

*Marilyn Boatwright (BFA '20) is an artist originally from Tampa, FL now living and attending college in Boston, MA. Currently, Marilyn is completing their final semester as a senior in the photography department. Their work focuses on how photography can be used as a way to process memory, identity, and relationships.*

*Anika Am (AA): What was your first moment with photography that felt significant, and made you want to study it? Is there an image that goes with this moment?*

Marilyn Boatwright (MB): I used to just take pictures around my neighborhood in middle school. I did not think about photography as an art form until I decided I wanted to apply to go to magnet highschool instead of going to my local highschool. My mom helped me sneak into a construction site to take some photos then I added them to my portfolio thinking less than nothing about them. When I was interviewing with my portfolio the photo teacher, Linda Galgani, zipped right past everything else, held up the two walgreens 5x7 prints of concrete barriers with overgrown weeds and went, "these are really good you have an eye for this". I've been chasing that high ever since.

*AA: What is the title of the current work you have been making, and what is it that you wish to express with it?*

MB: My thesis is called "they get it honest". It's a shorthand of "to come by it honestly", it is another way to say "the apple doesn't fall far from the tree". My granny tells me all the time when I'm being stubborn like my father, I "get it honest".

I interpret this title to be talking about what I got from my parents and what I am doing with it. My complex experience with my parents is not isolated, even within my family. The cycles of abuse and mental illness are passed down and the inability to recognize these cycles perpetuates these problems. Therapy gives me the space to recognize what the patterns of behaviour that I experienced were and allow me to grieve. Therapy also shows me that I continue these behaviours in my own ways and that I subconsciously place myself into similar positions as when I was a child. I get all of this honest, but I also am digging into what it means to face that directly and choose to grow out of it instead.

In general I think the audience can understand from "they get it honest" some form of southern idiom and a discussion about what truth is if they're not familiar with the phrase. I like the idea that some people will get it instantly and some people won't.

*AA: What encouraged you to experiment with so many different mediums, and how was it like intertwining them together?*

MB: I work with my hands to really feel like I've made something instead of just capturing a moment. When I was working on my thesis work, I was looking back at my personal artist history, and wanted to be able to bring in elements of mediums and techniques that I hadn't used in a while. I probably tried 20 different things and maybe 4 of them went into the thesis.

I learned cyanotype in highschool and was just messing around with it at first until I realized it would be really interesting to cyanotype the things my parents and grandparents have given me and ended up making them into a directory of information about these people in my thesis.

I also shot 35mm B&W in highschool so I took out my old camera but I only had color film to shoot with. This ended up being a good problem to have since my work is intensely colorful.

The best was being able to install for reviews in December, being able to present the whole part of a project as one piece was really exciting. I'm really confident in my ability to make visual patterns and connections so I knew if I just made enough stuff I would be able to start piecing together patterns. Being encouraged to experiment with every aspect of photography; scale, medium, paper, everything allowed me to really embrace creating one large installation instead of separate images that are sequenced in a line. David Hilliard saying "this is really good you should be proud" ? euphoria

*AA: Who are three of your photo heroes, and why?*

MB: Robert Mapplethorpe - My highschool teacher would do 10m bellwork on artists and for Mapplethorpe she would have to censor google images, which means I went home and looked him up. In highschool I really enjoyed the way he was able to hit emotional tenors with singular images but as an adult I know that I was magnetically attracted to queer people and how they see the world. Now, I really admire his tenacity to make work and being able to put himself out there into the art world and build a career for himself in such a short time. I also now know about him being a Big Racist and Not Great Guy so the rose tinted glasses are off.

Catherine Opie - I didn't know lesbians made art about being lesbians until my college professor showed us Opie's work at Allegheny. I had to go to the bathroom and cry about it during the lecture. I really admire Opie's ability to make all kinds of work, from the Dyke Deck to her landscape work, she pursues every possible idea and does it all so well. I also enjoy that Catherine Opie is an archivist and historian of Mapplethorpe's work and like listening to how she talks about him and how he changed the art world and influenced her as an artist.

