

**Welcome to The Meeting, Please Find Your Seat**

A Thesis  
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Fine Arts  
with a  
Major in Art  
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by  
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### Authorization to Submit Thesis

This thesis of Katrina K. Fekkes submitted for the degree of Master of Fine Art with a Major in Art and titled "Welcome to The Meeting, Please Find Your Seat," has been reviewed in final form. Permission, as indicated by the signatures and dates below, is now granted to submit final copies to the College of Graduate Studies for approval.

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## Abstract

Using familiar utilitarian objects and household materials, I construct semi-autobiographical works from my fractured urban experiences. Acting as both barriers, portals and containers, I use materials such as tarps, fencing, fabric, concrete, and clay to create open narratives about struggles and triumphs found within ordinary life. These works explore reaching rock bottom, a period of shame and regret, when isolation and fear became my constant companions.

Constrained in emotional turmoil, I chose to live in the margins—a lifestyle that left me craving the material and psychological comforts of home.

In reflection, I carve out a relationship with my past through my works and discover new grounds to build a sense of security— no matter how precarious—from.

I use the tactility of fabrics and the precision of building materials as a metaphor for comfort, maintenance, and structure abundant in domestic life. The malleability of clay informs the viewer of the resilience and adaptability of the human psyche. Through these material interactions, authentic vulnerability and tension form, allowing the viewer to deposit their allegory into the work and alleviating mine.

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## Dedication

My husband, Nick, my sun and stars. The patience and kindness you show me daily is unbelievable. After every critique or a long night at the studio you let me vent about the emotional rollercoaster ride these years have been, and you always find the words to inspire me to keep going. You have never stopped encouraging me to follow my dreams. Thank you for doing life with me. No take backs.

Papa, you taught me how to think like a builder. I am a skilled maker in my craft because you led by example. You taught me to stay humble and teachable. This milestone I have accomplished is a direct correlation of the time you spent pushing me to be better.

Mom, thank you for our morning phone calls, you listen when I need to talk, and you talk when I can't speak. You have never given up on me and have always encouraged me to walk in faith, always reminding me, God has a plan for my life, and it is good!

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## Chapter 1: Step Twelve

*“Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and addicts, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.”*

The first time I told my story I was standing in a halfway house in front of a dozen drunks and junkies in recovery. I was trembling with anxiety and fear, questioning the words that would come out of my mouth. Would they even make a difference to these people? Surely these folks have walked a rougher road than I, so how could my story make any difference in their lives? I would soon find the answers to these questions, but those would come with time. As the fog of addiction slowly lifted off my soul, I began to realize that my experience, and strength had the power to encourage others to live a new life. A life free of fear and shame. I began creating powerful work through vulnerability and opening up about my personal struggles, brokenness and addiction. *Seeking Shelter*(figure 1.1) is a work created out of my fractured urban experiences, the life I lived in the lowness of humanity and the pulls of addiction. This sculpture helped begin teasing out vulnerability and tension imbedded deep in my story. It gave me a doorway in which my past could be viewed through the use of mixed media and installation. Using familiar materials such as fencing, cinderblocks, tarps, thread, clay and grass. I began to expand upon material interactions and combine those with the narratives of my past which has resulted in an exploration into a new visual language. The use of building materials in my work offers up metaphors for rehabilitation, renovation, and recovery. The environment and geography become allegories for my internal state and

condition. What appears as rubble, in shambles, a product of trauma, emerges as a ripe and fertile ground for creativity and reinvention.



*Figure 1.1 Seeking Shelter clay, fencing, grass, tarps, sizes may vary, installation, 2019*

## **Kat's Story**

I was born in Salem, Oregon in 1985, the youngest of 6. My parents were not married yet but had now 6 children between them ranging in age between 9 and 0 before their 27<sup>th</sup> birthdays. Being the youngest often carries a certain stigma to it and will later come back and effect my decision-making abilities as a young adult.

I was in and out of the hospital so regularly as a child that my parents made the decision to move from rainy, damp and moldy western Oregon to find drier, sunnier weather so I could breathe, and they could get away from their exes.

After relocating in different parts of Eastern Washington our family arrived in a nowhere town outside of Spokane, Tum Tum. It's about as interesting as it sounds, the only redeeming quality was the nearby water source, Long Lake. Pine trees and sand surrounded us as far as the eye could see, foreigners to this land, we were also without a home and isolated from the outside world. My parents worked diligently to source power, and water so construction of the garage could begin as quickly as possible. Meanwhile, my siblings and I were catching the hour-long bus ride to school and being ridiculed daily for our less than stellar hygiene. We spent the weekends falling trees for firewood, and helping with the build, I think we actually spent most our time whining about chores and whispering secrets about how much we hated my parents for making us do all these terrible tasks. We had no idea how these moments in time would alter our futures and shape our characters.

