

Gemma Driskell Final Major Project Contextual Essay

My chosen topic for my FMP is exploring the human mind, specifically the subconscious and how it effects our productivity. This links to my FMP as I will be making as much as possible with little to no planning, so that I get the most genuine product of the subconscious as possible. The medium I'll be focusing on for my FMP is collage, which will be made up of cut up magazine photos and found materials which I collect throughout the Final Major Project to make fast art, so my ideas are quickly recorded by producing. I chose this topic because I'm extremely interested in psychology and the human behaviour. I'll be researching topics and artists related to surrealism and dadaism because of their strong connection to psychology and the change they brought to society. My method of producing as much as possible will be my own psychology experiment as live research of the mind for example I will be dream journaling and therefore recording the subconscious. In my presentation I stated my preferred mediums I'm either already familiar with or want to try such as drawing and animating and the artist who inspired me like Joan Miro, Rene Magritte, Salvador Dali and Hannah Hoch.

The history of modern collage started with Japanese calligraphers who pasted poems onto sheets of paper in the early twelfth century decorated with golden paper shapes of birds and stars. In Western Europe from mid seventeenth century a popular pastime for women was creating cut-and-paste silhouettes and decorative paper collages devoted pictures in prayer books. Decoupage came about in the nineteenth century as printed imagery was becoming more accessible to anyone. with artist Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso. Coined by cubist artists Braque and Picasso, the term "collage" comes from the French word *coller*, or "to glue." these artists are what help make this movement emerge, started working with various mediums to create modern Avant Garde collages around 1910.

Collages can be created from a range of materials, though most are made of paper or wood and often feature cut-and-pasted photographs, painted forms, or even 3-dimensional objects. As more and more modern artists began exploring the practice throughout the 20th century, these mediums became more varied and increasingly experimental.

Associated movements to collage include cubism, dadaism and surrealism. Cubism, which started around 1907 through the 1920's and was founded by Braque and Picasso, though most often associated with painting also created collages. Cubism's signature of fractures and deconstruction complement making collage art well as it brings together dissimilar pieces together to build a picture like an intentionally disordered puzzle. Collages appealed to cubist artists like Braque and Picasso because the overlapping of different materials and sticking it down meant there wasn't a risk of the art looking 2D; a key aim of cubist artists to create dimension in their still life work.



Picasso, 'Bottle of Vieux Marc, Glass, Guitar and Newspaper' (1913)

Dadaism, inspired the work of Braque and Picasso, also began to experiment with collage in the 1920's. Dadaists created collages incorporating iconography, from reinterpreted portraits to figures rooted in fantasy. Dada

artists also used more materials when making their collages than the Cubists. Members of the movement were known for being innovative using seemingly worthless or often overlooked items like tickets, magazine clippings, sweet wrappers, and even 3-dimensional materials. By transforming temporary and unimportant materials into polished pieces the Dadaists challenged traditional perceptions of art.

