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Earth Tone Sigh Spell

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts
at Virginia Commonwealth University

by
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Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
May 2021

Acknowledgements & Gratitude

Orla McHardy
Stephen Vitiello
Corin Hewitt
Jonathan Molina Garcia
Pam Turner
Semi Ryu
Julie Grosche
Chris Mahonski
Chase Westfall
Monica Kinsey
Brook Vann
muthi reed
Connor Marie
mariah barden jones
Ellen Hanson
Damien Ding
Abed Elmajid Shalabi
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Abstract

A written accompaniment to the artist's thesis exhibition titled *Earth Tone Sigh Spell*, conceived during the years 2020-21 and installed at The Anderson Gallery, Richmond from May 1–15, 2021.

The following thesis explores themes of personal memory, geo-theory, myth, symbol, and historical event. The artist uses research and stream of consciousness writing methods as a way to weave these concepts together and tie them back to her own practice with installation, sculpture, and new media.

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INTRODUCTION

April 3, 2020. 9:48 a.m.

I dream of the sound an apple makes when you take your first bite. Its thin, red, membranous skin bending, breaking beneath my teeth. I can feel the crisp core tremble, a bass-y vibration ripples on my tongue. I dream of the what ifs. My mind runs through the maybe's. I dream of the never's and I wake up with a feeling in my throat. A throat feeling. I toss and turn in the didn't's and wake up in the did's. Sleep brings me stories unfinished, lines unsaid. I dream of bugs pressed on windshields and fast cars. 75 miles per hour and a whole constellation of laminae staring back at me. Worker bees fly into my tempered shield. Millions of midges splattered against the glass. An invertebrate magnum opus. An ensemble of organisms. I see Orion's Belt in the wings of a fly. A radiating cosmos of life and death appears in the blink of an eye. What a way to go. I dream of their lives before the windshield. I dream of the convergence of that moment. The Eternal Return. I wonder what flowers they pollinated and what spring they celebrated. I wonder what winter they hid from and what gifts summer brought them. How would they fall? My mind runs through their maybe's and I'm not even dreaming anymore.

New media installation can be thought of as art that situates itself within the experiential. The experience of something. I find my practice in this arena, a place of provisional encounter. I use the word provisional because often in my installations the precise outcome is unknown. I rest easy in the undefined, because I sleep knowing that various components—environment, light, object—will weave together and form a constellation only possible in that space and that time. We could call this site-specificity. We could call it something else. Serendipity? Chance? Fortuity? Either way, this mode of making relies on circumstance and atmosphere. A sort of ecology, I mean that in a broad sense. Ecology can be defined as the study of the environment, and I use it as such, but I would like to consider that “the environment” encompasses more than the natural world. I would like to consider that “the environment” stretches far beyond nature into the cosmos, into our cells, into the fabricated web of *life as we know it*. Particularly because in this moment, the lines between nature and man, digital and virtual, have become obfuscated. It is my belief that new media and installation lend themselves to the blur.

In the following thesis, I will make connections between historical events, philosophies, personal memory, deep time, geology, embodiment, sensation, light and shadow—to name a few—in the name of the present. In the name of un-naming. In the name of being here, in the now. From the first explosion of the atomic bomb to the Stoics’ philosophy of cosmic connectedness, I seek to draw parallels between worlds, stories, myths, objects. Between those images that stay with us and those memories that flee us.

How can the experience of an image fold into itself to become a memory? How can the sensation of an object make you feel the inside of your body? Drawing into itself. (re)coiling, (re)calling, (re)viving. Looking back to the future, from the past of the present. Threading one self into whole, into hole, into ground. Sucking on the same end. Growing together, apart. My voice is in your heart, your heart is in my throat. I can hear your muscles tensing and the fly buzzing. It lands on the window sill, time freezes for a brief moment while the fly licks its chops. Reorienting its tiny little body, propping itself on the chipped paint. A warm breeze outside calls the fly home. What will tomorrow bring? A wave folds in on itself, never the same twice. Endless waves. Pulses. Vibrations. Coarsing through the sand. The salt of the earth. The unsteady plates. They shift under you, as I do.

We’re all alone, together.



July 16, 1945. 5:29 a.m.

The first successful explosion of the atomic bomb, also known as the 'Trinity Test'. Following this geologically significant and world-altering event, scientists discovered a new mineral formed by the blast called 'Trinitite', or more colloquially 'atomsite'. It possessed a light green color, translucent and glistening as it rained down from the combusting mushroom cloud. A rare fossil of human feat and deemed relatively safe to handle, many mineral collectors sought out samples of Trinitite. Post-ignition there was a sudden demand for the glassy rocks, making them a highly desirable and rare addition to many a collector's treasury.

PART I

Poetics of Sensation: Towards a Fresh Geoaesthetic

A post-human sheath envelopes the earth's crust. I can hear the techno-fossils concatenating. Stratigraphic data 00001110001010001010001100101000101010111110001010101000101010101011100010101010001010100011001010100101010001010 narrates our distant past and I know that the whispers of "the end" have finally come to a head. Digging deep, be it for granite or memory, cryptocurrency or conspiracy, has long been a human trait that I hold in both regard and contempt. I see the stones displaced by time—innocent, protean formations dependent upon the whims of subjectivity— and I can't help but wonder why they don't just...

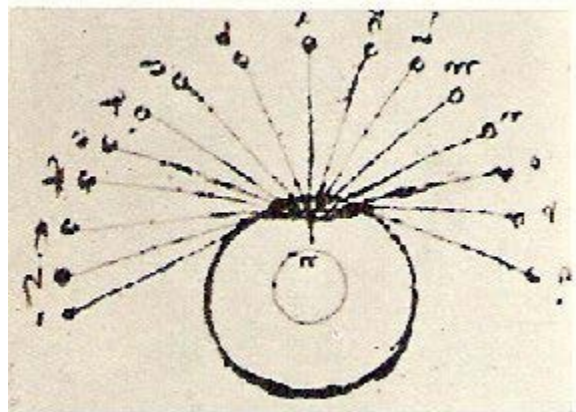
Act out!
Speak up!
Come here!



Petroglyphs!

The assemblage of object, light, and moving image proffers a sensorial atmosphere and asks what aesthetics and illusion can do. Material translucency plays a pivotal role in expressing qualities of "the beyond" that I am interested in, as well as the poetics of atmosphere. My research-based practice submits itself to the imperceptible geo, bio, techno and cosmic forces of the universe and seeks to shed light, literally, on the indiscernible qualities of what's between the subject, the object and the experience. From the micro- to the macro- I want to draw connections that haven't had a chance. I am exploring technologies and methods of extraction and pushing for equilibrium through experience. The poetics of association—human's innate need to interpret—add and detract from the work. I can only take you so far.

I seek to draw out new sensations. Not only in subject but in object. Not only in the physical but in the virtual. Simultaneously radiating and retracting from one another, the entanglement of form and material enables deep reflection on affect and an immersion in the virtualities of life. I submit to process and give in to its hypocritical (in)finity.