### *Learning how to build*

I was 8 years old when we moved to the property, and I envision that it was around this age that I began to understand functionality and purpose of building materials. While I was still too young to do any kind of heavy lifting, I found myself being the helper, or the go-getter of

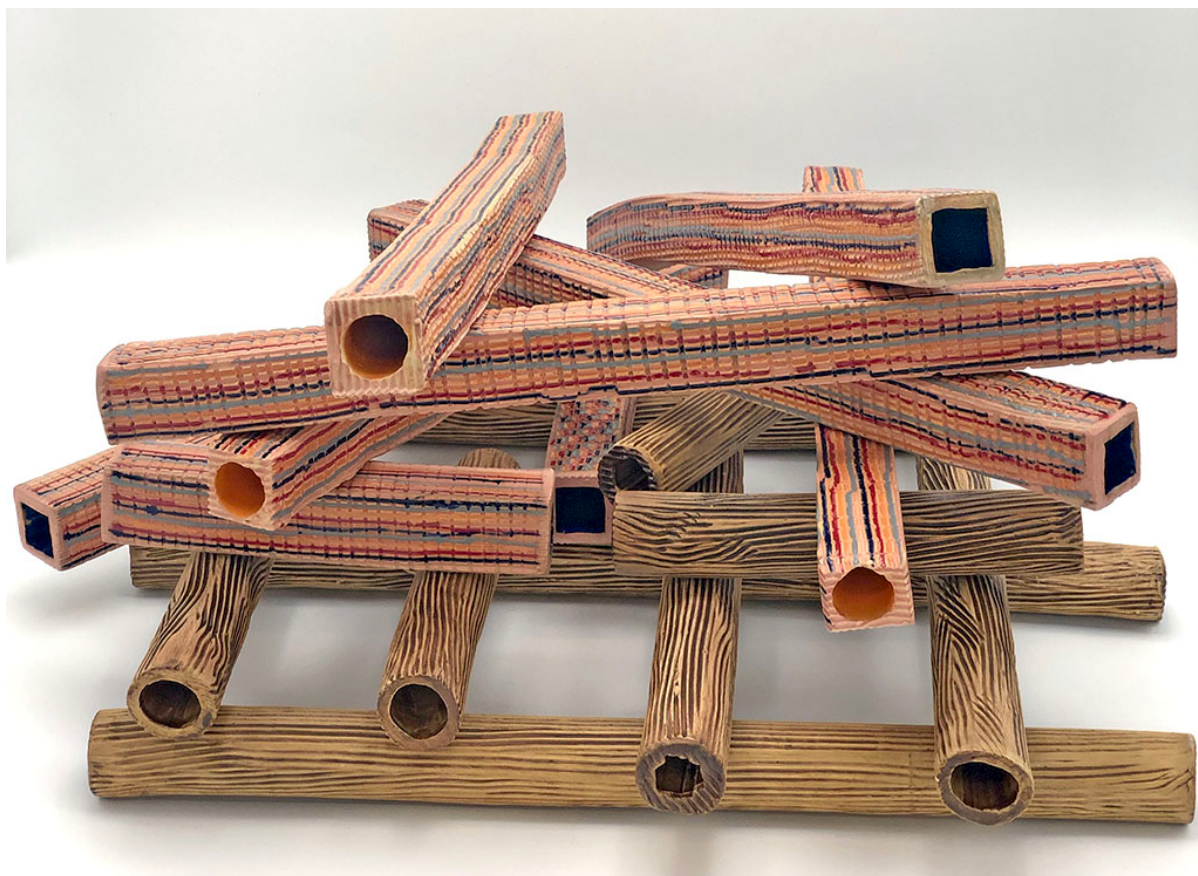
the tools, nails, boards, or the occasional lemonade. I absorbed everything, quietly making notes in my head before scurrying off to find a sandy ditch to make my mud pies.

As I got older, and my siblings began to move away there were less opportunities and desire for playing in the mud and the list of to-dos seemed exhaustive. I hung sheetrock, installed heated flooring, hung siding until my arms were dead and painted for days on end. I too couldn't wait for the day I would have the courage to leave this place.

*Breaking Ground (figure 1.2)* is a playful sculpture inspired by my experience of helping build our family home. Thinking about the different materials it takes to construct a home from the ground up I thought about how I could reimagine these materials to be constructed solely out of clay. I extruded large hollow coils of clay and gave each one texture with a curly wire around the exterior. The hollow tubes began taking shape and a childhood game of *Lincoln Logs* began to emerge. The familiarity and tactility of the extruded clay pieces begged for interaction and play.

The foundation of this structure is created from layering round "logs" into a supportive grid, however there are no notches cut from the clay to make a truly stable foundation. There is a tension that occurs as the square tubes settle into a precarious placement on top of the round tubes to form a grid like pattern. This could be construed as a backwards way of creating a solid foundation, putting square columns atop a round base, but in this case, the texture of the round tubes helps to hold the structure stable. I use this piece as a foreshadow into my future

work, these hints into my past helps to cultivate an understanding into my use of color, texture, form, and begins to contextualize my ideas surrounding my childhood.



*Figure 1.2 Breaking ground, stoneware, 23" x 23" x 14", 2019*

## Step One

*"We admitted we were powerless over drugs and alcohol-that our lives had become unmanageable."*

I was several years into a downward spiral fueled by methamphetamine, alcohol, and a laundry list of bad decisions. It was a chilly winter evening when I first stepped foot into a "biker" clubhouse. My childhood best friend brought me that evening to meet her newest scumbag boyfriend and then current President of the Iron Order. Now, *Sons of Anarchy* was a popular show at that time, so I extracted what little knowledge I had gained from the Hollywood culture surrounding biker gangs and their treatment of women and preceded to enter the club, sure to be seen, but definitely not heard. My nervousness must have been apparent, written all over my face as I tried to blend into this foreign atmosphere decorated in women's lingerie and smelling of sour booze and stale cigarettes.

It would be about another 6 months until I would step foot back in this clubhouse, and one year after that I became the Vice President of the Iron Order's Ol'Lady and a patched in member of the Iron Maidens. My road name was Snakks, the double k's represent my first and middle initials, and I always rode with a pocketful of candy, so I didn't grind my jaw when I was high. I traveled with this club across the country, over 10,000 miles of road under two wheels, I rode in parades and funeral processions, in freezing cold rain and scorching hot sun. Most of my time was spent in a drug induced haze, when there were no drugs, I poured liquor down my throat to blot out pain of reality.

It began as any other booze filled weekend would. The clubhouse was filling up with bikes and the bonfire was getting started. The clubhouse was located on a main arterial through the east end of Spokane called Dog Town or Hillyard. I remember the road being louder than

usual that evening, bikers from opposing clubs would rev their engines as they passed, oftentimes shouting profanities and insults at the members sitting outside. It was known that the IO had beef with several other gangs around town, but that night it was more obvious than usual.

I was inside the clubhouse when I heard the shots begin, the screams followed. Bullets pierced the windows and I hit the floor, I was in an extremely vulnerable area lined with windows, not really thinking about the consequences, I got up and ran to the back of the house, gathering a few women and some small children. We fled into a tiny room in the back and waited for the dust to settle.

I carry the trauma of that experience with me to this day. This was the first of the “Come to Jesus” moments I would have that year and it was not too long after this incident that I sincerely tried to get clean and sober.

*Where the Hell are My Friends?* (Figure 1.3) is a retrospective look into this traumatic experience. Its aggressive references coincide with the "writing on the wall" and urn shaped container signifying death knocking at the door. This vessel shows imagery of place by using the Monroe St. Bridge in Spokane, the place where so much damage was done in my life. The use of graffiti-like writing suggests a period of rebelliousness and anarchy which becomes a thread to inform my future work. The bullet fragments are a testament to the aggressive and dangerous lifestyle I was caught up in and the chaos of that dreadful night. I created this piece during the time I was still extremely apprehensive about being transparent or vulnerable in my work. I was uncertain how my story might be received and when I still carried a small amount of shame from my past. The creation of this vessel began laying the foundation for a deeper understanding into my own story. A story of restoration, renovation and recovery.





Figure 1.3 *Where the hell are my friends?* porcelain, bullets, 13 1/2" x 5 3/4" x 5 3/4", 2018

### **Welcome to The Meeting, Please Find Your Seat**

Working through my past experiences has catapulted me into thinking about the relationships within my family that were altered and changed during my destructive years. I decided it was time to invite my family members into the work. For my MFA thesis work, I have set out to create a set of vessels and accompanying chairs that serve as placeholders for specific members of my family. I am exploring how each of these works independent of one another and how they work together as an installation to create a deeper narrative—a more open narrative to viewers.

*Welcome to the meeting, please find your seat (Figure 3.1)* is an installation that addresses the generational impacts of addictive behaviors and highlights my own dysfunctional family dynamics. This meeting is called to seek out restoration for lost or distant relationships and to offer the hope of recovery within the family unit as well as an individual basis.

I began my exploration into the characters of each family member by first relating them to a chair. Each one celebrated for their unique characteristics and qualities. The chair that was chosen for each person would end up on a vessel in some capacity. The form, function, and imagery on the vessels work in unison with the chairs to become important identifiers for each character. Another important reference for the work comes from the author Michel Foucault, his theories regarding the ways humans become products of their institutions (work, school, prison, domestication, religion, sexuality) have allowed me to enrich each character's background, layering complex ideas into each place setting.

### **I'm a little teapot**

*I'm a little teapot,  
Short and stout,  
Here is my handle  
Here is my spout  
When I get all steamed up,  
Hear me shout,  
Tip me over and pour me out!*

*I'm a very special teapot,  
Yes, it's true,  
Here's an example of what I can do,  
I can turn my handle into a spout,  
Tip me over and pour me out!*

As the maker and person calling the meeting, I pondered long and hard on how to create a form in which my own character was depicted. I found myself stumbling, procrastinating, and taking inventory of myself.

Who was I to be in the land of vessels? While the form itself was hard to envision at first, I knew right away what the imagery must depict. I believe that as the youngest, I appropriate bits and pieces of all the other characters you will meet in this story. The images on *I'm a little teapot* (Figure 1.4) highlight and unify my belonging with those around me while making a strong case for self-identification and inventory-if you will.

The teapot is a vessel that holds warmth and pours its contents out. It is a giver and used to calm anxious souls during peace talks. It is also a vessel in close association with a kettle and will boil and bubble over if not attended to. I found myself relating more and more to this form as I took inventory of the teapot in relation to my own characteristics.



