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ART 493 SMP 1: Fall 2017  
Experiencing the Ethereal



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## Artist's Statement:

Wherever we are, the space we occupy is influenced and altered by the individual's interpretation, perception, and response to that space. No two people will ever have the same experience on all sensory levels, even though they may be occupying the same space. How we use that space or view that space will change depending on not only the person and their mood at that moment, unique traits and abilities, or cultural/ethnic/academic background, but also any number of environmental influences. Therefore, revisiting places from our past often result in entirely different emotions as those that we remembered.

Entering a space is an experience. The concept behind the creation of this installation is to encourage people to enjoy the freedom of walking into the space and experiencing an altered perception of reality. By transforming the space, it becomes separated from the gallery; not just by walls, but also by the mutated snail chair, the fairy-like butterflies, the pillow pond, etc. The snail is a functional object, as are the grass floor and pillow pond. These all allow people to use the space as they please, while mentally and emotionally transporting themselves outside of the gallery walls. Altered perceptions of reality and how we see everyday objects, and how these objects are transformed into flora and fauna. This will hopefully extend the viewer's vision and potentially readjust and expand their future perceptions of their environment when encountered in their daily lives.



## Beginning Thoughts:

Throughout this semester my concept has changed drastically, this includes everything from materials to placement in the gallery. My original concept evolved around totems and their meanings, the butterfly and the snail, but quickly turned into experimenting with space. I used surrealism combined with ethereal imagery to transport the viewer to a new environment. While the belief of totems helped shape the creatures, but the meanings were no longer needed, the butterfly represented happiness and creativity while the snail represented slowing down to take a moment to find peace.

Transforming a localized space into a new world was something I slowly began to incorporate into my concept. The idea of sitting in a snail chair and surrounding the viewer in a forest full of fairy creatures started my surreal journey into altering the viewers perception of reality. The art I completed for the fall semester I would consider a finished work, something I won't continue in the next year, but what I have and haven't done for this installation will follow me into future exhibitions. The exploration of creating a transformative space was to give a room that transcends from the gallery. It gives an interactive space that people can walk through, touch, lay down in, and experience that can't be done with other sculptures or paintings.



## Getting to the Basics:

### **1.) What was your first memorable art experience and how is it relevant to what you are doing now?**

My first memorable art experience was taking western art history my first year of college because it opened up how I viewed art and what could be art and how other people discussed and thought about art with today's modern thinking. Its relevant to what I do now because I'm constantly thinking back to art history discussion and how people might view the work.

### **2.) What inspires you? What are some of the sources, both within art and outside of art that you turn to?**

What inspires me is my own unique way of viewing the world and my beliefs of symbolism within nature/organic objects. That would be outside of art. Inside of art, I lean towards surrealism and abstract art.

### **3.) What draws you to the medium and materials you work with?**

I found that sculpture allows me to materialize what I am conceptualizing more easily than painting/drawing does.

### **4.) How is your art a response to the world you live in?**

It's a response to how people view things and the symbolism that goes into it. "Normal people" would see a butterfly and see it as something pretty but to me it's a symbol of creativity and happiness. To me it's about viewing everyday little things differently.

### **5.) How does your choice of medium(s) affect your work and contribute to its meaning?**

I think trying to make the symbolism a physical object of 3D form will help give the viewer a more physical connection to the message. Sharing the space with the sculptures will help the viewers embrace or see the work differently.

## Climbing up the Thought Tree:

### **1.) Katia, your project deals with altering space in an aesthetic and sentimental manner. Have you done this before? How? Where? When? Why? What?**

Oh wow, that's a good question. I have dealt with this before in Lisa's advanced sculpture class in the Spring. It was our final assignment that revolve around space. I was inspired by the empty fire extinguisher cubby in Monty, and this got me thinking about what would fill that emptiness. Which lead me to thinking about how we look at fire extinguishers. So, I made my own fire extinguishers that had fake aquariums inside of them, three of them actually. I placed them in the main hall of Monty, that circle of the main entrances, so you couldn't miss them. They ended up disrupting the space people at first people would walk up to them thinking nothing of it and then, bam! It was something else! It made a lot of people stop and look, it made them think about what was and wasn't supposed to be there.

