

Fall 2016

## Manual / Issue 7 / Alchemy

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Issue — 7

*Alchemy*

# Manual



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LABO ET DIBI





## **Manual**

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The cover image for this issue is a marker for *Transmutation*, an augmented reality by Markus Berger and Michael Grugl, available at [risdmuseum.org/transmutations](http://risdmuseum.org/transmutations)



(cover)

Jan van de Velde II  
Dutch, ca. 1593–1641  
*The Sorceress* (detail), 1626  
Engraving on paper  
Plate: 21.3 × 28.6 cm. (8 3/8 × 11 1/4 in.)  
Purchased with a gift from  
Mrs. Murray S. Danforth 53.317

(inside cover)

Unknown artist  
German Endpaper, ca. 1780  
Hand-blocked, gold-stenciled paper  
40.6 × 25.6 cm. (16 × 10 1/4 in.)  
Mary B. Jackson Fund 40.080



Bohemian  
Tumbler, 1730–1740  
Glass with gilding  
Height: 9 cm. (3<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in.)  
Gift of Mrs. Webster Knight II, by exchange 73.057

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**Rachel Berwick** has shown multimedia installations at venues such as the Serpentine Gallery, London; 26th Bienal de São Paulo; Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; Smithsonian American Art Museum; and Sikkema Jenkins, New York. She has received awards from the Joan Mitchell Foundation, the Smithsonian Artists' Research Fellowship program, and the Rauschenberg Residency program. A professor at RISD, Berwick serves as head of the Glass Department.

**Stephen S. Bush** is an associate professor of religious studies at Brown University. He studies philosophy of mysticism, religious ethics, and theory of religion. He is the author of *Visions of Religion: Experience, Meaning, and Power* (Oxford University Press).

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**Doreen Garner** (RISD MFA 2014, Glass) is a Brooklyn-based artist focusing on exploitation of the black body in medicine from the seventeenth century to present day. Garner has completed residencies at LMCC Workspace Program (2015), Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture (2014), and the Abrons Arts Center AIRspace Program (2016), and has shown in Bergen, Norway; Lommel, Belgium; New York; Boston; and Philadelphia.

**Michael Grugl** is an Austrian innovator and architect. His works in Europe and South America range from the urban interventions, exhibition and set design, and the adaptive reuse of historical buildings to solar-powered thermodynamic systems. Grugl teaches at RISD's Interior Architecture Department and heads an architecture firm in Linz, Austria.

**Kate Irvin** is the head curator of costume and textiles at the RISD Museum. Her most recent exhibition is *All of Everything: Todd Oldham Fashion*, and her upcoming shows include *Repair: Thrift to Resistance*. With Laurie Brewer, Irvin authored *Artist/Rebel/Dandy: Men of Fashion* (Yale University Press).

**Mimi Leveque** is a conservator of objects and textiles with a special interest in archaeological materials. Currently at the Peabody Essex Museum, she was previously at the RISD Museum, where she worked with Florence Friedman and Gina Borromeo to conduct faience replication experiments.

**Dominic Molon** is the RISD Museum's Richard Brown Baker Curator of Contemporary Art. In 2015 he organized the first solo exhibition in an American museum of work by Scottish artist Martin Boyce, and he is currently developing an exhibition of Adam Pendleton's work, slated for 2019.

**Douglas R. Nickel** is the Andrea V. Rosenthal Professor of Modern Art at Brown University. A specialist in nineteenth-century photography, he is the author of *Lewis Carroll: Dreaming in Pictures* (Yale University Press) and *Francis Frith in Egypt and Palestine* (Princeton University Press).

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**Elizabeth A. Williams** is the David and Peggy Rockefeller Curator of Decorative Arts and Design at the RISD Museum. Her research interests include American and British silver from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, French faience, American and British interiors, chinoiserie, Japonisme, and the grotesque.

**Bryan McGovern Wilson** is a multidisciplinary artist whose work addresses themes of time, ritual, and the body. Through material investigations, images, and live performance, he blurs the boundaries between established and marginalized ways of thinking and working. Wilson received his BFA from the RISD Glass Department and is currently a fellow at the Neiman Center for Print Studies at Columbia University.

**Diming Stella Zhong** is an artist based in New York City. In 2015 she received a BFA from RISD, where she was professionally trained as a glass artist. Her multimedia work investigates impalpable senses and relationships through constructed spaces.

augmented-  
reality cover

— Artist on Art

***Transmutation***

Markus Berger and Michael Grugl

The cover image for this issue is a marker for *Transmutation*, an augmented-reality project. Please head to [rismuseum.org/transmutations](http://rismuseum.org/transmutations) to activate it on your mobile device

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# Lunar Sages and Solar Dodgers

Bryan McGovern Wilson

Those who pursued the “royal art” to the point of “dropping out” found that an elaborate subculture had been constructed for them to drop into. Once inside it, they invariably adopted the apocalyptic visions of the underground which were wholly alien to the rationale of Western Christian society.

—*Alchemy: The Medieval Alchemists and Their Royal Art*,  
Johannes Fabricius

When we think of alchemy as art, what happens?

Initially, we run into complications.

We think of the molecule and the liberation it contains. We believe in constraints and ways of being in the world. We imagine riches springing forth from the mind via the hand, working as King and Queen, Bride and Bachelor. To think of alchemy as art is to move from the position that alchemy can only bring the body so far, that something and somewhere lies beyond what is known. This place is probably smelly, disorganized, and baffling to the socialized brain. In art and in hermetic philosophy, the passage of the material is analogous to the body of the alchemist—herself a union of the corporeal and the ephemeral.

The relationship of spheres is at play here, if only within the sphere of the skull and the shocked meat within. We can understand alchemy and art not as a discrete set of disciplines or disciplines intertwined, but as spheres of thought coexistent, covalent, nested within one another. Alchemy and art are not about finding resolution, but building the capacity for curiosity, formulating questions that invest fields of knowledge with possibility, prompting the unexpected and emergent to manifest.

Gesture becomes a point of overlap between the two modes of thought. We can understand alchemy in the present time-space as a sensibility, an attitudinal lens of experiencing reality. The hermetic forebears have done their jobs well, their polymathic roots branching into the limbs of disparate sciences. The alchemic specialist of the now takes as foundation the dreams of her forebears; anything can be any things in the magnetic athanors of particle accelerators. Yet the hermetic gesture is sustained in the modern endeavors of the physical sciences; in the pursuit of spheres within spheres, through fleeting nuclear fires, she pursues the weave of reality itself. The artist does not privilege the quantitative

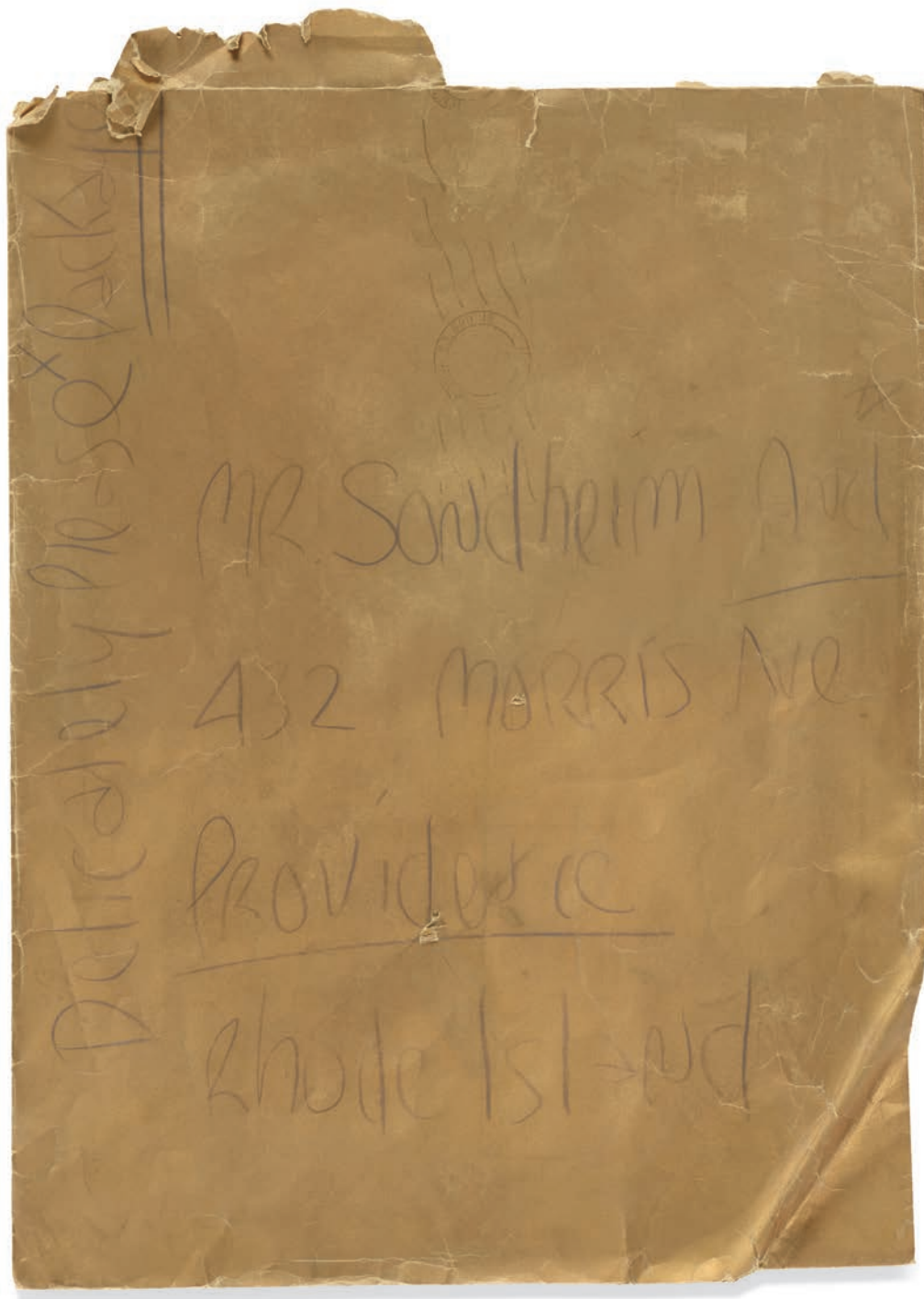
in this way. She is concerned with the gesture itself and its ability to stay true to and depart from the list of terms that develop through that gesture. To speak of the artistic gesture is to speak of the unifying mandate of the artist: to create art.

Art-making is more within the realm of transmuting gold into lead and reveling in the seeming futility of that gesture. The alchemic changing of lead into gold extends beyond the novel or superficial; it speaks to the processes by which humans apply meaning to a world devoid of it. To be an artist or an alchemist is to have an intimate relationship with language and materials as tools for transformation and transmission of information across time and space. To engage as an alchemist/artist is to be the perpetual student of the present moment, to synthesize culture, so-called science, and the implications of existential borders into a discipline that is repeatable, a practice.

Art and alchemy are not singular, unified pursuits. Their practitioners are trans-disciplinary, disjointed, and solitary in their practice, and their labor and the ordering of their lives become porous, overlaid in the pursuit of other-than or beyond-dominant modes of understanding. The artist may embody the mercurial in order to expand her vision, but her constant reward for work is more work.

The goals of alchemy and art lie somewhere in the polysemous penumbra of desire. The desire to mediate, to transform, to transcend the confines of mind and body is sustained. To connect through history, generating a culture-material vessel that travels through time-space—labor enacted in the present, mindful of the past, stored and transmitted into the flow of future waters. The teaching of alchemy is a coded space filled with dead ends and misdirection, and allegory and metaphor reign triumphant. The modern alchemist continues the tradition of coded languages, adorning and insulating their revelations within language, instantiated through translation. Art holds the power of transformation through synthesis. Art, in its manifold manifestations, has an intimate relationship with the beholder, and fluency in its terms is not a prerequisite. Knowledge is not necessary for understanding.

