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Polyanthroponemia: A Pursuit of Mystery

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

by

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May 2018

Acknowledgements

To my mom who taught me how to love generously and work hard,
To my dad who showed me how to hope even when it was hopeless,
To Rosaline who helps me to know myself,
To Ebbel for zapping my nose with a bug zapper racket,
To Anne for never being too emotional,

To Jenna for her infectious courage,
To Chelsea for her steady positivity,
To Anne B. for her critical mind,
To Sasha for her level-headed encouragement,

To Jack for his encouraging and motivating visits,
To my committee: Andrea, Blair, Debbie and Margaret for their insightful critiques,
difficult questions, and for helping me to discover my work.

....

And Mike.

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Abstract

POLYANTHROPONEMIA: A PURSUIT OF MYSTERY

By Magdolene Dykstra, MFA

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

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2018

Major Director: A. Blair Clemo, Assistant Professor,
Craft & Material Studies Department

I wish I could believe in something. Having grown up in a religious household, I have continually teetered between faith and doubt. Landscapes seen and unseen are my last source of awe; here my doubt is suspended – for a moment. Using unfired clay, I create alternate landscapes inspired by sublime philosophy. The sublime experience is born in a sense of amazement linked to fear of something beyond our understanding or control. The amazing intricacy of microbiology, a whole universe existing alongside and inside us, fascinates me. The abundance of unfamiliar life in my work triggers a cautious curiosity. My imagined worlds push beyond the boundaries provided for them invading our tense reality. These unfamiliar landscapes offer a window of escape, where viewers explore their relationship to an alternate world which bears similarities to our own.

Introduction

My work searches for the place where I feel enveloped in a sense of awe. I was raised in the Evangelical Christian tradition, where emotional experiences are evidence of full involvement in church services. People around me would raise their hands and close their eyes as they sang praise songs. I was expected to feel God, but this never happened in church. During the past two years, my quest for the place I experience awe began with researching religious architecture with the aim of creating a contemplative room for viewers. The disappointing results of this artistic exploration led me to look for ways to activate a reflective space in viewers' minds. My pursuit of wonder unaffiliated with a specific religious tradition led me to research sublime philosophy. This report documents my evolving definition of the sublime. Initially, I identified the sublime as the edge of logic, which inspired me to portray immeasurable infinity. My second definition of the sublime linked it to grand landscapes. Finally I understood the sublime as a sense of uneasy amazement in confronting something foreign, unknown and beyond human understanding. This led me to the unseen landscapes of microbiology. My thesis exhibition uses clay to make this unusual life visible. This shape-shifting medium surrounds viewers in an unfamiliar wilderness.

Religious Architecture

Temple for One and *Blue Room* were inspired by my desire to examine the physical traits of a religious space. In *Temple for One*, I used fabric walls to create an intimate space which contained an altar made of ceramic hands formed in the sign of the benediction. This sign of blessing is usually seen performed by Christ in religious art. The repetition of the hands, arranged in a triangle, gestured towards the ritual component of spirituality. The textile walls drew references to revival tents, the Hebrew tabernacle of the Old Testament, and theatre. The dim lighting signaled spiritual overtones, while the simple threshold supplied another important feature in setting the sacred space apart from the gallery.

Temple for One was too specific and too vague at the same time. Although *Temple* used the particular symbolism of the benediction, it didn't drive the viewer towards a distinct experience. The hands, although they suggested a focal point for reflection, were a specific reference to Christianity that was not accessible for all viewers. Combining these concerns with my increasing distance from Christian dogma led me to remove specific religious symbols in my next work. The space accommodated one or two people at a time; however, when there were others waiting to enter they became an audience for the person inside. By default, *Temple* became a surveilled space, where people outside observed the participant who sat inside. Although interesting and compatible with my experience of religious spaces, I wanted to remove

that aspect of the work in a drive to create a space where I and the viewer would feel free to access some sort of spiritual experience.



Figure 1. *Temple for One*, 2016



Figure 2. *Temple for One* (interior), 2016

My next step in pursuing an experience of awe was to focus more on a space to contain the body, rather than the altar. I wanted to envelop the viewer, instead of offering them an object viewed from a distance. *Blue Room* asked passers-by whether they were willing to enter with a sign on the door knob, thus priming them for some sort of metaphysical experience inside. The door and hard walls provided the opportunity for participants to separate themselves from the surrounding world.

Blue Room combined my research of religious architecture with an interest in James Turrell's *Skyspaces*. The octagonal form referenced sacred geometry. Many religious artists use the concept that certain forms and proportions effectively suggest the divine, for two primary reasons. Precise geometry creates a unified sacred structure that distinguishes it from its profane surroundings. Secondly, flawlessness in architecture parallels God's perfection.

In addition to form, religious structures employ the ethereal quality of light to stimulate a spiritual state of mind and express a place's holiness. Connected with its power over life on Earth, light has long been linked with spiritual forces. For example, the Roman Pantheon was constructed to have a dialogue with the sky. Through its single oculus the shifting light sweeps around the circular room, periodically illuminating the enclosed shrines.

The open ceiling of *Blue Room* was a distant reference to an oculus allowing sunlight to pour in, representative of divine inspiration; however, since there was no ceiling/roof to limit the opening, the placement of the *Blue Room* in the atrium of the Fine Arts Building continued to draw tones of surveillance. When a participant entered, they would inevitably look up to see the second floor. Even a willing participant would

have to forcibly calm their mind against the possibility of being seen from above. I concluded that even hard walls and a closed door didn't block out the sense of surveillance. Since my hope was to create a room where participants could enter and withdraw from the world, this was a disappointing result. The interior focused the loud echoes of the building, which countered the quiet, contemplative space I desired. Even my collection of blankets wasn't enough to counter the loud busy-ness. Instead of a space for contemplation and reprieve, *Blue Room* became a surveilled nest with the color and dimensions of a porta-potty.



