



Jumble Gym

Playful Randomness in Contemporary Jewelry

Stefan Gougherty

MFA Thesis in Metal, 2020

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Hello :-)

This is a catalogue of my MFA thesis and other works created during my graduate studies in Metal at SUNY New Paltz from 2018-2020.

More information about my work can be found at www.stefangougherty.com. You can also reach me through Instagram @instagougherty or by email at info@stefangougherty.com.

Thank you for your interest!
-Stefan Gougherty

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Playful Randomness in Contemporary Jewelry

The year is 2020 and there are no flying cars. Phones have become sentient—but peel back this layer of autocorrect and humans are dumber than ever before. Born in the eighties, I marvel at how much and how little has changed within this short blip. Y2K and 2012 have come and gone. We made it to the future—but where did it go? It seems to have stalled in the 1960s among the rocket ships and Google architecture of early flagship McDonald's. Visionary industrial designers like Raymond Loewy and others sculpted trains, trams and toaster ovens for Mach 1—these aerodynamic surfaces a celebration of the modernist ethos for speed and progress. Fast forward to the present and our culture seems to have abandoned this vision completely. In the presence of resource scarcity, environmental collapse, overpopulation and other nightmares, it has become apparent that there are serious limitations to our material existence. In *The Archaic Revival*, philosopher and psychedelic evangelist Terence McKenna speculates on the notion of a forward escape, survival of our species through a deep dive within, via technology. With so much of our lives now spent behind screens, could this be what is happening?

Advancements around the millenium ushered in an entirely new dimension for humans to inhabit. With the internet now so integral to our reality (for better or worse),

visions of the future have shifted from atoms to bits and the unlimited potential of this new imaginative realm. As a contemporary standing on the shoulders of Loewy and other designers, imagining the future as they did becomes more difficult. In a digital world where space and time are flattened, this explosion of information is rapidly accelerating change. An utter randomness emerges that is reflected in the aesthetic of our era—no longer envisioned through aerodynamics and chrome, this new future is instead glimpsed through absurdity. In a celebratory gesture, I create jewelry that reflects our strange times and imagines where we are headed. Through irony, illusion and a jumble of vastly different references, these playful objects mirror our increasingly multi-layered reality of interconnection, information overload, and contradiction.

Wearable art is an engaging, democratic format for these reflections of the present to unfold. When a sculpture is miniature and designed to live on the body, it becomes jewelry. Seduced by sparkle, material and other attributes, we invite these objects into our lives where they are celebrated and seen by others. Fascinated by this auto-dissemination inherent to jewelry, “small and shiny” has become my strategy for creating public art. I explore these gray areas between art and jewelry, blending the universal appeal of the shiny with the

open ended possibilities of art. For example, *Spyware Brooch* [p. 22-23] captures attention with a sparkling gemstone, mirrored surfaces and iridescent metals, but also hints toward surveillance with a smartphone camera fragment that reveals it's own jewel-like qualities. “If I wear a brooch on my body I am making a larger commitment to it than if I were to hang a painting in my home” writes Dutch art historian Liesbeth den Besten in her book *ON Jewellery* (61). At home on the body and activated by wearing, jewelry is uniquely personal, public and interactive.

In this crazy world of corporate entities, political soap operas and cartoon pop stars, reality is elusive and open for interpretation. Through trickery, illusions, and staging contradictions within objects, I articulate this confusion of modern life. In *Venus Charm Bracelet* [p. 30-31] vastly different references of time, scale and subject are blurred together in a flash of silver. Pairing symbols of gigantic objects like the planet Saturn with tiny puka shells, and ancient artifacts with pop emojis; frames of reference become distorted. Totally random, yet surprisingly cohesive, I search for moments of clarity among the chaos. For example, in the necklace *Party on a String* [p. 20] a rhythm of shape and color unites these disparate objects. Forced to exist side by side, familiar references like soda can tabs, coins and jewelry tropes are altered, creating a haze of memory that overlaps their individual boundaries. This juxtaposition of different realities can also be seen in Dutch jewelry designer Gijs Bakker's *Sportsfigures Series*, where newspaper photographs of athletes interact with gemstones to create a seamless merger of totally different realities (artist's website). Another jewelry ally, David Bielander explores similar phenomena. In his *Cardboard* series, precious metals are meticulously transformed to look like simple cardboard

cutouts, creating a disconnect between our visual expectations and the weight of the cold metal (designboom). I explore similar illusions of perceptual dissonance in my jewelry made from stretched coins. In the *Elastic Dollar Pendant* [p. 26], a silver dollar appears to be stretched like rubber by the heavy anchor attached to it. This perceived weight is also a deception, as the anchor is a hollow construction of thin sheet metal. In the brooch *Quarter Perspective* [p. 24-25], a quarter is stretched into an oval around four inches long resulting in the appearance of a much larger coin viewed from perspective. By recreating the beveled edge in titanium, which would also be prominent in this viewpoint, the illusion is further enhanced. I utilize these flattening techniques throughout much of my work not only as tricks of perception, but as references to our increasingly image based experiences.