Through the artistic lens, one does not need to know the elements of what they behold, only that they are different than they were before their encounter with it. The artistic gesture attains a precision in this way, a jolt of energy that binds one state to the next, the exoteric and the esoteric merging and expanding outwards again. It depends upon bodies converging and expanding out. The mechanics of this interaction are unpredictable, variable, and subject to change without notice. Unknowable.



James Lee Byars  
American, 1932–1997  
Untitled Ephemera, ca. 1971–1972  
Manila envelope with graphite and gold spray paint  
38.1 × 30.5 cm. (15 × 12 in.)  
Mary B. Jackson Fund 2005.33.1  
© The Estate of the Artist

# From the Files

An Artifact from the Future: Lanzavecchia + Wai's *Space Quilt*  
by Kate Irvin

*If, by choice or by necessity, we had to envisage life on some planet other than Earth, what kind of “minimal hand luggage” would we take with us on our journey to other galaxies or a different celestial body with acceptable living conditions for mankind?*

So begins the design challenge posed by Barbara Brondi and Marco Rainò, the curators of ANOTHER TERRA / *Home Away from Home*, a collective exhibition of work presented in Turin, Italy, in 2012. In response to this provocative call for designs highlighting the ways humans interact with everyday objects, the Italian/Singaporean collective Lanzavecchia + Wai presented *Space Quilt: One day in the life of V. M. on Earth*, an otherworldly handwoven Mylar textile akin to a thermal blanket, imprinted with the mundane sequence of the daily routine of an individual named V. M.

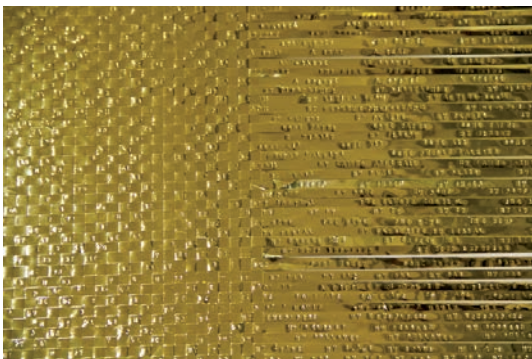
Referring to themselves as researchers, engineers, craftspeople, and storytellers, the design duo explains how the prosaic might meld with the innovative to guide us into an unknown, perhaps alien future. Living in a new world, V. M. relives old ways through the memories stamped into the fabric of the quilt:

*Like a mantra, on each woven golden Mylar strip is hand-stamped repeatedly in absolute chronological order, the individual names of objects encountered, touched, or used. A seemingly mundane fragment of life is then sealed, given permanence. These words re-materialize the possessions, their related everyday gestures and rituals of a day on Earth that is impossible to repeat ever again. One day in the life of V.M. on Earth is both the product of a private story and an artifact for the future.*

- Collective: Lanzavecchia + Wai,  
Italy and Singapore,  
2009–present
- Artists: Francesca Lanzavecchia,  
Italian, b. 1983  
Hunn Wai,  
Singaporean, b. 1980
- Object: Space Quilt: One day in the  
life of V. M. on Earth, 2012
- Materials: Mylar plain weave, hand-stamped
- Dimensions: 220 x 150 cm.  
(86 5/8 x 59 1/16 in.)
- Acquisition: Georgianna Sayles Aldrich  
Fund 2012.58

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Photographs courtesy of Lanzavecchia + Wai



# Double

Florence Friedman /  
Mimi Leveque

# Take



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**Florence Friedman:** Ancient Egyptians viewed the Beyond as a place filled with pleasures, but also with danger and demons. Clearly, the dead needed to be equipped for the journey. While they might use passwords to navigate the perilous byways of the underworld, more commonly they relied on amulets, placed in or among the mummy bandages, to ensure protection of the body. This elegant three-piece work, called a pectoral, is such an amulet.

Originally laid across a mummy's chest (*pectoral* refers to the chest), this work was sewn into the bandages via the little round thread holes that pierce the wings and body of the figure. Both the material of the pectoral and its winged subject were understood as aiding the deceased's safe passage into the afterlife, a process accomplished in part through the power of light, a critical element in the meaning of this work. Made of a bright blue material that we today call faience, the ancient Egyptians called it *tjehnet*, meaning "sparkling" or "scintillating," like sunlight. The shiny material of this pectoral, therefore, was understood as being replete with the light of the sun. Light was so important to the ancient Egyptians that they

made their major deity the sun god, and one of their books on the afterlife, which we typically call the Book of the Dead, they called the Book of Going Forth by Day. Death, for them, was not about descending into darkness and oblivion, but about moving into light and new life.

The squatting figure in the pectoral is the goddess Isis. Sometimes depicted as a bird of prey known as a kite, Isis is shown here with broad wings which would have embraced the chest of the

Egyptian  
 Winged Isis Pectoral, 1075–712 BCE  
 Faience  
 7 × 10.5 cm. (2¾ × 4¼ in.)  
 Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund  
 1996.73.1



mummified man or woman whom she protected. A telling attribute of Isis is the solar disk between cow horns atop her head, the disk being a powerful symbol of life-giving light. The disk and horns originally belonged to the cow goddess Hathor. Isis, like Hathor, was a mother goddess—especially mother of the king—and a protector of mankind. She figures in myth as the sister and wife of Osiris, the god of the Underworld, whom she aided in

resurrection. Because Isis helped Osiris, Egyptians thought she could likewise help them in death, when they became “an Osiris.”

The theme of transformation runs throughout this pectoral, in both its material and subject matter. The faience material, through firing, magically transformed from a dull paste to a lustrous blue, and the pectoral’s subject of a light-infused goddess aided in the transformation of its owner from death to new life.

Egyptian  
Winged Isis Pectoral, 1075–712 BCE  
Faience  
7 × 10.5 cm. (2¾ × 4¼ in.)  
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund  
1996.73.1



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**Mimi Leveque:** It is small wonder that the ancient Egyptians thought that the faience material from which this shining blue and turquoise-colored goddess was made was magical. Every step in producing faience is difficult and even counterintuitive.

The materials that were used are nearly colorless. Quartz pebbles or flint nodules, when finely ground, make a white powder. Sodium carbonate or bicarbonate—the components of baking powder—and ground calcium carbonate or oxide are also white. Only when the coloring agents and water are added to make a paste is there a hint of change. The addi-

tion of copper would turn the wet paste a pale green, while cobalt, the element that makes the darker blue details, would make the paste look pale pink.

To shape the pectoral, the paste could have been placed in three small molds made from terracotta, as terracotta molds have been found in excavations. However, as we discovered when we conducted faience replication studies here at the RISD Museum, it would have been easier to cut out the outline around a template, then model the details using hand tools. Easier is really an exaggeration, as the faience paste is not a simple material to work with; it resists holding crisp details, and if it is



# Take Double

Florence Friedman /  
Mimi Leveque



worked too long it loses some of its final color. That is where the real magic of this material is revealed. As an object made of faience paste dries out, the salts and colorants are drawn up to the exterior, and the fire from the kiln transforms the nearly colorless surface into a scintillating blue glaze. Unlike a clay object, onto which a glaze must be added to alter the color, an object made of faience is self-glazing.

What would inspire the Egyptians to create such a complex material? We know they highly valued the gems turquoise and lapis lazuli for their sacred blue colors, but these semiprecious stones

were rare and costly, as their sources were located as far away as Afghanistan. In early dynasties, the Egyptians experimented with glazing carved steatite (soapstone) to produce shiny turquoise-colored stones that were used as amulets. Most of the components needed to make faience were readily available in Egypt, although the copper came from as far away as the mines in the Sinai, where there was a temple to the goddess Hathor, Mistress of Faience, who is referenced in our pectoral. Although we aren't yet certain of the date of its earliest use, once faience was developed, it became the ancient Egyptians' preferred decorative material. The depth and quality of color and the fantastic range of uses to which it was put—from amulets to figurines to drinking cups—was unsurpassed by any other substance. Faience became the luxury item, *par excellence*.

The perfection seen in this lovely pectoral required centuries of experimentation. We still don't know how the ancient Egyptians figured out their formulation, or, despite our many attempts at replication, how they created their most complicated faience objects. The slight smile of the goddess suggests that she knows that not all her secrets have been revealed.

Unknown artist  
 American  
 Witch Ball, 19th century  
 Glass  
 Diameter: 10.6 cm. (4  $\frac{3}{16}$  in.)  
 Gift of the estate of Harriet H. Tyler  
 24.130

# Double

Rachel Berwick /  
 CA Conrad

# Take

Fall 2016

**Rachel Berwick:** The term *witch ball* conjures images of a device for generating or revealing spirits or forces beyond our realm, forces unknown to those of us outside the occult. The RISD Museum's witch ball, however—a simple blown-glass form—appears distant from these associations. A sphere, it is the most direct response that molten glass makes to a glassblower's breath. The scale of it, no more than a single breath, would fit comfortably in my hand. Small bubbles trapped within the uneven skin cause its color to vary from pale blue to almost black. The material holds the memory of its liquid state, frozen now at room temperature. There is a small jagged opening where the glass was abruptly broken away from the blowpipe, evidence of its making.

While the history of witch balls extends to seventeenth-century England, this particular example was made in America in the nineteenth century, a time when the belief in witches and witchcraft was alive and well. This was also a time when American glass factories were in full swing. Individual glassblowers made witch balls on their own time, during lunch breaks or at the end of the day, using whatever glass was left in the furnaces when production in the factory was done. Since the American glass houses predominately produced bottles, jars, and window glass, witch balls were typically clear, blue, green, or amber. Size could vary, and some were decorated with thin threaded-glass patterns. Witch balls were most often intended as gifts for friends or family, or kept for personal use.

Rather than serving as conjuring devices, witch balls were used to repel evil in its various forms. Hung in houses and barns to watch over the structure and its inhabitants, these hollow spheres could contain herbs such as dill and rosemary, believed to ward off evil forces. The witch ball's basic power to protect, however, was derived from the physical and optical properties of glass. Glass has an innate ability to reflect and refract, becoming a lens without much provocation. When a glass surface is curved—say in a sphere—its field of vision increases exponentially. A ball the size of your hand can capture the reflection of an entire room, including that of any approaching witches. Witches are said to be repelled by their own reflections and would, thus, stay away. The witch ball is, in effect, an eye to watch over you.

Reconciling the images *witch ball* conjures against the actual object and its history, I am brought back again to the material essence of glass. Glass is a material of wonder. It figures significantly in the history of alchemy, science, and art—and in the occult for that matter—because of its myriad physical and optical properties. Properly defined, glass is a solid liquid. It embodies transformation. It is magical. And in the end, the glass witch ball both fascinates and puts us in the position of wanting to believe.

Manual



# Take Double

Rachel Berwick /  
CA Conrad

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Unknown artist  
American  
Witch Ball (detail), 19th century  
Glass  
Diameter: 10.6 cm. (4 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in.)  
Gift of the estate of Harriet H. Tyler  
24.130

*Through the Witch Ball, Mount Monadnock Transmission:  
A (Soma)tic Poetry Ritual*

We have only begun to accept and harness the alchemy of poetry. This is the third poetry ritual I created to find a cure for my depression. The first two garnered poems I liked enough to publish, but the rituals did not heal me. This one mended me. If alchemy is the process of turning undesired substances into gold, then this ritual brought the shine back to my life and gave me peace.

In 1998, my boyfriend Earth (aka Mark Holmes) was bound, gagged, tortured, raped, covered in gasoline, and burned alive. This brutal hate crime took Earth's life at a time when he was living on a queer spiritual commune in Tennessee. I fell into a deep depression and it often felt that it was impossible to recover. When I did start to feel functional again, there was still an underlying sadness that never went away, and with it came a movie in my head playing over and over where Earth's rapists and killers are caught. There is a courtroom scene in this movie where I could see their backs as the judge passed sentence on them. This movie was my private daily torment, and every time it played a large stone hand pressed into my chest.

