

MARY GRING

2020 ART & ART HISTORY
MFA THESIS EXHIBITION



Video still from *Disintegration/The Cure*, 2020

DEPS ARTIST PROFILE SERIES

MAY 2020 • SERIES 01 • VOLUME 29

2020 ART & ART HISTORY MFA THESIS EXHIBITION

The *2020 Art and Art History MFA Thesis Exhibition* features the works of MFA candidates in Columbia's Interdisciplinary Arts and Media and Interdisciplinary Book and Paper Arts programs. The exhibition, which includes artists' books, prints, drawings, textiles, sculptures, photography, sound, projections, and installation works, represents the culmination of three plus years' worth of development of a cohesive body of work for each artist. This exhibition, taking place at the Glass Curtain Gallery has been postponed to a later date due to the COVID-19 outbreak. This edition of the DEPS Artist Profile Series intends to give you an in-depth look at the work to come as well as a deep glimpse into the artists process.

Participating Artists: Julia Arredondo, Mary Gring, Rebecca Grace Hill, Selena Ingram, Maria VanDyken Li, Skye Murie, and Andrew Shoemaker

The *2020 Art and Art History MFA Thesis Exhibition* is presented in conjunction with the Art and Art History department and Paul Catanese, Director of Graduate Studies for Art & Art History and Professor at Columbia College Chicago.

DISINTEGRATION/ THE CURE

Mary Gring's practice is particularly influenced by personal and everyday experience with mental illness and the resources and safety needed to simply exist. Through a willful repetition of actions, text, mark-making, and audio, Gring attempts to regain some control over her illness and reach a place of radical self-acceptance. Her performances, videos, sculptures, and installations serve as a way of re-establishing boundaries for my own personal artmaking and art world. Describing her MFA Thesis Installation, Gring states:

Disintegration/The Cure is an immersive, multimedia installation that encourages healing and acceptance through creative self-care. Inspired by problematic, high-stakes performance art and my personal experience with mental illness and physical disability, Disintegration/The Cure subverts my compulsive behaviors through fixed, methodical artmaking processes. In this project, I film myself taking a shower—a mundane action performed obsessively—by encasing an endoscopic camera within a bar of soap. Separately, materials such as dye, mica, and glitter are used to make two thousand bars of soap. The video performance and accumulation of soap bars are brought together through projection and a scented sculptural installation that invites viewers to confront the intimate, honest realities of illness, coping, and physicality in a way that could seemingly swallow them whole.

Mary Gring is an artist and educator based in Chicago who combines performance, video, projection and sculpture to create immersive multimedia installations about health, illness, and self-care. Originally from South Bend, Indiana, Mary studied fine art and sociology at Saint Mary's College before pursuing an Interdisciplinary Art and Media MFA from Columbia College Chicago. Gring is a recipient of the 2020 Albert P. Weisman Award and has exhibited her work throughout the Midwest.

For more information on Mary Gring:

www.marygring.com



Soap from *Disintegration/The Cure*, 2020



Soap from *Disintegration/The Cure*, 2020



Photo documentation of soapmaking process



Photo documentation of soapmaking process

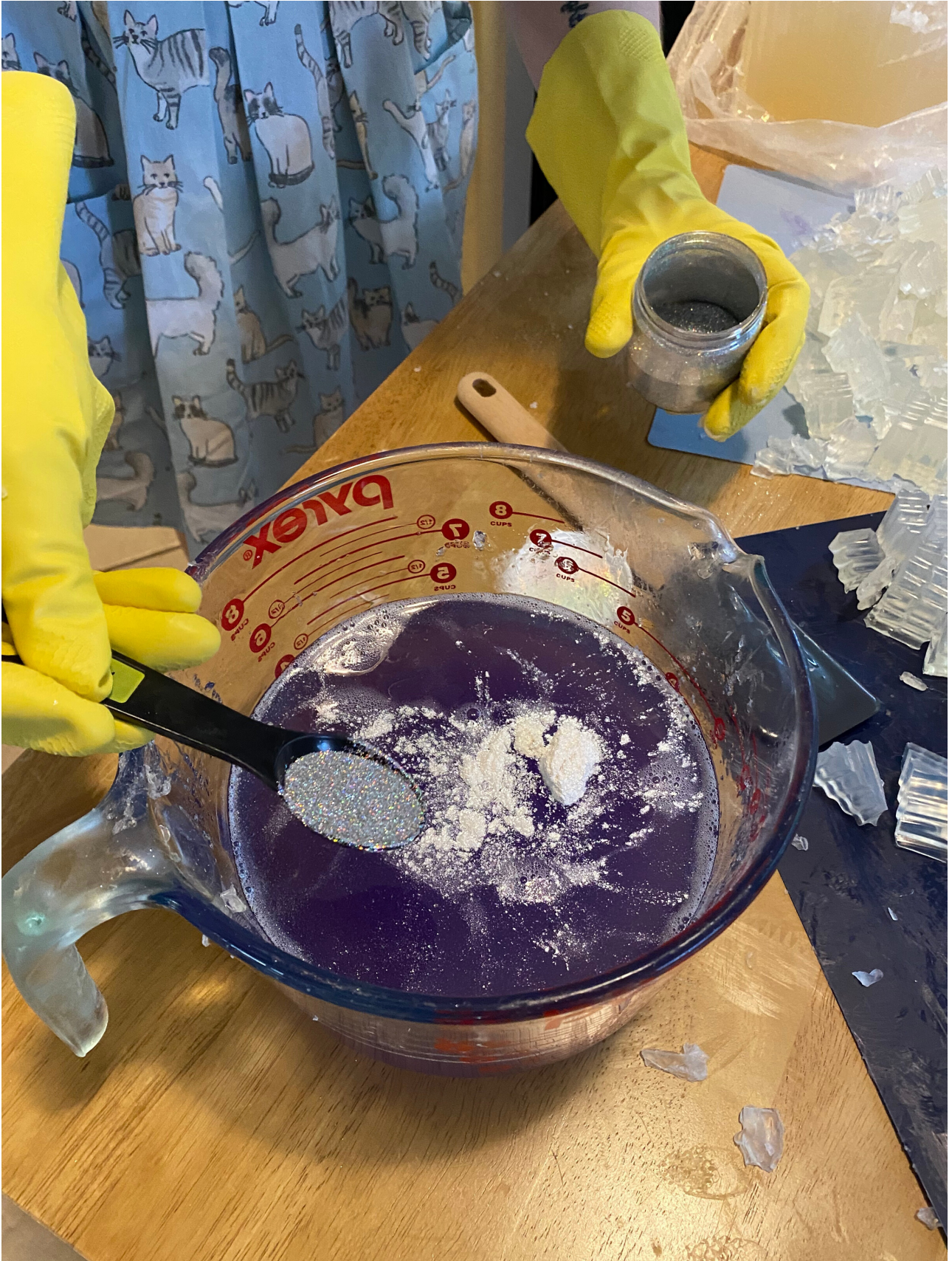


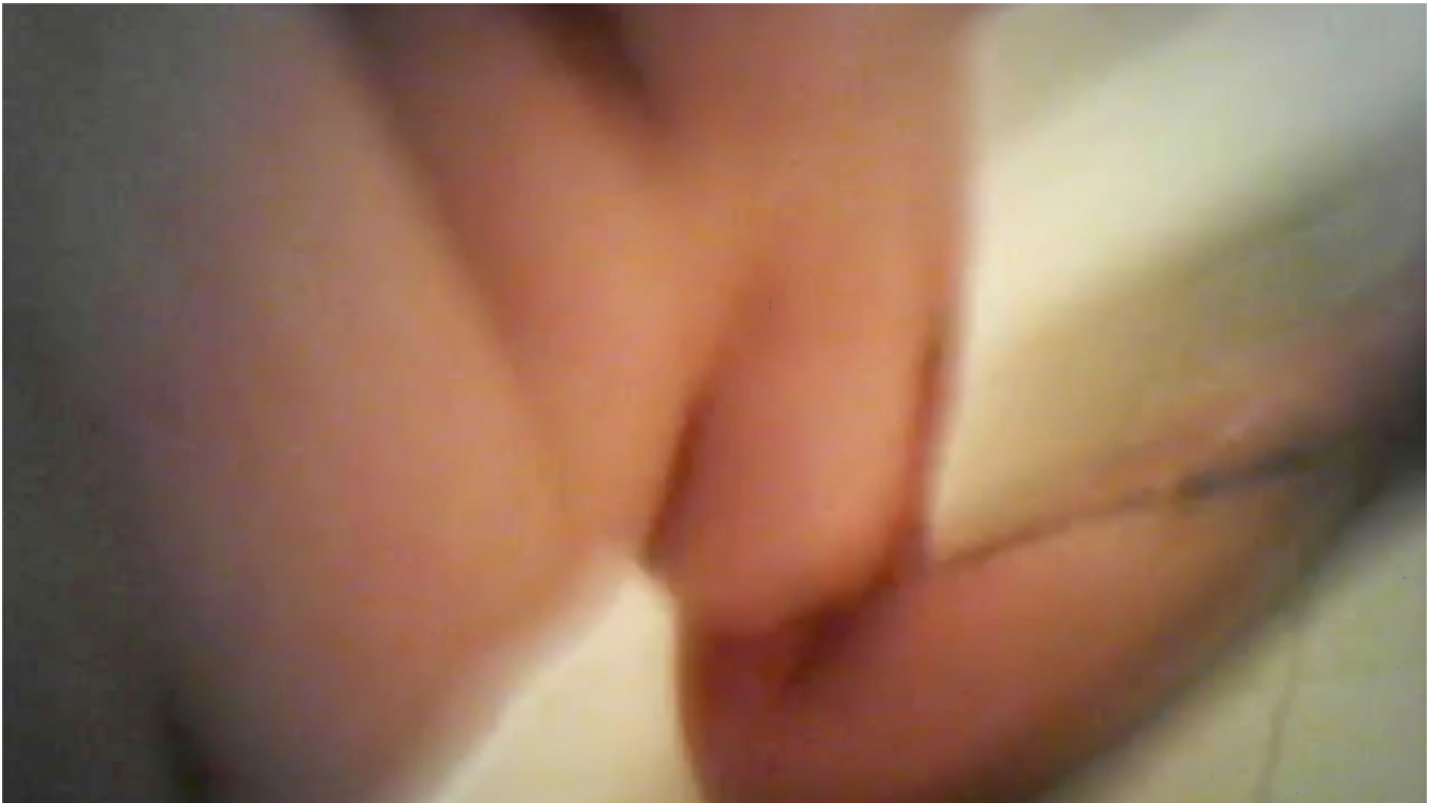
Photo documentation of soapmaking process



