Category 5: Support for faculty members in fields where there is little external funding available. This category does not include fields where there is significant external funding available, albeit this funding may be difficult to obtain due to the level of competition.

Being Dick-ish with Jane: Textual Landmines and Backlash Shenanigans in “Postfeminist” America
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Abstract:
Funding sought to purchase materials and crucial equipment necessary to create a series of printed and embroidered images on silk, based on the structure of the “Dick and Jane” narratives, and discussing contemporary issues relating to women’s social and body politics via textual messaging. Imagery will illuminate how semantic interpretations of language serve certain anti-feminist agendas—and how additional layers of disseminated rhetoric encourages women to engage in self-doubt and use conformity to reinforce these ideas and police outliers. The desired effect of this series is to offer evidence to women, especially young women, of how traditional mores adapt and persist within the culture, and to spur a more critical assessment and questioning of perceived roles for women in 21st century America.

1. Category Justification:
Working consistently with the UMM Grants Office to identify opportunities for external funding in the visual arts, substantial awards remain sparse and agencies prefer funding smaller research projects. I have had a consistent record of modest grant awards since 2008, and have used them to complete more focused projects.
(50 words)
2. Present Status of Knowledge:

dickish (From Wiktionary)

adj. (US, colloquial, pejorative) Used to describe someone who is offensively unpleasant and vexatious, either intentionally or obliviously so.

“Yes, Republicans need to weed out candidates who talk like morons about rape...The problem here is not policy but delicacy — speaking about culturally sensitive and philosophically complex issues with reflection and prudence.”

--Charles Krauthammer, November 8, 2012

“See, women don’t mind that this is how Republicans are governing with respect to women’s rights. They just like to hear that their rights are being repealed in more flowery prose...like mandatory medically, unnecessary transvaginal ultrasounds...You can say that more softly. You can say it in cursive, if you want to. But it’s still going to bring protesters out on to the streets to line your walk of shame into the building from which you are trying to govern that way.”

--Rachel Maddow, November 9, 2012

“There is something powerful in the whispering of obscenities, about those in power. There’s something delightful about it, something naughty, secretive, forbidden, thrilling. It’s like a spell, of sorts. It deflates them, reduces them to the common denominator where they can be dealt.”

--Margaret Atwood, The Handmaid’s Tale

It’s week ten in the class and always the same. This first year course for art majors to explore themes in contemporary art has reached the unit on pluralism...specifically, feminism...and the students will perplex me once again. When asked who believes that a person should be allowed rights and freedoms (including those of expression) regardless of age, race, gender, sexuality--all hands raise proudly to affirm years of elementary and secondary school lessons in diversity. When I follow-up to poll who identifies as a feminist, all but 5 hands in this room of 30 (predominantly female) students will furtively vanish; and when pressed to explain, all eye contact will cease. Finally, one brave student will speak up, and say that she doesn’t want to be called a feminist because they all hate men and are angry all the time. Besides, she adds, everything is equal now. The others nod in agreement.
Albeit frustrating, this energizes my artmaking.

Beginning this research as a young, third-wave feminist, I struggled to understand the mixed messages of how to craft aspects of my own identity. While no dominant, patriarchal voice informed those choices, many women of my generation had still managed to internalize those familiar meta-messages. Now, I also see my work acting as a sort of primer to educate a younger, more dubious audience, to coax them to see things more critically and examine their choices without feeling those external pressures to conform to ill-fitting or outdated mores.

My research reclaims positive feminist messages by using the dearth of negative ones in order to realign or destroy them from within. Interjecting humor into this critique not only exploits the absurdity of both the “norms” and radical agendas, but also creates a more hospitable situation to introduce contrary arguments when considered with a bit of laughter. I deliberately use source materials from bygone eras in the construction of my imagery—from vintage girdles, to alphabets, to flash cards used to educate children—nostalgia makes it more possible to see the extremes of the situations, but also renders the past as complicated as the present, much to the chagrin of those who miss “the good ole days.”

After more than 15 years of creating fiber-based artworks exclusively by hand, I began a radically different direction in my work in 2007 with Husqvarna Designer SE machine and software system—a free-motion sewing machine capable of “stitching-out” almost photo-realistic interpretations in thread combined with a software system that could generate embroideries from user-generated digital files. Since that shift, the field of fiber-based and stitched works that I previously inhabited with only a handful of other artists has been expanding exponentially, as both established and younger artists began mixing traditional processes with those of the textile arts and new technologies. The resulting artworks are no longer confined to niche galleries or institutions, garnering positive acclaim and collectability in mainstream Art venues.

My first series, Look and Learn, Little Girl, is a collection of 70+ works that references primary school flashcards, mixed with irony, absurdity and sarcasm to illuminate the positive or negative consequences of conforming to stereotypically passive or aggressive means of behavior. Background card and text information was first printed on silk fabric run through an inkjet printer before digitally organized imagery was added by machine. Source imagery includes clothing, toys, utensils, appliances, etc., to represent a female character and are paired with a word determining the passivity or aggression of the individual. (For example: a telephone is “obedient,” and an iron is “domineering.”)
The second series, *The Alphabet of Regrettable Behaviors*, asks “What makes a good girl?” Is it the one who does what others expect of her or the one who does what she deems best for her? Girls Leadership Institute creator and author Rachel Simmons reports that even elementary school aged girls can deftly describe the conditions one must embrace in order to be seen as “good” in today’s society: “The Good Girl was socially and academically successful, smart, and driven, pretty and kind. But she was also an individual who aimed to please (people pleaser), toed the line (no opinions of things) and didn’t take risks (follows the rules). She repressed what she really thought (doesn’t get mad) and did not handle her mistakes with humor (has to do everything right).”