Eye's line of sight²

In *Geology of Media*, Jussi Parikka argues that “the geological is like a membrane”.³ It is a mediator for the nonhuman, for the organic, for the temporal, material and abstract. It is a hyperobject⁴, viscous and intangible and ever changing. It indexes time and archives history through slow processes of stratification. In this way, the geological deals in new materialism, a recent designation of materialism that challenges the contemporary and humancentric emphasis on meaning and representation. Among other things, new materialism reifies that we are living with(in) a vast and complex system of materials that are “nonreducible to linguistic signification”.⁵ In effect, new materialism proposes that we de-emphasize meaning and refocus our attention on sensation, perception, and sensibility. These are the tools that will unearth the secrets packed in the soil beneath our feet. They are the tools that will dust off the primordial glyphs inscribed in the geological.

Parikka suggests that we “think like new materialists, archaeologists-cum-geologists excavating how the stratified participates in the contemporary bio-political sphere”.⁶ We need to dig deep and look up—to project and retroject—and unfurl the potentialities of the vast and untapped intelligence in nonlinear, stratified histories. We need speculative fictions that reconsider our past(s) and “imagine alternative futurities”.⁷ What would it be like to go forward and look back? Can we have memories of the future? From this perspective, it is vital to consider the role of fossils as indicators of human and nonhuman life— as fragments of a past unwitnessed. Fossils preserve life within death. They memorialize epochs and archive inconceivable scales of the geological. We have seen prehistoric fossils— organisms mineralized and pressed into sediment. Bones, shells, and skeletons imprinted in rock strata. But what of fossils of the future? What are they composed of? Parikka writes of future fossils “narrativizing a future-present in which media and residues of waste might be the only monuments we [leave] behind”.⁸ Perhaps in this future imaginary we can begin to develop a “planetary, geo-centered perspective”.⁹

My future fossils look like translucent stones filled with putrescent apples. Their rot oozing out of small air pockets, leaking onto rotating pedestals and filling the air with aromas of Ambrosia,

Fiji, Red Delicious and Granny Smith. A worker bee’s paradise. What will these apple cross sections divulge to curious future descendants? My future fossils look like gelatinous chunks of bio-plastic containing toothpaste tubes and oyster shells and cherry blossoms. In this post

apocalyptic imaginary, small desk lamps cast light on the spinning stones, writing shadows on the wall, recalling the paintings at Lascaux. An eternal evanescence, undecipherable and transient.

The environment imparts an affect of both hope and doom. Stalks of lavender, adorned with viscid membranes, press into lumps of red clay and catch the dim light, throwing unintelligible silhouettes around the room. What afflicts these blooms? Spiral luminaries are strewn about and reflected in the acrylic panels positioned against upturned platforms, prompting thoughts of the

space beyond. Neither here nor there. It’s all a matter of (deep) time.

Trace elements permeate our blood,
 our blood soaks into the dirt,
 the dirt hardens into the stones that become the foundations of
 our malls and memorials.
 The bones of those before us start our cars and power our engines.
 Midges fly into our windshields.
 Atomic residues set in the silt.
 Oil and blood and calcium are the air of the Anthropocene.
 Deep breath in. Exhale. Dust.
 The breath of life.
 This mesh, the fabric of being,
 weaves itself through me and into the dirt.
 It digs deep into the stones and the lava.
 It heats the earth and returns through shifting plates.
 This is the geological.
 Obscure crystallizations in rocky formations anticipate past events and
 fold futurities into a present that we have to yet to encounter.
 My mind is tectonic.

July 16, 1945. 5:32 a.m.

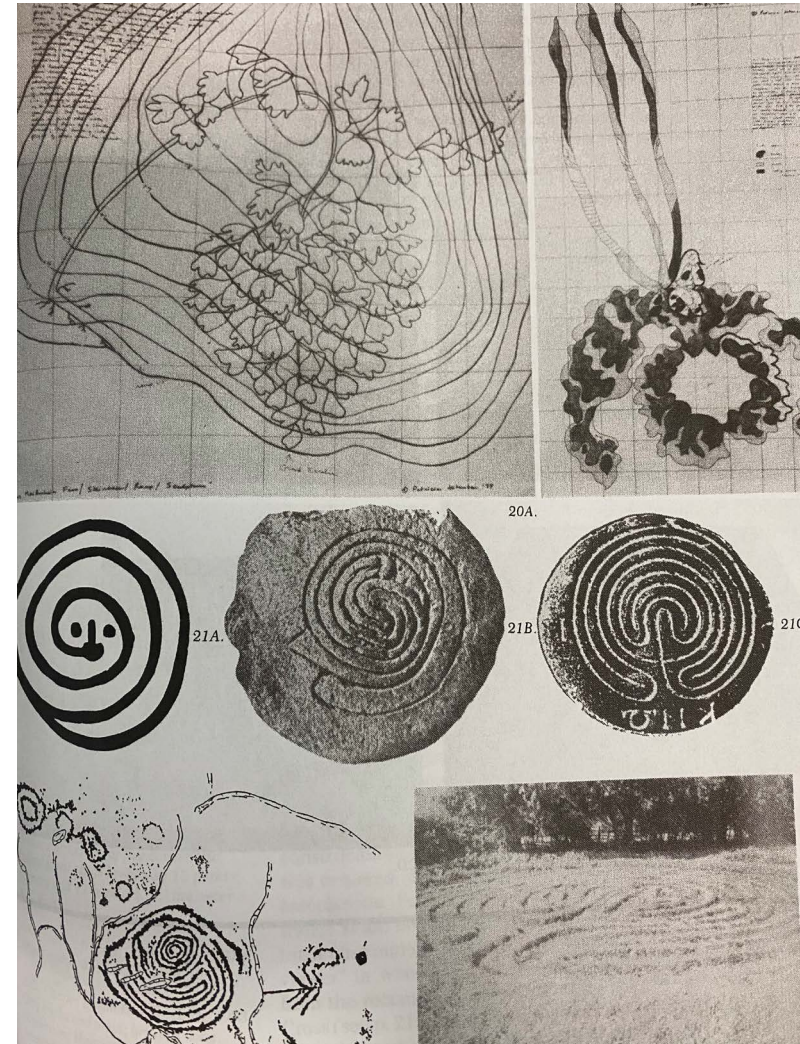
The detonation echoed around the world. A radiating divergence, spiraling out and drawing in. 33°40'38"N 106°28'31"W. Those glassy rocks rained from the sky, drumming on the dirt, dawning a new geologic time. The same dust still kicks up from the blast. The quarryman lug rocky bones from the bottom of the pit, unearthing deep time, conjuring new materialities. I am called to document and expose. The bits and pieces fit together in a myriad of ways, none right and none wrong.

The word *geography* translates from Latin *gē* (earth) and *graphia* (writing) to come to mean earth writing. Inscription on the earth, writing in the dirt, muddy messages from the past.