Claude Cahun - Finding Cahun (and Marcel Moore) was awesome and I really needed to find them when I did during college. All of the themes I was thinking about, from gender to religion to politics, they were thinking about and creating these dadaist imagery surrounding it. I love playing with self image in photography. I love seeing an artist making these images at a time in history where people would tell me artists like that didn't exist.

*AA: What is one image you've made more recently that you feel strongly articulates the theme you are expressing in your work?*

MB: Honestly, I've very much moved on from working on this project in this form for now.

The most recent image where I think nailed it was the family portrait in the boat house. I thought about how to take it for a couple days and when everyone was sitting in that half of the boat I asked if they'd let me take a picture. Getting to direct my family and have them listen and cooperate was really nice and they enjoy being able to share in some part of my work and process.

The image itself is super packed and very confusing but it has everyone in it. I think it accomplishes a tense feeling and communicates the distance between me and my family. I was

able to use the space to make the composition really complex so that it is almost jarring to the viewer to figure out where everyone is and how it's taken.

I don't take images of my family that paint them in as horrible people. They're people I have a complex and tense relationship with, and I think this family portrait gets that across without giving you too much. I think that's why I don't like to lead with talking about the harder problems my family is dealing with; they're just as confused and complex as I am and deserve to be seen that way in photos.

*AA: What themes do you find yourself exploring often in your work?*

MB: Mainly gender and sexuality, it really fucks me up that people imply how they should treat me and how I should act by what they guess my genitals were when I was born. It fucks me up even more that I fell for it to be safe, and now have to spend my entire 20s unlearning all that too, so I make a lot of art about it.

I also often make work about mental illness. I have struggled a lot with mental illness but have also been able to recover a lot from the damage. I think being able to not only talk about mental illness but be able to say "it gets better, i'm still here" is really important.

*AA: What are some things that you have been meaning to explore but haven't gotten to yet? Physically- medium wise, or conceptually?*

MB: I would love to be able to do polaroids, all the different types of polaroids.

Now that I've got my intimate fears of talking about these topics in photography out of the way, I would like to use art to talk more about the things I worry about in the world around me. I think the catharsis of making the work and having people understand it and see it has given me some space to feel comfortable talking about the wider world in my art. I feel like people want to hear what I have to say.

*AA: How has your work changed from while in your Florida to being in Massachusetts? Or has it not influenced it all too much?*

MB: In Florida, my photo work was individual image by individual image, I wasn't thinking about photography as a conversation. My final project for high school was black and white nude portraits of my friends that I took in the closet of the darkroom, despite my teacher asking me to stop and change it a million times. The focus was on composition, lighting, and tones and they are still gorgeous images. Absolutely no higher thinking going on in those images though, besides unrecognized lesbian yerning. I really didn't think of photography as a device to tell stories and communicate ideas until college.

For my studio art capstone at Allegheny, my professor was at a wits end with me the entire time because I did not know how to make a project. It was a month before the final exhibition before I just took pictures that I had made of myself and my friends and started smearing makeup and glitter on them then giving them divisive titles relating to gender dysphoria and mental illness. I ended up with five 20x24 images that I used as a jumping off point to hold my classmates and my professors' accountable for their inability to use my

pronouns and create space for me to talk about what I was experiencing. It got a lot of praise at the exhibition which made me realize that the art I make matters and people like to hear how I feel which was a game changer.

MassArt was the first time I felt that I had resources to talk about ideas in depth with people who were equally excited about them. The ability to be surrounded by people who did the work, and went above and beyond their own expectations is a wonderful place to learn how to be an artist. Without the incredibly smart and overwhelmingly supportive staff, I would have never made it this far and made work as in depth and complex. Without the peers in the department to share their own perspectives, I would never have had half of the good ideas I had for this project.

*AA: Outside photography, who/what are your influences?*

MB: I am influenced by the way everything is connected  
by leslie feinberg and andrea long chu and alison bechdel

By finishing people's unfinished sentences

Im influenced by the desire to create in order to push away existential dread  
catherine opie, collier Schorr, elle perez, and my peers