2018 Professional STATEMENT

To summarize my efforts of the past five years, I have set and exceeded my professional development goals in ways I could have never imagined. My greatest accomplishments have been in the realm of my work within the Drifters Project, which triangulates art/science/activism in a collaborative and elastic international framework, and as well through my personal work in traditional studio forms of painting, drawing and collage. With the Drifters Project, I have been featured in several films made by professional filmmakers, from **National Geographic** to independent studios like Picture Window Media and By the Brook Productions, to two student productions, one for GSU and one for University of Southern California Annenberg Film School. These films have been shown widely in film festivals locally, nationally and internationally and the National Geographic film *The Plastic GYRE: Creating Art from a Plastic Ocean*, has gained its widest audience as a featured video on National Geographic’s website. Additionally, I have been featured twice on the **Weather Channel**, and in two **PBS television** features. This is a rare accomplishment for an artist, and signifies the importance of the subject matter of my work.

I have shown my artwork in museums and galleries in multiple countries, including the **Goulandris Museum of Natural History** in Athens, Greece, and as a part of a special project of the **55th Venice Biennale**, sponsored by the Ministry of Culture of Venice and Rome. My work has been shown in numerous museums in the US including the Anchorage Museum, The David J Sencer Museum of the CDC, the Fisher Museum of USC, the MINT Museum, The Frist, and many others. My work has been purchased for major collections, most notably the **Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art** and the **High Museum**. At Crystal Bridges, both my paintings and my sculptural installations were purchased as part of the **State of the Art** exhibition, where curators traveled 100,000 miles across the US to chose 100 artists’ work representing the breadth of artistic practice across the United States. This exhibition showed in 2014 at Crystal Bridges and has since traveled multiple major museums across the US from 2015-2017. My installation “Ghosts of Consumption” was chosen as a featured image, and therefore was reproduced in numerous print media, including the Wall Street Journal, and many more digital websites. I have also been commissioned for **private commissions** with large-scale installations, and multiple large works for a **public commission** for a 5-star Raffels Hotel in Istanbul, Turkey, and another in Taiwan. To me, it was a singular accomplishment to insert two 8 ft works of environmental statement made of hundreds of recovered ocean plastics into a highly visible public space.

My greatest external honor was winning the $50,000 **Hudgens Prize**, one of the largest awards given to an artist in North America. There was a top-tier jury for this prize who selected my work from over 350 other artists. The jury consisted of Toby Kamps, Curator for the **Menil Collection** in Houston; Doryun Chong of the **Museum of Modern Art** and now at the M+ in Hong Kong, and Heather Pesanti, Curator for the **Austin Contemporary Art Center**. This award was intended to be, and indeed was, life-changing. It allowed me to hire an assistant, a talented GSU alum named Susan Knippenberg, who was not only my studio production assistant but also traveled with me to work onsite in locations all over the world, and continues to do so. With her help, I have been able to greatly increase the scale and complexity of my work, and to increase my work in film and digital media. To this end, I expanded my creative output to include working with Greek editor and videographer in the production of 30-minute documentary film called *Plastic Free Island*: *Kefalonia* that has been shown in prestigious venues around the world, including its premier at the Oceanographic Museum in Monaco, and won several awards at other international film festivals. Susan has since become the Director of Education and Outreach for Drifters Project, and as she is just finishing her MA in Art Education at GSU, will contribute in untold ways as we go forward.

My other great honor was to receive recognition as **Distinguished University Professor** at GSU. This is a profoundly meaningful recognition to me, as it signifies not only my personal accomplishment, but also the esteem at which the University Administration holds the arts. I believe this is the first time an artist has held this distinction at Georgia State University, and to be amongst the very important work done by all the other honorees is a milestone. It inspires me greatly, and I continually strive to work at my highest level to be worthy of this award.