The cave. The body. The cosmos. The seed. These antediluvian sites of *earth writing* have persisted through time, providing a home for history to lay its head. Protean formations of object, image, and language dance with the viscera of minerals and memory—a crystalline emergence, a constant becoming. Deleuze and Guattari define assemblage as a ‘constellation’ of disparate elements coming together to form provisional entities; human and non-human, organic and inorganic, technical and natural. Its aggregates are not fixed or stable, but rather fragile and contingent, symbolic of our world today. Assemblage nurtures a potentiality of relation and acts as an encompassing through line, elastic and mesh-like. I think of the drawings on the caves at Lascaux and how their stories still hold true. I think of labyrinthian passages, written in stone, sinking back down toward the earth’s core. I think of massive stalactites, and dinosaur bones, and bits of plastic, being unearthed after eons of rest. I think of memory. I think of history coruscating from the collective unconscious, writing itself into the atmosphere like vapors emanating from cracks in the earth, heating the atmosphere.

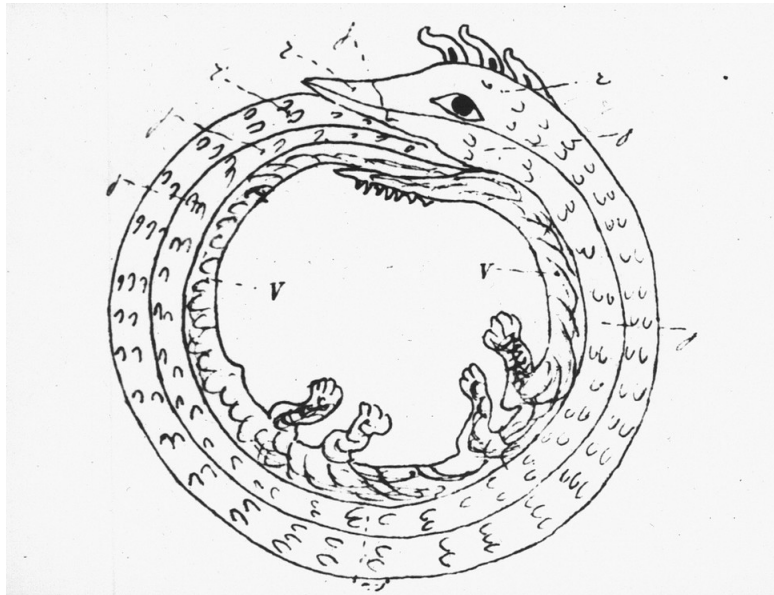
PART 2

Ge Graphia: A Myth Is Just a Braided Dream



Various labyrinthian patterns⁰

Robert Morris said that “the past had to become object in order that the future might be controlled”.¹¹ With the objectification of the past, we lose synchronicity and time becomes a straight line. We lose the constellatory moments that are continuously gathering, continuously moving in all directions. We lose our (past) selves. We lose the horizontal, which Lucy Lippard associates with “the oppressed, the feminine, the earth element” and which can be seen as the infinite, looping around back toward itself.¹² The Ouroboros. Chthonic transcendence. In the objectification of the past we lost connection to the cyclicity of time. We forgot the Celtic spirals and Labyrinths and the monoliths and the Nazca Plains. Writing on the belly. Stretch marks on Mother. By turning a blind eye to the writing on the wall—the weaving of the earth—modernity has effectively silenced the feminine. The provisional and contingent have been replaced for the concrete and the known. The mythical matriarch has been superseded by the red-blooded hero. The “Eternal Feminine” connects us back to loving and feeling, the irrational, prophecy and sensuality. In this space perhaps there can be healing, perhaps the past can release itself from objecthood and memory can live free. Perhaps in this space we can reclaim myth from toxic heroism, and give it back to community—togetherness.



Uroboros devouring itself, 15th century¹³

How can we reconnect to the Uterine Frog Goddess?¹⁴

In what *void* does she reside?

The cosmos.

In what *place* does she lay her head?

The cave.

How does she live in *time*?

The body.

How can we *know* her?

The seed.

In the 19th century, the Romantics often referenced “nature’s handwriting”—that which can be seen everywhere, on everything.¹⁵ From snake shed to flower petals, seashells to crystals, rain drops to pine cones. These perfect messages, inscribed by Mother Earth herself, embody the mysterious relationship between psyche and material, for, as Jung says, “the whole cosmos is a potential symbol”.¹⁶ In these raw transmissions we can perhaps glean the spirit present in matter. We can perhaps draw closer to the collective unconscious that oozes through eons, carrying with it stories and lessons and truths and knowledge from those (that) which came before. Natural symbols (animals, stones, plants, water, fire, etc.) are particularly endowed with meaning. Perhaps because of their omniscience, their being-there-ness. Perhaps because of their eternal presence, their sensual transcendence. I think of the shape of an egg, so perfect in its oblong-ness, its round edges soften the air around it. It soothes the energy in its attendance. I think of a stone, tempered by time and weather, ebbing into itself, waxing and waning toward flawed perfection. The repetition of time—*revolution*—sculpts matter into ever-more exquisiteness, to the extent that nothing more needs doing.

If we listen to storied time (myth/dream), I mean really listen, it presents us with an entire catalogue of intimations about the secrets woven into the fabric of being. This egg-shaped world, pirouetting in space, bears the fruits of infinity. From the depths of the earth to the depths of our psyche, coded strings of knowledge—enciphered rivers—braid the past, the present and the future into an elaborate lattice of mythic scale. Follow the endless threads into the cosmic cave of Spirit. Dine at the table of time. Enter the womb-like rooms, winding mazes of birth/death/rebirth, return to your center where you may decide to dance in a circle. Revolving around the axis of your heart, you pick Barley from the cracks in the soil and wonder about this marvelous germination. You look at a seed. How? It’s so dark in here. *Pars pro toto*.

The Part Standing For The Whole.

A seed is a world.

You are a seed.

You are the world.

You always are.



Bushman Rock Painting¹⁷

“Myths are things that never happened but always are.”

—Sallustius, 4th cent. A.D. (quoted in Carl Sagan’s *Dragons of Eden*)

The recurring symbols of transcendence present in most myths—spiral, stone, water, egg, ball, snake, seed, cave, mound, moon, mandala—share many kindred traits, but of them all I feel that it is their soft edges which are most sensational. Their honeyed contours bleed into the firmament, coating everything they touch with a saccharine patina, making this orbit a little sweeter. I think about my personal connection to these soulful totems and why I feel so drawn toward them. I wonder if perhaps in another life I was a moon. Or a mound. Maybe I was an egg. I think of fresh mountain spring water—dribbling from the core, purified by slate—and how I position my mouth just-so below the wellspring and lap up its fresh aqua. I don't know why I think of that, but I do. My body bends itself along the undulating crag, kneeling in reverence to its steady bounty.

This is life.

Life-giving.

Giving-life.

I think of Medusa and how her earthy power of turning man to stone was actually a condemnation by Athena, who found Medusa's rape in her own palace to be unsightly. Medusa's punishment, or rather the product of severe victim-blaming, was that she would have a head full of snakes and any man that locked eyes with her would turn to stone. Of course, as a young and beautiful immortal, this fate was seemingly the end of Medusa's life. Confined to far-off caves, Medusa was only ever visited by those who thought themselves intrepid enough to take her on. I could go on about the issues surrounding rape culture, the perpetuation of victim blaming through narrative and the abhorrent ways in which femme bodies have been crafted/sold/narrativized to the public, but I would prefer to talk about how Medusa's power is in fact the most formidable of all the Gods and Goddesses through the ages. The capacity to petrify.