*Figure.1.4 I'm a little teapot, colored porcelain, decals, 9"x 6"x 7 1/2", 2021*

### Step Four

*“Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.”*

Early on in my ceramic career I attended a workshop Deborah taught at Gonzaga University and since then I have looked up to her and the path that she has laid out for aspiring ceramic artists. Deborah uses a combination of wheel thrown and hand-built pieces that are altered and manipulated using darts. Traditionally this is used for tailoring in order to make an innovative shape or give structure to the fabric; I have used these same methods in each part of my tea set to define the shapes of the bodies, handles and spout.

The process of altering a form by way of darting can be nerve-wracking, you must be precise in your cuts to get the clay pushed back together and mended. Although, this way of working gives them a unique flare, it also makes the forms a bit more unpredictable and increases the likeliness that the clay will pull apart at the darted seam and crack.

The tea set includes the teapot and five other vessels. I view each piece as an important part of the family. Each of these additional pieces acts as a supporting role for the teapot. It is not complete without the family that includes three altered cups, a lidded sugar jar and a small cream pitcher. As I was reading through Deborah Schwarzkopf’s online bio she states, “Throughout my upbringing, the kitchen was a stage for experimentation, and the table, a place for generously gathering people together. Working with clay and sharing handmade pottery at mealtimes is a catalyst for conversation and creativity.” My pieces in this installation *Welcome to the Meeting, Please Find Your Seat, detail of tea set on table (Figure 1.5)* are also set out on the table for sharing, to activate movement and to form lines of communication through the family members at the meeting.



*Figure 1.5 Welcome to The Meeting, Please Find Your Seat, detail of tea set on table*

*Institutionalized by Higher Education*

The chair I have chosen for myself is a stool. It could be a child's stool in relation to my line of succession, or merely a stool used in the realm of education. I have always loved school, I have always excelled there and found comfort in the routine. I find that when I am enrolled in school, I have a purpose in life and when I am throwing clay on the wheel my purpose becomes my passion. I like to think of my chair at this table being a pottery stool, like the one I use while honing the skills of my craft. I find it to be fitting in relation to my character at this table. It sits in ambiguity, with openness to what is around it, willing to connect and waiting for the opportunity to be seen.



Figure 1.6 *Welcome to The Meeting, Please Find Your Seat*, detail of teapot place setting and stool.

## Chapter 2: Step Eight

*“Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.”*

Step eight is the beginning of the end of isolation, it’s about learning to live with others, and forgiveness. The ceramic vessels I have created for each member of my family, including myself, focus on the generational impacts of addictive behavior, contention, controversy, and mental illness. I characterize each personality through representational imagery, words, colors, textures, and form.

I construct the forms by first throwing clay on the wheel. Each form has individual characteristics and personas that are amplified by the use of colored porcelain or through a dark stoneware body. It was a conscious decision to use color saturated clay in three of the pieces. I wanted the body of the vessel to be inherently black, gray, or blue in order to layer more meaning within the piece, while understanding the process in applying the imagery would be affected if I had chosen to treat just the surface instead of the body itself.

Skewing the work from my own perspective I first throw a functional form that fits the identity of the persona I am trying to capture i.e., a cookie jar, tea set, coffee cans, bottle and cups, vase, and water ewer with mugs.

By highlighting the flaws of each character through the form, color and imagery I allow the viewers access to unearth truths within the pieces and themselves.

Each of the ceramic forms carries a representation of a chair, this imagery is a thoughtful simile. All the furniture was either self-declared or assigned after much deliberation in the purpose and function of each. I believe this added layer of domestic illustration enhances the dialog of character and identity.



While these forms were all made with the personas from the members of my own family, my goal is to convince the viewer to relate pieces of each of the vessels with their own family members, friends, or themselves. Identifying with the similarities instead of the differences allows for a deeper connection to my work.

## Amphora Vase

Despite our less than normal living conditions we carried on as average children and the years passed by. High school was particularly challenging for my brothers and sister. I was five years younger and transitioning from elementary to middle school, for me there is a lot of information that I was not privy to at the time. However, I remember the day that my brother Brandon came home from school covered in red hot anger and tears. This was a pivotal memory and one that would catapult a series of events that would forever change my family. The "Jocks" had been torturing Brandon for a while but this time they went too far. During lunch time they carved *BRANDON IS GAY* into the wood picnic tables outside the front entrance of the school. My mother who had been working as a lunch lady at the high school caught wind of the vicious attack on his personhood and marched down to the principal's office demanding it be removed or else, she would come down with her chain saw and remove it herself!

In hindsight the reaction of my mother only added fuel to the fire for the misery and humiliation of my brother. It wasn't long after, that Brandon began filling out college applications for universities across the state. He needed to get away, to start a new life, and to leave this family behind.

We dropped him off at Western Washington University in Bellingham August of 1998. He has refused to come home for visits or engage in any holiday traditions since. Brandon has gathered a "new" family now, one of his own choosing.

Two years ago, he authored a book about his childhood. Each chapter of his book, *Pistol Whipping a Toddler*, is titled with a nickname, intended to hurt them if they ever found out. I am guessing I was allowed to read this book given my name was not listed in the table of

contents like my mother, *Chapter 10: Kimberly Christ, or my father, Chapter 14: Papa can you hear me? Or whoever Chapter 3: Boozy Suzy And Her Brownstar might be*. While these titles and characters seem playful and comical, his story unfolds into a tale of terrible hardship, and the constant desire to find acceptance. I was finally at an age to begin putting the pieces together for myself, and the past that was kept from me began to reveal itself through his recollection of memories. It was through this story that my brother and I begin to relate. Our journey will cross paths in our struggles, and we will begin to build an unseen relationship through our testimony of overcoming addiction and our path to recovery.

