

A. Nicole Bauguss
nicolebauguss@gmail.com

Artist Statement

We live in an age of consumerism, wherein people are quick to buy and replace easy and cheap products. This rapid and frivolous consumption is often a futile attempt to satisfy our longing for something more significant or profound. Since the industrial revolution, consumerism has driven the pace and quality of life. We become more disconnected from our ecosystems and fail to be sustainable – both environmentally and personally. What we now call “sustainable” is less than what it essentially means: the ability to take care of and provide for ourselves and others in the most basic human ways (food production and preparation, shelter, and furniture construction etc.). Human production and excess continually deteriorates the environment: our landfills are full, countless species are extinct, and our natural resources are depleted. We are in a state of economic and ecological crisis. This is my departure point in my work that spans the production of discrete sculptural objects, tactile functional furniture, boxes, large-scale integrative installations, and site specific performance projects. Through my work, both formally and conceptually, I investigate physical interactions—visceral, sensory, tactile, and emotional experiences in art and life as it relates to personal, artistic, and ecological sustainability.

Everything around us is relevant; the objects collected in an art piece or within one’s home each contribute to how we experience the world. Textures, sounds, the existence or absence of objects in that space collectively contributes to an individual’s experience of ‘space’ and hence, life. What is the value of our lived experience as it relates to art as a daily practice? What metaphorical connotation does a chair have at a table versus a bench? What historical relevance do certain objects hold in our memory and why are they important to our present or future? Is the texture, finish, or design of objects within a space significant in our relationship to that space? How does it enhance or detract from our sensory experience, influence our memory or the quality of our lives? As a 3D artist and builder, I delight in and am intrigued by the ways in which people move through their personal spaces—how this parallels the way they metaphorically move through their lives. I work to understand the psychophysical connection people have to the spaces they inhabit, or rather the culture of how we understand our body in space. I explore this in my current work with performing installations. Movement through constructed environments encourages audiences to observe and engage with the materials, their histories, and the complicated nature of our gendered spaces and body politics. I create multisensory experiences through installation and audience engagement to contemplate the value of everyday rituals and materials, encouraging the audience to occupy the spaces in familiar and unfamiliar ways. Familiarity elicits the power of memory, personal stories, and re-connection, engaging seemingly disparate emotions and reactions in one space. This process of creating, constructing, and deconstructing presents an engaged, critical framework for articulating assumptions, perspectives, and power dynamics; how we reflect society and also the ways we can affect change in and create society. Intersubjective experience manifests through the installations and objects to create deeply connected experiences with art.

Evaluating these broader concepts in my work and reflecting on my childhood growing up in rural North Carolina, I am conscious of the inseparability of food, home, rituals, and daily

life as art practices. Particularly I am interested in the cultural interactions, practices, and material culture present in working the land for food, livelihood, and beauty typically found in rural southern families. Living in urban areas for the past five years, issues of access, social justice, health, and the sensory experience of food integrated into my artistic practice and research questions. Over the past year, I have committed myself to deeper investigations surrounding food as a reflection of cultural values and artistic engagement. Through beekeeping, gardening, cooking, bread, and cheese making, I investigate these rituals in my artistic practice through the lens of constructed identities such as gender, race, class, and sexuality. My work, which is ultimately a finely crafted object, evolves from intersubjective actions.

These explorations focus the lens upon the specific experience of my Southern upbringing by excavating place to explore both memory and spectacle. Through this excavation and research, my artistic inquiry initiates and interrogates gender assumptions around domestic and manual labor practices. These recent explorations feature sculptural tool studies in lard, soil, building materials, flour and cornmeal—offering the opportunity to experience familiar everyday objects in new and critical ways, thereby challenging assumptions of both form and function.

Cathy O’Keefe, from her article *Culture as a Guidepost for a Balanced Life*, invokes the spirit of William James, the father of American psychology who “advanced the idea that we can’t think our way into a new kind of living; rather, we must live our way into a new kind of thinking.” My artistic practice blurs boundaries of viewer/artist, promoting the participation and exploration of ecological design and sustainability in our lives for vibrant cultural engagement, creating spaces for critically reshaping our tools (perceptual and material) necessary to manifest art as a lived experience. At the intersection of political and aesthetic discourses, art as social practice animates my work through considerations of collaboration, intelligibility, freedom, collectivity, and action. Through this lens, art possesses the capacity to integrate and explicate considerations of urban planning, built environments, social and environmental policy, histories, economies, and sustainable food practices to foster collective and embodied change in communities. However, it is only through a dedicated and disciplined art practice and understanding of craft that any social practice by a visual artist can succeed.