I take my time. In wandering. In wondering. Through alleys, behind my flat and in the recesses of mind, I take my time. Spiralling down and around, I curl my toes on the gravel of the forgotten. I eat rocks. Each one tastes a little different. I use my judgment in deciding not to. I stare at the red light, in the hopes that it will turn green. I stare at the stone, in the hopes that it might come alive. Who am I kidding, it already is alive. I pick up sticks. I pick up detritus pulverised by tires and time. Hats, jugs, cans. Jung says the hat epitomizes the head. Unter einen Hut.¹⁸ Under a Hat. Crowning the cranium. Craning the crownium. That's not a word. Unter einen Hut. What of the jug? I suppose, in Jungian thinking, the jug might represent the femme. The vessel of life. The uterus. "The wind hath carried it in his belly", Hermes wrote on the tabula smaragdina. Prima materia. Perhaps this cultural detritus is prima materia. Smashed spray cans and splintered pencils. Used tampons and cracked glass. Unum Vas. This is what I see in the alleys.

Jung wrote "that this birth can issue from an amorphous mass has its parallel in the alchemical idea of the prima materia as a chaotic massa informis impregnated by the seeds of life".¹⁹ Gelatinous masses, plastic heaps, inorganic accumulations. The assemblage of postmodernity. That's what I see in the hollows. I want to preserve this eclectic assortment of life today. I want to register the particles and keep them as they are. I want one gaze to turn them to stone, to give them an everlasting presence in the here-and-now. A cosmic comportment.

But I suppose

even stone

turns back to dust.

Back to Medusa and her mastery in archiving. Perhaps this is all a little morbid. Maybe I have an obsession with death. But I find this gift, turning man to stone, so enchanting. That this story became so hardened in history speaks to two things. The first is the power of womxn. The second is that mythological motifs reaffirm a universality across humankind and through these motifs one may come to further understand how we got here. How we evolved to be exactly where we are right now. Through symbol and parable, we might discern a bit more about the phylogenetic expansion of the human mind, its deep attachment to the nonhuman, to materiality, to seed, to cosmos. Jung called it *Dream-thinking*.²⁰ A bottomless cavern of prehistoric associations, full of meandering paths toward new knowledges—new relations—new materials.

I explore these symbolic tenacities.

I wonder at their timelessness.

I hold out for new knowledge.



Found bottle; March, 3, 2020 3:26 p.m.

I loved to cry. It gave me reason to excuse myself to my bedroom. It was there, crying, that I would lie down on my little bed, and stare at the ceiling light. Fast tears welling, I let the salty beads rest on my lower lids, tilting my head back so as to keep them exactly where they were. Right there on the edge of falling. I stared through each growing globule, up into the light. As kaleidoscopic lenses go, the shafts of light reflected and refracted into each other and into me, bringing to life hallucinatory spectacles of a beauty I have yet to see since. Cocooning prisms. The room shifted, the walls expanded, the light pulsed. I became weightless. I lost all sense of body, of self. I became light. If I narrowed my eyes enough, and focused my pupils on the phosphorescent rays emanating from above, I could change the light. And in turn, the light changed me. I sat there for hours, even after the feelings had passed, willing briny drops to pool so I could continue watching the lustrous orbs dance around my room

In this practice, I discovered over time that the kaleidoscopic effects would differ depending on which emotion I found myself in.

PART 3

Salty Psychedelia: Void, Place, Time, Lektia

In sadness, the light recoiled into itself, drawing its energy Back. Back. Back. Folding into itself, sucking up, before scattering across the room, eventually finding solace in the corner of my eye.

In embarrassment, the light turned into a helical whirlpool of flickering beams. Their brilliance shimmered across the undulating room, wrapping me in a warmth so soft it could have been mistaken for silk.

In anger, flashes of the brightest-white-you-have-ever-seen formed tiny, star-like bursts, surging along the glassy edges of the crystalline net that swaddled me. Engendering a sort of spirally daze, I rose to perspective, from where I could look back and see myself.

And finally, in happiness, the light, all psychedelic and summery, extended its entire heart (whole being) toward me. And I, back toward it. Its rays so tender and bountiful I swear I was in the presence of Ecstasy herself.

This ceremony continues on into the present. I have honed my salty psychedelia. Unearthed the madness in my method. All in the name of being-in-touch. In touch with a certain solution of salt, soaking my spirit in the brine of now. Now-brine. A piquancy to the present. The light magnetizes and draws me forth, so close I can almost touch it, can almost breathe it. It's all very DIY if you consider the materials used to attain this kind of being-there. Just a little sadness, or happiness, or what will you. Combine the feeling with a pinch of salt, a luminous source, and some rudimentary muscle movement. There you have it. Ecstatic vision! Sometimes the best things in life are free. Money can't buy you bliss. Jubilation time! If I'm being honest, this is a sort of proto-drug. I've always been prone toward hallucinogens and these light-filled-illuminations were some of my first trips. It's just a connecting back-to. A divination toward _____. I don't have the answer for everything. Sometimes it's up to you to do the work. What were you thinking? Did you have something in mind to fill in the blank? The present is really just a filling-in of the blanks. It's a space between two blanks.

The Stoics, founded in Athens by Zeno of Citium, developed a school of philosophy in the 3rd century BC that Elizabeth Grosz describes as a “vitalistic cosmology”, as “philosophers of the surface, between height and depth”.²¹ Between these localizations, high and low, Stoicism founded the 4 *Incorporeals*—void, space, time, and lekta—to further understand the conditions in which materiality, and life’s essences, can be revealed. In these revelations one can edge closer to living in harmony with nature and with self. Void can be defined as the absence of all things. ○ But within absence there can be presence, and it is here in this potential presence where place/space can be located. ● All voids have the ability to hold space, and as soon as they do, they move from being an absence to being a presence. ○→● Before its occupation, void is nonlocal, extensive and infinite. It reaches. It seethes. It moves and stills all at once. Void becomes place when a body occupies it. A body can be anything from a speck of dust to a giant ocean wave to the wings of a fly. A body is you, is me, is us. As bodies enter void, place becomes known, and in place time can be felt. Embodied. A body occupies the air around it, becoming presence, and therefore situating itself between a past and a future.

Zeno believed time to be “the dimension of all motion without qualification”.²² Past, present and future are occurring now, then and forever—simultaneously and without hesitation. They push and pull on each other, swaying tides to-and-fro. All motion, in all directions and scales, is time. And finally we come to the fourth *Incorporeal*; lekta. Sense. Without lekta we may never truly know the other three. Lekta is the breath of the cosmos. It is what whispers in between the lines. Lekta is thought and non-thought. It constantly becomes itself in void, in time, in place. It “resides on the surface of events and in the depths of bodies”, engaging one another in a dance.²³ Foxtrotting along the edge of dimension, seeping into dreams and love and into the bottoms of your feet. Lekta can be found everywhere and no where, singing in chorus, with exhalations so sweet and gentle you may feel a tickle your ear. The 4 *Incorporeals* represent length, width, breadth, depth, volume, capacity and in so doing they are markers of the immaterial—that which cannot be seen but can most certainly be felt.



