

---

Theses and Dissertations

---

Spring 2018

# Sweet, slick, & wicked

Cameron Eliza Lee York  
*University of Iowa*

Copyright © 2018 Cameron Eliza Lee York

This thesis is available at Iowa Research Online: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/etd/6345>

---

## Recommended Citation

York, Cameron Eliza Lee. "Sweet, slick, & wicked." MFA (Master of Fine Arts) thesis, University of Iowa, 2018.  
<https://ir.uiowa.edu/etd/6345>. <https://doi.org/10.17077/etd.qob2i868>

---

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/etd>



Part of the [Art Practice Commons](#)

SWEET, SLICK, & WICKED

by

Cameron Eliza Lee York

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Master of Fine Arts  
degree in Art in the  
Graduate College of  
The University of Iowa

May 2018

Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Terry James Conrad

Copyright by

CAMERON ELIZA LEE YORK

2018

All Rights Reserved

Graduate College  
The University of Iowa  
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

---

MASTER'S THESIS

---

This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

Cameron Eliza Lee York

has been approved by the Examining Committee for  
the thesis requirement for the Master of Fine Arts  
degree in Art at the May 2018 graduation.

Thesis Committee:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Terry James Conrad, Thesis Supervisor

\_\_\_\_\_  
James Snitzer

\_\_\_\_\_  
Andrew Casto

\_\_\_\_\_  
Isabel Barbuzza

To Chris and Brenda, no words will ever be enough, but, when I say I wouldn't have made it this far without you both, I mean it. Your unwavering love and support has made my wildest dreams possible. Thank you.

My family, Christina & Chris, Sean, Zac, and rFT, thank you for sticking with me through the light and the dark, the sticky and the smooth. You all are my tribe and have hugely contributed to the shape of my soul.

To Scout and Petey, You both came into my life during times when I was in the darkest dark and you both individually brought me a little bit of light. There is no way I would have made it to 26 without the sweetness of your souls. Thank you.

My Day One Bae Ones, Colette Conover, Julia Batakis, Kayley Jerman, Alison Conover, Adam Michaelis, Jake Fehlman, Dylan and Carson Scott, Alana MacCabe, Daniel and Michael Murillo, thank you for growing up with me, for building forts with me, for adventuring in The Canyon, for building and riding various vehicles, thank you for all the times we laughed so hard we cried; thank you for shaping me into the human I am today.

To My Hunties, Your collective wisdom, love, sass, support, understanding and patience has made my heart swell and my soul giggle. You all are true blessings and I am beyond lucky to have you by my side.

Iowa family: Andrew Mullally, Sophie Issak, Connor Colvill, Abbey Blake, Hunter "Funkbot" Creel, Jake Lee, Mary Claire Becker, Dayon like Crayon, David Meyers, Rachel Kauff, Alison Rosh, Amie Aulwes, The Lasansky Family, Tim "Sabertooth" Taranto, Sam Kirk, Wild Bill, Pretty Ricky, Mitchell Volk, Julia Wolfe, Ali Hval, Nicole Shaver, Joe & Laurel Lacina, and Ben Wills, thank you, thank you, thank you. Because of you all I have grown.

Sonoma Family: Mckella Koho, Rachel Jackson, Sophia Larsen, Ashleigh Hayflich, Mac Hart, Garret Gooch, Jonny Angulo, Hillary Rush, Forrest Werner, Tomas Zavala, Jordan Bergero, Dan Versman, Justin Ringlein, Walter Tom, Siera Goodrich, Christian Garcia, and Adventure Programs, thank you for setting me on the right path and redirecting me when I wandered.

Mentors: Kurt Kemp, Nate Haenlein, Andy Casto, Terry Conrad, Jim Snitzer, Anita Jung, Tom Christison, Hannah Givler, Diana Behl, and Kathryn Polk, thank you for showing me all that I could be when I couldn't see it clearly myself.

To The Pacific Ocean, The Redwoods, The San Jacinto Mountains, Golden Gate Park, and The white hot heat of the desert, thank you for all the formative and insightful moments of clarity.

