

We are, as a species, social creatures. What makes me “me”? Is my identity something only I curate, or is it defined by my interactions with others and experiences throughout life? This installation explores the idea that I am solely defined by my social exchanges. I will be exchanging my personal art for objects from others.

There are three mediums through which I have created poems. Each has a different personal significance and can be exchanged for something that I think has equal significance. This could be an act, an item, or another significant representation. Once the exchange has been made, the item given to me will not be traded further, since the act of trading represents my relationship to that person.

If all that I am is what I receive from other people, what does that make “me”? Can I be a person of my own design if I am a collection of other people’s stories or interactions? I believe that I am defined by my choices and by those around me. We are not totally whole without other humans.

Maggie

**Who am I?**

Maggie



Personally, it's hard to say for myself who exactly I am. Sometimes, I think I have the answer, but then I've already changed. Who was past "me", and how do my experiences make me who I am today? Is what I'm doing now going to have consequences as well? Who am I? Some people you meet fit a perfect stereotype, but if I were to ask them what stereotype I would fit, what would they say? What is the impression I give people, and once they get to know me and me them, how does our relationship affect one another?

Before I was even an idea, I was rushed. My parents met in college. My mother, a reformed hippie, met my father, a punk with bleached hair and an earring. They were often in the same place at the same time, but never actually crossed paths. Around a year later they were engaged, and married on the 100th anniversary of Alfred Hitchcock's birth- also a Friday the thirteenth. Less than a year after that, I was an idea. Nine months after that, I was born. Names considered for me were "Zofia" or "Yohan" (if I was a boy), but I was instead named after my great grandmother, Magdalene.

Often I've heard the story about how Magdalene fled from WWII Germany with her mother, sisters, and stepfather to California. Her future husband had done the same, but rather than go through immigration, he jumped ship and entered illegally in Texas. The two met and married in Canada so he could return legally and they could start a family back on the west coast in LA. The stories of Magdalene are always something that makes you laugh. When asked to hold up a finger to focus on while having her picture taken, she only ever offered the middle one. Yet my mother was terrified of her, because she would rage if she pinched Magdalene's snap dragons. Maybe it's because of the numerous stories about my mother's rich family history I've become so enthralled by every aspect of history. Maybe my namesake and I could even share a similar mentality.

But that's too far back. A name alone doesn't make a person. I was born on Sunday June 4, 2000 in San Jose at 3:52 a.m., making me a Gemini. I still don't know how I feel about my sign, but maybe that's a part of having the duality of a Gemini.

The next addition to my family after me was my cat, Frankenstein, in 2002. I was barely two when my mom brought him home as a kitten. I remember sitting outside the bathroom door before I could be allowed to pet him, receiving a strict warning on how I could never-ever-ever pull on the kitty's tail or whiskers or he would get mad and hurt me. I when I entered, I found him behind the toilet. I sat across from him for days, offering him treats and toys and talking to him until he finally was calm enough come out. He was still wary, and shied away from most people's hands. At two, I socialized a feral cat. Since then, Frankie has never left my side. He's still terrified of the outside world and everything else in it, but has always found comfort under my bed. He's an old man now and watches over me when I sleep from the foot of my bed. I've never met an animal I didn't love, or a stray animal that didn't love me.

My little sister Lorelai was born the same year and had horrible lungs. The San Jose air gave her Bronchitis. So, in 2004, we moved to the then-rural town of Gilroy- the supposed garlic capital of the world. The house that we moved to now is in the suburbs, but then had farms and open fields on all sides. Across the street there was a nature preserve. There was meant to be a creek that ran through it, but it always went dry, making it a good home for numerous bugs, stray cats, and sometimes the homeless. You could see the hills on either side where the valley narrowed, and you could measure seasons by the changing of the crops and how many bugs were falling dead out of the sky. The first March we moved there it rained for an entire month.

In that house I grew sunflowers and lima beans. Maybe it was just because my father had become a self-taught gardener, but every plant I touched flourished. I wanted to help my dad turn

our small backyard in the Japanese style garden of his dreams. My mom took the family on hikes up into the Santa Cruz Mountains, and I practically lived at the beach every summer.

I found myself distanced from the natural life when I entered catholic school at age 5, but only really began to understand what that meant until I was 8. I had been thriving in a challenging academic environment. I was in second grade, doing math at a fourth grade level and reading at a middle school one. I was the best in my art class and the teacher's pet. But the time came for the other kids to be given first communion, and I was left in the dust. I couldn't drink the stale wine or eat the cardboard cracker or wear a mini bride dress. I was left out and I didn't understand why. And my exclusion went further. As it was a small school of 300 students, everyone knew everyone, and furthermore, the parents knew each other. My mother, a teacher at the school, found herself excluded from the rich wine mom club because of her teacher status. I found myself uninvited from birthday parties and friendless because of the parents.

