

Ada McCall

Social Media in Excess

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## **Artist Statement**

I am a multidisciplinary artist, working with paintings and drawings. I create work that is primarily figurative, but is also based upon my life experiences, emotions, current political and pop culture events, as well as my experiences as an Asian American transracially adopted woman. I reclaim my individuality, narrative, and authority through my work. I use oil paint because it is versatile, and I love the way it feels and looks applied on a brush to canvas. With my drawings, my primary medium is graphite and charcoal, because it's simple yet is so expressive. My process is largely intuitive or from my own reference photos, or stock photos. My process starts with strong emotions within myself, from my lived life experiences, ethic/values, and politics. I am also hoping to convey a different take on a concept/idea, whether it's philosophical, social, or political. Art making is therapeutic, healing, and introspective. Allowing me to think of life's complexities from new perspectives.

## **Thesis Proposal**

Social media is something that many people of all ages use. My goal is to show the effect of social media on the younger generations through my art. The Millennials and Generation Z, who were born, or at least grew up in this fast-changing technological, and digital world, are affected the most. They quickly adapted to being constantly online and adjusted to more easily to this new technology than the older generations. The defining definition of the millennial age and generation Z have been debated many times, and there are different opinions about what age group it encompasses. According to a Pew Research study done in 2019 “Anyone born between 1981 and 1996 (ages 23-38 in 2019) is considered a Millennial, and anyone born from 1997 onward is a new generation”. I was born in 1997 the cutoff date for what is considered Gen Z. Both age groups are living in a society whose culture is strongly affected by social media and are most apt to use it in excess. This paper explores the obsession with materialism, consumerism, and superficiality, and its effect on the mental health and self-esteem of its users.

The rich have always flaunted money since the beginning of time. Now social media has become the ‘go to’ place to showcase and flaunt their wealth, from casually posting pictures of their designer bags, clothes, luxury vacations, and cars to inside their lavish mansions, they can reach millions of people easily within seconds. We in turn scroll through their feed to see their lives of excess. Before social media, it would not be so blatantly in our faces. Many people aspire to become wealthy, because of the luxurious lives and luxury possessions they see on social media, where they appear so happy. In this way social media promotes and idealizes materialism and wealth. The documentary film *Generational Wealth* directed by Lauren Greenfield, specifically speaks to the importance of it on my generation.

Social media promotes superficiality because our generation is extremely obsessed with physical beauty. This in turn creates a place where narcissism and superficiality thrives. Most of us admire and like to look at beautiful people. All the people who are admired by our generations' pop culture, are all considered to be beautiful by society standards. People see what they perceive is beautiful on social media and try to obtain the beauty standard by any means. When beauty is equated with monetary gain and approval from others, people who cannot, and do not look like this, are left feeling like they are not enough and can become depressed. Models like the Hadid sisters, Kendall Jenner, Hailey Bieber, Emily Ratacowski, are talked about constantly. They are praised and worshiped just because our society deems they are worthy of our attention and praise. This leads to over-emphasis on the superficiality of beauty and looks. People, mainly young women, posing in exaggerated stances taking selfie after selfie, trying to look like the online influencers.

Narcissism, materialism, and showing off wealth and beauty, is typical within social media, keeping updated on the latest viral media hype/news of what their favorite influencers and models are up to. Social media plays a huge part in promoting ideations of wealth and physical attractiveness. It's a place for them to showcase and flaunt their wealth. It is an ideal place for people to engage in "ego-enhancing activities" (*The relationship between addictive use of social media, narcissism, and self-esteem*, Andreassen). The social media apps feed into narcissism, for certain people, because they can use the apps to boost their egos and show off, then these people are idolized. I am inquiring about how social media plays in driving these goals and obsessions. Values and mindsets many people born of these generations, actively participate in it, including me. I am critiquing social media and the control and influence it has on the Millennial and Z generation. Inquiring about the complacency in these overlapping

generations and within myself, as well as investigating the ideations, goals, and what that is telling us about our cultural values. I am particularly focusing these questions within the context of pop culture that is tied in with the digital age of social media.

However, this obsession with social media has a very real impact on the emotional and mental health of some of its users. Many people become depressed by looking at others' lives online, constantly comparing themselves in every way, from physical looks to wealth and even relationships. Many become addicted to the cycle of validation of through likes and followers. Social media reinforces that the beautiful and rich people, whether they are famous or not, get the most likes, praise in the comments and attention. When people rely on validation from others for their self-esteem, their self-worth is given to others to decide. There is a vicious cycle of unhealthy social media use. When you feel lonely, depressed, or anxious, you use social media as a way to relieve boredom or feel connected. However, using social media more can increase the feeling of missing out and feelings of inadequacy and isolation. This worsening of feelings causes people to use social media even more, leading to a downward spiral. In the New York Times Article *How Does Social Media Affect your Mental Health*, it states, "Facebook's internal research showed that Instagram, in particular, had caused teen girls to feel worse about their bodies and led to increased rates of anxiety and depression, even while company executives publicly tried to minimize the apps downside."

