

University of Montana

ScholarWorks at University of Montana

Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, &
Professional Papers

Graduate School

2015

Snip, Snap, Snout: THIS TALE IS TOLD OUT

Crista A. Ames

University of Montana - Missoula

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd>



Part of the [Fine Arts Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Ames, Crista A., "Snip, Snap, Snout: THIS TALE IS TOLD OUT" (2015). *Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers*. 4465.
<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/4465>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.

SNIP, SNAP, SNOOT: THIS TALE IS TOLD OUT

By

CRISTA ANN AMES

Bachelor of Fine Arts, Washington State University, Pullman, WA, 2008

Thesis Paper

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts

The University of Montana
Missoula, MT

Spring 2015

Approved by:
Sandy Ross, Dean of The Graduate School
Graduate School

Committee Members:

Professor Trey Hill, Co-Chair
Fine Art

Professor Beth Lo, Co-Chair
Fine Art

Professor Cathryn Mallory
Fine Art

Curator of Art Brandon Reintjes
Montana Museum of Art & Culture

Snip, Snap, Snout:
THIS TALE IS TOLD OUT

“Now that the others have run out of air, it’s my turn to do a little story-making. I owe it to myself. I’ve had to work myself up to it: it’s a low art, tale-telling. Old women go in for it, strolling beggars, blind singers, maidservants, children – folks with time on their hands.”

–Margaret Atwood from *the Penelopiad*

Introduction

Mythology has shaped human thought and experience since before recorded history. Passed from one generation to the next, myths elevate and aggrandize realities that are difficult, complex or horrifying. This is what makes us human, an inspiring capacity toward metaphor and the ability to make beauty, lyricism and splendor—order from the chaos. Within mythology, the cause and effect of both misery and joy may be explored in their wholeness. In this act of imaginative translation, we may come to understand how misery and joy are naturally coexisting.

In my thesis exhibition *this tale is told out*, I use the layering of mythology, iconography and personal narrative to explore the animal nature of humans and how these relate to the ways we establish and sustain relationships. I am interested in exploring the imagery and iconography of mythologies and their historic relationship to pastoral life, animal husbandry and women's craft—drawing on my own experience of growing up on a sheep farm. This paper will demonstrate how my thesis work is based in contemporary tales of trauma, joy and womanhood.

Background

Storytelling has always been at the center of my work. At the beginning of my graduate career, my work consisted primarily of figurative vignettes based on stories that had been passed orally through my family. The vignettes allowed me to take those family tales, reimagine them and then make them my own.

As my work developed, the stories I told began to shift away from simplistic moral tales towards an exploration of complex personal narratives. I moved away from tabletop-sized ceramic vignettes and began working in full-scale, multi-figure works. I also began to choose and incorporate specific symbolic materials that contextualize the work in mythology, history and narrative. This shift to working in life-size scale has allowed me to move away from anecdote-based works to works that address more universal narratives. In place of representing the folktales or anecdotes of my childhood, this newer work brought elements of myth and personal experience in conversation with one another, allowing for hybridity and complexity.

As my practice has evolved, the figure has increasingly appeared in my work in the form of fragments: arms, legs, hands, feet, etc. For me, fragments serve to emphasize the gestures and hold the same emotional or conceptual integrity that an entire figure would.

My work also draws on my formative years growing up on a small sheep ranch. Though I am no longer practicing animal husbandry, the scientific, experiential and emotional knowledge I developed throughout my childhood continues to impact me as an artist. In particular, I continue to reference consistent themes drawn from the everyday practices surrounding birth, death and fertility.

The animals serve as character stand-ins for human personalities and experiences, while tools and actions normally used in ranching and farming allow me to explore gender and narratives. I strive to create approachable narratives about human experiences and relationships within the shroud of lyrical, pastoral nostalgia. By using human and animal figures and depicting moments from my personal narrative symbolically, I am using my story as a tool to illustrate the fragile and complicated nature of life and humanity while investigating the gap between myth and experience.

As a sculptor working primarily in ceramics and textiles, my material choices are significant. The use of clay has historical associations found in religious texts, most notably the Bible, but also represents dual associations of permanence and frailty. Raw wool engages historically women's traditions of craft, mythology, inheritance, community and labor. An organic fiber, wool is also an impermanent material. This integration of both permanent and impermanent materials within my work articulates my interest in systems of memory, loss and transformation. Just as the act of remembering transforms the wholeness of an experience into something different and enduring, so will time transform my work, degrading some elements and leaving others to endure.

Fertility

Cervical Stitch | Sealed Disquiet | Open Desperation

The work entitled *Cervical Stitch* (figure 1) was the first work that had two overlapping narratives present in one piece. The main body of the work, the white dress, was given to me by a friend with the statement, “I no longer need this because I can’t have children.”

My friend then shared the following story with me: She had purchased this piece of clothing while she was pregnant, to use as a nightdress to wear while her belly swelled. She then suffered a miscarriage in which some fetal tissue failed to be expelled, resulting in an infection and her eventual infertility.

In completing this piece, I sought to connect my own fears surrounding pregnancy and fertility to the emotional weight this object carried. I decided to embroider my internal reproductive organs on the garment and included a disruptive black stitch at the *cervices*.

The hooked needles on which the dress hangs are reminiscent of the needles I used to stitch sheep that had been badly nicked by clipper blades during shearing. This signifies dangers imbedded in practices expected of us, such as shearing or childbirth, and the threatening nature of the medical tools available to resolve these dangers.

After finishing the embroidery on this garment, I discovered that the color embroidery floss I had used lent the uterus embroidery the appearance of an animal’s head, reinforcing the associations between human and animal fertility, fear, and complications.

In her piece, *Moor* (figures 2 and 3), Janine Antoni also uses materials laden with intrinsic narrative. For *Moor*, Antoni constructed a rope from different materials donated by friends and family. Here, the rope is symbolic of an umbilical cord connecting Antoni to the people in her life. The act of making the rope was about that process of connection and collection. *Moor* raises questions regarding the history of an object, and how this history is transferred to the viewer. Will the viewer be able to discover the meaning of the objects within the rope? Has the story somehow been held within the material? ¹ These are similar to the questions I asked myself while making “Cervical Stitch.”

Fertility problems can lead to relationship problems for, and between, women. The pieces *Open Desperation* (figure 4) and *Sealed Disquiet* (figure 6) have been placed together in this exhibition so that they might be seen as one, or read as a conversation between two bodies. Here, I wanted to create a conversation about my relationship with my older sister that illustrated our conflicting ideas surrounding fertility and motherhood.