### **2.) Again, regarding the development of space, how would you characterize your bedroom?**

Haha, well my room is chaotic... Very chaotic. I have hand prints covering my ceiling and random paintings that are painted directly onto the wall. I don't like blank spaces; white walls bother me because there is nothing there. It's like a blank canvas, I want to fill it. If you look at my main studio desk, its messy, that's how my desk is at home but those are the only messy parts of my room. My bedroom reflects what is going on up here in my head, I just need to get it out.

### **3.) How do you imagine people interacting with your constructed space in the gallery?**

I want people to literally walk into the space, sit in the snail chair or lay on the grass floor. I have hopes that people will be enveloped in the space and take joy in experiencing what is inside, maybe even leaving with a new view of the world.

### **4.) Have you thought about adding chairs, pillows, blankets, etc. to create a more inviting and comfortable environment for people to simply hang out in?**

I already have the single snail chair, but you do have a point because I don't want the room to be a "only one person at a time" thing. I have been thinking about a fake pond to the side that would be made of different sided pillows that people can freely move. This is something I am still experimenting on, but I don't know how that will be visually cohesive.

### **5.) Your project so far incorporates two of the five main sense groups. What do you think about adding elements to your project which also involve the other three? (Music (... as you want), Fragrance (Vanilla), Candy (Starburst))**

That is something I have been thinking about, mainly sound. You know, nature sounds or a soft breeze, I could record the sounds of the woods in my backyard so acquiring the sounds

wouldn't be difficult. Food is a great idea, something else to welcome in the audience, it would have to be something wrapped as to not spread germs or attract bugs. Plus if no one eats the food then it is left sitting there for a month...Hm, maybe it is better not to include anything edible.

**6.) You've mentioned the notion of ethereality in regard to your art, how does this relate to your view of life/yourself/your problems?**

It doesn't really. I relate more to the ethereal world because everything makes more sense, and anything can happen in that reality. That's how my mind works and it kind of how I like to see the world. I mean, some of the things I believe in will seem like a bizarre idea. For example, how I view the butterfly as a totem instead of an insect, so by creating the butterfly into something totally different can give other people a sight into my view of the world.



## Mid-Semester Critique Reflection (10/18):

These past two weeks of critiques have given me a lot to think about when it comes to material, display, and concept. I have no disagreements with any recommendations suggested to me because these are all things I needed to think in depth. The biggest thing I was told to work on was broadening my materials, go beyond using premade items and craft store flowers. So, I expanded on the butterfly and began working with feathers, paper, shrink wrap, fabric, and possibly evergreen leaves. With the materials I want to add fluidity because creativity is a fluid process, this is something I want to successfully accomplish because through the SMP process I have drastically changed my whole project.

Display is also something that has altered from original sketches; a single branch with many butterflies placed in still positions, and one large snail doing nothing beneath it. Now the installation has its own room that creates a fictional space, changing the viewer's perception of reality. This is becoming effective with the change of material because when making something common, like the butterfly, into a feather like fairy creature it will help people be able to absorb their surroundings as ephemeral. During one of my critiques I was told I needed to either find a balance between ethereal or realistic, or just pick one. So, I picked ephemeral because it fit my concept better than realistic or a combination of the two. That's why I decided to cover the snail chair in patterned fabric, it will make the snail more welcoming to sit on and gives another notion of being in an altered reality.

Because of these positive changes my concept as also switched to something greater than just the totems. Originally it was all about the totems and their symbolism but after visualizing the installation as a room I have come to realize that my piece is more about disrupting a space to create a new one. While this space is based off totems it has become more about a state of being, how sitting in a fictional space can transform how we view natural beings. The outcome of the snail has also change because of this, first it was a stool and now it is a chair that surrounds the viewer. Having people sit in the snail makes them the snail that is in the environment and experiencing the space it lies in. Any weaknesses that I had with my SMP was the concept and now that I have figured it out through the critiques I now know it is one of my strengths that will bring the whole subject together to create a cohesive piece.