Symbols are often lifted directly off the screen and translated into metal. As seen in the *Venus Charm Bracelet* and *Tab Necklace* [p. 27], emojis provide a bridge between the digital and the physical. Die-formed from two dimensional profiles, the shallow contours that define these shapes are precisely mapped with dark patinas to create a high contrast, graphic representation. *How to Make a Chain* [p. 38-39] is a more explicit blend between the real and the virtual. This necklace demonstrates how a popular Cuban link chain is made, through a combination of metal components and custom lenticular holograms which animate the progression of steps from raw wire to final product. *Trompe L'oeil Augmented Reality* [p. 36-37] is a brooch designed to look like a floating hologram. Through vibrant paint and precise construction, it appears to be digital, or Photoshopped at first glance. Inspired by the dystopian writings of authors Philip K. Dick and Neal Stephenson, this disturbing clash

of jewelry with science fiction anticipates with dark humor where technology could be headed.

These examples of irony and contradiction mentioned above, explored within the context of jewelry create many opportunities for laughter. Tapping into the transcendental power of humor can cast a wide net of attention and universal appeal—if the joke lands. Searching for these lighthearted entry points, I sample content from trash to treasure, creating unpretentious objects where everything is fair game. *Laughing Gas Necklace* [p. 42-43], made from recycled whippet canisters found littered throughout my college town, could not be more ridiculous. I explore humor directly in other pieces like *Self Assembling Chain* [p. 32-33] and *Bug Brooches* [p. 11], confident assertions that humor can also be taken seriously.

It's too easy to be an artist these days. That's what makes it difficult. With Adobe, Rhino and Safari, canvases can be painted, bronzes can be cast and all delivered via next day air with a few clicks and a credit card. Unusual materials are sourced instantly in the palm of my hand with Google shopping, often to my surprise available "nearby only" amidst the random isles of the suburban landscape. During a stroll through Lowe's searching for bimetallic strips found in thermostats, a display of bottle brushes jumped out like magic. Clouds of neon fiber burst from precise wire spirals, I had to figure out how to make this. "Thread is a man-made structure at the limit of our eyesight," describes material scientist Mark Miodownik in the insightful book, *Stuff Matters* (xv). It was this scale, multiplied by the tens of thousands of strands, which combined to create a haze of glowing, geometric information. Empowered by

YouTube's vast collection of *How it's Made* videos, I translated the industrial machinery into a craft analogue I could replicate at home. I forgot the thermostats, and instead left with parts to build a custom bottle brush machine. With the world's information now available in our pockets, the creative process has become hyper spontaneous, resulting in random outcomes that echo this compounding effect of technology. Tinkering with the bottle brush machine, I created *Fuzzy Necklace* [p. 13-15], a glowing soft jewelry cousin to the bottle brush and pipe cleaner. I celebrate these industrial manufacturing strategies whenever possible to anchor the work firmly within the present. Serial processes such as molds, die-forming and 3D printing not only streamline the process, but impart a sterile neutrality to the objects—erasing the evidence of my hand from their origins. Through industrial representation, I point to the collective, our technology, society and other large structures. I often go through great effort to allude to mass production, even if this is yet another illusion.

This collection of work presented in Jumble Gym is my attempt at articulating the present through the playful lens of contemporary jewelry. Random and agnostic, these objects mirror our multi-layered reality of ever increasing contradiction and complexity. Summarized beautifully by designers Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby in their book *Speculative Everything*, "from theme parks to soap operas to brands, whether we like it or not, we now live within a multitude of realities" (159). Sampling content from vastly different realities, the scope of this jewelry investigation is intentionally broad, encouraging unusual crossovers and unexpected outcomes. Totally random, yet surprisingly cohesive, these objects point to a world where everything is interconnected—and anything is possible.





