



Objects as Portraits is a project originated from a painting project I did in high school titled *Objects that Matter* (examples pictured on the left), in which I painted 16 still lifes of my fellow classmates' most representative or cherished objects. Originally following this project, I planned on doing true to size still lifes of family members' objects through the medium of color reduction printmaking (specifically linoleum relief) that would be an opportunity to talk to family and get to know them. I chose Akemi Ohira of the Printmaking department because she is my advisor for being a Studio Art major and I was in her class at the time. I felt very comfortable expressing my ideas with her and knew her to be a supportive and understanding professor. I ended up doing five interviews with the subjects being my parents, my younger cousins who lived only a couple hours away, and my Halmoni (grandmother on my Korean side). These interviews were great opportunities to have heart to heart conversations with my

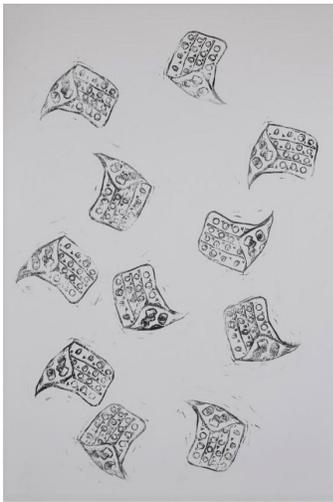
family, but after starting the work of making the prints, my original idea did not feel as fulfilling as I had hoped. After starting a couple color reduction prints (a process of printmaking that involves layering different colors atop each other to create an image), it felt as if I was not saying anything about the items and instead I was simply doing realistic renderings. It felt too close to my high school project and I wasn't being critical with my representations. Instead I switched to black and white, a shift that I felt was more interesting in how it puts all of the objects in the same rendering. Examples of the original still life photos taken in tandem with the interviews are to the right. The top photo is of my dad's items: a signed hat from his team when he stopped coaching basketball, a Ken Burns signed baseball, and a coffee bean grinder. The one below is my cousin's items: his downsized electric guitar, a copy of *The Titan's Curse* by Rick Riordan, and a stuffed bunny that he has had since babyhood.



As quarantine continued on with no end in sight, I had a complete existential crisis. My original project felt shallow and in the midst of loneliness and hearing news of people dying, I no longer wanted to do pieces that felt disconnected from the world we were living in. I still felt that examining people's items was an interesting standpoint, but I slightly changed the perspective. Therefore, my project now consists of three parts, each attempting to describe one kind of relationship between human beings and objects. The parts are "The Discarded," "The Cherished," and "Seeking Comfort." Larger images of final prints are available at mayakneebonekim.com

The Discarded

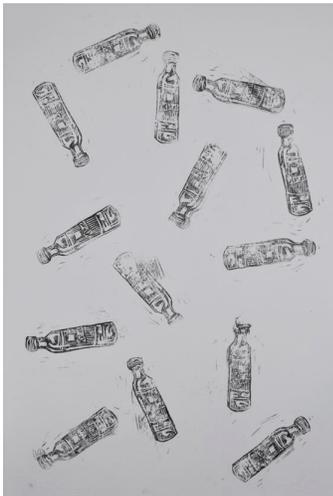
This section came from reflection of the way people categorize something as valuable and what was considered garbage. This project was in response to the accumulation of discarded things in landfills and was therefore informed by the environmental state of the world, but was also in response to the way that the government and other human beings treated people as disposable. Allowing the number of Covid deaths to climb, the killing of Black people by the police without consequence, and as I write this, the shooting of Asian people in Atlanta by a man trying to get rid of “temptation” show that there is some understanding among the privileged in the United States that some people are considered valuable while others are considered disposable. The images below are of the pieces created with the linoleum block used to make them.



Birth Control
12x18



Doll Heads
12x18



Mini-Alcohol Bottles
12x18



Flowers
12x18

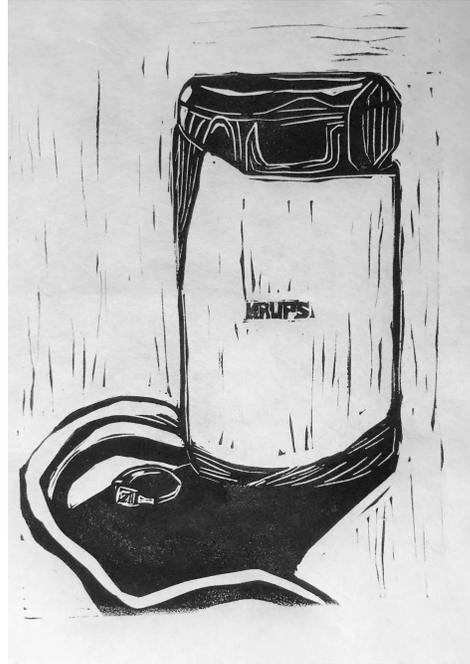
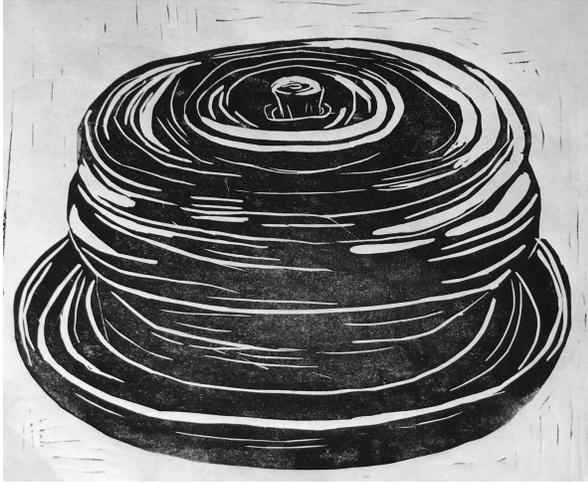