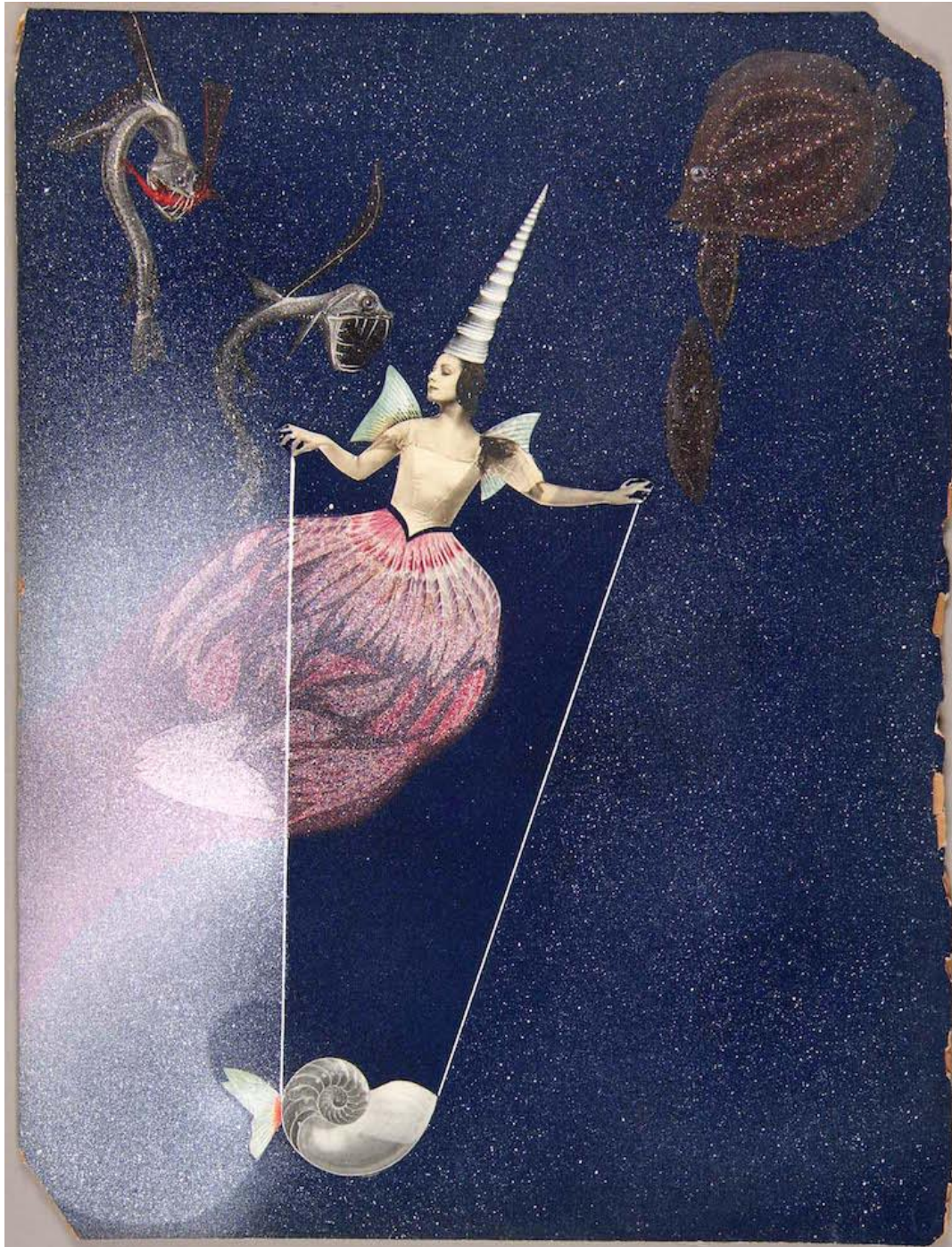
German Dada artist Hannah Hoch was known for her clearly political collages and helping pioneer photomontage art. She found it hard for other artists who were men to not consider her an amateur and worthy of exhibitions because of her gender. Hoch cut up mass media to appropriate and recombine images and text to critique popular culture, the failing of Weimar government from 1919 to 1933 and the socially constructed roles of women. She explored gender and identity in her work particularly criticizing the concept of the “New Woman” in Weimar Germany, a vision of a woman who was supposedly man’s equal.

In my Final Major Project, I want to repurpose iconographic media like Hannah Hoch did and make it either satirical or political or both.



Hannah Höch, 'Flight' (1931)