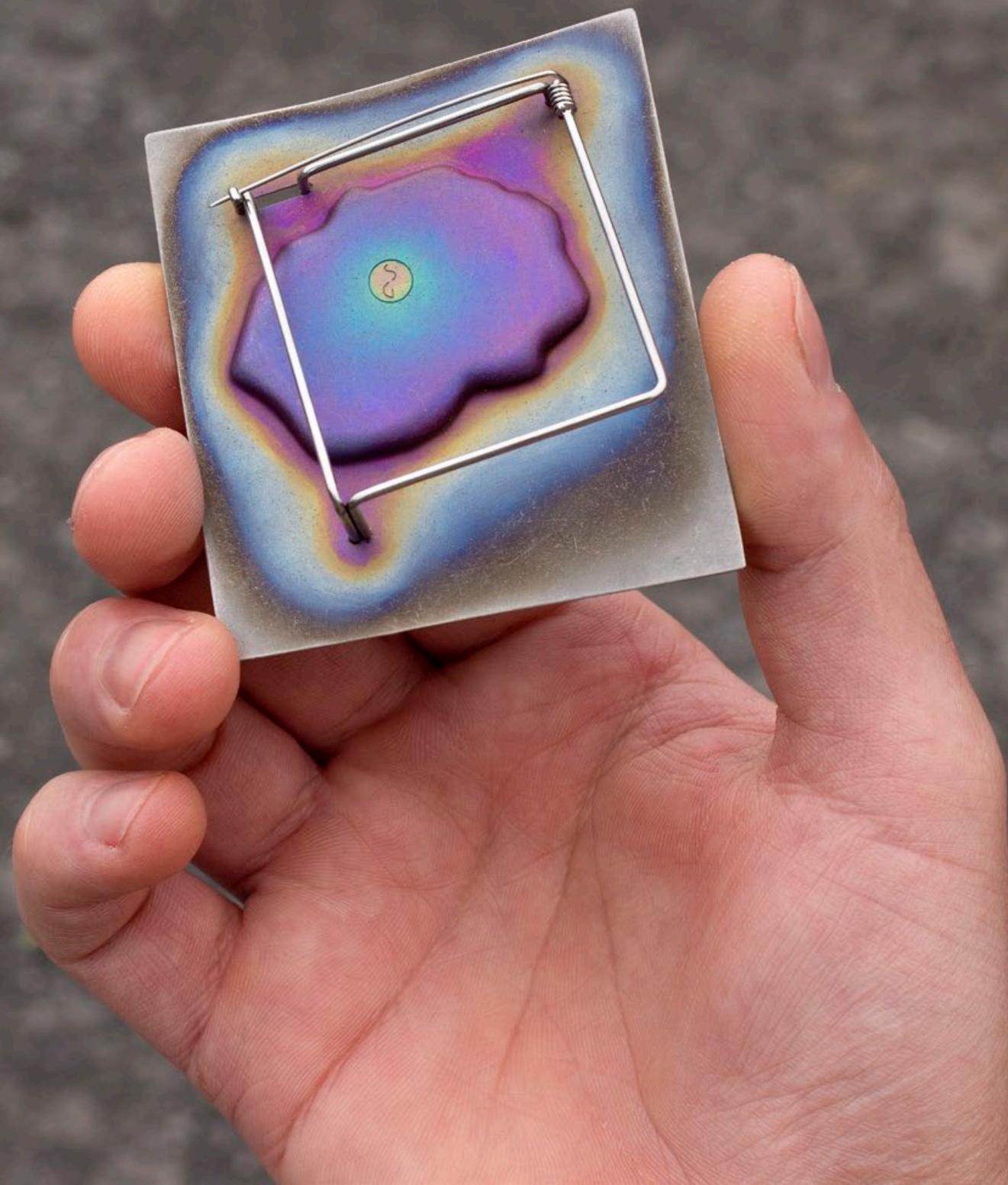




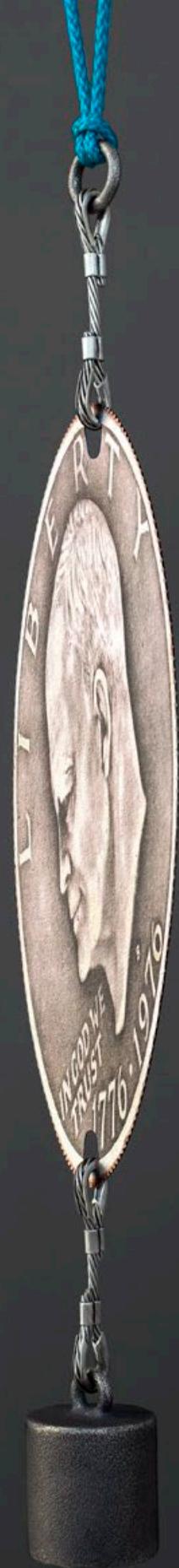












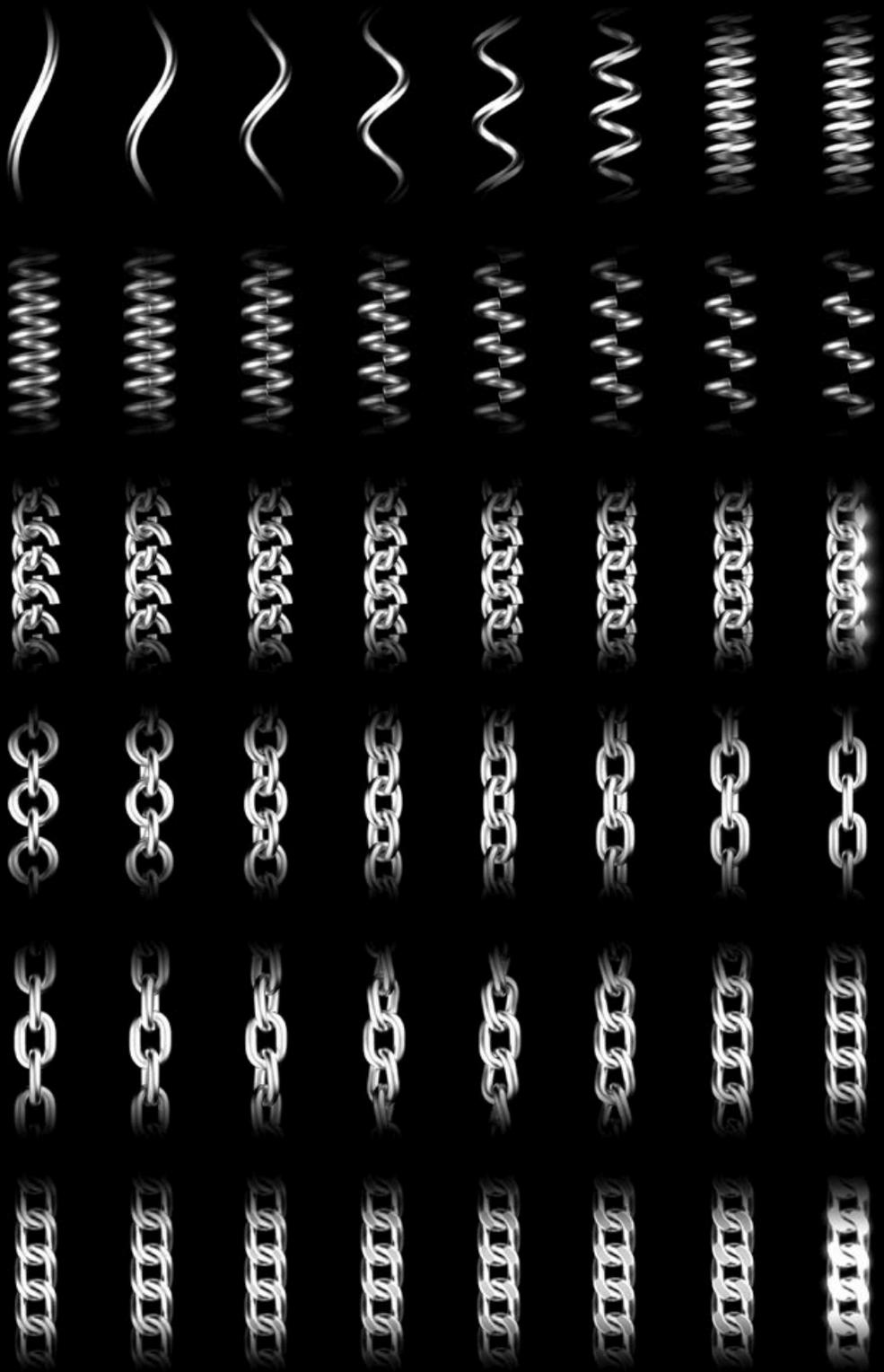


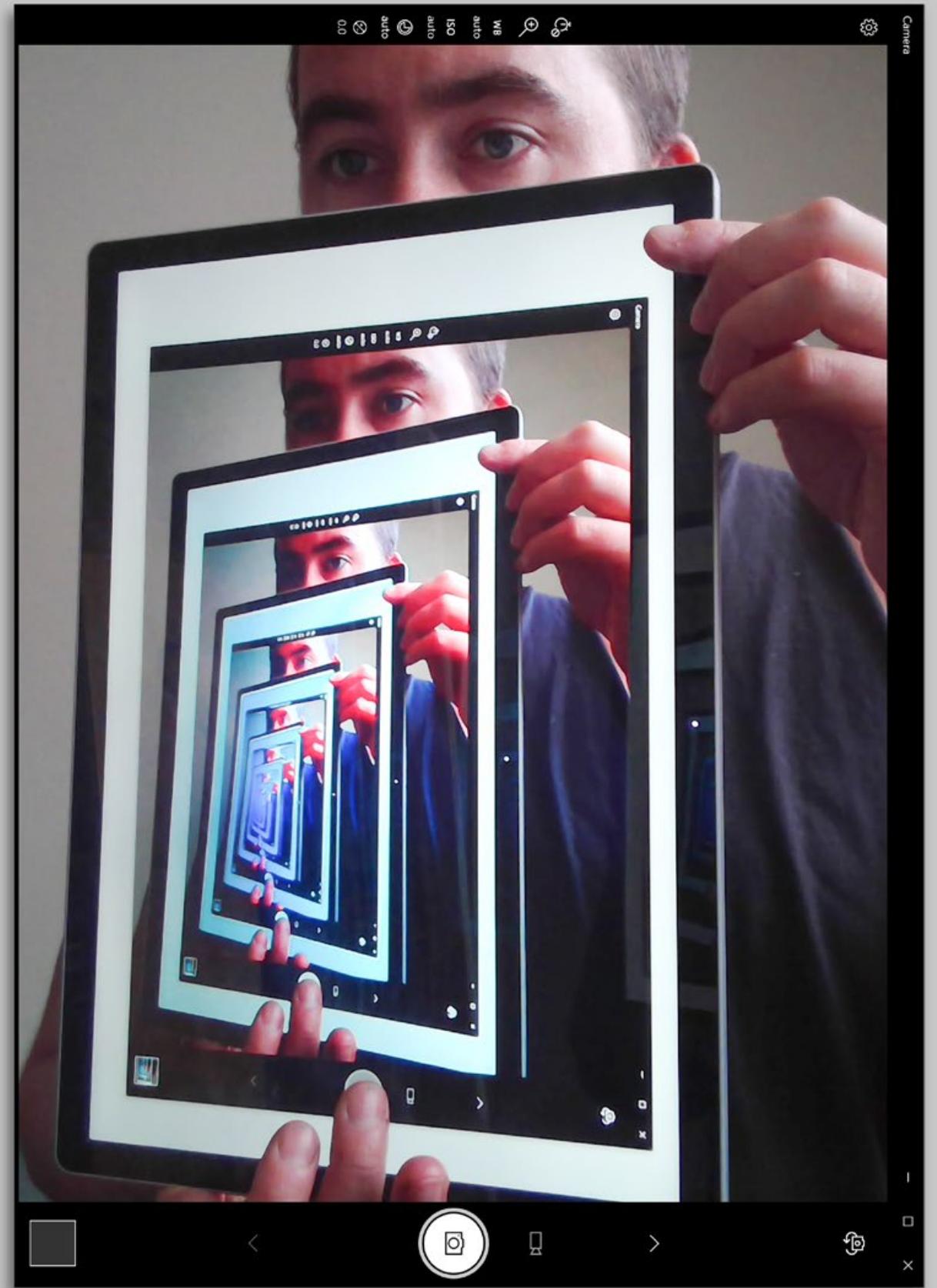










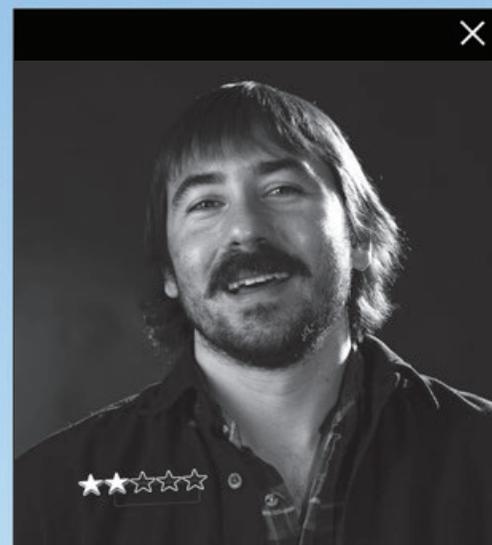






About Me

As an only child growing up in the Arizona desert, I found entertainment through my tinkering hands and curiosity. Fascinated with archaeology, I spent countless hours of playtime recreating ancient artifacts—then trying to convince everyone I found them in our backyard. From Egyptian Ushabtis to UFO debris, anomalous objects were discovered all around the Tucson suburbs! Fast forward to the thirty-something artist, not much has changed. I now make jewelry but still try to stage mystery