Figure 3. *Blue Room* (entry), 2016



Figure 4. *Blue Room* (view from interior), 2016

Entering the Sublime

Instead of continuing to invest in physical spaces where I didn't experience even an inkling of awe, I dove into sublime philosophy to find a space between overly simplified religious doctrine and a wholesale denial of any sort of spiritual dimension. I tried to find the spaces where a sense of something wondrous was still present. At this point, I began to use my studio practice as a place to explore meditation as a means of escaping the material world. I pinched hundreds of portions of porcelain thousands of times, attending to the material in my hand. The intuitive method of working with clay required an acceptance of the futility in attempting to grasp a continually shifting and expanding reality. Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh describes mindfulness as the "miracle by which we master and restore ourselves." ¹ As I approached the end of my first semester in graduate school, my practice had become lost and scattered. Returning to clay through the lens of mindfulness allowed me to take hold of my mind again, while continuing my search for the sublime.

My research led me as far back as Nicolas Boileau's 1674 translation of Longinus' Greek treatise from the 1st century AD. *Du Sublime* drew attention to art that dealt with the limits of our understanding.

Closely associated with the Romantic Movement, the concept of the sublime began to be employed by those who wished to challenge traditional systems of thought that were couched in the old language of religion, a rhetoric that now seemed founded on outdated conceptions of human experience.²

¹ Hanh, Thich Nhat. *Miracle of Mindfulness*. Boston: Beacon, 1987. 14.

² Morley, Simon. "The Contemporary Sublime." *The Sublime*. London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2010. 15.

The sublime represented the impossibility of reconciling the metaphysical with the sensible.

In *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) Edmund Burke linked the sublime experience to fear and horror, establishing a binary between the sublime and the beautiful. Burke's text tied the sublime with the sensations of terror, pain and danger, which affect us more powerfully than beauty and pleasure.³ He presented fear as the apprehension of pain, which results in tension in the mind and body. From here, Burke drew a connection between the tension of fear and the strain of muscles performing labour. The repetition of an exercise, mental or physical, causes increased muscle tautness. The body builds a level of expectation with each repetition. This tension is the core of Burke's sublime experience. He used the example of a colonnade of uniform pillars causing an increasing agitation in the eye. This repetitive visual creates an artificial infinite, and moves the mind to a consideration of grandeur.⁴ Burke also presented the convulsion of shattered expectations as producing the unease necessary for the sublime.

In 1790, Immanuel Kant presented another perspective on the sublime in his *Critique of Judgment*. Kant referred to it as the subjective experience of something our rationality cannot fathom. When reason finds its limit, we are overwhelmed by complexity and grandeur. The excess of the sublime forces a confrontation of the edges of logic and imagination.⁵ He posited two types of sublime experience: the mathematical

³ Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. London, 1798. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online [Gale]*. Accessed 5 Dec. 2016. 246.

⁴ Ibid. 264.

⁵ Ibid. Morley, 16.

and the dynamical. The mathematical sublime relates to ideas that are beyond the parameters of experience, such as God, mortality, and eternity. The dynamical sublime resides in the context of reason being overshadowed by the might of nature.⁶ My first definition of the sublime was rooted in Kant's mathematical sublime:

sublime
/se 'blīm/

1. The edge of reason, as experienced when confronting ideas like God, mortality, and eternity.

Attempting to portray infinity, I translated Burke's artificial infinite from the repetition in his colonnade to the multiplicity of my *Hanging Tiles*. I had been looking at the work of Thilo Frank and Yayoi Kusama who evoke Kant's mathematical sublime through their illustrations of infinity. Frank's *Infinite Rock* exhibits a solemn exterior, reminiscent of the Ka'aba in Mecca. Inside, the viewer discovers a room of mirrors and a swing. As the viewer experiences a throw-back to childhood, they are enveloped in their endless reflection.⁷ Similarly, Kusama's *Infinity Mirror Room – The Souls of Millions of Light Years Away* allows the viewers to lose a sense of self when they enter the mirrored room filled with dots of light.

My simple installation of porcelain tiles and their shadows hinted at a never-ending repetition, tickling the edge of logic – my first step in an evolving definition of the sublime. The spaces between the tiles allowed viewers to walk through the installation, engaged with the details of each tile which had been pinched to its breaking point. This

⁶ Pillow, Kirk. *Sublime Understanding: Aesthetic Reflection in Kant and Hegel*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003.

⁷ Rosen, Aaron. *Art & Religion in the 21st Century*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2015. 21.

highlighted the tension between the singular unit and the group. As viewers wove through the space, they experienced a shift in the material's reaction to light: the tiles were opaque from one view, and translucent from another. This simple surprise of materiality activated a sense of wonder; however, once the translucency was discovered the mystery was unveiled. Furthermore, the monofilament that held the porcelain tiles was distracting in its failed attempt at invisibility. Lastly, the uniformly spaced square tiles were too controlled to lean into the untidy edges of logic.



Figure 5. *Hanging Tiles*, 2016



Figure 6. *Hanging Tiles* (detail), 2016

Sublime Landscape

I finally found the doorway to my sublime: in landscape. In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (1827), Friedrich Hegel declared that the sublime was the “way by which the divine manifested itself in the natural world.”⁸ Just as the Romantic artists of the 19th century viewed the wilderness as a sort of secular church, my second definition of the sublime identified landscape as my remaining source of awe.

sublime
/se ‘blīm/

2. Sense of grandeur and admiration that gestures towards the existence of something beyond humanity’s material experience; often experienced in the great things of nature: violent storms, disorienting heights, unfathomable depths.