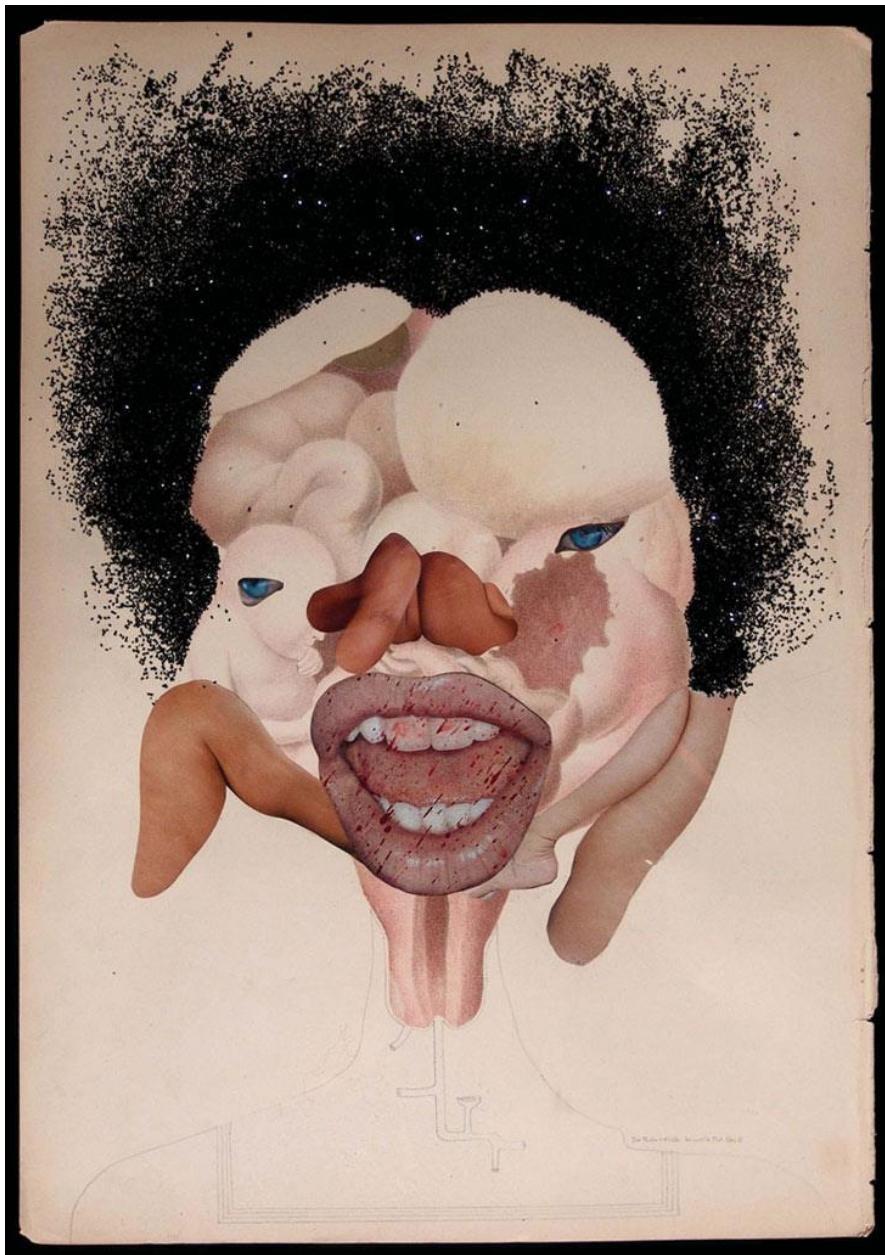
Like Dada, surrealists took on the cut-and-paste technique and adapted it. Much like their automatic approach to painting members of this movement relied on the subconscious to produce unique assortments made up of photographs, illustrations, coloured paper, and paint. Surrealists abandoned the focus on still life of the cubists' and instead developed on the Dadaists progression towards strange subject matter to make art evoking dreams. Artists such as Joseph Cornell and Andre Breton clearly display this focus who used this method to conjure up understandable yet entirely made-up scenes.



