2016

Unknowable Terrain

Carli A. Holcomb

Virginia Commonwealth University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd

Part of the Metal and Jewelry Arts Commons

© The Author

Downloaded from https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd/4302

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact libcompass@vcu.edu.
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

Carli Anne Holcomb
Bachelor of Fine Arts, University of Wyoming in Laramie Wyoming, 2013

Director: SUSIE GANCH, PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT CRAFT AND MATERIAL STUDIES

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia
May 2016
I am endlessly grateful to those who have shared in this experience with me. To the highs, and the lows, and all that exists between.

To my parents Diana and Steve Holcomb, the two of you truly are my north star. To my sister Callie Frazier for being my constant, and my amazing family, without each of you my world would be mundane.

I would especially like to thank Susie Ganch for taking a risk with me, and for all you have given. My life was altered the moment you placed your work on my arm. Since that moment you have been one of the most powerful forces in my life. Your unwavering support gave me the courage to brave uncertainty, celebrate my own story, and embrace my goals.

In addition I want to thank Leah Hardy for making me believe again, and for nurturing the best part of who I am. To Blair Clemo for your passion, insight, and wisdom. Conversations with you have been some of the most rewarding parts of this experience. To Sarah Nance for stirring my sense of awe, to Bohyun Yoon for your shared excitement, and to Ben Jordan for your unwavering friendship.

And lastly to my champions, Heath Matysek-Snyder, Heather McCalla, Jason Hackett, Susan Iverson, Kathleen Kennedy, Morgan Babic, Niely Chen, Paul Junod, Kate Lovelace, Mark Ritchie, Lucy Derickson, Kelley Morrison, Alicia Dietz, Anessa Jones, Jeremy Zietz, Elizabeth Theriault, Leigh Suggs, Hillary Waters, Victoria Ahmadizadeh, Stephen Nunes, and many more. Without each of you I would not have been brave enough to seek the unknowable, whatever it may be.
Table of Contents

Acknowledgements........................................................................................................ii
Table of Contents...........................................................................................................iii, iv
List of Figures................................................................................................................v
Abstract..........................................................................................................................vii

Chapters

Part I The Chase

The Chase......................................................................................................................1

Part II Beneath

Beneath.......................................................................................................................2

Part III This Ground Is Not Below You

The Source....................................................................................................................7

This Ground Is Not Below You No. 3.................................................................13

Part IV The Infinity of Tiny Coincidences

Once More..................................................................................................................19

Amalgamate...............................................................................................................22

Constellate................................................................................................................26

Part V Unknowable Terrain

Unknowable Terrain..................................................................................................31

Entangled.................................................................................................................38

Crystallized..............................................................................................................41

Above......................................................................................................................46

Part VI In Conclusion
# List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1: Sanchi Stupa</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2: Beneath</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3: Beneath</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4: Beneath</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5: Beneath</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6: Jack Hills Zircon</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7: The Source</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8: The Source</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 9: The Source</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 10: This Ground Is Not Below You No. 3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 11: This Ground Is Not Below You No. 3</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 12: Once More</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 13: Once More</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 14: Amalgamate</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 15: Amalgamate</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 16: Constellate</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 17: Constellate</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 18: Constellate</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 19: Unknowable Terrain</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 20: Unknowable Terrain</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 21: Unknowable Terrain ................................................................. 35
Figure 22: Unknowable Terrain ................................................................. 36
Figure 23: Unknowable Terrain ................................................................. 37
Figure 24: Entangled ............................................................................. 39
Figure 25: Entangled ............................................................................. 40
Figure 26: Crystallized ................................................................. 43
Figure 27: Crystallized ................................................................. 44
Figure 28: Crystallized ................................................................. 45
Figure 29: Above ............................................................................. 47
Figure 30: Above ............................................................................. 48
ABSTRACT
UNKNOWABLE TERRAIN
By Carli Holcomb, MFA

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

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2016

Major Director: Susie Ganch, Professor, Craft/Material Studies Department

I see the moment of creation as a threshold, a fertile ground where anything is possible. My work combines an interest in science, mythology, cosmologies, and a childlike sense of wonderment to seek the unknowable. I create formless floating worlds that have a seducing, enlightening, and ultimately deceiving presence. Vibrant lusty clusters of candied opulence emphasize the wetness at the beginning of life. Dry folds give way to woozy nests and frenzied organisms while dripping crystalline structures puncture soft unknowable terrains.