The MacDowell Colony granted me a residency in 2013 and I brought with me a crystal Earth gave me the last time I saw him alive. For years

I had kept it hidden from myself in a box and whenever I accidentally found it I would quickly cover it and hide it again. As soon as my decision was made to use it for the poetry ritual it was with me at all times, even under my pillow as I slept. Each morning I meditated with it and placed it under a headband to press it against my third eye. I swallowed a smaller round crystal then fished it out of the toilet the next day, sterilized it, and ate it again.

It was full autumn and I would sit on a rock, Earth's crystal pressed into my forehead while another pulsed in my belly as I stared into the forest, locking eyes on the trunk of a distant tree. Suddenly after a few minutes of staring, every falling leaf could be seen moving at once. This is how I would write in the shadow of Mount Monadnock. One day I saw something other than leaves move; it was a bobcat staring at me from the top of a boulder. We locked eyes for a few minutes before she disappeared into the forest. That night I dreamed I woke inside a tree; the wood surrounding me was a warm, fibrous silk and I could hear the sap moving inside a soft steady heartbeat. Within a week the torturous movie in my head dissolved and has never returned. While I will always love Earth, I am free from desiring vengeance for him. I believe in the strength of poetry.



ALGA S T  
DAGL P  
R  
N I  
I  
DAM  
R I E T

Rembrandt van Rijn  
 Dutch, 1606–1669  
*A Scholar in His Study*, ca. 1652  
 Etching, drypoint, and engraving  
 on paper  
 20.6 × 15.9 cm. (8 1/8 × 6 3/16 in.)  
 Gift of the Fazzano Brothers  
 84.198.602

# Double

Emily J. Peters /  
 Stephen S. Bush

# Take

**Emily J. Peters:** In a darkened study, a man turns momentarily from his work to look upon an apparition before a leaded-glass window. He sees a glowing rebus, within which words in Latin surround Christ's monogram (INRI). Underneath, a disembodied, almost invisible arm and hand point to an oval object that might be a mirror. Behind the glowing rebus is a curtain rod and curtain; and above it, to the left of the window, a fluttering form with no discernible body within. The man is surrounded by objects that indicate he is a scholar in his study: a slanted reading desk, a small book, a globe, and, behind him in a recess, a skull or *memento mori* adjacent to a hanging Jewish prayer shawl.

The Dutch seventeenth-century artist who made this provocative print, Rembrandt van Rijn, did not title it, and subsequent attempts to interpret it propose both highly specific and rhetorical meanings. In 1679, more than twenty-five years after its creation, the work was identified as "Practicing Alchemist" in a Dutch inventory, although the image does not correspond with the numerous contemporary representations of alchemists. In 1731, another inventory listed the print as "Doctor Faustus," referring to the devil-dealing scholar of German legend and Christopher Marlowe's play, *Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* (produced in Dutch in 1650), although the print does not accord with any passage from the play. Recent studies revolve around the meaning of the rebus, and propose that the print was a commission by a Protestant anti-Trinitarian sect (van der Waal), a representation of Jewish mysticism (McHenry) or Jewish conversion (Perlove), and an allegory of the Christian faith (Hinterding). Deliberations on Rembrandt's substantial and complex relationship to the Jewish community in Amsterdam shape these studies.

Rembrandt's technical mastery of etching propels the layering and obscurity of the subject matter. The etching process consists of bathing a copperplate in acid to burn an image, which may have unpredictable and accidental results and a certain kinship to alchemy. As if to exploit this association, Rembrandt emphasized the technique's more magical qualities in his rendering of the print. In the foreground, the scholar's robe conveys solidity and volume, created with several layers of crossed lines of different weights. The softer dark recessed spaces of the room are rendered with lines crossed multiple times at every angle, contrasting with the sketchy, almost unfinished visual notations in the foreground. In the center, Rembrandt created the ephemeral rebus and gauzy specters by sketching forms with one or two lines on top of chaotic crossed lines. He allowed the openness between lines to suggest light coming through. Taken together, these varied techniques evince a transformative state between materiality and ephemerality, between earthly and otherworldly things. The transmutation that takes place before our eyes—whether technical, alchemical, or spiritual—may be, in the end, the elusive subject of the print.

#### Further Reading

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McHenry, Deni McIntosh. "Rembrandt's 'Faust in His Study' Reconsidered: A Record of Jewish Patronage and Mysticism in Mid-Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam," *Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin* (Spring 1989): 9–19.

Perlove, Shelley. "Awaiting the Messiah: Christians, Jews, and Muslims in the Late Work of Rembrandt," *Bulletin: The University of Michigan Museums of Art and Archaeology XI* (1994–1996): 84–113.

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Stephen S. Bush: A cipher appears before Rembrandt's scholar, and the scholar is a cipher to us. Is he Faust? An alchemist? A Jewish mystic? A Christian sectarian? A patron of Rembrandt's? What is the apparition? A theophany? A Kabbalistic message? An alchemical code? Our desire for clarity on these matters is confounded by the fact that alchemy, Kabbalah, and magic were not always distinct pursuits in the time leading up to Rembrandt's day. Further, in that period and place, Christianity and Judaism interacted and sometimes overlapped in complex ways.

Presumably the source of the revelation is God. A glorious light shines forth supernaturally, and an angel is on hand as witness. At the center of the symbolic code is a clear reference to Christ: INRI stands for Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews. The emerging scholarly consensus sees the outer rings of letters as Kabbalistic. In putting Christian and Jewish elements together, the code could then reflect the view of some Christian Kabbalists that the Jewish texts of Kabbalah point to Christ.



# Take

In artistic depictions of divine revelations, the mystical experience frequently overpowers the human spectators, rendering them passive and overwhelmed. The typical range of emotions in response to an appearance of God includes ecstasy, awe, reverence, fear, surprise, humility, adoration, and devotion. Rembrandt knows this well. In his painting *Belshazzar's Feast* (1636–1638), when God appears, the king of Babylon is shocked and afraid. He violently twists around, flinging a companion's drink to the floor. In the print *The Angel Appearing to the Shepherds* (1634), the heavens open, spilling forth divine light and a host of angels, and the humans recoil in terror, falling over backward and fleeing aghast. Even the livestock bolt. In the painting *The Stoning of Saint Stephen* (1625), the martyr throws his arms up, not to protect himself from the rocks with which the mob is about to pummel him, but in ecstatic adoration of God's glory as it rends the sky above him.

The scholar in his study, though, is not caught up in ecstasy, wonder, or fear. He is studious, inquisitive. Around him are arrayed the tools of his trade, the implements of inquiry into worldly mysteries. At his window a spiritual mystery has suddenly appeared. Natural enigmas and heavenly ones are on a par. Scientific and religious studies require the same habits of mind. The scholar does not even so much as turn his body toward the vision but remains facing the desk—where his natural knowledge resides—as he gives supernatural knowledge a sidelong look.

Rembrandt is here emphasizing active human inquiry in relation to the divine. As opposed to one who can only receive divine revelation helplessly, the scholar puts his intellectual faculties to work to investigate heavenly problems. Rembrandt positions him in a state of curious inquiry as to the import of the supernatural missive, and he does just the same to us.

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# *Edinburgh Castle from Greyfriars, 1843–1847*

Douglas R. Nickel

Scotland enjoys a special place in the early history of photography. The English inventor of the process, William Henry Fox Talbot, so admired the writings of Sir Walter Scott that, in the fall of 1844, he toured locations around the country connected with the life and stories of the author in order to secure views for what became the world's first published book to feature photographs, *Sun Pictures in Scotland*. Within a decade, Talbot himself was residing in Edinburgh part of each year. One of his closest friends, David Brewster, was a native Scot. Brewster not only invented the kaleidoscope and a popular version of the stereoscope but also brokered the most productive creative partnership in the history of the medium—that of David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson. Hill and Adamson's 1840s view of Edinburgh Castle, as seen from the cemetery at Greyfriars Kirk in the Old

FIG. 1  
Robert Adamson  
Scottish, 1821–1848  
David Octavius Hill  
Scottish, 1802–1870  
*Edinburgh Castle from Greyfriars*  
(detail), 1843–1847  
Salt print from paper negative  
11.9 × 15.9 cm. (4 1/16 × 6 1/4 in.)  
Mary B. Jackson Fund 75.030

Town section of the city, is redolent with contrasts—between church and state, past and present, art and technology, and, curiously enough, between modern science and alchemy. The RISD Museum’s print (Figs. 1 and 2) reflects an intellectual economy typical of the dawning Victorian age but in many ways foreign to us today. As such, it provides an object lesson in the value of social context to our understanding of art history.

Talbot announced his method of photography on paper—what he called “photogenic drawings”—in January 1839, spurred to action by newspaper reports of a rival invention conceived by the Frenchman Louis J. M. Daguerre. When details of the daguerreotype process were eventually made public, Talbot confronted the weaknesses of his own system and went back to work to make improvements. In spring 1841, he advertised the “calotype,” a variant that used a developer solution to shorten exposure times of the negative from minutes to mere seconds. His mother and Brewster urged him to safeguard the process with a patent, so, hoping to protect his creation from vulgar commercialization, Talbot now required those wishing to take up photography in England, France, and the United States to secure a license from him first.

For reasons unknown, however, Talbot never patented the calotype in Scotland. He conveyed details of his discovery to David Brewster, who at the time was principal of the Colleges of Saints Salvator and Leonard at St. Andrews University, and Brewster in turn enlisted two colleagues, Hugh Lyon Playfair and Dr. John Adamson, to join him in experimenting with it. By the spring of 1841, Adamson had succeeded in making the first calotype portrait in Scotland. Talbot was anxious to see his invention prosper in the North, and he encouraged Brewster (who studied light and optics) and Adamson (a chemist) to refine and promote it. At the time, Robert Adamson, John’s younger brother, was seeking a new occupation; he had trained to become an engineer, but that calling proved too demanding for the sickly and shy young man. Under Brewster’s aegis, the two Adamson brothers entered a period of intense study of the calotype, such that by early 1843 Robert was prepared to move to Edinburgh and establish himself as a professional photographer. He opened his studio on Princes Street, up Calton Hill, in May.

Coincidentally, the General Assembly of ministers of the Church of Scotland was meeting in Edinburgh that very month, albeit under something of a cloud. Clerical appointments had become increasingly subject to legal disputes and the will of civil courts, and many of the churchmen present at the meeting could no longer abide this state interference in their affairs.

FIG. 2

Robert Adamson  
Scottish, 1821–1848  
David Octavius Hill  
Scottish, 1802–1870  
*Edinburgh Castle from Greyfriars, 1843–1847*  
Salt print from paper negative  
11.9 × 15.9 cm. (4 1/16 × 6 1/4 in.)  
Mary B. Jackson Fund 75.030



With great drama, a block of 155 evangelical ministers walked out of the assembly, resolving to form their own new denomination, to be called the Free Church of Scotland. Present at the event were both Brewster and the painter David Octavius Hill, secretary of the Royal Scottish Academy of Fine Arts. Within days, Hill made public his plan to produce a grand oil painting and commemorative engraving that would show the breakaway group reassembled and signing their historic deed of separation from the established Church. For the undertaking, he would need accurate portraits of hundreds of busy, important men. He began making preparatory sketches, but was then approached by Brewster with an idea. Might it not be more expedient to secure his many portrait sketches by means of photography? The painter met with the young Adamson, examined some early calotypes and the studio operation, and was won over. Hill proceeded to use his connections and position to arrange sittings at the studio for the various churchmen, and, before long, other members of Edinburgh society.