When representing each of our attitudes towards childbearing: hers; infertile but anxious to become a mother, and mine; fertile but reluctant to conceive, I chose to represent the two figures as sets of legs. This decision was, in part, a response to Anita Diamant's assertion that all life comes from between two legs.² By fragmenting the bodies this way, I was able to assert the themes of fertility and motherhood within the work in addition to creating a surreal tension. In each set of legs, I tried to capture the emotion I felt best illustrated my sister's and my feelings toward motherhood through their gesture and stance.

An artist who uses a similar truncation of the body with an open vessel form is Elise Siegel in her piece *Twenty-four Feet* (figure 8). Through Elise's use of fragmented bodies, the viewer is forced to rely on the use of body language to evoke moments of internal struggle and emotional chaos. Similarly, in my works *Open Desperation* and *Sealed Disquiet* I am using body language to help portray the emotion of the figures.

The legs in these pieces are rendered whole from toe to hips, where they are revealed to be open vessels with a thin fragile rim. In both pieces, this rim forms a line that encircles each leg and then intersects at the interior of the vessel to form a *Vesica Piscis* or "vessel of the fish"—a term that came to represent the 'yoni', or form and symbolism of the female reproductive organs, because ancients insisted the sexual secretions of a women smelled like fish.³

In this piece, the forms of *Vesica Piscis* between my figures' legs represent the full symbolic capacity of female fertility: the yoni through which all life is created. The yoni takes the form of a smaller vessel, in which symbolic seeds are placed. In patriarchal agricultural societies, seed was made synonymous with semen while women were equated with passive soil in which a seed might grow. It was not until knowledge of the complexity of a human

egg was revealed that this simple agricultural metaphor shifted to represent the possibility of life within an egg, and the seed could represent fertility in both its male and female capacity.⁴

For Example, Erica Spitzer Rasmussen embraces a more contemporary myth associated with seeds. In a lecture given by the artist, she explains the significance of her own use of watermelon seeds in her work *Juju Dress* (figure 9).⁵

As a small child, my girlfriends and I believed that swallowing a watermelon seed resulted in pregnancy. As an adult, I found myself battling infertility. Hence, the dress was constructed of cast and leafed plates of paper, modeled after medieval armor. Watermelon seeds were tied at each juncture. The dress was worn to my monthly 'procedures' as an attempt to enlist magical assistance."

Sealed Disquiet is a self-portrait depicting the uninvited awareness of my fertility as a result of my sister's battle with her own, and my wariness toward motherhood despite this. The cross leg pose with off-balanced footing serves to illustrate this point. *Sealed Disquiet* is placed on a cement base to facilitate her posture while also elevating her as valuable. Finally, the yonic vessel in this figure is overflowing with fennel seeds, implying both an abundance of fertility and the exercise of control over this fertility (figure 7). The quantity implies abundance, while the particular use of Fennel recalls the history of the fennel seed being used "to seal the womb" or render women infertile.⁶ For Example, Diamant writes in *The Red Tent*, "The thought of another pregnancy filled her with dread, and so she took to drinking fennel to keep Jacob's seed from taking root again."⁷

Representing a very different attitude towards fertility and childbearing, *Open Desperation* is a depiction of my sister's enthusiasm toward motherhood even when being hopeful is absurd. Her stance is open as the title suggests with her toes out and heels together. Her yonic vessel is made at an angle and holds only a small number of mustard seeds that appear to be on the verge of spilling out (figure 5). The use of mustard seed references hope or impossible faith, as quoted in Mathew 17:20; "Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there', and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."⁸ By using a scant number of mustard seed, precariously placed, I seek to illustrate my sister's infertility as well as her ambition and hope in the face of harsh statistics.

In creating these pieces, *Open Desperation* and *Sealed Disquiet*, it was important to me that I create a balance between fragility and strength. This is comes from my study of the body through dance. One of my major influences, choreographer Pina Bausch, frequently utilizes a combination of fragility and strength in her choreography. In *Café Müller*, Bausch uses bursts of violence followed by long silences and eloquent, slow movements of the body to emphasize the meaning and emotion of her chorography (figure 10).⁹ In addition to this deliberate use of the body, Bausch's use of color as and lighting to signify emotional qualities has significantly influenced my work. In *Open Desperation* and *Sealed Disquiet* I used black coloration to soften the movement of the feet and give a somber feel to the pieces, while bright glazes were used to draw the viewers' eye to the yonic vessels of each figure.

Thread

Allocated Juncture | Blind Strife Of The Entwined | The Tentative Truth Of Fate

...the other reason women wanted daughters was to keep their memories alive...my mother and mother aunts told me endless stories about themselves. No matter what their hands were doing – holding babies, cooking, spinning, weaving – they filled my ears.¹⁰

Allocated Juncture (figure 11) is about the integrity of the female experience, femininity and the female body through gestures of the hand. It references both the traditionally domestic task of spinning and also the metaphorical responsibility of spinning tales (telling stories), both of which are passed down from woman to woman. Here, I am evoking the historic responsibility of mothers to tell their daughters the history of their lives in a time when women's lives weren't recorded, well as the responsibility of daughters to keep their matriarchal legacy alive. It is a homage, or monument, to women in history and the actual labor they performed, as well as the stories they told that formed our mythic ideas of motherhood today.

This piece references the Moerae from Greek mythology, which were the three sister-goddesses of fate who personified the inescapable destiny of men and women. The three sisters are the “spinner” the “apportioned of lots” and “she who can't be turned” who cuts the thread of life. Each of the Moerae's threads is said to be a person's life; spun, measured, and cut. The title is an allusion to the word *Moerae* itself, meaning: “allotted portions.”¹¹

Since I have chosen to illustrate only one of the three mythological sisters in the piece, it has a distinct quality of loneliness. Alone and cut off from relations with other females, the task at hand feels that much more daunting. The pile of wool not only represents labor, but also the mythic burden of responsibility for life itself, and a responsibility to continue the story.

My research into dance and subtle gestures is present in the posing of the hands for *Allocated Juncture*, as well. Gesture is a subtle thing. Raising or lowering a pinky, for

example, or pinching this finger versus that finger can completely alter the feeling or meaning of the hand.

In our contemporary culture and throughout history, gestures are often gendered, as well. We recognize that men move in a certain way, and women move in a certain way. For example: In Mayan dance, painting or sculpture, the poses or movements of the figure are dictated by the actions or gestures attributed to their gendered role in society, male figures or dancers display the quick movements associated with hunting, while female figures or dancers exhibit the slower movements associated with nurturing. In his book, *To Be Like Gods: Dance in ancient Maya Civilization*, Mathew Lopper tracked the relationships between depicted body language, gender roles and scenarios in which they are posed.¹²

However, the gendering of gesture can be subtle or misleading. Context, fragmentation, or bias can complicate the gendered association with a gesture. This ambiguity works to my advantage. My audience might assume that the hands I depict are female because of the task that is being done, or pick up on certain ‘masculine’ gestural cues that then complicate the narrative, action, or feeling of the figure.