Through the process of making I indulge my desire to create an otherworld, one that bubbles, garishly drips, and slips slowly into lavish amalgamations. By combining artificial and organic materials with the rich traditions of metalsmithing, I am able to explore the infinity of tiny connections that make up the complex whole of the natural world. I make as a result of my own curiosity, drawing and building an imaginary world, from one layer to the next.
PART I
THE CHASE

"When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe."
– John Muir¹

The word chase is an apt description of my desire to understand the world that surrounds me. My chase began in the vast landscape of the American West, the geography of my childhood. I grew up near the headwaters of the Green River, where glacial silted mountain streams merge with lakewater to create a fertile flowing beast of a river. I grew up on the bow of a drift boat; my earliest lessons in life were learned by observing the ecosystem; nesting birds high up in the trees, insect hatch patterns, the phases of the moon, and the way the river currents tugged at my legs. In this ecosystem I saw life and death, and with each new season I saw rebirth.

When I asked my parents about the fawn carcass filling the air with the sweet smell of death, crawling with insects one day, and an empty nest of bones and fur the next, they did not protect me with a story of an eternal paradise. Instead, I was taught about the cycles of life. Despite this understanding, I knew there must be more to the story than a simple rhythm of life and death. I began to wonder how many lives the gnarled cottonwood trees at the edge of the river had lived, all they had witnessed, and how much they would share when they were gone. I began to believe, as my body was returned to the earth, my memories would also be returned, decaying, forgotten at first, but eventually rebuilt and shared again by others.

¹ Muir, John. My First Summer in the Sierra. Houghton Mifflin. 1911
PART II
BENEATH

“—There is no completeness; nothing endures, nothing lives; there is only change, unreasoning unreasonable; only birth and death repeating the same story each time, yet different; why? The voice laughed—‘Why you know already; look in your hands.’”

— Vikram Chandra

On my third day in India, the only word I could write in my sketchbook was “clatter, clatter, clatter, clatter, clatter...” No matter where I was I could feel the tumultuous weight of the world outside. As my travels through India continued I found myself seeking out the sacred spaces of temples and shrines, to which deity they belonged it did not matter, they were simply a refuge. Though my relationship with these spaces began as a way to escape, I quickly started to connect with them, to take on an awareness of the purpose these spaces served. They were not only places of silence and solitude, but spaces of devotion and contemplation. For as long as I can remember, I have contemplated the universe, questioned the idea of gods, and challenged nearly everything I have been told, but I have never surrendered myself fully to any act of spiritual praise. In India I surrendered. I saw Shiva in the great dance to destroy worlds, I could feel the shivers roll up my spine at the contemplation of Yama the God of Death, and I greeted Ganesá by crossing my arms before my chest and gently tugging at my ear lobes in the hope that he would remove obstacles and lead me to spiritual fulfillment. At Sanchi Stupa (Figure 1), the oldest stone structure in India, built to house the remains of Buddha, I embraced the Buddhist teachings wholeheartedly. I walked in concentric circles around the structure knowing the

---

path to the center is clearly marked. My sense of awe deepened with each turn. Something about this place made everything surrounding it seem charged. Even the fallen leaves held a feeling of deep mystery. Their origin and existence as unexpected as my own.

On my last day in India I found myself outside a temple carved from dark volcanic rock, etched deep from centuries of monsoon rains. As I ran my hands along the seams of a carving, cut from the rock under a sky vastly different than my own; I had a profound feeling of freedom, it was the freedom of not believing. What I found in that temple was not god, but the joy of knowing I didn’t need an answer.

I left the temple at a full run, I was alive, and I could feel the earth beneath me trembling with my new feeling of total enlightenment. As I was running I kicked a stone, and something came over me. I wanted to keep this moment forever, to never lose this sense of freedom, so I collected the stone.

This stone would later find a home in the first of my graduate work titled *Beneath* (Figure 2-5). Each brooch in this series of six is a hybrid of a river rock meant to explore moments of deep introspection. As I created this series of
brooches I was adjusting to life in a city, far from the people and places that I loved. I was reminded of those first days in India, my mind heavy with the knowledge that everything had changed. In “Beneath” (Figure 2-5) I singled the rock I had collected in India out of the pile and placed it on a pedestal of its own (Figure 5). It was partially an act of elevation, and a reminder of the knowledge that what is real in this world is what is just beneath you.