Tusk bracelet, Oceania, n.d.²⁴

On the topic of length, width, depth, volume, and capacity, I’d like to call forth an installation titled *Ab Ovo: Solfeggio 1’s and 2’s*, produced in the fall of 2020 and consisting of an animation, faux rocks, lava rocks, and sound. As images pulled from various sources and time-frames morph into one another, their transition from one to the next offers an in-between space—that which cannot be thought or said, but sensed. Images fuse together in a seemingly timeless loop. Could this go forever? Yes. And in the forever is where you might find some answers. To what questions, I’m not sure. Maybe that’s the question. What is the question? The images projected onto the wall morph into and out of one another, fastening endless hybrids. There is a steady, low vibration that emanates from the faux garden rocks. Upon first sight, one might ask if these are “actual” rocks. But with some closer inspection it becomes apparent that these rocks are simulations of the “real” thing—imitations that stand-in for the thing itself. Mirrored refractions of the natural world. “Man-made” facsimiles tethered to the viewer’s perception of representation, of what it’s trying to be. In its trying, the faux rock sheds light on the gap between the thing itself and its sequence of becoming. An animating force that awakens our senses to the liveliness and lack thereof residing in the thing. Though, even a faux rock has life. The smaller (and real) lava rocks that snake around the room under their simulated counterparts operate as barometers for the real. (See *Part 5: Work* for images)

A kind of touch stone enots hcuot fo dnik A



Asymmetrical stone ax (L), Stone ax butt (R), Anse a Milieu, n.d.²⁵

Maurice Merleau-Ponty suggests that a viewer can see a tree, but in some way, a tree can also see the viewer. This proposal speaks to the immanence of perception.²⁶ More closely, how seeing is not a single channel, but a multitudinous experience of exchange. The simultaneity of perception involves interaction from all parties—viewer, tree, wind, sun—and this can be thought of as consciousness. An embodied experience. We are of and in the world, and this notion frees both viewer and object—that which is being seen—from any kind of hierarchical organisation. The horizontal is an infinite, feminine and cyclical space which radiates interconnectedness. The body is the site wherein perception and consciousness become embodied. It is this embodiment, between flesh of the world and atmosphere, that allows one to perceive space.

PRESENT



You can touch it, but you can't have it. You can touch it in the service of abstraction. Is the present not just infinite narratives colliding, and then the next moment, reorganizing, recoiling, reviving, rehearsing, reiterating. RE: RE: RE: RE: your last e-mail, I'm so happy you reached out across this pirouetting void to try to connect to my digital presence it's so crazy how we got here have you thought about that lately I mean come on imagine man in a cave I mean really we are just animals let's be real I am the same as a mouse as a leaf as a puddle as a rock as a pencil as a pen as a thought a mere thought this screen I'm looking at is really no different than looking at the back of my eyelids while trying to sleep have you ever done that it's truly a fantastic experience I mean what you can see on the inside of your eyelids I often do it at night in my own psychotic attempt to try to calm my racing mind I close my eyes without letting my pupils fall back into my head they stay right there and they project onto the blankness of my eyelids it's like my own little movie theater I remember the first time I did it I was taking a nap in a small town in the state of Bahia in Brazil I was sharing a bed with Effe and I was so constipated I hadn't eaten in days my stomach was as hard as a rock I couldn't fall into any sort of slumber because I felt like I was becoming a rock in fact and so I started staring into my self ... anyway I started staring and I remember thinking about a tiger and then I saw it there on my eyelids really like a movie I couldn't believe my eyes no pun intended it was like my thoughts were becoming my reality I could see whatever I wanted I can still see whatever I want I saw tigers and bears and I've even seen myself as a baby it's really incredible what our silly little minds I mean I guess they're big or like the biggest or like the most thoughtful minds I guess that's what makes us human but yeah they are capable of a lot I mean woof woof dang anyway in the end I had to eat so many prunes before I ... ya know ... I lost a lot of weight and bought this fabulous little Brazilian bikini I came back from that trip and my boyfriend moved away and everything was different but really it was all the same anyway I'm really mauldering on here ok I'll see you later write me any time.



Here we have a perfect example of what ecstatic vision looks like. Writing spells into thin air, seeing what you want to see in the world. Be the person you want to meet, or however that saying goes. Just Be. That's enough, that's all I ask of you. Because being is enough. There's not much more to say on the subject other than it's important to remember just how connected to light we are. Just how much light we are. Just how much light we have.

Just Right.

January 15, 2021, 10:34 p.m.

It's a nice night. The moon is shining, not a cloud in the sky. If there were, I would read it like a book. Pages and pages of script, utterances emanating from the source; from the blue. I can see the stars above. Clear as day. The sand finds its way between the creases on my skin. It fills in the grooves. Tiny little specks of sea and shell, congregating on my pelt, massaging the soles of my feet. I'm simply walking. Walking along the beach. It's not necessarily romantic, but it's certainly unreal. The image of the ocean strikes my retina with such potency I almost fall back on my heels. It feels like some sort of buttery holograph. A vast light field, reflecting and refracting the moon's rays. On the horizon I see a fiery orange glimmer radiating from a darkened form. Perhaps a boat. Perhaps not. As I adjust to the dimmed light, I begin to sense with greater poignancy the atmosphere of this particular water's edge. I can hear the fish singing lullabies. I step on something stiff; it cracks. This isn't sand. I reach down and pick up the pieces. A shell. Not a sea shell. A molted carapace—the remains of a horseshoe crab who outgrew its self. I run my finger along its silhouette. Smooth and rough at the same time. I feel its tiny grooves, sculpted in time by the tides.

Praktikum

Praktikum



Horseshoe crab cast²⁷



Limulus (Mesolimulus) walchi fossil horseshoe crab²⁸

Horseshoe crabs date back 244 million years ago, making them earth's living fossils. The definition of a living fossil requires that the living being resembles its fossil taxon. There has still been some evolution of the species but overall they exhibit a "stasis" over extremely long geological time scales. To think that horseshoe crabs now might look and act similar to horseshoe crabs then...

What a miracle.

Speaking of miracles.

The ball or sphere falls into a similar category as the horseshoe crab.

And in this case, it is an even older example of “stasis”.

Eternal.

It is perfect in form, and therefore has required no reason to evolve.

Across time, place, and culture the ball has been engaged in a number of activities.

From sport to funerary offering,

decorative object to Mother Earth herself,

the spherical form is without a doubt a living fossil.

Living? You ask.

Well, sure. Why not?

Vibrant matter!

All things, living/nonliving, human/nonhuman, carry within them a soul.

Lekta.

They communicate. They sense.

Their very existence, multitudinous and far reaching, weaves us into the story.

The big picture.

Through these ancient bodies we are given the occasion to connect back to the each and every genesis,

to feel the moment that things began.

They become conduits to spirit and soul—to the sighs of creation itself.