Hill's training in composition, lighting, and the fine-art tradition in portraiture complemented Adamson's technical proficiency with the camera, and his genial nature spared his young partner from dealing with sitters. Talbot's sanction and their respective photographic talents coalesced into a partnership that lasted four-and-a-half years and produced nearly three thousand images—the most prodigious single body of work to emerge in the medium's first decade. The clerical portraits would be largely completed by the end of 1843, but in going about them, the duo seized the opportunity to try out alternate poses and the arrangement of small groups, beyond the needs of the painting. By July, Brewster was writing to Talbot that the partners proposed to apply the calotype to “many other general purposes of a very popular kind” and “different bodies and classes of individuals.”<sup>1</sup> Their initial results were exhibited in Adamson's studio, to positive press: one artist attending even suggested the portrait studies were like Rembrandt, but improved. Before the year was out, Hill and Adamson had begun work on “different bodies and classes of individuals,” including a pioneering series of the working-class fishermen and fisherwomen of the port at Newhaven, Highland types and costumes, literary tableaux, and distinguished citizens of the nation. They also photographed architectural monuments within their city and at St. Andrews, old castles around Scotland, and military subjects, which they advertised would be included in forthcoming published volumes of original calotypes. Only the volume on St. Andrews ever appeared, but each of their many and diverse photographic subjects was evidently conceived to take its place as part of a series.

The RISD Museum’s view of Greyfriars Cemetery would have been included in volume three, *The Architectural Structures of Edinburgh*, as one of about forty compositions taken of or within the churchyard. Like most of the images in the series, it deploys figures (sometimes Hill himself) posed amongst the tombs and gravestones. In this instance, an unidentified man and young woman lounge together on the grass. To our modern eyes, an old cemetery may seem like an inauspicious spot for a rendezvous—even one staged for the camera—but in the nineteenth century, Greyfriars was regarded as a public space, like a commons, as it had for centuries functioned as meeting place and parade ground. Indeed, in encountering the photograph’s three main compositional elements—the figures, Greyfriars’ masonry, and the looming castle—contemporary viewers would have brought knowledge of the historical significance of the setting to their understanding of the image and its connotations.

Opposite the couple, we see some of the earliest architecture extant in the churchyard. A Franciscan monastery stood on the site in the fifteenth century—monks of that order wore gray robes, hence the name—but the friary was dissolved during the Reformation and replaced by the protestant Greyfriars Kirk in 1620. Monuments to James Chalmers and John Jackson, patriarchs of two leading Edinburgh families, date to the same period; these are not tombs, but memorials built into the boundary wall, as even in the seventeenth century the city cemetery was oversubscribed for burial space. The monuments frame the castle, fortified home to Scotland’s kings and queens from the twelfth century onward. When Charles I ascended to the throne in 1625 to become king of all Great Britain, Edinburgh became his. The English-bred Charles exploited the judiciary to persecute those who challenged his claim to royal authority over the Church of Scotland and to push his anti-Calvinist episcopal reforms. Four years after an insulting Anglican rite of coronation at the castle, he unilaterally imposed a version of the English Book of Common Prayer upon the Scots. On July 23, 1637—the first Sunday the prayer book was to be used—a woman threw her prayer stool at the dean of the High Church of St. Giles, and riots spread across Edinburgh. Many called for a reaffirmation of the 1581 agreement made with King James IV, Charles’s father, denouncing Roman Catholicism and pledging independence of the Scottish Church from secular authority.

The following February, Scottish nobles, gentry, and clergy gathered en masse at Greyfriars to sign a National Covenant insisting upon self-government for the Scottish Church and rejecting the English “innovations.” To Charles, the Covenanters Movement was tantamount to a rebellion, and he sent his armies north. The dispute dragged on for half a

century and through two civil wars: in 1679, twelve hundred Covenanters were arrested, with many of them sent to prison cells set up for the purpose within the Greyfriars Kirkyard. In the end, about eighteen thousand Scots died trying to save their presbyterian system of church government from the English practice of rule by bishops and monarchs. Early nineteenth-century illustrations of the signing of the National Covenant posed the hallowed ground of Greyfriars—filled with brave Scots, living and dead—against the outlying castle (Fig. 3). Hill and Adamson’s calotype partakes of the same compositional strategy, though its politics are

now more latent. Viewers then would have recognized the emblematic significance of the juxtaposition, however, and likely found in it a historical echo of native rebellion against civil interference, first by fearless Covenanters and then, in their own day, by the Disruption of 1843 and its new Free Church ministers. Though bloodless, the second insurgency traced its

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FIG. 3  
*Signing the Covenant in Greyfriars Churchyard, Edinburgh in 1638*  
From *Scottish Pictures Drawn with Pen and Pencil*, by Samuel G. Green, published in 1886  
Lithograph  
Private collection  
Ken Welsh/Bridgeman Images

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principles of conscientious protest explicitly to the first, and it would not have been lost on Hill that Thomas Chalmers, the founding moderator of the Free Church, bore a family name memorialized within the borders of his Greyfriars view. The calotype's peaceful air was thus charged with meaning in the 1840s, looking back to a turbulent national past while asserting its continuity into the present.

\* \* \*

Politics and religion informed early photography in another way, and here David Brewster again proves a central figure. We tend to think of photography as a thoroughly modern innovation, but in fact it arrived at a peculiar, transitional moment in Western history, when the concept of “modern” was still being worked out. From the time of Aristotle until the first decades of the nineteenth century, the intellectual domain we now understand as “science” was commonly referred to as “natural philosophy”—the study of the physical universe and its workings. People like Talbot and Brewster were trained in natural philosophy, which took mathematics, mechanics, optics, astronomy, botany, chemistry, medicine, and other areas of learning as correlated parts of a single pursuit. As good Christians, they understood that God's design on earth made itself known to humanity in two ways, through the revelation of Scripture and through God's other book, the Book of Nature. They studied nature with conviction in the ultimate interrelatedness and common origin of all empirical phenomena, and however mysterious nature's secrets may appear, all would in time be deciphered and put to use for the benefit of God's greatest creation, humanity. “Science,” from the Latin *scientia*, merely designated particular kinds of knowledge. It was only in 1833 that William Whewell coined the term *scientist* to (derivatively) acknowledge a modern shift toward narrow specialization and secularization, as God was abandoned as a final cause and explanation. In its first decade, though, photography could still be seen as simultaneously an invention and a discovery, a technology based upon a natural property of substances changing color under exposure to the light of the sun. Talbot marries the language of natural philosophy and modern science when he describes how he deduced his process from the darkening of silver salts: “Such were, as nearly as I can remember now, the reflections which led me to the invention of this theory, and which first

impelled me to explore a path so deeply hidden among nature's secrets," he writes in *The Pencil of Nature*. "They are impressed by Nature's hand; and what they want as yet of delicacy and finish of execution arises chiefly from our want of sufficient knowledge of her laws."<sup>2</sup>

Likewise, the modernizing impulse of the so-called "chemical revolution" of the eighteenth century served to recast our present-day understanding of alchemy as an essentially occult and delusional set of practices. But before the revisionist posture of the scientific Enlightenment came to prevail, alchemy was simply the infant version of what we now call chemistry. The term *al chemia* derived from the Arabic *al-kīmīā*, which in turn refers to the ancient Egyptian *khem* ("black earth") and the Greek word for "mixing"; the Arabic article *al* started being dropped even in the Renaissance. European alchemy was a scholarly pursuit developed by serious experimenters from antiquity until the nineteenth century. Most versions followed the ancient division of matter into elements (fire, air, earth, and water) and Aristotle's fascination with change—both natural change, as when an acorn becomes an oak, and forced change, as when mixing blue and yellow pigments produces green. Alchemy and modern chemistry inherited this basic concern for the transmutation of materials from one state to another. Nearly all versions of alchemy involved belief in a *prima materia*—a generic or fundamental element. Lead or mercury were though capable of being reduced to this condition, and then, with the addition of some ennobling substance, changed into silver or gold. Elixirs were believed capable of making mortal flesh immortal, akin to the "water of life" described in the Gospels. It is unlikely Sir Isaac Newton would have conceived his theories of light and gravity had he not studied alchemy exhaustively and accepted its "occult" principle of non-material influences on material bodies.

Alchemy's mixing, heating, cooling, and distilling are all familiar features of the modern laboratory, but after Antoine Lavoisier systematized chemical names and measures in the 1780s and the "scientific method" of hypothesis and experimentation were universally adopted, alchemy came in for attack—not for its goals or results so much as for unsound reasoning and undisciplined methods. Modern science argued that, instead of a common *prima materia*, each element had its own unique fundamental part, the atom. The acceptance of modern chemistry over competing systems (and popular lore) took time and amounted to a political struggle. To the modernizers, this struggle necessitated declaring—in the strongest terms possible—that alchemy was not only founded on a mistake, but that its continued invocation signified backwardness and superstitious delusion. Because alchemical ideas informed so much

of modern chemistry, and because adherents such as Talbot and Brewster retained many spiritual beliefs about nature in their religious outlook, the repudiation of alchemy was still an ongoing project, even in the 1830s.

Photography in particular suggested fanciful associations with alchemy and the uncanny. Upon receiving the first samples of Talbot's process in 1839, Brewster wrote back to thank him for what he called "your specimens of the *dark art*."<sup>3</sup> Two years later, another scientist colleague, John Herschel, described the calotype as "really magical" and quipped that there must be something demoniacal behind it.<sup>4</sup> The popular press picked up on such language, comparing photography to sorcery and necromancy—communication with the dead—and in his notebooks Talbot himself referred to his creations as magic pictures or fairy pictures. The reasons are not hard to imagine. In the 1840s, the photograph appeared as a strange and unheralded kind of picture, and at the time of its introduction no one fully understood the chemical science that made it possible. A clear solution of silver nitrate was applied to a treated surface, exposed to light, and a darkened image spontaneously appeared there. That is to say, a noble metal (silver) was reduced—transmuted—into something new, a permanent picture. Daguerre's process, made from mercury on silver plates, might well have appeared akin to the Diana's Tree, the branch-like and seemingly living dendritic growth from a mercury solution of silver crystals, described in alchemy texts. Talbot and Brewster, though well trained in the modern approach and vocal advocates for its prospects, nonetheless shared a sense of wonder and awe before Creation, and reached into the immediate past to find linguistic figures to express it. This affective valence can be felt clearly in Talbot's first description of his invention, in 1839, to the Royal Society: the phenomenon "appears to me to partake of the character of the *marvelous*, almost as much as any fact which physical investigation has yet brought to our knowledge. The most transitory of things, a shadow, the proverbial emblem of all that is fleeting and momentary, may be fettered by the spells of our 'natural magic' and may be fixed for ever in the position which it seemed only destined for a single instant to occupy."<sup>5</sup>

By invoking "natural magic," Talbot points obliquely to those Renaissance authors—Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa and Giambattista della Porta, for instance—who proffered books of alchemy and natural philosophy in the esoteric mode, with chapters on the four elements, divination, the influence of the moon and planets, metallurgy, sorcery, magnetism, and other topics intermixed. Both were faithful Christians who believed all genuine marvels to be the handiwork of the Creator, but they ran afoul of the Inquisition, as the Catholic Church claimed

exclusive authority to consider the miraculous, including anything resembling magic. Talbot points more directly to his friend Brewster, who seven years earlier published a book titled *Letters on Natural Magic*. Like its prototypes, Brewster's volume ranged over a great variety of topics and was pitched at a popular audience. But its unifying theme went counter to theirs: he wanted to supply rational explanations for effects that seemed mysterious to the uneducated, such as mirages, ventriloquism, and apparitions. Though "modern" in his Enlightened desire to banish unreason and superstition, Brewster's motives were specifically political and theological. He points out how ancient rulers and priests used conjuring and illusions to prey on the credulity of the people, and religion to maintain power, and notes how

the same delusions were practiced after the establishment of Christianity, and even the Catholic sanctuary was often the seat of these unhallowed machinations. Nor was it merely the low and cunning priest who thus sought to extort money and respect from the most ignorant of his flock; bishops and pontiffs themselves wielded the magician's wand over the diadems of kings and emperors; and, by the pretended exhibition of supernatural power, made the mightiest potentates of Europe tremble on their thrones.<sup>6</sup>

Scotland, whose educational system and literacy rates were the envy of Europe in the eighteenth century, witnessed that progress decline in the 1830s, as funding cuts and the demand for industrial labor took their toll. In Brewster's view, this trend threatened public morality and opened up the Scottish people to the "spiritual despotism" that follows when individuals cannot think—or believe—for themselves.

