

DAILY RITUALS

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis takes seriously the banal moments of daily routines of home and career, which for me includes a commute between two rural towns in West Texas—Muleshoe, where I live, and Canyon, where I am a graduate student—but also a shift between the two worlds of domesticity and professional life. Back and forth, again and again, I feel like I have one foot always in each world, but never fully in either. Part of my routine is a drive that is exactly ninety minutes long—too long to be brief and too short to really count as long. Again, this amount of time feels divided between two things but never either one fully. The repetition of this activity, of this to and from across space and time, has given me an opportunity to look at the world and think about making art. My thesis explores how art is a balancing act of short and long, of living life and creating work. I investigate how art, especially the kind of stylized art I do, is always built on the observation and experience of the world but then it is always also a translation of the world into something else, something aesthetic.

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I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family and friends for their love and support every step of the way.

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INTRODUCTION

My work bridges the gap between my domestic life and my professional life. The purpose for this body of work is to show the humanness and creativity of everyday activities, such as morning routines and daily rituals that bring us comfort. I use this word “ritual” to point out that the repetition of routine can reach beyond simply a calming practice and can reach the level of spiritual peace. Rituals are often associated with spiritual practices, and though my work is not directly about religion in any way, there is something philosophically and spiritually deep for me about my daily routines and the art they inspire. Personally, I gain a powerful sense of control from structured living, while I also struggle with being self-motivated to stay productive in the sometimes-mind-numbing routine. I recognize that my own children thrive with structure, that they are happier, and life is easier when we settle into a routine. There is peace in knowing the expected.

My thesis focuses on the banal chores of home life and work life, such as doing the laundry or getting ready for the day. Something about sorting and folding or laying out clothes the night before is meditative to me in its sheer repetition. My body of work explores the balance of boredom and creativity, and of repetition and inspiration. My work uses techniques of abstraction and stylization to explore these two sides of reality and representation. I will explore the difference between these two terms—abstraction and stylization—later in this paper. My work consists of paintings on both canvas and

clothing because that is where I am making the connection between home life and school life. For me, painting brush stroke after brush stroke is repetitive and meditative in nature, not unlike housework and domestic chores. One is a metaphor for the other in my mind.

In my work, I draw on other women artists who have used their daily life as the basis of their art, including Georgia O’Keeffe, whose long walks through the various landscapes where she lived over the course of her life inspired her to build abstract pictures that always kept one foothold in nature and one foothold in art.¹ I especially relate to her time spent in West Texas in the early twentieth century, a landscape through which I commute almost daily. Like O’Keeffe who was painting the landscape in which she explored almost daily, I am also painting scenarios from my everyday life. I draw too on other women who have used their everyday routines as the basis of their art, including the performance artist Mierle Ukeles, who determined that her existence and labor as a mother was itself a work of art. She coined the notion of “maintenance art,” through which she raised her boring daily activities up to the level of artistic creation.² Likewise, I use my own banal routines as the foundation for my work.

My process begins with a visual journal and a calendar. I identify my daily routines from both home and work, and then I photograph or draw objects and

¹ On O’Keeffe and her methods of abstraction, see Barbara Haskell, ed., *Georgia O’Keeffe: Abstraction*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Jonathan Stuhlmman and Barbara Buhler Lynes, *Georgia O’Keeffe: Circling around Abstraction* (West Palm Beach: Norton Museum of Art, 2007); and Richard D. Marshall, *Georgia O’Keeffe: Nature and Abstraction* (Milan: Skira, 2007). On O’Keeffe’s experiences of the landscape in West Texas, see especially Amy Von Lintel, *Georgia O’Keeffe’s Wartime Texas Letters* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2020) and Von Lintel, *Georgia O’Keeffe Watercolors, 1916-1918* (Santa Fe: Radius Books, 2016).

² On Ukeles, see especially Mierle Laderman Ukeles, “Mierle Laderman Ukeles talks about Maintenance Art.” Online at: <https://www.artforum.com/video/mierle-laderman-ukeles-talks-about-maintenance-art-63533> (accessed October 2019), and Ukeles, “Maintenance Art Manifesto,” in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, *Art in Theory: 1900-2000* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 917-18.

experiences that identify those activities. I take an object or scene from my family's routine and simplify it into its essential linear form. I rework these forms and translate them into circular designs. The circular forms are reminiscent of a mandala. A mandala comes from the Sanskrit word for circle and represents the circle of life and wholeness. Mandalas have historically been used as aids for meditation by Buddhists. The mandala provides a sense of calm and comfort. Buddhist monks will create intricate sand mandalas over which they meditate and then they destroy them, sweeping the sand into a body of water as a way to demonstrate the impermanence of all existence.³ While Buddhist monks must follow strict and specific guidelines for their mandalas, my mandalas have fewer aesthetic limitations. They conceptually represent how I create balance and peace through a ritualistic behavior, just like the peace and comfort that comes to me from structured daily routines and "maintenance-based" living, using the words of Ukeles. In my mandalas, I focus on objects from the world around me as I carry out my daily activities. The material sources for my work are photographs of these mundane but meaningful objects. I use the source images to experiment with simplification, stylization and repetition.

My thesis comprises both acrylic paintings and installation work.⁴ For these paintings I produced the underpainting, which is a symbolic representation of a daily to-do list. I painted several different colors that each stand for something specific, such as work, soccer practice, ballet, homework, or laundry. The brushstrokes I make are

³ On using the Mandala as means of therapy, see Susan I. Buchalter, *Mandala Symbolism and Techniques: Innovative Approaches for Professionals* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2013).

⁴ On the rise of installation art in the contemporary art world, see Vivian van Saaze, *Installation Art and the Museum: Presentation and Conservation of Changing Artworks* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013).

horizontal and linear in fashion. The colors overlap, the brush strokes vary in size and shape. They represent for me the chaos and constant flux of life. Then to create the mandala I used Adobe Photoshop to compile drawings from a certain activity, such as washing and ironing shirts. For example, *Pressing Shirts* (fig. 1.1) includes a button-down shirt, a bottle of laundry detergent and an iron. With photoshop and a digital grid, I arranged the objects to have radial symmetry. The objects repeat four times, a repetition that signifies how these tasks continue to repeat in my life. Then I projected the mandala onto the painted canvas and trace the lines with charcoal. Next, I painted white paint around the charcoal lines, to represent how we try to make structure and hygiene out of these chores. White for me is a very meaningful color. It can stand for purity, as when a woman wears white for her wedding, but also for cleanliness, as when we bleach our clothes to whiten them. It also points out issues of gender and domesticity, as white connects to womanhood and motherhood again through wedding dresses and white, clean laundry. Finally, white also means erasure and nothingness, as an absence of color, and I use the whitewashing of my found clothing objects to point out the passage of time and the aging process. Once the white paint is dry, I used a wet washcloth to wash off the charcoal, which then exposes the colorful underpainting. This process of washing away and revealing beauty underneath signifies for me the idea of the beauty in the ordinary, and the joy in producing a clean and ordered life.

For my final thesis show, I included three sculptural installations with a collection of paintings. The installations are arranged as mandalas to create a phenomenological experience for my viewers. Like Marcel Duchamp and his ready-mades, one being the *Fountain*, which was a urinal purchased from a hardware store, I take and use objects

from the world around me. Also like Joseph Kosuth, who is known for his installation *One and Three Chairs*, which is a manufactured chair, a photograph of a chair, and a dictionary definition of a chair, I explore the relationships between found objects, their reproduced images, and their ultimate meanings.⁵ Both Duchamp and Kosuth used mass produced items and changed their context to make them art. Similarly, I took items from around me, such as my family's old clothes: my daughters old baby pajamas, princess dresses, and socks, for instance, and my son's jeans and shorts that are now two sizes too small and my husband's button-down shirts that he doesn't wear anymore, jeans that I decided I'll never be able to wear again and some of my old shirts.⁶ These items are mass produced too, but unlike Duchamp and Kosuth, they have much personal meaning for me. Duchamp's urinal and Kosuth's chair lacked any personal significance for the artists, but my chosen objects connect directly to the bodies and lives of the people I love and to myself. Therefore, they are less just generic objects and more like spiritual relics, embedded with deep meaning because they touched the bodies of important people. Again, this helps connect my work to ritual beyond just meaningless or generic repetition.

The fact that my family has set these aside and grown out of these clothing items also represents to me how time passes, and we cannot reverse growth and aging. All these things are actual items that I have repeatedly washed, folded, ironed and put away. To prep these clothes for installation, I wanted them to be stiff and hold their shape, again

⁵ For more information on Joseph Kosuth's conceptual art see, Ring, Nancy. "Kosuth, Joseph." *Grove Art Online*. 2003; Accessed 28 Feb. 2020. <https://www-oxfordartonline-com.databases.wtamu.edu/groveart/view/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.001.0001/oao-9781884446054-e-7000047736>.

⁶ *Ready-Made Originals: The Duchamp Model*, see Molly Nesbit, *The MIT Press Stable*, *October*, Vol. 37 (Summer, 1986), pp. 53-64

like preserved fossils or relics rather than just old rags. I also wanted to tone down the colors and unify them together by color, so I painted them with white latex paint and then white acrylic paint on top. I want the viewers to think about the themes of balance, repetition, maintenance, and domesticity—balance and repetition in the circular shape and repeated patterns, maintenance in the fact that they are stiff and ordered and painted white now, and domesticity in the aspect that they were all worn and used in the daily lives of my family members. My intent with this body of work is to inspire me and my viewers to slow down in this fast-paced world, to relish the repeated and even the boring activities of maintenance and survival as part of the creative structure of life.



Fig. 1.1 *Pressing Shirts*, acrylic on canvas, 30 x 30 in.

INFLUENCES

In the 1960s, Mierle Laderman Ukeles coined the term “Maintenance Art,” a notion that directly influences my work.⁷ When Ukeles went from being a single woman and artist to a wife and mother, she described how her life demanded a difficult new balance, and how her roles as artist and mother were clashing in traumatic ways for her. Motherhood was invigorating, she said, and it helped her to see the world through the eyes of her young child. But she still felt like she was in a crisis and her two worlds were competing with each other. She was frustrated living as a mother performing boring but necessary “maintenance” activities such as cooking, cleaning, changing diapers, and laundry. One of Ukeles’s heroes was Marcel Duchamp, she was deeply influenced by his “ready-mades,”⁸ where he made art out of already existing objects. She describes Duchamp as having the power to rename things and call it art, so she was going to do this too. Ukeles took the “western notions of art as freedom and non-western repetitive systems and crashed them together to make art.”⁹ She said her life was “maintenance” and called it art (fig. 2.1).

⁷ On Ukeles’ process during *Washing/Tracks/Maintenance: Outside* (1973), see ‘Mierle Laderman Ukeles’ *Matrix 137*, (Hartford, CT: Wadsworth Atheneum), pg. 5-6, accessed online April 2020 at <https://www.thewadsworth.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Matrix-137.pdf>.

⁸ For more about Dadaism and Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain*, and ‘ready-mades’ see, David Hopkins, *Dada and Surrealism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 9-17.

