THE MATERIALITY AND ART HISTORY OF GLITTER

by

Molly Mapstone

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in American Material Culture

Spring 2021

© 2021 Molly Mapstone
All Rights Reserved
THE MATERIALITY AND ART HISTORY OF GLITTER

by

Molly Mapstone

Approved: __________________________________________________________
Sarah Wasserman, Ph.D.
Professor in charge of thesis on behalf of the Advisory Committee

Approved: __________________________________________________________
Martin Brückner, Ph.D.
Director of the Winterthur Program in American Material Culture

Approved: __________________________________________________________
John A. Pelesko, Ph.D.
Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences

Approved: __________________________________________________________
Louis F. Rossi, Ph.D.
Vice Provost for Graduate and Professional Education and
Dean of the Graduate College
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is with gratitude that I extend my most sincere thanks to my thesis advisor, Dr. Sarah Wasserman who eagerly agreed to advise my project, continually supported and challenged my changing ideas about glitter, and offered advice and guidance throughout this difficult year. Thank you, Sarah, for reading each draft of this thesis, and for providing me with the crucial intellectual direction that I needed to wrap my head around glitter as the incredibly complex medium and material that it is.

The Winterthur Program in American Material Culture has provided me access to a world class graduate training that was both incredibly unique and fundamental in shaping my ideas about history, art, and material culture broadly. Its people are what makes Winterthur so special. I thank Dr. Catharine Dann Roeber for always believing in me and for assuring me that wild research topics and projects are, in fact, okay and welcome at Winterthur. Additionally, I thank Dr. Thomas A. Guiler for always pouring his time and energy into all of his students to ensure that we had steady ground to stand on throughout our time at Winterthur. I also thank Greg Landry for showing me the magic of material culture and for always modeling what an empathetic scholar acts, speaks and writes like. Furthermore, I thank Catherine Matsen from the Conservation Department for her willingness to work with me, and honor last minute requests, to uncover the granular details of materiality and for providing my work with crucial scientific scaffolding that this project in particular necessitated. Last but not least, I thank Dr. Martin Brückner for leading the Winterthur Program and for continually going to bat for both the Program and its students.
My professors at the University of Delaware have generously shared in and my enthusiasm for glitter and all things material culture. I thank Dr. Rebecca Davis for supporting my research starting from my first day at grad school. Thank you, Rebecca, for never doubting me and for providing my project with theoretical frameworks to see glitter though new lenses. I also thank Dr. Julie McGee for supporting my work from the first time that I told her, and the rest of her seminar, that I would be researching the art history of glitter for my master’s thesis. Thank you, Julie, for providing me with even more theories to think through glitter, and also for helping me in narrowing down and transitioning the project to something that I could tackle during a pandemic.

I thank each of the artists featured in this thesis for continuing to push the formal boundaries of glitter to new heights and dimensions. In particular, I thank Jamie Vasta for her generous support of my project and for producing such amazing works that truly demonstrate a mastery of the medium. I thank Jefferson Pinder for showing us new ways of seeing and imagining the future through his work. I also thank Jonathan Lyndon Chase for their critical eye for material and for producing works of art that reveal the remarkable beauty in everyday existence.

I thank my Winterthur classmates for all of our late-night conversations where we thought through our projects, hopes, and dreams and for always extending their generous support to me. I thank Benét Burton for always reassuring me that my project was worth doing and for being an excellent co-director for our Upcycled! public art project. I also thank Cara Caputo for encouraging me to keep going and for always letting me tag along to feed the goats and sheep, among other adventures. Additionally, I thank Peter Fedoryk for always being there to bounce around ideas and test new ways of looking.
It is with love and gratitude that I thank Kayle Avery for his unwavering support for me and my work. Cheers to new beginnings in Philadelphia and cheers to us.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES........................................................................................................... vii
ABSTRACT......................................................................................................................... viii

INTRODUCTION................................................................................................................ 1

Chapter

1 THE “FREIGHT” OF GLITTER .................................................................................... 4

2 SCIENCE AND HISTORY ......................................................................................... 18

3 ART HISTORY............................................................................................................. 31

3.1 Jamie Vasta............................................................................................................ 34
3.2 Jefferson Pinder ..................................................................................................... 38
3.3 Jonathan Lyndon Chase ......................................................................................... 41

4 CONCLUSION ............................................................................................................. 47

FIGURES ......................................................................................................................... 51
REFERENCES .................................................................................................................. 58

Appendix

A ANALYSIS OF GLITTER SAMPLES ........................................................................... 64
B IMAGE PERMISSIONS................................................................................................. 76
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Kusama, Yayoi, *Fortress of Stars*, 1988, mixed media, 15 ⅞ x 10 ⅞ x 4 ¾”, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. *Courtesy of National Gallery of Art. Photo by the author.* ................................. 51

Figure 2. Museum label for Kusama, Yayoi, *Fortress of Stars*, 1988, mixed media, 15 ⅞ x 10 ⅞ x 4 ¾”, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. *Courtesy of National Gallery of Art. Photo by the author.* ............ 52


ABSTRACT

Glitter is ubiquitous throughout our material world. Likewise, it has become prevalent in works of contemporary art. Despite the growing presence of glitter in recent art, scholars and critics have largely dismissed its significance as a complex material with a variety of significations. This thesis unravels the materiality of glitter from the perspectives of history and science to paint a more holistic portrait of the material. Through this interdisciplinary perspective, this thesis analyzes the work of three contemporary artists who work with glitter and have pushed the boundaries of the material to new heights. These case studies exemplify the range of possibilities that glitter advances in fine art. Above all, this thesis argues that glitter is a serious and complex material that merits critical interdisciplinary analysis. In taking a material culture perspective, this thesis also unpacks broad cultural meanings of glitter and how these meanings affect interpretations of its uses in art. Glitter is an integral material of contemporary art, it is already part of the contemporary canon, and as such, warrants the critical interdisciplinary perspective crafted in this thesis.
INTRODUCTION

Pressed into layered sheets then cut into tiny hex particles, glitter’s journey begins in the confines of a factory. It is mixed and funneled into containers, traveling next to either a wholesaler account, or a retail storefront. Store workers methodically place the glitter onto the shelves to ensure an enticing display. One jar of silver multicolored glitter catches the eye of a customer. Keeping in mind a specific project they’re working on; they purchase it and take it home. On the way, they notice a single particle of glitter on their arm. “That’s strange,” they think to themselves, “this isn’t even from the one I bought.”

Once inside their home, they can’t help but open the jar and dig in. Feeling the gritty pieces between their fingers, they look into a mesmerizing multicolored glitter world. They watch with blissful amusement as the rainbow of light sparkles against their skin. After a satisfying moment with their recent purchase, they decide to put the lid back on the jar. This task proves to be more difficult than expected, as the pieces seem to cling on everything. After repeatedly attempting to scrape all the pieces back in the jar, they proclaim this task impossible and decide to instead wash their hands with soap; a last-ditch attempt to rid their body of the now bothersome particles. They watch as water carries the glitter down the drain. This time, they are sufficiently pleased and conclude that it is a mercurial material, only to be unleashed when absolutely necessary for their project.

A few days pass by and they begin to notice flecks of glitter on the carpet, deep in their hair, the kitchen floors, and in the sink basin where they washed it from their
hands. The glitter seemed to have integrated itself into the fabric of their home, body, and material world.

Once unleashed from its container, glitter travels on our clothing and bodies to new places. This fictional vignette effectively illustrates how haphazardly glitter seems to move across space and time. It also describes how its visual and tactile qualities entice us into becoming hubs for its movement. Glitter is clingy and easily manipulated. Its small size and stunning visual properties make it a choice material for a range of surfaces from cars, to cell phone cases, and football helmets. Its most recognizable form is loose in plastic containers, readymade for decoration. When poured out onto a surface, it can be sifted, arranged, and adhered with seemingly any adhesive. As this passively traveling substance, and as an actively chosen decorative material, glitter has become a pervasive fixture in our everyday material world.

Each of the following chapters works to form a body of knowledge through which art containing glitter can be more thoroughly interpreted and contextualized. Chapter 1 unpacks the freight of glitter from both a social and cultural perspective, and a scholarly perspective. Combining popular sources such as the infamous internet listicle blog post, political demonstration tactics, and popular works of comedy with scholarly books and articles, this chapter constructs a framework to understand how glitter has been written and thought about. This chapter also reviews how art historians and art critics have written about glitter. Additionally, I offer a preview into the art history of glitter in looking to works of art and artists who have used glitter throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In constructing this preview, I argue that glitter is already a part of the art historical canon, regardless of how under-researched it is by scholars.
Chapter 2 seeks to answer the questions: what is glitter? And how and when did glitter become widespread? Through a combination of original scientific research and a manufacturing and business history of glitter, the chapter provides a foundational study of the material while revealing its ubiquity in a variety of unexpected industries. Uncovering the fine details of its materiality allows for a more specific interpretation of glitter’s meanings in art as a scientifically complex, highly engineered new material. Using scientific research on glitter, I also probe a trail of misinformation through which glitter became singularly conflated with the broad category of microplastics to explore how glitter recently became an even higher-profile material. In doing this, I explore what the implications of glitter’s new status as an anti-environmental signifier means for artists. Additionally, this history functions as a starting point to understand how glitter became widespread. Newspaper articles and interviews with high profile individuals in the glitter business offer of a survey of its use history in the late twentieth century, which provides a framework for understanding glitter into the twenty-first century.

Chapter 3 is a survey of glitter in recent art. In considering examples of varying applications, from a variety of artists of different backgrounds, I demonstrate glitter’s incredibly wide range in art. In these diverse contemporary approaches to the material, connections between glitter and queered aesthetics, femininity, and bling practices emerge, bringing forward an outline of the social history of the material. Each artist uses different formal applications that stretch the commonplace associations with glitter and push the boundaries of fine art into new, unexpected, and unexplored territories.
Chapter 1

THE “FREIGHT” OF GLITTER

Glitter is a distinct material in both its optical and material properties. It is similar to some materials found in nature like mica, varieties of beetles, butterfly wings, and mother of pearl seashells. Unlike these natural materials though, glitter is industrially produced using highly specialized equipment. Also unlike these other materials, glitter is low cost, and readily available on the shelves of craft stores in a multitude of shapes, sizes, colors, and varieties. It is a means through which people can easily create dazzling, luminous, reflective surfaces. Cost aside, materials like gold, diamonds, glass, and mirrors achieve some of the effects of glitter, but glitter is uniquely discontinuous and fragmented. When spread out on a surface, it creates a field that reads as multidimensional through its visual reflective properties when it is in reality, flat. Glitter refuses and resists the unified, seamless surface. In this sense, it is a democratized material through which a reflective surface can be achieved.