The Romantic artists of the 19th century evoked Kant’s boundless dynamical sublime in their landscape paintings.⁹ Joseph W. H. Turner, for example, portrayed the changeability of nature in his unbridled seascapes and serrated mountaintops, shown in *Snow Storm: Hannibal and His Army Crossing the Alps*. His contemporary, Caspar Friedrich, focused on the man gazing across the landscape in *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* (1818). In Joseph Addison’s “On the Pleasures of the Imagination”, he stated that the imagination plays an active role in the sublime experience. External objects hit us with a “rude kind of magnificence”, while our imagination is filled with an object that

⁸ Ibid. Morley, 16.

⁹ Ibid. Rosen, 72.

is “too big for its capacity”. The reaction to the sublime is one of astonishment and a “delightful stillness and amazement’ (No. 412)”.¹⁰ Nature was the object of the Romantics’ reverie which led to the sublime experience.

In contrast to works that illustrate the vastness of the sublime, Richard Long’s walking works draw attention to his insignificance in the context of the larger world.¹¹ “Rather than being derivative of the natural sublime, [land art] bring[s] attention to the greatness of nature by engaging directly with it.”¹² Long combined physical endurance and order in his ephemeral pieces. His artwork consists of photo-documentation of his walks in various locations. The evidence of his movement usually takes on simple forms, often lines on the ground that will be erased by the elements. The transience of these works speaks to the supremacy of nature over human efforts.

My *Interventions* marked the land with porcelain paths. I juxtaposed collections of small, hand-formed, ceramic components with larger settings – whether natural or human-made. These works drew attention to places that hold a sense of mystery, whether it was a defunct hydro-electric station or a burrow that harboured unknown residents; however, the material behaved in a predictable way. These porcelain chains did exactly what you’d expect – drawing lines in the landscape. Finding mystery in these *Interventions* depended on the viewer’s musings on the burrow, the abandoned building and the murky water. The wonder lay in the landscape itself, not in the work. The work simply drew attention to what was already there.

¹⁰ Brady, Emily. *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy: Aesthetics, Ethics and Nature*. Cambridge University Press, 2014. 15.

¹¹ Jackson, Steve. “Richard Long”, *Richard Long Official Website*. Space in Between. Accessed 12 Dec. 2017. www.richardlong.org/.

¹² Ibid. Brady, 146.



Figure 7. *Intervention: North Bank Trail, 2016*



Figure 8. *Intervention: Power Station, 2016*



Figure 9. *Intervention: Water Line*, 2016

Subversive Sublime

Romanticism was a movement of protest against the Industrial Revolution and capitalism's commodification of everything, which fractures human relationships alienating producer from consumer. Romanticism hurled chaotic passion "in the face of the apparently well-ordered bourgeois world."¹³ As a response to their discomfort in an industrial capitalist society, Romantics reached for a past paradise in order to channel their hope for an alternate reality and a better future. Ironically, the limitless horizons of their paintings fit neatly in their frames and were even more easily turned into commodities by the system they denounced. But the sublime is uncontainable and unsaleable.

Is the answer to break out of the neat confines of the frame? Installation art "carries a hint of mild subversion (the work will probably be unsaleable) and risk (since the outcome is unpredictable)", but the art world, an arm of capitalism, has absorbed even this genre into its center.¹⁴ Just as the Romantics were foiled in their resistance of capitalism, installation art is bought and sold as part of the machine it might have undermined. Yayoi Kusama's blockbuster infinity rooms are branded as selfie opportunities, and Meow Wolf sells tickets to experience their "Big Fun Art".¹⁵

¹³ Fischer, Ernst, John Berger, and Anna Bostock. *The Necessity of Art*. London: Verso, 2010. 67.

¹⁴ Bishop, Claire. *Installation Art: A Critical History*. London: Tate, 2012. 37.

¹⁵ Davis, Ben. "George R. R. Martin's Santa Fe Art Space Is an Odd Force." *Artnet News*. Artnet News, 28 June 2017. Web. 15 Jan. 2018. <<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/george-r-r-martin-backed-art-collective-556880>>.

Land art emerged in the 1960s as a refusal of the gallery setting and by extension the commercialization of art; but how did Robert Smithson fund the *Spiral Jetty*? A \$9,000 grant from the Virginia Dwan Gallery of New York; and the Dia Art Foundation leases the lake bed where *Spiral Jetty* is located in order to protect the project.¹⁶ Furthermore, the remote sites of some land art installations limited viewing to those with the means to access them, so the movement was accused of elitism. How do I step out of the frame, deprioritizing salability, while also making my work accessible?

Just as in the 1960s, today's politically disengaged art is regarded as complicit with the status quo. Installation art can be used to upend a conservative ideology that privileges a singular perspective. By denying the viewer any ideal place from which to take in the work, this format destabilizes a hierarchical approach to the viewing experience favoring multiple outlooks. "Installation art, by using an entire space that must be circumnavigated to be seen, came to provide a direct analogy for the desirability of multiple perspectives on a single situation."¹⁷ In this way, installation art subtly advocates for alternate perspectives that are often disregarded by the hegemony. By deterritorializing the art object, installation art, trains us to remember the multiplicity of reality, like the multifaceted sublime.

There is a liberating quality to being embraced by an artwork, rather than approaching a clearly defined, detached object. "Recent critics and artists writing about installation art have suggested that the viewer's active presence within the work is more political and ethical in implication than when viewing more traditional types of art."¹⁸ In

¹⁶ "Robert Smithson, Spiral Jetty." *Dia Art*. Dia Art Foundation. 17 Jan. 2018. <<https://diaart.org/visit/visit/robert-smithson-spiral-jetty>>.