⁹ *Mierle Laderman Ukeles talks about Maintenance Art*. Artforum Video. 2017. 4 minutes, 18 seconds. Online at: <https://www.artforum.com/video/mierle-laderman-ukeles-talks-about-maintenance-art-63533>

Ukeles's interest in Duchamp parallels my own. Duchamp was part of the artistic movement of Dadaism because of his anti-art expressions. Dadaism fights against previous artistic conventions and is based on iconoclastic confrontation. Duchamp's most notorious "readymade" is known as the *Fountain* (fig. 2.2) which is a urinal that he purchased from his local hardware store. He turned the urinal upside down and signed it as "R. Mutt," his pseudonym for this piece. Duchamp entered it into an exhibition for the Society of Independent Artists in April 1917. Artists were told that membership fees would guarantee their piece into the show. However, this was not the case and his piece was rejected. Duchamp as a founder and promoter for the society fought to have the piece in the show. Ultimately the piece was not included in the exhibition because it was deemed not suitable as art. Duchamp was fighting against art-for-art's sake, playing on intellect instead.¹⁰ This moment in art history is the beginning of 'ready-mades'. 'Ready-mades' are mass-produced objects that are chosen by the artist then taken out of the intended context, given a new function and exhibited as art. Similar to 'ready-mades' are "found" art objects. However, unlike 'ready-mades', which were selected because of their "visual indifference"—objects like a bicycle wheel or urinal that had no personal meaning for the artist—"found" objects can be deemed worthy of appropriation not only because of their visual appeal, but also because of their personal connection to the artist thereby reinforcing reliance on the idea of art as visual manifestation and experience.¹¹ I use found objects in my installations, but not just random objects found off the street, but

¹⁰ For more about Duchamp's *Fountain*, and New York Society of Independent Artists exhibition see, David Hopkins, *Dada and Surrealism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 9-11.

¹¹ For the difference between 'ready-mades' and 'found' art see, Dalia Judovitz, 'Introduction' in *Drawing on Art: Duchamp and Company* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1968), xv-xvi.

rather objects that are like relics for my family. A relic can be defined as a fragment from the past, a surviving trace of something—a remnant of something meaningful. It can be something left behind or abandoned. In religion, a relic is often the physical remains of a saint or the personal effects of the saint for purposes of veneration as a tangible memorial, an object of reverence. The articles of clothing that make up my installations are found art objects as well as relics for me. Duchamp opened the door to a new way of thinking about artworks and what qualifies as art. I build on this but more like Ukeles, I draw on my own personal life and its meaningful practices and objects.

Along with Duchamp, Jackson Pollock was another hero of Ukeles's who used his body to make paintings.¹² Photographer Hans Namuth described Pollocks' painting technique of *Autumn Rhythm*, as slow to start but gradually became faster, like a dance as he flung paint onto the canvas (fig. 2.3). His movements became rhythmic as his whole body interacted with the painting. Pollock laid a seventeen-foot-long unstretched canvas on the floor and would lean over it, walk around it, kneel on it, as he would paint with a paintbrush in one hand and a stick in the other. Pollock would hurl paint on the canvas but used other items as well such as sand pebbles, cigarette buds, bottle caps and other miscellaneous items. Pollock's use of his entire body to paint became known as action painting.

With this notion of body-based art, Ukeles started looking at people in society who use their bodies to perform maintenance. She observed the sanitation workers in New York City and the custodial staff at her local art museum. These people worked hard to clean and maintain cities, buildings, and art works. The museum custodians' actions of

¹² On Pollock's painting techniques, see Evelevyn Toynton, *Jackson Pollock* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 69-74.

sweeping and mopping, for example, used their bodies to create repeated lines of cleanliness on the floor, a temporary but still purposeful form of art, according to Ukeles. To respond to that, Ukeles did an art performance where she got a bucket and sponge and washed the steps leading up the art museum (fig. 2.1).¹³

Ukeles took that act of maintaining objects and made it her artwork. Ukeles wrote a manifesto detailing how the act of living and maintaining one's life or the life of others constitutes art. She also included an exhibition proposal where she and her family would live in the museum and she would maintain the space. I have had similar struggles since my two children were born and I decided to go back to school. My goal is to become a professional artist and art educator. I have struggled with depression and how to be a good wife and mother, artist and student, all while maintaining my life of banal domestic tasks. Taking Ukeles' lead, I have chosen to use "maintenance art" as the basis of my thesis work.

Another artist I am inspired by is Georgia O'Keeffe and her methods of abstraction taken from the world around her. I relate to how she left the bustling city of New York for the slower-paced worlds of West Texas and Northern New Mexico. The nature of rural life can have a much different pace, related to repeated cycles, and repetition of activities in ways that are different than urban living in a densely populated city. This is also something I appreciate living in a small West Texas town, raising my family in a rural setting, and commuting day after day across the desolate empty landscape of my region. In her rural settings, O'Keeffe found time to walk slowly

¹³ On Ukeles' process during *Washing/Tracks/Maintenance: Outside* (1973), see 'Mierle Laderman Ukeles' *Matrix 137*, (Hartford, CT: Wadsworth Atheneum), pg. 5-6, accessed online April 2020 at <https://www.thewadsworth.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Matrix-137.pdf>

through the landscape day after day, or to ride in cars with the windows open or the top down, ever observing geography and landforms, or watching the sun slowly come up or go down on the horizon.¹⁴ When she was observing her surroundings, she always did so with the eyes of a designer. She wrote daily about having images in her mind from nature that she wanted to make, but found it frustratingly difficult to get them “right.”¹⁵ She had a way of selecting essential and simplified elements from her observations, then reimagined them in ways that were always different from but always related to the original scenes she observed. O’Keeffe’s *From the Plains I*, (fig 2.4) is an example of how O’Keeffe closely observed the world around her choosing key qualities from the landscape then streamlined the colors and shapes in her painting. My work unfolds in similar ways. I use my commutes back and forth from work to home, or the repetitive activities of tending a house in a rural area, to think about designs and the way I can respond to them aesthetically.

O’Keeffe synthesized abstraction and reality, and my works do the same. Like O’Keeffe, who when she lived in a rural area had to commute to larger communities for supplies or recreation and leisure, I too live in a rural community and must travel for work and for amenities. However, unlike O’Keeffe who was often walking and working outside had the opportunity to be out in nature when observing it, I rarely do. My ninety-mile commute to school is in a closed-in car on the highway. My access to nature and my surroundings is through my car windows, that both frame and distance me from the scenes I see. And yet, I am continually thinking about life and art together, about my life

¹⁴ On O’Keeffe’s observations of the landscape, see O’Keeffe to Stieglitz, December 10, 1916, as reproduced in Von Lintel, *O’Keeffe’s Texas Letters*, 63.

¹⁵ On the difficulty of getting her ideas onto paper, see O’Keeffe to Stieglitz, October 9, 1916, as reproduced Von Lintel, *O’Keeffe’s Texas Letters*, 50 - 51.

and its daily maintenance activities as aesthetic inspiration. Moreover, I work not with a simplification method, as O’Keeffe did, but with a stylization method. When I take objects and make them into images in my paintings, I used only the contour lines because of the tradition Tibetan mandalas that starts with contour lines. My style is almost childlike or cartoonish too because I find that it connects to my role as a mother. Lastly, I am also interested in taking a three-dimensional object and making into a two-dimensional image. O’Keeffe did this too, but her forms are more shape-based and mine are more line-based.

I have additionally drawn on the abstraction and stylization methods of sculptor Louise Nevelson, in part because of her use of stylized geometry in patterns and in part because of her use of a single color to blend her found objects sculptures into a single design. In 1941, Nevelson began making sculptures from found wood. Her assemblages were made up of discarded materials she found on the street. Nevelson gave new life to the refuse in her formal structures, similar to Duchamp’s use of ‘ready-mades’. In 1957, Nevelson’s wood assemblages became a collection of shadow boxes, instead of free-standing sculptures. Nevelson composed each shadow box individually then would combine them to make one piece. *Sky Cathedral*, for example, is made up of thirty-eight separate boxes, all painted the same color of black house paint. Nevelson’s installations were often rectangular, stacked against the wall and intended to be viewed from the front. They were also all painted in a monochromatic color, usually black or white, to unify the diverse elements of the wooden shapes (fig. 2.5). Comparable to Nevelson’s assemblages, my installations are also a combination of found objects which are assembled together, meant to be viewed from the front, and painted one color to unify

them. And like Nevelson, I chose white to symbolize their wholeness, cleanliness, and purity, and to play on issues of gender and domesticity.

Yet another artist I draw upon is Mary Cassatt, an Impressionist who is best known for her domestic images of women and children, including her paintings and color prints (fig. 2.6, and fig. 2.7). As a female painter in the mid to late-1800s, she was limited to what and who she could paint. She painted the people she most often associated with: women and children.¹⁶ Therefore, like Ukeles, she made art based on her own life, and featured the daily maintenance routines of the women raising children around her. For example, in *The Child's Bath* (fig. 2.6), she shows the innocence of children and the labor of the mother to take care of her child. The common activity of bathing a child becomes the basis of her art. I am drawn to her affectionate poses of mothers with their children, because they celebrate routine feminine labor as creative and beautiful, something I do as well in my work. I appreciate the tenderness in which Cassatt has portrayed the monotony of motherhood. Cassatt's childlike flatness of space in her prints has also been an important inspiration for my simplified forms in my mandalas.

As a painter, I am also drawn to the Impressionistic style and its inspiration from Japanese woodblock prints. Not only did the Impressionists use color and paint to capture the fleeting effects of light and atmosphere that they directly observed, they also innovated with their design compositions, incorporating new use of cropping, flatness, asymmetry, and diagonals that made their pictures in works of art rather than mirrors onto reality. You can see this in *In the Omnibus* (fig. 2.7) where the three figures are off-

¹⁶ On the gender divide among Impressionist artists, where the women artists were more limited in their subjects than the men, see Griselda Pollock, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity," in *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism, and Histories of Art* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 50-90.

center and framed by the repeated pattern of the bus windows. These techniques also influenced the abstract designs of O'Keeffe decades later, and they influence me to consider patterns and creative design balances rather than simple mimetic representation in my work.

Along with Cassatt, I am also interested in the Impressionist painter Claude Monet and his work in series, especially his paintings of the Rouen Cathedral, *The Façade in Sunlight* (fig 2.8) is an example of just one of the thirty or so he painted of the façade of the cathedral. While working on this series Monet rented an apartment across the square from the cathedral and painted the façade every hour throughout the day. He then displayed his best twenty paintings in an exhibition at the Durand-Ruel Gallery in 1895.¹⁷ What I appreciate about these paintings are that he spent the time observing the same subject and how it changes when the light and shadows dance across it over the span of the day. He was painting the same subject over and over much like I perform the same daily activities over and over again. For Monet, who painted what he saw as the lighting on the cathedral changed with the passing hours, my daily rituals change with certain times of the day as well. I paint the things that I see and experience over and over again. It is Monet's repeated act of looking at the same subject, and then translating it into art, that I am particularly interested in.

Finally, Judy Phaff is an installation artist that has been a direct inspiration for me because of the phenomenological experiences she creates with her sculptural room-sized works as well as pieces that attached to the entire. She completely transforms the space so that each viewer has a physical or bodily as well as a mental and visual experience.

¹⁷ On Monet's series work and his Rouen Cathedral series, see William C. Seitz, *Claude Monet: Seasons and Moments* (New York: Arno Press for The Museum of Modern Art, 1969). 30-33.

