I’ve always carried dreams of what my body could be one day. Sometimes they scream from within me and shake me down to my bones, while other times they have been completely drowned out by other voices in my life. As children, many people dream of what their bodies will grow into. At times this dreaming is full of impatience, but it is still accompanied by the underlying comfort of inevitability. After all these years, my dreaming has not stopped but all guarantees of inevitability have vanished. This is the body I have. The only changes that can be made call for active effort and a painful amount of patience. But it is the things which cannot be changed that force me to close my eyes and avert my gaze, avoiding the sight of a body that both is and is not my own. Everyday I clothe myself in the knowledge that when people look at me their view is formed by the assumptions of a body I do not have.

To protect ourselves against criticism and invalidation, many Trans people feel the need to perform very traditional, binary genders. Within this defense mechanism, Trans women are pressured to be purely feminine and Trans men purely masculine. I want to own every part of myself. I will play with the complex reality of my femininity rather than just sweeping it under the rug. I might not be able to look at my body, but I will not hide from who I am. Living in this honesty is not comprised of grandiose moments, but rather is built by private, simple acts of bodily ritual, such as binding my chest and painting my nails.

The medium of etching feels particularly suited to me because the long, delicate, and organic process mirrors the steady evolution of my story. Each image slowly grows from one stage to the next as I progress through an exploration of my truth: looking back at the days before puberty, when my flat-chested body was still my own, at the times I tried to contort myself into what others wanted me to be, and at the days when I remembered how to live as myself. This is not a before and after, not a simple “Female to Male.” I am telling a story as complex, fluid, and intense as I am, full of raw and sometimes seemingly contradictory moments.