To fully understand glitter’s role as a new form and its broader implications in contemporary art, close attention must be paid to its materiality and its history. By paying such attention, I explore and explain glitter’s role in recent art, arguing that its increasing use makes it a critically contemporary material that has been largely overlooked by scholars of material culture and art history. Popularized by the sculptures of Marcel Duchamp in the early twentieth century, and mid-century pop art from prominent staples of art history like Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol, the
aesthetics of mass production in fine art are rooted within a broader history. The recent proliferation of glitter in art illustrates the turn toward mass production. More precisely, glitter demonstrates a material turn from the reproduction of images in mass produced culture to materials directly sourced from mass produced and mass manufactured culture. Glitter is a new, seductive, and democratized material that calls into question, once again, the boundaries drawn between art and the everyday.

In order to fully comprehend glitter’s materiality and history, we first need to take it seriously as a material. Though we might think of it as a banal substance, glitter is affective, and powerful. There are numerous articles and blog posts that mention visceral reactions to glitter. Glitter Hate Mail offers to send a package of glitter to anyone in the world for only $6.99. The home page of their website reads, “We’re


taking one for the team, this glitter gets on everything. We hate glitter. People call it the herpes of the craft world.”

Through a simple order form and a relatively small payment, this service promises to deliver an uncleanable glittery mess. In a chapter titled _An Accident Waiting to Happen_ from Karen A. McClintock’s memoir _My Father’s Closet_, McClintock describes how glitter functioned in her childhood home as a point of contention and instability that her father tried to restrict despite her desire to use it in crafts: “Glitter was definitely an accident waiting to happen. According to Dad, glitter sprinkled accidentally onto Anso Nylon carpet shot straight down toward the floor and cut the fine silky threads of the pile, leaving damage visible to the naked eye only years down the road, but it nevertheless assaulted the carpet’s integrity.”

That glitter “assaulted” the carpet in the eyes of McClintock’s father, seen alongside a real business that promises to create a similar mess, signifies a more widespread negative view of the material. Its clinginess combined with its highly visible material properties contribute to the perception of glitter as pesky and obnoxious.

In addition to unfavorable attitudes towards glitter, popular media spreads animosity towards glitter. In one specific comedy book, the authors used misogynistic, gendered arguments in an imagined sequence of events wherein glitter spoils the plans of men to cheat on their partners. According to comedians, Bill Burr, Joe DeRosa, and Robert Kelly, glitter is a main enemy of men who seek undetectable extramarital relationships. In their book _Cheat_, the authors have this to say about glitter, “To a cheating man, there is no greater adversary, no better foil, no more formidable foe than

---


They even go on to write a brief history of the material and disparage the inventor who created and popularized its most contemporary iteration, “In 1934 a machinist from New Jersey named Henry Ruschmann invented the modern form of glitter by grinding up plastic… On behalf of the entire cheating community, fuck you, Henry Ruschmann…” Just after disparaging Ruschman and his invention, the authors used glitter as a means through which they degrade women, whom they perceive as the principal consumers and users of glitter, “Most folks would say that women wear glitter because it’s fun or sexy or enchanting. Nonsense. It’s a woman’s way of marking you. Once you’ve been branded by glitter’s wicked burn, you’re off limits to all women… It’s the male version of a scarlet letter.” Cheating is an accumulation of simplistic and misogynistic-based platitudes, including arguments against glitter. While it could be argued that this book was intended as a work of comedy, and that by design blows situations out of proportion for comedic effect, the contents of the book effectively reveal cultural attitudes surrounding glitter. In depicting glitter as a material opponent to men, the authors contribute to broader cultural stances against glitter because of its perceived consumer audience. Later in this thesis, I demonstrate that glitter is widespread throughout a variety of non-gendered, and conventionally “masculine” objects, complicating such gendered perceptions of the material.


7 Burr, DeRosa, and Kelly, 78.

8 Burr, DeRosa, and Kelly, 78.
People have learned how to creatively adapt and politically weaponize this hatred of glitter. Anya M. Galli documents the temporal arc of “glitter bombing” as a short-lived activist tactic of dumping glitter on politicians who endanger LGBTQ+ rights in her article *How Glitter Bombing Lost Its Sparkle: The Emergence and Decline of a Novel Social Movement Tactic*. Galli argues that perhaps one of the reasons why glitter bombing was a short-lived practice was because of how glitter was refracted through reporters and the media, “cultural resonance did not translate to political efficacy: popular media coverage emphasized sparkles, rainbows, and the ‘fabulosity’ while failing to communicate glitter bomber’s political claims in support of LGBT rights.”

This uneven perception of glitter highlights its complexly layered significations for different individuals and groups. On one hand, the activists who employed glitter in an attempt to draw attention to active threats to LGBTQ+ rights understood glitter to be a serious but playful material that is visually striking and resonant with queered aesthetics. On the other hand, these associations were either lost or altered by the media who portrayed glitter as simplistic, failing to reconcile its materiality with its complicated and varied histories. This begs the question: are there forms of representation that can capture glitter’s complexity? Are there forms that effectively retain and relay its playfulness as well as its potential to comment meaningfully on practices of production and consumption?

This thesis looks to contemporary art to answer such questions. For glitter’s place in fine art to be fully appreciated, its material and cultural histories must be

---

reconciled and considered to be part and parcel of one another. Materials should not be divorced from their histories for the sake of simplifying or dismissing their uses. Glitter is a ubiquitous feature of our material world that is at times ordinary and at others thoughtfully employed in the work of fine artists. Because it is familiar and elicits strong reactions from people who come into contact with it, glitter is a powerful material in art. Artists draw upon the contradictions embedded within its physical/formal qualities and social histories. Glitter has come to embody an entirely new formalism in fine art that cannot be fully appreciated until we understand glitter’s composition and how histories of its uses are intertwined.

This thesis is therefore also concerned with re-writing the history of glitter. Within the field of art history, glitter has not been seriously considered as a complex material deserving of scholarly attention. Mentions of glitter in exhibition and gallery announcements treat the material as an afterthought or a simplistic head-turning, eye-catching headline. One example can be seen in Claire Voon’s review of a gallery show of Devan Shimoyama’s work, Close to Home: Devan Shimoyama in His Glimmering, Incisive Portraits at Kavi Gupta Gallery in Chicago, for Artnews in 2019. Voon wrote on Shimoyama’s use of glitter, “Shimoyama has long imagined places of safety and refuge, specifically ones for queer black individuals, through portraits made using color pencil, oil paint, and fabric, as well as eye-catching materials like glitter, synthetic flowers, and costume jewelry.”

This sentence is where Voon wrote most thoughtfully on the importance of glitter in Shimoyama’s work. Glitter is used almost

like punctuation for a train of thought where the artist’s use of avant-garde materials supports Voon’s argument rather than driving it. While this is certainly not the worst example of a dismissive attitude toward glitter, it does draw attention to the need for more careful consideration of the ways that new materials are introduced into the world of fine art, where oil paints are a given, and synthetic flowers are “eye-catching.” Each of the materials Voon lists are indeed eye-catching for varying reasons, however, glitter requires a precise and systematic unpacking of its materiality and histories to analyze and interpret works from artists like Shimoyama because of its rich complexly layered histories and unique formal properties.

In addition to scholars and critics who largely neglect glitter’s role in contemporary art, there exists a tenuous atmosphere surrounding discussions of the material. Anxieties toward the material are evident in both the words of critics, and in the writings of those who work with glitter from artistic and scholarly perspectives. In a 2018 interview with _Artnet News_, Lynda Benglis reflected on her use of glitter in her artistic practice, “…we’re taught to limit our appreciation for glitter. I grew up with sparkly things, like my dance baton and my bright pink girl’s dance costume, and I loved those things, I still do. Why should what we’re naturally drawn to be conditioned out of us?”

Benglais’ use of glitter has been ongoing since 1973 when her solo exhibition opened at the MoMA PS1, _Lynda Benglis: Sparkle Knots_. Her


bold claim that we are, in a way, conditioned to reject glitter is supported by Lisa Metherell’s dissertation *Glittering Orientations: Towards a Non-Figurative Queer Art Practice*, where she writes “Glitter is not a ‘serious’ art material. With the exception of the work of Jim Lambie, it rarely enters the canon of western art history and is more often found in children’s art projects, or adorning bodies, for example in nail art and make-up.”¹³ Interestingly, one of Metherell’s main arguments is that glitter is an important material fixture in queer culture that reverberates in fine art. That Metherell would, to some extent, denounce glitter in her dissertation on glitter speaks to broader negative opinions about the material from the fine art world. In 2015, gallery owner Michelle Gaugy posted a hostile comment about glitter in fine art online. Gaugy wrote that “glitter is (take your pick): little girl or stripper costume stuff, transvestite eyemakeup extra, annoying material people put on greeting cards that gets all over the place… If artists want to use get [*sic*] reflective effects, there are many ways to do it that are *ever* so much richer, and don’t carry the psychological freight of glitter, and don’t fall off, besides.”¹⁴ The offensive and outdated language she uses to refer to the makeup choices of likely queer individuals is revealing of her profound misunderstanding of the possibilities that glitter brings to fine art. Her comment highlights the urgency with which art historians must approach glitter and other materials new to fine art. A comprehensive scholarly intervention into this discourse of the materiality and history of glitter while situating it within art history is past due.

¹³ Lisa Metherell, “Glittering Orientations: Towards a Non-Figurative Queer Art Practice” (United Kingdom, Birmingham City University, 2014): 139.

Glitter is a lost material in some cases when museums do not take seriously their responsibility to fully document and communicate the materials that constitute the works in their collections. One such example is a small Yayoi Kusama sculpture in the National Gallery of Art collection in Washington D.C. (Figure 1). For its medium, the museum listed “mixed media” on the wall label and on the website (Figure 2).\textsuperscript{15} 

\textit{Fortress of Stars, 1988}, is a black box painted with irregular silver stripes holding inside silver and black spotted organically shaped cylinder-like worm forms. Beyond the worms is an oval of silver hair-like material; even further in the next concentric zone is a layer of chicken wire. Behind the chicken wire is the final layer, constituted of different colors of glitter that cover purple textured waves. At first glance, the rainbow glitter at the center of the sculpture is hardly visible because it is surrounded by many concentric zones of other materials, discreetly hidden behind the chicken wire. Upon further inspection, the layered complexity of the materials and the visually striking glitter come forth. The small sculpture requires long, careful, and close looking to notice the constellations of materials, surfaces, and color that Kusama hid behind the layers. This sculpture could benefit from a greater attention to material specificity from the curators at the National Gallery of Art. Had glitter and the other materials that constitute this complex sculpture been listed, perhaps more viewers, visitors, and scholars would appreciate the extraordinary ability that glitter has to elicit visual wonder, and in this case, mystery. In not listing glitter, the museum obscures the prevalence of glitter in fine art. Metherell’s claim that glitter rarely enters the cannon is simply not true. Benglis and Kusama are arguably two of the more

recognizable, famous individuals in the western art cannon. However hidden, glitter is already a part of the cannon, and it is already in museum collections.