The start of the actual bullying came in third grade. When I was 8, my mom caught pneumonia and broke her rib coughing. At the time, she taught part of my third grade class. The parents thought I got special treatment because of her status even though her counterpart made sure it would never be unfair. When my mom was forced to be on bed rest, the kids of the parents who spread rumors about my special treatment began to give me the silent treatment. I was crushed. My only friends refused to talk to me, and no one else did in the first place. Day after day a knot in my stomach grew until I broke down, begging my mom not to let me go back to school. She cut her break short to come back.

I started slipping away more after that. At school, my grades fell and I couldn't do much of anything otherwise. Bullying continued- emotional and physical. My friendships continued to fall apart and by sixth grade I was left with 2 friends.

Home life wasn't much better. We had been fighting for years. It was "any family's arguments"- I thought at the time- amplified by 100 at least once every day and had been going on constantly for just about 10 years and I had had it. I was 12 and miserable. I wanted to be the *emo* teen stereotype; I had long shaggy hair and wore dark colors in the middle of summer. I listened to music that I hated just because I thought that it would be cool to scare people with how metal I was. I wasn't at all.

Luckily, my skin grew tougher. Maybe I just stopped caring about the things that were said (or lack thereof), by my family or by the people at school. Maybe I was just bitter and wanted to prove everyone wrong. In my last year at the catholic school, I rose to the top of the class. I headed the yearbook for the whole school, I was once again the class pet and I was confident in myself enough to shed some of the emotional weight gained from the past nine years there. While family life was no better, knowing that I was going to be leaving everything behind to enter high school gave me the confidence I needed to make it through the year.

That summer before my freshman year, I entered the Oxbow summer camp, to my grandfather's wishes and much to my own dismay. I wanted the summer to be lazy. I went in, completely reluctant. Day one, I had already made friends with people I am still friends with to this day. I painted. I sculpted. I made things I had never thought I could. For once, I had escaped the microscopic judgment that was my life back home and entered a truly wonderful and caring environment. The last day of the two weeks, we went out early and all laid on each other's stomachs in the dew, and I knew I was ready to take on the next four years of my life.

My freshman year I began to write and paint more. I didn't quite have the materials or the opportunities I had over the summer, but I was growing into my own. I found myself once again rising to the top in my English, science, and art classes. I consider myself to be a very shy

person, but my circle of friends just kept growing. I was surprised at how many people recognized me. I thought I would be lost in a school of 2,000, but instead felt more than ever that I belonged.

In the three years between then and now, I've dyed my hair a dozen times, red, blue, pink, you name it. I've become comfortable wearing skirts. That's most of my wardrobe as of now. I've even almost broken my lifelong habit of biting my nails. I'm starting to be active-starting to create myself. People change, and I am no exception. I intend to continue changing as well

At this point, I would like to introduce myself as I see myself now. I'm sixteen; I love the beach and songs that make me sad. I don't have a favorite color, and I would still very much like to be a princess. I can't eat meat, but not for ethical or religious reasons. I see myself as a dreamer, and my Myers Briggs type is Introvert-Intuitive-Feeling-Perceiver (INFP) -- the dreamer type. I'm a Gemini, like I said before, always changing, always growing, but not necessarily so catty as other Gemini's. Others have told me I seem like a grandma who will bake cookies any day for you. While I'm flattered, I see myself more a lazy dreamer in the literal sense that I love to sleep.

My plans for the future are fuzzy- make art, sell the art, have cats, read books, be happy. When high school ends, I might move to Oregon just for the location. I'm going to work, babysitting, retail, service, anything to further me as soon as possible I'm eager to continue on this path I'm creating, where once I was not even picturing tomorrow.

After high school is easy. In a year and a half, I will finally have a break from education. I'll be an adult. I'm going to work any (actually good) job I can get. College seems a bit like a lofty dream at this point. My education thus has not necessarily left me eager to jump directly into something new. After all, college is a bit like a tattoo, and I could regret whichever I choose. Instead, I'm focusing on life. Where will I live, what will I do.

I want to live in Ashland, Oregon. I've visited there once and fell completely in love. I need a place that's quiet, someplace with a big public library and a place that actually gets snow. I could go there by myself or with a friend or roommate; it didn't matter. I'm also not going to set my goals too high. Right out of high school, many people have their life mapped out. They want to be doctors, lawyers, NFL players. But like people- and because of people- plans change.

How likely is it that my life is going to go the way I want it to? A bit at best. But who can say? Work can be hard to find without college experience, but college is hard without money. Houses cost money, food cost money, living alone costs money. It's hard, and life will probably get harder before I figure everything out.

I have one end goal, one dream. I want to be an old lady with grey hair pinned up in a bun, sitting on a porch with everything and everyone I love sitting around me. I was to be happy and be successful; If not successful in business, successful in making my life a good one. If living life happily is my only goal from here on out, I am confident.

The me from today will almost certainly not be the me from tomorrow. But, if that's the case, is there any point to this self-analysis?

Yes, there is. One hundred percent.

Even though we are constantly changing, we are always coming into contact with one another. Humans are social creatures by nature and for years, my own inability to become one-whether it was my fault or not- left me with next to nothing. If you play the victim to whatever comes your way, you have no say. If you don't know who you are, you have no way of bettering yourself for the future.