Social media platforms and idolized influencers can now affect people and our culture in ways that can shape the fabric of our reality. Beauty, self-worth, and success comes from online and not real life. Our sense of self has become skewed by social media. Some people try to look like influencers by changing themselves in irreversible ways like plastic surgery, just to get followers and likes. Furthermore, in the online sea of information overload, only few make it,

leaving many of us feeling unvalidated and with low self-esteem. Feeling self-conscious, and in turn, their self-worth plummeting from the lack of validation online, instead of living in the real world. With technology that is evolving more than ever, there are of course negative effects, and outcomes of digital technology. Social media has grown from casually sharing moments with friends, to becoming, for many, an addiction to scrolling, online validation, self-endorsement, self-promotion, and the fear of missing out.

As part of Generation Z, which is younger than a millennial, I was born into a world that was already online. It has enveloped me into it and the effect on me has been detrimental. There was a time where I spent much of time scrolling feeds, idolizing, and comparing myself with popular influencers. I felt jealous and depressed because I longed to be thin, pretty, and wealthy. I wanted to be able to have a luxurious life and wear designer clothes. I wanted approval and validation from likes, comments, and followers. Whenever I had the will to pull away, a notification would bring me back. I could only think about the life I wanted to have, and how I felt disgusting, and never enough in my own body. I could be on my phone for 12 hours a day, and on my worst day a over 15 hours. Where I constantly compared myself to social media influencers and models. I felt jealous and depressed, when I saw women who fit the standard of the white Eurocentric westernized standards of beauty. I wanted to be as thin, pretty, and rich too. I wanted to be able to have a luxurious life and wear the newest and sought out clothes. I wanted all the approval and validation from likes, follows, telling me I was beautiful, and that I mattered. I was addicted to scrolling on my phone psychologically, emotionally, and physically. I couldn't concentrate. I couldn't focus. I could only think about the life I wanted to have, and how I felt so disgusting, ugly, and never good enough in my own body. Therefore, I strongly believe that my generation and the millennial generation, have influenced us on social media in a

mostly negative way. Since our popular culture puts physical attractiveness and aspirations of wealth as the most important goal. Social media increases that mentality, desire, and fixation. Since all people of generation z have not experienced a world without these platforms, I know the effect goes beyond me. Why do most people never challenge or pushback against this addictive, narcissistic, superficial behavior, where flaunting wealth and the way you look has become the social norm?

I am examining and criticizing these generations, because as a culture, we are in a very politically correct culture. Yet not very many people ever question the way influencers and models are idolized. I want to explore this desensitization to social media with its fixation on materialism, obsession with physical looks, and the idolization of influencers who make a living off it. That is, they are famous just for being rich and beautiful and not for their actions or deeds. Many do not question, challenge, or ask about and what they add and do for society? A lot of them just participate in performative activism and allyship when it comes to social justice and human rights. Social media influencers and models are vastly made of people who promote superficiality and materialism more than humanity. We not only see this on their Instagram pages, but at our local grocery stores. Their faces are the front covers of popular magazines. Many teens and young adults today are more likely to pay attention, and/or care about whatever their favorite influencer and model is currently doing, rather than current news about events around the world. Many of their followers idolize them, so many people only start to care or even know about world news, only if it's posted by them. I am questioning what social media influencers and models are offering to the world, besides their wealth and looks? If influencers and models have such a big influence on others, shouldn't they have a responsibility to help influence and create a better world? I know they influence, but what else? Influencing us in what

ways? I am curious. I have been influenced by them to care more about if I have enough likes on a selfie post and beautiful, than in other parts of my life. Therefore, it informs my opinion that the Millennial generation and generation Z are going backward on what should matter to us. I believe that physical looks and materialism and wealth are not the most important goals in life. In my opinion, I believe the current pop culture and social media is the fuel and is the gateway to that world.. Social media amplifies and confirms that people who are the idolized, celebrated, and deemed as successful, are all beautiful and wealthy, instead of for other their other deeper, more meaningful traits.

I am fascinated with the idea of the “American dream” and how it inspires people to dream of freedom that will be from the accumulation of wealth. Also, how the idea of freedom gives license to be narcissistic and self-centered, to not care or feel any moral obligation or pressure to do anything to contribute to the greater societal good. The documentary “Generational Wealth” directed by Lauren Greenfield in 2018, was very impactful and informs and inspires me to stick with this subject. Greenfield is also questioning the world of materialism and the obsession to accumulate social status with wealth and the way one physically looks.

