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Gaslight

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GASLIGHT

by

Melis Agabigum

A Thesis Submitted in
Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in Art

at

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

May 2016

ABSTRACT

GASLIGHT

by Melis Agabigum

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2016
Under the Supervision of Professor Yevgeniya Kaganovich

Gaslight is an exploration of the psychological phenomena of “gaslighting” in abusive relationships. Sensations of disorientation, insecurity, and the overwhelming feeling of being trapped are metaphorically imbued in the soft sculptural objects installed within the confines of the gallery space. In conjunction with the crocheted soft sculptures, the use of fabricated shadows also manipulates the viewer into questioning the physical truth of the art objects.

Reality is further blurred as the objects extend their capacity of occupying space, drawing the viewer in to inspect whether or not the shadows that they are seeing are true projections or ghosts from previous presences of light. Through dim lighting, drawn shadows, and webbed forms, the small-scale installations in *Gaslight* take on the role of the manipulator—manipulating the viewer to confront emotions regarding entrapment and self-doubt.

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To my family and close friends for their unwavering support and love during my personal experiences that led to the creation of this body of work.

While the circumstances that inspired *Gaslight* are unfortunate,
your love, counsel, and confidence in me,
made me the strong woman I am today.

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I would like to thank Josie Osborne, Marna Brauner, Dr. Shelleen Greene, and Veleta Vancza for all their support and mentorship. Lastly, thank you to professor Marianetta Porter and Dr. John Marshall from the University of Michigan, where I completed my Bachelor in Fine Arts. Their belief in my abilities and encouragement to attend graduate school to earn my Master in Fine Arts is the main reason why I am here today, writing this thesis.

*Gaslight*¹: (v.) **1.** *To manipulate (a person) by psychological means into questioning his or her own sanity.*

¹ Lighter, James E., trans. "Gaslight." Def. 2. *OED*. Comp. *OED*. Oxford English Dictionary, n.d. Web. 23 Mar. 2016.

Introduction:

Dark, insecure, and unsettling feelings flood in and out of my heart as I try to catch my breath from the nightmare that has been haunting me for the last five years. I begin to recite the mantra that has become so engrained in my daily routine that if it were a visible scar on my body, you could see it from a mile away. *You are strong, confident and smart. This used to never happen. You used to be self-assured, secure, happy, and unfortunately, naïve. Go back to that mental space. Be that person, just don't be naïve.*

These thoughts; feelings; emotional offsets...these are experienced by many people, some who do not even know the underlying cause for feeling this way. There are many who experience this kind of self-doubt, sadness and frustration on a regular basis.

These feelings of self-doubt and insecurity are experienced and associated with individuals who have undergone a form of abuse called "gaslighting."

I seek semblance in reminding myself: *I am not alone.*

My MFA Thesis show *Gaslight*, is an exploration of the psychological phenomena of "gaslighting" in abusive relationships. The name comes from the 1938 play *Gas Light* (also known as *Angel Street*) by British dramatist Patrick Hamilton, and its 1944 film

version directed by George Cukor, starring Charles Boyer and Ingrid Bergman.²

Gaslighting refers to the action played out by Boyer's character of dimming the gaslights within the house to "psychologically manipulate his wife into believing that she is going insane."³

According to clinical psychologist Dr. George Simon:

In recent years, the term "gaslighting" has come to be applied to attempts by certain kinds of personalities, especially psychopaths — who are among the personalities most adept at sophisticated tactics of manipulation — to create so much doubt in the minds of their targets of exploitation that the victim no longer trusts their own judgment about things and buys into the assertions of the manipulator, thus coming under their power and control.⁴

In *Gaslight*, I explore subtle manipulation tactics through affective circumstances of truth, darkness, and entrapment. Sensations of disorientation, insecurity, and the overwhelming feeling of being trapped (which occur emotionally within individuals who have or are experiencing instances of gaslighting) are metaphorically imbued in the soft sculptural objects installed within the confines of the gallery space. Through dim lighting, drawn shadows, and webbed forms, I take on the role of the manipulator—manipulating the viewer into experiencing disorientation and self-doubt in what they may or may not be accurately seeing and feeling while viewing the work.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

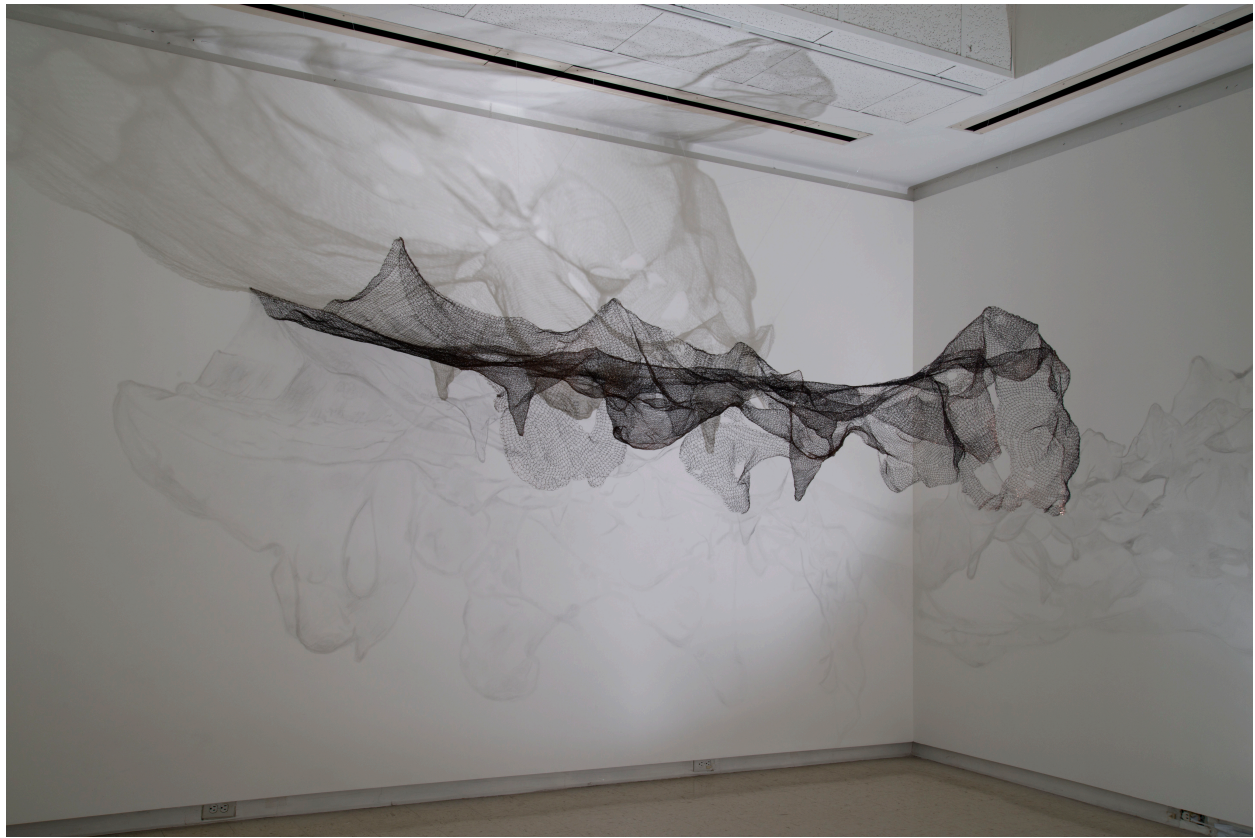
⁴ Simon, George, PhD. "Gaslighting as a Manipulation Tactic: What It Is, Who Does It, And Why." Psychology Philosophy and Real Life RSS. November 8, 2011. Accessed March 23, 2016. <http://counsellingresource.com/features/2011/11/08/gaslighting/>.