and paradox within these small objects. Studying industrial design at RISD empowered my capabilities as a maker. A job designing bluetooth headsets in Silicon Valley led me to the field of wearable tech, where I worked for Google on future versions of Glass and other prototypes. Missing the open ended possibilities of art and the satisfaction of the handmade, a fall deep down the rabbit hole of making jewelry has brought me back to school. Graduating in 2020 with a master's degree in metalsmithing from SUNY New Paltz, after a lifetime of working with my hands—I have finally found my craft.



MFA 2020



Jumble Gym



Recycle Bin

Image List



p. 11
Bug Brooches
2019
Anodized titanium



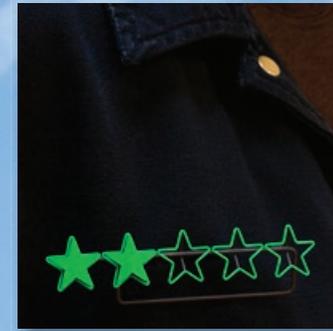
p. 13-15
Fuzzy Necklace
2020
Anodized titanium, synthetic fibers



p. 18
Psychedelic Grandma Brooch
2019
Anodized titanium, sterling silver



p. 20
Party on a String (necklace)
2020
Sterling silver, stainless steel, plastic, synthetic fibers, found objects



p. 36-37
Trompe L'oeil Augmented Reality (brooch)
2020
Stainless steel, paint



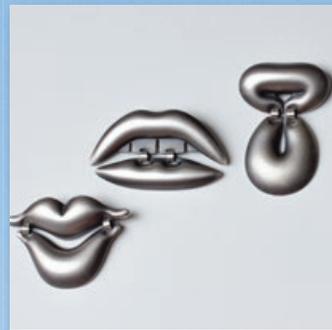
p. 38-39
How to Make a Chain
2019
Sterling silver, custom lenticular animation holograms



p. 40
Ear Earrings
2020
Sterling silver, stainless steel



p. 42-43
Laughing Gas Necklace
2019
Recycled nitrous oxide cannisters



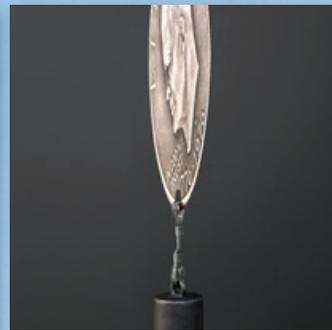
p. 21
Lip Brooches
2019
Sterling silver hollow-forms



p. 22-23
Spyware Brooch
2020
