

# 2020 UNDERGRADUATE FINE ART THESIS EXHIBITION

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MADISON JULIANA  
ALEXANDER



*Self-Portrait, 2018, photograph*

## DEPS ARTIST PROFILE SERIES

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APRIL 2020 • SERIES 01 • VOLUME 18

# 2020 UNDERGRADUATE FINE ART THESIS EXHIBITION

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*The 2020 Undergraduate Fine Arts Thesis Exhibition* features the works of seven degree candidates in Columbia's Fine Arts program. The exhibition, which includes zines, prints, drawings, garments, and installation works represents the culmination of four years' worth of development of a cohesive body of work for each artist while earning their degrees. Originally taking place at [The Arcade](#), the physical exhibition has been moved to an online platform due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

This edition of the DEPS Artist Profile Series hopes to illuminate the works of these artists in a meaningful way, giving you the chance to connect with them and their work across boundaries.

**Participating Artists:** Madison Juliana Alexander, Andrew C.S, Simon Knuth/Psymon, Anthony Macias/Sancte Antoni, Mark Lexby, Jamie Nance, and Kristin Sherwin.

*The 2020 Undergraduate Fine Arts Thesis Exhibition* is presented in conjunction with the Art and Art History department and Adam Brooks, Professor at Columbia College Chicago.

# MADISON JULIANA ALEXANDER

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Madison Juliana Alexander's practice is about soul-searching. She works mainly through interactive art installations, performance, and media such as photography and video to document performances, especially those done in private. The finished product is always a mix of art objects, found materials, and interactive prompts that come together in a full sensory experience. Alexander's practice centers vulnerability, honesty, and finally catharsis for all because her belief that we all deserve the peace that comes from this kind of growth.

Alexander works with issues of visibility and finding catharsis using her own experience as a catalyst for conversation. Through installation, performance, and participatory prompts Alexander engages her audience physically with her work to allow them to feel connected to her and to be able to project their own personal experiences onto what she presents. She has found that when she shares her personal experiences, people feel empowered to share their own which is a step towards healing.

Alexander's model is deceptively simple; identify something that is hard to talk about and then talk about it. Up to this point her subject matter has come from a very personal place touching on anxieties over sex and sexuality, coming from extreme poverty, being raised by a single parent. Alexander states:

*I've always felt like I have the world on my shoulders and what helped me lessen that burden has been to talk about it – but that lesson didn't come easy. Now I want to extend that relief to others because I know I'm not the only one who feels that way.*

Madison Juliana Alexander is a multi-media experimental artist from Chicago. In 2018 she began work on the *Cabinet of Curiosities* project where she explores the spaces that encase trauma, and the debris left behind. Recently Alexander performed a continuation of this project, *Residual Ritual*, at Dfbrl8r gallery early in 2020. Her current works deal with celebrating pleasure and the things that keep us going through trauma.

For more information about Madison Juliana Alexander:  
[madisonjulianaalexander.com](http://madisonjulianaalexander.com)



*The Little Death*, 2020, performance, photograph





*Residual Ritual*, 2020, live performance



*Cult of the Porn Goddess*, 2019, live performance, installation





*Self-Portrait*, 2018, photograph



*Venus, Artist, Whore*, 2018, performance, photograph



# INTERVIEW WITH MADISON JULIANA ALEXANDER

Conducted by Kaylee Fowler

**Kaylee Fowler:** As much of your work is based out of your own experiences, how much personification or creation of an alter-ego happens in your work? Thinking of your installation *Cult of the Porn Goddess* or *Venus, Artist, Whore*, are these meant to be partial depictions of you or fabricated characters?