The Installation and Sculptural Objects

The show consists of three mid-sized sculptural installations within the gallery space.

When the viewer initially walks into the gallery, a dimly lit room that sets a subdued tone for the work greets them: it is inviting and yet, slightly unsettling with the dark lights and dark objects that inhabit three separate walls of the space.

The first piece, *When the Sun Rises, Sometimes it's Hard to Believe There Ever Was A Night* (Fig. 1), is suspended from the ceiling six feet off the ground, slowly and subtly declining to 5 foot 7 inches above the ground. There is a single spotlight lighting the piece from below, which casts a shadow upward onto the walls and ceiling above the suspended trap. Surrounding the walls and ceiling are real and fabricated shadows from various light sources that previously lit the piece. These real and false shadows extend the art object beyond its physical mass and crawl along the walls and ceiling like mysterious, ominous wisps mixing fact and fiction. They lead the viewer from underneath the hanging net toward the back wall and force the viewer to move along toward the next sculptural installation.



(Fig.1)⁵

The second piece installed within the gallery space is contained in a corner with a sharp spotlight focused on the floor. The piece is titled *The More I Step into the Sun, The More You Step Out of the Light* (Fig. 2), and is made from copper that has been spray painted black, and a component with 24K gold plating. The piece consists of two parts that are connected to one another with an elongated, winding crocheted tube reminiscent of an umbilical cord. In the corner, there is a deformed bulbous form that is

⁵ Agabigum, Melis. *When the Sun Rises, Sometimes It's Hard to Believe There Ever Was A Night*. 2016. Gaslight, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Art Center Gallery. Photo Kayla Massey.

not lit. Under the spotlight on the floor is a 24K gold plated form, which houses a thinner crocheted snare that is spread out on the ground (Fig. 3).



(Fig. 2)⁶

⁶ Agabigum, Melis. *The More I Step into the Sun, The More You Step Out of the Light*. Gaslight, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Art Center Gallery.



(Fig. 3)⁷

The final piece in *Gaslight* is made from black powder coated copper wire. The object expands over the central wall within the gallery space and extends 7.5 Feet in diameter. The piece is entitled *My Heart, Your Past, and Other Black Holes* (Fig. 4) and is tensioned away from the wall to create an entrapment of space between the piece and the wall. Behind the central crocheted bulb are a series of drawn graphite shadows in varying values along with a projection of the central bulb from the tight spotlights illuminating the piece. Composites of writing and line work make up the fabricated shadows that subtly surround the perimeter of the crocheted sculpture.

⁷ Ibid.

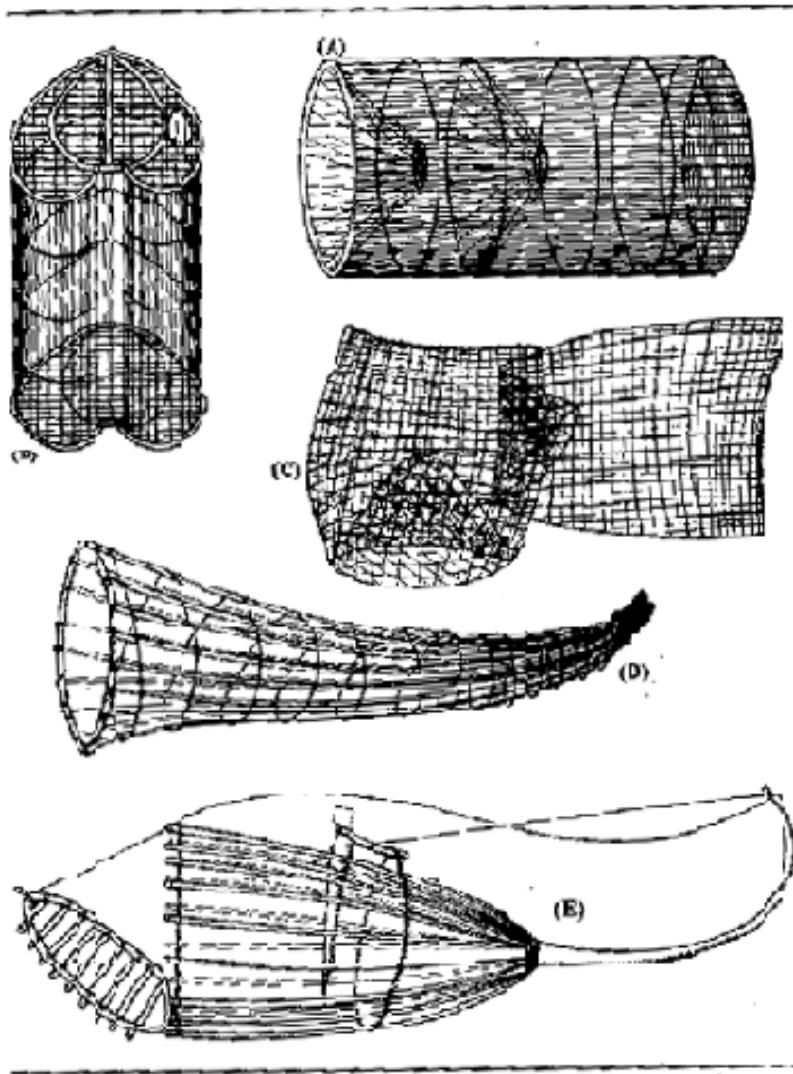


(Fig. 4)⁸

⁸ Agabigum, Melis. *My Heart, Your Past, and Other Black Holes*. 2016. Gaslight, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Art Center Gallery.