¹⁷ Ibid. Bishop, 35.

¹⁸ Ibid. Bishop, 102.

other words, these critics suggest a link between activated viewing and activated participation in the socio-political field. It's a reach, but I like it. Surrounding viewers in an artwork may encourage them to immerse themselves in the struggle to look critically at their reality.

Ilya Kabakov commented, "[Installation art is] impractical in our practical time and its entire existence serves as a refutation of the principle of profitability."¹⁹ Despite the mega hit installations of Ai Weiwei, Yayoi Kusama, and Meow Wolf, the root of installation art as discordant with capitalism continues to sprout in the works of Tanya Schulz, Clare Twomey, and Motoi Yamamoto. Tanya Schulz uses a range of craft materials and found objects, including sugar, glitter and candy to create ephemeral, fantastical landscapes. Her work references utopian dreams and the ideas of paradise explored in folk tales, mythology and cinema. Clare Twomey collaborates with local communities to create large-scale ceramic installations that question ideas of authorship while engaging historic and social contexts. By allowing her installations to disappear or be destroyed through audience participation, Twomey engages in a critique of the accepted means of art distribution and ownership. Motoi Yamamoto's ephemeral installations transform the gallery into a ceremonial space as he draws extensive labyrinths with salt, a symbol of purification and mourning in Japan. Yamamoto's careful labor references the dignity of life; however, at the end of an exhibition, the artist returns the salt to the sea. The transience of his work conveys not only a sense of deep sadness, but also the inevitability of mortality.²⁰

¹⁹ Ibid. Bishop, 17.

²⁰ "Motoi Yamamoto." *Biwako Biennale*. Energyfield, 2014. Web. 28 Jan. 2018.
<<http://energyfield.org/biwakobiennale/artist/motoi-yamamoto>>.

The use of commonplace, low-tech materials stands counter to Western society's infatuation with infinite technological advancement and our addiction to the pacifying effects of mass media. Thus, the medium and presentation make a political statement "without subjecting the work to explicit propaganda on the level of content."²¹ Furthermore, the installation format revels in its unproductivity pushing against the means-ends structure of capitalism.

No one owns the sublime, and it cannot be bought – much as we may try. Clay is an egalitarian material, available worldwide in ditches and riverbeds. Its adaptability made it one of the earliest materials used for making art. This ancient material even features in creation myths. Numerous cultural traditions speak of the gods forming humans out of the earth. A Mongolian myth speaks of the world being born from water. After a holy being stirred the water, it "congealed into land...coagulating into continents."²² This wet dirt, rich with the ingredients for life, is the only material that makes sense for me to create my own world.

I have always been drawn to the directness of clay. I don't need anything to translate my movements into its flesh. It responds to me, and I to it. There is infinite potential in this loop. Clay is always willing to shift, even if it means cracking or completely breaking down. Humans have been seduced by clay's malleability and mutability for millennia. The earliest art objects were made of clay. For example, in Le Tuc d'Audoubert Cave of Ariège, France, a sculpted bull and cow bison have lain for

²¹ Ibid. Bishop, 32.

²² Hurd, Barbara. *Stirring the Mud: on Swamps, Bogs, and Human Imagination*. Athens, University of Georgia Press, 2008. 17.

about 15,000 years. Their clay bodies have dried out and cracked, but the finger marks of the ancient artist are still visible along the smooth hinds.²³

As Thomas Hirschhorn stated, the politics in art is found in how it is made:

“To make art politically means to choose materials that do not intimidate, a format that doesn’t dominate, a device that does not seduce. To make art politically is not to submit to an ideology or to denounce the system, in opposition to so-called “political art”.”²⁴

Clay is a base material. Its squishy lumps provide a contradiction to more refined materials. Its physicality pushes against the flood of digital simulacra that muddies reality, while resisting the cult of hypertechnology.

Raw clay maintains its ability to change. My work breaks down into its original ingredients, unlike our digital footprint which resists erasure. The fragility of raw clay mirrors one of the remaining truths of life: it ends. Its impermanence imbues it with preciousness; this delicate construction must be treated with care.

²³ “14,000 Year Old Bull and Cow Bison of Tuc D'Audoubert.” *Bradshaw Foundation*, Bradshaw Foundation, www.bradshawfoundation.com/france/bison-tuc-d-audoubert/bison-tuc-d-audoubert2.php. Accessed 1 Feb. 2018.

²⁴ Ibid. Bishop, 124.

Contemporary Sublime

Theoretical discourse of the sublime reached its peak in the 18th century. The upper classes enjoyed excursions into the mountains of Britain, Europe and North America during the Grand Tour of the 18th century, contributing to the development of British Romanticism; but the sublime has decreased in philosophical and artistic study since the mid-19th century. Is it relevant today? Have we discovered so much that the enigmatic sublime is obsolete?

The metaphysical may be the last taboo in the art world. Western civilization has moved so far beyond the possibility that religion may have valuable insights, and the committed intellectual elite regard store-bought spirituality with disdain. While religious dogma and spiritual trends sometimes lack the nuance required to interface with reality in a meaningful way, my conclusion is not to discard all things metaphysical.

For those who assert that our lives cannot be accounted for within a paradigm which states that we exist within a life-world produced wholly from cultural signs and systems, the sublime defines the moment when thought comes to an end and we encounter that which is 'other'. ...What, for example, is happening psychologically within the force-field of the sublime experience when formal and objectively ordered social time is destabilized by some unstructured, informal and subjective 'moment' of heightened experience, presses on us from beyond our normal reality, challenging the assumptions upon which a such a reality is based.²⁵

²⁵ Ibid. Morley, 17-18.

