

Glass as a Metaphor

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Abstract

During the fall semester of 2022, I conducted an independent study using glass as both a medium, which is the material used to make a work of art, and a substrate, which is the base that materials are applied on, to see what can be created with glass. The reason behind using glass was based on the inspiration of my own bones since they are fragile and can break easily, making glass a metaphor for my own physical body. There was also the chance of being able to expand my artistic abilities using material that can break as I had to figure out how to go about engraving and breaking glass deliberately. Three major projects were made: the first dealt with layering of engraved plexiglass to create an image, the second involved body parts made of glass, and the last was a series of art performances. Throughout the independent study, I've found ways to create images that can reflect what is around them, how to effectively build a piece without breaking glass, and how to capture moments of glass breaking. With patience, glass is another medium and substrate an artist can use.

I began my investigation of my first project by creating an image on plexiglass. Due to plexiglass being clear, I had the idea of layering the pieces to create depth in the image. Before the engraving process, I first sketched an image to be under the piece of plexiglass, so I had something to follow as I engraved. Different parts of the sketched image were color-coded. I used an engraving tool that had different bits, which allowed me to create different textures and have different sizes to those textures. While engraving, I kept note of which part of the image would be located on each piece of plexiglass and how it would look once the pieces were overlapped. In total, I engraved 15 individual 10"x10" plexiglass pieces and used those

pieces to create three separate images. The images are framed so they can be displayed without the worry of layers coming apart.

The next project focused on creating a glass leg, and two separate legs were made for this part of my independent study: the first one mostly dealt with going through trial and error to learn how to make one, while the second involved taking what I learned and creating a more successful piece. I collected cheap glass cups, Starbucks' bottles, and jars as my materials. Before building the leg, I tested a glass bottle to see how much force it would need to break from an engraving tool. I realized that I was able to manipulate how I wanted the glass to break and where exactly to break it by engraving in one spot

consistently. This then formed a crack around the bottle, and it eventually broke. Next, I played around with the broken pieces to figure out where each piece should go to form a leg. I marked the glass where I wanted to drill holes in and use slip screws to hold the pieces together. I drilled holes into the glass using a small drill bit under water, and for the most part, I was able to do it without breaking any pieces. The reason why glass should be drilled under water is to help prevent the glass from breaking and to provide lubrication for the drill bit. The last part of this project was putting the glass together using screws and metal brackets.

The last project dealt with breaking glass as an art performance. This required setting up a blank white space, finding empty bottles and cheap cups, editing video recordings, and capturing moments from the videos and turning it into an image. Using white paper on a broken box, I wrapped the box to create a blank space that was not distracting. Under the paper at the bottom, I put a metal plate to create a hard surface for the glass to break against. I set up my phone to take a video of myself breaking the glass and to document the art performance.

I did this performance two separate times: the first time using clear and brown glass bottles, the second time using cheap glass cups that were painted. After the performance, I watched and edited the videos, capturing images of moments where the glass would be in mid break, colliding, exploding, and the aftermath. Selected images were then edited to add a different feeling, causing some of the images to look either sharper and crisper, or blurry and soft. The best moments documented were printed out in the graphic design lab and framed.

Throughout my independent study, I learned how to use glass to create art pieces that were personal to my struggles of having brittle bones. As an artist, I improved my creating process and learned that I should simply create without the fear of the piece not being perfect. I found a new art form that I enjoy and will continue working with. As an artist, I know I can only get better if I keep learning and creating, and with the independent study I did, I am more eager to explore glass pieces.

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