In *Allocated Juncture*, the gesture of the hands implies a reference to something specific and has a graceful dance-like quality without giving away what that specific gesture means. The hands delicately hold the wool. Graphite—with its rough, metallic quality—is used to draw the viewer’s eye to the point of termination where the yarn is being cut. The purple on the fingers can be seen as red in certain light (figure 12). The purpose of the color remains ambiguous. It is unclear whether this subtle concentration of color serves to convey the intent of the work, the rubbing raw of the figure’s fingers from massive amounts of labor, a premonition of the labor to come, or something else entirely.

When I began *Blind Strife Of The Entwined* (figure 13), I wanted to create two female figures that were in opposition to one another, with the tension between them being emphasized by a forced and complicated connection. What began as two complete female figures later shifted to be a single full figure and one set of arms emerging from the wall. Often, when I draw on past personal experiences in my work, my current experience will start to inform the process—transforming the work into an expression of both past and

present. As I worked on *Blind Strife of the Entwined*, it transformed into a work about power, pain, submission and control in widely different scenarios. The full figure in this piece carries the bulk of the piece's emotional quality and functions as a reflection of myself. Through the female figure's recoiling pose with outstretched arms, I intended to convey a very complex emotion. Her body is visibly under duress and pulling back with significant force, implying that she is actively fighting against an attempt to control her, yet, her face conveys a sense of peace and serenity, as though she accepts and understands her situation—she is complacent, and she might even be willingly submitting to it.

The figure is placed opposite the hands on the wall and the viewer becomes aware that it is in fact this presence who is truly in control. The transition of the red color on the wool and hands is used to emphasize the pulling gesture, and the slack created between the hands creates a reference to an animal lead or bridle. The hands know they are in control and they have chosen to be so.

In my depiction of the hands, I intentionally altered the gesture and scale in order to complicate their gendered reading. Though physiognomically, they are male hands, the gesture may not specifically read as male. Through this ambiguity, multiple narratives—tensions of power between and within gender relationships—are present, and the past and present narratives exist simultaneously.

The tug of war adds a combative gendered component to this piece. Who is literally winning here? Does the fully present body of the woman give her power, or is the partial invisibility of the male body in control?

The gesture of the (male) hands comes from the reining in of a horse; a movement I learned as a young girl riding horses (figure 14). Within horse culture, a horse that trusts her partner rarely struggles against commands. There is a clear difference between a horse that has been “broken” and a horse that has been “whispered”. The relationship between a rider and their horse is one that is built on trust – a horse does not have the same leaning toward loyalty as a dog – you must gain the trust of a horse, and when you ride a horse you essentially become an extension of it.

Carrying this metaphor into this piece, and particularly in the female figure's complex expression and body language, the viewer begins to understand the complex

dynamic of trust. Has the female been broken or whispered? Clearly this is not an easy relationship, a complexity and ambiguity that is reflected in the piece.

Another artist, Tip Toland, also uses of self and familial portraiture to explore hierarchy. Her use of the fragmented figure, like mine, makes the viewer rely on the use of body language and gesture to reveal the underlying narrative. . For example: in her piece *The Whistlers* (figure 15), one whistler leads while the second follows tentatively. The complex and subtle expressions of the figures reveal the uncertainty of their own relationship, as well as the way criticism of one's siblings functions as criticism of ourselves.¹³

In an excerpt from an interview, Joseph Beuys said:

For me, [being at war] was the time when I first realized the part the artist can play in indicating the traumas of a time and initiating a healing process. By that, I mean that I saw the relationship between the chaos I had experienced and the process of sculpture. Chaos can have a healing character if it is coupled with the idea of open movement to channel the warmth of chaotic energy into order or form (transformer).¹⁴

With the piece *The Tentative Truth Of Fate* (figure 16), I choose to reference the myth of the red string of fate: an invisible red cord said to tie two people together who are fated to meet. This thread alludes to an indissoluble bond between two people that expands beyond infinity, beyond destiny, reaching into past present and future. Here, the string is used as a metaphor for the great journey we all take to find a meaningful emotional connection with another person. Visually, I chose to reference the Japanese iteration of this myth, in which the cord is tied around the pinky finger of the two fated individuals. The overabundance of red string in this piece suggests that the string of fate is not the simple line we imagine. Rather, it is a complicated knot that must be unwound (figure 17).¹⁵

Once again, a single piece is reflecting two narratives simultaneously. The mythic image forks, and the romantic narrative depicted by the size and gesture of the hands, connoting sex and age, are contrasted by a childlike reference to pinky swearing, cat's cradles and a visual reference to the umbilical chord.

Stories of the red strings of fate and the metaphor of umbilical cords allow us to

make order of the chaos and complexity of our relationships by reducing them to a single line. Strings of fate take into account the end result – not the events that led to the result.

The Tentative Truth Of Fate seeks to illustrate the duality that exists within human relationships: the self-evident simplicity of attachment and the endlessly complex ways in which those attachments take shape.



Figure 1
Cervical Stitch
2013
Found objects and embroidery thread
22"x2"x60"



Figure 2
Janine Antoni
Moor
2001
Mixed Media
Dimensions variable Installation views, "Free Port," at Magasin 3
Stockholm Konsthalle, Sweden Courtesy the artist and Luhring
Augustine



Figure 3
Janine Antoni
Moor (detail)
2001
Mixed Media
Dimensions variable Installation views, "Free Port," at Magasin 3
Stockholm Konsthalle, Sweden Courtesy the artist and Luhring
Augustine



Figure 4
Open Desperation
2015
Stoneware and mustard seeds
39"x20"x12"



Figure 5
Open Desperation (detail)
2015
Stoneware and mustard seeds
39"x20"x12"



Figure 6
Sealed Disquiet
2015
Stoneware, concrete, and fennel seeds
42"x18"x18"



Figure 7
Sealed Disquiet (detail)
2015
Stoneware, concrete, and fennel seeds
42"x18"x18"



Figure 8
Elise Siegel
Twenty-four Feet
2004
Ceramic, aqua-resin, paint, fabric, wood
Dimensions variable