Figure 2. Beneath, 2014
Figure 3. Beneath 2014

Figure 4. Beneath 2014
Figure 5. Beneath, 2014
“Exploration is in our nature. We began as wanderers, and we are wanderers still. We have lingered long enough on the shores of the cosmic ocean. We are ready at last to set sail for the stars.” — Carl Sagan

THE SOURCE

When I began working on “The Source” (Figure 7- 9) my goal was simple, even if ambitious: I wanted to build a landscape with radically different properties than our own. Without knowing, I pried open some of my deepest curiosities. As a maker, I now see my function as a runner between realms. I want to understand nature’s secrets - the essence of physical reality beyond all of us. My desire was to create fabulous clusters of life, capable of spontaneous generation and of magical deeds that defy what we consider reasonable in this world. In order to do this I delved deep into creation myths, and the scientific theories that form the base of our understanding of the universe.

Looking back on my early childhood cosmology, I can see how connected I felt to the landscape of my youth. Everyday on the riverbank held mystery, and my hunger to understand fueled my curiosity. “The Source” (Figure 7- 9) emerged from a similar curious desire. I was creating other worlds to gain a closer knowledge of not only what I believe, but what could potentially exist beyond all of us. This felt like pushing a threshold and scratching a very human itch to know where we came from, why we are here, and what that means. In the most basic

---

“The Source” (Figure 7-9) grew out of a kinship with the environment, and was crystallized within my desire to encounter the ethereal, even if only within the confines of my own imagination. In this piece fluff materials are crystallized and catalyzed in layer upon layer of wonder and naivete. They possess their own geological timescale. The dripping facets of wet crystals are the remnants of chandeliers that adorned the homes of Richmond Virginia’s long faded elite. Kept in a decaying cardboard box at an architectural salvage yard known as Caravati’s, these crystals were unlikely to adorn anything else within their lifetime.

There is a harmony between the oldest materials in this piece being crystals, and the oldest known mineral on earth being a crystal. Known as Jack Hills Zircon (Figure 6), these crystal zircons date back nearly 4.4 billion years.⁶ “Excuse me here, but I can't help myself — if that crystal had eyes, it would have looked up and the moon would have been 10 times bigger in the night sky. The moon was closer then. Oh, the amazing things an object that old might have seen as 4 billion years rolled by.” Robert Krulwich⁷ There is a certain magic to being a witness. To observing and learning. This meandering installation spread across the floor of Warehouse 22, in the old Philip Morris Tobacco Packing Warehouse, had an atmosphere of its own. Standing above the installation, and witnessing its magenta shadows as they draped across its dusty planes, gave a sense of both knowing and unknowing. Of bearing witness to something simultaneously of and not of this world.

---

Figure 6. Jack Hills Zircon, 4.4 Billion Years Old. Courtesy of University of Wisconsin
Figure 7. The Source, 2015

Figure 8. The Source, 2015
Figure 8. The Source, 2015
Figure 9. *The Source*, 2015
There is something deeply poetic about the idea of the earth possessing all the qualities of the heavens, but being distant and indifferent. As I traveled in India, I was told countless creation stories, but there is one that has stuck with me since I first heard it told. It is the story of Indra, sometimes referred to as the Thousand Eyed, the cosmic milk, and his mischievous act:

When Indra, one of the primal Vedic gods, saw a clod of earth floating on the primeval waters he took his stambha or staff and pushed the clod of earth on the cosmic waters, thereby creating a space between the earth and the heaven, a space where mankind could live, and more importantly an epistemic space where knowledge can arise.” Harsha V. Dehija

In “This Ground Is Not Below You No. 3” (Figure 10-11) I explore this creation myth through material. The heavens are a twisting mass of colors, suspended above a puddle that appears to have an entire cosmos contained just beneath the surface. Puncturing that surface is a small cluster of the same materials contained within the heavens. The artificiality of the materials, are representative of the limits of my belief. I have always regarded creation stories as metaphorical rather than literal. A way of explaining the infinite complexity and intrinsic simplicity of existence. Despite this, occasionally, I find myself looking into the stars in the night sky, contemplating the infinite black space between them, as if it truly were