This thesis is in conversation with a growing body of research on and around glitter. Most notably is Rebecca Coleman’s 2020 glitter monograph *Glitterworlds: The Future Politics of a Ubiquitous Thing*. Her book focused on glitter through the lens of social science and offers a feminist theory of new materials. Coleman followed glitter through different cultural worlds, exploring how it can be used to gain a deeper, materially-driven understanding of gender, sexuality, and race. Acknowledging the lack of scholarly attention to glitter, in the final chapter Coleman posed new ways to look at glitter for future studies. One of her sets of questions asked, “What happens if we notice the various spaces and places that glitter moves to? What happens if we follow glitter to these spaces and places.” I will work toward answering these questions by addressing glitter’s materiality and then following glitter into fine art spaces like museums and galleries.16 Equally important to note in glitter-defining literature is Caity Weaver’s wildly popular and well researched 2018 *New York Times* article “What is Glitter?”. Additionally, books and articles that acknowledge glitter’s presence in queer cultural practices like Julia Bryan-Wilson’s *Fray: Art and Textile Politics* work to build a historic basis for understanding the gendered aspects of the material. Krista Thompson’s *Shine: The Visual Economy of Light in African Diasporic Aesthetic Practice* explains how luminous materials like glitter are significant in African diasporic aesthetic practices. Also noteworthy are the significant number of

MFA theses and doctoral dissertations that make use of and mention glitter.17 Most of this research focus on its uses by queer communities and other subcultures. Lisa Metherell’s Glittering Orientations comes the closest to a material understanding that touches on glitter’s use in art. My research builds upon this body of work to uncover the complex, layered, and previously overlooked implications of glitter in art. One new interpretive strategy I offer is a scientific analysis of glitter samples. In addition, I look to an archive of newspapers which uncovers the early industrial history of glitter to reveal how and when it became widespread. Bringing together the methods of material culture studies with an art historical approach to fine art, I uncover the multiple and significant meanings of a surprisingly elusive yet ubiquitous material.

Material culture studies heavily informs the object centered methods and theoretical framework of this thesis. In looking at glitter through a holistic lens that considers its scientific material structure, business and manufacturing history, social history, and art history, I am using Arjun Appadurai’s theoretical framework famously laid out in his introduction to The Social Life of Things, “For that we have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses and

their trajectories. It is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things.”

In understanding the diverse histories of glitter, richer interpretations of its many uses in art become clearer and more apparent. Coleman also uses Appadurai’s theory in Glitterworlds: The Future Politics of a Ubiquitous Thing to “follow the things,” to uncover and ask, “the ways in which glitter is engaged with in everyday life, and the politics it might generate?”

Tracing the biography of glitter allows for the creation of a holistic portrait of glitter in fine art, one that situates the art in consumer and material histories. This unique intersecting methodology creates space for more complex, less reductive, interpretations of its uses by fine artists.

In addition to material culture studies, two art historical texts inform my interpretations of glitter in contemporary art: Julia Bryan-Wilson’s Fray: Art and Textile Politics and Krista Thompson’s Shine: The Visual Economy of Light in African Diasporic Aesthetic Practice. Bryan-Wilson’s book presents a gendered reading of glitter through the perspective of queer makers who used it in their costumes to proudly claim as an aesthetic of campy excess. For queer collectives like the Cockettes and the Angels of Light, Bryan-Wilson argues that textiles, and the glitter used to adorn them, were part of broader self-liberating politics that could be used to see beyond culturally constructed categories, “gender was treated like clothes, and handmade outfits were part and parcel of a utopian vision in which smashing gender binaries seemed to them entirely possible. They wanted to devise their own discourse


19 Coleman, Glitterworlds, 17–19.
of drag, on whose iterative daily, momentum might ignite a total transformation of the self.”

Glitter accentuated the fake realness of drag costumes. Bryan-Wilson uses this reading to draw attention to the logical fallacy embedded in the commonly used cliché, “grit beneath the glitter,” arguing that the grit and glitter were never really far apart in that the material properties of glitter were an ideal site for the breakdown between artifice and reality. Using Bryan-Wilson’s framework, I argue that fine art, in mediums beyond textiles, is an additional site where glitter contends with and dissolves the binaries of real and fake, and high and low, through both its material properties and general accessibility to create reflective, luminous surfaces.

Thompson, on the other hand, lays the groundwork for understanding glitter through the lens of race in her book, opening new ways to think through the complex layered relationships between light, performance, and fine art. From dancehalls in Jamaica, to urban photographic practices that make use of spray-painted backdrops and Kehinde Wiley’s paintings, Thompson pushes the aesthetic importance of seeing and being seen to the forefront of the numerous ways in which we can think through African diasporic artistic practices. Thompson introduces the concept of bling through an economic perspective, “What I describe as a visual economy of light is in part a product of everyday aspirational practices of black urban communities, who make do and more with what they have, creating prestige through the resources at hand… they have the potential to disrupt notions of value by privileging not things but their visual

effects."²¹ I apply Thompson’s theory to glitter, by arguing that, as a widely available, highly reflective, and democratized material—readily available at a low cost in craft and art supply stores, and a variety of online retailers—it disrupts long-established conventions of value. While glitter is not an essential aspect of bling, use history that suggests connections with bling, alongside its inherent bling-like qualities, intersect to form a useful lens to develop a comprehensive understanding of glitter in art. In paying attention to bling, I create space for glitter to be understood through the cultural practices of historically marginalized people ensuring that this element of glitter’s use is not elided. In addition, bringing together methodologies from material culture studies and art history demonstrates a truly interdisciplinary approach to the study of new materials in fine art, one that considers how the history of a material could impact its uses, and how scholars interpret these works of art in a broad, yet materially specific, context.

Chapter 2

SCIENCE AND HISTORY

Despite commonplace arguments against the use of glitter in fine art that are built on a foundation of suggestions that it is categorically unsophisticated, glitter is an incredibly intricate material. Scientific analyses of glitter provide an additional layer of insight into visual qualities of glitter that are useful to the study of art. Because there is little known about the specifics of the material, including what it is made of, scientific analyses can offer unique insight that is not yet accessible to scholars who typically rely on close looking alone as the starting point in their analytical toolbox. Additionally, because glitter is a new material, it is critical to foreground scholarship on its history and applications in contemporary with a clearer picture of the material itself. Alongside this scientific analysis, I follow glitter from scientific research through a trail of misinformation to reveal how glitter has taken on cultural meanings that have become widespread. Furthermore, this section looks to the history of Meadowbrook Inventions Inc. as the leading manufacturer of high-quality glitter in the US to unravel how glitter became widespread in an array of products, from seasonal holiday decorations to motorcycle helmets. In addition, this history works to complicate one-dimensional interpretations of glitter that seek to unilaterally dismiss its merit in fine art using simplistic arguments.

When viewed through a scientific lens, glitter is an incredibly complex material. Through a brief review of scientific studies on glitter, a more exacting definition of the material can be created. One study, Characterization of multilayered
glitter particles using synchrotron FT-IR microscopy, published in *Forensic Science International* in 2011 by Laetitia Vernoud, Hans A. Bechtel, Michael C. Martin, John A. Reffner, and Robert D. Blackledge, sought to analyze the structural layers of glitter using samples from Meadowbrook Inventions Inc. The authors cited the ubiquity of glitter throughout a variety of objects and materials and speculated that, “Because glitter is small and light, it is readily transferred and retained on contact, often without our knowledge. For these reasons glitter may be important associative evidence in criminal investigations.”22 After using several instruments and methods of analysis, the authors conclude that, “Most glitter particles are composed of three or sometime many more distinct layers,” and in their discussion of the data they note that glitter in their samples contained multiple layers of polymers and sometimes a few layers of aluminum.23

To supplement the findings of Vernoud, Bechtel, Martin, Reffner and Blackledge, I obtained samples of glitter from Meadowbrook Inventions Inc. and worked with conservation scientist Catherine R. Matsen in Winterthur’s Scientific Research and Analysis Laboratory to isolate and identify the layers that constitute glitter (Appendix A). Because the authors of the 2011 study sought to identify the unique layered structure of types of glitter to use in forensic science, they were less concerned with identifying the specific materials that were used to create each layer in the glitter. In Matsen’s analysis, the small size of the glitter particles made stabilizing


23 Vernoud et al.
and isolating the particles for analysis extremely difficult. Results of her analysis were inconclusive due to instrumental limitations. However, Matsen uncovered valuable information about glitter’s composition. From the samples, she found that a transparent colorless iridescent sample contained layers of polyethylene terephthalate (PET) and polymethylmethacrylate (PMMA), a gold-colored iridescent sample contained PET, PMMA as well as chlorine, and a non-iridescent variety contained aluminum metal. When examined under a microscope, this combination of materials reads as exceedingly intricate, to say the least. Glitter is complicated to an extent that scientific study of the material requires some of the most sophisticated methods and instruments of chemical analysis available. This brief scientific analysis exposes a total incongruity between the fine details of its materiality and oversimplified understandings and ideas about it, adding to mounting evidence that glitter is rife with contradictions and as such, merits serious attention. Furthermore, when read together, this scientific data may offer a definition of glitter that is simultaneously broad and specific to account for variations in varieties. Taking these findings into account, I define glitter as a typically hexagon shaped, multilayered particle composed of layers of plastic, sometimes aluminum, measuring a few micrometers in diameter.

Scientific studies on glitter (that may or may not actually mention glitter specifically) have been cited to foster misinformation that shapes environmentally focused concerns about the material. Starting in 2019, supermarket chains in the UK, such as Tesco, Waitrose, Aldi, and Hobbycraft, have responded to calls from environmental campaigns to eliminate products that contain glitter. According to an

24 Rebecca Smithers, “Tesco Joins Crackdown on Plastic Glitter for 2019 Christmas Range,” The Guardian, August 4, 2019,
article by Rebecca Smithers published in *The Guardian*, these retailers were pressured by a petition that, “cited a study showing that up to a third of fish caught in the North Sea contained microplastic particles – including glitter.”

After following the link to the petition, it becomes clear that the author of the petition, Peter Roberts, generalized findings from the scientific study mentioned in *The Guardian* article. The petition claims, “One recent study showed that up to a third of fish caught in the North Sea contained microplastic particles. We have no idea what the long-term effects microplastic will have on us, our children or the animals that share our planet. This is a very disturbing thought.”