## **PUBLIC ABSTRACT**

Consumerism and Death are both very political and ever present in our lives. Violence and death are seemingly on the rise, coinciding with the use of media as a distraction. It seems as though every time there is a catastrophic event, the president takes to social media to pick fights or make outlandish claims to distract the people from what is truly happening. Consumption of physical goods is another fixation heightened by the media and celebrities. For the average human, keeping up with social trends is the thing to do, and there is such a quick turn around with what item is considered “hot”. This way of living leads to mass production, leading to mass consumption, ending with mass waste. This societal residue of consumption is pushing us ever closer to mass extinction and we can’t seem to kick our wasteful habits.

All of my work for my MFA show will be like encountering an ooey-gooey shiny glitter coated acid bomb. The viewers will be drawn in with the sweet scent of sugary treats and hypnotized by the bright sun-shiny colors, only to realize they’ve been distracted and an acidic tinge lingers in the air. The dark rippling undertones start to reveal themselves to the audience and suddenly we realize that it's not all fun and games. Behind the bright colors are dark truths ready to spew some truth juice into your blissed out mindset.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES .....	v
SWEET, SLICK, & WICKED .....	1

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure

1. Installation View 1 .....	4
2. Installation View 2 .....	5
3. Slick & Slippery 1 .....	6
4. Slick & Slippery 2 .....	7
5. Slick & Slippery 3.....	8
6. Copper Sketchbook .....	9
7. Death Breath .....	10
8. Homemade Sin .....	11
9. Yellow Gloves .....	12
10. Triple Knotted Shoe Laces .....	13

## **SWEET, SLICK, & WICKED**

Consumerism and death are both political and ever present in our lives, and these are the two themes my recent work focuses upon. Consumption of physical goods is a fixation heightened by the media and celebrities. For many people, keeping up with social trends is the thing to do, and there is a quick turn around with what current item is considered “hot”. This way of living leads to mass production, leading to mass consumption, ending with mass waste. The societal residue of living beyond our means is pushing us ever closer to extinction and we can’t seem to kick our wasteful habits. I am caught between deeply caring about our earth and the way we treat it, and recognizing that the human race’s time on earth is temporary. The universe holds a delicate balance, which has allowed humans to exist, but the balance will shift again. Such is nature. I’m interested in why we fear death when it is life’s constant companion.

Symbolic imagery expresses emotions, ideas, actions, and recounts memories. It is a way to tell a story, but still preserve an air of mystery. The viewer is led into the territory of my themes, and then set loose to discover where their own stories become interwoven with mine. I use specific symbols to talk about consumption and death. Consumerism often shows up as plastic carry-out bags, cigarettes, meat, chewing gum, lighters, pop cans, or drug baggies. The repeating shape of gravestones, coffins, the hellhound, skulls, bone bits, and spots of rot exemplify death. I weave the symbols together into different patterns to make reference to a narrative that is just out of reach. The audience must fill in the gaps themselves and draw their own conclusions.

Found scraps of paper, luminous colors, and hand drawn elements that complement my themes are incorporated within my prints. Watercolor paint, graphite,

and relief printing accentuate my etched imagery to build a visual history through layers, giving the feeling of depth. These sugary, yet sinister sensibilities carry over into my sculpture work. I create physical forms and textures that mirror the imagery in my print work. The sculptures look like they blossomed out of the drawings in my prints and sketchbook and became three-dimensional. I think that when you can see or feel the weight of something, whether it is physical, mental, or emotional, you can see and feel the lightness of other things. Keeping this in mind, I take multiplicity from printmaking and apply it to my sculptural practice, playing with the multiple, repetition, and what amassing forms can mean.

Both my 2D and 3D work fits in with the Mission School artists that were working in San Francisco starting in the 1990s. Mission School artists like Barry Mcgee, Margaret Kilgallen, and Chris Johanson are often lumped into the Lowbrow art movement that values technical skill and cultivation of a narrative. Origins of the lowbrow approach can be traced to 20th century movements such as American Regionalism and Dada. Both of those movements question the distinctions between high and low art, folk art and fine art, high art culture and popular culture. Similar to pop art of the 1960s and 70s, lowbrow art is about exploring and critiquing those distinctions.