Many artists today have been exploring the mental burnout, self-comparison, and addiction to social media, where they have ironically been found and promote their art on Instagram. Many artists on Instagram have inspired me because they do art on ideas and feelings around wanting to be rich, change their physical appearance, and comment on current celebrity and influencer culture. Some of the more known artists who have made art about subjects that I’m interested in are Andy Warhol and Jeff Koons. These artists all have made art about consumerism, materialism, reproduction, pop culture, and the elevation of everyday objects. Andy Warhol is known for his iconic imagery of everyday things like Campbell’s tomato soup,



and his reproductions of Marilyn Monroe's face in different colors. Warhol's work in his glamorization of everyday mundane objects and reproductions of prints of celebrities is relevant to my work because he makes me think about capitalism and how celebrities and mundane objects can be elevated and glorified through art. How the celebrity becomes a product of obsession and fixation because their imagery symbolizes fame, wealth, beauty, and success. Koons is a reference to me. He has made it in the art world because, he plays to the high snobbery of the art world, as with the idolization of influencers. The art world loves Koons for what I believe is because he plays to the promotion of consumerism and materialism and worships celebrity idolization. Whether it's from his sculptures of huge shiny objects of balloon dogs, huge reproductions of everyday objects, or sculptures of celebrities like Michael Jackson and his money. Andy Warhol and Jeff Koons are ironically influential artists to me because their work deals with the subjects of fame, materialism, consumerism, and not critical or challenging commentary around it. They inspire me, because I want to make art on the same things but have my art challenge the status quo, and to not kiss the ass of popular culture. Whereas Jeff Koons and Andy Warhol are celebrated for their fame and light heartedness to the meanings of their art, it doesn't critique popular culture but celebrates it. The institutional academic art world is capitalistic and elitist, so they celebrate the kind of art Andy Warhol and Jeff Koons by giving them a ton of exhibitions, press and attention. Jeff Koons is one of the richest living contemporary artists, and is becoming a celebrity himself. Popular culture celebrates their work because our pop culture loves materialism and anything that is exciting to consume and gives instant gratification. Our generation loves art that is pretty, light hearted and easy to understand at first glance.

I am proposing a solo exhibition of various mediums in the 511 gallery or in the atrium, with 4 moveable walls where my art will be displayed. I am proposing one 30'' by 40'' sized oil painting, on a stretched cotton canvas board, three 17'' by 14'' sized graphite and charcoal drawings on paper, five photographs and one photo slideshow. The topic of all the mediums will be about social media's emotional effects and impacts on users, and social media's influence on our culture, and how the influencers/models influence millennial and generation Z born people. I choose to use oil paint because it's a familiar medium for me and I enjoy the action of painting, and how accomplished I feel after. I want to work on my technical skill with paint application and using paint to express what I want to convey. Painting can intercept ideas in a way that can speak to the viewer, where other mediums don't. By using traditional mediums, I am hoping that by doing paintings, I can intrigue the viewer to stay with the painting for longer. It is interesting to me to use traditional classic art materials and supports in an ever-evolving technological world. I choose to do drawings because, when a person draws a photograph or is doing life drawing, it transforms that imagery into a whole new dimension. It can transfer its power into a visual language, that is not expressed in the same way as a photograph. Not to say that I am not interested in photography. I am interested in photography for how it connects to our fast-paced, saturated culture of visual imagery. Photography is a medium many people use and love, that has historically been used to document and show proof of existence. The digital world is a real-world that many millennials, generation Z, and all other living generations utilize to share themselves and their life. I am proposing a series of five photographs about my ordinary mundane life. Where the subject will be of me as I truly am. Unglamorous. As the saying goes "No one is posting their failures" or an unflattering selfie, but I am interested in doing exactly that. To challenge the perfected image we curate for others to perceive us in the way we want them to. I

am also interested in incorporating visual media/sound into my thesis. Only if, and after I've completed the other mediums, would I then attempt to do it. I do not have any strong experienced technological skills, but I could get help from friends that do have experience creating live-action video work. If time is on my side, I will make a picture slideshow, or video loop that I project onto the wall. The slideshow or video loop will be about social media influencers. Whether it's me mocking them or recreating their imagery and poses, then having it project right where my photographs of my unfiltered life will be displayed. My purpose for creating this is to intercept the many ways we try to hide the reality of our real lives. As a society, we only want to show the good parts and highlights of our lives. My goal is to be candid and vulnerable to show the falseness of the lives we project on social media. I will record the sounds from my phone and other people's phones of the message notification sounds of pinging and buzzing to the sounds of typing on a keypad, to create a looped soundtrack. Its purpose would be to play within the exhibition space because my goal is to create an immersive experience for the viewer. I want the experience to feel visceral and unnerving to the viewer. I classify visceral with eliciting strong emotions of any kind to the viewer and making it unnerving to look. I classify unnerving by if it makes the viewer uncomfortable, angry, disgusted, or elicits any strong emotion that overwhelms them.

My research comes from many different sources. It comes from my personal life experiences as an Asian American woman and transracial adoptee who takes part in social media, with a life history of anxious attachment, traumas, and low self-esteem during all my teen years up until my senior year of college. I have been appropriating celebrities and influencer photographs from their Instagram and drawing them. My process starts with photos on

Instagram, then they become my own, from recontextualizing them, to showing and saying something different.