While Roberts was careful to not directly connect the scientific study in question directly to glitter, Smithers’ newspaper article makes an additional leap in suggesting that glitter was a part of the microplastics detected in the fish by the scientists.

After scouring databases to find the scientific study both authors mention in their writings, I found *Microplastics En Route: Field Measurements in the Dutch River Delta and Amsterdam Canals, Wastewater Treatment Plants North Sea sediments and Biota* published in *Environment International* in 2017 by H.A. Leslie, S.H. Brandsma, M.J.M. van Velzen, and A.D. Vethaak. Given that authors of the study focused the discussion of their data on the North Sea and provide an in-depth http://www.theguardian.com/business/2019/aug/05/tesco-joins-crackdown-on-plastic-glitter-for-2019-christmas-range.

25 Smithers.

analysis of microplastic accumulation rates in fish, and also that this article was published recently, I am confident that this is the article that was left out of the 38 Degrees petition. Interestingly, the study did not link the microplastics it studied to specific types of objects, and glitter is not mentioned once in the article. Despite these facts, the dangers of glitter became a highly publicized takeaway from this piece of scientific research. With every step that further disconnected the scholarly research from public discourse, glitter became increasingly sensationalized. Glitter is definitely a microplastic, and it poses unknowable dangers to the environment, however, its danger has been greatly magnified. In reality, recent research shows that the primary source of microplastic-based pollution is synthetic fibers from textiles.27

Glitter has clearly become embedded in public consciousness over time. Its meaning has shifted to fit diverse narratives, from a key material in queer homemaking aesthetics, to something that women wear that could foil the plans of a disloyal partner, to an alarming material that is destroying waterways. This superpower that glitter possesses to capture attention is critical to its effectiveness in contemporary art. Knowingly or not, artists who employ glitter in their work are cleverly taking advantage of this preexisting spotlight to create new meanings for the material, and in doing so, they construct bright, shining, new ways of interpreting reality.

The origins and initial uses of glitter in the twentieth century are significant to the study of glitter in art because this history can begin to unravel how glitter went from being largely thought of and used as a seasonal decorative material, to a material that has taken on a culturally embedded set of meanings. Largely shrouded in mystery, as is noted in Caity Weaver’s intriguing 2018 article “What Is Glitter?”, the glitter industry is incredibly secretive. However, this was not always the case. Articles published in local New Jersey newspapers throughout the mid- to late-twentieth century reveal a previously unexplored wealth of information about the origins and evolution of the glitter industry. Home to two leading glitter manufacturers, Glitterex and Meadowbrook Inventions Inc., New Jersey is a critical center in the early history of plastic glitter. This archive is centered around Meadowbrook Inventions Inc., its founder Henry F. Ruschmann, and his son, Henry W. Ruschmann, who eventually took over the company. According to claims on their website, Meadowbrook Inventions Inc. considers itself to be, “The World’s Leading Glitter Manufacturer, Distributor and Exporter since 1934,” as well as “the inventor of modern Glitter.” Because Meadowbrook Inventions Inc. was founded in 1934, and Glitterex was not founded until 1963, the early history of large-scale plastic glitter manufacturing is best told through the lens of Ruschmann and Meadowbrook Inventions Inc..

---


30 “Bulk Glitter Supplier, Manufacturer, Glitter Company.”
Furthermore, one of the purposes of this analysis of Ruschmann his company is to complicate the often-repeated idea that glitter was invented by accident. I argue that this oversimplified inventor narrative mythos of Ruschmann has, in part, contributed to an oversimplification in broader discourse surrounding the presence of glitter in fine art. In characterizing Ruschmann’s invention as accidental, glitter has become somewhat of a minor, inconsequential material. In reality, over the course of decades, glitter not only became a successful facet of Meadowbrook Inventions Inc., but also ubiquitous throughout the material world. In looking towards the longer history of Meadowbrook Inventions Inc. and Henry F. Ruschmann, glitter emerges as a highly complex invention that was just one piece of Ruschmann’s precision cutting firm, and farming business.

According to his obituary, Ruschmann was born in Frankfurt, Germany and immigrated to the US in 1926 where he founded Meadowbrook Inventions Inc. in Bernardsville, New Jersey. Newspaper records indicate that in 1943 Ruschmann bought his New Jersey farm in a package deal with livestock, farm equipment, and dairy equipment. In the following years, Ruschmann’s success as a farmer is evident in local newspapers through announcements of dairy records set by his dairy cows. At the same time, Ruschman pushed Bernardsville to allow him to expand his farm


and change the zoning of his property to accommodate a, “light manufacturing operation producing “spangles,” tiny ornaments for dresses.” Over the course of about two years from 1957 to 1959 Ruschmann pushed the legal boundary for the manufacturing side of his primarily agricultural-based business and was cited for zoning violations. Within this same time frame when tensions were high between Ruschmann and Bernardsville, two fires destroyed multiple buildings on Ruchmann’s property. Shortly after the second fire, the city investigated the incidents and detained two of Ruschmann’s farmhands without bail. After Ruschmann obtained his last zoning variance a newspaper article stated, “Some previous protestors had feared the business might grow out of proportions for the community and its rural atmosphere,” illustrating the town’s apprehensive attitude towards Ruschmann’s increasingly visible glitter manufacturing operation. This combination of high-profile scuffs between Ruschmann and Bernardsville, along with pressure to safeguard trade secrets, lay the foundation for Meadowbrook Inventions Inc.’s future secrecy.

Following a tumultuous decade of zoning violations and modifications, as well as fires, Meadowbrook Inventions Inc. steadily gained a foothold in the glitter

34 “Order To Act on Alleged Zone Violation,” *Bernardsville News*, June 20, 1957.

35 “Order To Act on Alleged Zone Violation.”


industry. Articles published in Bernardsville area newspapers indicate that Ruschmann was successful in his efforts to transform his farm into a full-scale glitter operation. An article titled, “Bernardsville’s Meadowbrook Inventions Most Of The World’s Glitter Comes From This Quiet, Conservative Town,” published in 1982 contains quotes from an interview with Henry F. Ruschmann’s son, Henry W. Ruschmann who likely assumed his father’s role as head of the company. W. Ruschmann stated that, “We’re one of the very few companies in the world to make glitter and we’re the largest. We have 80 to 90 percent of the market.”

Similar to the 1982 article, an article titled, “The Glitter Factory brightens the season” published in 1979 also highlights this juxtaposition between the extreme success of Ruschmann’s glitter business and Bernardsville generally, “There, hidden just off Route 202 in a pastoral setting of tall evergreens and rolling green fields where cattle and geese graze, is a small shop known to local folks as the “glitter factory.””

Words like “hidden” and “pastoral” intentionally sensationalize Ruschmann’s successful product, glitter, against the decidedly mismatched backdrop for the business. In suggesting that the factory is somehow incompatible with the town, the authors of these articles contribute to an attitude that however ubiquitous glitter is, it is incongruous with its “conservative”


town of origin and it therefore inconsistent with customary values typically associated with the word conservative.41

However contradictory Bernardsville and glitter are made out to be in the two highlighted articles, the authors focused on the precise thinking and specialized equipment put into the manufacturing of Meadowbrook Inventions Inc.’s products later in their articles. In “The Glitter Factory brightens the season” Fiedler framed the origins of glitter from Meadowbrook Invention Inc. as, “almost by accident in the late 1940s,” because the machine Ruschmann used was originally not used for glitter but for, “a customer [who] wanted some material cut into tiny particles.”42 The customer in question was likely related to Ruschmann’s other business ventures in precision cutting with notable firms such as, “Kodak, Bendix, Hercules and Armstrong Floors.”43 In the later article, “Bernardsville’s Meadowbrook Inventions Most of The World’s Glitter Comes From This Quiet, Conservative Town” the author, Stuart, interviewed W. Ruschmann, and opened the article with a more sensational tone that evolves into a more technically orienting analysis of the business. On the meticulous aspects of glitter production, Stuart wrote:

“The key to Ruschmann’s success, his son said, was finding a more efficient and less expensive way to produce glitter. Until 1948, glitter was made by punching round pieces out of a roll of metal foil. Much of the foil was wasted this way, because there was no use for the foil around the holes and the edges. Ruschmann changed the shape of

41 Stuart, “Bernardsville’s Meadowbrook Inventions Most Of The World’s Glitter Comes From This Quiet, Conservative Town.”

42 Fiedler, “The Glitter Factory Brightens the Season.”

43 “Henry Ruschmann.”
glitter from circular to hexagonal, thus enabling a continuous cutting machine to utilize every inch of the foil, his son said.”

That the Ruschmanns were constantly innovating their process and working towards a more precise, efficient manufacturing method requiring highly specialized machinery reveals an apparent contradiction between the reality of glitter production and popular reception of the material that recall Gaugy’s comment that glitter is, “something cheap, tacky, childish or garish.” According to the inventors themselves and the writers who met them, glitter is a serious, technologically intensive material. When read together, these sources from the late twentieth century reveal a more complicated origin story of glitter, one that considers the intricacies of its materiality. In this historic context, glitter emerges as a material that was not only complicated from the beginning, but also a material that became increasingly complicated.

In addition to the revealing a foundation for contradictions embodied in glitter, these articles trace the origins of glitter from seasonal decorative material to something so widespread that it would be extremely difficult to track down all of its many uses. In the earlier 1979 article, Fielder wrote, “Christmas glitter was the only product at first, but today the glitter is produced for diversified uses,” and in later in the article listed additional products. This article was part of a series produced by The Courier-News titled “12 Days of Christmas” which were intended to, “capture the spirit of Central Jerseyans during this holiday season.” Christmas decorations are

44 Stuart, “Bernardsville’s Meadowbrook Inventions Most Of The World’s Glitter Comes From This Quiet, Conservative Town.”

45 “Has Anyone Noticed the Increased Use of Glitter in Fine Art?”

46 Fiedler, “The Glitter Factory Brightens the Season.”

47 Fiedler.
possibly the longest associated products with glitter. Caity Weaver referenced Christmas twice in her 2018 article “What is Glitter?” when analyzing the early history of the material which, like Fielder’s article, was also published close to Christmas on December twenty-first. Although pinpointing the initial use of glitter may not be possible, it has always been heavily associated with Christmas. The association with glitter and a seasonal holiday categorically designates glitter as ephemeral; to be unpacked for a specific time of the year and put away when the holiday is over. However ephemeral these holiday decorations may have seemed when aluminum and plastic glitter was first introduced in the early twentieth century, by virtue of its enduring materials and more recent associations with other celebrations, fashion, and cultures, glitter is the opposite of ephemeral.