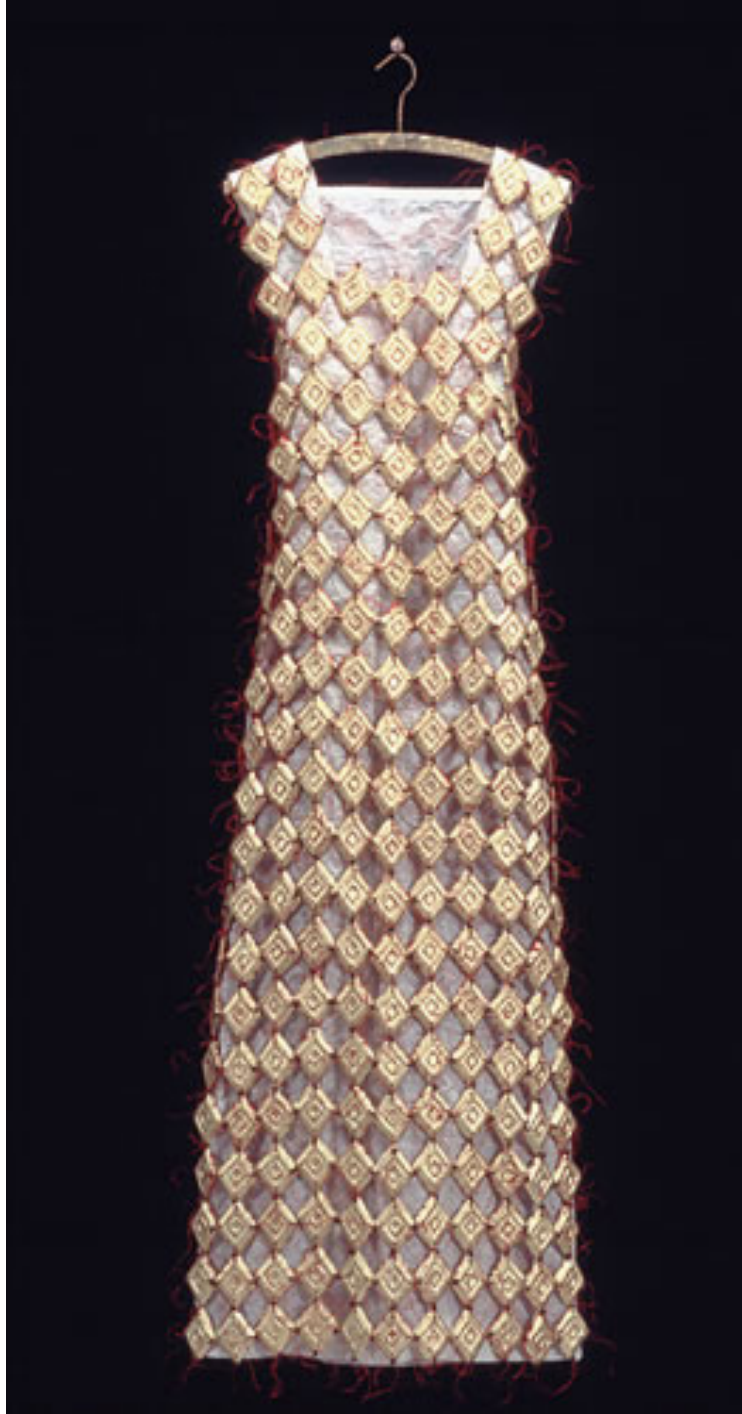


Figure 9
Erica Spitzer Rasmussen
Juju Dress
2003
mixed media with handmade paper (abaca, cotton, kozo, acrylics,
tracing paper, waxed linen thread, gold leaf and watermelon seeds)
18" w x 60" h x 4" d



Figure 10
Pina Bausch
Café Müller
First performed May 20, 1978



Figure 11
Allocated Juncture
2014
Stoneware, wool, and wax
53"x60"x35"



Figure 12
Allocated Juncture (detail)
2014
Stoneware, wool, and wax
53"x60"x35"

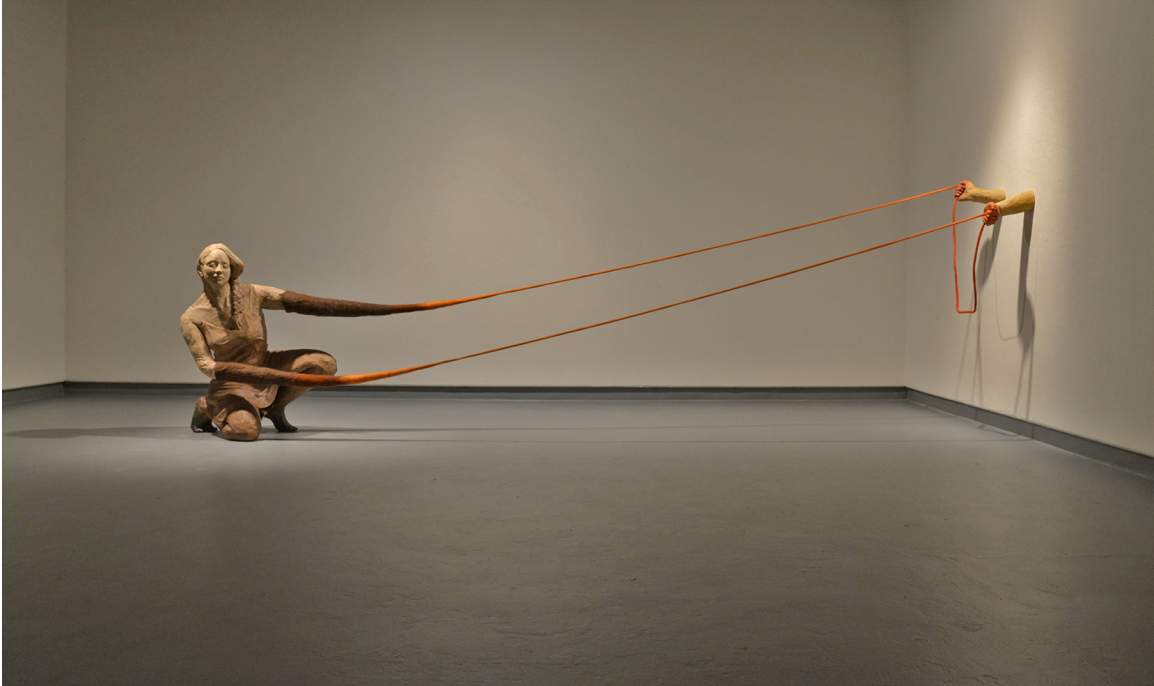


Figure 13
Blind Strife of the Entwined
2015
Stoneware, graphite, and felted wool
56"x150"x30"



Figure 14
Blind Strife of the Entwined
2015
Stoneware, graphite, and felted wool
56"x150"x30"



Figure 15
Tip Toland
The Whistlers
2005-2006
Stoneware, paint, pastel, synthetic hair
23"x40"x24"