---

the cosmic milk. In the cosmic milk, the stars too become the thousand eyes of Indra, winking down upon his mischievous triumph.
Figure 11. This Ground Is Not Below You No. 3, 2015
PART IV
THE INFINITY OF TINY COINCIDENCES

“My life amounts to no more than one drop in a limitless ocean. Yet what is any ocean, but a multitude of drops?” — David Mitchell, Cloud Atlas

It was early morning, and the sun was just beginning the slow climb over the horizon. I was standing ankle deep in the ocean off Deer Isle Maine, at the edge of the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts. Tidewater was edging its way up the rocky coastline, before being beckoned back with equal wanting. I was attending the Haystack conference, and trying, after my first year of graduate school to check in on myself. I used my time at Haystack to reconnect, to heal, and to celebrate all the amazing changes that had come the year before. At the conference I delved deep into the words of each lecture, fully participated in the workshops, and gave myself the freedom to explore the area surrounding the school. At the conclusion of each event, I would bolt into the forest or out to the ocean. I felt so alive, and the creation of art once again felt meaningful.

It was at Haystack where I first heard the anthropologist Tim Ingold speak about the relationship between form and meaning. In Ingold’s “Bringing Things To Life: Creative Entanglements in a World of Materials” he describes the notebooks of Paul Klee:

In his notebooks the painter Paul Klee repeatedly insisted, and demonstrated by example, that the processes of genesis and growth that give rise to forms in the world we inhabit

---

are more important than the forms themselves. 'Form is the end, death', he wrote. 'Form-giving is movement, action. Form-giving is life. -Tim Ingold\(^{10}\)

As I listened to Ingold speak I began to consider my own relationship to material and process, and through this experience I began to understand the ethos of my work. I began to understand the act of creation is an inseparable part of the way I explore the world. It is through material that I shape my understanding of nature. Through making I am no longer seeking a singular beginning, or a point of origin, but a gathering place of great compromise. A constellate.

\(^{10}\) Ingold, Tim. *Bringing Things To Life: Creative Entanglements in a World of Materials.* University of Aberdeen. 2010.
ONCE MORE

I have an indelible connection to the natural world. As I have progressed in my work I have continued to allow this thread to become a central part of my making. At the conference Tim Ingold’s unpublished lecture on “Making as Weaving” articulated a theory of making in which he states:

...forms of artifacts are not imposed by the mind upon inert substance, but arise within fields of force and flows of material. By intervening in these force-fields and following the lines of flow, practitioners make things. In this view, making is a practice of weaving, in which practitioners bind their own lines of becoming into the texture of material flows comprising the lifeworld.” -Tim Ingold

Coming to terms with this purpose has reconnected me to the wonder, mystery, and myth that surrounds me on a daily basis. It has reinforced the importance of observing the world. In “Once More” (Figure 12- 13) The development a cosmic landscape was no longer my desire, but the creation of a distant shore, a place of nowhere was at the center of my quest. The landscape was at once transitory, improvisational, and rhythmic. It was initially a cluster of 19 opaque liquid pools, breaking down and dissolving into dust, but evolved, was pared down, and reexamined when I put it into a real environment.

---

Figure 12. Once More, 2015
Testing ideas is a crucial part of my process as a maker, each action I take is a material experiment. These experiments are equal parts creative and destructive. My bone pile, as I like to refer to these failed experiments, is filled with ideas that are only partially fulfilled, questions half asked, and materials rendered useless. My bone pile is extensive. In “Amalgamate” (Figure 14-15) materials recycled from my bone yard are sedimented in satisfying strata of fixation after fixation. Plexi glass, metal, resin, crystals, and trash become a timescale of my own conceptual experience.

The Byrd Park Pump House served as the installation grounds for both “Amalgamate” (Figure 14-15) and “Constellate” (Figure 16-18). The pump house built in 1883 served as Richmond’s municipal water source until 1924. It was one of the first places I visited as I was learning about Richmond, and beginning to call this place home. The Pump House drew water up from the James River through the Kanawha Canal system. The pump house itself was far from just a municipal building. The second floor of the building also served as an open air ballroom, where people would gather for dances, picnics, and other celebrations.¹²

As I walked the creaking floors of the pumphouse allowing the rooms to unfold before me like dry empty pages, I was aware of just how unique this space was. There is something subtly utopian about the idea of using municipal

buildings, buildings necessary to the everyday function of society, as social gathering places. A space designed simultaneously for work and leisure.