Ball²⁹



Ball³⁰

I situate my practice within the back-and-forth. I reconnect with archetypal entities and engage in conversation. This conversation isn't necessarily linear, I see it more as a never-ending play. A patterning of similarity and difference. I imagine objects as containers, of secrets, the unknown, of each other. Shoes inside rocks. Rocks inside apples. Found objects recast as themselves. I'm interested in plurality of meaning, of form, of self. I'm interested in looking in and out simultaneously. Where do the micro/ and the macro/ meet? With this in mind, I give myself permission to integrate a variety of forms in my work. I use objects—detritus—found on walks, sticks picked up along the way, skeletal vertebrates left behind, that cross my path. I incorporate casts of these as well as their “original”—because I'm not sure there are originals anymore. These may be coated in activated charcoal or filled with crushed rose petal powder. I believe that the human and nonhuman are in such close proximity that the lines are becoming blurred. I use my own possessions in my work. Shoes I've worn. Flowers I've been given. I believe that my practice deals in what I do everyday. I look closely at my own place and how that may be another thread in the magic carpet of being.

Harriet Hawkins describes installation as an “experience of experience”, bringing “consciousness of one's corporeality to the forefront of the art experience”.³¹ In this way, installation in some way or another installs the bodies of its visitors in the work—it becomes a participatory space wherein the installation focuses attention to bodily presence and absence, sensuousness and sensation, past and present. It becomes an active exchange of looking, feeling, breathing. The work evolves through its being experienced and bears the fruit of reflexivity. What does the ball see when it sees you? Subjectivity wraps itself around reciprocity, imbuing the present with a sentience.

A L E X A N D E R

Earth Tone Sigh Spell, my Master's thesis exhibition, conceived after two years of studio practice, material exploration and knowledge research, is an installation that seeks to foster an animating exchange between viewer, space, object. The rotating display in the center of the room holds a variety of archetypal forms which act as mnemonics for recollecting the manifold patterns within the web of existence. The installation concerns itself with emergence of meaning, of symbol, of experience. Its intention is not to instill any firm answer. There is no right and no wrong. Its intention is to put forward the potential of an experience that might foster a reconnecting-to. It is open ended. It is abundant. As the oblong shape rotates slowly in a clockwise pattern, the objects upon it seemingly float in space and are lit at various stages of the revolution. The almost imperceptible sound in the room is a deep, bassy rumble that plays the Solfeggio Frequency 174 hZ, slowed down to 23%. Upon entering, the viewer must adjust to the starkly lit room. The mirrored reflections create a sort of light psychedelia as shadows and reflections are cast upon the ceiling, dancing above the viewer. The piece harks back to institutional methods of display, and explores the preciousness of objects. As the boundaries between man/nature/technology/spirit become less and less strong, *Earth Tone Sigh Spell* provides a space that the viewer can ponder these proximities and their (perhaps) *eventual collapse*.



Snake shed ball, 2021³²

In my practice I seek to shape, through fortuitous associations, relationships that cross the boundaries of logic. It's about finding connections between things that are not necessarily related. It's about conjuring felt meaning, collapsing history into a timeless vortex, in order to experience the potential of the sensorial—the atmospheric. My work proposes alternate paths for engaging with the nonhuman, in the hopes that if we can collectively gain a more nuanced and fluid awareness of ourselves and our relationship to this vast world, then we can perhaps move forward in more imaginative and ecologically-sound ways. I plan to bring in a vast range of objects, images and writing into my installation, synthesizing the personal and the universal; the historical and the mythic; the found and the fabricated. I believe that this broad amalgamation of personal memory, geo-theory, reference, and materiality further opens up what it means to be a New Media artist. Crossing boundaries is intrinsic to New Media, and by pushing through traditional thresholds of logic and meaning-making, the medium reaches beyond art into knowledge production. It reaches toward geography, philosophy, anthropology—expanding into diverse pedagogic realms and forging new inscriptions. *gē graphia*.

PART 5

Work

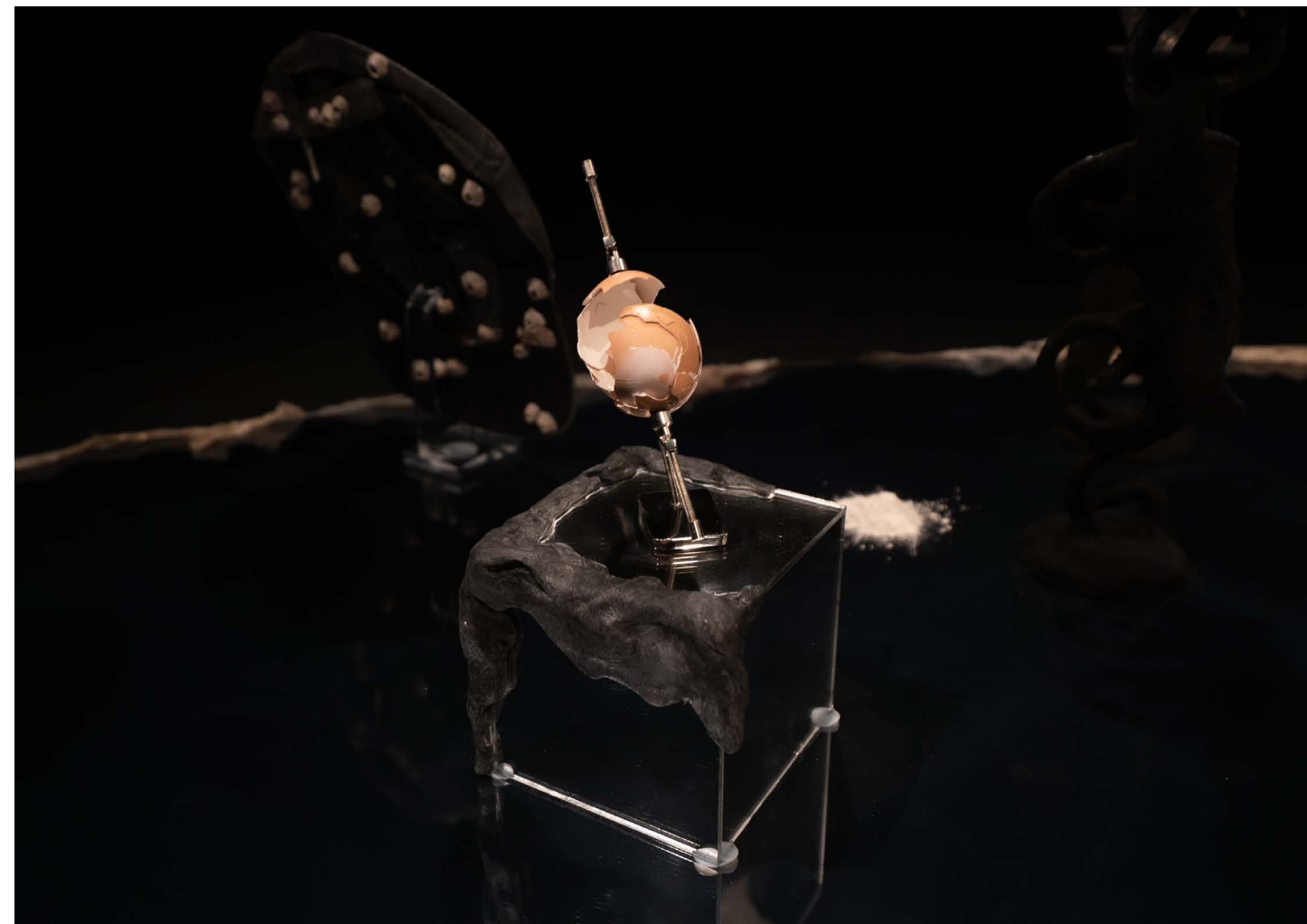


[PLEASE CLICK HERE FOR VIDEO DOCUMENTATION](#)

