



# Fēminārum: Investigations of the Consciousness of Gender in Sculptural *Ecorché*

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## INTRODUCTION

I am a B.F.A candidate currently in the senior year of the Sculpture program in the Lyme Academy college of fine arts campus, recently in association with the University of New Haven, in Old Lyme, CT. My focus is in figurative representations situated in classical idioms; this is an abiding core passion.

I have been studying Figurative Sculpture for 5 years. My interest in the subject started much earlier when I first noticed at an early age the monumental sculptures in my home city of Fall River, MA. Sculptures like "The Hiker" by Theo Alice Ruggles Kitson, "Major General Lafayette" by Italian (Roman) Sculptors Ettore and Arnaldo Zocchi and "Prince Henry the Navigator" by Aristide Berto Cianfarani. Throughout years of Art study I fell in love with the unique level of craftsmanship involved in making such things and the effect Figurative Sculpture had on me and people in general. I am now pursuing sculpture with those ideals in hopes of having one of my own sculptures in the city of Fall River, MA.

## ABSTRACT

Throughout history Artists were responsible for the conceptualization and realization of anatomical representations by not just recording information but also making them beautiful. It was they who made choices of design, composition, format, and to an extent iconography. The nature of the modern artist is tightly bound by contemporary stylistic and iconographic conventions. It is by my observation of this history and my experience in academia that led me to realizations of inequality amongst subject matter and the processes of understanding the human figure within classrooms and studios of artistic discipline.

I proposed to sculpt an écorché (a figure drawn, painted, or sculpted showing the muscles of the body without skin, normally as a figure study for a work, or as an exercise in training.)

The tradition of écorché has been largely male-centric deeming female surface features such as adipose tissue, mammary tissue and genitalia as pointless or unimportant to artistic expression. In few words, if an artist wants to create a female representation then they often use the male anatomy as reference because its "the same". Through this project I intend to overcome male-centricity not merely by including such tissue, but by considering such tissue contextually by including the female model's responses to the resulting anatomical forms as they take shape in the developing work. My premise in this approach is that the crucial omission in the écorché tradition is a place for the voiced response, more than the tissue, of the female model in the fashioning of an anatomical sculpture. The question my sculptural project is designed to provide one answer to, then, is what a gendered anatomical guide for sculptors would look like that incorporates the responses of its model while the forms comprising this representation are being selected and shaped.

I hypothesize that this project will advance knowledge of the human form conceptually and aesthetically with intent to advance understandings of aesthetic conditioning ("beauty") and subjective recognition of the qualities of identity and individuality.

My methodology is necessarily open-ended, and is proceeded on the basis of the degree of recognition the model voices in response to the developing work, rather than on the basis of strict physiology. The outcome represents a dialogue or mediation between classical idioms and human subjects.

I have chosen three individuals, who all have experience in modeling for artistic purposes to collaborate with me. Each of them was interviewed and asked the same questions. I generalized their responses and choose the best way to represent their ideas based on my understanding of successful visual communication.

My questions aimed at discovering their work experience in the studio, past and present. I asked them to express their feelings and understanding of gender portrayal in art. I asked them to tell me what "beauty" meant to them. etc.

## RESULTS

I believe it is important to shed light on this state of conviction dealing with the bias against female *écorché* as a sculptural art form and anatomical reference. This project will advance knowledge of the human form conceptually and aesthetically with intent to advance understandings of aesthetic conditioning ("beauty") and subjective recognition of the qualities of identity and individuality. Thus, learning what is important to include in sculpture.

The most notable responses, in general, conveyed a desire to see something new, new to us, me and the models, and still be evident of classical idioms. Through our conversations it became apparent that there is a predilection for androgyny. I did my best to transform our talks into a physical form. This is what I've come up with.

The sculpture is very nearly complete in clay form and I am sure it will be rendered into the perfect finish by my birthday Nov.7, 2016. By this time I will be ready to create a mold and cast the sculpture.

## METHOD & MATERIALS

I will be asking the model to:

- 1) pose as a consenting, paid, unclad artist's model for visual (NON-photographic) inquiry for purposes of a sculptural representation. This sculpture is not intended as a portrait of the model, but as a typifying representation of human anatomy that will use a female model as its point of observational reference. The ecorche sculpture is a figure without skin, and therefore this type of sculpture is without identifying characteristics.
- 2) be available for six 5 hour sessions, twice a week for three weeks. a typical shift schedule spanning 5 hours will include 15 minute breaks after every 20 minutes of posing. Granted that the model is willing, the pose will prolong and the breaks will be reduced respectively, and conversely if the model is unable to pose for the typical length of time. Every opportunity to make the model comfortable will be provided (fan controlled electric heaters, clean fabrics, pillows, foam floor mats and props). The doors to the studio will be closed (not locked) and have postings on the outside that read, "Model in session, knock before entering".
- 3) be interviewed by myself at the beginning of the process, at intermittent points in the process of the creation of the sculpture and at the end of the process. During these times the model will be clothed. Interviews will not take place while the model is posing, but that the interviews will take place during paid time.

I will document the dialogue formed throughout the interviewing. This will allow for full review of the process of the sculpture.

The interview will begin with visual comparisons between very different images of sculpture representative of the female form. This will provide a basis for questions about which the model thinks comes closer to "true-to-life". An effort to briefly cover the history of sculpture will be made through images. Some of the images will include works by Bernini, Clodion, Modigliani, Kevin Francis Grey, Lorenzo Quinn, Mueck and Piccinini. The questions will be asked in a formal nature that relate to sizes of specific body features; abrupt or smooth transitions between body units; or pose/carriage as an expression of energy/exertion, or rest/contemplation; or any others that may be inspired by the models responses. It may also come to showing the model other forms of art and or architecture, literature, etc. to mix things up a bit, allowing myself to interpret the model's responses, rather than being merely directed by them, all in order to hone the sculpture. During the middle stages of development of the sculpture comparisons between it and the images and documented dialog will be reviewed and further interpretations will be gathered that will influence the finish of the sculpture.

Throughout the sculpting sessions the model will be asked to articulate her reflections on the following questions:

What I like most about the experience so far is...

What I like least about the experience so far is...

The aspects of the portrayal of my gender in the sculpture (pose, and/or "body language"; its associations with other art; its association with activities or "what it is doing"; its level of detail; its "expression" and/or the kind of feeling it projects or alludes to or opens up; the things put in, the things left out, or the things focused on; its "realism"; its personally identifying features; its dimensioning/sizing/proportions; its textures) from which I feel alienated are...

The above aspects of the portrayal of my gender that spark recognition in me are...

My co-mentors and I will discuss these responses, and I will write my own reflections on how they should modify the work. A visual record of the progress of the work in conjunction with the model's responses and of my adjustments in response to them will be maintained.

At the conclusion of the sculpting process, the model will have the chance to express her final impressions of the success of the final product in the dimensions laid out in the above questions. The dissemination of the sculptural end-product (described below) will be made available along with the record of the dialogue that produced it. Finally, a presentation to faculty and students of the entire project will be arranged.

The Sculpture will be constructed using traditional methods and materials. A steel armature will be constructed to support the weight of the clay ( Monster Clay) and prevent any deformation. In order to sculpt the small extremities of the body, like the figures and toes, flexible aluminum wires will be fastened to the steel. A core is built up on the armature to reduce the amount of clay necessary to sculpt details, this is typically made up of an assortment of foams. The rigid clay is then applied over the core and worked to the projected likeness.