The Symbolism of Form within *Gaslight*

Each sculptural installation in *Gaslight* draws from the forms of nets, snares, and traps. For example, traditional Asian Fishing traps (Fig. 5) inspire the forms in the pieces, *My Heart, Your Past, and Other Black Holes*, and *The more I step into the Sun, The more You Step out of the Light*. Like the “Ouroboros” (The snake eating its own tail that obscures where one point begins and ends), many of the sculptures’ forms fall into an infinite state of renewal and repetition of the same cycle. Each of the pieces begins and ends at a centralized vortex, engulfing the point of origin. This unity of beginning and ending becoming “one” often symbolizes either rebirth, or death depending on the connotation the viewer would like to associate with the work.



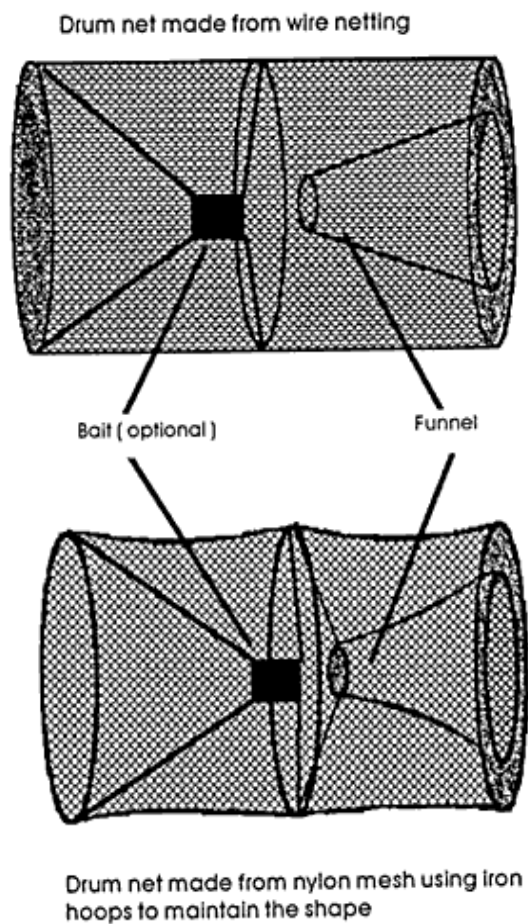
(Fig. 5)⁹

These points of start and finish in a continuous cycle can be seen in traditional woven fishing traps, specifically “drum nets” (Fig. 6). The woven traps have large entrances, but upon entering the form, leaving is near impossible, due to the funnel shaped

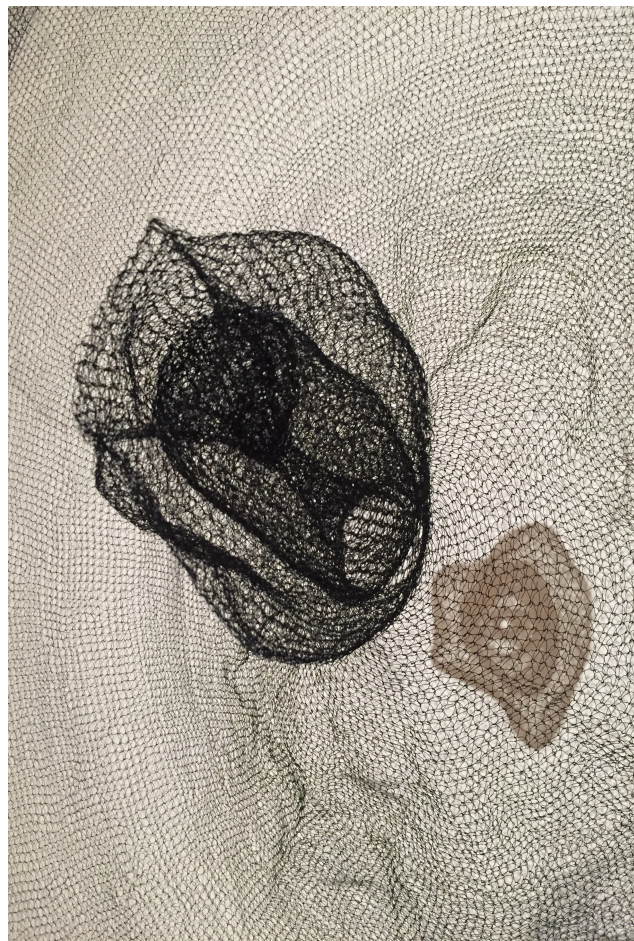
⁹ Various types of fish trap from tropical rivers: (A) cylindrical drum trap (worldwide); (B) vertical slit trap (Asia, Bangladesh and Mekong river); (C) folded woven trap (Niger river); (D) funnel trap (worldwide); (E) spring trap (Africa, Niger, Chari and Zaire rivers). Digital image. *FAO Corporate Document Repository*. Fisheries and Aquaculture Department, n.d. Web. 23 Mar. 2016.

chambers. As described by the Fisheries and Aquaculture Department of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations:

This consists of a funnel or funnels leading from the outside to an initial chamber (the "parlour") and a second funnel to an inner or holding chamber (the "bedroom"). Research has shown that traps with more than one funnel catch more than traps with a single funnel, although the quality of the catch is often reduced as a result of injury to the fish caused by the increased number of projections on the inside of the trap.¹⁰



(Fig. 6)¹¹



(Fig. 7)¹²

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

This inability for fish to escape from drum traps becomes the symbolization of death within my work (Fig. 7). Much like the fish's struggle to escape, gaslighting creates a sensation of entrapment within the abused. They feel stuck, hopeless, and in extreme cases, feel as if their soul is dying. Symptoms of gaslighting range from moments of confusion to severe cases of depression. As listed in an article published by *Psychology Today*, written by Dr. Robin Stern PhD, those who are or have been gaslighted experience the following symptoms¹³:

- You constantly second-guess yourself.
- You ask yourself, "Am I too sensitive?" multiple times a day.
- You often feel confused and even crazy.
- You're always apologizing to your partner.
- You can't understand why, with so many apparently good things in your life, you aren't happier.
- You frequently make excuses for your partner's behavior to friends and family.
- You find yourself withholding information from friends and family so you don't have to explain or make excuses.
- You know something is terribly wrong, but you can never quite express what it is, even to yourself.
- You start lying to avoid the put downs and reality twists.
- You have trouble making simple decisions.
- You have the sense that you used to be a very different person – more confident, more fun-loving, more relaxed.
- You feel hopeless and joyless.
- You feel as though you can't do anything right.
- You wonder if you are a "good enough" partner.

¹² Agabigum, Melis. *My Heart, Your Past, and Other Black Holes*. Detail. Digital Image. 2016. Gaslight, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Art Center Gallery.

¹³ Stern, Robin, Ph.D. "Are You Being Gaslighted?" *Psychology Today*. May 19, 2009. Accessed April 17, 2016. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/power-in-relationships/200905/are-you-being-gaslighted>.