It is unlikely that the period viewer of Hill and Adamson's Greyfriars scene would have considered its imagery in such portentous terms. Its opposition of the temporal and the sacred is subtle, universalizing, and elegiacally Romantic: a young couple of the present haunts a storied landscape of the past. It is impossible to fully recover what its makers saw in it, and how it may have related to the history unfolding around them at that moment. But we today can feel the magic of being transported back to their world and, even now, some of the same wonderment that greeted Talbot's sublime invention in the 1840s.

- 1 Sir David Brewster, letter to William Henry Fox Talbot dated July 3, 1843, National Media Museum, Bradford, England, document number 4839.
- 2 William Henry Fox Talbot, "Introductory Remarks," in *The Pencil of Nature* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1844–1846), n.p.
- 3 Brewster, letter to Talbot dated February 12, 1839, National Media Museum, Bradford, England, document number 3804.
- 4 John Herschel, letter to William Henry Fox Talbot dated March 16, 1841, National Media Museum, Bradford, England, document number 4213.
- 5 Henry Fox Talbot, "Some Account of the Art of Photogenic Drawing" (London: Taylor, 1839); reproduced in *Photography: Essays & Images*, ed. Beaumont Newhall (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1980), 25.
- 6 David Brewster, *Letters on Natural Magic* (London: Samuel Murray, 1832), 60.

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# Cowan and the Cullet

## A Tale of Contemporary Alchemy

Elizabeth A. Williams

The beat-up barrel had sat behind the glass furnace in the studio for years. Its contents had been deemed useless, unceremoniously shoved to the periphery, and forgotten. But for a graduate student with funds for supplies running low at the end of the semester, might the barrel hold the solution to the MFA thesis project whose deadline was looming large? It was full of amputated heads of baby chicks, dismembered parts of bunny rabbits, and assorted jagged shards, all made of bright pink glass. The discovery was priceless.

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76

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FIG. 1

Amber Cowan

American, b. 1981

*Whole Milk Wash Basin in Colony Harvest* (detail), 2013

Glass

49 × 49 × 14 cm. (19 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 19 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 5 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in.)

Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2015.44

These trashed Easter candy dishes made by the Fenton Art Glass Company of Williamstown, West Virginia, had somehow made their way to the Ceramics and Glass Department of the Tyler School of Art at

Temple University, where they became artist Amber Cowan’s unlikely source of invention, or reinvention. A small sticker still attached to the barrel bore the name Gabbert Cullet, leading Cowan to another location in Williamstown that was a motherlode of industrial glass, spanning the color spectrum. Each trip Cowan has made to the site from her home in Philadelphia has tended to result in a haul of around 500 pounds of glass.

Rescued from what Cowan calls the “dustbins of America,” waste glass is the artist’s current medium of choice. What was once manufactured out of great demand and placed with pride on America’s dining tables has now been reduced to broken fragments and useless lumps, heedlessly thrown into massive mounds and sold for a mere dollar a pound. Drawing on the alchemical powers of the artist and her own technological mastery of process, Cowan transforms this cast-off jumble of rubbish into a considered and refined amalgamation, honoring the material’s origins and forming its future. Whether one defines Cowan’s use of recyclable materials as environmentally conscious sustainable design or an incredibly thrifty sourcing of materials, her work in waste glass aptly serves both endeavors. The refuse glass Cowan works from is commonly referred to as cullet, most likely—and appropriately—from the French *collet* (little collar or neck), referring to the collar of glass left on the blowing iron after a piece is made, which is typically melted down and reused. The locations at which this refuse is gathered and resold are havens of glass in every hue imaginable [Figs. 2 and 3].

A perusal of Gabbert’s offerings yields more than forty-five varieties of glass, many retaining historical names such as Yellow Burmese Opaque and Case Cranberry. Cowan has been tempted by swirled latte-colored Chocolate glass and brilliant Sky Blue glass, and she uses both of these historic glass types in

FIGS. 2 and 3

The artist has made friends with Delbert, who for more than fifty years has sorted glass at Gabbert Cullet, corralling the glass yard’s potential chaos into organized, color-coded mountains

Amber Cowan standing on a pile of milk glass at Gabbert Cullet. Photos courtesy the artist



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her work, but her next major foray into cullet glass after the pink candy dishes was milk glass, which found its way into some of her thesis-show works and continues to be a mainstay of her oeuvre.

Cowan's *Whole Milk Wash Basin in Colony Harvest* [Figs. 1 and 4], recently acquired by the RISD Museum, is made from milk glass, specifically a very popular line of milk glass, *Colony Harvest*, which was produced from the 1950s into the 1970s by the Indiana Glass Company, a subsidiary of Lancaster Colony Corporation.

Milk glass, traceable back to the ancient Romans, was widely produced in Venice by the end of the fifteenth century. At this time, Italian glassmakers and ceramicists were desperately competing to fuse a combination of elements into what might pass as porcelain, that highly desirable ceramic produced in the East but still out of the technological

grasp of the Western world.<sup>1</sup> Although different approaches were taken, they looked to tin oxide to replicate the whiteness of porcelain. In ceramics, tin oxide was added to the glaze that provides the white background for *maiolica*; with glass, the addition of tin resulted in Venetian milk glass, known as *lattimo* (derived from latte, or milk) or *vetro porcellano* (porcelain glass). In the eighteenth century, when porcelain was

FIG. 4

Amber Cowan  
 American, b. 1981  
*Whole Milk Wash Basin in Colony Harvest*, 2013  
 Glass  
 49 × 49 × 14 cm. (19 5/16 × 19 5/16 × 5 1/2 in.)  
 Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2015.44



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considered so precious in Europe that it was called white gold, the economical alternative of milk glass spurred the production of colorfully enameled wares in France (*verre de lait* or *blanc de lait*), England, and Germany (*milchglas* or *porcellein-glas*). Examples in the RISD Museum's collections feature a range of decorative schemes, from neoclassical motifs and hunt scenes to figural portraits and Asian-inspired floral patterns [Fig 5]. Whereas European glassmakers were ultimately unsuccessful in reproducing true porcelain, milk glass gained a following and was used for making functional wares through the twentieth century, by which time it was widely collected on its own visual accord.

Milk glass took a different form in America, once again as an economical alternative, but this time as a substitute for the more luxurious cut glass. The addition of lead makes glass more brilliant and easier to cut, and cutting became a more popular form of glass decoration than engraving in the nineteenth century. Deep V-cuts formed glittering patterns of interlocking stars, fans, and rosettes. The cut-glass style was very popular, but it was also time-consuming and costly, which prompted the rise of a less expensive alternative technique: pressed glass, a mechanized version of mold-blown glass. The Egyptians began blowing glass into molds in the second century, but it was not until the early nineteenth century that pressed glass was further developed and refined. Because

a mechanized plunger was more effective than human breath in forcing molten glass into a mold, pressed-glass molds could create exceptionally intricate, complex patterns [Fig. 6].

By the mid-1800s, milk glass was available to the masses, a cheap commodity born in the era of industrialization. The once highly valued medium had become commonplace, and as the new century turned, pressed-glass production soared to new heights with the development of a completely mechanized manufacturing process that was eagerly employed by companies popping up all over the country.

Capitalizing on the trend were James Beatty and George Brady of Dunkirk, Indiana, where manufactories, fueled by the abundant natural-gas discovered in the area and serviced by ample railroad lines, were thriving.<sup>2</sup> The Beatty-Brady Glass Company set down stakes in 1896, but was soon subsumed by the National Glass Company, along with eighteen other businesses, to form a glass conglomerate. The vacillations of American industry reached a nadir when stocks plummeted nearly fifty percent during the Panic of 1907, causing National to declare bankruptcy. The Dunkirk facility soon rose from the dust, reincarnated as the Indiana Glass Company, which would exist in various forms for nearly a century.

By the 1920s, the Indiana Glass Company had become a major player in the nation's glass market, supplying not only tableware to America's dining rooms but also products to commercial entities including taverns,

tearooms, restaurants, soda-fountain shops, and hospitals. The host of today's websites selling vintage tableware and decorative wares to collectors attests to the variety of examples made by Indiana Glass. Their diverse market share maintained the company's stability in the 1930s—Indiana is credited with the creation of the first lines of what is known as Depression glass—and through the end of World War II, when the proliferation of restaurants and diners reignited glass production.

The fickle and cyclical nature of style brought milk glass to the forefront once again in the 1950s,

FIG. 5

British  
Cup and Saucer, 1750–1800  
Glass with enamels  
Height (cup): 4.3 cm. (1 $\frac{1}{16}$  in.)  
Gift of Mrs. Herbert W. Clark and  
Mrs. William A.H. Comstock 25.132

FIG. 6

New England Glass Company  
American, active 1818–1888  
Salt, ca. 1840–1850  
Pressed glass  
4.9 × 5.8 cm. (1 $\frac{15}{16}$  × 2 $\frac{5}{16}$  in.)  
Gift of Mrs. H. Martin Brown 33.127



when the company dug into their archives, giving new life to Pattern #619, *Indiana Custard*, which had been pushed aside since the 1930s to accommodate new trends. True to its name, the original glass was a creamy rich custard color, but the new and improved version was milk white, and renamed *Orange Blossom*. As sales slumped again due to the debut of plastic tableware as an alternative to glass, a fortuitous market twist triggered a very successful second line of milk glass made at the Dunkirk plant.

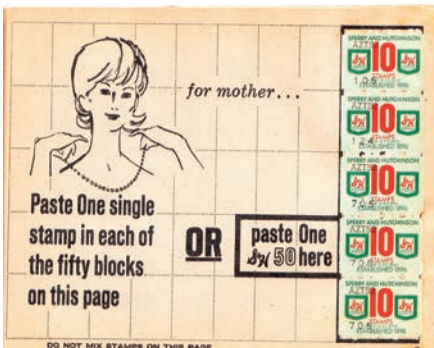
The Indiana Glass Company was saved from threat of bankruptcy in 1957, when it was purchased by the Lancaster Glass Company, who merged it with its other holdings to form the Lancaster Colony Corporation in 1962. The addition to the company's name came from Colony Glass, one of Lancaster's subsidiaries and the creator of *Colony Harvest*, a milk-glass pattern decorated with grapevines. Colony Glass could not keep up with the demand of this popular line, so many of

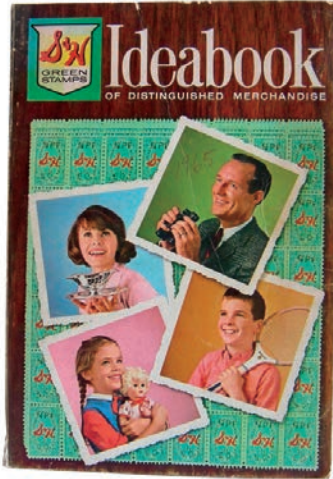
the molds were sent to the Indiana Glass facility to boost production. An array of mold forms designed in the 1940s turned out vast quantities of a full dinnerware line, canister sets, punch-bowl sets, snack sets, pitchers, various-sized vases, cake plates, salt and pepper sets, cups and saucers, goblets, tumblers in three sizes, covered and uncovered serving bowls, cereal bowls, candle holders, covered butter dishes, sugar and cream sets, spooners, sherbet sets, compotes, tiered servers, and candy boxes. Both Indiana and Colony manufactured the goods, but all items continued to be marketed and sold under the Colony name.

