

At its core, my work stems from the clash between my upbringing as a third-culture kid and expatriate and the rude reckoning of Western-realities I began unearthing during my adult life. As a child, my experience of the United States consisted of the trips to my grandmother's house in present-day Silicon Valley--jet-lagged memories composed of pancakes, Target runs and the Disney Channel. Between these impressions and the ideas of American life that were propagated through film and media--scenes of California dreaming, well manicured lawns and white picket fencing-- when I arrived in the States for college, I was met with a version of the US closer to Baudrillard's depiction in *America*, and the imaginary US I had envisioned offshore quickly began to dissolve. Through both a liberal education and my travels across the nation, I slowly began to uncover a much more complex, and often unethical, version of the United States than the one I was sold. This America was ripe with cars, convenience, and capitalism; ridden with all of the environmental and societal consequences associated with the aforementioned. Before I began this MFA program I wanted to continue to play with materiality and further explore themes of excess and waste in a consumer-driven society. However, to say that entering this MFA program amidst a pandemic has greatly framed my work would be an understatement.

At the beginning of the academic year, I was looking largely at modes of consumption, an ode to the consumer culture in which we exist, with a primary focus on food. As the art of sourdough bread baking trended and sales of alcohol and junk food skyrocketed, it became clear that individuals were using food past its utilitarian function; and enlisting it as a means to pass the time or as a vehicle for escapist relief. While these acts weren't out of ordinary, the circumstances were, as Slavoj Žižek writes in *Pandemic!* "the world as we knew it has stopped turning." In a culture of capitalism, which seeks to validate an individual's experience based on how "busy" they are, the stopping of the world--as well as the truly Dionysian nature of a global pandemic--gave rise to the cracks already present in the system; allowing for a moment, or months depending on how well you followed the CDC's guidelines, of existential reflection in one's life for those who were brave enough to face it.

As the pandemic raged on and the virus began to mutate, so did my practice. First with an evolution in medium and then with the uneasy recognition that my *Stacked* series was allowing me to

partake in the similar form of escapism I was analyzing, I wanted to diverge from the Pop Artist's trend of solely celebrating everyday items and invoke a more-than superficial reading to my work. Inspired by my own day-to-day observations, I began depicting imagined individuals partaking in acts of consumption through vignette scenes. Alternating between sculpture and a time-based medium allowed me to further explore the craft of world building, while the malleable nature of video editing exposed the opportunity to move my work between spaces of the real and the unreal--reflecting, both the observed realities of the external world as well as the inner workings of my consciousness.

While my work continues to hold elements of "fun," I see this in direct correlation to the tensions drawn between my nostalgic reading of the United States and the cynical awareness I have developed as an adult--while I don't believe we should celebrate a life of excess, I don't believe that we should all only eat kale salads for the rest of our lives either. The use of an infantilized aestheticization and humor also serves as an entry point for the viewer, allowing a buffer before they are subtly faced with the harsh realities and existential circumstances I associate with contemporary Western society. In a theory course on Performance in the Everyday, I realized how much power lies in our everyday lives and how much of it often goes unnoticed, as it falls into abysmal mundanity. As Henri Lefebvre writes, "to know the everyday is to critique it," in allowing my viewers to see themselves within these depersonalized characters, or recognize the scenes in which they are happening, I aim to critique the necessary modes of escapism used to dissociate from our often shallow, materialistic, and highly individualized culture, in an attempt to ask: are our methods of modernity and convenience, as we continue to head down an existential climate change catastrophe and feel the unreprimanded consequences of unmitigated capitalism, worth it?