### *Institution of Sexual Identity*

As I began my research into Brandon's Amphora Vase, I stumbled upon an artist with whom I felt preceded in a likeminded way in his work as to what I had envisioned for Brandon's vessel. Wesley Harvey's current body of artwork examines gay male sexuality through the lens of queer theory using appropriation of imagery and objects. He states, "I want to address the social and cultural issues and implications of homosexuality in a society that is becoming more accepting of what used to be a scarlet letter worn only in the shadows of back alleys and dimly lit rooms. I want to examine not only the normative behavior but also the deviant lifestyle that often gets neglected and chastised. The use of gold and floral designs in excess gives me a visual overload of imagery and objects that deeply satisfy my tawdry desires. Ancient Greek and Roman pottery are an endless source for my starting point when working with ceramics."

Creating a vessel for Brandon began with using blue mason stain to color a batch of porcelain. Blue could be used as a color we associate with a specific gender, but I just remember it was his favorite color growing up, so I went with it. The Amphora vase is wheel thrown with

pulled handles; the floral design is slip painted purple pansies that fade up to black outlined pansy decals. Incorporating both styles of pansies help the eye to move around the vessel, adding interest to the surface and a layer of context to the piece. I choose to add glitter to the handles and around the lid to add an element of drama and flare that is often associated with queer identity and drag queens and is represented through his amphora vase titled *Glitter dusted pansy (Figure 2.1)*

The purple chaise lounge was added to the vessel because of its origin of dual functionality and posturing. These loungers were popular for Greek symposiums; social gatherings where men would drink and converse amongst each other in rows of kline couches against three walls facing the door. Acting as both a sofa-like seat by day and a bed by night, chaise lounges aren't really designed for sleeping but lounging and chatting. Some of my fondest memories of my brother revolve around his way with words, his intelligent vocabulary, paired with his endearing snobbery was always a dramatic and theatrical event. His chair in the installation is positioned away from the table to address the distance he has cultivated in the past 25 years, keeping a layer of protection between himself and the family. This is also reflective in the plastic sheet placed over the chaise lounge (*Figure 2.2*).



*Figure 2.1 Glitter dusted pansy, colored porcelain, decals, glitter, 21"x 15"x 7", 2021*



*Figure 2.2 Welcome to The Meeting, Please Find Your Seat, detail of amphora vase place setting and chaise lounge*



*Figure 2.3 Welcome to The Meeting, Please Find Your Seat, detail of chaise lounge away from table and covered in plastic*

## Water Ewer

I have a blended family. Brandon and Tara are my half-siblings from my mother, and they share a disappointing father who was always a bit aloof in their childhood. Out of all my half siblings Tara has been my closest ally and most consistent sibling. My mom would tease that I was Tara's baby; from the moment I arrived she took care of me like her own. She would constantly have my back when my brothers picked on me, and she would tattle to my parents when they arrived home from work. If she would not have tattled, they would never have known the cruelty that transpired. I must have been too scared to tell them myself and even to this day when stories surface my parents admit they were oblivious to some of the shenanigans that happened so long ago. Later, when Tara got her first car, she would often let me tag along, despite our age difference of five years and completely uncool to her high school friends, she did not seem to mind. Tara could not wait, though, to get out of the garage, stop sharing a bed with her little sister, and avoid the contention within the family. Her nature has always been to nurture and her dream was having a family of her own. At age 18 she was married and by 19 had my first niece.

I was 14 when Tara got married. This was my first taste of abandonment, it sounds silly now but her leaving and moving on with life meant that I was left all alone, with my parents for four more years. While I was hypervigilant about my own loss and fury of being abandoned by my sister, I neglected to notice Tara had been struggling right along with me. A mixture of, selfishness, immaturity, and the feeling of isolation, lead me to believe her life had become interesting and my life continued to be a struggle. This prevented a clear view of Tara's continuing internal battle.



*Everything is Fine...Really (Figure 2.4)* captures the internal battles of domestic life. The language surrounding the forms include the words: Anxiety, Avoidance, Distraction and Coping. These words are laid out in a crossword style pattern, intersecting, and traversing each other as they wrap across the surface of the forms. The intermingling of these words assists in understanding the mental hardships of daily domestic life. For my sister, to cope, that meant distracting herself in avoidance of the mounting/multitude of issues. If things are avoided for too long, it was only a matter of time before anxiety would attack. This is a constant cycle, exacerbated by the swinging door of fostering children while holding down a full-time job.

The imagery on this pitcher is achieved by drawing onto the green clay and filling in the marks with colored slip. The technique is called *inlay* or *mishima*; once the slip has dried, it is scraped off the surface, leaving the carved recesses to hold the colored drawings. This is one of my favorite methods of adding imagery to the surface of a vessel. I feel a sense gratification in the initial carving through the green clay, to then paint on globs of brightly colored slip, all while knowing you must scrape it off to reveal the narrative hiding below.