## Critique Reflection:

Through this semester I've had six different critiques from visiting artists and my peers. These have been positive experiences and I have learned so much, and because of having so many artists willing to come and critique my work I was able to make quick changes that helped shape my work into its finished form. One of the biggest suggestions I had was to step away from literal representation, butterflies looking like a normal butterfly or realistic sizes, and go towards the abstract. Keeping this in mind and speaking with professor Lisa Scheer helped form the idea behind the snail chair and making it a functioning object. Being visited by professor Giulia Livi helped me discover the concept behind painting the branches and the color of the walls, this completes the space into becoming an ethereal space instead of trying to find a balance between the real and the fake. My fellow student artists encouraged me to push my idea further which brought me to adding the pillow pond so multiple people could enjoy the space at once and what else could invite them inside.

Even when the amount of critiques seemed high I will admit that everyone gave me something to work on and grow with, something I want to carry with me into the next semester. There are things I couldn't fit into this exhibition because of time but are things worth considering. Visiting artist Yeon Jin Kim advised on moveable objects in the space, something for the viewer to play with. One of the reasons I didn't pursue this concept because of the amount of time I'd need to make them, but mostly because I didn't want so many stimulants happening that the viewer won't know what to focus on.

Looking back at my first attempts with this project and the journey it has taken, nothing is like the original concept but that's what I like about it and others would agree. When having my professors and peers return to my studio space, and seeing the progression, even when liking what they saw they still gave me more to brainstorm. I hope there is more encouraging words to come from my viewers as much as I was given this past semester.

## They Inspire Me:

- 1.) **Casey Weldon** is an American artist best known for his use of melancholy and humor in conjunction with the iconography of modern pop culture. "Post-pop surrealism." is what he calls the style he puts into his artwork. His most famous work is a series of paintings known as *Four-Eyed Cats* and *Kittypillars* (2016).
- 2.) **Soo Sunny Park** is a Korean artist that immigrated to the United States when she was twelve. Her artwork plays with the use of space and how her installations can alter the room. The work is meant to be explored, not just something to look at from a distance, but can also be altered by people walking through the installation.
- 3.) **Sandy Skoglund** is an American artist who is known for her altered and unique rooms. One of her best-known works *Radioactive Cats* (1972) is a great example of how she uses a space and alters it to the point of disrupting its own space. A dull grey room filled with neon green cats, but what is presented to the viewer is a photograph of a finished product instead of a space they can move through.



Boundary Conditions  
(2014) (by Soo Sunny Park,  
Photography by Nash Baker)

Kittypillar  
(2016) (by Casey Weldon  
from caseyweldon.com)



Radioactive Cats  
(1972) (Photography by  
Sandy Skoglund)

## Analysing My Work:

My work has to do with the transformation of space which viewers can enter and interact, this shifts the energy of the gallery into a new localized space. The use of uncommon materials with everyday objects help push this idea of how to alter someone perception. A snail turned into an embroidered chair and butterflies turned into mystical creatures of feathers and paper, and with a pond made of pillows shifts the normal gallery space into a new experiences.

This space is opened to anyone to do anything in the created space. The snail is a functioning chair which someone can sit in to observe or find a moment of calm. I wanted the use of fabric on the chair to be something someone wouldn't usually associate with a snail; blue opalescent, ruched silk makes up the skin of the snail with brown leather shell stripped with patterned blue, red, and green paisley silk. These colors pop off the shell and contrast with the muted tone of the snail skin, this adds something obscure that helps shift the concept step further away from reality and into the ethereal.

Using feathers and paper to make up the butterflies is an addition to this transformation. This idea came to be when I would invite people to come sit in the chair during its construction so see how they felt about it. The first would be out comfortable they felt and how they could see themselves reading in the chair. Placing the butterflies in the trees isn't somewhere one usually finds the butterfly, and making them out of neutral toned feathers further distances the insects out of our normal idea of what they look like, same with the use of paper. By switching the colors usually associate with the butterfly onto the snail, and vice versa, brings a new way of viewing these creatures. The use of material that belong on a different species of animal tricks the viewers eye, first they might assume it is a bird in the trees and then upon a second glance they realize it is another thing entirely. While using the paper is more contextual, like flora and fauna, in use of material it doesn't trick the eye like the feathers, but it gives a narrative on the wings. Some of the wings have illustrations and others have text of the same story, the edges of the paper wings are lined with gold which is inspired by gilded pages of books.