To conclude my proposal is about confronting the viewer with strong imagery, that critiques and immerses them into the digital age of consumption, narcissism, materialism, and idolization of influencers. The promise of a better social status, of the more wealth and perceived beauty you have, that meets cultural standards. I want to be very upfront on the negative effects of social media on peoples mental health. To be candid about Influencers and reality stars, models, and celebrities, in how they fuel Generation Z and Millennials to idolize them, just because of the way they look and the wealth they have. I am interested as to why so few question what they promote? I am questioning why we idolize, admire people for these reasons. Why does that get more attention than anything else about the person? I believe it is our responsibility to speak up on a culture, that tells us we should not question the impacts of others influences. When we see the highest rates of loneliness, life dissatisfaction, depression, and rates of plastic surgery has drastically gone up, because we are told we are not enough. That we do not own enough things or good enough material objects. I will create because it challenges the status quo. It threatens and critiques the popular culture, that they are probably a part of.

## **Thesis Abstract**

This body of this work is about the negative impacts of social media; specifically addressing Generation Z and the millennial generations. I grew up into a world that was changing and quickly progressing into the online stage that it is at now. I first became interested in the impact of social media because of the impact it had on me. Once I created my Instagram account in freshman year of high school, it has enveloped me and the effect on me has been detrimental. Our popular culture sets physical attractiveness and aspirations of wealth as the highest goal and the measure of success. Since Millennial's and all people of Generation Z have never experienced a world without these platforms, I know the effect goes beyond me. I am focusing on three components of social media platforms. They are:

- 1) money, wealth, and materialism,
- 2) obsession with physical attractiveness, and how it leads to superficiality and narcissism.
- 3) the emotional and mental impacts, which leads to low self-esteem and self-worth.

This work is targeted towards and a critique of social media both for myself, my generation, which is Gen Z, and Millennials. There are three parts to my show: the photographs, slideshow, and drawings. my intent of this show is to address the negative impact social media can have on its users. I hope to elicit a visceral, contemplative, relatable, even uncomfortable, and confrontational response to my art. I hope it makes people think about how social media affects them, their children, their friends and the society and culture we live in today.

## **Oral Defense**

Hello everyone! Thank you so much for coming to my defense today.

First off, I want to do a land acknowledgment. I respectfully acknowledge I am currently defending my thesis on the PNCA campus, that is part of the Portland Metro area that resides on unceded traditional villages of the indigenous land of the Multhomah, Kathloment, Clackamas, Tualatin, Kalapuya, Molalla, and Chinook peoples and many other tribes who made homes along the Columbia river. I also acknowledge the systemic policies of genocide, relocation, and assimilation that still impact many indigenous/native American families today. I am giving a content warning that there will be a mention of suicide. Anyone who is not comfortable with that can step out for a moment.

As an introduction, I am a general fine arts major with a minor in ecology. The medium I mostly work in is drawing, but I don't limit myself to just that. As you can see here, I have a wall of photographs and a slideshow. The materials and methods depend on the subject of the work and what I'm trying to communicate. This body of this work is about the negative impacts of social media specifically addressing Generation Z and the millennial generations.

### **WHY I CHOSE THIS PROJECT**

I first became interested in the impact of social media because of the impact it had on me. I was born right at the cut-off date between being considered someone part of Generation Z which is younger than a millennial. I was born in 1997 and I consider myself a millennial. I grew up into a world that was changing and progressing fast into the online stage that it is at now. Once I created my Instagram account freshman year of high school It has enveloped me and the effect on me has been detrimental. There was a time where I spent much of my time scrolling feeds, idolizing, and comparing myself with popular models and influencers. I felt distraught and hungry for my desire to be supermodel thin, stunningly beautiful, wealthy a travel the world in five star luxury hotels. I wanted to be able to have a glamorous life and be

able to buy designer clothes without looking at price tags. I wanted approval and validation from likes, comments, and followers. Whenever I had the will to pull away, a notification, or my own strong urge would bring me back. I could only think about the life I wanted to have, how I aspired to look, and how I felt fat, and hopeless to ever look achieve this. I would spend lots of time thinking about ways I could afford all the luxury things they had and the experiences money allowed them to have. I could be on my phone for 12 hours a day, and on my worst day over 15 hours, where I constantly compared myself and life to social media influencers and models. Our popular culture sets physical attractiveness and aspirations of wealth as the highest goal and the measure of success. Since Millennial's and all people of Generation Z have never experienced a world without these platforms, I know the effect goes beyond me. Even though I became very interested in this issue several years ago and not many people saw it as a problem. However, now the public is becoming aware of it. From the congressional hearings regarding FaceBook and Instagram, to the most recent suicides that attribute social media as the cause. I am focusing on three components of social media platforms. They are:

- 1) money, wealth and materialism,
- 2) obsession with physical attractiveness, and how it leads to superficiality and narcissism.
- 3) the emotional and mental impacts, which leads to low self-esteem and self-worth.