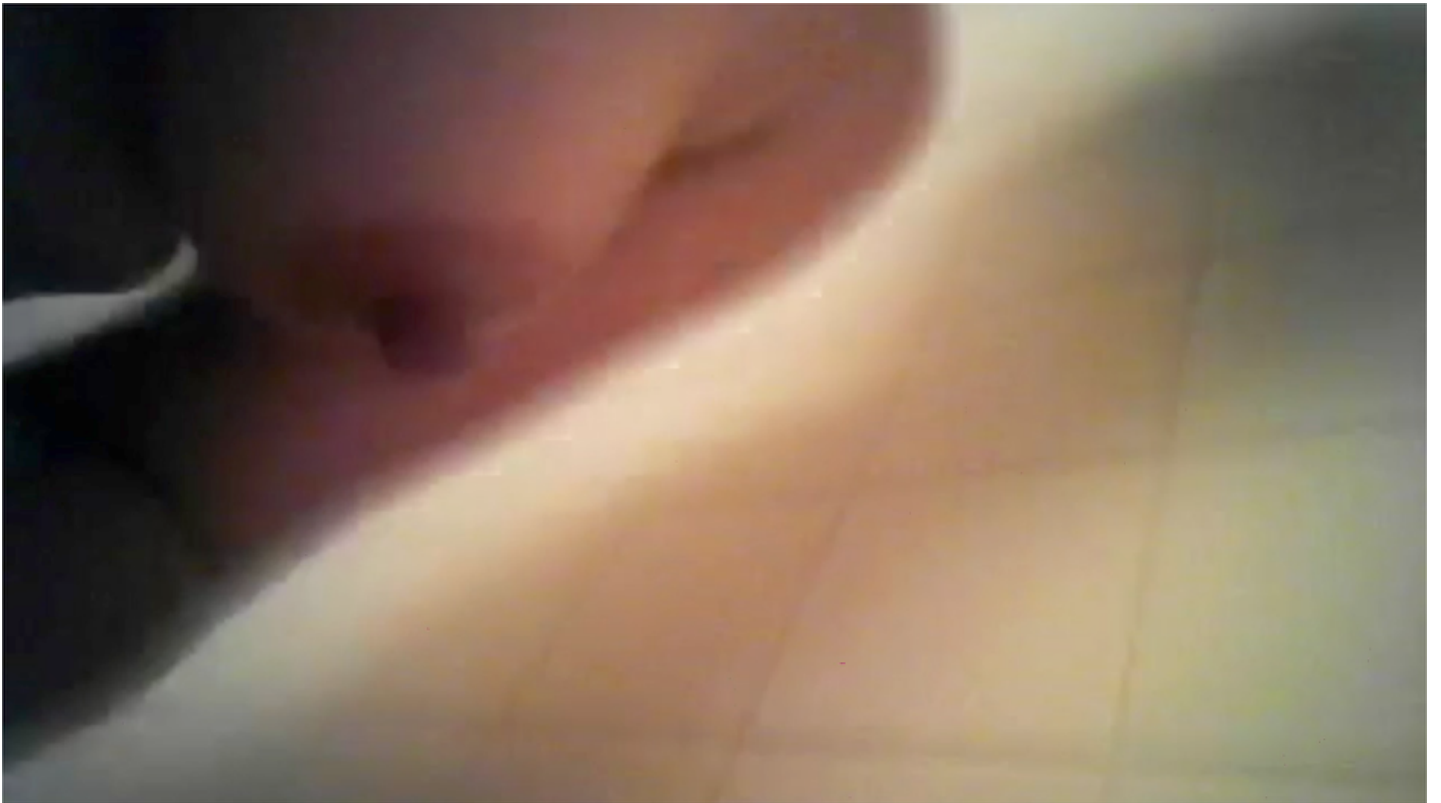
Photo documentation of soapmaking process



Video still from *Disintegration/The Cure*, 2020



Video still from *Disintegration/The Cure*, 2020



Video still from *Disintegration/The Cure*, 2020



Mary Gring making soap on Instagram Live for *COVIDTV*, a quarantine-inspired makers channel started by Julia Arredondo

INTERVIEW WITH MARY GRING

Conducted by Kaylee Fowler

Kaylee Fowler: Why did you choose soap to use as a repetitive object in this project?

Mary Gring: My thesis project and art practice are primarily influenced by my personal and everyday experience with mental illness. A few years ago, I was diagnosed with anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorder, two diseases that feel constant and all-consuming. Mental illness manifests itself in a variety of ways and demands different treatments or needs; I have been prescribed both medication and weekly therapy to better manage my symptoms. These symptoms were made worse after a car accident in April of 2016 left me with six broken ribs, a broken tailbone, shattered pelvis, skull fracture, and severe concussion. As a result, I was confined to a bed or wheelchair for four months before graduating to a walker and finally to a cane. Though I am able to walk unassisted now, I still deal with the mental and physical consequences of such traumas and diagnoses. I am especially concerned with and aware of the resources and safety needed to simply exist and operate in my daily life.

In regard to my art practice, I am interested in how these illnesses control my mind and body and force me to perform in obsessive or destructive ways. In working on *Disintegration/The Cure*, I knew that I wanted to supplement the performance and subsequent video projection of taking a shower with a sculptural collection of something. Like artists Ann Hamilton, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, or Rashid Johnson, I am interested in having physical, sculptural evidence of a durational performance or act of labor. Furthermore, I wanted to engage in a making process that felt methodical or meditative rather than harmful or destructive. I examined and researched numerous materials and objects of significance to me, considering how each might look and function within the context of my installation. Ultimately, it made perfect sense to handmade my own bars of soap.

KF: Had you done soapmaking before this project?

MG: I had never made soap before working on *Disintegration/The Cure*. Soapmaking can be done using a variety of methods and materials, but I used a simple melt-and-pour process to make my own bars of soap; I take premade soap base, chop it up, melt it down and pour it into molds. This process also allowed me to include materials such as mica, glitter, eucalyptus, spearmint and dye in my soap.