Cornell, 'Untitled (Celestial Fantasy with Tamara Toumanova)' (1940)

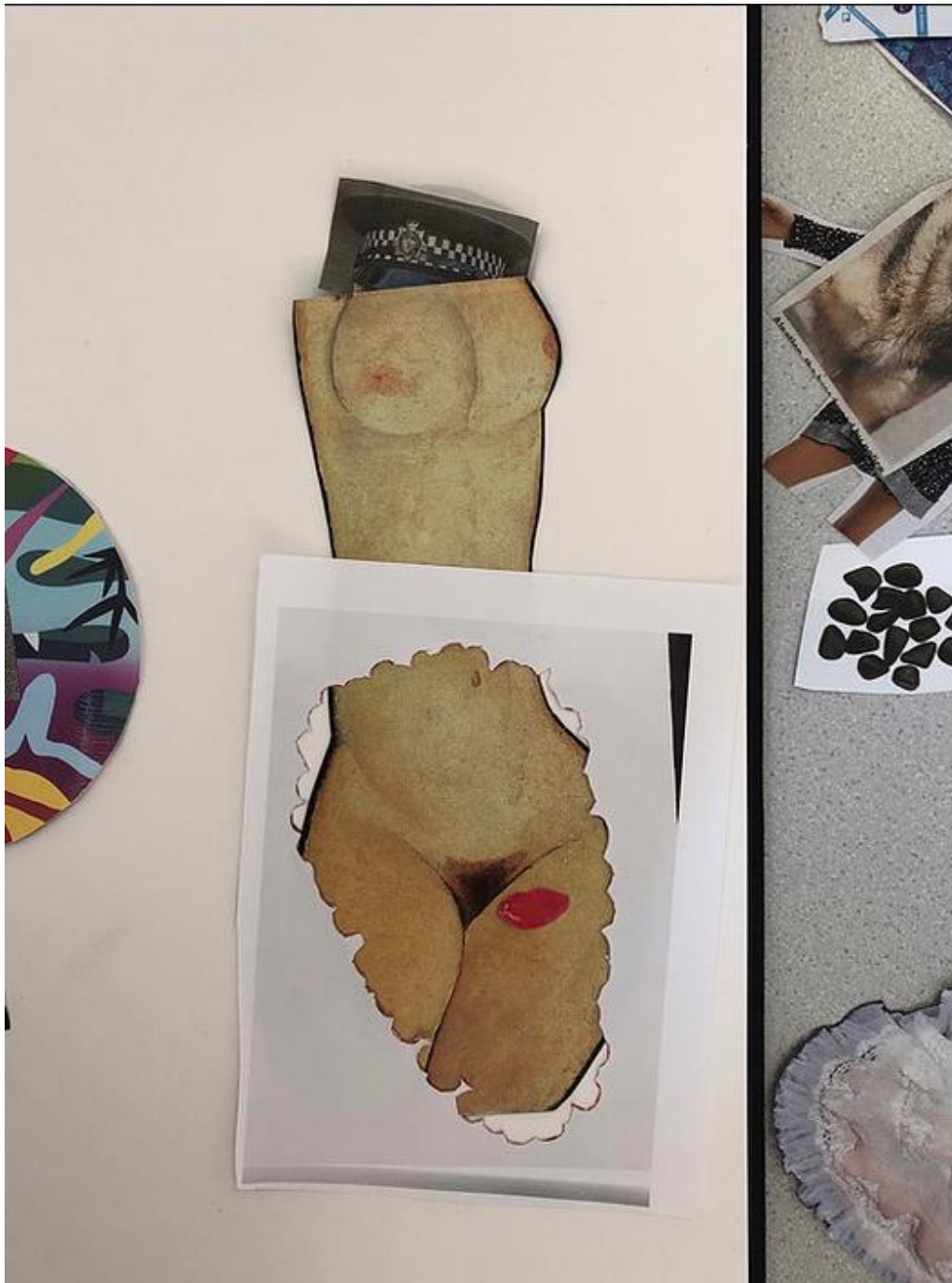
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A contemporary artist today that practices a version of cut up technique is Wangetchi Mutu who's collage process mimics amputation, transplant operations and torturous prosthetics. Her work explores the violence and the misrepresentation of women, particularly black women face in the world today. In this piece below sexual organs become a face of pain giving birth, struggling to speak which can convey the normalisation of plastic surgery in modern society and how the face wears glitter in its hair represents the unrealistic beauty standards of women. Simply by mismatching photos and giving them new purposes Mutu carries on a modern journey for politics in art. I want to explore more artist like Wangetchi Mutu who carry on the collage tradition but make it relevant to the world today and adding a personal touch like her mythical, fictional pieces. I find her meaning, her method and style inspiring to make my art my collages symbolise topics such as equality, consumerism and environmentalism.