The branches the butterflies sit upon are colored with shades of yellow and orange, painting them keeps the branches from getting lost in the realm of everything else fill with colors. This also brings the whole room into a new space, it brings the audience out of the gallery and into the ethereal forest. Creating the forest is done by jutting branches from



the walls to surround the viewers, to imitate the ceiling is hanging branches. Having them hang will give the illusion of overhead treetops, along with lights that cast shadows further establishing where the viewer is being transported.

Painting the walls of the gallery a dark navy blue and having a curtain separate the room from the other art in the gallery helps create the division between the two spaces. Without that break of the curtain there will be difficulty splitting the ethereal world from the actual world. This can also be applied to painting the walls, if they aren't painted and kept white the illusion is broken. If I were to just use light gels to add color to the installation I don't think it would be enough of an alteration in the scenery for the viewer.

My artwork is inspired by artists like Soo Sunny Park, Sandy Skoglund, and Casey Weldon. These artists use their skills to change our perception of space or reality by use of imagery and play with what we see as normal. These artists have different approaches, but all come to the same conclusion of dabbling with what a person already thinks of a space or object and plays with our sense of familiarity, reawakening our senses. Even though the photos I will use are of an unfinished product it is clear what is effective and what comparisons are being stated between my art and other artists.

### **Surrealist Movement**

The 1920's was the beginning of the Surrealist Movement, the Surrealist artists wanted to channel the unconscious as a way to unlock the power of the imagination. They wanted to get away from the rationalism and literary realism, and were powerfully influenced by psychoanalysis. The Surrealists believed the rational mind repressed the power of the imagination, weighting it down with taboos. Influenced also by Karl Marx, they hoped that the psyche had the power to reveal the contradictions in the everyday world and spur on revolution. Their emphasis on the power of personal imagination puts them in the tradition of Romanticism, but unlike their forebears, they believed that revelations could be found on the street and in everyday life. The Surrealist impulse to tap the unconscious mind, and their interests in myth and primitivism, went on to shape many later movements, and the style remains influential to this today. (Durozoi 63)

Surrealist imagery is probably the most recognizable element of the movement, yet it is also the hardest to define. Each artist relied on their own recurring motifs through their dreams or/and unconscious mind. At its basic, the imagery is outlandish, perplexing, and even uncanny, as it is meant to jolt the viewer out of their comforting assumptions. (Breton 3) Nature, however, is the most frequent imagery: Salvador Dalí's, one of the most well-known Surrealist artist, work often include ants or eggs relied strongly on vague biomorphic imagery.

I have always been drawn to the abstract and surreal art because it goes outside of normal thought. This technique of thinking and rearranging reality helped form my installation by breaking the boundaries of transformation and how the viewer distinguishes the space. For example, making the snail into a large item to use or use of colors to remind the viewer they



aren't in an average room. I don't believe my artwork would be successful if I had gone with Realism or Minimalism because they don't have the same impact as Surrealism. What I'm doing isn't minimal or about what is real, but rather what isn't real and using that to my advantage to alter perception.

### Comparisons to Soo Sunny Park

Space is always something to consider when creating installations of artwork, so when researching artists there was one that I kept looking to, Soo Sunny Park. Her work revolves around space and how our perception of it can change depending on certain things being done in that space. *Unwoven Light* (2011) deal with transcending the space through light, shapes, and viewers. She states on her personal website that when someone walks into the room a motion sensor moves the chain linked object, as light shines through the Plexiglas squares in the chains it changes the look of the room and how a person is seeing the sculpture. (Baker) Sound is also a factor in her work, the tempo and pitch changing based on how fast someone moves through the space.