This work is targeted towards and a critique of social media both for myself, my generation, which is Gen Z, and Millennials. I'm targeting these groups because of the rise of mental health issues and phone addictions due to the content on social media and from influencers among young people. The intent of this work is to explore these topics which are rampant on social media: my own reaction, experience, and my own part I played being influenced to value money, physical attractiveness above everything else and above my own mental wellness. I am critiquing myself for being pulled into the dark endless digital rabbit hole of social media's influence and its addictive pull of power to keep you on their platforms. My

audience includes the people of Millennial and Generation Z who aspire to have, continue, and uphold this way of thinking, who are part of a new mental health epidemic because of social media in an increasingly more digitalized world. These aspirations of acquiring endless wealth is promoted and encouraged even more in this generation, and now displayed on social media. Adhering and striving for unrealistic beauty standards is because like Bell Hooks ( American author, scholar, and social activist) has defined it best, we live in a Imperialist, white-supremacist, capitalist patriarchy. This is why hetero-normative, Cisgendered, euro-centric patriarchal beauty standards are which I am critiquing social media.

In my research I came across an article in the Guardian newspaper. It looked into the mental health statistics of young people caused by Instagram and FaceBook. Quote:

“Among the most concerning findings was the among users who reported suicidal thoughts, 13% in the UK and 6% in the US traced them back to Instagram. The article of the study found that 40% of Instagram users who reported feeling unattractive said the feelings began on the app. The article goes on to say that:

“Being surrounded by constant images of the ‘perfect’ life and seemingly perfect bodies can also have a big impact on how you feel about your own life and appearance, and it can be really hard not to compare yourself to others.”

In the New York Times Article *How Does Social Media Affect Your Mental Health*, it states, “Facebook's internal research showed that Instagram, in particular, had caused teen girls to feel worse about their bodies and led to increased rates of anxiety and depression, even while company executives publicly tried to minimize the app's downside. ”

In the academic article, “*The relationship between addictive use of social media, narcissism, and self-esteem*”, they address narcissism and social media. Narcissism, materialism, and showing off wealth and beauty, is typical within social media, keeping updated on the latest viral media hype/news of what their



favorite influencers and models are up to. Social media plays a huge part in promoting ideations of wealth and physical attractiveness. It's a place for them to showcase and flaunt their wealth. It is an ideal place for people to engage in "ego-enhancing activities" The social media apps feed into narcissism, for certain people, because they can use the apps to boost their egos and show off, then these people are idolized. It is a place where narcissism thrives and normalized. All together I used over 34 sources.

### The Big Picture Concept:

In order to truly understand what it is like to be in the rabbit hole of social media, I had envisioned this show to be an immersive experience. Therefore I wanted to incorporate social media photos and short videos into the work. That is because when you are endlessly scrolling on social media, you feel surrounded by it, completely immersed in it, and overwhelmed by it. I wanted to combine the conceptual side with the feelings/mood of when you are there. The other reason to have video clips and photos, is that it creates a contrast to the drawings. If there were only drawings, you wouldn't see the "perfect/fake" world contrasted with the "real" world it impacts. You would see the projection of a beautiful life, that has been perfectly curated, without the mundane life experiences of mistakes and bad days we all have. It wouldn't show the heavy emotional toll on mental health. I also wanted to show an experience where the pictures of me looked like they could just be posted because it would be considered "post-able". I wanted it to be recognizable and relatable to connect to more people. Whether they connect to it themselves or see their friends or others posing and acting like this. The video might draw in those people who are attracted to that on social media, and therefore, into the whole exhibit. Or they could just be curious. As I mentioned earlier, I'm really targeting Gen Z and Millennial's, and I hope this will help pull them in. Once they're in the gallery space, they will see the whole show and hopefully, be able to relate to it and or think about the topics of the work. Which is another reason why I have the slide show and the photographs. One change I made was that I originally had planned to draw people on their phones

but realized that, not only was that done frequently, but it would be viewing people outside their experience and not how it feels “in your own head”. At one point I made drawings of people posing in an exaggerated way at Disneyland, to show how silly and unnatural it looks. But I scrapped that idea because it was far more effective on screen. I instead used the drawings to show the emotional impact of the social media’s fixation with wealth and beauty on one’s own mind. As well as to show the emotional and mental impacts on us as individuals and as a society and culture. The contrast was another way I hoped to get the audience to try to actually see the negative impacts on a person in an open vulnerable and honest way.

(Role of maker, thinker, director, and actor)

There are three parts to my show: the photographs, slideshow, and drawings. Not only was I the artist, but I was the designer and the architect of the show. Not only coming up with the concept, but I was the director, photographer, the editor, and actor. I took this huge idea and brought it into the real world and to its completion. There were times when it seemed to go backwards as I kept making changes, and where I felt a creative block and frustration but each change made it stronger.