**Madison Juliana Alexander:** Part of myself is definitely in all of my works. I choose the topics that I work with based on sources of my own insecurity or anxiety. In the *Cult of the Porn Goddess* I created the Porn Goddess to be a deity, and I became the High Priestess in the *Cult of the Porn Goddess*. My role was to facilitate the meditation and reflection in the environment I created so that myself and those visiting the shrine would be able to meditate about sex and sexuality. On the other hand, with *Venus, Artist, Whore*, I was representing the tropes of women in art history from the male perspective due to my own anxieties about being pigeon-holed as a "female artist" rather than an artist; especially because I choose to use my own body in my work, I am at the same time the *Venus, the Artist, and the Whore*. These are more like roles I fill rather than fictional characters.

**KF:** Catharsis is often a motivating factor for an artist to create, but with your work you want to provide catharsis for the viewer as well. What are the ways you've found to best connect with and provide this for the viewer?

**MA:** Many times, all it takes is for me to share my personal trauma and experiences for people to come forward and share their experiences with me. I find getting all the hardship off my chest lessens my burden and makes it easier to cope, so I try to extend this release to my audience. I would feel a bit selfish just saying that my art is my own personal therapy and only getting that release myself. The first instance of this that really stuck with me was when I shared a piece about my father who was a child molester; after sharing my project multiple people came up to me and shared their own experiences and I was honored to be entrusted with their stories. From there I started the *Give Me Your Anxiety* project where I asked people to give me objects that they associate with a traumatic or hard time, and then displayed these objects among my own. The reciprocity and participation is so important to me.

**KF:** In the process of creating art with the intention to give some catharsis to the viewer, has this act of talking about difficult things and taking on the anxiety of others ever gotten in the way of your own catharsis? How do you take care in ensuring that by lessening the burden for others, you are not increasing the burden for yourself?

**MA:** Throughout my life I have been approached by people who have borne their souls to me. I can remember numerous instances from grade school to the present where I have gotten talking to someone I don't know very well and ended up with them telling me something that was troubling them or causing them pain in their life. I don't mind being an ear to these people because I have had to be vulnerable to people as well. It's harder to be the vulnerable one than it is to be the listener, so I do both. I tell my story which does two things: one, it acts as my own sort of therapy, and two it encourages others to do the same. I want to lead by example because I truly believe that if we all share our stories people will start to realize that others have been through what they are going through, and shows that people have been through things you can't even imagine. I think it causes empathy, it shows resilience, and it feeds into a cycle of healing.

**KF:** What is it about working with multiple medias that you have found to be best to convey an idea or experience?

**MA:** Growing up I remember meticulously decorating my room. My mom let me paint the walls, paint the ceiling, hang posters, whatever I wanted really. I would rearrange things often and I think this is what got me thinking about space, objects, and images as three things that I work well with in tandem. I also think of art as a holistic experience. I usually have a concept and then want to find the best way to possibly convey that idea and that often comes using multiple different medias and putting things together in unconventional ways. Also, I just love art supplies. I'm someone who likes to experiment and though I have things that I consistently go back to, I like to branch out because sometimes trying something new gives you the unexpected edge or the quality you are looking for, or a specific medium has meaning that I want to imbed in my work, it varies piece to piece and I like to be kept on my toes.

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**KF:** How are you still remaining engaged in these kinds of conversations in quarantine? And are there experiences you've seen during this period of isolation that will inform your work going forward?

**MA:** I am trying to stay busy and occupied. This time has given me space to go back to painting which I enjoy but often don't have time for. I also have been engaging in "craft" particularly crocheting. There's a lot of repetition showing up which I think reflects the monotony of quarantine life. One unexpected consequence of all this is, because I am even more limited than I ever have been because of lack of space and resources, I have been coming up with creative ways to work and have engaged with more mundane materials in an artistic way. I have been working on a series of "quarantine performances" using just sticky notes and sharpie markers, two things that one can easily find around the house. I'm enjoying this exploration of repetition as a representation for monotony and my feeling of claustrophobia and think this time is helping me understand my own "art language" better.

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# DEPS ARTIST PROFILE SERIES



*The Little Death*, 2020, performance, photograph

**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 Assistant Kaylee Fowler. Design, animation and illustration by Graphic Design major and DEPS Exhibitions Assistant Gianella Goan.

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