

Maxwell Cloe: The final piece that I had was *Lap Work and Leftovers*. So tell me about all of these.

Mo Kessler: Yeah, so this was a funny exercise. I adore this space so much. So I sort of had this break when I was coming into my pieces here at school where, you know - so I went through a three-year program and getting out of my second year and I was really wanting to make a turn in my work and I didn't know how to do that or what it was going to go on. And I realized that that my studio being on a traditional campus was creating this really stagnant energy for me because I am - as much as I play both hands of rural and urban spaces - I love industrial, like industry. I love the aesthetics of crumbling-in industry. I really like buildings and structures. And you know, this is why I live in Baltimore right now. There's not a scene that I'm more in love with. But so anyways, long story short, I just like needed to get out of my studio because it was like so pristine and so nice. This is also a shout out to WCU's master's program. Like they have the nicest studios, like our facilities are amazing for how small a school we are. But yeah, I just needed to be able to watch something else happen outside of my window, outside of this, like just utterly breathtaking view, beautiful view of this mountain in front of our campus. So, you know, complaining for no good reason why I have this artist block living in this beautiful space.

I decided I should rent a storefront and I was thinking about renting a storefront for my show. So at the end of the semester, but instead I was like, "well, what, you know, what would happen if I rented it out basically for half of a semester?" So I was then just making work as reaction to the space I was in. And this is a storefront that used to be a kitchen supply store in Dillsboro, North Carolina, which is like the tiny town, right outside of Sylva. I technically live between those two but Dillsboro is really cute and it has the railroad that runs through it so there's this tiny little moment that it looks like a splash of a city for a second. And I just was thrilled by that. So I went into the space, loved the city around it, and then like, you can see the wood paneling is just like the most spectacular wood paneling ever. And it's so busy and I loved what a challenge that was because, you know, like there's a reason why galleries are white walls. It helps with the work. So I just love the space. And then I just locked myself in there for about two months. And the first piece that I made, like I just walked the perimeter with a piece of yarn and I kept layering the yarn, listening to a two-hour-long lecture by Noam Chomsky. And I called that piece *Noam Chomsky War and Peace* and that was really fun as a fun way to get to know the space. And then I like couldn't figure it out. Couldn't figure it out. And like I am saying, I feel like this is just a whole experience of me just finding that I repeat myself all the time, but I like didn't know what I was going to do so I gave myself a repetitive task and I was like, "I'm just going to crochet a rug." Because so much of my larger work at that point was me using a crochet stitch that you would use to make a rag rug. But I hadn't made a rag rug yet. Like I hadn't just like made a functional thing. So I started making these rugs. And I have like a full, massive tangent that I can go down on like rag rugs. But there's a lot of writing on my website if folks are interested, I won't bore people on that. There's just this concept that's really exciting to me because it connects me directly to a craft tradition in my family. And it's also something that I've been able to do fast and efficiently for a while. So I'm making these things at my house and then I pulled them into the space, not knowing what's happening. Then I realized that "Oh, my gosh. I've been living in like a granny fantasy space and I'm just making granny blankets." And this makes sense

to me now. From there it was just playing around and experimenting. So the pieces that are on that aren't hanging that are like the gray ones. Those are rag rugs as well. That I put over top of these like armatures that I made out of trash essentially. I put it over that and then I hand painted them in cement. So there's like 20 layers of cement on those rugs that make them create the shapes that they did. The pieces that are hanging are hanging from galvanized chain that I've macramé-d over top of, in some of them and some of them I've crocheted over top of them. Cause macramé. Is a great idea that takes like just absurd amount of time. Like, it doesn't make sense how long it takes. It's not fair cause it looks really great. But anyway, so I had a time crunch and that's why they're different, but I liked them. But yeah, this, you know, for as heavy concept as, as the other pieces were, this guy is - I gave myself permission to just play around with these elements as just sculptural elements. So they speak a lot to me about my connection and an obsession with minimalism, this sort of intersection between craft and minimalism, because I think craft by nature is so tedious and time consuming and the hand is ever present that it doesn't naturally lend itself to a minimalist expression because minimalism is so about the one solid material. You really don't see your hand in a lot of ways to be pulled off in more of the traditional vein.

So I just wanted to combine those two and then just play with this idea of how to create forms that are not reliant on an inner structure, because so much of my work, like I said, is like armature based. So using gravity, using tension using a hardener to like create hollow forms, like all this was going on. And then thinking about my high concept after I created it was starting to articulate what I'm still continuing, starting to articulate. So I'm not - I don't have all of my thoughts around it, like cemented, but just this idea of like, "what is working class aesthetics? And like, where do they enter a gallery? Where do they enter like art spaces? how can they be used as like a bridge to like basically a bridge and a signal to folks that are experiencing the work that might see themselves outside of the, art world." I become immensely frustrated with how class-based our experiences of art is because of all of these years of underfunding our education and public schools. So you create this space where only wealth privileged folks have access continuously that they don't have to seek it out for themselves. Like we all have access if we fight for it, you know, in ways that like you can go and look up articles on the internet about art history. But you know, you look at like wealth and private schools, like they always have art programs like that stuff has never been defunded. They might be run by the same people that defund art educations on public school side but like, that's always a thing. Whether you had access to that art education or not is a class signifier. And then if you think about like how, if you were never taught about art, contemporary art history, if you were never taught about these movements, how is art remotely welcoming to you? Like you walk into a gallery and it's having a conversation that like you were never granted the dictionary on the words that they're using, let alone the history of how this conversation started. And so I think a lot about like my folks who, especially my dad, who's super supportive, but like didn't have any sort of art education and him first interacting with contemporary art and that super common expression of like, "well, I could do this. Why is this here?" And, and knowing that comment represents like 50 years of an internal conversation that like is super internal and no one has access to it outside of like privileged folks. So how, how do you use aesthetics? How do you use formalism? How do you use material language to signal to somebody that you don't have to understand everything about

me for this to be for you and how there is something about formalism that can cut through that elitist language to talk about something universal. At the end of the day, like I said earlier, like we're all raccoons. We love shiny things. We also love forms. Like we're we live in objects, we exist around objects. You can appreciate formalism without understanding the word formalism or anything like that. So where there's points in the material - there are decisions that I've made with this material, because there was points with how I was interacting that I was doing like "Oh, wow. That made a shape that's really interesting to me." And that interest just being the sole purpose of keeping that decision, you know, and knowing that translates, you know? So you don't have to have any of the background that I do, but forms defying gravity, or sloping in a certain way or creating a certain pitch, they're just interesting. Like I said, I don't have all of my thought process cemented around that. So there's not a good conclusion to that conversation, but I'm very interested in that space of like, what are working classes aesthetics? How do they exist in the, in the gallery space, but also what does it mean for working class people now to like demand and reclaim art as a tool of the working class, rather than just like us sort of passively handing over art to the elite. So I think I that's like a, a thread that I'm continuing to like investigate. And like I said, I don't - it's not a good way to like put a chapter end on that, but these are the questions came out of this piece and that I'm exploring still.