Much of the demand for *Colony Harvest* glass was generated by S&H Green Stamps, first conceived by Thomas Sperry and Shelley Byron Hutchinson in 1896. An American invention, trading stamps encouraged customers to pay in cash—the only way to earn stamps—and to establish and maintain loyalty to specific merchants.<sup>3</sup> For each dollar spent, shoppers were given a stamp in denominations of one, ten, and fifty points. The consumer then carefully adhered their stamps to the pages of Quick Saver books, with each completed book totaling twelve hundred points [Fig. 7].

The program first flourished on novelty, then interest waned until after WWII, when retailers looked to trading stamps to drive customers away from their com-

FIG.7  
Pages from a 1975 S&H Quick Saver book





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FIG. 8  
S&H Ideabook, with a  
page advertising a nine-piece  
milk-glass set

petitors and into their stores, where, according to the S&H motto, the average family could “Save a Little. Live a Little.” By the company’s mid-1960s zenith, more Green Stamps were printed than U.S. postal stamps, and most gas stations and supermarkets doled out stamps to eager collectors. A 1962 S&H Green Stamp advertisement featured a grocer claiming that husband shoppers plead, “My wife will shoot me if I go home without.”

Families gathered around the kitchen table, dutifully licking stamps to fill books redeemable at some 800 nationwide freestanding redemption centers. The phenomenon found its way into popular culture, including movies, print, and television. Who can forget the *Brady Bunch* episode pitting Marcia, Jan, and Cindy against Greg, Peter, and Bobby as to how to redeem the family’s treasure-trove of stamps from the failing fictitious Checker Corporation? The girls wanted a sewing machine, the boys wanted a rowboat, neither side had enough stamps, and the company was closing. A competition deemed the girls the winners, but compromise prevailed as they returned with a portable color TV set, a fairly cutting-edge possession for 1970.

Artist Amber Cowan recalls that when visited her grandmother in the late 1980s, large bags of S&H Green Stamps awaited her, ready to be affixed into Quick Saver Books that turned the seemingly interminable collection phase into unbridled purchasing power for what the company called “life’s extra pleasures.” An expansive range of merchandise could be had in exchange for the correct number of Green Stamps marked with a red S&H logo and the point amount. The company’s Ideabooks illustrate the equivalent of a pre-

Amazon.com bonanza, featuring page after page of must-have merchandise, including a *Colony Harvest* nine-piece beverage set for two and a half books. For three thousand points in gummy paper stamps, the avid collector could become the proud owner of one sixty-five-ounce ice-lipped jug and eight fourteen-ounce glasses, the set described as “beautiful milk glass in a grape and leaf design [Fig. 8].”

Cowan’s introduction to *Colony Harvest* glassware occurred while she was teaching at Salem Community College’s Samuel H. Jones Glass Education Center. A student who learned of Cowan’s use of discarded glass, specifically milk glass, shared with Cowan many pieces of glassware that had been collected over the years by family. During one visit, she gave

Cowan ten *Colony Harvest* snack sets, which typically had been sold as eight-piece sets comprising four plates with raised rings to hold the four cups [Fig. 9]. In Cowan's words, "The particular richness in the *Colony Harvest* white is so seductive in its depth that it was an undeniable choice for second-life redemption."

Tableware manufacturers marketed the first snack sets in the 1920s, in response to the revival of card playing. Women's clubs—which mirrored the emergence of men's clubs after the Civil War and focused on gardening, literary interests, and card playing—proliferated and remained popular through the 1970s.<sup>4</sup> These gatherings, as well as ladies' luncheons and teas, were the impetus for the development of specialty tableware on which to serve light fare while accommodating the event's activities. Small versions of snack sets compactly perched on the edge of card tables, and slightly larger versions held creatively shaped finger sandwiches, sweets, and a beverage, which often was punch served from a pressed-glass punch set. Guests could stand to socialize, adeptly holding both the plate and cup with one hand and eating or drinking with the other. Although not deemed proper for formal dinners, snack sets made from colorful inexpensive glass allowed the stylish hostess not only

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economical novelty, but also encouraged the more daring entertainment schemes that came to be associated with ladies' social occasions. The low cost freed the middle-class housewife from the same mundane tableware day in, day out, and afforded her the ability to entertain in the latest fashion, thus serving as an early example of throw-away consumer culture.

Indiana Glass manufactured the *Colony Harvest* through the late 1970s, about the time S&H Green Stamps' popularity began to wane. *Harvest* molds were then put into the service of producing carnival glass, an inexpensive iridized glass that debuted at the turn of the twentieth century and was frequently given as prizes at carnivals. Carnival glass was inspired by the fine art glass blown by Tiffany Studios, and was first made by Fenton Art Glass Company in 1907 as *Iridill*. Although Fenton is still in business, the Lancaster Colony Corporation stopped production at the Indiana Glass Company in 2002, moving the equipment to an Oklahoma plant. In 2008, this plant closed, and Lancaster ceased producing glass altogether.

The numerous snack sets that were once considered avant-garde, along with plentiful numbers of many other pieces of American pressed glass, now pour into secondary-market outlets including cullets, thrift stores, and flea markets. The artist notes, "Because of its prevalence in American homes due to its availability as a reward item, the *Colony Harvest* wares pattern is a very common and overlooked item in today's secondhand market. The pattern is flooding thrift-store shelves as subsequent generations are replacing it with more contemporary tableware."

Cowan found that the *Harvest* glass not only appealed to her aesthetically but it also responded well to the technical process of her work, which relies not on alchemical sleight of hand or acts of visual trickery but on skill and a sound understanding of the chemistry of glass. Gabbert Cullet's available glass inventory includes each glass type's COE rating, or coefficient of expansion, a measure of how much that material will expand for each degree of temperature increase. In short, although cullet or thrift-store glass may be a cost-conscious source of material, it cannot simply be mixed, melted down, and repurposed without careful consideration. Each glass has a specific COE rating and cannot be combined with a glass of another rating; in fact, even glasses with the same rating do not always mix well together without severe cracking.

To begin a piece made from vintage glass, Cowan heats the glass she will use for the day in a kiln to around 1000 degrees Fahrenheit, pulling out lumps of glass with a pair of hemostats, a scissor-shaped medical instrument typically used to prevent the flow of blood from an

FIG. 9  
An eight-piece *Colony Harvest* snack set  
with its original box

open vessel. She then creates individual forms, often drawn from nature: leaves, feathers, abstract spirals, spikes, and flowers. Each piece is made individually and shaped by flameworking, or heating the glass with a handheld torch. Bonsai shears, for example, transform the warm glass into rippling feathers. The artist amasses a group of these individual naturalistic parts over the course of weeks and sometimes months before transforming them into one whole.

The RISD Museum's *Whole Milk Wash Basin in Colony Harvest* is an example of Cowan's organic process of assemblage, in particular the assemblage of *Harvest* snack-set parts. The work grew and naturally developed as Cowan arranged each component, using a large ceramic mold for the bowl-shaped form, over a few days. On completing this phase, the mold and assemblage were put back into the kiln at approximately 1320 degrees Fahrenheit, causing the glass elements to gently fuse together without pancaking; much trial-and-error testing was conducted by Cowan to bring this penultimate phase to successful fruition. Finally, the glass was sandblasted, giving the surface a soft, velvety finish, much like bisque porcelain.

In using *Colony Harvest* glass in her work, Amber Cowan has become interested in its history, compelling her to consider not only the origin of this material, but also to retain fragments of its original form in her pieces. The artist relates her transformative approach: "I reconstruct this glass and alter its original state while keeping intact the original vintage feeling. I wish to reference the history of the pressed-glass industry and bring into focus the feeling of its past glory and forlorn future." A close look at *Basin* reveals the looped handle of a *Colony Harvest* snack-set cup [Fig. 1], including the vestige of the grape-leaf decoration, realizing Cowan's intent to achieve the pattern's "futuristic reincarnation into its true luxury calling."

**1** For a discussion of milk glass, see Gordon Campbell, ed., *The Grove Encyclopedia of Decorative Arts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 514; and Harold Newman, *An Illustrated Dictionary of Glass* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), 180, 198, and 221.

**2** The author wishes to thank Bob Rawlings, curator of the Glass Museum in Dunkirk, Indiana. Rawlings was an employee of the Indiana Glass Company for twenty-eight years, leaving as vice president of manufacturing. Also, for information on the Indiana Glass Company and images of its production, see Craig Schenning, *A Century of Indiana Glass* (Atlglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, Ltd., 2005).

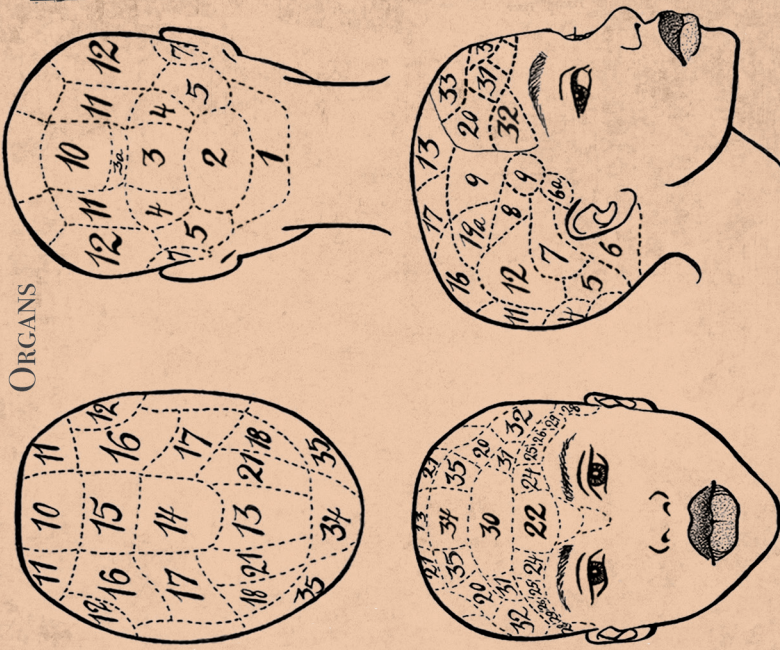
**3** For information on S&H Green Stamps, see Michelle Slatalla, "Clicks Not Licks. As Green Stamps Go Digital," *New York Times*, March 9, 2009.

**4** For information on the development and use of snack sets, see Charles Veneble, et al., *China and Glass in America 1880–1980: From Tabletop to TV Tray* (New York: Dallas Museum of Art in association with Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2000), 39–56.



FIG. 144

NAMES, NUMBERS AND THE LOCATIONS OF THE ORGANS



- 1. CLARITY 2. CONFIDENCE 3. STRENGTH 4. ENDURANCE 5. LOVE 6. FEARLESSNESS
- 7. SELF ESTEEM 8. ASSERTION 9. PASSION 10. AMBITION 11. COURAGE 12. CREATIVITY
- 13. ENTHUSIASM 14. DETERMINATION 15. EFFICIENCY 16. INTELLIGENCE 17. POWER
- 18. FAITH 19. PATIENCE 20. STEEL 21. SINCERITY 22. HONOR 23. GENTLENESS
- 24. PERCEPTION 25. RESILIENCE 26. INNOVATION 27. INDEPENDANCE 28. CANDOR
- 29. DISCERNMENT 30. PERSEVERANCE 31. REASON 32. ADAPTABILITY 33. BRAVERY
- 34. INTEGRITY 35. ACCURACY

"KNOW THYSELF"

PHRENOLOGICAL MAP OF BLACK EXCELLENCE



‡SPECIALLY DEVOTED TO THE "SCIENCE OF MAN" ‡  
 CONTAINS PHRENOLOGY AND PHYSIOGNOMY WITH ALL  
 THE SIGNS OF CHARACTER AND HOW TO READ THEM;  
 ETHNOLOGY OF THE NATURAL HISTORY OF BLACKNESS  
 AND ALL ITS RELATIONS.