Wangechi Mutu, 'Ectopic Pregnancy' (2004)
Glitter, ink, collage on found medical illustration paper

In my own work I have tried to apply the methods of collage and its historical artists to prompt and further develop my production. The cut-up technique of materials will be a huge influence on my work. I will use what I can find and repurpose it like cubists reshaped dimensions with cut up paper, Dadaists who changed the meaning of found materials like text and rubbish and surrealists who repurposed their dreams. So far, I have restarted cutting up everything I like the shape of in magazines and newspapers, creating a collection is sorted into colour-coordinated piles like paint on a palette ready to use and mix to build a final image. Sometimes I close my eyes and pick from my colour coordinated piles of images and place them on my page to stick down and other times I carefully mix images together simply because they juxtapose each other making an unlikely scenario or character making it surreal or satirical.



Like surrealists I am inspired by the subconscious and how we can access it and use it to make art. Psychologist Sigmund Freud believed the easiest and truest path to retrieve our subconscious thoughts is through dreams. I wanted my work to be surreal and I wanted them to be personal, so I thought I'd start journaling my dreams. Whenever I can remember my dreams, I write them down as quickly as possible without filters and upload them on to a dedicated dream journal page on my Wix website. I planned to reference my dreams in my artwork using any material I feel confident in. I think I will most likely use drawings, paintings and collages to reference my dreams, so they are seamlessly made so it's as close to automatism as possible.

Surrealist automatism is an art-making method I want to use in my FMP. It is a method that suppresses the conscious control over the making process allowing the subconscious to have freedom to express itself. Great surrealist artists such as Salvador Dali and Joan Miro used automatism escape the control and limitations of their conscious and replace it with chance. This created weird and wonderful new art. Salvador Dali practiced this using his dreams as the automatic idea, and though I personally do not like the look of the art because I think it uses a sort realistic painting style which I find ironic as its far from what surrealists were trying to achieve, I find his work inspiring. I find dreams very valuable even if they are non-linear and hard to grasp, I find it impressive to capture that idea and do it with such boldness. In *Soft Construction with Boiled Beans (Premonition of Civil War)* Dali used his dream to prompt this piece to represent the horrors of the Spanish civil war six months before it started. Subsequently Dali claimed he knew the war was going to happen and his work was evidencing the prophetic power of his subconscious mind.



Salvador Dali, 'Soft Construction with Boiled Beans (Premonition of Civil War)' (1936)

More reasons for being inspired to go in depth to surrealism and psychology goes back to A-level film studies when I studied the subject and watched the fantasy/silent film 'Un Chien Andalou' (An Andalusian Dog) (1929) based on the combined dreams of director by Spanish director Luis Bunuel and artist Salvador Dali. I'd never seen anything like it before and was disturbed but uncaptured by it like a car crash. Reasons for this could include the church being represented poorly

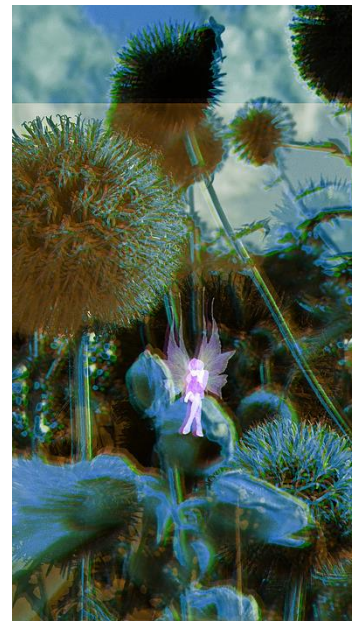
in a mostly Christian country at the time and being offensive, overstimulation of confusion from the non-linear narrative and the horrifying depictions of the human death and sex drive in corpses and groping. I understood this was the auteurs intent to make the viewer not want to watch it, but this only made me further fascinated by the potential power of the human brain and my own subconscious and thoughts I don't often share; ideas that aren't socially acceptable. I wondered what I could make for my FMP if I used my own dreams, random thoughts and automatism method and recorded it what I would muster.

