blueprints



Final Design + Set Blueprints



Puppet



Couch Rig

DEFENSE ASSETS



Video: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1uOKk-JOSwS9kzJXAnpBbE8bDfIpfPbxY/view?usp=sharing>

Projection: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cKy4y9fKgP_Qd_qIt23h1t9cx0UV7WU1/view?usp=sharing

Bibliography:

Main Sources:

J. Friedman, Matthew “ History of PTSD in Veterans: Civil War to DSM 5” PTSD.VA.GOV Website. National Center for PTSD.

J. Haraway, Donna “A Cyborg Manifesto” Socialist Review, Text, 1985.

Totaro, Donato “The Final Girl: A Few Thoughts on Feminism and Horror” Volume 6, Issue 1. Off:Screen. Web Article. 2002.

Visual Research:

Lisson Gallery “ Nathalie Djurberg & Hans Berg” Lisson Gallery, Article and Exhibition Documentation. 2019. Anderson Ranch Art Center.

“2019 Summer Series: Paul McCarthy” Anderson Ranch Art Center. Youtube Video. 2019

Trecartin, Ryan “I-Be Area (Full Movie)” Indie Film. 2007.