Viewers experience the work independently because their body interreacts with the work in a unique way.¹⁸ I enjoy the all-encompassing experience of her installations. Her work is mostly geometric shapes, lines and colors that overlap and intertwine to create a new form. *Honey Bee, for Holly Solomon* (fig 2.9) is an example of one of her wall-hanging pieces. The piece spans from the floor to ceiling. She takes abstraction to another level beyond O’Keeffe. She creates forms that are non-objective, that communicate non-verbally and without a direct subject matter. The work is about interaction and how our bodies enact with the installation. My installations are wall-hangings that incorporate different shapes and sizes of clothes into the form of a mandala. Their original colors have been muted with white paint. Instead of pure abstraction and line work, my patterns are formed from found objects—clothing cast off from my family’s collection.

My work blends the maintenance art of Ukeles, with the abstraction of O’Keeffe, the installation techniques of Pfaff, the domestic subject matter of Cassatt, and the repetition and series work of Monet, with the readymade techniques of Duchamp and Kosuth, and Nevelson. In combining the ideas, subjects, and techniques of these artists, I have tried to create a unique body of thesis work that is both personal and relatable beyond myself, reaching for larger meaning about the balances we all create in life.

¹⁸ On experiencing the installation, see Irving Sandler, *Judy Pfaff* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 2003), 1-3.



Fig. 2.1. Mierle Ukeles, *Washing, Tracks, Maintenance: Outside*, 1973, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut.



Fig. 2.2. Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*: orig. Stieglitz photograph ready-made porcelain urinal turned on its back, 1917, ready-made.



Fig. 2.3. Hans Namuth, *Jackson Pollock*, 1950, Gelatin silver print, 48.5 x 38.7 cm. (19 1/16 x 15 1/4 in.).

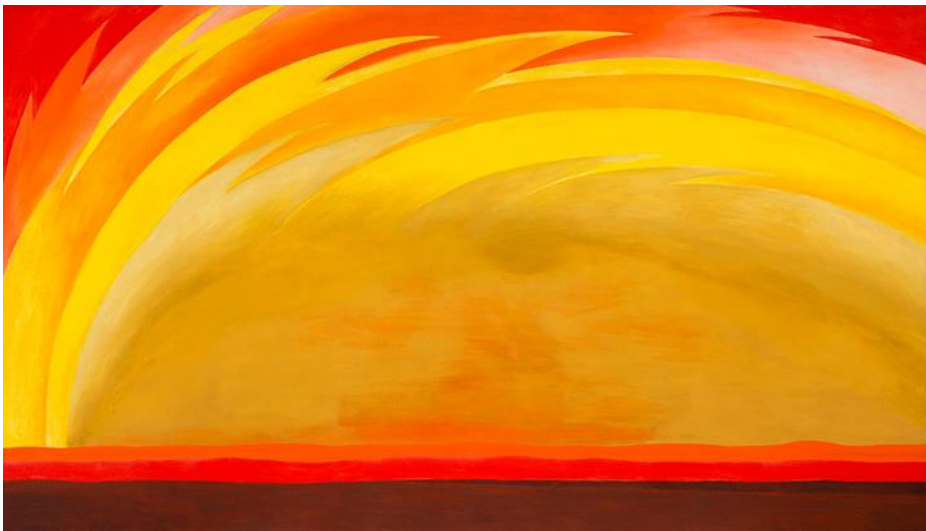


Fig. 2.4. Georgia O'Keeffe, *From the Plains I*, 1953, oil on canvas. 47 11/16 x 83 5/8 in.



Fig 2.5. Louise Nevelson, *Dawn's Presence - Two Columns*, 1969 – 1975, wood painted white, 116 x 67 x 31 inches.



Fig. 2.6. Mary Cassatt, *The Child's Bath*, 1893, oil on canvas, 100.3 x 66.1 cm



Fig. 2.7. Mary Cassatt, *In the Omnibus*, 1890-91, etching and aquatint, 36.6cm x 26.8cm.

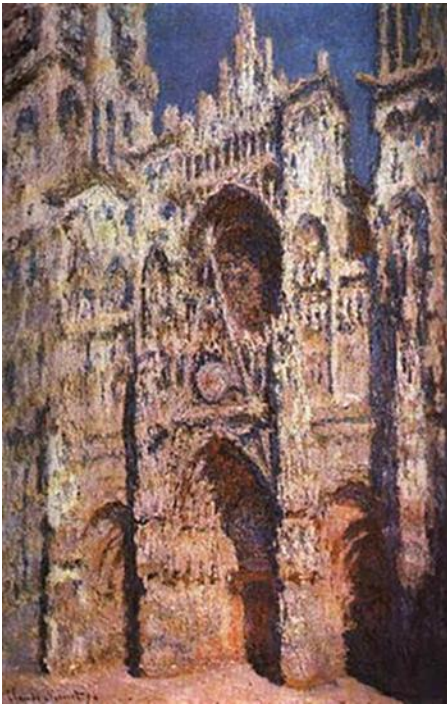


Fig. 2.8. Claude Monet, *Rouen Cathedral; The Façade in Sunlight*, 1894, oil on canvas.



Fig 2.9. Judy Pfaff, *Honey Bee for Holly Solomon*, 1987, Painted metal and wood, found objects, plastic, 99 ½, x 118 x 35 in.

PROCESS

My thesis exhibition is composed of paintings and installations that explore the deep connections between my domestic life and my professional life, and how my mundane routine can inspire creativity and artistry. To do this, I use things like clothing and household objects from my everyday life to create mandalas, which allude to the fact that routines and schedules are repetitive but also can be meditative and therapeutic. My creative process begins with a journal and a calendar. I make a list of appointments, work schedule events, and both school and after-school activities for my kids. From that list, I chose objects that visually represent those activities. For example, the work *Monday - Friday* includes images of a toilet, teacup, car keys, a road, and speed limit sign. Every morning my routine is the same; wake up, go to the bathroom, drink morning beverage, then begin the drive to work or school. These objects are representations of my cyclical morning routine, repeated day after day, in a way that the round mandala shape symbolizes.

I picked objects that were specific to me and my family but also relatable to other's daily lives as well, in other words, common even boring objects. The first step in the creation of one of my paintings is to make drawings of these objects. While I make these drawings, I select my grounds, and I often work on canvas because of its larger size. My canvases range from 30 inches to 48 inches in length. Compared to my body size these material grounds feel large scale but also not overwhelming and instead

manageable. This size also relates to how my daily rituals that they represent can be big and looming tasks but are also manageable if kept up with and handled day after day, such as laundry. For example, in our house we wear a clean set of clothes every day and for my family of four that amount of dirty clothes can pile up quickly. Therefore, my laundry chore is something on a repeated, never-ending cycle, not unlike the mandala shape I organize my drawings into.

After completing the preliminary drawings and priming the canvases, my next step is to begin an underpainting-using arbitrary colors which represent the chaos and unknowns of everyday life. Even while the designs are organized and my chores are ordered and manageable, they do not always work out perfectly or the way I planned. Life always throws us curve balls, and the underpainting represents that underlying lack of control. My brush work at this phase is horizontal to read like text from left-to-right. Some colors were painted with a big brush and are repeated several times while other colors were painted with a small brush and exist in only a few portions of the underpainting. The varying colors, shapes and sizes symbolically represent the importance of each activity being repeated again and again, day after day. Colors that are painted big and repeat a lot represent important things in life, like work tasks or schoolwork. In contrast, my daughters' ballet class is only once a week and for about forty-five minutes. Ballet class is represented as small irregular colors because it is a smaller part of our week. *Getting Ready for School--in progress* (fig 3.1) shows the underpainting with the charcoal lines of the mandala drawn on.

To begin each painting, I choose from a list of days of the week or times of the day, such as morning, noon and night, and then picked one to focus on. For *Bedtime* (fig.

3.2), I wrote a list of things we do every night and picked the most important and consistent things. The painting includes toilet paper to represent going to the bathroom before bed, and an open book to represent the bedtime stories we read every night. It also shows a glass of water—representing that last effort for the kids to avoid bed with the question “Mommy, can I have a drink of water?”—and several moons to signify nighttime and to represent another form of repeated cycle. The moon shows the passage of time, reminds us of calendars and reliable consistency.

To determine the composition of each piece, I input my source images into Adobe Photoshop and use a digital grid to arrange the objects in radial symmetry, thus making a mandala-like composition. *Date Night* shown in progress (fig 3.3) reveals the photoshop sketch with the grid. I often make several duplicates of each object to create repetition with the mandala to show that those activities repeat day-after-day and week-after-week. By using radial symmetry of the object, I want to reveal how this structure and consistency is comforting and peaceful. After completing the sketch in Photoshop, I project the image onto the underpainting and trace it in charcoal.

Once the sketch is on the canvas, I paint white gesso around the charcoal lines to fill in the negative space. Gesso is an acrylic primer that has chalk grit mixed into it which helps the acrylic paint adhere to the canvas. Gesso is translucent, so it is my first layer of the mandala, which is painted on top of the colorful underpainting. While painting the gesso, I tried to avoid the charcoal lines, but occasionally they would make contact and mix to make grey. That is another reason for painting the white acrylic paint on top of the gesso; to cover the grey parts and get a brighter, more opaque white on top. Once the canvas was sufficiently covered in gesso, and the gesso is completely dry. I use

a wet washcloth to wipe off the charcoal, exposing the colorful underpainting. *Getting Ready for School* shown in progress (fig. 3.4) is what the painting looks like with the gesso and the charcoal lines still on the canvas. The colors and brush strokes from the underpainting are still visible.

Now that the charcoal has been washed off, I go back and paint white acrylic paint with a bristle brush. The stiffness and coarseness of the natural fibers from the bristle brush make imperfect painterly lines. I allow to the opacity of the paint to vary, allowing more of the underpainting to be partially visible through the paint. This process exposes the colorful underpainting as the lines that define my content. In effect, these lines are subtractive, meaning they are not rendered by tool, and enhanced by the color shifts present in the underpainting. This effect makes my imagery shift and moves the eye around the composition. The underpainting is colorful and chaotic to represent a busy, full life. The white mandala on top represents slowing down and getting into a routine to make the chaos calm. I choose variation of opacity rather than a solid white field to represent that life is not perfect, and no matter how hard we try we cannot avoid the daily maintenance tasks that are necessary—these always come to the surface. The lines that make the mandala are colors from the underpainting. It is where the crazy schedule gets subdued to focus on the here and now of that time of day. The same way large tasks are split up into smaller manageable tasks, the paintings show picking out things to get ready for the day. That daily to-do list does not go away, but it is manageable as the daily tasks are completed.

Once the painting is completely dry, I varnish the paintings with an acrylic gel medium to seal and protect the painting. The gel medium unifies the whole painting;

some of the colors are glossy medium, while others are matte. When the lights from the gallery hit them, the sheens are different. To prevent this, I used glossy gel medium which unifies the whole painting have the same glossy sheen. This unification again represents the order I try to create out of life's chaos.