I was surprised to think of how early these ideas were shared in the 1920's and its impact on society which caused heavy backlash from critics in and out the surrealist movement. I was also taken aback that an artist had an involvement in a production of a film which made me think 'why hadn't anyone done this before?' When I researched further into Salvador Dali's involvement, I discovered a personal motif of his which was ants. They were included in his infamous painting 'The Persistence of Memory' on the back of a pocket watch as well as in the film 'Un Chien Andalou'. The ants came from a dream Dali had one day and I'm not sure why he included the ants in his art as well, but I think he liked them as I think this motif portrays the destruction of time and human mortality though I understand they're not meant to have meaning. I'd like to have my own motif like Dali and include it in my work. So far, I believe my automatic, go to doodle is a spiral and a reoccurring theme in my dreams are tidal waves, so I want to work with these patterns of shapes and events to create art for my final major project.



Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dali, 'Un Chien Andalou (An Andalusian Dog)' (1929)
Salvador Dali, 'The Persistence of Memory' (1931)

I was inspired to use collage because I'd never really practiced in a medium other than painting and drawing until I started unit one and two on of my foundation art course. I have chosen to focus on cut up technique for my final major project as I've looked back at what I enjoyed most in my past work so I would enjoy and mass produce for my Final Major Project. In unit one I enjoyed most my façade project where I used trial and error in folding and distorting paper until I invented coils of paper chains. I'd never used paper in such a way that it needed to be 3-Dimensional, but I found it surprisingly fluid and enjoyable, and a material I'd want to revisit again. For unit two I continued with my Identities project into my Encounters Project using digital editing to make collages with a dreamy filter edited over. I want to combine these two together, distorting paper and reimagining the subconscious through the suitable and existent medium of collage.



I started reading textbooks on the topic of collage and one named 'cut and Past, 21st Century Collage' where the author Richard Brereton introduces collage. He states "We are reassured by the familiar. Collage is a medium that connects the past and the present, sometimes offering a glimpse of what may be the future." I figured photos and documents are fragments of time and when collected they are a collage. For nearly a year now I have been taking a photo nearly every day of myself when I wake up, fragmented glimpses of me throughout the year. I started to document the growth of my shaved head safter I cut off my hair back on the 18th of May 2020. I want to include this in my Final Major Project because I think its related, especially to Richard Brereton's quote as I am the most familiar thing/person I know, my collection of photos includes the past and he present and suggests the future that I will look different and inevitably age. My hair will grow, and the lighting will change depending on seasons and times that I'm awake. I want to a make a video/time-lapse/time-lapse of my photos together which I think counts as a collage because it's cutting up something (time) and bringing it back together as something new (a video). I plan to carry on taking these series of photos even after I finish this project, recording fragments of growth like torn up pieces of paper into a collage.

I also believe if time can be fragmented, and my recordings of growth can count as collages then everything around me that I collect and put together is a collage such as the clothes I wear (I match old and new together), the relationships I make with people (all from different background) and the food I eat (can be grown in different places but end up on the same plate to make one dish).

Things my FMP will explore:

The subconscious, researching surrealist artists, researching and practicing the automatism method of art like the surrealist artist before me and making my own methods, documenting my dreams and random thoughts for inspiration of art, encouraging myself to doodle and making art whenever possible, creating politically driven and comedic collages using magazine cut-outs, reading more textbooks and web pages on the origin of collage and its artists, discover practicing collage artists to be inspired by, making gifs/time-lapses/animations/short films of my work and documenting the growth of my hair.

I'm not sure I will make a final piece with so many paths to explore but I think that will be my project; exploring in as many corners of what I'm interested in as possible, making as much as possible along the way and recording the journey.

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