(SLIDE SHOW/ SHORT VIDEO CLIPS)

The concept for the video did not change all that much over time, I just decided to do a slideshow of pictures of myself primarily instead. I did incorporate a few short video clips scattered in between. I felt it was important to have a real-life projection of imagined curated pictures that an influencer would maybe consider “good enough” to be posted on their own social media. As it is a direct conceptualization of what we see on our screens.

Because pictures keep changing as you watch the slideshow, it mimics scrolling, where the images constantly change. Which is exactly how one would function to follow any social media accounts. I didn’t feel a drawing or painting would have the same impact or feel when it comes to showing curated images

of the self. I made the slideshow of myself and took inspiration from influencers right down to copying the expressions they made posing for selfies because, as mentioned before, I didn't want to simply copy influencers' posts by drawing them. For one, it would not be anything different than what people are constantly seeing in popular culture and it would just be reinforcing what I am arguing against. Secondly, I wanted to choreograph my own ideas for poses, create my own take of expressing the energy I think they give off, and play with poses and facial expressions inspired by their own. By having myself imitating them, for some people who aren't into the model and influencer thing, they would find my behavior silly and reconfirm their own beliefs of how irrelevant and time wasting it is, viewing this type of content on social media. I do not have the looks of the Eurocentric white standards of beauty. I do not have the body or facial looks of a high fashion model. I think that the Generation Z and Millennial generations have grown up with social media and see it as the normal and relevant way of communication. They have limitless saturation of information and content and have become numb to narcissistic and superficial behavior. For example, the highest paid runway fashion models are white women. Kendall Jenner being the top paid high fashion model for three years in a row, making 40 million alone with just modeling. She is a white woman. Not Armenian as many people falsely assume. Yes, there are women of color who are models but the popular ones in mainstream pop culture adhere to euro-centric standards of beauty. That being said, they have the advantage and privilege of popularity and likeability on social media. I also do not fit into the slim/thick model type that is also popular on social media. So by using myself as an actor to try to mimic and resemble these types of jobs, it may seem somewhat "off" to some people because they may think "I am trying to be something that I am not and appear to hold myself in high-esteem because of this. This type of opinion would make the slideshow and short video clips more of a parody than anything because I clearly do not fit into the modeling world at all. My hope for the viewer by doing this was to have the viewer see them in a new perspective from a different opinion. I believe having a

“regular” person, like myself, imitating what I saw influencers and models pose and act like, the viewer would see how it’s quite unnatural to be in public posing in such an exaggerated way.

My process was quite simple and straightforward. I used the Club House at my apartment for the shoot so the location would have the right “sleek” look so as to assume wealth. Some of the facial expressions I used are typical of those used by influencers and models. During the shoot I intentionally exaggerated some of the expressions to satirize the look. While doing this, I found myself needing to think I was superior to everyone else in order to get the expression right. It was a strange feeling. I shot all of it on my iPhone because that is how most people access social media and log into accounts. One of the surprises was just how long the editing took. It ended up taking a whole day. I was sooo done with looking at myself for that long.

For the Photography part of this body of work I created 24 photographs on high luster photo paper. With each photograph around about 18 by 24 in size. The 24 photographs are conceptually about an attempt to be candid and push myself out of the comfort zone of projecting a perfect life on social media. These were made over the very beginnings of my thesis project. I took photos of my real life that’s very messy, stressful, and uninteresting. I took the pics without thinking of taking pictures of anything specifically. It was all photos of what was occurring at the time, in the exact moment. I took pictures of myself when I didn’t look or feel my best. Vulnerable pictures of when I was actually crying, angry, or upset. Or to show off my “food baby” after majorly overeating. I wanted to take pictures of everything that would not be deemed unfit, unacceptable, and embarrassing. Anything people usually don’t want to show, things that wouldn’t be exciting to share, reveal and post eagerly is what I wanted to take pictures of. They are all pictures I’ve taken on my iPhone. They would be in my “recently deleted trash can on my phone given 30 days until they would be deleted forever. I began to take screenshots of recently deleted photos as a whole group of 12 photos in a grid. These mimics the 12 photos you see if you scroll for a

slow and short 2 seconds when you see an Instagram profile. I decided to print out each of my 24 photographs with 12 photos in each one of them individually, to immerse and grab their attention to my uncandid and unfiltered life. A life that is usually only seen by oneself or maybe by very close people in one's life.

The drawings conceptualize the emotional and mental health impact of social media. I wanted the background to use actual images from influencers on Instagram, Snapchat, or YouTube and, either transfer or collage them onto the background of the piece. Each of the 12 mixed media drawings is on 18 by 24 inch charcoal paper. Each piece consists of acetone xeroxed paper transfers, paper collage, various harnesses of charcoal, oil pastels, and conte crayons.