There are still so many questions left unanswered by theory, science, and religion. It is important to embrace the not-knowing, because when humans acknowledge the limitations of the systems we use to structure our world, we can open ourselves to a more empathic coexistence with our travel companions. The sublime reminds us of the gaps in our understanding and trains our minds to be open to previously unimagined alternatives to the reality we think we know. “For while we may no longer believe in eternal essences or values, we still often sense that our lives are fashioned by forces beyond our control, which underpin and drive acts of thinking or representation.”³⁰

What do we know of our reality? We live in a system which commodifies objects, natural resources, people and experiences. The top priority is profitability. We know this doesn't work. The environment is at a tragic tipping point due to capitalism's obsession with infinite expansion. The prevalence of mental illness in capitalist societies points to the system's dysfunctionality. We are sold the notion that we need more of the newest thing in order to be happy; so we blindly follow the tide without considering how this shiny, new gadget will affect our well-being, or how its development and manufacture affects the world around us. By defying tidy packaging, the sublime attempts to resist the capitalist model. Contemplation of the sublime is unproductive, a nemesis to a product-driven sales model. Even though capitalism continues to absorb the sublime through ecotourism, an awareness of the sublime still holds potential to challenge the assumption that this broken system is the only option.

A reinvigoration of the Romantic exploration of sublime nature facilitates reflection on our relationship to the environment. The view that nature is static and

separate from our existence is no longer sustainable. It is dynamic and fragile. While the Romantic sublime is based on our vulnerable position within the grandeur of nature, my work emphasizes the fragility of an imagined wilderness. Instead of Burke's landscape which is terrifying in its ability to destroy us, the terror now lies in the destruction of this imagined land. Who and what is causing this decay? There is an uneasy balance in my work between the accumulation of this mysterious life and its deterioration. My final definition of the sublime reflects this tension:

sublime
/se 'blīm/

3. a sense of uneasy amazement in confronting something foreign, dark, unknown, wild and beyond human control; this experience is fleeting and linked to a sense of impermanence and loss.

In the midst of the Western world's cultural crisis, "The experience of the human subject – individual and collective – and the aura that surrounds this experience, are being dissolved into the calculation of profitability, the satisfaction of needs, self-affirmation through success."²⁶ The sublime is still needed as an escape from the dehumanizing effects of capitalism. When confronted with humanity's persistent self-destruction, I'm not the only one to reach desperately for something beyond this dingy reality. The search for the sublime fixes my eyes on a distant hope. This search is a longing for something bigger that can explain or at least contextualize the realities on this plane.

²⁶ Lyotard, Jean-François. "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde." *The Sublime*. London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2010. 39.

Impossible Sublime

How do you visualize the unimaginable? How do you portray the unrepresentable? A major feature of the sublime is its inability to be represented; however, as Kant put it, even if the ineffable cannot be adequately pictured in our sensual world, it “can be revived and evoked in the mind by means of this very inadequacy”.²⁷ Therefore, an artwork may only successfully present the sublime through its failure; however, attempting a sense of the sublime should not be discounted.

Art can convey the fearful boundlessness of the sublime without actually being sublime itself. A Turner painting can remind us of our feebleness in the face of raging seas, without having to experience the real threat of drowning. An installation by James Turrell can overwhelm us with a lack of equilibrium in its vast emptiness, so we can imagine the incredible vacuum of space. Walter De Maria’s *Vertical Earth Kilometer* reminds us of the incredible mass on which we stand. Even Robert Smithson’s aggressive invasion of the Great Salt Lake highlights the incredible difference in scale between human manipulation and the water’s continual momentum, gently chipping away at *Spiral Jetty*.

While these artworks reinforce the perceived power in nature, my work focuses on the unfortunate power humans have demonstrated in the anthropocene. Today we see that nature isn’t impervious to harm, as we alter ecosystems and diminish the

²⁷ Zizek, Slavoj. “The Sublime Object of Ideology.” *The Sublime*. London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2010. 58.

growth of biodiversity. The earth is more fragile than we once thought. By enlivening the imagination, my work reminds us to reconsider our relationship to the natural world, even the parts that aren't pretty. Thus, it moves toward "revitalizing the natural sublime as an *environmental* sublime".²⁸ Reveling in mystery, my work does not give up hope altogether, nor does it present clear solutions. Rather, it exercises the viewers' compassion while training them to entertain the fluidity of the unknown.

²⁸ Ibid. Brady, 183.

Reverie in Landscape

Landscape is my source of awe, and I want to feel surrounded by it. For *Cloud*, I arranged the porcelain tiles in a form that referenced air flow. This juxtaposed airy-ness with the sharp edge of ceramics. The abundant presence of my fingerprints pointed to an unfathomable collection of moments contained within the wave form. However, *Cloud* was a hanging sculpture – not an immersive experience. Furthermore, the square tiles continued to push against the organic references of cloud and water as well as the fuzzy edges of mystery.



Figure 10. *Cloud*, 2016



Figure 11. *Cloud* (detail), 2016

Moving forward, I decided to change the parameters of my interaction with porcelain. Instead of pinching it into squares, I started with a lump of clay and pinched from the middle out allowing the porcelain to take whatever shape it wanted. When installing *Maquette 1.25*, I created a variety of density between the gaps and clusters, and also focused on creating a sense of movement.