Figure 2.4 *Everything is Fine...Really*, porcelain, luster glaze, 16"x 13"x 7", 2021

*Institution of Domesticity*

The water ewer form for my sister, Tara, was inspired by Julia Galloway's 2016 Exhibition, *Dwell*. In this exhibition Julia decorated her vessels with images from her own home. She was particularly interested in objects or areas of her house that had the deepest sense of domesticity and personal or family history. On her website she writes about the work, "On several pots I have a wicker chair, often with a window or a light. This was my grandmothers chair— "the 5 O'clock chair, where my grandmother would 'take off her face' at the end of the day, or, where she would sit when making phone calls. I love the idea of using pottery that has a home on it—metaphorically getting nourishment from where I live." When I first laid eyes on these pieces, she had created for this exhibition I was puzzled. Something so intimate and yet so simple as a room in your house or a chair passed down from your grandmother could have so much emotional pull and resonance. Putting those images on a functional piece of pottery, something else that was so familiar in our domestic space. The room I chose to inlay into the clay is a nursery, I believe it speaks loudly to the years of child rearing and hours of domestic wrestling matches. The chair appropriately placed for Tara is a rocking chair. A rocker of simple design with no more sentimental value placed onto it than the precious time spent gliding a newborn baby. In her case, ten out of the twelve babies she cared for were born already addicted to various substances, the other two are her own biological daughters. The burden and a challenge of caring for babies addicted at birth is only accepted by a true giver. The water ewer provides the essentials for life and is paired with matching mugs; one of the mugs also acts as a lid. This vessel is meant to share its contents, and in (*Figure 2.5*) a directional line has been implied from her vessel to my mothers in which it faces. She also shares a mug with my mother at the table, offering up an

understanding into a side conversation. Her rocking chair is situated at an angle towards the end of the table, suggesting a direction of focus (*Figure 2.6*)



*Figure 2.5 Welcome to the Meeting, Please Find Your Seat, detail of water ewer and mug place setting*



*Figure 1.6 Welcome to The Meeting, Please Find Your Seat, detail of rocking chair in conversation with the pew*

### **Whiskey Bottle, Cups and Cuffs**

Casey is my half-brother who shares the same father as me. He spent most of his childhood flip flopping between his mom's house and ours. Since my mother had Brandon and Tara already, Casey seemed to fit right into the chaos. He is the same age as Tara so growing up, they were often mistaken for twins. They couldn't be more contrary in character or temperament.

Casey was the first of my family members to confront me on my addiction and corresponding lunatic behaviors. Over the years I had seen the rise and fall from his own alcohol induced choices, moments of manic chaos, and rage filled catastrophes. I visited Casey in jail, seen him beat up, kicked out of bars, and laying in hospital beds. I thought to myself numerous times, "I will never be like that." There is a saying in recovery, "If you spot it, you got it," so if there was anyone on this planet that could call me on my lifestyle of addictive behavior, it was him; and he did.

It happened right after I stole his car. He was working in North Dakota during the oil boom and I was using his place as a flop house when I was on drugs. My own car was on the fritz so I borrowed one of his for a week. He ended up coming home without any warning to discover his car missing and his house in disarray. Needless to say, he was angry with me; he sat me down and had a really unpleasant older brother talk. Casey was new to recovery at this time, and I vaguely remember him pleading with me to go to a meeting.



Figure 2.7 What kind of birds can't fly? Jailbirds. colored porcelain, 18"x 5"x 5", 2021

*Institutionalized by the Criminal Justice System*

To achieve the height of this black porcelain bottle, I first wedged nylon fibers into the clay body for additional strength before throwing it on the wheel. I wanted this vessel to be tall in stature, a commanding presence that speaks to the character of my brother. Conversely, porcelain's true nature is to slump and twist the moment you demand verticality, without the added structure of grog to hold it together, it becomes an unusable puddle of slip with the same consistency of cream cheese. The nylon fibers assisted in keeping the black silky porcelain from falling in on itself as it became taller, but in the end, I decided to throw two vessels and combine them together, giving me the correct proportions for the bottle form and control necessary to trim and alter the piece.

The metaphors embedded deep into this vessel are not of coincidence or happenstance. The vertical inlaid stripes behind the decal graffiti wall represent a life spent in and out of jail, wrestling with rebelliousness and fighting for freedom. Not always freedom from institution, but freedom from addiction, mental illness, and anger. The brightness of the white underglaze upon stark black vessel corresponds with the life of an extremist. There is only black and white, no gray area, and no middle ground. A lonely extremist, the chair image screen-printed onto this bottle is in complete isolation, cold and hollow, stark white, resistant to emotion and deficient of depth or value. The red slip trailed dots radiate like anger from the seat and find unification with the red nestled into the circular relief surrounding the form and the interior of the cups within the set (*Figure 2.7*)

The antique wooden bar chair is sitting backwards at the table to inform us of my brothers' attitude towards the family (*Figure 2.8*) Postured in a way to either turn his back to the



meeting or to sit backwards in the chair replicating a rebellious and disinterested approach to the happenings at the table.



