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Cultivation, Erudition, Edification

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CULTIVATION, ERUDITION, EDIFICATION

Ariel Lee has a BA in Fine Art from University of California, Santa Cruz and tends to use drawing modalities (pen/ink, pencil/paper) or oil paint, and often is inspired by the surrealist influence.

She is a third year medical student at NSU-COM rotating through Broward Health.

THOUGHTS ON GENDER, MEDICINE AND THE FEMALE FORM

- ▶ *Cultivation, Erudition, Edification* is an exercise of self-portraiture. Few careers are as all encompassing, and all consuming as that as a physician. Becoming a physician is a metamorphosis, it changes who you are and becomes an intrinsic part of who you become. As a medical student, I am measured first by my intellect, and then by my communication skills, social competence and responsibility. In a way, I am somewhat disembodied by my profession. Everyday life comes with a mask on your face, bulky scrubs obscuring your gender and the epochal white coat spilling over with notes, books and instruments. Gender becomes entirely inconsequential. That's why, in this piece, in place of the classic female form, there is a medical cross. It expresses the duality of constantly sacrificing my body to medicine while at the same time giving me the freedom to be judged by who I am intellectually in this field, without the critique placed on the body so often seen in mainstream society. In medicine, the importance of my body has been eclipsed by the importance of my mind.
- ▶ However, just because I'm in a profession that doesn't rely as heavily on my gender doesn't mean that the weight of the feminine ceases to exist. There are other ways, both subtle and blatant in which I feel the burden and joy of being a woman as well as a medical student. For one, in this piece, the hair is flowing out and interconnecting with the knowledge that is saturating the background. Shortly before I began the medical school interview process I cut my hair short because I knew I wouldn't have the time to style it in a way that would be deemed professionally acceptable. Since that day at that first interview, I have not cut it again. It has now been over three years worth of growth. When I look at myself in the mirror, I measure the person I was then and the person I have become by my hair, which now flows over my shoulders and almost down to my waist. Not only is it a physical chronology of hard work and time passed, it's a keepsake of femininity that I can enjoy in the rare moments that I get to myself.

ARTIST STATEMENT: ARIEL LEE

- ▶ Finally, perhaps one of the greatest achievements and most potentially treacherous permutations of the female form is the ability to bring forth life. Despite so many obstacles that have been overcome, pregnancy as a student physician is riddled with roadblocks often in the form of deeply rooted sexist and antiquated rules and beliefs. I know any number of my male classmates who are married and whose wives are either pregnant or have children. When my classmates go on rotations, or go to interview, they are not forced to disclose whether or not they have a child on the way. They will not risk having their names struck from a list because they may have to take an absence to attend to their family. They will not face being passed over for their qualifications because of the possibility that they may incur other responsibilities in the near future. But I do, and I am, and I will-- because one of the most beautiful and miraculous things my body can do has also become the biggest liability to my career and future success. I am asked to sacrifice my ability to secure a residency and secure a job, or to delay and forego motherhood.
- ▶ This is something that many female medical students face alone. I strongly believe that something needs to be done in order to change these practices, and here in the portrait can be seen a series of cracks where the uterus lies. It is a broken system, in great need of repair, it is a part of my life and I am a part of it.
- ▶ I wanted to create this piece in order to present the female form in a different light, one beyond the superficial we often see in advertising, beyond the classic male gaze of female portraiture, which relies so heavily on the aesthetics of the physical body. In my clogs, with my hair pulled up and my surgical cap on I am just as much a woman as the patient I'm taking care of who's breastfeeding her child, or the sister who stands at bedside in her full makeup, skirt and high heels. The female form is more than a set of lines and curves to be dressed up, bathed in flattering lighting and flaunted. It is beyond the physical, it is a metaphorical and cerebral, sometimes intangible representation of who we are as both women and human beings.