The Cherished

This part of the project aligns the most with my original ideas. I took singular items of the still life photos from my interviews and made prints of them. I still believe in the value of seeing what items people care for and what it means for their identity as a person. In speaking to people, I found similarities between what they chose despite different ages and backgrounds. The most common citations people had for the objects that they cared about were that they had the object for a long time or someone they cared about had gifted it to them. The bunny and snowglobe were items chosen by my cousins. When I asked them why they chose these objects, they both cited that their parents had given them these items and that made them special. In the case of the bunny, my cousin said that he has had it his whole life and that also made it special.

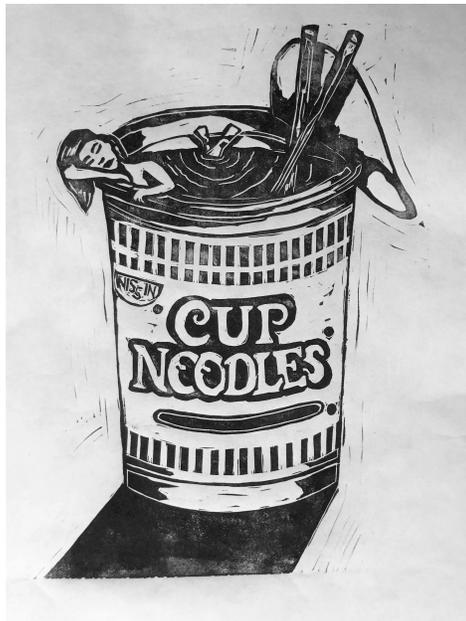
In the cases of the other objects, I depicted a wooden container of my Halmoni's which was gifted to her from her father after he received it in the 1940s. I will point out that there is a language barrier between me and her as I don't speak Korean, but from what I understand, this was one of the few objects from her family that survived the Korean War and also made it to the United States when she immigrated in the 1970s. The other piece is a combination between my mother's wedding ring and my father's coffee bean grinder. The wedding ring is a replacement that my mother had to purchase after her first one got stolen. The coffee bean grinder is a hot topic in our house as it is one of the first items that my father was able to purchase with his own money and has lasted decades at this point, but my mother thinks it needs to be replaced. Putting their items together was probably the most in line with my original intentions for this project, and it is a silly way to create a portrait of their marriage in a way that is meaningful, but also thoughtful.





Seeking Comfort

This final aspect of the project is the one that has sparked an exciting future of prints for me. In the lowest points of quarantine, I found myself seeking comfort in items in order to find some sort of groundedness in reality when everything felt strange. In the two prints here, I am going to show a relationship with food and scented candles. While this sounds silly, I wanted to show dependency on these things as well as how dependency can be destructive. These pieces are meant to point to greater themes of unsustainable habits as well as loneliness, a feeling that many people have grappled with over this year.



Budget: \$2000

Final Spending:

Brayer: \$13.11

Block Printing Ink: \$16.50

Nikon D3500 Camera: \$399.95

Rechargeable Camera Battery: \$59.96

Camera Bag: \$60

Camera Tripod: \$25.77

Linoleum: \$253.86

Printmaking Paper: \$176.66

Etching Tools: \$9.99

Printmaking Tray: \$18

Total Spent: \$1015.80

I did not use the entire budget as I did have the intention of spending some money on transportation as well as on more expensive linoleum. I was not able to go anywhere and out of convenience I instead bought a large roll of linoleum which was easier to transport and happened to be less expensive than the mounted linoleum that I listed in my original budget.

Reflection

I am grateful that I was able to tackle this project over this last year. I have learned technical skills surrounding printmaking, as well as found multiple different directions that I can take me practice in the near future. While the pandemic made life difficult, I was able to use this project to examine some of the feelings I was having and create something from it. The rest of the funds will be used to continue this exploration and reflection as we continue to live through the pandemic more than a year later.