The second element of my thesis exhibition are clothing installations. These are wall pieces made from clothing stapled directly to the wall in a mandala shape. Referencing Marcel Duchamp's 'ready-mades', I use mass produced manufactured clothing and turn them into art. I changed the context of these clothing items to create something new. Once I have selected the individual pieces of clothing, I paint them white to soften the colors of the individual items but also to unify them into one new piece. Each installation has between twelve to thirty articles of clothing. Each piece of clothing gets three applications of paint. The first layer goes on the front of the clothes with white latex paint. I let that dry for twenty-four hours, then turned the clothes over to paint the backs with latex paint, and then allow this layer to dry for another twenty-four hours. These first two layers creates the stiffness needed for the clothes to remain flat and hold their shape once they are stapled to the wall. This stiffness makes them appear more like fossils or relics rather than usable clothes; again, I choose clothes that are not being worn by my family but represents times and moments past. Next, I paint the front of each piece of clothing again with white acrylic paint to soften the colors of the clothes. Some color still shows through similarly to the varying opacity in my paintings, just as some of our history of the clothing's original use will still show through as memories even if they are converted into my art.

I laid the clothes out of the gallery floor to check spacing and placement of the clothes, much like a preliminary sketch. Once I am happy with the arrangement, I began stapling the clothes to the wall one by one. This stapling for me mimics the repetitive chores I complete day after day to maintain my family life. I moved through the design slowly and methodically, as I do with folding laundry, for instance. I started with the innermost circle of clothes and the one that is at the top, then continued stapling and layering clothes in a clockwise fashion until all were on the wall. I wanted to make these mandalas from actual clothes because part of our daily ritual is to get dressed for the day, and also these clothes were worn by my family and me during our lives in the past. They protected our bodies and helped us lead our lives and make our memories. The maintenance of the laundry is a ritual in and of itself, and I show this ritual aspect through the organization of the clothes into the balanced mandala shape.



Fig. 3.1

Getting Ready for School--in progress 1; underpainting with charcoal drawing, 40 x 45 in.



Fig. 3.2

Bedtime, acrylic on canvas, 36x48 in.

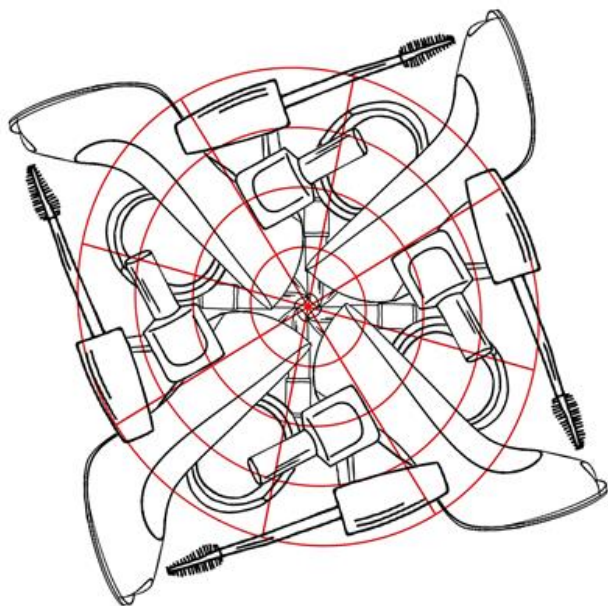


Fig. 3.3

Date Night--Adobe Photoshop sketch, with grid



Fig. 3.4

Getting ready for school—in progress 2; still has charcoal lines and first layer of white paint, 40 x 45 in.

ARTWORK

Day at the Office (Fig. 4.1) is a painting about the monotony of office work. My first job as an adult was at Clovis Community College. I was a work-study in the advising office. The job was easy enough. I could do my homework after my daily filing and light cleaning duties were completed. This painting depicts contour line drawings of the objects that I used at work: scissors, a pen, paper clips, and a stapler. The bottom layer of the painting is the underpainting that is a colorful interpretation of the to-do lists of life. The drawing in the foreground is depicting how I use ordinary objects repeatedly to create a pattern in my life and thus find harmony. First, I drew the objects from work, scanned them and used Adobe Photoshop to compile them together in a circular composition to create a mandala. I traced the mandala onto the canvas. I whitewashed the areas around the lines. The lines that are left reveal the contour line drawings. The work also features one of my “found” art objects which is one of my old button-down shirts that I adhered to the canvas using gel medium. I painted over the shirt, but the buttons are a prominent feature referencing the outfits I would wear to my office job. I included this article of clothing to comment on the dress code required by many jobs that homogenize employees. I use the symbol of a button-shirt to represent a job—that is, working outside of the home—in several of my pieces. Office work is often seen as boring and mindless, but I found the routine of the job gave me a structure that was beneficial. The repetition of the office materials in the painting are the tools that are often

overlooked. However, they become the focal point that illustrates the meditative qualities of office work. While working “9 to 5” at a desk may not be the most ideal form of existence, this painting represents the idea that a peace can be found in the day-to-day routine of office work.

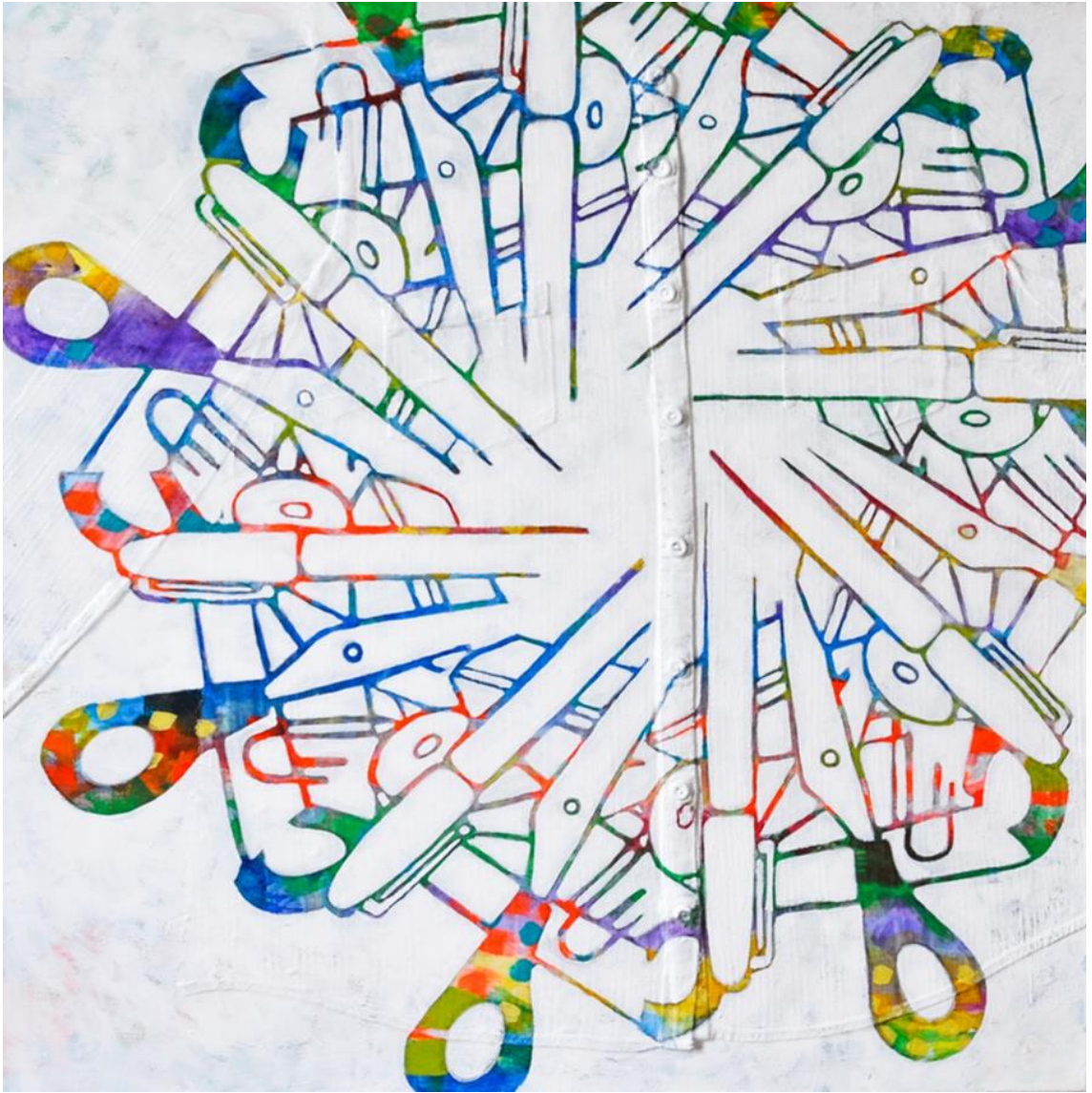


Fig 4.1

Heather Hancock, *Day at the Office*, 2020, button-down shirt, acrylic on canvas, 30 x 30in.

Pressing Shirts (Fig. 4.2) is about the task I despise the most in the world—ironing button-down shirts. This painting includes the image of button-down shirts, clothing irons, laundry detergent and the numbers of a clock. Here I don't use the shirt or other objects themselves, but rather the representations of them. And I do not show them photographically but rather through only the contour lines. This mandala is comprised of four shirts, four irons, and four bottles of laundry detergent. The soap is there to signify that clothes get worn, then washed, ironed, hung up and then the whole cycle is repeated. The idea of “cycles” is layered within the painting. The mandala is a cyclical form, just like the cycle of the wash, literally spinning in the machine, and the cycle of the repetition of dirty to clean, week after week, and going to work day after day.

Underneath the white paint are paper cut-out numbers of the clock. The numbers refer to the “9-5” job that is five days a week; but also comments on how housework and domestic labor doesn't stick to the 9 to 5 but rather is 24-7. So, these numbers themselves signal time passing, never stopping, the clock that is always ticking whether we are aware of it or not. But at the same time, we all also know time is relative and a concept we all adhere to that can be bent and manipulated. Time can expand if you slow down and mediate, again referencing the ritual and spiritual repetition that I draw on for inspiration.

I used gel medium to adhere these numbers to the canvas on top of the underpainting. I used paper numbers instead of painting the them because I wanted the numbers to stand up off the canvas and give them dimension. Again, with this I point out how we see time as “real” and material, but which is also a myth in some ways, and it is also thin and fragile like the paper they are printed on. The numbers are underneath the

white paint because I wanted them to be barely visible, just a faint shadow is discernable, showing how time is always lurking in the background but never actually a tangible thing.

The shirts here also represent the clothing worn to a job, which are the only clothes I iron. I have never been good at ironing shirts and usually avoid this job. It can be so difficult getting the shirt lined up on the ironing board exactly right. I frequently end up adding more wrinkles than pressing them out. However, when I focus on doing to the job correctly, the repetition of movements can be soothing. When performing duties such as these, I tend to be methodical about them. I do them in a particular order and tend to do them in a clockwise direction—again a kind of meditation on clocks and time. For example, when ironing shirts I always start with the left front side, then the left arm, then the back, then the right front side and end with the right arm. The ritualistic obsessiveness of order gives me a sense of control, which brings me comfort, and informs the composition of this painting.



Fig 4.2

Heather Hancock, *Pressing Shirts*, 2020, paper, acrylic on canvas, 30 x 30in.

Date Night (Fig. 4.3) is about a routine Friday date night for me and my husband. We try to make sure we have time together for just the two of us. The objects in this piece are items I normally use to get ready for our outings together, but they also point out the gender expectations that I feel I must adhere to: high heels, a mascara wand, nail polish, powder compact, and tubes of lipstick. These items help adorn and decorate the body in ways that emphasize femininity and contrast with the clothes one wears when doing domestic labor. I do not wear make-up nor high heels for my day-to-day activities, it is reserved for special occasions, such as date night. The composition of this painting is slightly askew to indicate that we are not perfect, but we are doing the best that we can as a couple. It also points out how the challenges of me balancing schoolwork and my professional career with my domestic labor also requires effort on my partner's part.