I started the project by selecting screenshots of models and influencers and uploaded them onto the school computers at the library. From there I would decide to print the images in color or black and white from the school's printer. Aside from Instagram, I used to subscribe to content video subscriptions on snapchat like "Bling Life" "ELITE Lifestyle", "Hooked on the look" and "Daniel Mac" among others. These all speak to social media's obsession with wealth and beauty. I also used screenshots from YouTube videos and their users comments for acetone transfers, on certain pieces and printed them as well. It was important to use the library printer because not all ink on printers will do an acetone transfer.

To make the acetone transfer, I did the following:

I would select the xerox I wanted to transfer and place it face down on the paper, positioning it where necessary. I would then tape the borders to hold it in place. Next I soaked a cotton ball with acetone and covered the backside of the xerox copy. Using a bookbinding bone or back of a spoon, I would rub hard on the picture. This causes the image to transfer onto the paper. I would lift the image to see if it had transferred well, if not I would continue rubbing until I was content with the look.

Once I had completed all my transfers, I would begin the drawing process. The drawings are of images I took of myself on my iPhone, either looking sad, angry, or annoyed. I started my sketch with vine charcoal because it is more erasable and malleable. Once I was satisfied with the main sketch, I went on to use hard charcoal, conte crayon, oil pastel, and sharp charcoal either in combination or not, depending on the look I wanted to achieve. I also looked at the transfer imagery and placement when deciding where and what to draw on my piece. It takes 3-4 hours to do the acetone transfer for each piece.

The other process I used was to collage the background. However, instead of just cutting and pasting the images I took the used transfer image and glued it down. In this way, the image is not as vivid as if I cut it directly from the xerox. I wanted an indistinct image that could be done from recycling the previously used xero cutouts on other drawings. I would then draw over them using chalk and oil pastels, conte crayons, and various ranges of soft to hard charcoal. I would step back every so often and see if the images I drew from afar were effective to me when looking at them from a distance, when I would hang them up on the wall. I knew I wanted them to feel intense, saturated, busy and or overwhelming. The background conceptualizes the visual images I was consuming on social media. They are what I was looking at and the drawings on top are the reality in which I'm living. Using the collages was intuitive but now I see it may have been my natural instinct to then reinforce the imagery by using collage. Reusing the same images again can be a way that I subconsciously was showing the reinforcement of these images that were once all consuming to me. The drawings are a reflection and result of my mental health struggles and the emotional impacts I have personally felt by consuming this content. The drawings of my face were all taken by me when I was actually crying, upset, annoyed or angry. By having close ups of my face drawn over the transferred images I intend to show the viewer a personal struggle I've had with my social media use and, as well as, the negative effects of social media on many young people like me. Society is finally talking about how social media impacts young people, making them feel very unhappy, and lowers their

self-esteem, and satisfaction with themselves and their life, but I don't think people can actually have a full understanding of the very real impacts that can tear apart someone mentally and even physically. As mentioned before, it can go to the extreme of suicide. By using myself as the subject of the negative impacts of social media, it is harder to ignore and disregard the pain and deep depression that social media has put me through. And I hope by showing this, it will help other young people who may be negatively impacted by social media, because when you know someone who has been or is affected it is easier to hear them. Their stories become humanized and they know they are not alone.

My project grew, evolved, and changed quite a bit from my original proposal to the final result. For one, I decided not to do paintings of myself looking sad, staring into my phone. I am still new at oil paintings and did not feel I had the skill set. Also, paintings of that subject matter of people on their phones, has been done quite a bit, for instance with contemporary painter Peter Davis. I am a drawer and always have been. Secondly, I had originally proposed a sound piece that would be part of my video reel consisting of notification sounds on smartphones and I decided not to do it for now because I was not sure about how to use the sound to enhance my video. Thirdly, I originally was going to re-draw photographs from social media. For instance, I made a drawing of model Gigi Hadid posing in an exaggerated way, being photographed by a large, unglamorous female photographer. The drawing was to be part of a series called "Beauty maintenance by others". My goal with these drawings was to show the people who work hard to make these models and influencers look so seemingly flawless. I wanted to show the contrast between normal, working people contrasted with the models and influences. My mentor Michelle Ross helped me see that these were just "reinforcing the images" our society shows us every day. The same advice was given for the colleges of models and influencers of simply reinforcing the ideas that I am trying to critique. We also discussed an idea I had of drawing trash around the models posing in bikinis at the beach to address how we pay more attention to the models than to a trashed and polluted environment.

However she pointed out how easily this could be interpreted “as shaming women for what they wear at the beach and not being sex positive”. Which was not how I was thinking or my intentions at all. Michelle then suggested I focus on drawing myself; communicating how I personally have been negatively affected by social media models, influencers, and money. This really hit a chord with me. I’ve often drawn pieces that reflect my emotions so this would perfectly play into that. It would be going back to a medium I feel comfortable and familiar with. However, I wanted to expand and try new ways of drawing, new approaches, and new styles. The original drawings I did of the models and influencers were too tight and controlled, as my mentor said and I then saw what she meant. Therefore, I tried to be more loose with my hand and draw with charcoal instead of graphite pencils. Her suggestions were invaluable.