Abandoned architectural spaces have the unique ability to align us with specific visual experiences. Walls, floors, ceilings, and windows serve as demarcation lines both separating and enabling visual access. By installing work within these structures they become hybridized landscapes. Serving as equal parts body, memory, and potential these spaces may appear outwardly abandoned, but within each location there is a thriving ecosystem.

By photographically documenting these pieces, I was attempting to locate the essential nature of the object, and to acknowledge a space the world once celebrated, but has long since forgotten. I see the merging of architecture and object as an act of stewardship. The spaces are temporarily adorned with the objects I place within them. For just a moment the object and the spaces’ stories are linked. Each one continues to exist without the other, but for that one moment they needed each other. I see this as an act of love. Of acknowledging a space that has slipped from care and was abandoned by memory, and providing a context or a home for an object that has no true place.
Figure 14. Amalgamate, 2016
Figure 15. Amalgamate, 2015
A Constellate is a force that determines a gathering place. This word is formed in 17th century late latin. Derived from the root con- meaning “together” and stellatus- meaning “arranged like a star” a constellate is formed by clustered objects as if in a constellation.\textsuperscript{13} The title “Constellate” (Figure 16-18) is a duality, named in reference to the relationship between objects as well as the space these pieces adorn.

As I made this piece I returned once again to making a rock like form to represent place. The forms were covered in a dark ooze. The ooze meanders across the surface of the stones, reluctant to settle in the fissures, or cracks, but unable to resist the deepest crevices. Slick and sliding the ooze congeals just below the rock in a puddle.

Figure 18. Constellate, 2015
PART V
UNKNOWABLE TERRAIN

“Because I do not wish to know,” he says. “I prefer to remain unenlightened, to better appreciate the dark.” — Erin Morgenstern

Silently these pieces adorn a quiet, reflective and somber space. The walls are a deep hue of matte black dappled with reflective light, but even this light is swallowed by the yawning ether. Adjacent sits a brick wall, it is a crumbling remnant of the Train Depot this building once was. Somewhere between brick, ink, and void, these objects scintillate.

Figure 19. Unknowable Terrain, 2016

---

Looming above a small slick pile of coal shards, an entire cycle of destruction and renewal acts out its final collapse. A dodecahedron plays host to a crystallized world, held to the space tentatively by ropes that are themselves sedimented deep within the stone. Just above the stone, a brass pendulum is cradled in a circle, held fast in equilibrium by gravity. A glimmer of hope in the darkness.

The dodecahedron has a deep history of being associated with the universe. In Plato’s Cosmology the dodecahedron is often viewed as not only the symbol of the universe, but the actual shape of the universe. Fabre D’Olivet describes the philosophical history of the dodecahedron as “The number 12 formed from the ternary and quaternary, is the symbol of the Universe...” And continues to elaborate...

I simply speak as the interpreter of ancient philosophers and the modern theosophers, and say openly what hierophant of Eleusis and the Thebes confided only to initiates in the secrecy of the sanctuary. What is more, it is by no means merely an opinion maintained by a single people, at a certain time, in a particular country of the earth; it is a scientific and sacred dogma accepted in all ages and among all nations from the north of Europe to the most eastern parts of Asia. Pythagoras, Timaeus of Locris, Plato, in giving the

---

dodecahedron as symbol for the Universe, were expounding on the ideas of the Egyptians, the Chaldaeans, and the Greeks.”— Fabre D'Olivet

The history of the dodecahedron appeals to me because it speaks of a time well before my own, when curiosity was satisfied through experimentation. When an understanding of the landscape, the night sky, and all the happenings of earth were questioned, mythologized, and answered using whatever means possible. When the entirety of the cosmos could be symbolized by a simple geometric shape. A time when wonder was the lock, and observation was the key. To symbolize the entirety of the unknown in a simple geometric shape is a poetic way to describe the elusive. In many ways I see “Unknowable Terrain” (Figure 19-23) as a way of mapping the unknown. Of giving myself the permission to wonder about the unknowable. To pursue and make material my own curiosity. To get lost in all that I do not know.