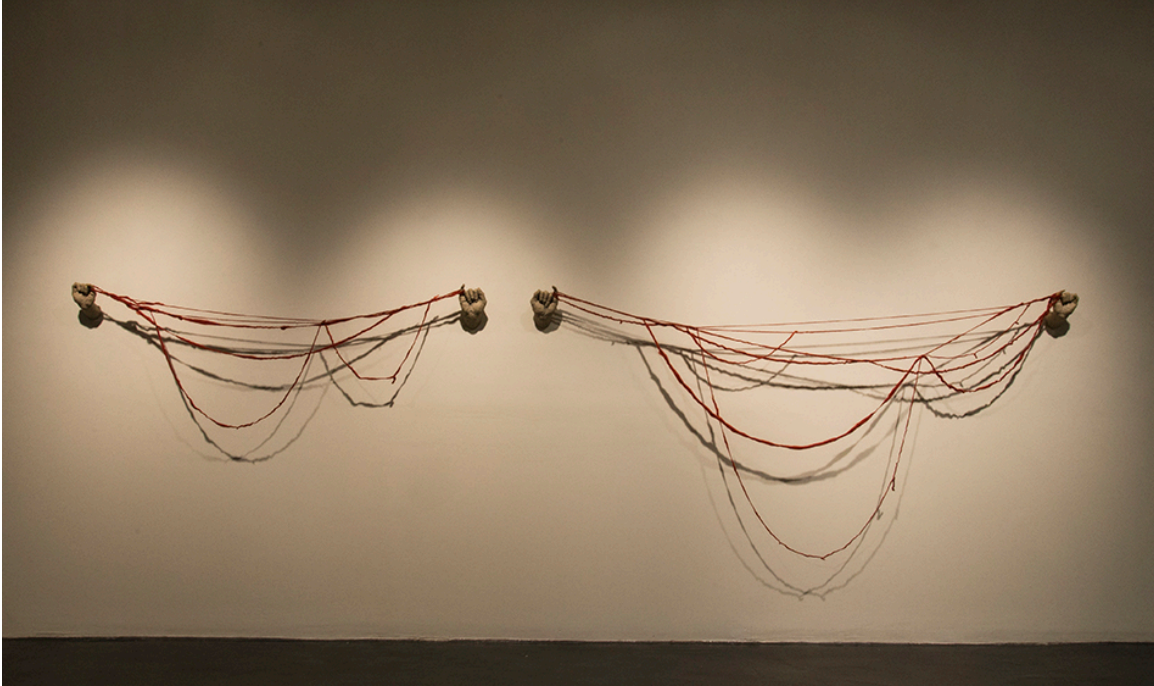


Figure 16
The Tentative Truth of Fate
2014
Stoneware and wool
24"x180"x6"



Figure 17
The Tentative Truth of Fate
2014
Stoneware and wool
24"x180"x6"



Figure 18
Silver Artemis
2015
Stoneware
8"x11"x7"



Figure 19
Encircled While Wandering
2015
Stoneware and fence posts
63"x 36"x 46"



Figure 20
Encircled While Wandering (detail)
2015
Stoneware and fence posts
63"x 36"x 46"



Figure 21
Beth Cavener
The Four Humors: The Sanguine
2010
Stoneware mixed media
52”x31”x19”

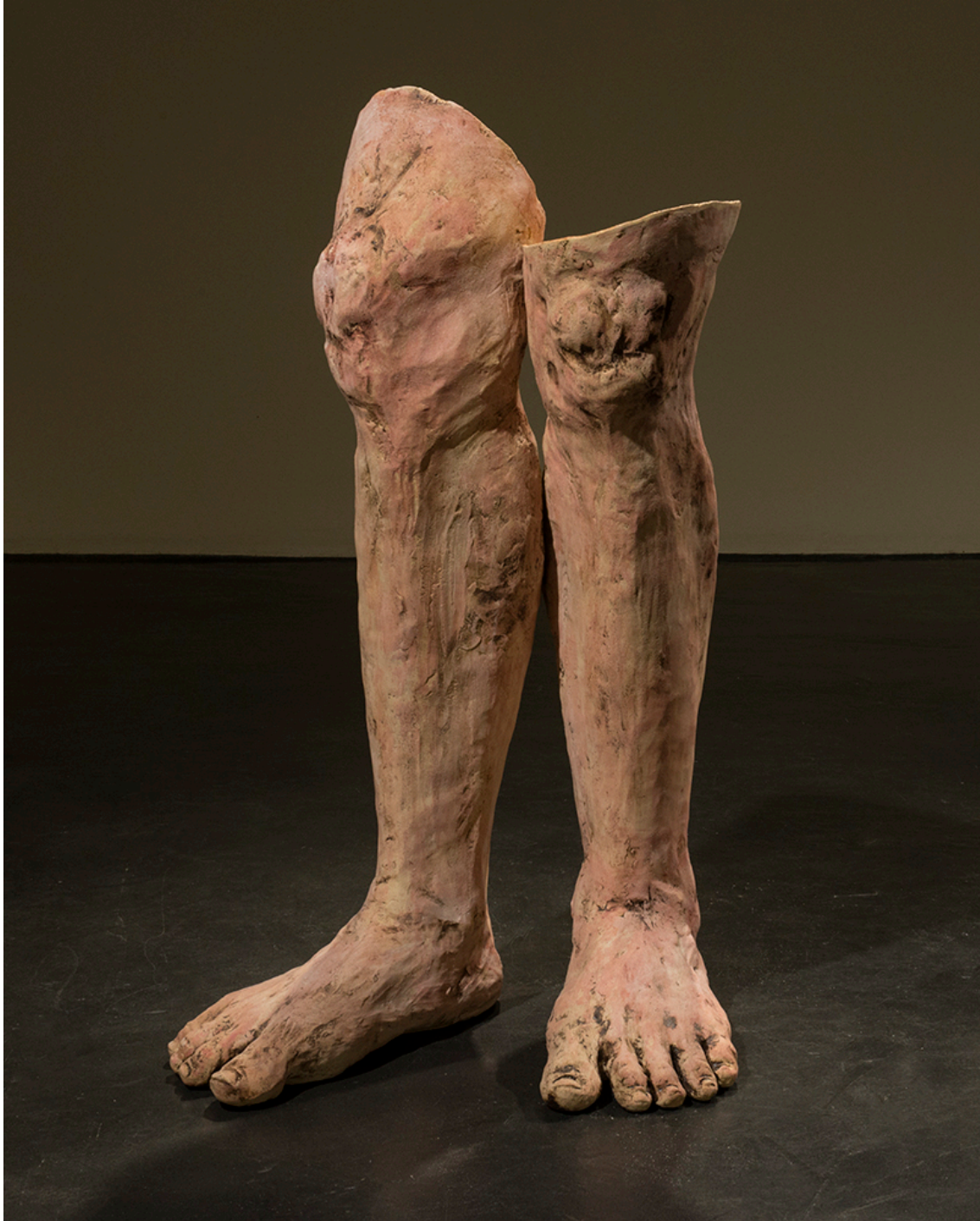


Figure 22
Short Still Wit
2015
Stoneware
35"x20"x17"