The only thing that stayed the same for the inspirations was the social media influences I said I would use in the proposal. I did end up using references from Snapchat and Instagram. I did end up taking many screenshots of high-profile figures like the Kardashians, models and influencers content on their social media.

#### ACADEMIC AND CREATIVE SOURCES

I had many creative influences. However, two artists, Andy Warhol and Jeff Koons, I listed as inspirations in my proposal last year but did not influence me at all in the end. In fact, my work is a complete antithesis of theirs. Their popular culture work has an unemotional, pop cultural look which is at the opposite end. American photographer and filmmaker Lauren Greenfield remained an inspiration to me going forward but I didn't look at her work constantly nor artist Frances Waite. I took inspiration from them in a broad sense of the feeling I was going for. I didn't look at them closely while doing the actual work. The same goes for every artist inspiration I mentioned in last year's proposal. I am still inspired by their work but I found it important to just focus on my own artistic instinct. I wanted to strive for my own style and creative ideas for this body of work. After showing some of my drawings to my mentor she



suggested I look up the artist Francis Picabia. I looked at the book “ Francis Picabia Our Heads Are Round So Our Thoughts Can Change Direction”. His paintings definitely informed and spoke to my work. I was also inspired by many books about social media’s negative impact on people and society and books about the problems the social communication of the internet creates. My bibliography includes over 35 references. One of the most interesting is the science fiction novel “Uglies” by Scott Westfield published in 2005. The novel is set in a future post scarcity dystopian world 300 hundred years in the future. Everyone is an ugly until they have a mandatory extreme plastic surgery operation at 16, that is forced on them by the government so they become pretties. It speaks to the ideas of beauty, perfectionism, and conformity that is so prevalent in social media today.

I believe that I have been successful with this project because my criteria for success was to be upfront and say exactly what my relationship has been with social media as well as to give my view on generation Z and the millennial generations. We live in a digital culture that we are still figuring out. We are trying to interact with technology the way we act toward each other in real life. It’s not the same thing and it will never be. Technology has changed us. There are good and bad parts of technology and the impact of Social media has, in my opinion, has had a more negative than positive influence on our lives. I believe I’ve captured my experience of finding myself losing the values that I hold most dear. I believe that I was successful because I pushed back when people didn't agree with me and thought I was wrong about social media. I did it anyway. I made the art I wanted to make and I said what I wanted to say. I see this work in the future continuing for a while, as well as more art around the topics I’ve explored here. I hope to see this work in a gallery, online, in articles online and off. I am an emerging artist that is ready to continue a new chapter of professionalism in my art practice.

## (WHERE DOES YOUR WORK FIT IN WITH THE LARGER CREATIVE AND CULTURAL MOVEMENTS)

I see this work in cultural, social, historical, political, and philosophical frameworks because people have been saying we are progressing into a more and more digitized world with technology constantly expanding. Technology I think will touch on all these aspects. As far as social and cultural, where I think it fits in best, social media is very much integrated and strongly part of Gen Z and Millennial generations. It speaks to the cultural shifts since the onslaught of social media, where everyone is connected and completely disconnected from each other at the same time. These were two generations that were essentially experiments. There was no real historical comparison, and the damage was already done before it was discovered. We are only starting to learn how to deal with excessive technological use and the effects excessive social media use has on people.

Before I conclude I would like to thank my mentor, Michelle Ross, for all the support and advice throughout this process. She kept me on track, which was no easy task. She encouraged me to experiment and play around with new ideas. She moved me out of my comfort zone. Thank you, Michelle.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, my intent of this show is to address the negative impact social media can have on its users. I hope to elicit a visceral, contemplative, relatable, even uncomfortable, and confrontational response to my art. I hope it makes them think about how social media affects them, their children, their friends and the society and culture we live in today. My use of photographs, slideshow with video clips, intends to put viewers in the world of social media, so one can feel the emotional impact through the drawings. And how I'm in fact not living the life I project on screen, rather I am playing a character that's not real. My drawings have been cathartic and have been a release of the anger, frustration, and sadness I've felt. I fell very far down the social media rabbit hole and I know how easy it is to fall in and how hard

it is to climb back out. Even though many still measure other peoples and their own by it, I am reminded that I can't measure myself on that false pretense. This work aims to convey that dark, overwhelming experience that keeps you in on your screen and stops you from living your own life. The dependence of social media was constant performing and self-surveillance. Not being on social media very much anymore, and having the depth of understanding of social media, now I feel empowered. I know my value is not how I look at all but how I treat others and what I do for the world. Beauty and money are things that are shallow and unfulfilling. Beauty fades and you can't bring your money with you when you die. I have found myself again reminded a value of a life is not what you look like or by how much wealth you have and the things you own. I hope this speaks to others, and helps them see social media in a new light.

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