FIG. 146

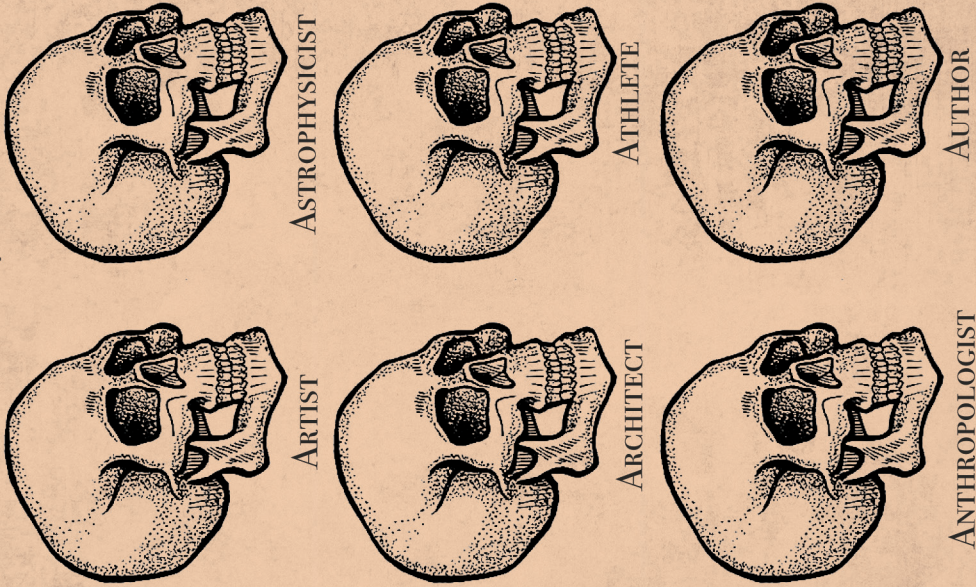


FIG. 145

STAGES OF WOKENESS

# Portfolio

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objects are identified on page 74

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BCJ 700A

Manual



BCJ 700 B

Lament (J.M.W. Turner 1802, British School)

J.M.W. Turner





















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Issue—7









# Damaged Good

Dominic Molon

In 1992, *Saturday Night Live* ran a fake advertisement for a FedEx-type company, Jiffy Express, whose business model was predicated upon taking responsibility for parcels that the sender deliberately sent late—in essence, accepting blame for their clients’ carelessness or neglect. The ad celebrated the company’s ability to “stain [a package], soil it, [and] recreate delivery mishaps and traumas,” thereby sustaining the ruse that the package was actually sent on time yet waylaid due to the express company’s renegeing on the faith put in them to transport it safely and punctually. The ingenuity of the fake spot—whose cheeky slogan was “If it has to be there tomorrow, call the other

guys, but if it had to be there three weeks ago, call us”—variably owed much to the reversal of our expectations that shipping companies deliver things responsibly. Yet it also worked because of our private, collective desire for such an improbable service really to exist,

FIGS. 1 and 4 (detail)

Walead Beshty

American, b. 1976

24-inch Copper (FedEx® Large Kraft Box ©2008 FEDEX 330510 REV 6/08 GP), Standard Overnight, Los Angeles–New York trk#798442758011, March 3–4, 2010, Standard Overnight, New York–Los Angeles trk#793338062474, March 9–10, 2010, International Priority, Los Angeles–Malmö trk#794399622166, February 7–9, 2011, International Priority, Malmö–Mostolés trk#871976834195, June 10–13, 2011, International Priority, Mostolés–Los Angeles trk#797697838522, November 3–7, 2011, Express Saver, Los Angeles–Long Island City trk#648262697493, October 5–8, 2015, Priority Overnight, New York–Providence trk#777078315465, August 25–26, 2016, (2010–present), 2010–present

Copper with accrued shipping labels

61 × 61 × 61 cm. (24 × 24 × 24 in.)

Gift of David Hoberman 2015.125

© Walead Beshty

thus absolving us of occasional lapses of accountability, and the shared disappointment of having packages arrive either late or extremely worse for wear. This latter notion plays on the frankly unknowable degree of care in handling that the third parties to whom we have entrusted objects of value to both sender and receiver will or will not provide. We voluntarily engage in an act of faith of sorts as part of this process, choosing the convenience of allowing others to move “valued” things from one place to another over the safe, knowable, but utterly impractical prospect of doing it ourselves.

Since 2007, Walead Beshty has developed sculptural works that conform to the structure of the variously sized boxes used by the American express-shipping company FedEx. Beshty then requires any further shipments of his sculptures to be conducted via FedEx, allowing them to take on a level of damaged intentionality related to, but quite different from, the fabricated distressing of the fictional Jiffy Express. They range from glass forms sized to the interior dimensions of the boxes that, when sent without protective packing materials (aside from the box) via Fed Ex, experience a predictable amount of damage that determine the outcome of the work [Fig. 2], to more durable copper works scaled to the size of boxes and sent as-is to accrue a patina of shipping manifests, dents, and fingerprint smears with each subsequent transport. The RISD Museum’s sculpture, *24-inch Copper (FedEx® Large Kraft Box ©2008 FEDEX 330510 REV 6/08 GP), Standard Overnight, Los Angeles–New York trk#798442758011, March 3–4, 2010, Standard Overnight, New York–Los Angeles trk#793338062474, March 9–10, 2010, International Priority, Los Angeles–Malmö trk#794399622166, February 7–9, 2011, International Priority, Malmö–Mostolés trk#871976834195, June 10–13, 2011, International Priority, Mostolés–Los Angeles trk#797697838522, November 3–7, 2011, Express Saver, Los Angeles–Long Island City trk#648262697493, October 5–8, 2015, Priority Overnight, New York–Providence trk#777078315465, August 25–26, 2016, (2010–present)* [Fig. 1], is characteristic of this latter body of work, and possesses the tell-tale blemishes of its numerous shipments. Beshty’s process of deliberately setting up the compromised integrity of non-descript objects began on a trip to photograph the headquarters of an Iraqi diplomatic mission to the former German Democratic Republic in Berlin, when he realized that his unexposed film had passed through airport security’s x-ray machines. After using the film for the photographs, he cultivated further “accidents” by sending it back though the same machines on his return trip to the United States, resulting in “unpredictable, coruscating



2

bands of color seemingly overlaying the drab interior shots.”[Fig. 3]<sup>1</sup> He has explained his expansion of the project from the pictorial into a sculptural dimension as having been motivated by his

own traffic and travel as an artist . . . [the] invisible part of the job, this of movement from place to place, [and from there] thinking about the movement of art objects [with] FedEx being a kind of “black box,” something that you assume . . . you drop something off and it just sort of appears somewhere else. There’s all this labor and . . . mechanics that are going on in between those two points and how one could use all of that labor, not just to make something appear in another place but to have that be the generative process of the work.<sup>2</sup>

FIG. 2  
Installation view,  
*Walead Beshty: Legibility on Color  
Backgrounds*, 2009  
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture  
Garden, Washington, DC  
Photo by James Ewing

This approach not only enabled unanticipated interventions to manifest themselves directly and physically, but also positioned them within the rich art-historical legacies of both process-based object-making and the development of “finished” works through the engagement of chance.<sup>3</sup>

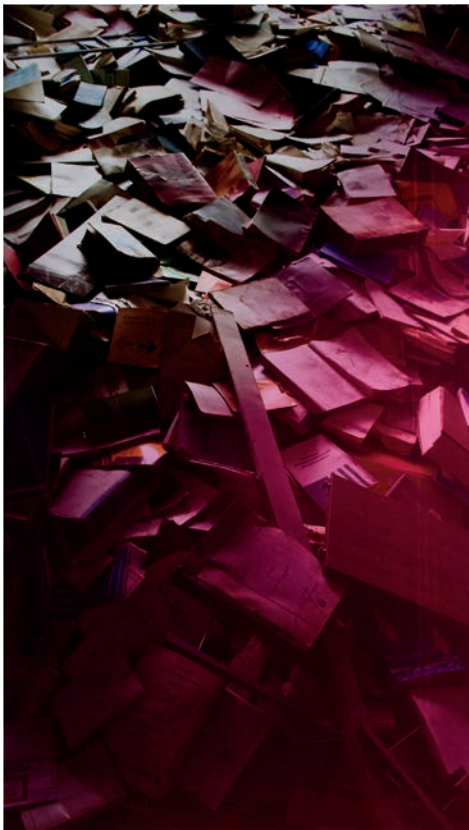
With every smudge, dink, dent, and indifferently placed adhesive label that blemishes its surface, the work becomes a museum registrar's or conservator's dream or nightmare. On the one hand, it confounds their professional impulses to maintain the integrity of the object and consigns them to a firsthand observation of the work's gradual self-destruction, while it also absolves them of any "damages" that the object endures over time. Ironically, from a certain perspective, the more wear and tear the RISD Museum's sculpture might sustain from being loaned to exhibitions, the more "valuable" it becomes in both critical

and fiduciary terms. Increased exposure of this kind also gradually makes it an arguably more interesting *material* object, with every new stop on its itinerary physically adding adhesive labels and figuratively building its cachet as an internationally travelled and appreciated work. (This is an elevated take, of sorts, on the hokey old cartoon prop of the suitcase covered in destination stickers to convey a sense of its carrier's itinerant existence.)

In this sense, one might consider Beshty's work in relationship to a child's transitional object, defined by psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott as "designat[ing] the intermediate area of experience, between the thumb and the teddy bear, . . . between primary awareness of indebtedness and the acknowledgement of indebtedness."<sup>4</sup> In other words, a transitional object is usually a toy or blanket that serves as a reassuring substitute for the secure intimacy of the parent. Because of its necessity and importance to the child, this object typically sustains extensive wear and tear, with its damaged appearance belying its surpassing significance in the early life of an individual. From this perspective, the *worst* fate any of Beshty's FedEx box works could hope for is to remain untouched and hermetically sealed in storage, a sure reflection of its relative *unimportance* as a work of art. And while a museum conservator or registrar might consider the protective confines of an airtight climate-controlled space the most ideal place for an art object to be kept, this work defies that logic by making its exposure to every element—human, chemical, atmospheric, or otherwise—a virtue of sorts, rather than a vice.

FIG. 3

Walead Beshty  
*Travel Picture Rose [Tschairowskistrasse 17 in multiple exposures\* (LAXFRATHF/TLCPHSEALAX) March 27–April 3, 2006]\*Contax G-2, L-3 Communications eXaminer 3DX 6000, and InVision Technologies CTX 5000, 2006/2008*  
 Chromogenic print  
 50 × 88 ½ in.  
 Photo by Richard Ivey



Beshty's FedEx sculptures curiously suggest the obverse of one of the most celebrated works of art in literary fiction—in Oscar Wilde's 1890 novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the titular painting (visually manifests the negative character traits and behaviors (including aging) of its real-life subject, who, conversely, becomes ever more physically beautiful. The RISD Museum's work and Beshty's others in this idiom are conceived and prepared to indexically wear their own life experiences on the surface, rather than serve as a surrogate representation of more intangible ideas or experiences of their ostensible creator (or perhaps "originator" is the more appropriate term).<sup>5</sup> And unlike more traditional works of art whose care and preservation is painstakingly maintained in order to sustain a sense of timelessness, these works truly exist in an eternal present, their appearance changing anew with each successive handling and presentation. The works thus become aged and reborn at one and the same time. When the work travels to its next exhibition site via FedEx, the title will be automatically updated to reflect the date of said shipment. Presentation as part of a museum's collection—as may be the case at the RISD Museum, for example—has the effect of suspending the work in time with its movement from storage to the galleries conducted "in-house," as it were, and the title reflecting the sculpture's last shipment.