I believe art to be a medium of both reflection and transformation. My practice centralizes the artist as a cultural worker and change agent. It is important to me that my art does work in the larger world, beyond the art world. It is deeply meaningful to me that my artwork inspires people, and I know this to be true because people from around the world reveal this to me. Art as a transformational medium is central to my teaching philosophy. Artmaking certainly transforms the artist, but in the act of deep self-reflection, the artist often reveals truths that resonate far beyond the personal, entering the social sphere. I work very closely with each and every one of my students, helping them to realize their best self. I work to instill deep and abiding confidence in their voice. I believe that the creative act is the most useful tool humans can cultivate as we move forward. Artists know how to identify and then to solve problems: by working on problems of their own creation (the act of starting a single artwork), artist gain training in identifying the unseen, acting as antennae for the oncoming, and addressing and responding with critical documentation, necessary dialog and creative and inventive problem solving. Now, more than ever, the artist’s societal role as out-of-the-box-thinker, explorer, and maker is necessary as we face the most complex problems imaginable. I am inspired by this role of the artist, and I inspire my students to think beyond their immediate sphere, while acting within that sphere as a change agent. I teach a wide range of courses from painting to installation, and from Critical Thinking Through Writing to special seminars on the role of artists, scientists and activists in addressing environmental challenges to what it means to be alive in the Anthropocene Epoch. The sub-topic of all my courses is bravery, and I don’t shy from addressing the most crucial issues we as humans on a changing planet are facing.

My service to the university and larger community is steadfast. My biggest effort in this regard was the creation and implementation of the **Welch symposium *The Plastic GYRE: Artists, Scientists and Activists Respond***. This was an immense undertaking that consumed me for over 10 months. I succeeded in raising over $\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to fund this event, which included over 32 different external organizations making fiscal contributions, as well as support from departments across GSU. The undertaking involved a complex collaboration between **GSU,** the **Plastic Pollution Coalition, and the** **Center for Disease Control and the CDC David J Sencer Museum**. I was able to fund the invitation of nearly 40 of the top researchers, artists and activists from all over the globe to Atlanta for the 2-day symposium, as well as some international student participants from Bahamas and Greece. We closed the 1st day of the symposium at GSU with a very special musical performance by Emily Saliers of The Indigo Girls. This effort concluded in a Proclamation for the City of Atlanta, a film (The Plastic Gyre, by GSU undergrad Rachel Ramoutar) that was widely broadcast on PBS, a major group exhibition at the CDC Museum, an archived live-stream on GSU website of the 40 talks given by experts – artists, scientists and activists from all over the world, broad media coverage, and activation of more than 400 attendees. The symposium concluded with the 2nd day at the CDC with panels on Social Justice. By fate or kismet, it was the same day the Georgia State legislature was voting on a Senate Bill introduced to prevent communities from introducing any legislation banning any form of disposable plastic, the infamous “Plastic Ban Ban.” Most of my panel of lawyers and lobbyists were down at the Capital for the vote, so the session was held by remote updates as the bill was on the floor and miraculously voted down by a bi-partisan majority: social justice had prevailed.

On the anniversary of the Plastic Gyre Symposium, I organized another follow-up event in March 2016 with my small team of GSU students and alumni to launch a campaign for Plastic Reduction Atlanta. We mobilized over twenty businesses, restaurants and arts establishments to give up disposable plastic for the month or permanently, and generated a city-wide map of participating businesses. We got sponsorship from Blue Heron Nature Center and donated paper Aardvark straws that we were able to disperse to the local restaurants. Some establishments like Hathaway Gallery committed to permanent plastic-free art openings where beverages are served in glassware, and for the food services at GSU to discontinue the use of plastic straws. We concluded the campaign with an awards event for the participating businesses that was held at Landmark Midtown Arts Theater, with a film screening of Plastic Free Island Kefalonia, speakers from the Mayor’s Office of Sustainability and a tabling event in the lobby of the theater of active environmental organizations combating plastic pollution.

At the University, I have served on committees at all levels of both the College of Arts and Sciences and the new College of the Arts, and on several important university committees. I provide regular and rigorous service to my department, on Executive Committee, Graduate Committee and the Welch Endowment Committee, among others. My biggest contribution to my department is the founding and ongoing stewardship of the Visiting Artist and Scholars program. I began this program while I was Associate Dean for Fine Arts in the COAS in 2000, and have overseen it ever since. I developed an open and thorough protocol for involving the entire department in inviting visitors, and this program has been a very significant feature in heightening GSU’s external profile, but also in anchoring the instruction of all disciplines of the department with top level artists, scholars, designers and educators. I have spoken in colleagues courses in the ESL department and my own department.

Locally, I am a frequent speaker at local community gatherings from civic groups to religious establishments to art organizations. I co-founded the Surfrider Foundation Atlanta Chapter in 2008, and with 200+ active members has since grown to include the entire state and become the Surfrider Foundation Georgia Chapter, and continue to be active on the Executive Committee. Through this grass roots volunteer effort, we have cleaned miles of coastline, provided testimony at important coastal legislation hearings and sponsored litigation for public access and protection of coastal zones.