

SYLVIE HARRIS

2022 MFA PHOTOGRAPHY
THESIS EXHIBITION



DEPS ARTIST PROFILE SERIES

MAY 6-20, 2022

2022 MFA PHOTOGRAPHY THESIS EXHIBITION

The *2022 MFA Photography Thesis Exhibition* features the thesis works of the MFA candidates in Columbia College Chicago's Photography Department. This exhibition presents photographs, installation, and video works that are representative of the culmination of research and practice these emerging artists have maintained throughout their time in the program.

Participating photographers:

Jes Farnum

Sylvie Harris

Katharine Norton

Emilie Plunkett

Ziru Tang

Fengzhao Xu

Senjie Zhu

The *2022 Photography MFA Thesis Exhibition* is presented in conjunction with the Department of Exhibitions, Performance and Student Spaces (DEPS), and the Photography Department.

SYLVIE HARRIS

I often find pleasure in the tangible nature of work in the garden, laundry and making beds. I combine photographs with textile scraps to build repetitive patterns that reference the cyclical nature of domestic tasks and their endlessness. Many of the images depict hands performing the mundane work of folding and scrubbing, combined with items that function in the home. Alongside this beauty, lies resentment for a cultural assumption that these labors are mine to complete. The textile pieces suggest a celebration of domesticity, but the repetition, or presence of typically silenced topics such as menstruation, express the unease that I feel as I grapple with my appreciation of domesticity which may conflict with artistic pursuits. This work reveals the dynamic tension that I have experienced with other women in my family between the joys of work at home, and sacrifices to career ambitions. I consider what the cultural result of a reformation within these expectations would be, and how to encourage that possibility. This work is a space of reckoning for that potential change, and identifying what conversations need to be had to affect it.

Sylvie Harris is a Brooklyn and Chicago based artist whose work celebrates domesticity while also addressing the challenges of societal expectations within the patriarchy. Harris is also a Curatorial Assistant at the Museum of Contemporary Photography and the recipient of the 2021 Stuart Abelson Graduate Research Fellowship in Krakow, Poland.

Instagram: [@sylvie_harris](https://www.instagram.com/sylvie_harris)



Making the Bed (detail), 2021, sewn pigment prints on cotton percale



Making the Bed (detail), 2021, sewn pigment prints on cotton percale



Domestic Invisibility, 2022, sewn pigment prints on cotton percale with cotton sheet



Domestic Invisibility (detail), 2022, sewn pigment prints on cotton percale with cotton sheet



Domestic Invisibility (detail), 2022, sewn pigment prints on cotton percale with cotton sheet

INTERVIEW WITH SYLVIE HARRIS

Conducted by Kaylee Fowler

Kaylee Fowler: Your body of work deals with domesticity and the connotations that come with it, specifically towards women. How do you personally relate to this, and how is this relation incorporated into your work?

Sylvie Harris: My relationship with domesticity, especially as a woman, is complicated. My work serves as an outlet for me to navigate the tension that I experience between my appreciation of work done in the home, and the resentment that I feel towards the cultural expectation that the unpaid labor of domestic work is mine to complete, from a gendered standpoint. I'm inspired by my grandmother whose full time job was to be a mother and a housewife, but her hard work, thrift and talents with sewing and cooking went largely unappreciated because those tasks were expected of her. She was also unable to pursue a career using her skills in fashion and sewing because of her role in the home. I find beauty in the way that she performed working in the home, but I don't want that life for myself. As I plan to get married and find my own role as a partner and mother at some point, I consider what needs to change on a societal level for me, and other people experiencing that gendered expectation, to feel fulfilled artistically and for that to be valued on a larger scale.

KF: A lot of your work for this exhibition is installed on fabric; what is your interest in this material to show work, and how does it play with and subvert the concept of your work?

SH: I use materials that have a use in the domestic space, but employ them in ways that render the objects less functional. I'm interested in how using these materials in a different way can subvert expectations of how they're meant to be used, while not completely destroying them or suggesting

those references to domestic work are entirely negative. I combine these objects with printed photographs that suggest the repetitive actions associated with those textiles, or comparing them to other events that take place in the domestic space. I've always been very tactile and interested in sewing, so I'm excited that textiles have found their way into my practice.

KF: How does the dimension of your work change or play with its interpretation, if at all? I often think about how large scale work takes up so much space, and how that intersects with ideas of gendered expectations and the bodily experience, and wonder if you had any thoughts on that?

SH: I was a strictly two-dimensional artist for most of my career so far, so the transition into working in a different way has been exciting and challenging. I appreciate how larger scale work demands more attention, but I also include small images that force the viewer to still engage on an intimate level. I do think that the ideas that I'm expressing in my work about the invisibility of domestic labor need to take up more space in our conversation about intersectional feminism, and working on a larger scale is important to that narrative at the moment. I definitely see future pieces growing in size and being exhibited so that all sides of the work are visible, but I'm still figuring out how to work in a three-dimensional way!



THE DEPS ARTIST PROFILE SERIES

The DEPS Artist Profile Series presented by Columbia College Chicago's Department of Exhibitions, Performance and Student Spaces (DEPS), is a virtual publication on select artists involved with the DEPS Galleries and the Columbia College Chicago community. Our goal with this series is to connect artist and viewer on a deeper level, and to highlight the amazing works and thoughts of our featured artists through interviews, artist biographies, and catalogs of work. Art has always been a way to connect with others, no matter where one may physically be. We hope by presenting the creativity and insights of the people involved in the DEPS Artist Profile Series that viewers may have one more way to stay in touch with, and support the arts community. The DEPS Artist Profile Series is managed by Fine Arts major and DEPS Exhibitions Assistants Kaylee Fowler and Sierra Delamarter. Graphic design is managed by DEPS Exhibitions Assistant Gray Beyer. This program is partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council Agency.

Learn more at: colum.edu/deps

Contact information: Mark Porter, mporter@colum.edu / 312.369.6643

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