I want to return once again to Haystack where I initially conceived of the idea of the dodecahedron, unlike the traditional hexagonal windows, I wanted mine to have circular portals. My initial model was rendered using a computer, laser cut on thin paper, assembled, then disassembled and stowed away at the bottom of my bag for the flight home. It wasn’t until a full semester later that the dodecahedron with its circular portals would be removed from the envelope and reassembled. I moved it around my studio for a long time, watching how the shape changed as I rolled it through my hands. How from certain angles it appeared perfect, and how the symmetry seemed to collapse from others. I went

through several versions of the dodecahedron before I was settled on the shape, first it was paper, then metal, then wood, and finally it was wood, but this time much larger. It was a form I needed to not only see, but also feel.

Contained within the dodecahedron is a single foucault pendulum made of brass, like the original Foucault Pendulum presented at the Meridian of the Paris Observatory in February of 1851. At this time people were already aware of the earth’s rotation, but until the Foucault Pendulum, a practical demonstration of this rotation had not been developed. The plumb bob in “Unknowable Terrain” (Figure 19-23) was carved from a single rod of brass using a lathe, and suspended from a mechanism that allows the pendulum to spin 360 degrees, but prevents it from wavering on its axis. The pendulum in this piece is not meant to show a rotation, but to draw attention to the line the pendulum draws in the direction of gravity as it sits at perfect equilibrium. The directionality of the pendulum tip adds visual weight to the linear descension of this piece. The place of greatest tension is between the tip of the pendulum and the rise of the crystalline rock formation just beneath it.

A cycle of deconstruction and regeneration follows the line of this pendulum. It is a balance of opposites, a chain reaction indicating there is a beginning in every end. In James Hutton’s Theory of The Earth he states “The earth reveals no vestige of a beginning and no prospect of an end.” Though the crystalline structure is crumbling, the pile left beneath it suggests a new potential.

---

19 Hutton, James. Theory of the Earth.
This piece is primarily composed of materials that at their very nature are enlivened by the cosmos. Metal, wood, earth, and stone.

Figure 20. Unknowable Terrain, 2016
Figure 21. Unknowable Terrain, 2016
Figure 23, Unknowable Terrain, 2016
Nestled in a corner, a mass of black organic matter dusted in metal particles, writhes and spills its way over a bed of coal. It clings to, smothers, climbs, and falls from the decayed brick wall of the Depot Gallery. Where many of the other pieces hover just off of the space, “Entangled” (Figure 19, 24-25) clings gently to the bones of this space, becoming less of an adornment and more of an ornament. Everything builds on itself, and will continue to build as the unknowable continues to tug at my curiosity.
Figure 24. Entangled, 2016
Tectonic plates of deeply scratched bronze shift under the shadows of dimly lit cubic zirconia. The plates themselves become a vast archipelago of ancient potential. Bronze as a material is deeply mythologized. The origin story of the first alloying of bronze is one of mystery. Told and retold throughout generations the story according to Martina Droth is as follows:

The legendary Bronze of Corinth exemplifies the reverence that was once invested in certain copper alloys, and the mystery that still surrounds their beginnings. Pliny, Pausanius, and other ancient sources describe a material so sought-after that blood was shed over it. Its origin, we are told, was the great fire of Corinth in 146 BC, in which all the metals that proliferated in this ancient city ran together and alloyed copper with gold and silver... Plutarch and Pliny, in their emphasis on the accidental circumstances by which Corinthian Bronze was generated, remind us that alloys are products of nature as well as man, and that fire, essential to human utilization of metals, is also part of their formation...” -Martina Droth

This origin story like many origin stories is as much about the true beginning of this material as it is about the understanding and perception of the society it emerged from.

It was important to me to be cognizant of the material origins of everything that went into “Crystallized (Figure 19, 26-28). Every material was

---

researched, conceptualized, mythologized, and altered before it found its way into
the work. Each material needed to have a history, and preferably a deep one.

Another remarkable thing about utilizing alloyed material is that we have
no way of telling when the material itself was alloyed. The individual elements of
the alloy have their own origin stories, but once they have been merged there is
no way of separating the material back into its constituent parts.