*Figure 2.8 Welcome to The Meeting, Please Find Your Seat, detail of backwards chair and whiskey bottle, cups and cuffs place setting*



Figure 2.9 *Welcome to The Meeting, Please Find Your Seat*, detail of whiskey bottle, cup, cuffs and napkin

### **Cookie Jar and Communion**

My mom was raised in a broken home that did not regularly attend church. She vowed early on that her children would have a happy and healthy childhood, free from the abuse and hardships that she suffered through. As she struggled to find her way and keep her promises to my siblings, she met my father who grew up in a conservative Christian home with both parents. He had taken some time away from the rigors of religious practice during his early 20's and they theorize that their lack in spiritual guidance was a leading factor in the creation of our brady bunch family.

I was just a few months old when my parents were married in a small Baptist church in Lyons, Oregon. The congregation welcomed my non-traditional family in with open arms and throughout our years in Lyons the members of the church became like an extended family. My mom was saved as a born-again Christian, and my dad was reunited in his faith. Together with the help of God and the church community they were bound and determined to make our blended family succeed.

When it came time for my parents to decide to leave the sleepy mill town of Lyons and head north to eastern Washington; the church community and support from family became like a sweet memory.

In desperation to find the community they had been left behind in Oregon, my parents began dragging us around to every church within a 20-mile radius. We started with the small rural congregations that were close by, hoping to find some kind of connection to another young family who lived in the middle of nowhere, like us, but each week the search continued and little by little more disappointment hung in the air, until a thick fog of despair accumulated over our household.

The truth is my parents never found the same kind of connection or community as they had in Lyons. As we grew older and had more to say about our Sunday activities, some of us kids chose to attend a non-denominal mega church in Spokane in hopes of blending into the carpet while others of us refused the practice all together. Nevertheless, my mother was and is still the advocate for bringing God into our lives, using her own testimony as evidence that through Christ all things are made new. Her hope in the Lord is contagious and conflicting all at the same time. She sits steady at the foot of the table, waiting for anyone who has lost their way. *(Figure 2.11)*

*Figure 2.10 A Mother of Noble Character porcelain, stoneware, decals, 14" x 8" x 8", 2021*

### *Religious Institutions*

There is something nurturing and warm about the humble form of a cookie jar. It serves a specific purpose of holding sugary treats which bring moments of joy and emotional nourishment. It seems only fitting that this form attach itself to the characteristics of a mother, my mother. (*Figure 2.10*)

This jar was thrown with a mid-range porcelain clay body while the church pew, floorboards and nails were hand built out of a dark chocolate stoneware. Combining these two clays gives a richness and depth to the overall narrative of this vessel. As your eye works around the jar, colorful stained glass sits as a relief above the cobble stone background and the biblical text laid out with a red iron decal. The nails are driven into the lid to activate the space around the church pew and give reference to the contention the faith has generated within each of us kids and our relationship with my mother.

The pew (*Figure 2.12*) sits as a solid visual anchor for the installation and is placed up to the table with an access to enter the space between it and the table. The texture of the fabric on the pew is harsh and tactile but the oak wood surrounding the painted upholstery acts as a barrier for one to lean upon for rest. The size of the pew has been scaled down, befitting for one to find comfort, but the orientation of the pew sitting square to the table suggests openness to all.



Figure 2.11 *Welcome to The Meeting, Please Find Your Seat*, detail of cookie jar place setting



*Figure.1.12 Welcome to The Meeting, Please Find Your Seat, detail of pew*



### Coffee Cans, Hammer and Nails

Growing up in a garage didn't allow us to own an excess of things. While I know for certain we never went without, we also didn't accumulate too much either. When toys and clutter would happen, it would drive my dad crazy. He would make individualized piles of our things, oftentimes throwing our stuff in an angry burst of frustration that would always result in the formation of tears. As his tone would slowly escalate his response would sound something like this, "Well if you would pick it up and put it where it belongs then I wouldn't have to throw it in a pile!" I was very young when I learned that everything has a home and if you want to keep it, it better find its way there.

As I got older, I realized that perfectionism and meticulous organizational standards, were generational traits that I would not be able to escape. I often find myself piling up my husband's things for him or criticizing him if things are not put back in the organized way, they were previous. A trait that may always be a work in progress.

I created two trompe-l'oeil coffee cans inspired by my dad's neatly organized containers and cans he kept stored away in the garage (after we moved out of the garage, of course.) They contained nuts, bolts, screws, nails, and every other kind of fastener or hinge you might imagine (*Figure 2.13*). This is not only a reference to the character of my father, but his father and myself. I was reminded recently about the number of containers and Marie Kondo inspired drawer organizers I possessed when my parents came to help me move. After the moment of teasing ceased my reply sounded something like, "and you wonder who I inherited this trait from?"



*Figure 2.13 The Original Workaholic stoneware, porcelain, decals, spray paint, 10"x 7"x 7", 2021*

### *Work as an Institution*

I chose to throw this form into a relatable vessel with a relatable piece of furniture. Whether we own a recliner or not, we understand the mechanics of it as well as the comfort made for the prime relaxation of one. I wanted to combine a clear picture of a well-loved chair that is used at the end of a long hard day of work. There is a feeling of nostalgia that occurs as you

see the cans combined with the recliner, and it seems we all know someone who would fit comfortably at this seat.