The increasing ubiquity of glitter throughout the twentieth century is uncovered in the two selected historic newspaper articles. In 1979, Fiedler listed some of the many products containing glitter, “The glitter… is used by a crash helmet manufacture to make his headgear sparkle. It does the same thing for such things as paint, artist and craft materials, jewelry, T-shirt lettering, and artificial marble in sinks and tubs," also noting that, “One artist made a painting of the Ruschmann farm using only their own glitter.”

A few years later in 1982, Stuart listed even more everyday products that contained glitter, “Aside from the obvious arts and crafts applications, glitter has dozens of uses: T-shirt decals, motorcycle helmets, floor and ceiling tiles, bowling balls, motorboat hulls, fingernail polish and body and hair spray (the latest in punk fashion to name a few,” as well as more obscure uses, “glitter has been used on

48 Fiedler.
tombstones and caskets.”

Stuart also pointed to utilitarian uses of glitter stating, “A rather unusual use for Meadowbrook’s steel “glitter” is in the brake shoe resin of jet airplanes… the tiny steel particles in the resin help dissipate the heat generated when the brakes are in use.”

Although newspaper articles cannot provide a definitive catalog of all of glitter’s many applications and uses, the increased number of products and range of uses points to an expansion of glitter’s presence in the material landscape of everyday life.

---

49 Stuart, “Bernardsville’s Meadowbrook Inventions Most Of The World’s Glitter Comes From This Quiet, Conservative Town.”

50 Stuart.
Chapter 3
ART HISTORY

In placing this section after the science and business history of glitter, I am taking up a call to action from scholars to write the history of modern and contemporary art through a materially driven lens. In What’s the Matter with Matter?, Hope Mauzerall claimed that modernists like Clement Greenberg, Michael Fried, and Rosland Krauss pulled art history away from materially driven theory in a longer Western metaphysical lens of privileging of form and abstraction over matter: “Matter, in this tradition, is the stuff of this world; form belongs to a higher, abstract realm that transcends worldly materiality.” In the same vein as Mauzerall, I argue that form and abstraction are themselves material because they are made from materials that cannot transcend their contexts. Glitter is one such material brimming with a contextual history that enriches interpretations of art containing glitter. Recalling Gaugy’s anti-glitter comment once again, unpacking what she refers to as the “freight” of glitter reveals that its affective qualities and its history are critical aspects to its interpretation. In drawing upon and connecting these histories, artists make use of the “worldly materiality,” and freight, of glitter.

52 “Has Anyone Noticed the Increased Use of Glitter in Fine Art?”
The edited volume, Materiality, is another example of a text that exposes a lack of attention to material in contemporary art history writing. In the introduction to the volume, Petra Lange-Berndt argued, “In fact, the legacy of this version of modernism is not a focus on materials, but quite the opposite: their elimination.”\textsuperscript{53} Dietmar Rübel also demonstrated an approach to remedying this problem in the introduction to his book, Plasticity: An Art History of the Mutableable, “Through a process of historical reconstruction the previous uses of the material can be seen as social traces that are brought back to life again in the art works. In this sense ephemeral and formless substances should be seen as indexical materials of social practice that resonate with the contemporary artistic background.”\textsuperscript{54} Glitter is in some cases regarded as both an ephemeral and permanent material; ephemeral for its connotations with fleeting celebrations, or disposable crafts, and permanent in that it is infamously tacky and difficult to clean. These dualities are, in part, why glitter is an inherently complex material, and should be interrogated and interpreted as such. In bringing forth “social traces” with art, the reconstruction of the “life” of glitter is possible in both Rübel’s use of the word life, and Appadurai’s. Glitter carries with it into galleries and museums the associations, uses, and histories people have attached to it. Drawing attention to the life of glitter enriches art historical analyses, and it is


only through a comprehensive unpacking of glitter that it can be fully appreciated for the incredibly layered and complex material it is.

Jefferson Pinder’s characteristic black glitter panels are created from, what resembles, Spectra brand glitter, which can be found in mainstream craft stores, including the children’s craft section of Blick Art Materials. In traveling from the children’s section of an art supply store, to a fine art object that represented the United States in the 11th Shanghai Biennale, glitter carried with it its embedded social and cultural lives. How does Pinder’s use of glitter create new meanings for the material? How do the other lives of the material effect its interpretation in other works of fine art? What can we learn about the glitter’s formalism through a close examination of specific works? In asking these questions, I posit lines of inquiry that my research on glitter picks up and weaves together to reveal unlikely connections, to form a deeper, more materially specific, portrait of contemporary art. Its associations with feminine and girl-power aesthetics, craft and categorically “low art,” bling and African diasporic aesthetic practices, drag costume and queer aesthetics, all at once culminate to form a rich history embedded in its materiality. In drawing out these connections, I argue that these histories should not be divorced from artistic applications of glitter, or any material, because they are a key facet of the material itself.

Glitter as an artistic form and medium demonstrates an expansive range of possibilities in unique formal qualities and broader cultural significations. An analysis

of works of art containing glitter from selected artists reveals that through different applications, techniques, and supporting mediums, glitter possesses latent qualities that are rife with possibilities for artists. Just as glitter has become a pervasive ubiquitous thing in our material world, it has also become a pervasive medium in contemporary art. I chose the artists in this section for their dramatically different applications of glitter. Through each of these artist’s unique use of the material, the different cultural connotations of the medium are revealed. These artists have pushed the boundaries for glitter as an artistic medium, revealing that formal explorations of glitter can take on new meanings, shed old ones, and become something that is at once strange and unfamiliar, yet recognizable and innovative. These analyses will work to form a preliminary canon of glitter art. Additionally, through the work of these artists, I make the case that glitter is a paradigm of contemporary art. That an exhaustive, encyclopedic survey of glitter in art cannot be realistically produced in a master’s thesis is an argument in and of itself for critical recognition of a complex medium. As glitter becomes a more prevalent tool for artists to express and reflect a range of phenomena, historic precedent is key in understanding its formalism and broader implications.

3.1 Jamie Vasta

Painted with glitter on panel in 2013 by Jamie Vasta, *Lil Miss Hot Mess* measures at eighteen by twelve inches (Figure 3). Against a backdrop of black glitter, a striking figure dressed in layers of varying patterns and an abundance of bright colors dominates the composition. With one arm folded in at the waist, and one hand grazing a necklace, the figure is fixed in a pose that reads as relaxed and serene. Pink lips, pink blush, pink eyeshadow, feathery eyelashes, and a red scarf accentuate a pile
of curled hair that frames the sharp gaze of the figure, who looks back at the viewer and slightly down, as if positioned slightly above them. Earrings, rings, necklaces, and bracelets compliment the vivacious colors of the figure’s dress, creating an aesthetic of bounty. The myriad of luminous colors in glitter used to create the portrait further add to compositional excess, creating a portrait that literally shines. The assured pose and hard gaze of the figure is equally complimented by glitter, exuding an affect of opulence and luminosity.

Based in Oakland, California, Vasta has been creating paintings composed entirely of glitter and glue on panel since before earning her MFA from the California College of Arts in 2007. Incredibly versatile across varying subjects, Vasta uses glitter to push the boundaries of figurative and landscape painting. Her gallery biography highlights some of her source material, “Staging actors, friends and family within the LGBT community, Vasta’s narrative series focus on art historical movements, contemporary culture and literary tales.” Lil Miss Hot Mess is one such portrait of a prominent figure in the LGBT community. The namesake of the portrait references the sitter herself, Lil Miss Hot Mess, a prominent figure in the drag community known for numerous accomplishments, her most recent being a children’s book, The Hips on the Drag Queen Go Swish, Swish, Swish. The book shows how drag queens literally add color and excitement to the world through their performance.


57 “Jamie Vasta.”
and presence. Glitter features prominently in Lil Miss Hot Mess’ costumes and makeup. In representing her in the medium of her choice, Vasta highlights the transformative, opulent, luminous aesthetics of glitter and its ability to create a representation of a human figure that emulates the same self-fashioning and abundance of material excess reflected in how she represents herself. This portrait is part of a series titled, Femme, that draws inspiration from, “17th century royal portraiture and 19th century society portraits.” Vasta stated that these subjects complimented the medium because they, “embody the visual impact of glitter,” with bright layered colors, striking poses, and luminous materials like metal and glossy makeup. Vasta contrasts the conventional compositional qualities of these portraits with glitter, such as the dark background that highlights the figure, and poses intended to show off their dress and jewelry. In this example, glitter additionally compliments the public persona and aesthetics of Lil Miss Hot Mess. As a luminous and highly visible material, glitter amplifies queer aesthetics through a new form of representation and portraiture.

Blue Gum Eucalyptus is another example of Vasta’s work with glitter on panel (Figure 4). Painted in 2015, it measures forty inches tall and thirty inches wide. Growing vertically from the yellow green colored grass in the foreground, intertwined tree branches lace around a trunk sparsely populated with leaves ranging from green to


bright red in color. Jutting out in multiple directions, the branches of the tree fill most of the composition. These branches sharply hang and seem to actively fall from the tree. One branch appears completely detached near the bottom of the composition and rests in the grass. Beyond the tree, the ground drops off to frame a river valley populated with green leafy trees on either side. Deep black and jade greens compliment the light blue and white color of the river. In a serpentine shape, the river winds to the right and then to the left of the composition. The river is mostly hidden behind the tree, its final curves unrevealed to the viewer. Rather than acting as a framing device for the grand river valley, positioned off to the side of the composition, the tree simultaneously permits windowed views of what lies behind it, and draws the viewer’s attention back to itself because it blocks a potentially picturesque vista.

Angular lines of the tree’s branches become more rounded as the branches grow away from the tree. A branch near the middle of the of the composition curves downward to compliment a similarly shaped bend in the river. Simultaneously complimenting, opposing, and impeding a view of the river valley, the tree challenges conventional landscape painting in more ways than its composition. Created using a myriad of glitters, this luminous painting demonstrates the bounty of different types and colors available, resisting narrow definitions and expectations for the medium.

In Vasta’s paintings, glitter functions somewhat like separate blocks or screens in printmaking. Each color occupies separate plane of space, like how each color of a woodblock print uses a different block. Glitter is granular, and unlike paint it cannot be mixed to create new homogenous hues. So, rather than mixing different colors of glitter together to achieve new colors, Vasta works in sections to create color blocked compositions with a distinct and striking rhythm. Through intricate subject matter and
effective use of color, Vasta’s paintings reveal new possibilities in art that defy convention, in part, through glitter as her material of choice. The selected example, *Blue Gum Eucalyptus*, from her œuvre is a part of a broader series, *After the Hudson River School*. A press release for the series draws attention to glitter as a groundbreaking material in landscape painting, “With glitter Vasta is able to take luminance of light further than ever imagined by the River School artists.”60 In Vasta’s paintings, the discontinuous and fragmented quality of glitter comes together through her painterly approach. The result is a relatively new and unique formalism that represents luminosity in subject matter through a hyper-reflective material. Vasta’s work stretches the limits of representing luminosity on a two-dimensional surface and illustrates how art historical conventions can veer in new directions with avant-garde materials.