Some of the symptoms listed inspire the manipulation tactics I use with my sculptural objects to create *Gaslight*. The feeling of distortion and disorientation become key affective qualities that I imbue within the objects of this body of work. For example, in *The more I step into the Sun, The more You Step out of the Light* (Fig. 8), each layer present within the larger bulbous form becomes more deformed and fragile from the weight of the material as it engulfs its previous layer. The result is a nest-like form that is an unrecognizable version of its interior cones.



(Fig. 8)¹⁴

¹⁴ Agabigum, Melis. In process image and detail of *The More I Step into the Sun, The More You Step Out of the Light*. Digital Image. March 31, 2016.

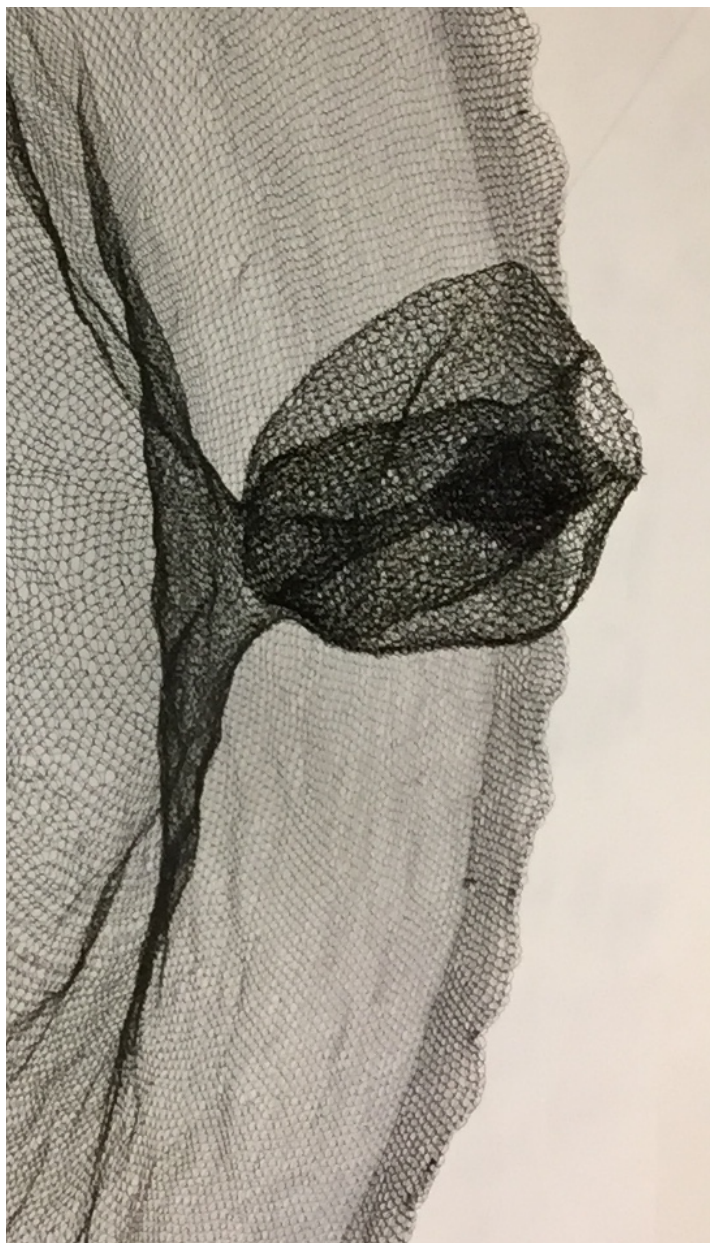
Similar to the experience of being gaslighted, where the ability to trust one's own judgment is distorted, the exterior form consumes the original, small cone, and shelters it in its core. In doing so, as the exterior grows larger, it becomes skewed over time. Ultimately, the repetition of engulfing and entrapping the smaller more definite and perfect objects within, create the sensation of in-escape and deformity. The true form of the original cone becomes lost and hidden inside.

This physical deformation that is meant to allude to distortion and entrapment can also be seen in the ouroboros formation of the 24K plated gold component of *The More I Step into the Sun, The More You Step Out of the Light* (Fig. 3). The gold plated component acts as both a physical trap and a symbolic trap, which is intended to lure the viewer in. Physically, the piece is attached to a snare that the viewer must step into, in order to inspect the sculpture close-up. The piece draws upon the build of an anglerfish; a predator that lures its prey. "Their most distinctive feature, worn only by females, is a piece of dorsal spine that protrudes above their mouths like a fishing pole—hence their name. Tipped with a lure of luminous flesh this built-in rod baits prey close enough to be snatched."¹⁵ A tight, sharp spotlight focuses on the gold plated ouroboros: it glimmers in the gallery space against the darkened corner that houses

¹⁵ "Anglerfish, Anglerfish Pictures, Anglerfish Facts - National Geographic." National Geographic. Accessed April 17, 2016. <http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/fish/anglerfish/>.

the larger deformed bulbous form. The gold lures in the viewer like the luminous flesh of the anglerfish, and without notice, the viewer stands in the black crocheted snare that extends its perimeter onto the gallery floor from the center of the golden Viking knit cone (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3).

In *My Heart, Your Past, and Other Black Holes* the same repetition and engulfment of form inspired by the ouroboros and drum net is seen in the central bulb form (Fig. 7 and Fig. 9). The piece rather than completely entrapping itself expands outward for its final layer and acts as a large net that entraps the shadows of the bulb against the wall (Fig. 4). The bulb, which is tensioned away from the wall, by fishing line from the ceiling, gives the effect of something either trying to escape away from the circular net, or something that is being sucked in toward a vortex that is projected upon the wall (Fig. 4 and Fig. 7).



(Fig. 9)¹⁶

When the Sun Rises, Sometimes it's Hard to Believe There Ever Was A Night (Fig. 1) draws its imagery inspiration from hunting nets that are suspended from above. The piece is crocheted with a border similar to a woven blanket that begins to morph into organic, misshapen edges as it moves away from its tethered point on the wall. The

¹⁶ Agabigum, Melis. Detail of *My Heart, Your Past, and Other Black Holes*. Digital Image. 2016.

piece plays on the fine line between suspended “blanket” and “net”. Motivated by the similarity of form, I play on the slight difference between the positive and negative connotation connected with the final object. The blanket’s planes undulate into organic holes, misshapen inverted cones, and blown-out bumps that mimic a landscape that is pushing down upon the viewer as they walk underneath the net (Fig. 10). The further the viewer walks into the space, the lower the blanket/net resides above the viewer’s head. This shift in form and height impedes on the viewers personal space and creates an environment that entraps the viewer from above in a claustrophobic crocheted cloudscape.



(Fig. 10)¹⁷

¹⁷ Agabigum, Melis. *When the Sun Rises, Sometimes It's Hard to Believe There Ever Was A Night*. Installation detail from gallery opening. Digital Image. 2016. Gaslight, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Art Center Gallery.

Each of the pieces in *Gaslight* are darkened with a surface treatment upon the copper wire. Black powder coat applied onto the surface of *My Heart, Your Past, and Other Black Holes* further enforces the idea that the object suspended and tensioned away from the wall is a metaphor for an entrapping black hole for whatever mysterious projection is behind it.

With *The more I step into the Sun, The more You Step out of the Light*, and *When the Sun Rises, Sometimes It's Hard to Believe There Ever Was A Night*, the blackened surface treatments are a result of a light layered application of enamel spray paint. These surface treatments of the crocheted soft sculptures further enforce doubt and mystery within the viewer. A light dusting of black spray-paint coats the main body of these pieces. Depending on the angle of perspective as well as the lighting, the sculptures appear black or copper to the viewer. As the viewer moves around and through the space of the installations, the surface appearance changes from black to copper (or vice versa) and creates a shift within the viewers mind about what it is they know about the work, and what they are seeing in that moment.

Crochet as a Mode of Communication

Crochet as an art form plays a predominant role in the creation and manifestation of these pieces. Drawing upon my personal history with crochet, I use it as a means of communication in creating sculptures that express my feelings when words are not enough. As a first generation American born Turk, I look to my past to cope with my personal experience of gaslighting as a means of therapy through making. In my previous body of work and Master of Art thesis show, *Dead Weight*, I also used crochet as therapy through rumination.

In a bizarre way, the repetitive making process of art becomes an outlet for me. I am a machine when I enter my studio: Walk in, sit down, turn "off" brain, let hands take over. And my hands repeat the same motion over and over again till they cannot go any longer. Till I will them to stop: I am in control... This is where the making process becomes my saving grace. It saves me from myself. I choose everything that I do and do not do. When I cannot turn my brain "off," I allow myself a certain allotment of time to think about my problems, or ruminate on the experiences I still carry with me from the past. Just as the thoughts and emotions flow, my hands flow with the monotonous motions of the crochet hook against the wire. My thoughts go in circles: my hook builds upon segments of circles and spheres... repetition and internalization of that repetition is what become ritual, myth and ultimately wisdom through consciousness. By participating in an action repeatedly, you begin to create a myth or narrative that exists through the life of that repetitive experience.¹⁸

The process of building line upon line into a three dimensional object becomes freeing for me emotionally. Similar to the work of artist Oliver Herring, who employed knitting

¹⁸ Agabigum, Melis. "Dead Weight." Master of Art Thesis, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2015.

in several bodies of work, specifically his *A Flower for Ethyl Eichelberger* project from 1991-2001, crochet/knitting acts a time consuming process that frees the mind. Herring on his artist website discusses the process:

... it happens by hand which frees up the mind to think and by the end of the day I could see how much I accomplished. In addition to being very practical it was also a poetic way to deal with my feelings and thoughts. I started with a complicated personal set of issues and, without really being too aware of it, channeled them through the filters of Eichelberger, AIDS, gender and identity into something larger. Meanwhile, the longer I knit, the more it transcended into a genuine, spiritual, and existential meditation on the passage of time, with my time being the principal capital...¹⁹

This transcendence and meditation that Herring speaks about is what draws me to crochet. It not only becomes a mode of emotional catharsis, but it also acts as a journey into discovery and reflection. I see the history of my grandmother in the work that I make, and in times of emotional duress, I find semblance in the strong cultural foundation that I felt detached from during my personal experiences with gaslighting. For many, making becomes the therapy necessary to find happiness because; "We turn toward objects at the very point of 'making.' To be made happy by this or that is to recognize that happiness starts from somewhere other than the subject who may use the word to describe a situation."²⁰ Crochet becomes the agency of attempting to find happiness and discuss my feelings in a universal manner. While the designs that I

¹⁹ Herring, Oliver. "Oliver Herring – A Flower for Ethyl Eichelberger." *OliverHerringStudios*. Oliver Herring, 2013. Accessed May 3, 2016.

²⁰ Ahmed, Sara. "Happy Objects." In *The Affect Theory Reader*, by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, 29-51. Durham, N.C. ; London: Duke University Press, 2010.

create are not intended to be decorative, the seemingly simple single stitch and double stitch chain that I use in my work enforces the mythology and narrative that even the simplest of actions can turn into something large or overbearing.

The art of crochet has a strong foundation in Turkish Culture. Women learned this art at early ages and used crochet or "Oya" (lace-making) to create intricate designs and patterns that communicated their thoughts and ideas during a time period where certain topics were barred from conversation.

Due to family etiquette and traditions, certain subjects would inevitably be banned from conversation, so as this craft evolved, the ensuing symbolic language emerged accordingly--a secret communication between women. It is a form of expressing one's emotions, whether happy, sad, or desperate, through specific combinations of colours and designs; a fascinating source of unwritten female chat; a type of gossip where you could condemn your mother-in-law or express your passion for your new husband without being ridiculed by the whole of society.²¹

In traditional Oya-making, each of the designs would have a different meaning and the women, rather than verbalize their thoughts, would point to the crocheted pattern attached to their headscarves, or in progress in their hands. Through this visual language, an unspoken means to communicate their feelings and ideas existed. While the negative connotations of women's silence on "taboo" topics were lost with the establishment of women's equality in Turkey, this art form of Oya continued to be

²¹ Ergen, Frances. "Oya - Turkish Needle Lace." *HandEye*, November 11, 2010. Accessed April 18, 2016. <http://handeyemagazine.com/content/oya-turkish-needle-lace>.

passed on to the following generations.

Those parallels of emotional oppression and communication of emotions through the art of crochet become the motivation for further utilizing textile techniques in metal. The pieces, as they are being made, become physical representations of the effort and time consuming investment of relationships. They resemble woven traps that pull you in without a form of visible escape. Viewers in the gallery space can see the time investment of a process like crochet and even without fully understanding or knowing what gaslighting is, they can be emotionally moved by the labour and time put into creating these sculptures.

We are moved by things. And in being moved, we make things. An object can be affective by virtue of its own location (The object might be *here*, which is *where* I experience this or that affect) and the timing of its appearance (the object might be *now*, which is *when* I experience this or that affect). To experience an object as being affective or sensational is to be directed not only toward an object, but to 'whatever' is around that object, which includes what is behind the object, the conditions of its arrival.²²

As stated earlier, the conditions of arrival for this body of work come from the dark and unfortunate experiences of my past. The time consuming nature of crocheting these sculptures parallel my personal investment in people during relationships, while experiencing self doubt, the feeling of entrapment, and disorientation regarding my

²² Ahmed, Sara. "Happy Objects." In *The Affect Theory Reader*, by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, 29-51. Durham, N.C. ; London: Duke University Press, 2010.

own thoughts and feelings about truth and lies. I create these forms as my means of communicating the sensations of disenchantment from my experiences of being gaslighted (Fig. 11). While a single line of wire is lightweight, the final crocheted objects are physically heavy (ranging from 20-25 pounds) and become the physical manifestations of the emotional weight that I have been dragging with me for the last five years. They are the symbolic traps that once sucked me in that I try to escape through the action of making.



(Fig. 11)²³

Ironically, the process of crochet allows these forms to become vessels with literal openings that lack complete closure. With each object that I make, I wait to find this feeling of “finishing” or making something whole—feeling secure in my choices that led up to the final point. But, these forms are imperfect and lack the closure I strive for:

²³ Agabigum, Melis. In Process image of Crocheting in my studio. Digital Image. February 16, 2016.

they are not water tight vessels, and rest as empty objects that cannot contain strictly because they have holes and openings. They are empty objects that trap their prey in the negative spaces.

Ambiance through Lighting and the Role of Affect in Creating "Bloom Spaces"

The shadows of this work, extends across the gallery walls as a symbol of the doubt and falsity of reality that is experienced and carried with victims of gaslighting. The physical truth of "what is" and "what is not" becomes a blur as the objects extend their capacity of occupying space. Shadow work, real and fabricated through focused spotlights creates an ambiance to the gallery space. This then sets the tone of the show for the viewer. Ambiance is the mood created for a certain environment and in *Gaslight*, the ambiance of the gallery is mysterious, sad, and unsettling. Inspired by lighting tactics used in German expressionist film and Alfred Hitchcock's works, I utilize light and shadow to unsettle the viewer. Darkness and dim lighting offers dramatic effects that can "obscure and prevent the audience from seeing the surroundings clearly."²⁴ Darkness can also "intrigue," "mystify," "enhance," and "distort through deep shadows (that) create surroundings in which danger may lurk."²⁵ The conjunction of some or all of these properties from darkness and shadow allow for an atmosphere

²⁴ Millerson, Gerald. *Lighting for Television and Film*. 3rd ed. 260. Oxford: Focal Press, 1999. Kindle.

²⁵ Ibid.

to exist within the space that evokes feelings of unease.

When the spectator enters the space from the brightly lit adjacent gallery, they are greeted with barely lit, dark objects, in a dim room. It sets the tone for the show and instills the affective quality of being gaslighted in that: "You know something is terribly wrong, but you can never quite express what it is, even to yourself."²⁶ These sensations of affect can be attributed to the following:

Affect marks a body's *belonging* to a world of encounters or; a world's belonging to a body of encounters but also, in *non-belonging*, through all those far sadder (de) compositions of mutual in-compossibilities.²⁷

Emotions experienced by the viewer arise from the in-compossibilities of what is in the gallery space; real objects coupled with what does not truly exist upon the walls regarding the shadows that they are seeing. These in-compossible spaces then act as "bloom spaces" for the affective encounter to take place. A bloom space is essentially a sensation space that is a threshold to the real.

Bloom spaces are everywhere. You can start anywhere. The etching of the refrain can show up in the mundane and the material process of solving problems. The hinge between the actual and the potential can pop up as an object out of place, the sense of an absent-presence, a road-block, a sticking

²⁶ Stern, Robin, Ph.D. "Are You Being Gaslighted?" Psychology Today. May 19, 2009. Accessed April 17, 2016.

²⁷ Gregg, Melissa, and Gregory J. Seigworth. "An Inventory of Shimmers." Introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader*, 1-28. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010.

point, or a barely audible whispering that something's up in the neighborhood... Anything can be a bloom space.²⁸

Ultimately, the gallery space as a bloom space becomes the affective commonplace that compels the viewer to further examine their environment. Dim-lighting and fabricated shadows are intended to create an eerie ambiance within the room. The extended graphite shadows enlarge the physical object to the eye, and at the same time, distort the true presence of the physical objects they mimic. For the audience, they only notice the real vs. fictional shadows upon closer inspection. During the point of recognition and internalization that what they believed to be real shadow, was false, their mental state of self-assurance shifts. The viewers' perspectives change from knowing fact to "second-guess yourself,"²⁹ and the feeling of "being confused and even crazy"³⁰ (even if it is momentary) for believing something that was real.

These suspensions open up revelations about the promises that had clustered as people's objects of desire, stage moments of exuberance in the impasse near the normal, and provide tools for suggesting why these exuberant attachments keep ticking not like the time bomb they might be but like the white noise machine that provides assurance that what seems like static really is, after all, a rhythm people can enter into while they're dithering, tottering, bargaining, testing, or otherwise being worn out by the promises that they have attached to in this world.³¹

²⁸ Stewart, Kathleen. "Worlding Refrains." Afterword to *The Affect Theory Reader*, by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, 339-54. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010.

²⁹ Stern, Robin, Ph.D. "Are You Being Gaslighted?" *Psychology Today*. May 19, 2009. Accessed April 17, 2016.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Berlant, Lauren. "Cruel Optimism." In *The Affect Theory Reader*, by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, 93-117. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010.

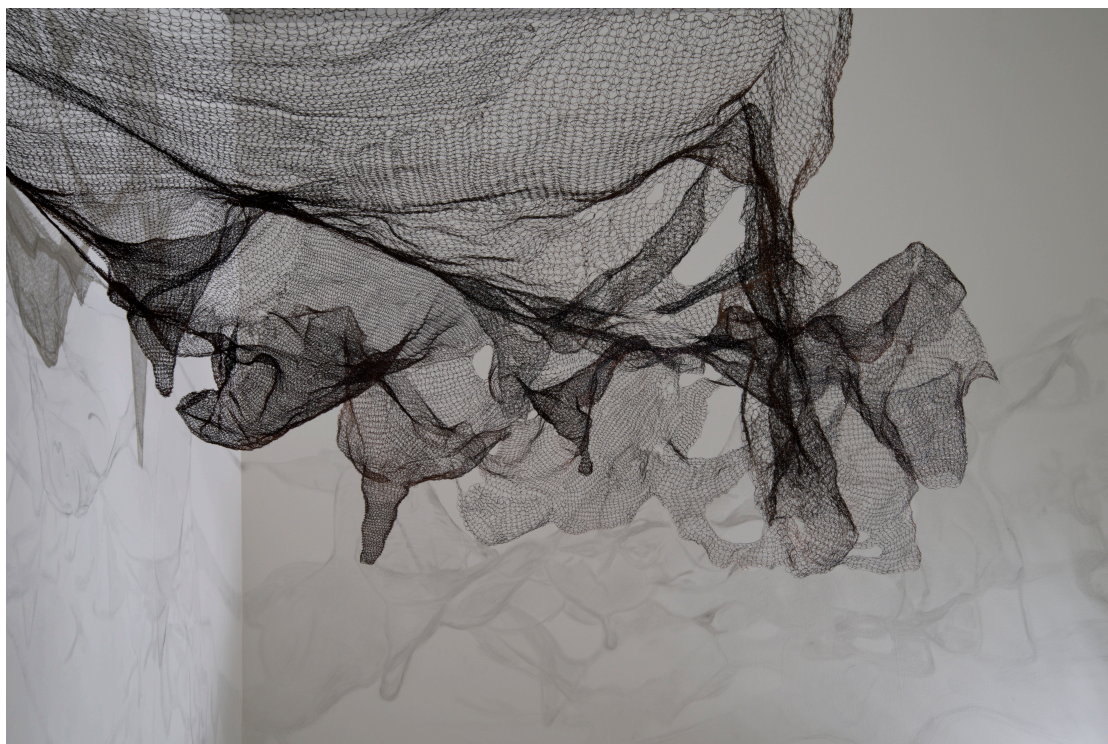
When a person has their self-confidence in what they believe to be true, proved otherwise, they become worn out over time. Gaslighting is a prime example of this.