This piece, like my others, includes numbers from a clock. As in *Pressing Shirts* the numbers are cut paper that have been glued on to the canvas. With its other meanings, the reference to the clock is also intended to be more tongue-in-cheek about me being late for things. It shows that we all try to keep to a strict time schedule in the contemporary world, but again how much of this schedule is self-imposed and not actually necessary all the time. The clock is particularly important to this piece. It symbolizes the time we have together as a couple, which is actually a very small amount of time despite how we live together in the same house every day, how we work together often, and how we raise our kids together. Our "formal" Friday "appointments" are something we have constructed for ourselves to serve as rituals, not just routines. To reach the balance of partnership that we seek, these must be taken seriously so the beauty of this balanced form points to that seriousness.

Similar to getting ready for the day, I have prescribed an order of how I get ready to go out. First, I will wash my face with a cleanser. Next, I get dressed—I do not want to mess up my styled hair when changing clothes. Then I begin applying make-up, light eyeshadow and mascara, then a red lipstick. Next, I will freshen up my hair by adding some curls with a curling iron and set the curls with hair spray. The last thing to do is put on are the high heels. For me, this ordered ritual of getting ready helps me to re-set, have a chance to be calm, set aside my mental to-do list and focus on our date. It is highly personal, but my viewers can glean the meaning of it in the balance and order of my image.

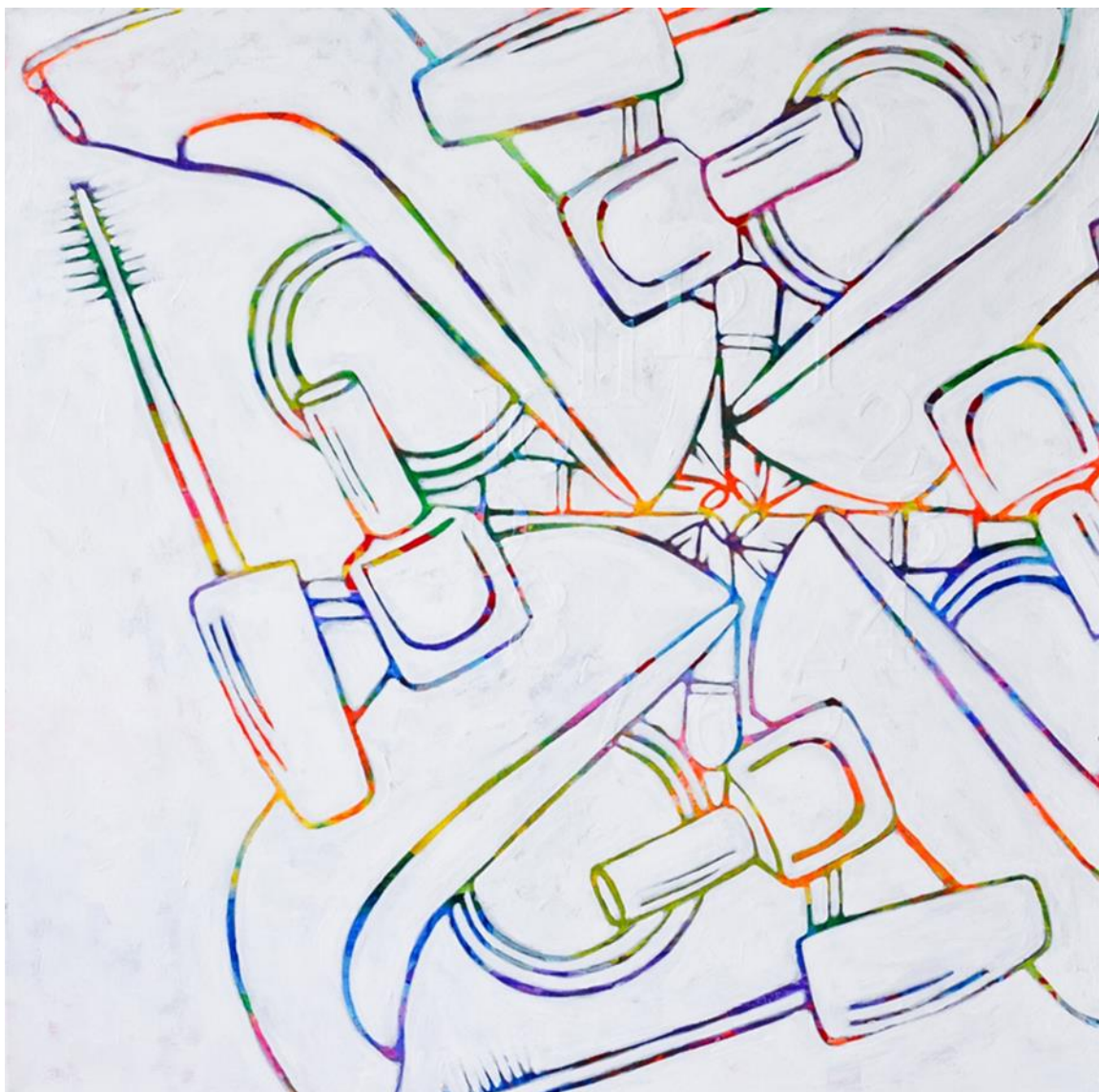


Fig 4.3

Heather Hancock, *Date Night*, 2020, paper, acrylic on canvas, 30 x 30in.

Night Before (Fig. 4.4) is one the earlier pieces in this body of work. The clothes radiate from a central point but are spread out instead of overlapping each other, not as true to form of the mandala design. The piece depicts contour line drawings of various clothing items from my children. In the center is a striped long-sleeve shirt. Next is a dress and button-down shirt. Around the perimeter of the mandala are jeans. This painting is about helping my kids pick their clothes for school the night before, instead of rushing in the chaos of the morning. It is symbolic of “laying out” our patterns and lives in an ordered way. Embedded within this order too is a bit of chaos, as when my son’s socks and shoes, which we carefully laid out, mysteriously disappear by the time he needs them. Despite our attempts to order and control life, there is only so much control we can impart. This design captures the balance between control and lack of control, between order and chaos. Occasionally, we find ourselves picking out two outfits for the day: cold weather (jeans) and warm weather clothes (shorts). The weather in my area can be unpredictable, and this securing of multiple plans seems necessary; the balance of the formal design captures this flexibility as well. It represents how no matter how much we plan; the future is still unknown and insecure.

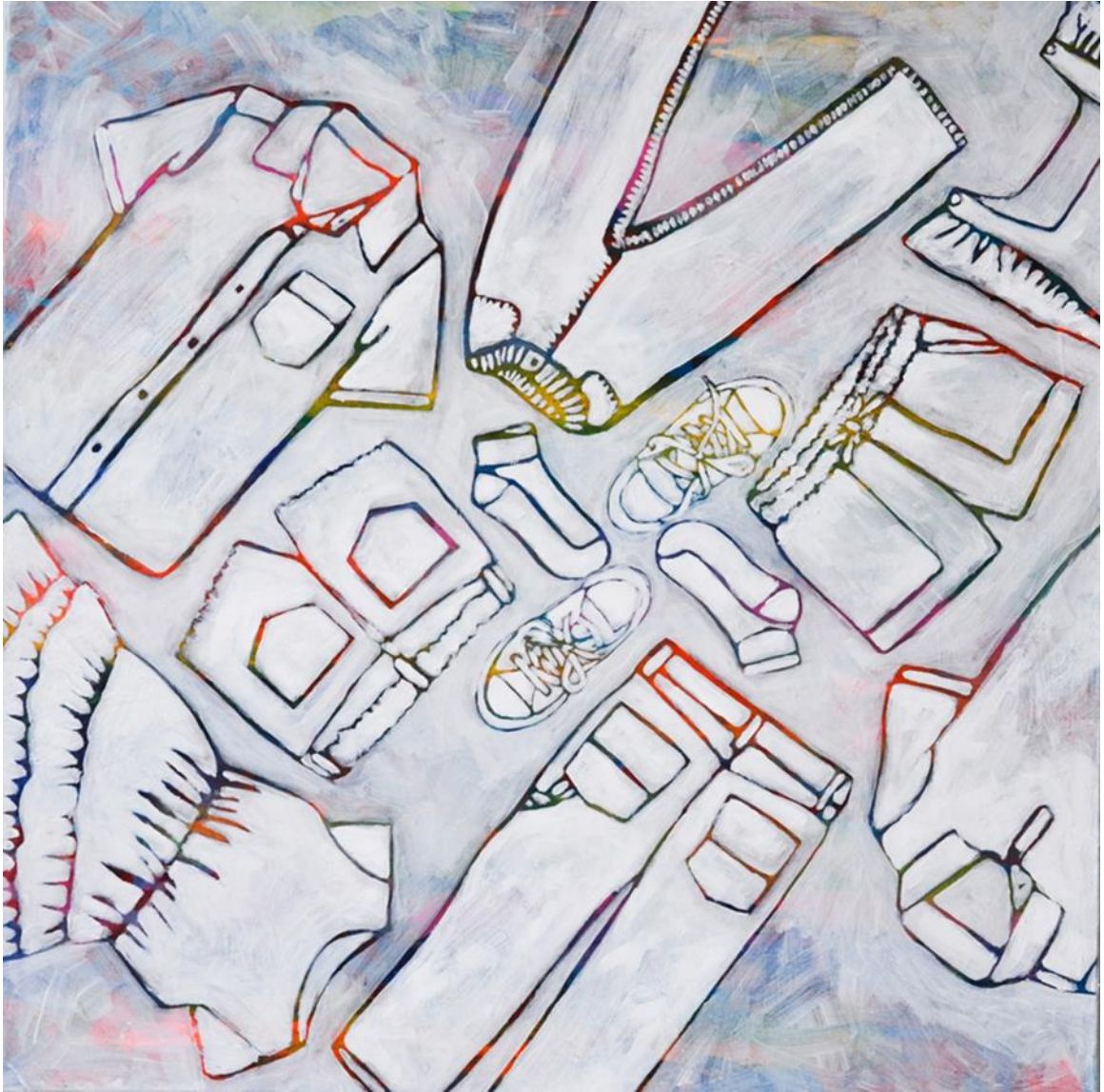


Fig 4.4

Heather Hancock, *Night Before*, 2020, acrylic on canvas, 30 x 30in.

Monday Morning (Fig. 4.5) shows how Monday morning tends to be the most hectic for me. It is when my week starts. I try to not think about the week on Sunday, that way I can enjoy it with my family. So, Monday is when the routine starts up again. First, this piece looks a little different than the others. Instead of a mandala, it is more a reflection of one side; however, the two sides are different. I did this to suggest the difference between morning and afternoon. The objects within the painting include button-down shirts to symbolize work, school zone speed limit signs, eyeglasses, a basketball, a soccer ball, a ballet shoe and a tennis shoe, a to-do list, a grocery list, and a functioning clock mechanism. This painting is made up of contour line drawings of things that illustrate the day. They are found objects but converted to images. These objects are symbolic of rushing, and the pressure of doing everything that is expected. The buttons show order and a sense of “keeping it all together.” The speed zones convey the desire to rush and the need for safety, and how these two aspects are often in tension, especially on Monday morning. The lists signify mundane everyday necessities, but also the beauty in charting the “maintenance” of life, in the way Ukeles did as well.