### 3.2 Jefferson Pinder

Jefferson Pinder created *Black Portal* in 2015 with nine flat panels covered in charcoal, spray paint, ink, and black glitter (Figure 5). Measuring fifteen feet high, the irregular geometric panels form together what is essentially a triangle with three points extending into space. The highest point in the triangular shape skews slightly to the left, connecting to the right point with a straight edge and connecting to the left point with a curved line. Negative space between the panels gives the work an energetic sense of movement; that each piece would lock together if pushed closer—like how

slow-moving cars in a traffic jam butt up against one another, but move further away when sped up—however, with space between each panel in the composition has the appearance of motion. The triangular shape further elicits motion, resembling the form of a flying aircraft with its sharp angular lines and a flat aerodynamic appearance. The word “portal” in the title of this piece also evokes movement, calling to question: Where is it headed? Who is invited? What is the purpose of this journey? Covered with a thick coat of dark glitter, Black Portal is incredibly reflective and luminous. Glitter adds to the motion imbedded in the compositional qualities of the piece by creating a surface that is most reflective when in motion; meaning that when a viewer moves while the piece remains static, light catches each irregularly applied piece of glitter at different angles. The unevenness of the application process creates a surface wherein the geometrically cut pieces of black glitter shine unevenly. Unlike the continuous aesthetic of other materials that are most reflective with static light like mirror or lacquer, a surface created with glitter is most reflective in motion. Pinder draws attention to these material properties of glitter through a composition that elicits movement using multiple techniques.

Pinder is a Chicago based artist who works primarily in video, performance, and installation. For Pinder, glitter was used as part of a broader series titled Onyx Odyssey, which according to Allison Peters Quinn at the Hyde Park Art Center was, “…a journey into blackness and all its complexities.” Pinder stated in an interview for an exhibition containing some of the pieces in the series, “I am looking at light and dark (black and white) formally… I use darkness as a formal and conceptual tool to

speak about our associations with darkness.” In this context, glitter directly confronts and complicates historically racialized definitions of black and white, which Pinder addresses throughout the interview with Matthew Clay-Robinson for the York College Galleries. In reflecting bright light, Black Portal serves as material proof that black, like white, is “light” in the most literal sense, and possesses the ability to embody the “pure… innocent… not intended to cause harm…” qualities that are wrapped in the definition of the word “white.” A material manufactured and used for its ability to produce luminous surfaces, the black glitter in Pinder’s work refuses racially historicized notions of the color black as completely devoid of color, and as such, the opposite of white, revealing that a black material can produce and emit light. In Shine: The Visual Economy of Light in African Diasporic Aesthetic Practices, Krista Thompson suggests numerous ways to understand how African Diasporic art disrupts and confronts violent economic systems of thought through concepts of reflectivity and light. In this way, Pinder’s application of black glitter to create a surface that reflects light further complicates these value systems, revealing through material that commonly held value systems are fabrications. Using glitter, Pinder directly confronts culturally constructed value systems that are partially reliant on assumptions about


63 Clay-Robinson and Pinder.


65 Thompson, Shine.
certain colors. Resulting in proof from Pinder that material revolution against these systems is entirely possible.

3.3 Jonathan Lyndon Chase

Measuring at thirty-six by thirty-six inches, Jonathan Lydon Chase created the portrait Wave Check in 2020 with acrylic, pastel, glitter, and silkscreen on fabric (Figure 6). In the center of the composition, an image of a face is reflected in a round mirror. The back of the figure’s head and body are rendered in the foreground of the composition. The figure is draped in purple, folds in the fabric are designated through graphic use of black lines. A well of black at the nape of the figure’s neck suggests that the garment the figure wears is a hooded sweatshirt. Skin on their arms, face and their scalp are also purple, in the same shade as the sweatshirt. Just as in the sweatshirt, elements of the face are created with thick black lines with gray used as a highlight in the lips and nose, and white is used in the eyes. Looking into the mirror with an offset gaze, the figure holds a rectangular form, presumably a hairbrush, near their square rhinestone studded ear. The hair at the back of the head is formed through horizontal wavy lines in deep purple and a lighter blue. These lines are dusted with a light colored, iridescent, near transparent glitter which compliments the dazzling rhinestone earring. Glitter, however, does not feature in the waves of hair in the mirror reflection of the figure, nor does the light blue. The hair in the reflection features the same wavy pattern in black and gray, instead of the bright purple and blue with glitter on the surface. This quiet and contemplative vignette is framed by a black door to the right, and a horizontal stripe of black near the top of the piece, reminiscent of a windowpane. Behind each of these layers of the composition: the back of the figure, their reflection in the mirror, and the door and windowpane, is a bold pattern. A wash
of purple with a layered undulating rectangular grid forms the backing of the pattern which is blotted with a deep orange red throughout; the same orange-red color is used to create interceding elements in the pattern. These elements are rounded in shape and use tightly curved black lines to create abstracted forms of roses, butterflies, human figures kissing, music notes, diamond rings, and dollar signs. Glitter directs the eye away from the energetic background and towards the figure, resulting in a delicately balanced composition. However, glitter is not used in the figure’s reflection, suggesting an unevenness in the figure’s outward appearance and self-perception. The figure’s downcast eyes look away, rather than assertively into the mirror. What at first reads as a peaceful contemplative instant between the figure and their reflection, now unravels to reveal an incredibly dynamic confrontation with the self. That the bright colors, glitter, and the rhinestone appear on the figure, and not in their image, could suggest that their image may not align with that of what others see, or vice versa.

Installed at the Fabric Workshop Museum in Philadelphia, Jonathan Lyndon Chase’s *The Big Wash* features numerous works containing glitter. Chase is a Philadelphia-based artist; and according to their profile from 2019 on The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, “Jonathan Lyndon Chase is a visual artist whose vivid, gestural portraits employ painting, collage, and drawing to reflect the complexities of black and queer identity.”66 Originally scheduled to open in late 2020, the opening was pushed to the fifth of January 2021 due to worsening public health conditions and

---

risks caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.\textsuperscript{67} The Big Wash was curated to display works created by Chase during their 2019-2020 Fabric Workshop Museum screen-printing residency wherein they produced yardages of fabric that appear throughout pieces in the exhibit, from sculptures, to paintings, to undergarments hanging on clotheslines that intercept the gallery space.\textsuperscript{68} According to exhibit descriptions on the museum’s website Chase’s work in this exhibit is organized around, “the laundromat as a site that is at once private and public.”\textsuperscript{69} The gallery features black and white checkered linoleum, a painted and collaged washer-dryer combo, paintings of laundromat washing machines, and stuffed soft sculptures of sinks makes this theme explicit, directly evoking forms and objects of the laundromat. As a space where individuals take their private intimate belongings for cleansing, for some, the laundromat is a ritualistic experience that coalesces the private and public. Using iconographic elements such as windows, doors, mirrors, and cell phones with photographs of bodies depicted on the screens throughout the exhibit, Chase draws attention to the body as a site that is also private and public. According to an article by Maximilían Durón for ARTnews, the laundromat also functioned as a restorative metaphor, “Chase looked to water and the elements as a way to evoke this concept of healing and


\textsuperscript{69} “Jonathan Lyndon Chase.”
transformation.”\textsuperscript{70} Chase used a variety of materials and techniques to convey these themes, however, glitter is exceptionally transformative.

Julia Bryan-Wilson’s analysis of glitter as a boundary eroding solvent used by late twentieth century gender-bending performance collectives in her book, Fray: Art and Textile Politics, is a useful lens to interpret Chase’s use of glitter. Glitter features prominently in a section of the book where Bryan-Wilson argues that the Cockettes and Angels of Light, “used their outfits as a laboratory site to craft multiple skins,” imagine new worlds, and identities for themselves.\textsuperscript{71} She then connects this movement to the history of art, “Handmade costumes—not to mention radical queer culture—are still considered somewhat marginal within art history[...]the residue of this textile craft stubbornly lingers.”\textsuperscript{72} In a 2021 interview with The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, when Chase was asked, “For whom do you make your work for?”, they responded with “LGBTQueer Black people.”\textsuperscript{73} Chase’s use of glitter in their work, alongside who they create for, continues this history outlined by Bryan-Wilson. In Wave Check from The Big Wash, the glitter adorning the figure’s hair, and not their


\textsuperscript{71} Bryan-Wilson, \textit{Fray}, 71.

\textsuperscript{72} Bryan-Wilson, 71.

mirror reflection, is transformative because of its luminosity. While the mismatch between figure and their reflection conveys a tension, this imbalance could also indicate a transformation. The luminous, iridescent glitter particles in the foreground of the painting are, in a way, a light source. When lights from the gallery hit the surface of the painting, light emanates from the figure’s hair and actively transforms the surface, drawing attention to the true self as perhaps distinct from a reflection, and as being imagined and fabricated by the self.