Images were gleaned from a large collection of 1950s and 1960s women’s magazines, including Mademoiselle, Seventeen, Good Housekeeping, McCall’s, and Better Homes and Gardens. Behaviors highlighted are considered transgressive to perceived traditional roles in order to question the idea of regret. The text structure for the artwork is based on examples from traditional alphabet books for children, letters are paired, assigned a name of a woman and a behavior with the same letter, and must end in a rhyme. For example:

- *E* is for *Enid* who Earned an equal wage, and paid for her keep.
- *F* is for *Fern* who Faked it, because she’d rather get some sleep.
- *G* is for *Ginger* who Gobbled up food, devouring each bite with pleasure.
- *H* is for *Holly* who flaunted her Hips, so curvy and ample of measure.
3. Plan of Work:

Concept:
In 2012, despite unprecedented discourse regarding women’s issues (birth control, equal pay, rape) in an election cycle for which women were a decisive factor in its outcome, numerous public figures, who seem to have little to lose--singer Katy Perry, Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer, and Katherine Fenton (the woman who asked Mitt Romney the presidential debate question about equal pay resulting in the infamous “binders full of women” response)--emphatically declared no interest in being labeled a feminist despite obvious shared beliefs with the movement.

Language has become the primary friction point in conflicts over equality; adversaries tangle over a word and its meaning, either clinging steadfast to traditional meaning (example: “marriage”) or seeking creative interpretations to create loopholes or complications (example: “legitimate rape”). It’s also not only what your movement stands for, but how well you manage how the opposition frames you with its words. Since the Reagan-80s, the dominant narrative portrays Feminism as antiquated, declaring all goals of gender equality completed and resolved, while blustery pundits rebranded this word to mean all things bad about women--from “Feminazis” to “sluts”--and created a more resonant image of the movement that’s exaggerated and misleading. Even advice books designed to help women succeed in a “man’s world”

still couch all advice in being assertive...but not overly so. Salon’s Mary Elizabeth Williams muses that “any word that feared and derided has incredible power. And how beautiful and strong that makes it.”

For this new series, I am taking the structure of the “Dick and Jane” narratives to illuminate this semantic minefield--from GOP talking points, to self help books to other relevant texts in order to explore the phenomenon of how language is reimagined, tweaked to serve particular agendas—and how self-doubt and pressure to conform is used to enforce these ideas and police outliers. Radical messages tend to go unchallenged if the intended audience is too concerned with managing a continual conflict from within. In vignettes ranging from a single image moment to multiple-image narratives, “Dick” will be free to offer increasingly outlandish ideas, while “Jane” and her cohorts become hamstrung by the language and increasingly aggressive to one another as they process their choices.

The imagery I will use is sourced from my collection of vintage media, specifically from mid-20th century primers for children (see right) and children’s clothing patterns to draw a series of imagined “fight” scenes that undermines the civilized and passive notions that society prefers to imagine its female citizens exemplifying while ignoring the brutality of female aggression. These images will be converted into embroidery patterns stitched onto silk that has been previously printed via inkjet to add additional imagery or text.

Process:
The Husqvarna Designer SE is limited to a 7” wide pattern, and that has been adequate for previous works. The Designer Diamond model can feature up to 14” wide embroideries and more complex stitch patterns via technological developments since the release of the SE--and will intensify the conceptual impact of this new series. An inkjet printer capable of printing fabric 17” wide to compliment this new size capacity is also necessary to complete the project.
These are the consistencies in my overall methodology of how the silk and embroidery patterns are created and outputted in thread, as well as time requirements for understanding the process:

• When embroidering on silk, my first task is to design the background information to thematically support the stitched work and then print it directly onto the fabric using a wide format inkjet printer.

• For images that are chosen for embroidery patterns, I use Photoshop to clean and correct for color, tone, etc. That image is next imported into the 5D Embroidery Software to convert the image into stitches. The design is further edited and optimized, sometimes at the individual stitch level before being transferred to the machine for output. All digital processing can take between 4-10 hours of work for each pattern.

• During the stitch-out, these embroidery patterns have between 80-150 color/thread changes, and each must be done manually. These machines think a bit like a painter: working in general shapes from light to dark, then going back to focus and refine the details closer to the finish. The stitch-out process for the machine embroidery requires between 4-80 hours to complete thread changes and cutting extraneous threads during its process.

• Once the embroidered patterns are complete, each image is further finished with detailed trimming of extraneous threads and any repair or filling of open areas. Then the work is mounted and inserted into the museum quality frames. Finish work requires 1-3 hours per image.

Timeframe/Outcomes:
I have been awarded a spring semester Single Semester Leave for the 2013-14 academic year and an invitation to show my work at the Minnesota Textile Center in the fall of 2014. I plan to organize digital files prior to January of 2014 and have all stitching done by August of 2014. This is a prime opportunity to complete this project, as my research methods are generally time-consuming, detail-driven, and emotionally intense. I am confident that the uniqueness of this series, along with timely examinations by mainstream media regarding socialization and aggression amongst girls (and how it influences future interactions as women), identity politics and the debate over control of women’s bodies will provide me with an excellent opportunity to contribute visual works to the dialogue as I secure additional venues for exhibitions.

Word Count for #2 and #3: 1,960 words
Sources: