Dear Bees, I love you.

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DEAR BEES, I LOVE YOU.

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Honors in the Art, Studio

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All requirements for graduation with Honors in the Art, Studio have been completed.

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This honors thesis is available at Iowa Research Online: https://ir.uiowa.edu/honors_theses/
“Dear Bees, I love you.” is a project about honey bees and our interactions with them as our weird, wild pets and as part of our food system. The goal is to learn the science of the hive and convince myself that as a beekeeper, I am the boss of the bees. I also wish to learn how beekeeping fits into the realm of sustainable agriculture and the environment. Most importantly, I am curious about our relationship with the bees and why society is still intrigued by them.

For the fall semester, I have been working as an assistant to a local beekeeper helping harvest and extract honey. The job has been an education in physical labor, bee behavior, and a balance between art and science. I spent time watching bees do their own bee things and asking my bee boss questions. Meeting with a biology professor who researches wild bees, reading hobbyist and professional bee forums, and historical references also helped inform my research about beekeeping and the place of bees in our culture. Constructing a langstroth hive and installing my own hand made stationary (with written notes) inside of the hive, allowed me to experiment with the bee keeping process in an artistic way.

I built a real beehive (according to industry standard measurements) and installed speakers with live bee recordings to bring the calmness of how it feels to work with bees into the gallery space. Adding a crockpot full of raw wax provided an element of scent to the piece. Through the building process, I learned how to make box joints with a router and jig. I also learned how to use a Tascam and audacity software to sample live sound and manipulate them to produce the effect of a hive. By inserting paper notes into the hive and only removing them after a full month had passed, I managed to get the bees to exhibit their ultra-hygienic practices in the form of wax, propolis, and chewing. The note writing was the most loving human gesture I had to offer, and also the most futile. It was an exercise in appreciation and an attempt to understand another species. The bees responded with their most characteristic bee response. Together, these two actions resulted in a cross-species art project for the sake of appreciation and understanding. This project helped me to be better able to communicate science and facts in an accurate, but simple way. Being able to talk to a wide variety of people about science through the different lenses of art is an education in effective communication.