Selected for their unique applications of glitter in their work, the artists in this section exemplify an expansive range of creative possibility within glitter. We are presented with new modes of interpretation and expression through glitter. Each of these artists captures unique aspects of glitter that makes use of its material properties to communicate significant facets of production and consumption. In her portraits and landscapes made entirely of glitter, Jamie Vasta captures a painterly approach to the material. Especially in her portrait series of prominent figures in the drag community, Vasta represents people in a medium that is meaningful to their artistic practices as performance artists that are both serious, and playful. As a performance art, drag seriously complicates pervasive and oppressive gendered modes of representing and presenting the self in a playful and oftentimes comical medium. Vasta aptly captures this essential quality of drag with glitter, a material that is also both serious and playful. Additionally, her landscapes disrupt traditional methods of representing naturalism. A landscape in an unexpected medium like glitter actively calls to question how we define natural. Are the oil paints traditionally used by the Hudson River School to represent landscapes natural? Or are they just expected? A glitter landscape reckons with such expectations and challenges boundaries between natural and
unnatural, and in doing so, calls attention to such a binary mode of thought as a fabrication. Likewise, Jefferson Pinder also uses glitter to complicate value systems. In using dark black glitter to represent a luminous airplane shaped portal, Pinder confronts racist ideologies by pointing out how entrenched these constructed belief systems and world views have distorted even perceptions of color. Through a more subtle use of glitter in their work, Jonathan Lyndon Chase highlights how glitter can represent complicated interpretations of self-representation. Chase uses glitter to comment on practices of fashioning the self, and of transformation. As a consumer product not initially intended for fine art, these fine artists have pushed the boundaries of creative possibilities in glitter to a new level, or perhaps stage. By stretching expectations of glitter, these artists have shown that in new materials lie entirely new possibilities for contemporary art. These new representational forms facilitate artistic interpretation that may not be possible in older media.
Chapter 4

CONCLUSION

As new materials continually emerge and are incorporated into the work of contemporary artists, rapid contextualization of such materials greatly enriches art historical interpretations. Glitter is just one example of a material that benefits from a material-centered approach to studying how artists have made use of its implications and connotations to create forms that effectively capture and add new layers to its complexities. Glitter, in short, shapes and is shaped by the art in which it is incorporated. This thesis provides a survey of the history of glitter, as well as some scientific analysis, and builds scaffolding around its uses in contemporary art to show that materials should not be divorced from broader cultural contexts. In starting with examples that demonstrate widespread attitudes towards glitter, as well as unsuccessful ways that glitter has been written about by art historians, I contend that if materials are not carefully unpacked and analyzed in a material and historical lens, interpretations of materials like glitter are unknowingly mischaracterized and perhaps ignored by scholars. Additionally, I show how a piece of scientific scholarship that focused on microplastics on large scale, and was not specifically about glitter, rapidly became fuel for misinformation surrounding the material, as well as broad generalizations about the environmental consequences of glitter. Similarly, I complicate the inventor mythos of Henry Ruschmann by placing him in historical context to reveal that from the manufacturer and inventor’s perspective, glitter was always complicated. Through this interdisciplinary lens, the works of art and artists
can be seen more holistically. The choices to use glitter in their work are neither automatically dismissed as pastiche, nor is their use of glitter ignored. This further allows for a materially-based analysis of their work and a systematic unpacking of the ways that glitter works as a material that complicates familiar ways of thinking and seeing. With its dazzling and reflective qualities, glitter affords new creative possibilities.

Another task enveloped in this thesis was to demonstrate how art history could benefit from a new materials perspective. In looking to glitter, I model how future scholarship could work to quickly contextualize and interpret the use of new materials in art. Returning to Jamie Vasta’s work, her more recent compositions focus again on landscapes. Created in 2018, *Inferno*, is a brilliant portrait of a burning tree (Figure 7). In the foreground, a tree that stretches from the top to the bottom of the composition burns in deep red. Yellows spread outward, and eventually near the top of the composition the fire fades to deep purple and black, resembling the night sky on a clear night. When read alone, the imagery and color are alarming; a fire obviously signifies cause for concern and distress. However, when considering her choice to depict a burning landscape in glitter, more provocative themes emerge from the work. According to an article by Karla Kane about the 2020 exhibit *Rooted: Trees in Contemporary Art* at the Palo Alto Art Center in Palo Alto, California where this work was featured from *Palo Alto Online*, “Jamie Vasta uses glitter – which she noted is commonly associated with messy children’s projects and thought of as a “cheap throwaway thing” – to create powerfully compelling imagery, including “Inferno,” which depicts a raging wildfire, creating an interesting contrast between the festive,
sparkly material and the traumatic subject matter.”74 This contrast that Kane picked up on is embedded in the materiality of glitter, and as I have argued throughout this thesis, is inseparable.

In depicting a destructive wildfire in a medium associated with cheap beauty that, at the same time, provokes immediate call for environmental concern, Vasta flips cultural assumptions about glitter on its head once again, and even turns these assumptions back to the viewer. Like fire, glitter is a force of contradiction, a potentially destructive, or constructive material. On one hand, glitter is made of highly complicated types of plastic that pollutes our waterways and material world on a scale not yet known. However, artists creatively make use of this material to reveal new ways of seeing and interpreting reality through their work. How could a democratized material used to create luminous surfaces become a force of destruction? Who is responsible for mitigating seemingly insurmountable, and impending, natural disaster? With glitter, Vasta calls attention to the contradictions of individual verses collective responsibility in large scale systemic problem solving and forges a new path through, one that recognizes new materials and the limits of such materials while positing futures not yet knowable. From the burning tree, a clearer sky is visible at the top of the painting, one that is obscured and dark, yet visible.

As the lines between art and the everyday continually blur, in part, by way of materials, more interdisciplinary, creative thinking is necessary to understand the increasingly interconnected and tangled web of human creativity. No longer does there

exist set boundaries between materials that belong in fine arts, crafts, and the everyday. Iconographic, bibliographic, or formal modes of interpreting contemporary art no longer suffice. To uncover and see the complexities of contemporary art, scholarship that considers materials is critical. As artists continually incorporate new materials into their work, scholars must reconcile their practice with this reality and update their methods to reflect it. New materials are the present, and the future. Glitter is just one of these materials.
Figure 3. Vasta, Jamie, *Lil Miss Hot Mess*, 2013, glitter on panel. 18 x 12”,
Figure 5  Pinder, Jefferson, *Black Portal*. 2015, charcoal, spray paint, ink, glitter on panel, 96 x 58 x 4”. [http://www.jeffersonpinder.com/black-portal](http://www.jeffersonpinder.com/black-portal)
Figure 7. Vasta, Jamie, *Inferno*, 2018, glitter on panel.  
REFERENCES


*Bernardsville News*. “Order To Act on Alleged Zone Violation.” June 20, 1957.


https://doi.org/10.17813/1086-671X-20-3-259.

http://glitterhatemail.com/.


Marchetti, Gina F. “Film and Subculture: The Relationship of Film to the Punk and Glitter Youth Subcultures.” Ph.D., Northwestern University, 1982. [http://search.proquest.com/pqdt/docview/303257883/abstract/E2A0D4291A0C4C5DPQ/4](http://search.proquest.com/pqdt/docview/303257883/abstract/E2A0D4291A0C4C5DPQ/4).


Appendix A

ANALYSIS OF GLITTER SAMPLES

ANALYTICAL REPORT

WINTERTHUR MUSEUM, GARDEN AND LIBRARY

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS LABORATORY

If the information in this report is to be incorporated in total or in part in a publication, even as a minor contribution, the manuscript must first be submitted to the Director of the Conservation Division, Winterthur Museum and Country Estate for approval because the data as stated may not be appropriate for its proposed use. Scientific Research and Analysis Laboratory Staff must be notified prior to any and all publications and presentations of this data.

REPORT NO.: AL6857
DATE: February 24, 2021
REQUESTOR: Molly Mapstone  ANALYST: Catherine R. Matsen

OBJECT DESCRIPTION (form, material, color, etc.)

Glitter Samples from Meadowbrook Inventions, Inc. Bernardsville, NJ 07924

PARTICULAR INTEREST

To determine the stratigraphy and chemical composition of four samples of glitter from Meadowbrook Inventions Inc., specifically:
Crystalina, 300 Mix, 0.008” hex (Sample 1)
Crystalina Jewels Glitter #321/421, 0.015” hex, iridescent (Sample 2)
Alpha Jewels Glitter Gold Alpha Jewel, 0.015” hex, iridescent (Sample 3)
Polyester Jewels Glitter 4P Brilliant Dark Gold, 0.015” hex, non-iridescent (Sample 4)

The Crystalina 300 Mix glitter was provided as a bag of loose material. The other three samples were taken from trade catalogs provided by the Meadowbrook Company. The glitter particles in the trade catalogs were adhered to the support with an unidentified adhesive.

**EXPERIMENTAL**

**Cross-section Preparation and Photomicrograph Procedures**

The first step to understand the stratigraphy, or layered format, of the individual glitter pieces was to prepare cross-section samples and examine and image them at high magnification under reflected visible and ultraviolet light. The four glitter samples were cast separately in mini-cubes, of approximately half inch widths, with polyester resin (Extec polyester clear resin (methyl methacrylate monomer) with methyl ethyl ketone peroxide catalyst (10mL : 8 drops), Extec Corporation®, Enfield, CT). For the three samples taken from the trade catalog, they glitter pieces were pulled away from the adhesive with a scalpel and tweezers. The resin was allowed to cure for 24 hours at room temperature and ambient light. Excess casting medium was removed from the cube just up to the surface of the sample with a jeweler’s saw (Rio Grande saw blades, laser gold). The cubes were then dry, hand-polished successively with 400- and 600-grit Buehler Carbimet paper (silicon carbide) and 1500- to 12,000-grit Micro-Mesh Inc. polishing cloths (silicon carbide or aluminum oxide) to expose the cross-section.

It was realized that the polyester resin did not “hold” the small glitter pieces well enough and so it was decided to re-cast the glitter in a stronger epoxy medium using JB Weld Clear Weld Quick-Setting Epoxy. The cross-sections were polished in the same manner described in the previous paragraph.

The epoxy cross-section samples were examined and digitally photographed using a Zeiss Axio Imager M2m binocular microscope (5, 10×, and 20× objectives with 10× ocular) equipped with a Kübler Codix HXP 120C mercury lamp for reflected visible and ultraviolet light. The sample was viewed in bright field reflected light and using the Zeiss 02 cube (excitation 365nm, barrier 420nm, beam splitter 395nm). Images were taken with the Zeiss AxioCam HRc digital camera in conjunction with Zeiss AxioVision software.

**Fourier-transform Infrared (FTIR) Spectroscopy**
Glitter from the Crystalina, 300 Mix, 0.008” hex was analyzed by FTIR (Fourier-transform infrared) microspectroscopy, an instrumental technique that permits the general classification of natural organic materials (such as waxes, proteins, oils, polysaccharides, and resins) and the more specific identification of synthetic resins, inorganic pigments, and natural minerals. One particle of glitter was transferred with a stainless steel scalpel and the aid of a stereomicroscope and then placed directly on a diamond cell. The material was rolled flat on the cell with a steel micro-roller to decrease thickness and increase transparency. The sample was analyzed using the Thermo Scientific Nicolet 6700 FT-IR with Nicolet Continuum FT-IR microscope (transmission mode); data was acquired for 128 scans from 4000 to 650 cm\(^{-1}\) at a spectral resolution of 4 cm\(^{-1}\). Multiple scrapings of the sample were taken from the bulk sample and multiple spectra were taken from different areas within each scraping. Spectra were collected with Omnic 8.0 software and analyzed in this program with various IRUG and commercial reference spectral libraries.

**Scanning Electron Microscopy – Energy Dispersive Spectroscopy (SEM-EDS)**

Secondary electron images of loose Crystalina, 300 Mix, 0.008” hex were acquired with scanning electron microscopy. A small amount of crystals were transferred to SPI Supplies double-sided carbon tabs (12mm diameter) applied to an SPI Supplies Zeiss aluminum slot head stub (12.7×3.1mm). The samples were coated with a thin film of vaporized carbon using an SPI-MODULE\textsuperscript{™} Carbon Coater with 2mm thick carbon fiber.