If you are labeled a workaholic, that often means you have made certain sacrifices. Most of my childhood my dad left town for work and was gone for weeks at a time, often returning for a short weekend here and there but when he returned home, he was not present or active in the family dynamics. He would isolate in his recliner and sleep until it was time to pack up and hit the road again (*Figure 2.15*). I intentionally left the recliner looking soiled, as the first layer of paint began to absorb into the fabric of the recliner it left a dinginess that offered up even more visual cues as to who might be sitting here. Grubby from working all day, the chair would also become reflective of that persona.

There are two cans, each with a slightly different label. A new version and an older version. This is a small detail that could easily be looked past, but to me the subtlety of the two renditions explores a deeper meaning. The old version is tipped over and warped with time, spilling out its contents of bent and rusted nails. Over the years the old version went through a series of changes and renovations. A slight branding upgrade was made and now the new rendition sits tall and present, fully engaged in a similar posture as the rest of the vessels (*Figure 2.14*). The lid is slightly askew in reference to a new openness that has occurred over the years with the help of active recovery.



*Figure 2.14 Welcome to The Meeting, Please Find Your Seat, detail of coffee cans place setting*



*Figure 1.15 Welcome to The Meeting, Please Find Your Seat, detail of recliner*

### Chapter 3: Step Five

*“Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.”*

The previous chapters have given an overview of everyone invited to this meeting; there has been an outline of their story, personal characteristics and vices; as well as institutions in which we become organized or trapped in alongside the stereotypes we become accustomed to.

As I set the table for this installation, I have become aware of how these pieces work together to form a much larger narrative than when they are isolated away from each other. The detailed elements interact with each other in the gallery space and request your presence. As you enter a familiar dining room setting you are asked to find a seat. This is the moment you begin to contemplate where that might be, and your focus shifts back and forth from the found and altered chairs to the vessels showcasing the corresponding furniture.

The table is built with representational components indicative of a stud wall created in the building of a home. The table legs are foundational and structural to the narrative that is my childhood. The raw edges and untreated legs were not forgotten or dismissed, but rather celebrated for their inconsistencies and flaws, a metaphorical connection to a construction site or renovation project. *(Figure 3.2)* I treated the top of the table a little differently, leaving a table runner of raw plywood peeking through the center to keep a similar aesthetic with the legs but surrounded it with the sandy beige paint. The paint becomes a barrier between the texture of the woodgrain tabletop and the softness of the linen placemats. *(Figure 3.3)*



*Figure 3.1 Welcome to The Meeting Please Find Your Seat, ceramic, wood, paint, found objects, mixed media, 16' x 8' x 4', sizes vary, installation, 2021*

The placemats bring warmth and depth to the installation and function to elevate the ceramic vessels off the tabletop. A napkin at each setting adds another dimension of softness while simultaneously serves as a prompt to facilitate the meeting. Everyone at the table has been assigned a specific reading “How it works”, “The Twelve Steps”, “The Twelve Traditions”, “A Vision for You” and the “Promises.” (Bill W. 2015) adding further contextual information for the individual attending. (*Figure 3.3*)

Layering the textiles creates conversation throughout the work and connects this space to an interior dwelling. The meeting is outlined on each of the napkins in the form of embroidery. I joined the furniture pieces and the table together as a family unit by using the same color, allowing for the difference to be seen through the individual’s ceramic vessel instead of the furniture upholstery or paint color. The color was chosen intentionally to work with the raw wood elements of the table and to bring warmth into the dramatic setting. I chose to paint the chairs all the same color instead of reupholster them (except my brothers, as he is the outlier, and his chair is pushed away from the table and covered.) The paint altered the surface of the upholstery as it dried into the fabric, creating a textural interest. There is a crispness that your hand craves to run across but is hesitant to do so in fear that it may be too abrasive and have the potential to hurt your skin. I think this too is a metaphor for the nature of this meeting. Having a designated chair, one that you may or may not wish to sit in could cause you to reconsider what you are doing at this meeting in the first place.





Figure 3.2 *Welcome to The Meeting, Please Find Your Seat*, detail of stud wall table legs



*Figure 3.3 Welcome to The Meeting, Please Find Your Seat, detail of placemat and napkin over painted wood tabletop*

## Step Two

*“Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.”*

It’s been 6 years since my last hangover, and I am proud to say that life has a new design and purpose. I’ve done the hard work that is laid out in the program of recovery and the promises have rang true. I’ve also seen miracles happen for countless others. My hope for this work is to inspire an audience to seek out a community and invest in restoration. Urging onlookers to find the courage for silent reflection and to share in an open dialogue together; beginning a journey that will break the chains of generational addiction.

Moving forward, I will continue to seek out material interactions through ceramics, wood and textiles. I believe that when they are used together, they form a rich dialogue and can be used as a relatable tool to connect with an audience of all ages, classes and backgrounds. Clay can be recycled until it is fired, textiles can be taken apart and put back together, furniture can be repurposed. These are all active metaphors for my experience and where I am in life.

My dream is that this installation will find its way to the communities who need to see it most, the ones who would benefit knowing that we don’t have to walk this path alone. “When a few men in this city have found themselves and have discovered the joy of helping others to face life again, there will be no stopping until everyone in that town has had the opportunity to recover—if he can and will.” (Bill W and Aaron Cohen 2015)

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