“Bronze statues have always been recycled, and in a sense this reflects the genesis of the
material itself. Bronze is the fleeting witness of world changes over millennia; it can be
melted down and reused, but is itself the prehistoric product of nature that, materially,
can never be made new.” Martina Droth21

The bronze in “Crystallized” (Figure 19, 26-28) could contain Corinthian bronze,
and I find something so tantalizing about that potential.

---

Figure 26. Crystallized, 2016
Figure 28. Crystallized, 2016
As you walk the line of stones set deep into silver tubes you witness the movement of light as it trips over facets, throws reflections, and has the ability to be every color at one time. At one moment the Cubic Zirconia are purple before slipping slowly into lavish red, twisting into ochre, green, and then blue, just before blushing purple once more.

When a stone is set it is permanently enclosed within another material. The two materials metal and stone become bound to each other. A binding of this sort is not easily undone. The metal holds fast to each facet of the stone. Through the process the silver becomes a knot of molecules hardened by work. When you look beyond the surface of silver you see the depth of its history. Silver is formed during the core-collapse of a supernovae and is brought to the earth on the backs of asteroids. The very material I used in “Above” (Figure 29-30) was formed as a star reached the end of its life, collapsed, and became something altogether new. There is a cyclical nature to the matter of our universe.

It is only by going back to the origins that we can truly begin to understand the essence of anything. By tracing something back to its start, we get a clear sense of its experience. In geology the passage of time is etched deep into rock, a layered chronology of experience. Human life, like all other matter is a process that involves the passage of time.

Between each stone setting is a distance. As you progress down the line each stone becomes more individualized, more alone, and less like the original. A millimeter becomes a centimeter, an inch takes on a quarter, until the end where a full sixteen inches separates two distinct settings. As history progresses, our memories grow shorter, and our separation from the things that make us human, the landscape, the passage of time, and even the slow climb of the sun over the horizon become even more distant.
Figure 30. Above, 2016
PART VI
IN CONCLUSION

There is a certain depth to the darkness that exists only in the mountains, where man-made light doesn’t penetrate. It is solid and intoxicating. The sky itself becomes a mass of inky black moss, sprinkled with thousands of glowing points. It is in remote places under a star dappled sky that I feel closest to my own humanity. Close to the strangeness of it all.

Despite all reason, and beyond all odds a universe exists, and within that universe debris relentlessly collided and grew, and were forced together by gravity to form the Earth. On Earth’s rocky terrain and beneath its watery surfaces bacteria, plants, and animals have lived, thrived, evolved, or died out. A timeline of singular order and infinite complexity. And amongst all this, seemingly without reason, you and I exist, and we have the ability to look up, and to wonder at those stars.

---

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Müller, Max. “Art. VIII.—The Sixth Hymn Of the First Book of the Rig Veda.”


Oskin, Becky. Confirmed: Oldest Fragment of Early Earth is 4.4 Billion years old.


Print.


Curricula Vitae

Carli Anne Holcomb
2316 Rosewood Avenue,
Richmond Virginia, 23220
307-262-3839
www.carliholcomb.com

Education

2016  Master of Fine Arts, Craft And Material Studies, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond Virginia
2014  Post-baccalaureate, Studio Art, University of Wyoming, Laramie Wyoming
2013  Bachelor of Fine Art, Studio Art, University of Wyoming, Laramie Wyoming

Awards

2015  Graduate Teaching Assistantship, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond Virginia
      Graduate Teaching Assistantship, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond Virginia
      Mildred’s Lane Fellowship, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond Virginia
      Travel Grant, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond Virginia
      Haystack Mountain School of Crafts Fellowship, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond Virginia

Exhibitions and Professional Experience

2016  Quirk Residency, Quirk Hotel and Gallery (Expected)
      Unknowable Terrain, Depot Gallery, Richmond Virginia
      Co-Chair, Ethical Metalsmith Student Committee
2015  Communication Coordinator, Ethical Metalsmith Student Committee
2015  Mourning works, Mildred’s Lane, Narrowsburg New York
      Death Complex(ity), Mildred’s Lane, Narrowsburg New York
      Warehouse 22, Richmond Virginia
      Pallet Cleanser, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond Virginia
      Forefront, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond Virginia

Bibliography

2016  “Shifting Sites” MetalSmith Magazine, Exhibition in Print (Expected)
2015  “Sieve By Design” Gunjan Suri, Mumbai India