Figure 23
Posturing Bow
2015
Stoneware
32"x28"x20"



Figure 24
Posturing Bow (detail)
2015
Stoneware
32"x28"x20"

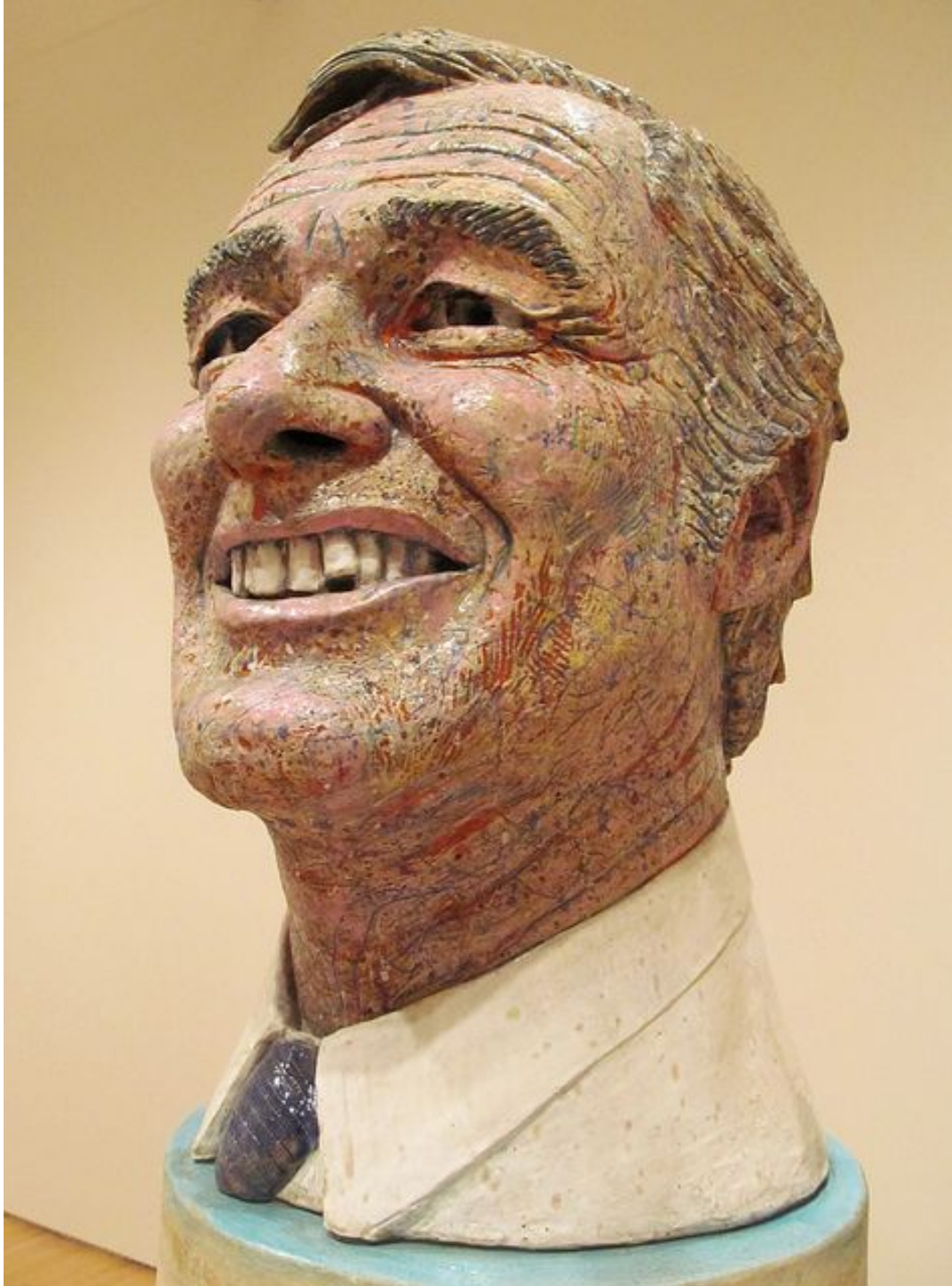


Figure 25
Robert Arneson
Portrait of George
1981
glazed ceramic
94" x 31.5" x 31.5"
Collection SFMOMA



Figure 26
Adrian Arleo
Sirens of Rutino
2012
clay, glaze, wax encaustic, gold leaf, metal base and rod
52 x 18 x 16"



Figure 27
A Breath of Consent
2015
Stoneware and wool
70"x76"x28"



Figure 28
A Breath of Consent (detail)
2015
Stoneware and wool
70"x76"x28"



Figure 29
Lapsed Animation
2015
Stoneware and wool
32"x98"x10"



Figure 30
Lapsed Animation
2015
Stoneware and wool
32"x98"x10"

Odyssey Series

Silver Artemis | Encircled While Wandering | Short Still Wit | Posturing Bow

These titles: *Silver Artemis*, *Encircled While Wandering*, *Short Still Wit* and *Posturing Bow* each reference Homer's *Odyssey*.

Silver Artemis (figure 18) is a sculpture of a small black lamb's head with white speckles, emerging from the wall. She is placed next to the vinyl, wall-mounted title of the exhibit as a means of introduction, both to the exhibition and to the allusions to myth. With this lamb, I created oversized ears that were blown back, giving the elusion of flying. The title *Silver Artemis* draws reference to the silver boat of Artemis, a myth about the moon's journey across the sky and its changing phases.¹⁶ As with many of the deities of ancient mythologies, Artemis was associated with many different myths of life and went by several names. In Greek mythology, Artemis is also said to be the goddess of childbirth and all animals.¹⁷ Although *Silver Artemis* is small, I wanted her name to be imbued with a lot of symbolism, so that she might introduce the viewer to themes they could expect to find in the exhibition.

Encircled While Wandering (figure 19) explores the idea the self-portrait as personal while also bringing in the idea of animal tropes. When considering which animal would best represent me in a state of distress, I wanted something that would not be perceived as aggressive and possessed a certain naïve quality. After careful deliberation, I decided to use the image of an ewe who is bleating while her nose is in the air (figure 20).