Earth Tone Sigh Spell, 2021
 Installation; rotating display, MDF, mirror plexiglass, snake shed, Genelec sub woofers, MP3 players, barley, glasses, rope (crytsallized), hat, barnacles, lava rocks, glass domes, chrome calipers, activated charcoal, Bentonite clay, aluminum cans, egg shells, lunar moth, Eco-Poxy, XTC 3D, Nigella heads, Free Form air epoxy clay, Feather Lite polyurethane, seashell, 3D print, leaves, twigs, museum wax, ammonite fossil, armature holders, Basketball & Football stand, acrylic spoon stands, pine cone, nitrous canister, dragonfly wings, candelabras,
 8x4 ft (rotating display table)
 Dimensions variable



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 Installation; rotating display, MDF, mirror plexiglass, snake shed, Genelec sub woofers, MP3 players, barley, glasses, rope (crytsallized), hat, barnacles, lava rocks, glass domes, chrome calipers, activated charcoal, Bentonite clay, aluminum cans, egg shells, lunar moth, Eco-Poxy, XTC 3D, Nigella heads, Free Form air epoxy clay, Feather Lite polyurethane, seashell, 3D print, leaves, twigs, museum wax, ammonite fossil, armature holders, Basketball & Football stand, acrylic spoon stands, pine cone, nitrous canister, dragonfly wings, candelabras,
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 8x4 ft (rotating display table)
 Dimensions variable



Hat 1, 2020
Found hat, XTC-3D, barnacles
8x11 in
Unique



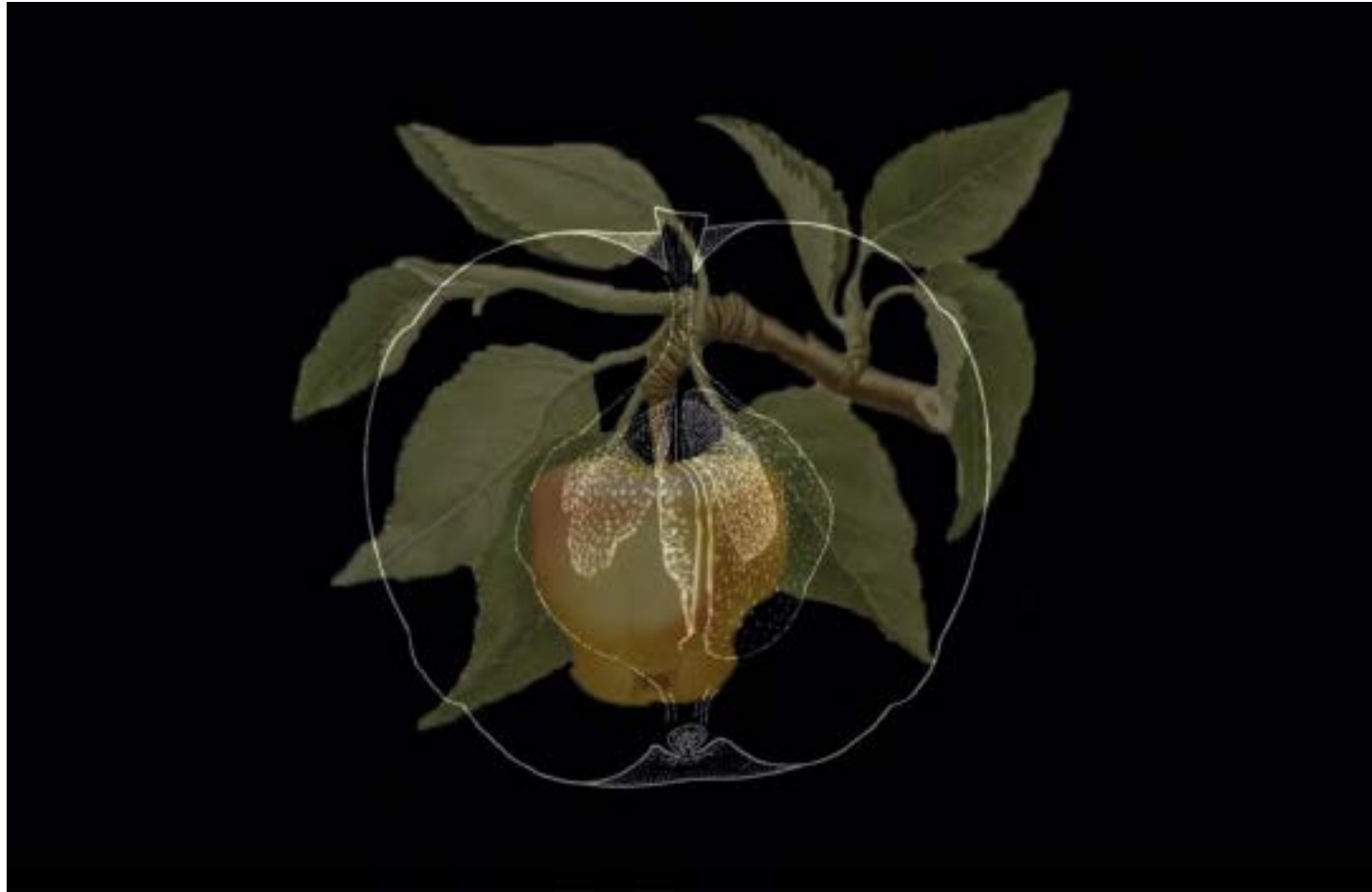
Hat 2 (likeness), 2020
Graphite on paper
9x11 in
Unique