My work, upon first encounter, is light and sweet, but once it is picked apart, dark fissures are apparent. Like hearing a clown's laughter in the distance; it should bring joy, yet it is relentlessly spooky and slightly other worldly. I use an array of colors to create an inviting aesthetic sensibility to pull my viewers in deeper, evoking an unbiased recognition and connection. I observe our country's politics and operations with a critical eye and make work in hopes of creating an open dialogue between opposing points of

view. Viewers are lured with the sweet scent of sugary treats, hypnotized by the bright and gleaming colors, only to realize they've been distracted and a mischievous tinge lingers in the air. The dark rippling undertones start to reveal themselves to the audience and suddenly we understand that it's not all fun and games.



Figure 1, Installation View 1, E260 Gallery, University of Iowa



Figure 2, Installation View 2, E260 Gallery, University of Iowa



Figure 3, *Slick & Slippery 1*, Intaglio and Mixed Media, 24x12", 2018



Figure 4, *Slick & Slippery 2*, Intaglio and Mixed Media, 24x12", 2018



Figure 5, *Slick & Slippery 3*, Intaglio and Mixed Media, 24x12", 2018



Figure 6, *Copper Sketchbook*, Copper and Mixed Media, 2'x18", 2018



Figure 7, *Death Breath*, Intaglio and Mixed Media, 12x14", 2018



Figure 8, *Homemade Sin*, Monoprint and Mixed Media, 2'x6"x12", 2018

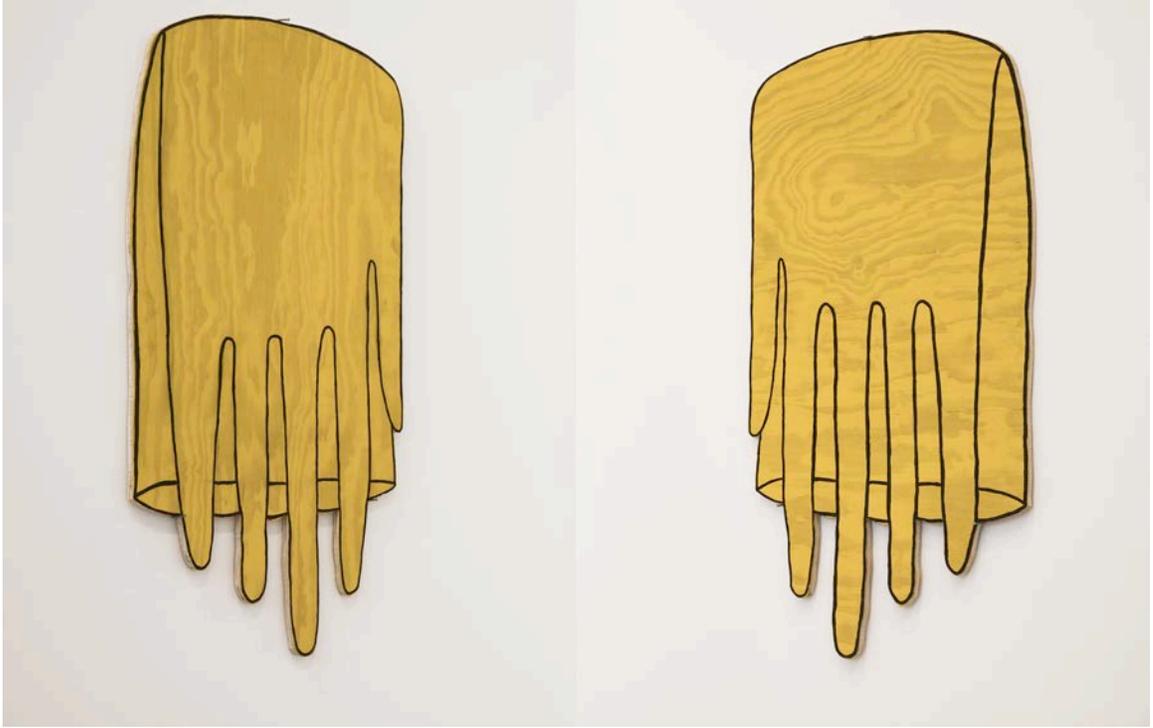


Figure 9, *Yellow Gloves*, Oil and Enamel Paint on Plywood, 3'x1.5', 2018



Figure 10, *Triple Knotted Shoe Laces*, Plaster Monoprints and Mixed Media, 12"x6",

2018