KF: What kind of relationship or dynamic are you hoping to establish with the viewers by filming this project from the perspective of inside the soap emerging out?

MG: By filming myself taking a shower with a camera encased in soap, viewers are actively invited to witness a universal yet intimate ritual. Rather than passively observing my body and performance from a distance, viewers actually take the place of the soap itself. Formally speaking, filming in this way allowed me to better play with the light and color of the bathroom and further abstract the video.

KF: You stated that your piece *Disintegration/The Cure* is inspired by high-stakes, problematic performance art; can you elaborate on some of the problems in performance art that inspired this project?

MG: There are a number of performance artists who have pushed their minds, bodies and viewers to extremes, even to the point of harm. Artists like Marina Abramović, Chris Burden, Wafaa Bilal, and LA Raeven have all engaged in what I would consider to be problematic performances that include willfully falling unconscious, getting shot, refusing to consume food, and implanting a camera into their head. While these performances were conceptually driven and perhaps well-intentioned, I find harming oneself for the sake of art to be inherently privileged and ableist. Furthermore, I think many of these performances manipulate viewers by creating dangerous situations and demanding intervention.

I acknowledge that what is harmful to one individual may not be harmful to another; harm and pain are difficult to measure or quantify. While I do not intend to establish any general rules or boundaries, I want other artmakers to familiarize themselves with such work and consider a safer, more ethical way of artmaking in the future.

KF: What sort of changes do you think need to be made to the mentality of performance art in order to foster more inclusion and room for self-care?

MG: I have been in precarious positions because of my physical and mental histories, and I would not willingly put myself in those positions again, especially for art. In *Enabling Art: Self-Harm in the Work and Reception of L.A. Raeven* (2014), author and art historian Ana Finel Honigman states:

"The danger of encouraging artists to connect self-abuse to their intellectual output is creating the illusion that creativity demands physical, even mortal, sacrifice." When we expect artists to sacrifice so much for the sake of art, there are a few outcomes: We create less constructive, empathetic artwork, we further ignore the needs of already vulnerable and marginalized artists, and we are complicit in a culture that already exploits our labor and humanity. I argue that we do not need to self-harm for the sake of art; we suffer enough already in our everyday lives. Instead, I suggest that using art as a means to bring about healing and acceptance is far more necessary and transformative. Ultimately, it is those within the art world who are best suited to change it, and change starts when we learn to care for and respect the needs of ourselves and others.

KF: Since your work places importance on the repetition of action, how do you determine the duration of a performance? How often do you repeat a performance, or film multiple takes of a performance?

MG: Though my work stresses the importance of repetition, I perform alone. I do not consider the duration of my performances to be especially significant because viewers do not see them live but rather through video documentation. That said, my performances usually take many hours to film and edit; I perform until I have enough material with which to work. I have a personal rule that my videos are non-linear and last between three to five minutes; narratives require full attention from start to finish and people are impatient. I want viewers to watch my video or navigate my installation for any length of time and still have a sensuous, embodied experience.

KF: Where did the audio element in *Disintegration/The Cure* come from, and what choices did you make to end up with that particular sound?

MG: The audio that accompanies the *Disintegration/The Cure* video is a manipulated version of *Plainsong* by The Cure, the opening track on their 1989 album *Disintegration*, from which the thesis gets its name. The audio is ambient and atmospheric, further emphasizing the escapist and psychedelic nature of the video. I also just love The Cure.

KF: What do you think you will take from this project into future works of yours?

MG: I see myself making soap long after this project is completed, and I know that I will continue documenting various performances and rituals of mine. Overall, *Disintegration/The Cure* has allowed me to better understand and prioritize my health and safety in artmaking and my day-to-day life.

DEPS ARTIST PROFILE SERIES



Soap from *Disintegration/The Cure*, 2020

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.

For more information, please contact Mark Porter, mporter@colum.edu / 312.369.6643
<https://students/colum.edu/deps>

Glass Curtain Gallery: 1104 S Wabash Ave, First Floor, Chicago, IL 60605

Follow us on [Instagram!](#)
Like us on [Facebook!](#)

[#ColumbiaDEPS](#)
[#columbiacollegeconnected](#)
[#Manifestrises](#)