Anodized niobium, CZ, stainless steel, smartphone fragment



p. 24-25
Quarter Perspective (brooch)
2020
Stretched quarter, anodized titanium



p. 26
Elastic Dollar (pendant)
2020
Stretched dollar, sterling silver



p. 44
Chime Earrings
2019
Stainless steel, aluminium chimes



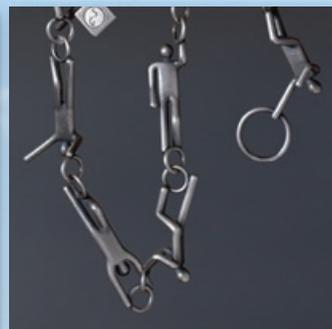
p. 45
Chime Bracelet
2019
Stainless steel, aluminium chimes



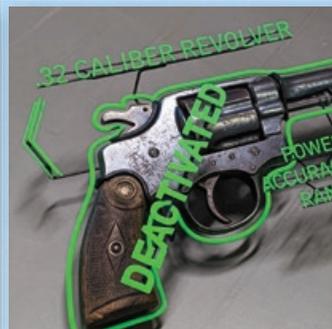
p. 27
Tab Necklace
2018
Sterling silver hollow-forms



p. 30-31
Venus Charm Bracelet
2019
Sterling silver hollow-forms



p. 32-33
Self Assembling Chain
2019
Sterling silver



p. 34-35
GAME OVER
2019
Deactivated revolver, stainless steel, paint

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Thank you for your interest!