The lists appear specifically in the lens of the eyeglasses. I did this for two reasons, one because I am blind without my glasses—signifying that without human-made inventions and interventions, I could not function well even on mundane tasks—and two, as a compositional element that contain the irregular shapes of the lists. This containment is symbolic of control, but the fact that it is a reflection also shows how control is illusionary. Lists are an important step in my creative practice. I begin a painting with a list of ideas, from there pick keywords, and draw objects associated with those words. The process of moving between words, images and objects is the basis of

my painting method. The actual grocery list and to-do list within the painting tie back into how I begin the painting process.

Another element is the clock again. I purchased the clock mechanism online for this piece and it really works. I wanted the clock to actually function as a clock, so I included four large paper cut out numbers; 12, 3, 6, and 9, so the clock can be easily read. The full clock numbers are smaller and painted in red. All the numbers are underneath the white paint. As with the other pieces, I wanted the numbers to be barely visual and only hint at their existence. The clock here truly symbolizes that they are only so many hours in the day, only so much time that anyone can get things accomplished. Somehow everything on the to-do list needs to get done; get to work, take kids to school, attend after-school ball practice and games, and go to weekly ballet practice. Truthfully, sometimes it all gets done, and sometimes it does not. Making lists and keeping a schedule help me to prioritize my time so that I can get done what I need to. Keeping a routine helps keep the whole family in harmony and this painting demonstrates that routine is a connection to both my professional and personal lives. This work both symbolically and literally represents the tasks we try to accomplish each week, and our balance of success and failure that is part of the reality of life.

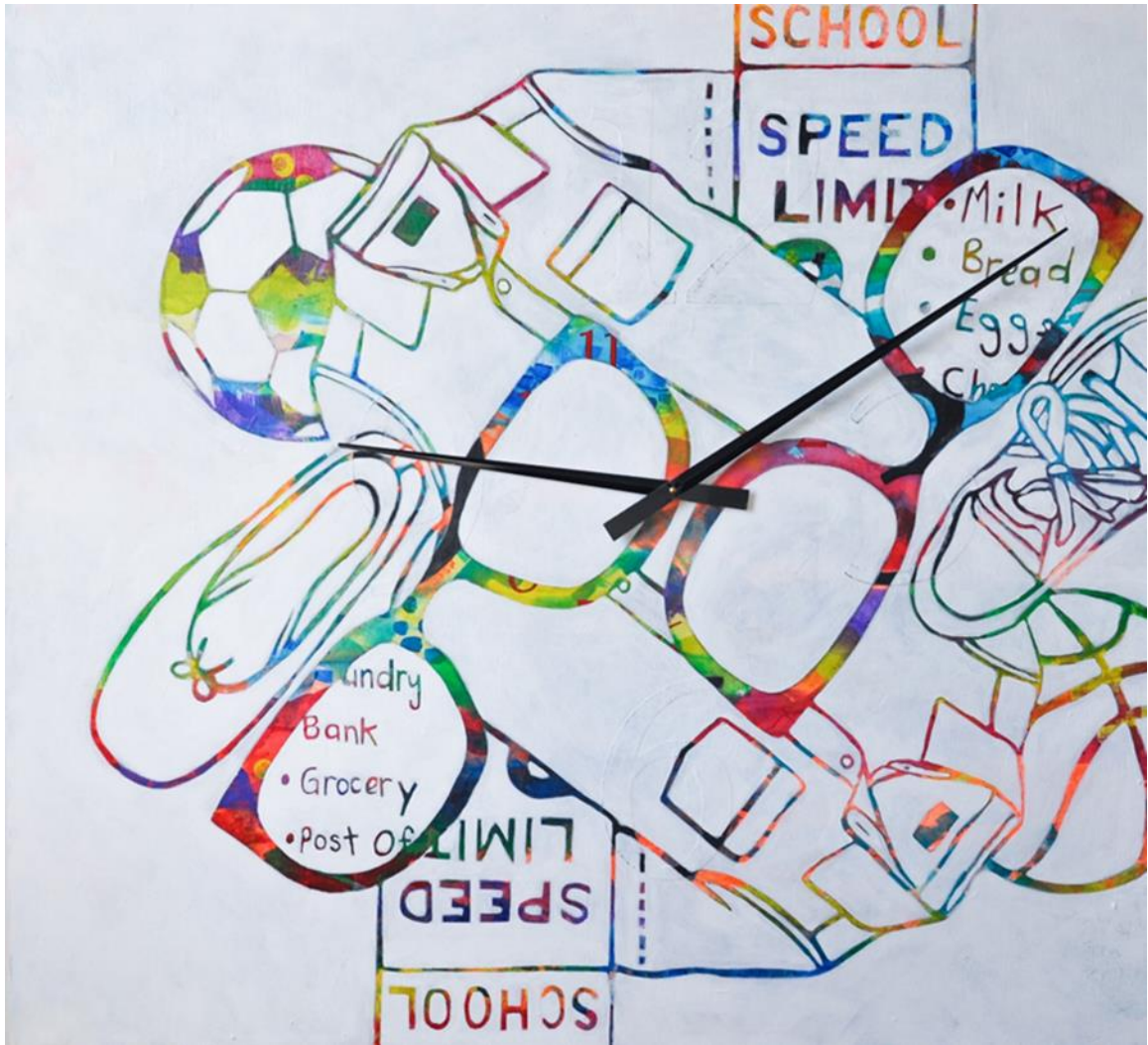


Fig. 4.5

Heather Hancock, *Monday Morning*, 2020, paper, clock mechanism, acrylic on board, 40 x 45in.

Getting Ready for School (Fig. 4.6) is a glimpse into the morning routine at the Hancock household. My children are still young enough right now that they need lots of direction, especially in the morning. One of the first things we do in the morning is eat breakfast, so within the composition the cereal is in the center of the mandala. Next is getting dressed, and even though we laid our clothes out the night before, crazy things happen. Socks and shoes get lost, or only the right-foot shoes—of every pair they own—can suddenly be found. I reference this imbalance here in the painting by only showing one shoe from the pair. Children can also be finicky, and they change their minds all the time; so, clothes must be changed, plans must be adapted. This work is both balanced and imbalanced, symmetrical and asymmetrical at the same time. This painting includes the most important and essential must-haves of the morning: breakfast, socks and shoes, clothes, and their backpacks. I go to great lengths to establish a peaceful morning routine for myself and my kids. I do not wake up happy and unfortunately neither do my children, so already mornings are rough. Again, the clock is an underlying presence, as I try to wake them up at the same time every day and we go on with our morning routine. The established morning ritual done in the same order everyday does help to establish a good vibe for the rest day. This imposed order is shown in the design because we do it five days a week but still struggle to do it.



Fig. 4.6

Heather Hancock, *Getting Ready for School*, 2020, acrylic on board, 40 x 45in.

Monday – Friday (Fig. 4.7) is about my own personal morning routine, whereas *Getting Ready for School* is about my children. Like anybody else, I wake up and take care of bodily functions and drink my morning beverage of choice: water. Then I continue with the rest of my schedule—most of which is helping my kids. I often feel pulled away from myself and my own body as I assist others around me. This work reflects that balance of self and other. The teacup shows the need for sustenance but also self-soothing. The other objects within the painting are a toilet, car keys, 75 MPH speed limit sign and a road. This is essentially what my morning looks like. The image of the toilet is a reference to mundane and necessary hygiene activities, but it is also a reference to art historical meaning. Just as artist Marcel Duchamp presented his “readymade” sculpture the *Fountain*, which is actually a urinal, I illustrate a toilet in my piece to show how the mundane can be beautiful and meaning; how the “shit” of life can be art.

Thankfully, we live in Texas and the speed limit on the highway is 75 MPH. This fact helps my ninety-mile commute to school take less time than it would if the speed limit were lower, like in neighboring New Mexico. It seems fascinating that I feel so “lucky” to have those few extra minutes every day because of this law. How those minutes add up day after day, commute after commute, and give me literally more time in my life outside of my car. Living in rural West Texas, I spend a lot of time on the highway driving to school, to a decent grocery store, to church, to the pediatrician—really to everywhere but my home itself. West Texas is full of open spaces and disparate places; and this requires travel to sustain life. As boring as hours and hours behind the steering wheel can be, that time is also highly meditative for me, especially when my morning regime with the kids does not go as smoothly as I would like. If I cannot

establish the peace that I need in the morning, I have the time on the highway to think by myself, mentally go over the to-do lists for home and school, or tune it all out and listen to music. Similar to the white paint on the painting which functions to calm the chaos and tone down the imagery while focusing on the design as a whole rather than on each individual thing, driving in the car has also turned into my time to meditate and tune everything out to focus on the here and now. While driving I can only really “do” one thing. Stay alert and watch the road. But while doing that, ideas and thoughts can swim around in my mind as if they were spinning in a washing machine. The white color shows that focus of the one task of driving, but the underlying imagery shows how the thought and plans and tasks never go away. They are ever-present but can be manageable with routine like my driving and life patterns.