Can 2 (likeness), 2020
Graphite on paper
9x11 in
Unique

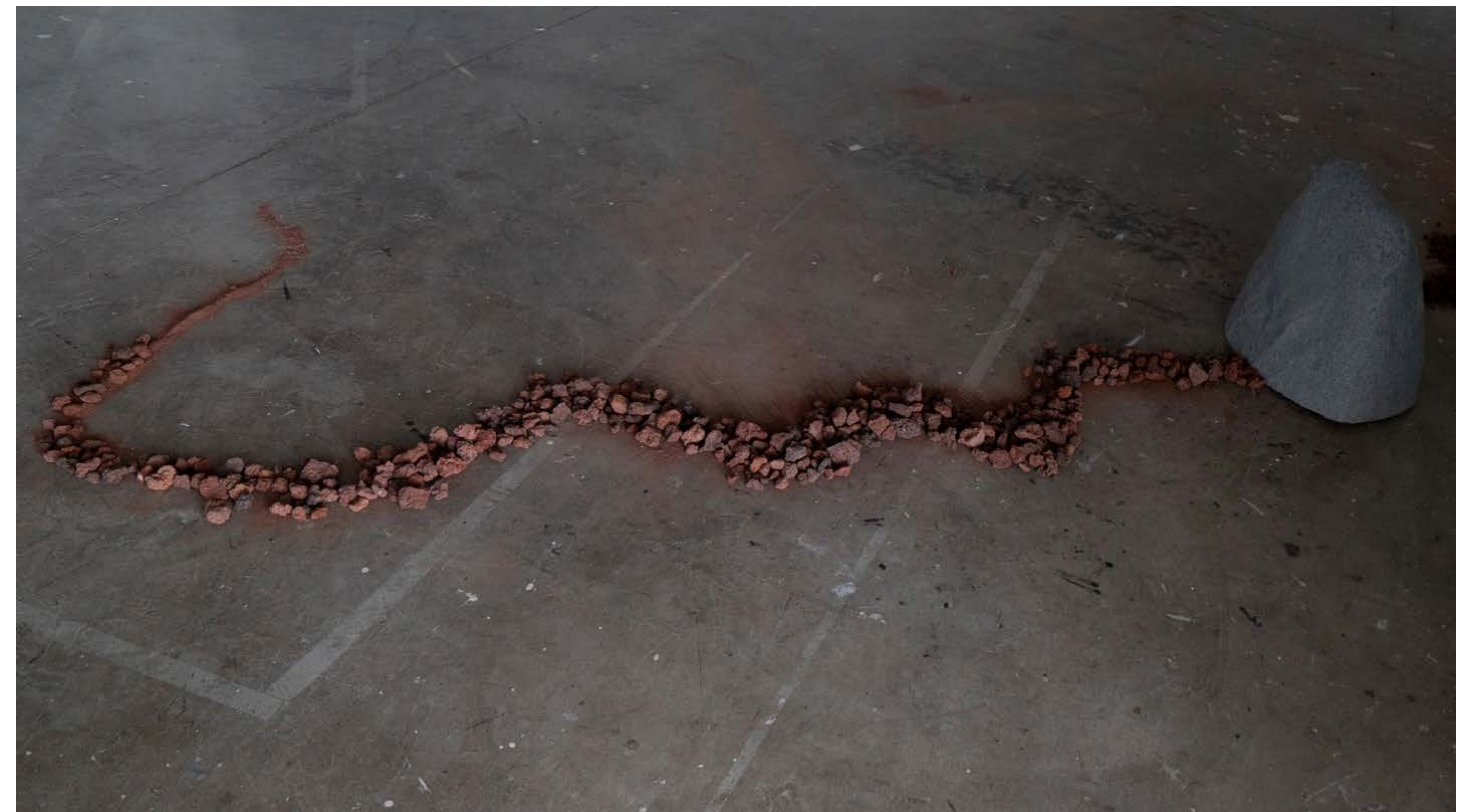


Can 1, 2020
Found can; polished aluminum
4x8 in
Unique



[PLEASE CLICK HERE FOR FULL VIDEO](#)

Ab Ovo: Solfeggio's 1's and 2's, 2020
 Single channel video, sound, lava rocks, faux rocks
 08:11 (loop)



Installation views, *Ab Ovo: Solfeggio's 1's and 2's*, 2020, FAB gallery, Richmond



Stone Notes (Jasper), 2020
Animation, sound
3:22 minutes

[EXCERPT](#)



Stone Notes (Chalcedony), 2020
Animation, sound
3:15 minutes

[EXCERPT](#)



Stone Notes (Septaria), 2020
Animation, sound
3:04 minutes

[EXCERPT](#)

Notes

- 1 Image: 1976. *Petroglyphs*. Place: Peabody Museum of Natural History. https://library.artstor.org/asset/AYALE_PEABODYIG_10313459289.
- 2 Leonardo da Vinci, Das Lebensbild eines Genies, Emil, 1955
- 3 Jussi N. Parikka., et al., *A Geology of Media* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 84.
- 4 Timothy Morton's concept of entities of such vast temporal and spatial dimensions that they defeat traditional ideas about what a thing is in the first place.
- 5 Parikka, et al., *A Geology of Media*, 103.
- 6 Parikka, et al., *A Geology of Media*, 106.
- 7 Parikka, et al., *A Geology of Media*, 123.
- 8 Parikka, et al., *A Geology of Media*, 135.
- 9 Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Massachusetts: Polity Press, 2013), 81.
- 10 Lippard, L. (n.d.). [Various labyrinthian patterns]. In *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory*.
- 11 Lucy R. Lippard, *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory* (New York: The New Press, 1983), 84.
- 12 Lippard, *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory*, 123
- 13 1478. Livre sur l'art de l'or... , fol. 196.. Place: Paris: Lib., Bibliothèque Nationale; grec 2327.. https://library.artstor.org/asset/AWSS35953_35953_31696608.
- 14 Heqet (Heket) was a goddess of childbirth, creation and grain germination. She was depicted as a frog, or a woman with the head of a frog, betraying her connection with water. As a water goddess, she was also a goddess of fertility where she was particularly associated with the later stages of labour.
- 15 C.G. Jung and M.-L. von Franz, *Man and His Symbols* (United States: Dell Publishing, 1968), 301.
- 16 Jung. Franz. *Man and His Symbols*, 257.
- 17 Image: 1977. *Bushman rock paintings*. Place: Peabody Museum of Natural History. https://library.artstor.org/asset/AYALE_PEABODYIG_10313459561.
- 18 C.G. Jung, *Dreams* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974), 121..
- 19 Jung, *Dreams*, 252.
- 20 Jung, *Dreams* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974), 33.
- 21 Elizabeth Grosz, *The Incorporeal: Ontology, Ethics, and the Limits of Materialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 21-22.
- 22 Grosz, *The Incorporeal: Ontology, Ethics, and the Limits of Materialism*, 35.
- 23 Grosz, *The Incorporeal: Ontology, Ethics, and the Limits of Materialism*, 43.
- 24 Tusk bracelet. Place: Peabody Museum of Natural History. https://library.artstor.org/asset/AYALE_PEABODYIG_10313283615.
- 25 Image: 1982. Left, asymmetrical ground stone ax, found by Clark Moore on the surface of the Pradel 1 site; right, eared butt of a stone ax, found by Clark Moore on the surface of the Anse-a-Milieu 1 site. Place: Peabody Museum of Natural History. https://library.artstor.org/asset/AYALE_PEABODYIG_10313459464.
- 26 Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, *Eye and Mind: The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1964), 159-190.
- 27 *Horseshoe crab cast*, 2021, Free-form Air, part of a larger cast/mold series, Courtesy of the artist.
- 28 Limulus (Mesolimulus) walchi, fossil horseshoe crab. Place: Peabody Museum of Natural History. https://library.artstor.org/asset/AYALE_PEABODYIG_10313278835.
- 29 c. 1978-1979, Image: 12-Jan-2007. *Ball*, Ae84 Profile. Place: UBC Museum of Anthropology, Raija Warkentin Collection. https://library.artstor.org/asset/AWSS35953_35953_38237193.
- 30 Stone ball. Ground Stone. Place: Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. https://library.artstor.org/asset/AWSS35953_35953_38630979.
- 31 Harriet Hawkins, *'The argument of the eye?' The Cultural Geographies of Installation Art*. "Cultural Geographies 17, no. 3" (July 2010) 321-40.
- 32 *Snake shed ball*, 2021, Snake shed, Feather-Lite polyurethane resin, 12 x 12 x 12 in, Unique, Courtesy of the artist

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