In *Gaslight*, I play the role of the manipulator but in non-traditional way. Rather than attempt to manipulate the viewer into thinking that the shadows are drawn when they are real (as would be the case in real gaslighting), I draw shadows upon the walls in cursive writing (Fig.14), loose, smudged lines (Fig. 13), and offer the viewer the opportunity to believe what they choose to believe upon first glance. This is partially done by using a technique often used in film and television called “False Shadow.”

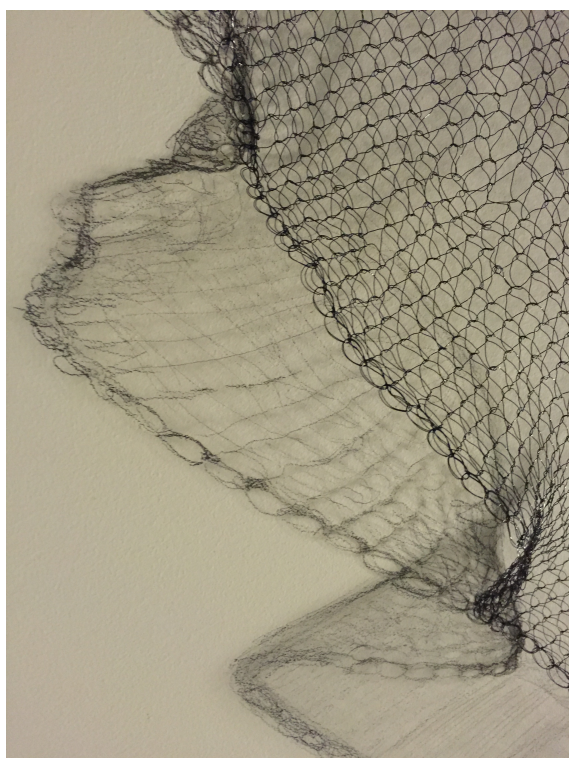
False shadow: This is not really shadow at all, but the impression of shadow that results when you leave part of a surface unlit...If adjacent lighting overlaps, it double lights a portion and creates a hotspot. If part of the surface is left unlit by adjacent lamps, this can appear from a distance as a false shadow.³²

I take false shadow in my show, and trace over the remnants of where the walls were once lit. Through moving the light source repeatedly, and overlapping drawings as substitutes for adjacent lighting overlaps (during the actual viewing of the work), I am able to create the illusion of shadow from a non-existent light source that appears as real shadow from a distance (Fig.12). Only through closer inspection can the viewer either confirm or deny the truth that I present.

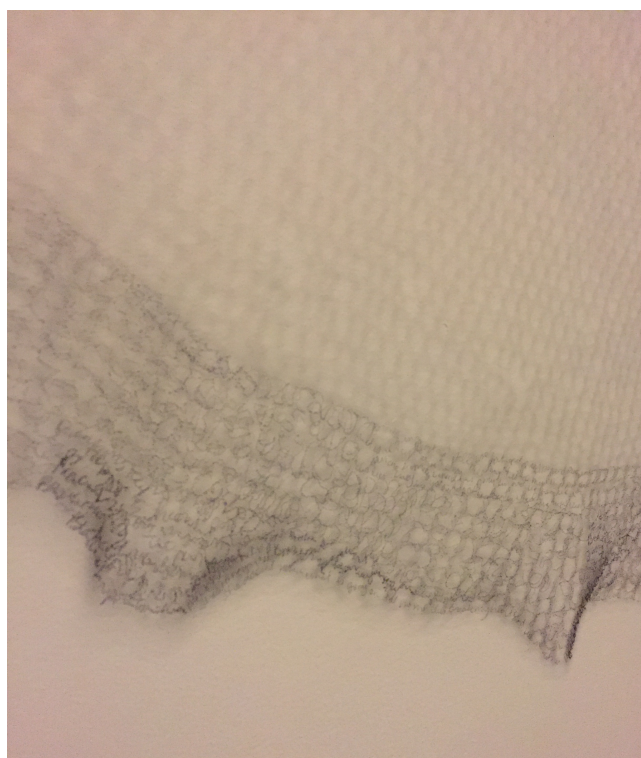
³² Millerson, Gerald. *Lighting for Television and Film*. 3rd ed. 260. Oxford: Focal Press, 1999. Kindle.



(Fig. 12)³³



(Fig. 13)³⁴



(Fig. 14)³⁵

³³ Agabigum, Melis. A mix of real and false shadow are above the piece with false shadows drawn below

Regardless of the choice made by the viewer to accept or reject the reality of what they are seeing and experiencing, the encounter that they have with the sculptures in *Gaslight* offer a new understanding of the conceptual artworks.

Our encounter with art has the capacity to produce these kinds of common notions and transversal becomings...it also operates to undo, or to break with, typical ways of thinking and feeling. There will in fact always be moments of rupture – irrational points...we might understand these affective ruptures as ruptures in an already ruptured world.³⁶

The crocheted objects and their dramatic shadows draw the viewer in and challenge their understanding of presence and time. The transversal becoming for the viewer exists within this plane of altering thinking and feeling. For example, the suspension of crocheted components in *When the Sun Rises, Sometimes it's Hard to Believe There Ever Was A Night*, drives the sculpture within the installation into a new space of becoming; it is no longer a series of crocheted copper wires, but rather it is the net that traps you from above.

This shift in understanding the piece from a literal object of material into a metaphoric object based on concept and emotion subconsciously moves the viewer into a state of

the sculpture. Digital image. April 7, 2016. Photo: Kayla Massey.