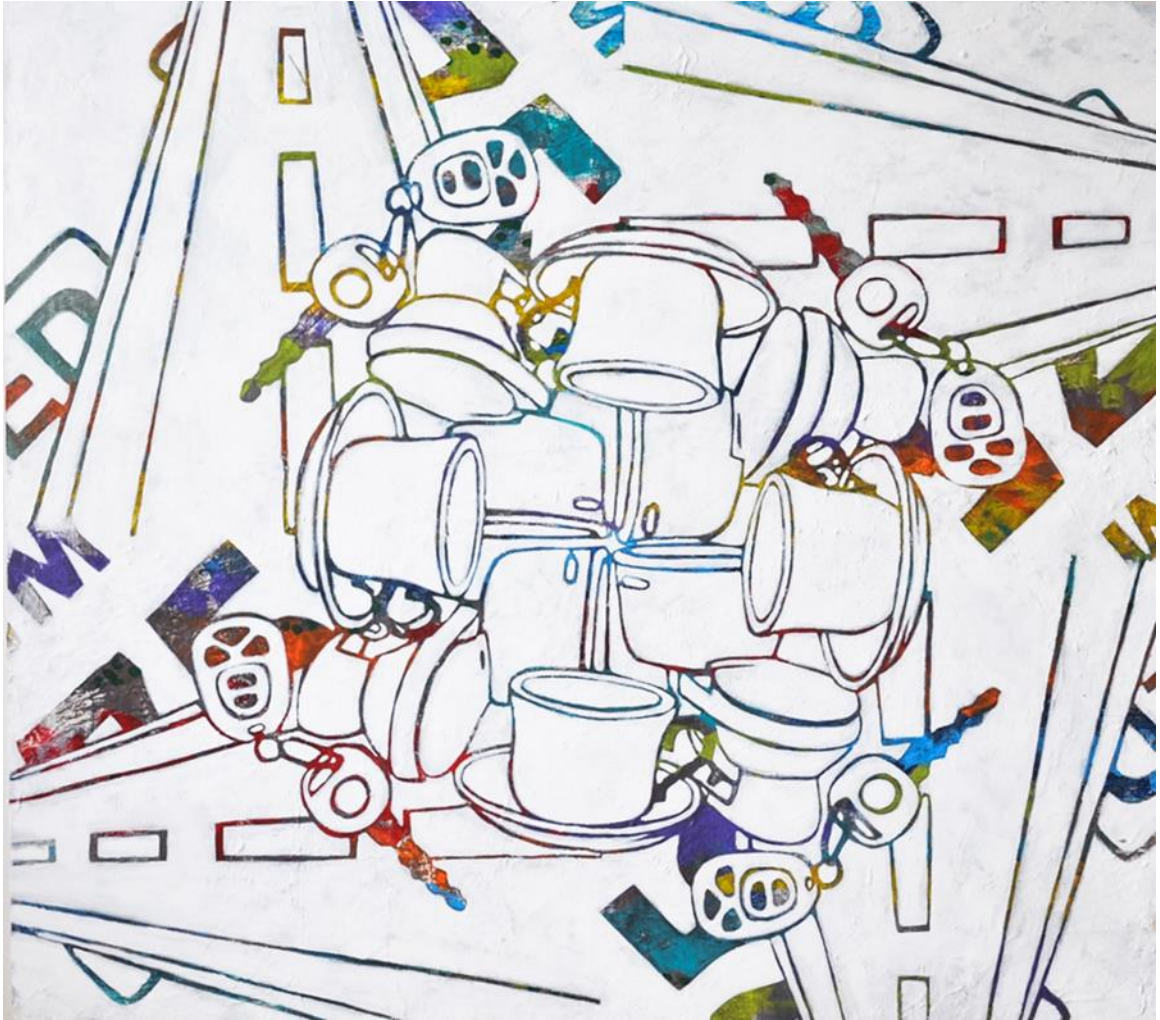


Fig. 4.7

Heather Hancock, *Monday - Friday*, 2020, acrylic on board, 40 x 45in.

Folding (Fig. 4.8) is one of the first paintings of this series. I used to despise folding laundry. The never-ending mounds and mounds of dirty clothes never seemed to stop. Then one day I realized how methodical I was about doing it—I think it was when my kids, bless their hearts, tried to help me. As much as I wanted them to help and teach them young to be responsible and do chores, I did not want them taking away that quiet time I had to myself. Folding laundry is one of those weird obsessive things that I like to do. I would sit on my bed, put the freshly laundered clothes in front of me. As I would fold them, I would make piles. It is also a multisensory activity. I smell the clean scent of the detergent having washed away the dirt and stench of life's tasks. I feel the soft fabric on my fingers, crease the folds and I work. And of course, I would see and appreciate the clean garments without stains.

I found myself arranging the piles around me, in a circular fashion. This is where the mandala idea really came from—how I fanatically arranged clean laundry around me. There was so much satisfaction in seeing, smelling, and feeling all those clean, folded, and organized clothes. Folding laundry is when I realized I needed to find the calm within the storm of daily life, and that that banal routines of how I fold laundry could become beneficial rituals and could bring me peace. Just like when I am methodically folding laundry, I methodically make paintings. The order in which I begin is the same; a list of words, objects that represent those ideas, a sketch, the underpainting, the sketch on canvas, then white paint on top. The meticulous order of painting is a ritual for me in and of itself. While this is a loose mandala design, the contour line drawings of clothes are arranged around a center point. Much like when I fold clothes on my bed, I arrange the clothes in piles around me, this composition reflects that action.

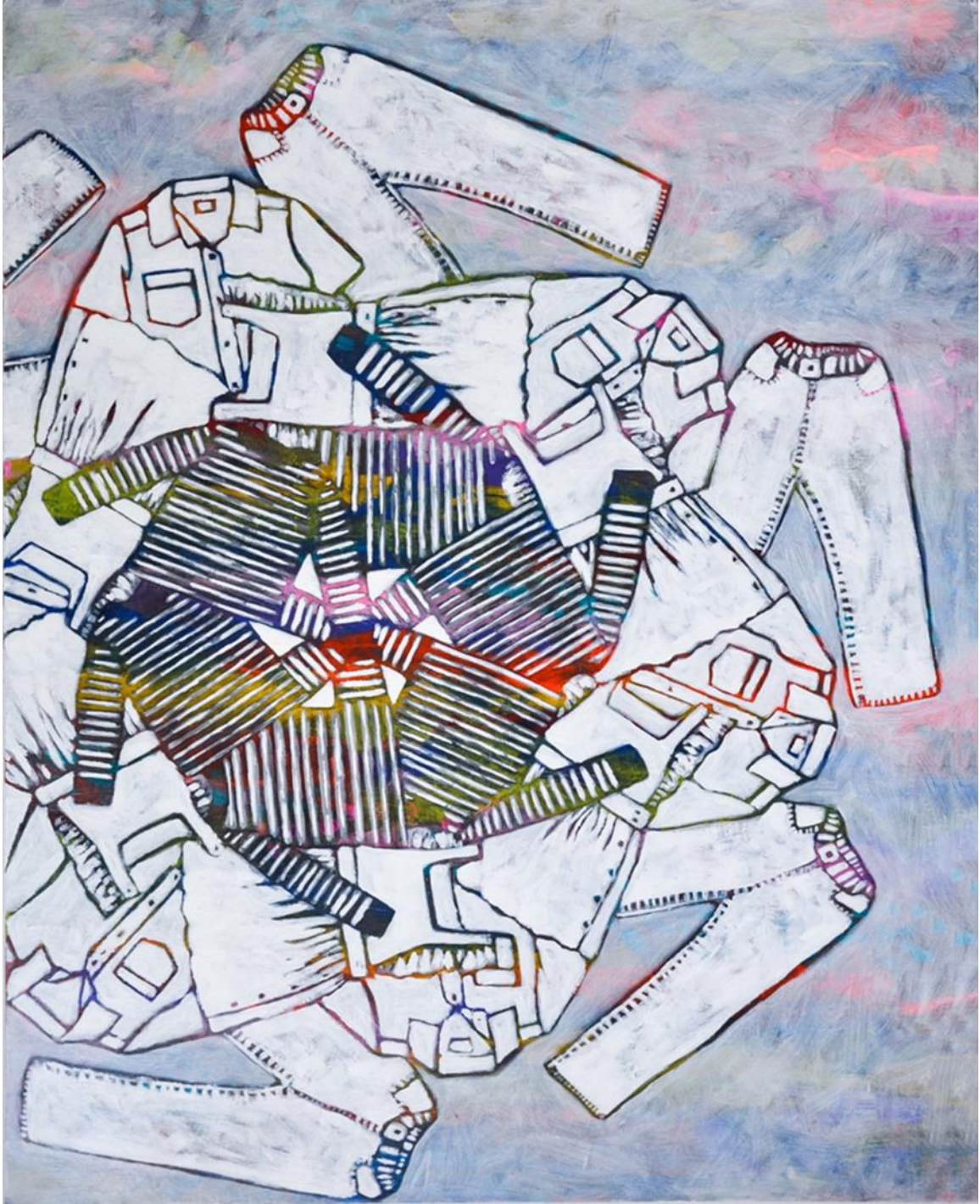


Fig. 4.8

Heather Hancock, *Folding*, 2020, acrylic on canvas, 48 x 36in.

Lunchtime (Fig. 4.9) describes not just the mealtime in its specific title, but it also shows a more symbolic meaning of mealtimes in general. We all need sustenance to live and generally eat at least three meals a day. Some in my family are advocates of a second breakfast on occasion. A lot of family time is spent around the kitchen table during mealtimes. My husband and I prioritize mealtimes so we can enjoy that time together as a family. The objects within the piece include a milk jug, apple, fork, slice of pie and saltshaker. They are shown as line drawings of the items. While making meals for my family, I try to serve them a well-balanced and nutritious meal based on the food pyramid. These always include at least milk and fruits and/or vegetables. The design reflects this desire for balance in the nutrition I give. While choosing objects to draw for the painting I picked foods that are our favorites and that relate to our lives. We are dairy farmers and believe that milk is essential for growing children and bone health for adults, so we consume a large quantity of dairy products. Inclusion of milk therefore in this image might seem obvious for any family, but for us it is also personal and part of our livelihood. While it is important to eat a well-balanced meal, it is okay to occasionally indulge in dessert. I chose to represent dessert as the ambiguous form of apple pie, a dessert that also seems very “rural American,” very “down home.” As “normal as Apple Pie” comes to mind and reminds us of the illusion of normalcy.

The overall composition of this painting is different. The shapes repeat and are in a circle, but when compiling the drawings in Adobe Photoshop, I used a grid to arrange the shapes in the top left quadrant of the circle. I then used the selection tool to select a triangle “pie” shape within the composition—instead of repeating the complete drawings of objects, I am repeating only a section of drawing. I then copied and pasted that pie

shape around the circle eight times. Therefore, the apple, fork and milk jug are not complete forms, they have been cropped. While composing this image, I liked the diagonal lines that resulted from the cropping. Diagonals impart dynamism into a composition, and while these items seem so banal, they also serve our dynamic lives. Eating is both totally repetitive and necessary, but it also highly enjoyable and creative. You can take plain foods and make them interesting with a little thought; that is what this work is about. The routine of feeding a family that become a ritual when it is embraced artistically and creatively.



Fig. 4.9

Heather Hancock, *Lunchtime*, 2020, acrylic on canvas, 48 x 36in.

Bedtime (Fig. 4.10) represents our nightly regime. Unlike our morning routine that may-or-may-not happen, this routine is more rigid, a stability that is illustrated in the design. The composition is made up of more circles and seems more visually coherent. Objects depicted within this painting are contour line drawings of toilet paper rolls, books, glass of water. The moons are painted more stylized with more of a shape, than just an outline. As in my other work, I reference the normalcy and hygiene of the bathroom, here in the roll of toilet paper rather than the toilet itself. And even the idea of a roll of paper used up, with the disposable roll at the center shows that passage of time in life, that using up of materials only to need more of them again. I included a glass of water because despite my best efforts there is always at least one “Mom, can I have a drink of water?” This request is about control, my children’s desire to ask for one more thing before they give up on the day. I understand that desire and I often accommodate it. But the control of the water is brief, then sleep brings the uncertainty of dreams and the future. Like the water is transparent, we think we can see in it and through it, but once it is gone, we will always need more.

I included the moons to indicate night but also to represent other forms of cycles in nature. Shown are all eight moons within the monthly moon cycle. I chose to have only four in the center of painting and move four out to the perimeter of the painting as a compositional element. Like the clocks in my other works, the moons measure time as a kind of calendar. In this painting I am tying in the idea that our lives are repetitive but can have much beautiful variation, akin to the moon cycles. At our home, we do the same five things right before bed in the same way day after day, but even with that there are

subtle differences—what book we read that makes us think about different things, or what the weather is while we fall asleep.



Fig. 4.10

Heather Hancock, *Bedtime*, 2020, acrylic on canvas, 36 x 48in.