My installation, much like Park's work, does rely on the audience interacting with the space. Though, it doesn't involve the requirement of movement to function, it does require someone to be in the space to transform. The art experience requires the participant to actively



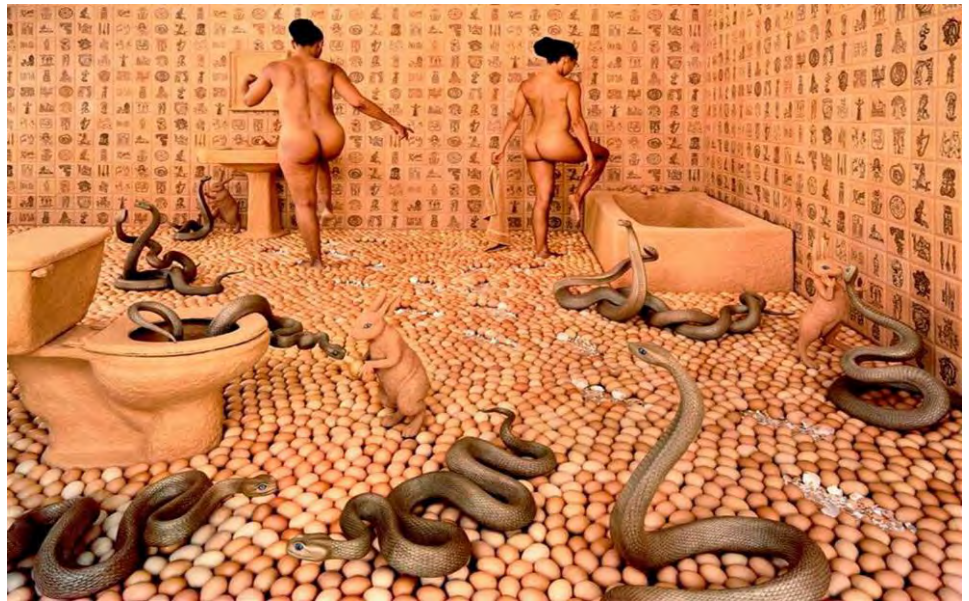
engage with the space, whether it be sitting in the snail or lounging in the grass, to alter their perception of the environment.

### Sandy Skoglund and Space

Environment is anything from a bedroom to the outdoors, it can be used for many things like relaxation or a daily routine. Sandy Skoglund uses sculpture mixed with real familiar places to break a boundary between the surreal and the normal by deconstructing the space. (Qualls 102) Looking through her online portfolio her piece *Walking on Eggshells* (1997) leaves the biggest impression on me, it is a bathroom with the floor made of eggshells that have been crushed by a woman making her way to the tub and sink. The bathroom is filled with snakes and rabbits, the snakes are coming out of the toilet or twisting on the floor and the rabbits are attempting to interact with the snake. (Panaro) This isn't something a rabbit would do in

nature, and when taking a closer look at the rabbit we can see they have tiny human hands. This whole piece is unsettling but alters how we view the rabbit, or the floor, or even bathing.

Unlike Park's work people can't walk into the space and experience it, Skoglund's finished product is a photo of her made up room. While I won't be taking surrealism to that extreme I do



want to leave some sort of impression on the viewer when they leave the gallery. I'm sure Skoglund's work does this in a subtle way but I think she lacks that strong impact by not giving a person the choice to connect with the space. Art is about having connections, and this is where my artwork extends on what she is trying to do. My audience will be able to connect with the space I have created, something not easily done with photography.



## The Casey Weldon Cohesion



Cohesion is the combination of two or more things. Casey Weldon uses cohesion to create surrealist creatures that may be seen as cute or vile. For this example, I am focusing on his Kittypillar (date unknown) paintings and in 2016 became vinyl figurines. The *Kittypillar* series was a combination of cats and caterpillars, furry cats with wiggly bodies and fourteen paws. It sits up with six paws stretched out as if it wants to be picked up. Like how Skoglund morphed the rabbit's hands, but Weldon keeps a cuteness to the kittypillar that makes most want to cuddle the little like, while as in Skoglund's the rabbit is off putting and uninviting. His use of cohesion is a perfect example of modern surrealist painting and his original take on mutating animal and insect.

Even though I am not painting for my installation I refer to his work as inspiration of thinking outside of the box when it came to creating my butterfly creatures. I didn't take the same approach of cohesion but rather one that involved the material and the insect, instead of using both a body of a bird and the body of the butterfly. This wouldn't work as well for my concept because they are already similarly constructed beings, the same thought process was applied to the snail but instead of two creatures it is an insect and a function object. I was encouraged to step more into the surreal and away from the literal representation so when researching Weldon's work, I found the balance of having surreal imagery without losing the creature that makes up the object.