³⁴ Agabigum, Melis. In Process image of shadow drawing in the studio using loose line-work in graphite. Digital image. January 13, 2016.

³⁵ Agabigum, Melis. In Process image of shadow drawing with cursive writing in graphite. Digital image. March 12, 2016.

³⁶ O'Sullivan, Simon. "Chapter 4: From Geophilosophy to Geoaesthetics The Virtual and the Plane of Immanence versus Mirror-Travel and the Spiral Jetty." In *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought beyond Representation*, 98-119. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

transcendent thought, that philosopher Simon O'Sullivan calls: "thinking immanence."

Thinking immanence is where we separate our selves as humans from the objects, which surround us.³⁷ We encounter objects differently and we perceive them in a new process of thought, where we recognize the new possibilities of what it is we are actually seeing.

Works presented in *Gaslight* act as ruptured parts in a new materialism approach/form of being. The sculptures new organization and material quality of the following: metal wire acting as a fiber/textile; being treated with powder coat, gold plating, or spray paint; coupled with their in-action presentation drive the viewer into a state of transcendence regarding their understandings of existence, time, and perception.

In the writings of theorist Eric Matthews, who interprets Maurice Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of perception and art, perception is defined as:

... a 'transcendental', not a situated subject. But the very nature of perception implies that a perceiving as opposed to a thinking, subject must be situated somewhere in the world of space and time: to perceive is always, as said earlier, to perceive from a particular perspective or view point... All these and other ways of interacting with the world give rise to its meaningfulness, so that the

³⁷ O'Sullivan, Simon. "Chapter 1: Rhizomes, Machines, Multiplicities and Maps Notes Toward an Expanded Art Practice (Beyond Representation)." In *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought beyond Representation*, 9-38. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

meanings of things in a sense, exist neither 'inside' our minds nor in the world itself, but in the space between us and the world... we are essentially embodied subjects.³⁸

The frozen momentum of suspended sculptures from the ceiling or walls in *When the Sun Rises*, *Sometimes it's Hard to Believe There Ever Was A Night*, and *The more I step into the Sun*, *The more You Step out of the Light* (respectively), or the bulbous forms being pulled from above in *My Heart, Your Past, and Other Black Holes* situates the subject of my intimate sculptural installations somewhere "in a world of space and time."³⁹ It causes the viewer to focus on "the embodiment of human action... and the agentic contributions made by an inter-subjective field."⁴⁰

Rather than providing the viewer with a state of before or after gaslighting, my work forces the viewer to focus on the result of human action (being put into the situation of manipulating fact and perception of reality). The viewer's perceptions of these human actions become the subject that they must confront. It is the viewer who must recognize the situation that they have been forced into, and must separate fact from fiction of shadow and object within the space (specifically with the works: *When the Sun Rises*, *Sometimes it's Hard to Believe There Ever Was A Night*, and *My Heart, Your*

³⁸ Matthews, Eric. *Merleau-Ponty: A Guide for the Perplexed*. 33-37. London: Continuum International Pub. Group, 2006.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Bennett, Jane. "Agency of Assemblages." In *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, 28. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.

Past, and Other Black Holes.) The installations combined with the presence of the viewer embody the act of gaslighting. Through detailed observation and interaction with the work, the viewer experiences a new perception of an event that is beyond his or her control. With *Gaslight*, the viewer is present for an event that exists beyond the reality of time—it becomes an event that quite often is unobservable to a victim of gaslighting, but with this show, the emotions I have experienced and put into the work are now present.

Conclusion:

When I began making the work that would eventually become part of *Gaslight*, I struggled with understanding how I could express emotions felt during events and instances of gaslighting. Did I want to become the manipulator? Force emotions of insecurity, self-doubt and feelings of entrapment or being trapped, in viewers; all sentiments that I still carry with me, like a slowly fading nightmare that resurges every so often?

I initially resisted the direction that the work was taking me. As I tried to divert my MFA show toward a place that felt safe, I played with ideas such as making my show about “feeling incomplete” (a now recognized symptom of gaslighting), or attempts at

“finding yourself” through crochet. This changed when I looked back at the successes of my previous body of work: *Dead Weight*. It was motivated by dark content, but became universal and beautiful in a haunting way.

Ultimately, *Dead Weight* solved many problems for me. It also posed several questions that I will be focusing on for the future: ways to further evoke emotional connection through body, space, and object; struggle, tension or reaction within the forms and materials; and ways to bring the performativity and agency of the objects back into play with the physical body. These are all questions that I look forward to answering within the next year and body of work.⁴¹

I remembered the ambitious questions I had posed myself; those questions I sought to answer with my future body of work: this body of work. Being brave was the way I learned to cope with my experiences of gaslighting, and reminding myself that being brave would allow me to respond to the questions I desperately wanted to answer with my art, freed me to accept where it needed to go.

The sculptural objects in *Gaslight* are intimate and yet, overbearing when barely lit and incorporated with real and false shadows. The objects for me successfully express the emotional skeletons and baggage that still I carry years after having saved and rediscovered myself. With each glance at the black hole that I have created in *My Heart, Your Past, and Other Black Holes* I can feel my emotions being sucked back into

⁴¹ Agabigum, Melis. "Dead Weight." Master of Art Thesis, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2015

my past memories of what was said to me to create such self doubt, hopelessness, and sadness. The works are bittersweet, as I see viewers step into the snare of *The more I step into the Sun, The more You Step out of the Light*, and as they laugh in amazement at the reality vs. fiction of the shadows that surround and extend *When the Sun Rises, Sometimes it's Hard to Believe There Ever Was A Night* across the gallery walls.

These bodies of work take an emotional toll on the viewers, and me but it also sheds light onto taboo subjects that many still struggle to discuss. I look at my Turkish ancestors and see how they dealt with expressing their ideas and feelings through the art of crochet, and I am motivated to do the same. With *Gaslight*, I bring light to my inner demons and hopefully help others who are struggling with similar experiences.

The work is universal in that the installations achieve their affective duties of promoting a transcendence of thought and perspective onto subjects like abuse and the emotions that are carried with victims into their new lives. *Gaslight* is a body of work that has the potential to continue on, join the objects in *Dead Weight*, and expand into further series' of works that can become part of a greater body of content in the future.

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Various types of fish trap from tropical rivers: (A) cylindrical drum trap (worldwide); (B) vertical slit trap (Asia, Bangladesh and Mekong river); (C) folded woven trap (Niger river); (D) funnel trap (worldwide); (E) spring trap (Africa, Niger, Chari and Zaire rivers). Digital image. FAO Corporate Document Repository. Accessed March 23, 2016. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/003/t0537e/t0537e07.htm>.