

“Social String Theory”

The formation and appreciation of art has been a vital tool in reconciling our everlasting brawl with identity, serving as a platform to explore ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, and many other facets of what makes us “us.” This series, titled “Social String Theory,” uses string as a metaphor to explore the fragility of identity. Whether we are being bound, supported, restricted, or influenced, the fluid nature of who we consider ourselves to be can be visually explored through the imposition of thread on the human form. A delicate yet restrictive string entangles us, rendering each movement a universal one. Others push and pull at our understanding of ourselves, producing a difficult tension between who we see ourselves to be versus how others perceive us. Identity becomes entangled with how surrounding individuals and groups communicate how they perceive us, whether verbally or nonverbally, through the lens of their own collection of experiences. This, in effect, plays into the equation of who we calculate ourselves to be.

Not only are our identities sensitive to external social pressures, but we are also malleable to the coercions of time. We are composed of many identities throughout our temporal journey, strung together by the enduring twine of time. With each passing second, experiences alter our understanding of ourselves. Who we are depends on the moment we decide to ask. Therefore, no matter the variance in answer from one point in time to another, each response is correct. These ephemeral understandings we have of ourselves construct a whole: we are an amalgamation of our past, present, and future selves.

Awareness of self is fragile; our security is binded with a very delicate sense of self-assurance. Cultural mores muddle the clarity of our identity, while simultaneously tying it together. Opinions of those in power within communities, from a local to national to global scale, alter our understandings of ourselves. The binding cords of culture mold, for better or for worse, our understandings of ethnicity, masculinity, femininity, and sexuality. If one does not fit within the constructs, they are then labeled, and treated, as “others.”

When we fail to find answers within ourselves, many of us turn to religion. The word “religion” comes from the latin root “religare,” which essentially means to “rebind.” This insinuates how religion typically tends to rekindle a lost connection between the individual and something greater. In this sense, the relationship between man and God is that of substantiation; the workings of God bind him together, allowing him to exist amongst the harrowing winds of earth. However, religion is also believed to be a cunning creation invented to dilute the rationality of the common people, and thus allow others to seize control. A question then unravels of whether or not religion, both as an organized cultural practice as well as an individual search for external answers, acts as a restrictive or supporting force.