## **Snail Trail**

Altering an active space is a theme I hope to carry over into my work for next semester. I doubt I want to expand on the space I will have finished with this installation but instead create another ethereal space. This progress has lead me down many paths or working with new materials like fabric, and new methods of visualizing my art. When I started everything was literal, down to the shape of the wings and the hardness of the shell. But, through my research and thinking outside of the box while experimenting with my medium of sculpture I found a new appreciation for surrealism and new ways to view something as small a snail. While the snail trail ends here that doesn't mean the path for my art ends.

Continuing into the Spring semester I intend on moving forward with my concept, I want to expand on my use of materials and going beyond three flat walls of a gallery. While I do think what I have accomplished for this semester has been successful there is already room for change and improvement. By creating a new installation in the Fall I will be able to inquire with fresh eys and rethink what ethereal spacial surrealism can be as an experience for me and the viewer.

## Annotated Bibliography:

1. Baker, Nash. "Soo Sunny Park | Unwoven Light." Rice Gallery, 11 Apr. 2013, (assessed October 23, 2017) [www.ricegallery.org/soo-sunny-park/](http://www.ricegallery.org/soo-sunny-park/)

This is a summary that the Rice Gallery in Texas did of Soo Sunny Park's artwork Unwoven Light (2013), along with a brief history of some of her other works and accomplishments as an artist. The article explains Park's experimentation of how light affects our perception of architectural space and creates a structural element to the space it takes up.

2. Breton, André, and Franklin Rosemont. What is surrealism?: selected writings. Pathfinder, 2012.

This book breaks down and defines surrealism. It states that surreal artists are aiming for what the unconscious sees and how they approach creating art to reflect the theory of what we define as surrealism.

3. "Casey Weldon" Widewalls, Spoke Art. 2017. Magazine

This online magazine focuses on rising artists like Casey Weldon. This article focuses on Weldon's interest in Surrealism and its effects on his favorite subject, which is cats. He talks about how he never planned on sticking with surrealism but it is an effective way of abstracting an adorable and domesticated animal.

4. Durozoi, Gérard. "History of the surrealist movement". University of Chicago Press, 2002.

This book is about the history of the surrealist movement which started in the early 1920's and ended in the mid 1950's. Durozoi covers everything from the artists who started the movement to its involvement with Dadaism.

5. Kaplon, Megan. "Soo Sunny Park: Sculpting Art and Mind." Art Business News, Madavor, 19 Sept. 2017, [artbusinessnews.com/2014/09/soo-sunny-park-sculpting-art-and-mind/](http://artbusinessnews.com/2014/09/soo-sunny-park-sculpting-art-and-mind/)

Interview conducted with Park about her beginning in art and how that grew into her current installations. It goes in depth about what inspires her and how she inspires art students and how she views her own art as an object taking up space.

6. Panaro, Luca. "Interview with Sandy Skoglund." Luca Panaro Interviews Sandy Skoglund ©2008, 2 Aug. 2008. (assessed October 23, 2017) [www.sandyskoglund.com/pages/published/pages\\_publish/luca.html](http://www.sandyskoglund.com/pages/published/pages_publish/luca.html)

A brief interview of Sandy Skoglund conducted by Luca Panaro that mainly focuses on her concepts of mixing the natural and artificial worlds together. The interview also goes into depth



of how photographing the staged scenes compared to a gallery installation and how all of her works are of fictional spaces and time.

7. Park, Soo Sunny. "Sculpture / Installation." Soo Sunny Park, 2001, [www.soosunnypark.com/](http://www.soosunnypark.com/)

This is Park's personal website that documents all of her work, gives her short biography, and offers links to other published articles about her exhibitions and art. It is an online portfolio including her artist statements and links to artists critiques.

8. Qualls, Larry. "Sandy Skoglund." *Performing Arts Journal*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1994, pp. 102-106.

Larry Qualls goes over the performing arts in his journal and talks about Sandy Skoglund and uses her as an example of transforming a space. The space itself becomes a performance without the requirement of people being in the room she created. The final product is always a photo and by having people missing from the photo it becomes a deconstruction of the space.