In order to compel viewers to walk underneath the piece and gaze upwards, I hung the porcelain components above head height, referencing the Latin word *sublimis*, meaning elevated or uplifted. Even though I did not address the floor in a more welcoming way, several viewers laid down under the piece. This visual recalled the childhood past-time of cloud watching. When viewers walked beneath the suspended porcelain, the varying density of light and shadow encouraged their eyes to wander through the hanging terrain. My fingerprints were present in each porcelain unit, allowing the viewer to follow these impressions as brushstrokes in a painting. The physicality of the thread – thin, but not perfectly smooth – created a rhythmic drawing. The thinness of the thread combined with the delicacy of the porcelain conveyed a sense of lightness in contrast to the downward thrusting lines which evoked Burke's artificial infinite. Viewers spoke of underwater life forms or fungi growing from the light – as in an upside down world.

The uniformity of the height of the pieces was almost self-consciously considerate of the viewer's experience, and its scale kept it in the realm of a hanging sculpture rather than an environment. The wooden frames and fencing used to suspend the piece referenced shoji screens and were distracting. So began my struggle to find a hanging apparatus that didn't compete with the suspended porcelain.



Figure 12. *Maquette 1.25* (scale), 2017



Figure 13. *Maquette 1.25*, 2017

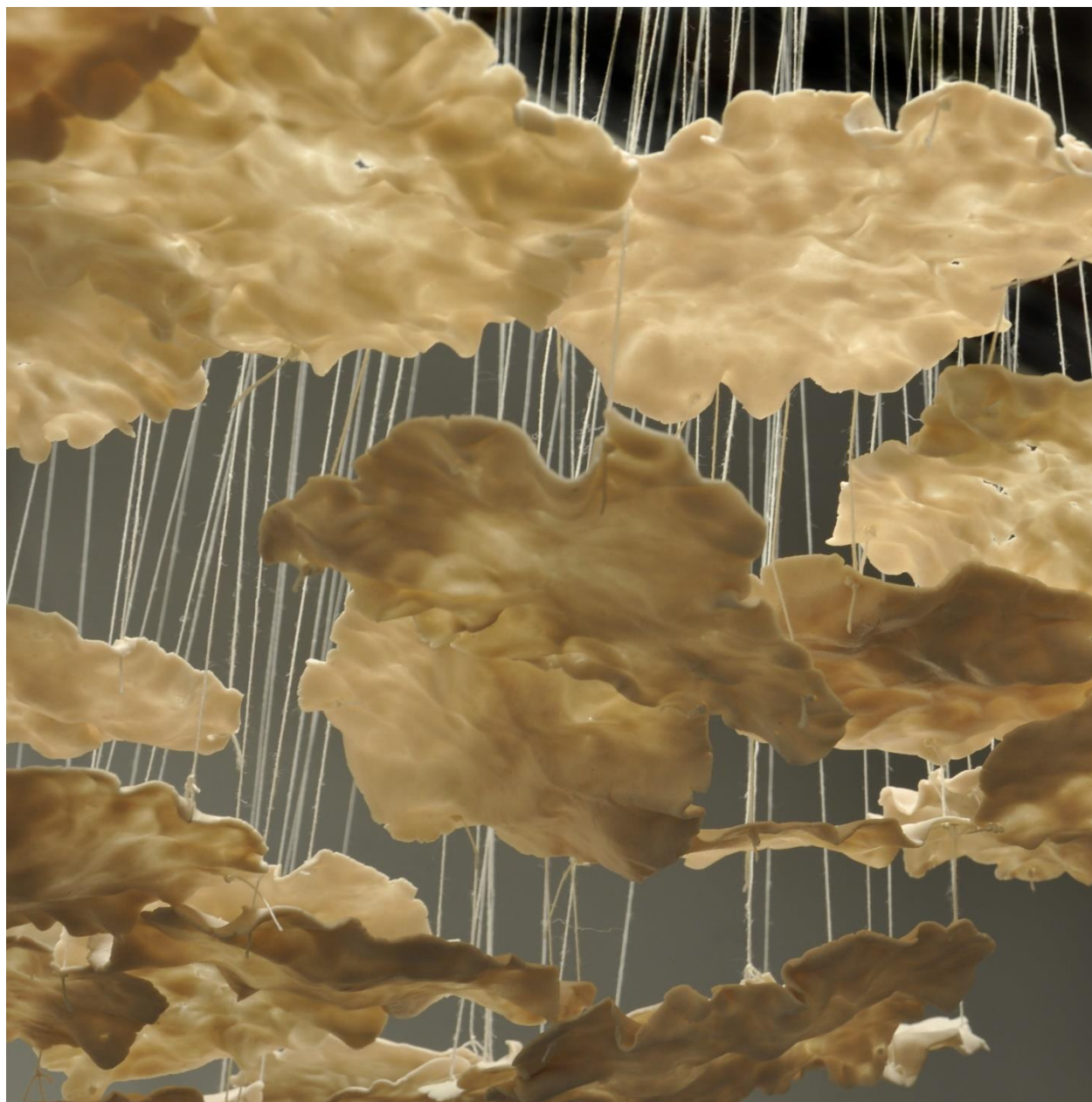


Figure 14. *Maquette 1.25* (detail), 2017

Untitled 2.22 was stimulated by the idea that a varied placement of the ceramic elements might create more of a sense of being inside of the work rather than it looming overhead. I suspended the porcelain components at lower levels, and invited the audience to walk through the space. I was inspired by artists whose work challenged a passive viewing experience. For example, in *Consciousness/Conscience* (2003), Clare Twomey challenged the conventions of gallery-going. Instead of offering a passive viewing experience, she coopted the audience as a performer in her installation. Twomey employed the services of a Korean factory to produce hand-cast porcelain boxes to cover the gallery floor at the World Ceramic Exposition in Korea. On the other side of the gallery, photographs documented the making process. As audience members were drawn in to get a closer look, they destroyed the porcelain boxes on the floor. Twomey stated that this piece was only fully realized when it was being destroyed; therefore the participating audience became a collaborator.