This posture is specific to sheep who are in labor or great physical pain. I wanted the ewe to outwardly represent pain and frustration. While this posture is typically associated with a prone position, it was important for me for the ewe to nevertheless illustrate a desire to run. By abstracting her legs I have also depicted her as hobbled or without legs, unable to run. I constructed her legs out of discarded wooden fence posts actually used in ranching; reiterating this idea of feeling cornered, stuck or fenced in.

The image of the trapped sheep on the Island of the Cyclops, which begins the tale and causes Odysseus to linger was one of my considerations when choosing to represent the distressed ewe. The word ‘odyssey’ itself is almost interchangeable with my use of ‘wandering.’

In Bill Stockton’s book, *Today I Bailed Some Hay To Feed The Sheep The Coyotes Eat*, he described an event after an ewe has given birth when her afterbirth gets stuck.

The ewe, since she knows the afterbirth isn’t another lamb, but still doesn’t understand its presence, will get “goosed,” and start spinning and running in an effort to rid herself of this unexplained “thing.” This scene can sometimes turn into a little rodeo, complete with bucks, gallops, and sprints.”¹⁸

I feel in some ways the ewe in *Encircled While Wandering* could also embody this idea of trying to outrun something you can’t see or don’t understand.

Encircled While Wandering is juxtaposed by the pieces *Short Still Wit* (figure 22) and *Posturing Bow* (figure 23), both of which represent a set of male legs, at a distance associated with the herding of sheep. *Short Still Wit* and *Posturing Bow* are not aware of their influence on the ewe. They face toward one another, self-contained—suggesting an element of callousness or indifference to the ewe’s distress.

Beth Cavener similarly employs anthropomorphism in her depiction of *The Four Humors* (figure 21) to talk about mental illness. In this piece, she also refers to the Ancient Greeks, utilizing the ancient philosophy which claimed that the human body consisted of four different fluids, or “humors.” Illness was always the result of an excess or deficit of one of these four fluids. The four humors, or fluids, were black bile, yellow bile, phlegm, and blood. By using animals as a stand-in of human personalities, Cavener is able to illustrate mental illness through a softer lens.¹⁹

The monumental and clumsy legs of *Short Still Wit* and *Posturing Bow* are intended to reference masculinity. The rough surface treatment is intended to emphasize the

masculine quality of the oversized legs (figure 24). This surface is similar to Robert Arneson's, *George Moscone* (figure 25). The legs have a weight and chunky heaviness to them that is also similar to Arneson's male busts. I chose to make them red because of the way one's skin will flush with activity. As with *Sealed Disquiet* and *Open Desperation*, the tops of the legs are vessels, which reinforces the other metaphors and symbolism of the piece.²⁰

Short Still Wit and *Posturing Bow* both are references to different ways in which Odysseus is depicted in literature. Odysseus is always defined by his barrel chest and short legs, as well as being a man of great wit—from which "Short Still Wit" was derived. The term bow has multiple allusions. Odysseus is said to be a talented marksman with a bow and is often located in the narrative on the bow of a ship.²¹ Additionally, the title plays on the dance term to *bow*, which is a figurative gesture meaning to bend at the knee or incline the head. These two works alternately represent two different types of masculinity which men are encouraged to display or keep hidden.

Continuing these connections to mythology, I consider the use of gold coloration inside the 'vessel' of these masculine legs as symbolic—linking this to the way gold is frequently used as a symbol of wealth, particularly as a metaphor for the greed of character or as a signifier that a person that holds material wealth.²² In this way, the figure is shown with the capacity for both power and corruption or moral corruption.

Short Still Wit represents the traditionally masculine role of Odysseus as conqueror of both women and land. *Posturing Bow* represents the less traditionally masculine side of Odysseus, the one who didn't force his new wife, Penelope, into consummating their marriage and feigned insanity to prevent leaving his wife and son.

Our perception of Odysseus is changed by what we learn from the storyteller. Are we to believe that Odysseus was the loving husband that strived to get back to his beloved, or was he a philandering, plotting bastard?²³ How do both of these personalities occupy the same person?

This connection to myth and women's experience, especially as linked to personal narrative, also exists in the work of artist Adrian Arleo. In her piece, *Sirens of Rutino* (figure 26), she draws a connection to the myth of the Odyssey by referencing the sirens, magic

women who cast spells on men so that they might wreck their ships on the rocky coast.²⁴ In *Sirens of Rutino*, however, the Sirens sit on the arms of the human figure and represent Arleo's own daughters.²⁵

Talking Wool

A Breath of Consent | Lapsed Animation

With the work, *A Breath of Consent* (figure 27) I wanted to make a piece that illustrated the web of tales we tell another when first becoming intimate. What is omitted or exaggerated?

In Danish culture there is a phrase, “*taler uld*,” which means: “speaks wool” or “talking wool.” This phrase refers to anyone who exaggerates or is prone to lie: a teller of tall tales.

The use of specific sheep behaviors as these relate to reproduction can serve as the starting point for a viewer to draw metaphors about our own romantic behaviors. At the same time, this form of metaphor can subvert gendered gestures by taking away or recontextualizing obvious gendered cues—utilizing gestures that are used by both sexes in very different experiences.

Male sheep make a certain facial gesture when they are in states of sexual arousal and responding to ewes in heat. It is, very sweetly, called “the courtship pose” in herding circles.²⁶ Ewes, however only make this facial gesture when in labor. Because the gender of the sheep in *A Breath of Consent* is left ambiguous, the facial gesture could signify either arousal or labor—forcing our identification with them as character stand-ins to be conflicting or complex.

The use of the color purple on both the clay and wool emphasizes the connection between the two heads and relates back to the tongue color of the breed of the sheep depicted, which is Suffolk (figure 28). The connection of the wool in place of their tongues implies a regurgitating of one's experience to form sexual or nonsexual bonds between the two sheep. Because of the ambiguity of sex and the obscurity of the gesture and color in the two the degree of intimacy the two sheep are exhibiting is unclear.

Originally, my intent was that two sheep would face one another directly because, unlike humans, sheep cannot see in front of them with eyes located on the sides of their

heads. I wanted their interaction to be muddled by their inability to see one another. However, the decision to hang them adjacent one another was dictated by the gallery space. This way, the sheep feel as if they were refusing to look at one another directly—peering as if out of the corner of a their eye. This is how sheep will position themselves to look at one another clearly, but because of our anthropomorphic projection, we experience them as doing the opposite.

The tension between the sheep’s ability and human perception of an animal ability, which is often exaggerated to mirror our desired, amuses and intrigues me. Even with our ability to see one another, we rarely see each other clearly. We might as well have our eyes on the sides of our heads.