In order to understand the elemental composition of the cross-sections, the cubes were first reduced in width so as to provide better imaging once mounted in the SEM chamber. The excess casting medium was cut off the back of the sample with a jeweler’s saw. The cross-section was mounted to an SPI Supplies Zeiss aluminum slot head stub (12.7×3.1mm) with SPI Supplies double-sided carbon tabs (12mm diameter). SPI Supplies conductive carbon paint (colloidal graphite in isopropanol 20% solids) was applied on the side and top surfaces of casting medium, without covering the cross-section itself, to prevent charging. The sample was examined using a Zeiss EVO MA15 scanning electron microscope with LaB\textsubscript{6} source at an accelerating voltage of 20kV for the electron beam, working distance of approximately 10mm, and sample tilt of 0°. The EDS data was collected with the Bruker Nano X-flash® detector 6 | 30 and analyzed with Quantax 200/Esprit 1.9 software.

**Pyrolysis-gas chromatography/mass spectrometry (py-GC/MS)**

The organic composition of Crystalina, 300 Mix, 0.008” hex was analyzed by py-GC/MS with no chemical derivatization. A few glitter particles were placed into a 50μL stainless steel Eco-cup fitted with an Eco-stick and placed into the pyrolysis interface were it was purged with helium. The Frontier Lab EGA/PY-3030D double-shot pyrolyzed system was interfaced to a Hewlett-Packard 6820A gas chromatogram equipped with 5973 mass selective detector (MSD). A J&W DB-5MS Agilent
19091S-433 capillary column was used for separation (30m × 250μm × 0.25μm) with helium carrier gas set to 1.2 mL/minute. Samples were pyrolyzed using a single-shot method at 600°C for 12 seconds. The Agilent Technologies MassHunter Workstation GC/MS Data Acquisition (version 10.0.368) software was used with instrument conditions as follows: the split injector was set to 280°C with a split ratio of 30:1 and no solvent delay (9.26 psi). The GC oven temperature program was 43°C for two minutes then ramped at 10°C/minute to 325°C, followed by a five minute isothermal period, for a total run time of 35.2 minutes. The MSD transfer line was at 320°C, the source at 230°C and the MS quad at 150°C. The mass spectrometer was scanned from 33-600amu at a rate of 2.6 scans per second. Agilent Technologies MassHunter Qualitative control software was used for data interpretation.

Raman
The loose glitter of Crystalina, 300 Mix and cross-sections of sample 1 were analyzed with the Renishaw Invia Raman spectrometer (785nm diode laser or 514nm argon ion laser) in conjunction with WiRE 3.4 software with extended scan from 100-400cm⁻¹, 50× objective lens, exposure time of 10 seconds/scan for one accumulation, and 50% laser power.

RESULTS

Cross-section Microscopy

Sample 1 Crystalina, 300 Mix, 0.008” hex (Sample 1)
Bright Field Reflected Light 50×

**Unable to cast and get a good polish of Crystalina Jewels Glitter #321/421, 0.015” hex, iridescent (Sample 2) cross-section

Sample 3 Alpha Jewels Glitter Gold Alpha Jewel, 0.015” hex, iridescent (Sample 3)
Bright Field Reflected Light 20×

Sample 3 Alpha Jewels Glitter Gold Alpha Jewel, 0.015” hex, iridescent (*Sample 3*)

Dark Field Reflected Light 20×

Sample 3 Alpha Jewels Glitter Gold Alpha Jewel, 0.015” hex, iridescent (*Sample 3*)

Reflected Ultraviolet Light 20×
Sample 4 Polyester Jewels Glitter 4P Brilliant Dark Gold, 0.015” hex, non-iridescent
(Sample 4)

Dark Field Reflected Light 20×

Sample 4 Polyester Jewels Glitter 4P Brilliant Dark Gold, 0.015” hex, non-iridescent
(Sample 4)

Reflected Ultraviolet Light 20×

FTIR

The spectrum of the Crystalina 300 Mix hex (red spectrum) matches most closely with a reference spectrum for tere- and isophthalic acids polyester (green spectrum).
PyGC-MS

PyGC-MS determined the composition of Crystalina 300 Mix to be composed of both polyethylene terephthalate (PET) and polymethylmethacrylate (PMMA).

SEM-EDS
Secondary electron imaging of loose Crystalina, 300 Mix, 0.008” hex (Sample 1) at 24×, 156×, 291× and 330× magnifications.
Back-scattered electron SEM image of Alpha Jewels Glitter Gold Alpha Jewel, 0.015” hex, iridescent cross-section (*Sample 3*)

False-color elemental mapping of chlorine (in green) and aluminum (in blue) of Alpha Jewels Glitter Gold Alpha Jewel, 0.015” hex, iridescent cross-section (*Sample 3*)
Back-scattered electron SEM image of Polyester Jewels Glitter 4P Brilliant Dark Gold, 0.015” hex, non-iridescent cross-section (Sample 4)

False-color elemental mapping of sulfur (in green) and aluminum (in blue) of Polyester Jewels Glitter 4P Brilliant Dark Gold, 0.015” hex, non-iridescent cross-section (Sample 4)

Raman

No successful results; data only showed detection of epoxy casting medium of cross-sections.

DISCUSSION
It is surmised from the pyGC-MS results that the three layers visible in the cross-section photomicrograph of the Crystalina, 300 Mix are arranged such that a layer of PET sandwiched between two layers of PMMA; however, this could not be confirmed with Raman spectroscopy.

Secondary electron scanning electron microscopy (SEM) images of the loose Crystalina 300 mix glitter provide great information as to the shape and topography of the particles at 156×, 291× and 330× magnification. The elemental analysis of the cross-sections was not extremely successful except to show determine that considerable amounts of chlorine is detected in Sample 3, Alpha Jewels Glitter Gold Alpha Jewel, 0.015” hex, iridescent. For Sample 4, Polyester Jewels Glitter 4P Brilliant Dark Gold, 0.015” hex, non-iridescent, elemental mapping of the cross-section indicates that aluminum (Al) is detected on the outer edges of the particles.

The following paper provides useful information on the varied composition and extremely thin layers comprising four different Meadowbrook Inventions Crystalina series glitters:


The authors of this paper were able to successful determine the composition and stratigraphy of the glitters because of access to two key resources: a microtome in order to precisely prepare and cut the glitter particles in cross-section as thin-sections; and the use of a synchrotron infrared source. The hand polishing used to prepare the cross-sections for this project at Winterthur is such that polish marks from the fine grit polishing papers remain visible on the surface of the cross-section. The authors of the Forensic Science Journal paper also used a low-emissivity glass microscope slide on which to place the cross-sections which allowed for higher quality optical images of the cross-sections, and thus an accurate determination of the number of layers and their thicknesses (in microns, μm). Use of a synchrotron beam source allows for a very powerful infrared light source to be focused to a very small spot size, approximately 3-10μm. This small area of analysis allows the composition of the individual layers of each glitter particle to be determined.

CONCLUSIONS

The instrumental analysis of four glitter samples at Winterthur’s Scientific Research and Analysis Laboratory attempted to characterize the layer structure and composition of four samples of Meadowbrook Inventions, Inc. glitter. Conclusive results were unable to be provided for all samples due to limitations in the sensitivity and
resolution of the available instruments; however, the analyses determined that the Crystalina, 300 Mix, 0.008” hex is composed of layers of polyethylene terephthalate (PET) and polymethylmethacrylate (PMMA), chlorine is detected in Alpha Jewels Glitter Gold Alpha Jewel, 0.015” hex, iridescent (Sample 3), and aluminum metal is present on the outside edges of Polyester Jewels Glitter 4P Brilliant Dark Gold, 0.015” hex, non-iridescent (Sample 4).
Appendix B

IMAGE PERMISSIONS

---

Molly Mapstone <mapstone@udel.edu>

Re: Image Information Request
1 message

Thu, Mar 18, 2021 at 9:39 AM

Huescis, Peter <p-huestis@nga.gov>
To: "mapstone@udel.edu," <mapstone@udel.edu>

Ms. Mapstone:

Since it's not our photo, and we are not the right holders, you don't need any authorizations from us.

Cordially,

Peter Huestis
Office of Visual Services
National Gallery of Art, Washington
p-huestis@nga.gov
Re: Image Permission Request

Jamie Vasta <jvasta@gmail.com>
Fri 3/19/2021 1:22 PM

To: Molly Mapstone <mmapst@winterthur.org>

Hi Molly,

You have my full permission to use and reproduce an image of that painting, as well as any others that are on my website. Congrats on finishing your thesis! Can't wait to check it out if I can.

Jamie
Re: Image Permission Request

Patricia Sweetow Gallery <ps@patriciasweetowgallery.com>
Wed 3/17/2021 8:15 PM
To: Molly Mapstone <mmapst1@winterthur.org>

Hi Molly, You have my permission to use the image of Jamie Vasta, Blue Gum Eucalyptus. Please use the below credit.

Image Courtesy of artist & Patricia Sweetow Gallery

Thanks - Patricia Sweetow
Re: Form Submission - Contact - Image Permission Request

Jefferson <jefferson.pinder@gmail.com>

Thu, 3/18/2021 8:25 AM

To: Molly Mapstone <mnapst@winterthur.org>

Nope. Be my guest. I hope the work serves you well. Thanks

Sent from my iPad
Re: Image Permission Request

Ken Castaneda <ken@companygallery.us>
Wed 3/24/2021 12:57 PM
To: Molly Mapstone <mmapst@winterthur.org>
Hi Molly,

Jonathan has approved use of this image. They only ask if you could kindly share the thesis when it's completed. The courtesy is as follows: Courtesy of the artist and Company Gallery, New York.

Let me know if you have any questions and good luck in writing!

All the best,
Ken
RE: Request for Approval to Use Analytical Report in WPAMC Thesis

Joy Gardiner <JGardi@winterthur.org>
Tue 4/13/2021 2:49 PM
To: Molly Mapstone <mmapat@winterthur.org>
Cc: Catharine Dann Roehm <creehbe@winterthur.org>

Hello Molly,
Thanks for the reminder and sorry for the delay. Yes, I do give my permission for the inclusion of the SRAL material. A fascinating topic!
Best,
Joy

Joy Gardiner
Charles F. Hummel Director of Conservation
Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library
And Affiliated Assistant Professor
Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation
Direct 302.888.4612
Cell 302.229.6050
S105 Kennett Pike
Winterthur, DE 19735
winterthur.org