I realized two main issues in *Untitled 2.22*. The translucency of the porcelain was lost when hung at lower levels. This was disappointing because this facet of the material was crucial to continuing a sense of ephemerality. Secondly, I began to understand that if I welcomed audience interaction, I needed to be ready for all audience interaction – not the just the audience I imagined. The likelihood of the piece being destroyed was pointed out. Although I didn't mind this component, I hadn't considered if that added content I wanted.

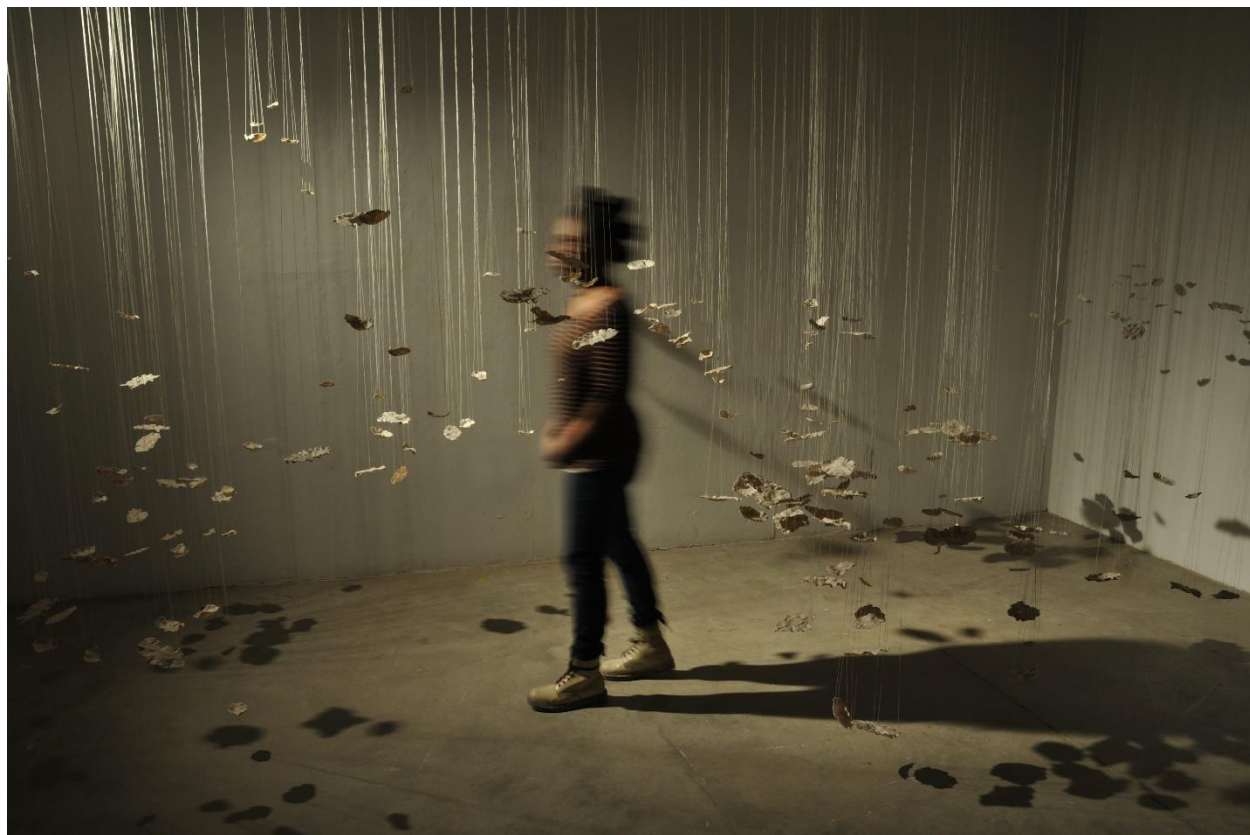


Figure 15. *Untitled 2.22, 2017*

Microbial Sublime

As I moved towards my candidacy exhibition, I began to explore how I could use porcelain on the floor to continue the suggestion of an alternate landscape. My goal was to address the sky and ground simultaneously, enveloping the viewer in a foreign world. *Study (Seed of a Universe)* provided another opportunity to test whether I wanted audience participation in the work. Just as Twomey did in *Consciousness/Conscience*, I invited the audience to walk through the miniature topography by installing *Study* in a high-traffic hallway. I also used this piece to further investigate the effect of light. I had previously experimented with blue bulbs, which felt heavy-handed in suggesting a waterscape. This time I chose yellow bulbs in the hopes of activating a cheerful tone. Although it successfully defined my space as separate from the fluorescent hallway, I realized through documenting the work that the tinted light muddled it.

I made thousands of little worms with the intention of creating a flood of them. Having reached out for help to make the vast quantity I needed, I started to realize that I wasn't interested in the conceptual content of audience participation. Still, I wanted to test the installation. The most important feedback I received from this exploration was a question: how does the work benefit from the interaction? Although this experimentation was important, I have realized that my work was complete without physical interaction. My mind was caught on the notion of passive viewing, but I realized that physical interaction doesn't make engagement more real. I wanted the viewer to sink into the very real world of their own imaginings. People had strong reactions to the mounds,

particularly wanting to pet them. Viewers reflected on awareness of their scale in relation to the installation – some feeling like giants hovering over a miniature topography, others wondering what this huge animal was.