For my installations, I reference the ideas of Ukeles perhaps most directly; as a mother, I have taken care of the physical maintenance needs of my children up to this point, including washing the dirty clothes and readying the clean close to be worn again. The installations are made up of my family's old clothes that are painted white and each article is stapled to the wall to create the design of a mandala. Thinking back to my description of my painting *Folding*, this is where the idea for my thesis came into fruition; finding the harmony and serenity that I desperately needed in life and finding in the most obscure way in folding laundry. I have three installations, they are slightly different in design, but with the same objective. They are the physical manifestations of the maintenance of my life, the evidence of me finding peace within the chaos of life. The banal maintenance routine of folding laundry becomes a spiritual and philosophical ritual, and thus I present it as an organized mandala. These clothes are remnants or "relics" from my family's past. They are my husband's old button-down shirts; my daughter's princess dresses and baby pajamas; my son's old shorts and jeans, along with my old shirts and jeans. They are found objects but not just trash found on the street—they are objects with meaning and significance for my personal life. In the forms of mandalas, they are memorialized and have become like religious relics for me. They remind me of the fleetingness of life; these items of clothing touched our bodies and protected them, but now they have holes or don't fit. They have become useless, but I have given them new life as my art. Each article of clothing has been painted white to unify the individual pieces together but also to symbolize the cleanliness of laundry, the wholesomeness we desire for our domestic spaces, the gendered labor of housework, and the beauty of peace found in ritualized routine. Because these installations are one in purpose, I did not want

to differentiate them with titles; they are separate groupings of clothing titled “installation” #1, #2, and #3.

Installation #1 (Fig. 4.11) has a mandala with its center as my son’s old infant and toddler shirts. The next layer are my daughter’s old princess costume dresses and her old pants, next are my old shirts. In the gaps of my shirts are the mis-matched socks that never found their mate. I started with the smallest sized clothing in the middle first and then the next ring around gets larger in size, representing how we grow bigger as we grow older, and our clothes get too small. This shows the changes in life that can’t be controlled or reversed.

Installation #2 (Fig. 4.12) starts in the center with my daughter’s old infant pajamas, then my son’s old shorts and jeans then out to my husband’s old button-down shirts. The nucleus of this mandala also begins with smaller sized clothes then get larger in size as the next layer begins. The idea behind this mandala was to show that the weekly maintenance of laundry is life-long and begins with birth; we continue to dirty clothes and require clean ones, day after day, year after year. It is inescapable. It also shows how for now my children cannot take care of themselves but as they grow up, they are slowly learning how to successfully take care of themselves. Someday they will do their own laundry for their own families. I do not know if they will get the same sense of satisfaction and accomplishment as I do, but they are well on their way to being independent adults who must find their own peace in life.

Installation #3 (Fig. 4.13) is made up entirely of pants. Some of the smaller pants were mine and my siblings’ old baby clothes, then my son’s old jeans, lastly are my own jeans. I learned that I have an aesthetic interest in jeans—something about the lines from

the seams and the back pockets is visually appealing to me. The stitching is linear and strong, and forms patterns that I appreciate. Conceptually I like the idea of putting on pants as the keystone of completion of getting dressed for the day. “Putting on pants” means taking control of life, getting ready to do labor. There is so much meaning in this activity. Pants can be formal and total informal, but they represent readiness and completion. Jeans are especially versatile and durable; they can be worn to work or play. Pants are worn all through life and at every age.

These installations are my favorite from this body of work. Like Pollock who used his whole body to make a painting—he walked around, kneeled, circled the canvas—I also worked on these paintings on the floor. I had to lean over, walk around and kneel on them to be in order to paint them. This also connects to Ukeles in that the act of doing menial domestic chores of cleaning the steps of museum requires being on the floor. For her, cleaning was maintenance and thus it could be art. I feel the same way about the “whitewashing” or painting of old clothes with white paint on the floor to construct my installations. My “found” articles of clothing also reference Duchamp and his ready-mades, but more like Ukeles, I take these found objects to a much more personal level in invoking my own domestic labor.



Fig. 4.11

Heather Hancock, *Installation #1*, 2020, clothes, latex paint, acrylic paint, 9 x 9 ft.

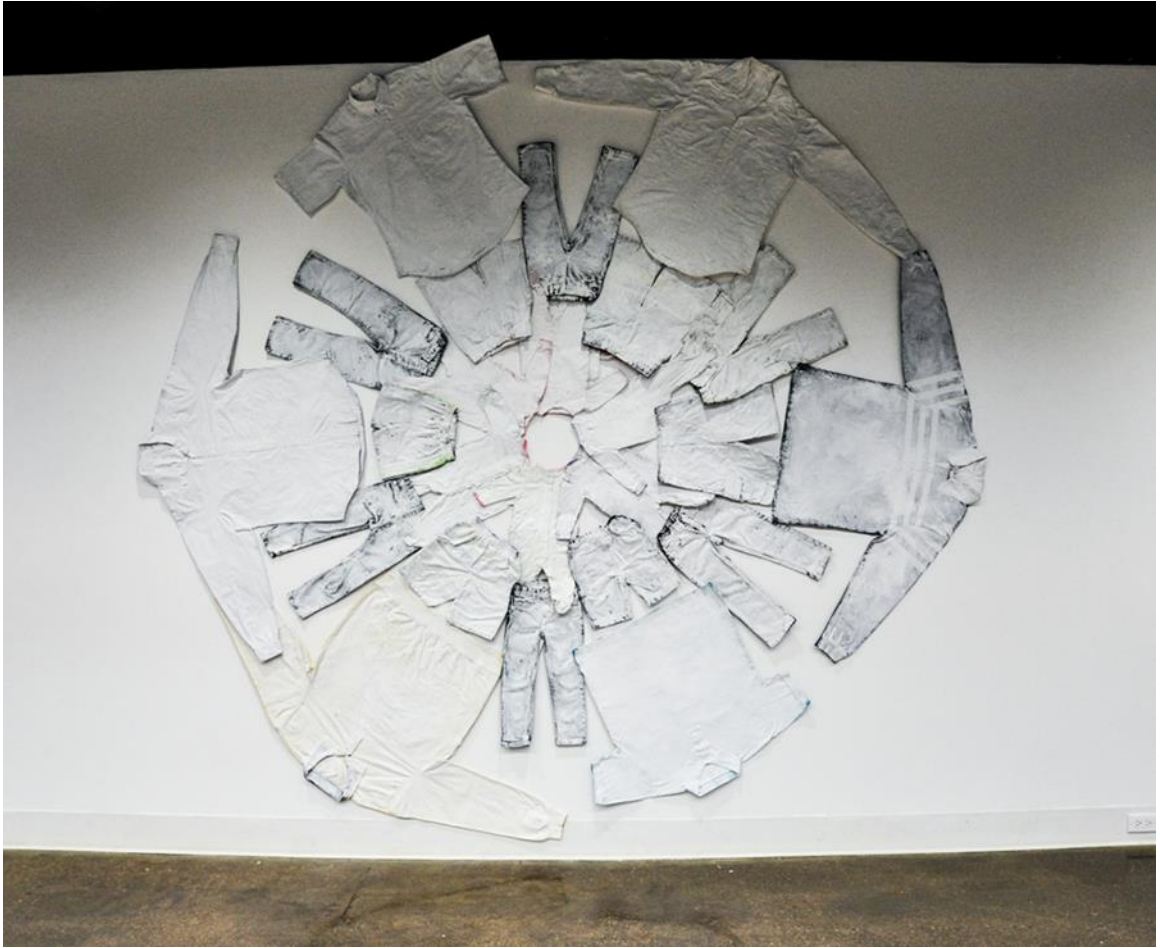


Fig. 4.12

Heather Hancock, *Installation #2*, 2020, clothes, latex paint, acrylic paint, 9 x 9 ft.



Fig. 4.13

Heather Hancock, *Installation #3*, 2020, pants, latex paint, acrylic paint, 8 x 8 ft.

CONCLUSION

Like many women with professional careers, I have a lot of things on my plate. I am a mother, wife, an artist, graduate student, and part-time teacher. This over-abundance of roles can be chaotic, and I often use to-do lists and calendars to maintain some level of order. But what I discovered was that my own chores and everyday life activities could be the source material for my art. While working on research for a class I stumbled upon a video of an interview of Mierle Ukeles. She was discussing how her “maintenance” art came into existence. She described how life was different for her once her first child was born, how boring it was changing diapers and maintaining a home. Ukeles described how she made a connection with Duchamp and his ready-mades—that if he can take an object and call it art, then she can too. She describes herself as an artist, that what she does and makes as art. Watching this interview with Ukeles was the catalyst for me. Listening to her describe her life, I felt like my daily routines had the potential to become my art in some way. I began to see my lists and calendars as a form of drawing, which led to the idea that my work connects and collapses my domestic life and my professional life.

I found that I enjoy doing domestic labor, because it is a check off the list, but also because I am obsessively structured about how I do things, like folding laundry. This routine activity became more of a healing or spiritual ritual for me, and that is what I wanted to explore in my art. It was more than just a routine, suddenly, and everyday life

chores became a way for me to feel peace and have an almost spiritual moment. Thinking about ways to show peace, balance, and meditation, I chose to use the mandala.

A mandala is a circular design made up of lines and shapes that has radial symmetry and its creation can be used as way to meditate, as with Tibetan sand painting. Using the mandala as a compositional guide, I began to make work that represented different times of my day and different rituals associated with that time. My piece titled *Bedtime* is about the nighttime ritual I have established with my kids. Doing the same things every night and in the same prescribed order was the inspiration for my symmetrical piece that still embodied some of the chaos of life, but within a structure that is calming. The piece *Monday - Friday* in turn is a depiction of my morning routine. The items in these designs differ because of the content of the ritual at that time of the day, but their overall similarity of order and balance shows how consistency and ritual repetition is a way to bring beauty and peace to life.

Soon, the spiritual motif began to extend into other elements of my work. For instance, I chose white as the predominant color of my paintings and installations because white is for me a “pure” color—in fact it is the absence of color, and one that stands for many things like purity, innocence, cleanliness, and safety. White for me had so many meanings, so I use it to show the spiritual cleansing process of my life; performing those mundane, but necessary, maintenance activities became a meditation for me and helped me achieve balance in my professional and home life. Then whitewashing them became a way to impart cleanliness, control, and beauty—to make them into works of art.

My thesis body of work is titled “Daily Rituals” because it is about my own journey from an overwhelming number of roles to a unification of myself through the

combination of my life and my art. My work represents the balance of the many roles I take on in my life, and each piece represents a step on this journey. The goal of my work is to inspire others to do the same with their own lives and see routines as much more than the mundane—to see routine as ritual, and ritual as art.

My chapters of this thesis have covered my artistic influences and my process for creating the works. My creative process produced ten paintings and three installations for my thesis exhibition. My body of work is about how menial tasks give me time to meditate so that I can find equilibrium between my professional life and home life. My MFA investigation has been a labor of love. At the beginning of my studies, I was having a hard time finding a balance between my personal life and my professional life. I had to raise my children, help my husband, and then commute 90 miles to campus to attend class. Then I had to find time to actually make the work. I honestly felt like I was drowning, but then art threw me a lifeline. The Ukeles video was the catalyst I needed to help me put faith in the creative process. I began to see my work and my life in different terms and surrender to the chaos. My lists and calendars became the sketches for an idea, one that I shaped into mandalas for my paintings. These paintings became the backbone of my thesis investigation, which I extended into the real world with the installations. The peace I achieved from the making of my work then extended into my daily life. I saw every part of my life as a ritual and this is what I show with my work. My thesis idea became reality and my work truly became the balance between the professional and personal aspects of my life.

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