



After Hours: My Reliquary Blushes

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Figure 1 (top): A woman of Brazilian and Irish descent sits at a counter in front of a large mirror, rows of blue lockers behind her with stickers on them. She is wearing a black lace bra, which is visible under a white lace dress with thin straps. Her face is obscured by a two-socket outlet in the mirror. A phone charger is connected to the lower socket, attached to a phone in her hand. An empty glass and some crumpled napkins lie out of focus on the counter in front of her.



Figure 2 (right): Two feet in clear, Pleaser platform heels without ankle straps on a tiled floor, captured through a mirror in a wooden frame in what appears to be a restroom. The image is rotated such that the bottoms of the heels are facing the right side of the image. There is white text close to the heels that reads "they get me closer to god" with three white cloud emojis underneath the line of text.

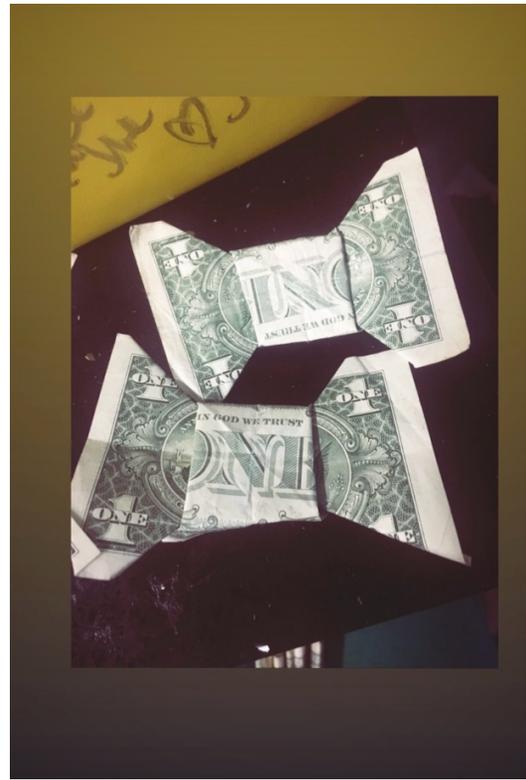


Figure 3 (top left): A pair of glitter heels rest atop a narrow infinity mirror table with green LED lights. The inverse reflection of the heels is visible. In the foreground, small white cursive text reads "welcome to my emerald city."

Figure 4 (top right): Two one-dollar bills folded into the shape of bow ties rest atop a black counter top. In the top left of the image, the corner of a yellow clutch bag is visible with a handwritten heart on it and a small amount of illegible text.

Artist Statement

This photo essay is a meditation on excess and the deliberate performance of femininity as survival strategy. Comprised of photos taken within a North American strip club between 2017 and 2020, this work aims to illuminate pockets of divinity, sanctity, and humanity present within spaces sometimes considered “dirty” or “excessive.” It considers the mundane, the grotesque, and the discarded detritus that makes up the lifecycle of a night at work. Cash and sexuality are two things considered taboo by society and organized religion, easily critiqued when they are expressed in excess. Sex workers deal intimately with both. The concept of a reliquary—a container for holy relics—questions what is considered holy and worth preservation.

These images are taken from one point of view; as such, they are not representative of all experiences or attitudes present in this environment. They are, however, in dialogue and solidarity with workers across the adult industry and their respective workplaces, with acknowledgement of the privileges and precarities that shape the industry. In the introduction to the anthology, *Working It: Sex Workers on the Work of Sex*, Matilda Bickers and Melissa Ditmore write, “The sex industry is a microcosm of society around us: it replicates, and in some cases exacerbates existing power structures” (2023, 10). These photos are my way of documenting the material culture of my labor, while contemplating the excess as both mundane and divine.



Figure 5 (top left): A black carpet with red and yellow spirals is visible under a black countertop below a large dressing room mirror, and a row of blue lockers is visible through the mirror's reflection. Scattered on the countertop are various items: crumpled tissues, a red hairbrush, a pink hair straightener, plugged in, a half-eaten hamburger, a silver cosmetics bag, a tan purse, purple hairspray, and bottles of various other hair and skin products. On the mirror, there is a heart drawn in black marker, and inside the heart a note also in black marker: "I'm thankful for these tits and ass for making that cash – Blair."

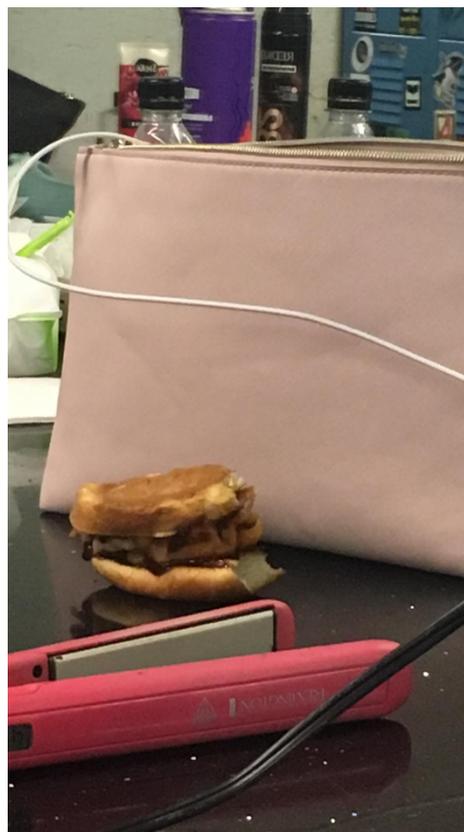


Figure 6 (top right): A close up of a pink hair straightener and half-eaten hamburger on a cluttered black strip club dressing room counter top. The hamburger appears to be upside down and is lying directly on the counter. A black charging cord and white charging cord are visible.



Figure 7 (top left): Two large, feathery black adhesive lashes are stuck to a pink spray bottle.

Figure 8 (top right): A black and white image of a white hand holding a dollar bill folded in the shape of a paper airplane. Behind, the black counter top is visible; an extension cord with various sockets is visible at the top of the image.

Figure 9 (left): Two pairs of stripper heels standing side by side on a metallic surface. On the left, a pair of rose gold platform sandals. Next to them, a pair of beige boots with some wear and tear in the ankles. On the right side of the image, an overstuffed blue tote bag is partially visible. Hanging above the shoes, there is a red cloth with a yellow cross on it. Above the cross there are faint handprints in white paint.



Works Cited

Bickers, Matilda and Melissa Ditmore. 2023. "Introduction." In *Working It: Sex Workers on the Work of Sex*, edited by Matilda Bickers with peech breshears and Janis Luna, 1–21. Oakland: PM Press.

EMILY MARIE PASSOS DUFFY is a poet, writer, performer, and the author of *Hemorrhaging Want & Water* (Perennial Press 2023). She is a co-founder of Working Girls Press alongside Molly B. Simmons. She was a recipient of the 2020 Disquiet International Luso American Fellowship and a finalist for the Noemi Press Book Award. She is a doctoral student in Translation Studies at the Catholic University of Portugal in Lisbon. **Instagram:** @duffylala