The lambs in *Lapsed Animation* (figure 29) are innocent onlookers to the tales that are presented to them. They are fresh and delicate, portraying the potential of life. When I began this piece, I wanted to create a work that embodied the felling of lambs first getting to know one another in the field. That first communication between the lambs seems to be through movement—something I had a chance to witness again for the first time in years, while researching sheep behavior in Ireland this past summer. There is an openness and joy to the way lambs run and jump through the field that reminds me of the way children at a preschool interact with one another. Children also socialize by speaking nonsense without knowing they speak nonsense. They test ideas and readily believe what they are saying is true.

Again, I employed the idea of “talking wool” because I was interested in exploring the more open or innocent element of tale telling and nonsense. In particular, I thought of the tendency of children to regurgitate information and stories they have heard as fact, taking the exact words at face value and unintentionally creating hybrid, nonsense “truths” by mixing narratives. This innocent diluting of information is illustrated through the use of the cotton candy pink wool coming from the ears and mouths of the lambs. Here, the wool connections do not run from mouth to ear, but rather mouth to mouth and ear to ear, implying speaking without regard for whether one is being heard, exaggerating the miscommunication and misinformation (figure 30).

The lambs represent a younger generation absorbing stories and relationship dynamics that are playing out around them. I like to think the “u” shape formed by the wool connections between lambs as a cup. This cup for me is another, final yoni—symbolizing the summer season, a flourishing harvest and a future generation of tale-tellers.²⁷

Conclusion

The works in the exhibition, *This Tale Is Told Out*, are not simply about the classical myths. Rather, the exhibit is about mythic possibilities. My hope is to catalyze thought in the viewer. I am using classical myths because they still inspire us today. Mythology initiates an imaginative translation, wherein we may understand how misery and joy naturally coexist.

The work aims to convey the feeling that there is a lesson to be learned here even if you might not be able put your finger on what that lesson is. I am making visual fables for adults, not cautionary tales, but stories of how life is. Relationships are complicated and messy, they aren't always smooth, they aren't always clear. There is always ambiguity and often there is also pain and suffering. I create these mythic articulations of such experiences in order to explain or try to understand what is going on around and within us. This paper conveys some meaning behind these works; it has left some other meanings in the shadows; and some meanings may not even be true. This is just one person's words. And now this tale is told out.

NOTES:

- ¹ Janine Antoni: "Touch" and "Moor" Touch | ART21. Accessed May 1, 2015.
- ² Diamant, Anita. *The Red Tent*. New York: Wyatt Book for St. Martin's Press, 1997, 211.
- ³ Walker, Barbara G. *The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred objects*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988, 16.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 494-495.
- ⁵ Spitzer Rasmussen, Erica. "Second Skin." Lecture, Visiting Artists Lecture from Jim and Jane Dew Visiting Artist Lecture Fund, Missoula, March 14, 2013.
- ⁶ Diamant, 77.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 99.
- ⁸ The Holy bible: New International Version, Containing the Old Testament and New Testament. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1978.
- ⁹ Pina. *Cineart*, 2011. Film.
- ¹⁰ Diamant, 23.
- ¹¹ Walker, 302.
- ¹²Looper, Matthew G. *To Be Like Gods : Dance in Ancient Maya Civilization*. Austin, TX, USA: University of Texas Press, 2009, 226-228.
- ¹³ Ames, Crista Ann. "Field Guild for Ceramic Artisans: Interview with Tip Toland."
- ¹⁴ Halpern, John. *Joseph Beuys, Transformer*. New York: Mystic Fire Video; and Fox Lorber Associates, 1998. Film.
- ¹⁵ "Red String of Fate."
- ¹⁶ Atwood, 81.
- ¹⁷ Walker, 58.
- ¹⁸ Stockton, Bill. *Today I Baled Some Hay to Feed the Sheep the Coyotes Eat*. Helena, MT: Falcon Press Pub., 1983, 20.
- ¹⁹ Cavener, Beth. "Follow The Black Rabbit: The Four Humors." Accessed May 1, 2015.
- ²⁰ MOMA | SFMOMA | Explore Modern Art | Our Collection | Robert Arneson | Portrait of George (Moscone). "San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Accessed May 1, 2015.
- ²¹ Rouse, W.H.D. *Homer The Odyssey*. New York: New American Library, 1937.
- ²² Campbell, Joseph, and Bill D. Moyers. *The Power of Myth*. New York: Doubleday, 1988.
- ²³ Atwood, p.71-80.
- ²⁴ Rouse, 138-147.
- ²⁵ Ames, Crista Ann. "Field Guide for Ceramic Artisans: Interview with Adrian Arleo."
- ²⁶ Simmons, Paula. *Raising Sheep the Modern Way*. Updated and Rev. ed. Pownal, VT: Storey Communications, 1989, 87.
- ²⁷ Walker, 352.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Ames, Crist Ann. "Field Guild for Ceramic Artisans: Interview with Tip Toland." Interview by Author. August 15, 2013.

Ames, Crista Ann. "Field Guide for Ceramic Artisans: Interview with Adrian Arleo." Interview by author. February 7, 2014.

Atwood, Margaret. *The Penelopiad*. New York: Canongate, 2005.

Campbell, Joseph, and Bill D. Moyers. *The Power of Myth*. New York: Doubleday, 1988.

Cavener, Beth. "Follow The Black Rabbit: The Four Humors." Accessed May 1, 2015.

Diamant, Anita. *The Red Tent*. New York: Wyatt Book for St. Martin's Press, 1997.

Halpern, John. *Joseph Beuys, Transformer*. New York: Mystic Fire Video; and Fox Lorber Associates, 1998. Film.

Janine Antoni: "Touch" and "Moor" | ART21. Accessed May 1, 2015.

Spitzer Rasmussen, Erica. "Second Skin." Lecture, Visiting Artists Lecture from Jim and Jane Dew Visiting Artist Lecture Fund, Missoula, March 14, 2013.

Looper, Matthew G. *To Be Like Gods : Dance in Ancient Maya Civilization*. Austin, TX, USA: University of Texas Press, 2009.

Pina. Cineart;, 2011. Film.

"Red String of Fate." Wikipedia. Accessed May 1, 2015.

Rouse, W.H.D. *Homer The Odyssey*. New York: New American Library, 1937.

SFMOMA | SFMOMA | Explore Modern Art | Our Collection | Robert Arneson | Portrait of George (Moscone). "San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Accessed May 1, 2015.

Simmons, Paula. *Raising Sheep the Modern Way*. Updated and Rev. ed. Pownal, VT: Storey Communications, 1989.

Stockton, Bill. *Today I Baled Some Hay to Feed the Sheep the Coyotes Eat*. Helena, MT: Falcon Press Pub., 1983.

The Holy bible: New International Version, Containing the Old Testament and New Testament. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1978.

Walker, Barbara G. *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983.

Walker, Barbara G. *The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred objects*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988.