Given Beshty's attention to minute details in the titling of these works, his specific use of the FedEx brand's packaging to determine the scale of the objects, and, presumably, the initial and subsequent shipping methods prompt consideration of how the sculptures relate to and evoke this particular and not historically insignificant form of human interaction and exchange. The company began as Federal Express in 1971 and grew out of founder Fred Smith's studies at Yale University regarding the impact and cost of time in an increasingly technologized society. FedEx innovatively streamlined the previously inefficient process by which parcels required different companies to handle the various stages of pick-up and delivery, and later engaged computer technology to "track" shipments in real time. As a matter of course, the company developed its own distinctively designed and branded packaging, the specific shapes and dimensions of which became the basis of Beshty's forms. His own research into the dynamics of these boxes revealed that "FedEx owns the rights to the logo and the design of the box but they also own the right to that volume of space. [Other express-mail companies such as] DHL [or] UPS can't produce a box of the same dimension . . . because there's something called an SSCC code, which is independent of the design of the box, and which is a kind of proprietary code for that volume of space. So FedEx not only owns the design of the box, but . . . also owns this volume [of











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are “failed” by their containers) or the box’s necessary durability (as in the copper cubes), and join Marclay’s record in a reflection on the fragility and vulnerability of things in the world and their need for protection, in spite their “willing” invitation of incident and damage.

It is critical to recall that the RISD Museum’s and Beshty’s other FedEx box sculptures emanate from a providential photographic accident (the exposure of film in the aforementioned exposure of undeveloped film to airport-security x-rays) and subsequent decisions on the artist’s part reengage that set of circumstances. Photography fundamentally involves a scientific process of different phenomena chemically interacting to produce a visual effect. In addition to the physics involved in the production of dents or dulled and flattened edges, Beshty’s FedEx-related works incorporating copper—as well as his *Copper Surrogates* (2009), which are polished copper tabletops that replace a gallery’s existing workplace surfaces over the course of an exhibition [Fig. 6]—also rely on the chemistry of the oils on the skin of those handling the work interacting with and changing the surface, not to mention any moisture that it should happen to encounter. These “fluid” interactions with a solid base evoke the incorporation of a liquid chemical developer as part of the traditional process of making a photograph. Considered from this perspective, the marks that inevitably accrue on works from the FedEx series take on a pictorially abstract quality, one not dissimilar from Beshty’s more conventionally oriented wall-based works such as *Picture Made by My Hand with the Assistance of Light* (2005) or *Six Color Curl (CMMYYC: Irvine, California, July 17, 2008, Fuji Crystal Archive Type C)* (2009), whose borderline-tautological titles similarly spell out the exact circumstances—

FIG. 6  
Walead Beshty  
Installation view, *Picture Industry*  
(*Goodbye to All That*), 2010  
Regen Projects, Los Angeles  
Photo by Brian Forrest

a performer is instructed not to play their instrument, to allow the piece to comprise the sounds of the environment while it is “performed.” A more object-based sonic correlative is found in Christian Marclay’s *Record Without a Cover* [Fig. 5], which, as its title suggests, is a vinyl long-playing recording by the artist that changes as it is handled, given that it is unprotected. Both Marclay’s and Beshty’s works extend Cage’s invocation of chance or third-party elements as unwitting collaborators into material form. Further, Beshty’s sculptures demonstrate either the limitations of a protective box (as with the glass forms that

process, materials, and date—by which they were made. While the boxes two-dimensional counterparts' more striking visual effects—including their rich colors or complex textural layerings of form—are the *result* of the manipulations of their photographic paper base, the sculptures' most inherently alluring visual component—the copper—must overcome an increasingly dense layer of abrasions and blemishes. Where Beshty's photographic-paper base is enhanced and elevated through the interventions made with it, the metal structure conversely *redeems* the effects of its process.

Returning, ultimately, to the most fascinatingly arbitrary and unpredictable aspect of the work's process—the circumstances of its shipment from one place to the next—one is reminded of the comedic premise of the *Saturday Night Live* delivery-company spoof mentioned earlier. Key to the functioning of the joke in that sketch is the notion that once a package leaves our hands it is presumptively out of sight and out of mind, with anything that happens to it completely unbeknownst to us. By making the physical evidence of their transport visually manifest, sculptures such as *24-inch Copper (FedEx® Large Kraft Box ©2008 FEDEX 330510 REV 6/08 GP), Standard Overnight, Los Angeles–New York trk#798442758011, March 3–4, 2010, Standard Overnight, New York–Los Angeles trk#793338062474, March 9–10, 2010, International Priority, Los Angeles–Malmö trk#7943996 22166, February 7–9, 2011, International Priority, Malmö–Mostolés trk#871 976834195, June 10–13, 2011, International Priority, Mostolés–Los Angeles trk#797697838522, November 3–7, 2011, Express Saver, Los Angeles–Long Island City trk#648262697493, October 5–8, 2015, Priority Overnight, New York–Providence trk#777078315465, August 25–26, 2016* put the details of their delivery very much in our sight and in our mind. As such, they not only function as authentic and indexical records of their various journeys, but also metaphorically evoke more expansive considerations of how time, movement, and human exertion and interaction leave all manner of marks behind.

1 Suzanne Hudson, "Walead Beshty: From Photography," in *Walead Beshty: Natural Histories*, ed. Jacob Fabricius and Ferran Barenblit (Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2014), 11.

2 Walead Beshty, "Conversations with Contemporary Artists" (public lecture, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY, May 26, 2010).

3 A broad range of examples of which might include the Surrealists' Exquisite Corpse drawings, William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin's cut-up literary experiments, the mail art of Fluxus and Ray Johnson, and a range of conceptually based sculpture, from Bruce Nauman's *A Cast of the Space under My Chair* (1965–1968) to Charles Ray's *Ink Box* (1986) to Janine Antoni's *Gnaw* (1992).

4 D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (New York: Basic Books, Inc, 1971), 2.

5 Not directly related to the RISD Museum's *24-inch Copper (FedEx® Large Kraft Box ©2005FEDEX 330510)* but perhaps to other works in the series in private collections, the titling-as-ongoing-record obligation of these works could reveal information the collector might wish to remain secret. For example, if the work were shipped to a storage facility in the state of Delaware, this might reflect its status as one of many valuable assets being sheltered from taxation, thus inserting it, unwittingly, into the increasingly fraught socioeconomic dialogue of American politics.

6 Beshty, "Conversations with Contemporary Artists."

# How To

**Make an Ancient Glass Unguentarium**  
by Diming Stella Zhong



Roman  
Double Cosmetic Jar (Unguentarium),  
late 3rd century–4th century  
Glass  
12.4 × 6.7 cm. (4 7/8 × 2 5/8 in.)  
Gift of Mr. Albert E. Southwick 60.021.26

In an attempt to understand ancient glassblowing techniques, curator Gina Borrromeo and I researched early glass objects in the RISD Museum collection. This curious unguentarium, a popular style of cosmetic container in the Eastern Roman Empire, interested us in particular, and I decided to try recreating it in the studio.

Weathered and semi-transparent, the unguentarium features two divided chambers attached to each other. This vessel could have been made by folding a long tube in half, adhering two separate cylinders, or pinching a single chamber down the middle. We were able to deduce this because glassblowing technologies have not changed fundamentally since the Romans first invented glassblowing about two thousand years ago. The same principle is still practiced around the world: inflate molten glass with a bubble of air, then shape it with specially designed tools. From the handles and decoration, we further see the Roman maker's proficient use of the magical nature of glass, a congealed liquid.

Diming Stella Zhong (BFA 2015, Glass) experimenting in the RISD Glass Department hotshop. Gina Borrromeo, curator of ancient art at the RISD Museum, stands third from the right (1).

In the RISD Glass Department hotshop, I picked up some molten glass by dipping the end of a blowpipe in the furnace, much like dipping honey. The glass appeared to be glowing yellow at this state (2, 3, 4). I was assisted by Christina Poblader (MFA 2015).

Then I blew the glob of hot glass into a bubble and elongated it using gravity (5).

I used a tool known as the jacks (shown here) to constrict the pipe end of the bubble, so that it could be broken off easily later in the process (6).

Nathan Wright (BFA 2016) pressed the bubble with a knife-like tool called a *taglio*. This created the middle crease (7).

Next, I transferred the other end of the partitioned bubble to another rod. This allowed me to work on the openings of the separated chambers. Lastly, the ribbon decoration and the handles were done by attaching strips of hot glass to the unguentarium and forming curves with a pair of tweezers (8).

Through recreating this object, I was inspired by how advanced glassmaking already was thousands of years ago, and I began to grasp how modern techniques were developed. This is the charm of ancient glass: it keeps us exploring and imagining.



1



5



2



6



3



7



4



8

Portfolio

(1)

Isaac Julien  
English, b. 1960  
*Untitled (Déjà -Vu No. 2, Baltimore Series)*, 2007  
From the portfolio Rivington Place  
Inkjet prints with gold leaf on paper  
Each image: 31.2 × 38.8 cm. (12<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 15<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.)  
Walter H. Kimball Fund 2014.35.2a–b  
Courtesy of the artist and Metro Pictures

(2)

Northern Italian  
Apollo, ca. 1540  
Bronze with silver and gilding  
18.7 × 6.4 × 4.5 cm. (7<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> × 1<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.)  
Gift of Mrs. Murray S. Danforth 73.079

(3)

Japanese  
Seven-Column Priest's robe with Court-Dance  
Theme, 1736  
Silk compound weave with supplementary silk  
and gold-leaf paper patterning wefts  
Length: 210.8 cm. (83 in.)  
Bequest of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 55.408

(4)

Arlene Shechet  
American  
*Jar 50130*, 2013  
Meissen porcelain with enamels, glaze, and gilding  
16.5 × 18.8 × 18.8 cm. (6<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> × 7<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 7<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.)  
Mary B. Jackson Fund 2014.49  
© Arlene Shechet

(5)

Rudi Gernreich  
American, b. Vienna, 1922–1985  
Harmon Knitwear, manufacturer  
American, 1960–1974  
Bathing suit, ca. 1965  
Center back length: 68.6 cm. (27 in.)  
Edgar J. Lownes Fund 1998.68.9

(6)

Pierre Roche  
French, 1855–1922  
*Friends of Japanese Art* (Les amis de l'art japonais),  
1911  
Gypsograph on paper  
19.7 × 13.7 cm. (7<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 5<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.)  
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 66.116

(7)

Maria Serena Perrone  
RISD MFA 2006, Printmaking  
American, b. 1979  
*Tristessa: Reappearance of the Vanished Filicudi*,  
2006  
From the series *In the Realm of Reveri*  
Three-panel woodcut with silverpoint and goldpoint  
on frosted Mylar  
Each panel: 121.9 × 60.3 cm. (48 × 23<sup>13</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in.)  
Gabor Peterdi Print Purchase Award 2006.93  
Courtesy of the artist and Cade Tompkins Project

(8)

Roman  
Funerary Wreath, 4th century  
Gold  
Length (right): 26 cm. (10<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.)  
Museum Appropriation Fund 32.007

(9)

American  
Locket, ca. 1800  
Gold, glass, human hair, and pearls  
Length: 4.1 cm. (1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.)  
Gift of Miss Rebecca Steere 26.403

(10)

Linda Connor  
American, b. 1944  
*Window and Thangkas, Ladakh, India*, 1994  
Gold-toned gelatin silver printing-out paper print  
19.7 × 24.1 cm. (7<sup>13</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 9<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in.)  
Mary B. Jackson Fund 2005.34.4  
© Linda Connor

(11)

David Adjaye  
British, b. Tanzania, 1966  
Knoll International, Inc., manufacturer  
American, 1938–present  
*Washington Skeleton Chair*, 2013  
Aluminum with copper plating  
82.6 × 45.7 × 51.4 cm. (32<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> × 18 × 20<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.)  
Gift of Joan H. and David E. Bright in honor of their  
daughter Katherine H. Bright, Brown University Class  
of 2016 2014.32

(12)

W. H. Barstow Studio  
American  
Portrait of a Woman, mid-19th century  
Ambrotype with hand-tinting  
Plate: 6.4 × 5.1 cm. (2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> × 2 in.)  
Museum collection 1988.056



# RISD MUSEUM

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