Figure 16. *Study (Seed of a Universe)*, 2017

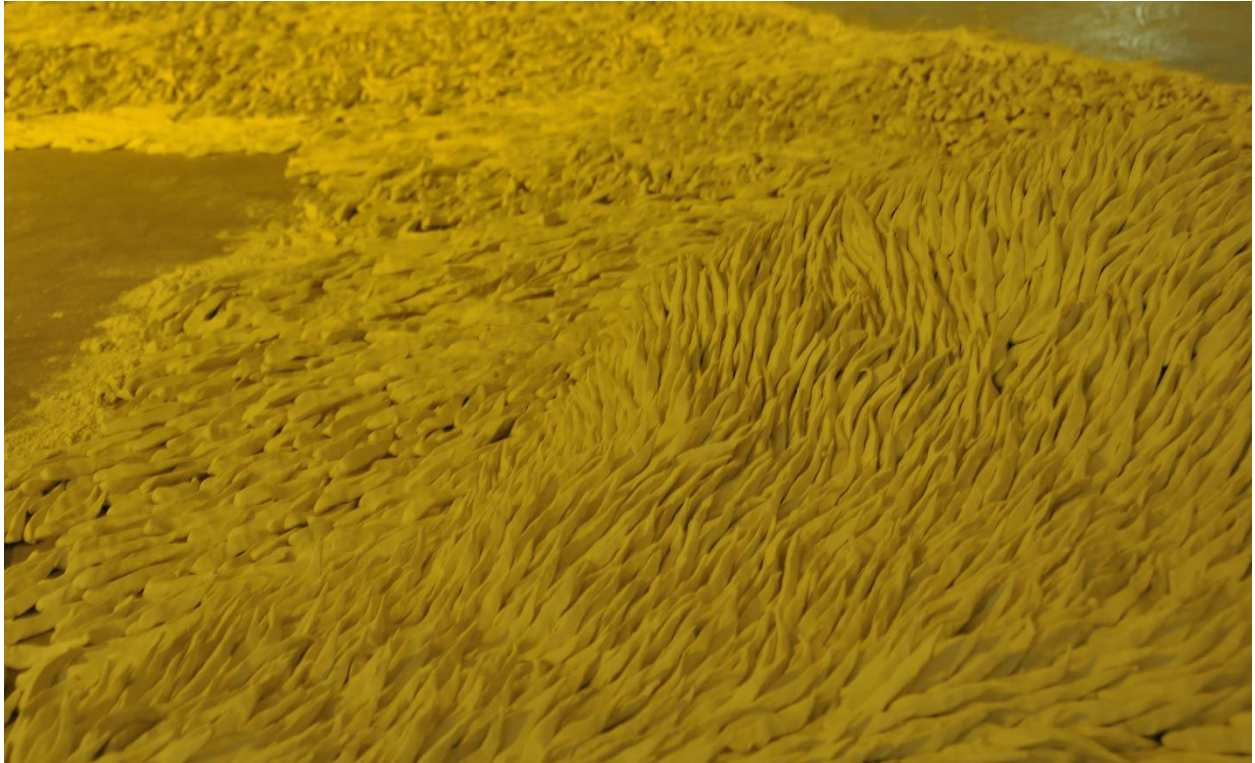


Figure 17. *Study (Seed of a Universe)* detail, 2017

During the process of creating this installation, I became enthralled with trematodes, parasitic flatworms known as flukes. Most trematodes move through at least two host organisms in their life cycle. For example, a liver fluke spends adulthood in a sheep's liver releasing its eggs in the sheep feces. Snails then consume the feces and become infected with the fluke larvae. The snail defends itself by excreting cysts containing the parasites, which are then eaten by ants. Once the larvae mature, they move into the ant's brain manipulating their behavior. This microbial life form makes the ant leave the safety of its colony to climb up to the top of a blade of grass, where the parasite paralyzes the ant until it is eaten by a sheep grazing in the early morning; and so, the cycle repeats. This invisible creature demonstrates such power over its unwitting victims and even affects more than one billion people, costing developing economies

billions of dollars in health care annually. This unseen, unusual life affects national budgets! In John Baillie's *An Essay on the Sublime* (1747), he identified two features that characterize the sublime: uniformity and uncommonness.²⁹ My concept of the sublime shifted to microbial landscapes.

For my candidacy exhibition, I wanted to create a quiet, calm landscape full of unfamiliar life. Although Burke's sublime emphasized terror and fear, Brady stated that we must feel safe from real terror in order to have the sublime experience of imagined terror.³⁰ Ideally my dreamscape would offer the opportunity for the viewer's mind to wander, considering their relationship to this imagined realm. I combined the suspended porcelain components with the mounds of flukes to see whether they would resonate with each other. The title was taken from Gaston Bachelard's musings on active dreaming: "a poetic image can be the seed of a world, the seed of a universe imagined out of a poet's reverie".³¹

Although the suspended units and floor pieces attempted to read as earth and sky, their roots as separately conceived pieces never blended. Another downside was that locating my installation in the middle of the gallery worked against my goal of calmness. Although a number of people explored the installation, walking under and around it, it was impossible for them to experience a complete escape from the noisy gallery. Furthermore, installing the work in the middle of the space held it in the boundaries of a discrete artwork, rather than an encompassing environment. Lastly, I

²⁹ Ibid. Brady, 17.

³⁰ Ibid. Brady, 42.

³¹ Bachelard, Gaston, and Daniel Russell. *The Poetics of Reverie: Childhood, Language, and the Cosmos*. Boston: Beacon, 2010. 1.

had forgotten the importance of tension. Calmness becomes dull when there is nothing with which to contrast. *Seed of a Universe* was easy to look at and easy to ignore.



Figure 18. *Seed of a Universe*, 2017

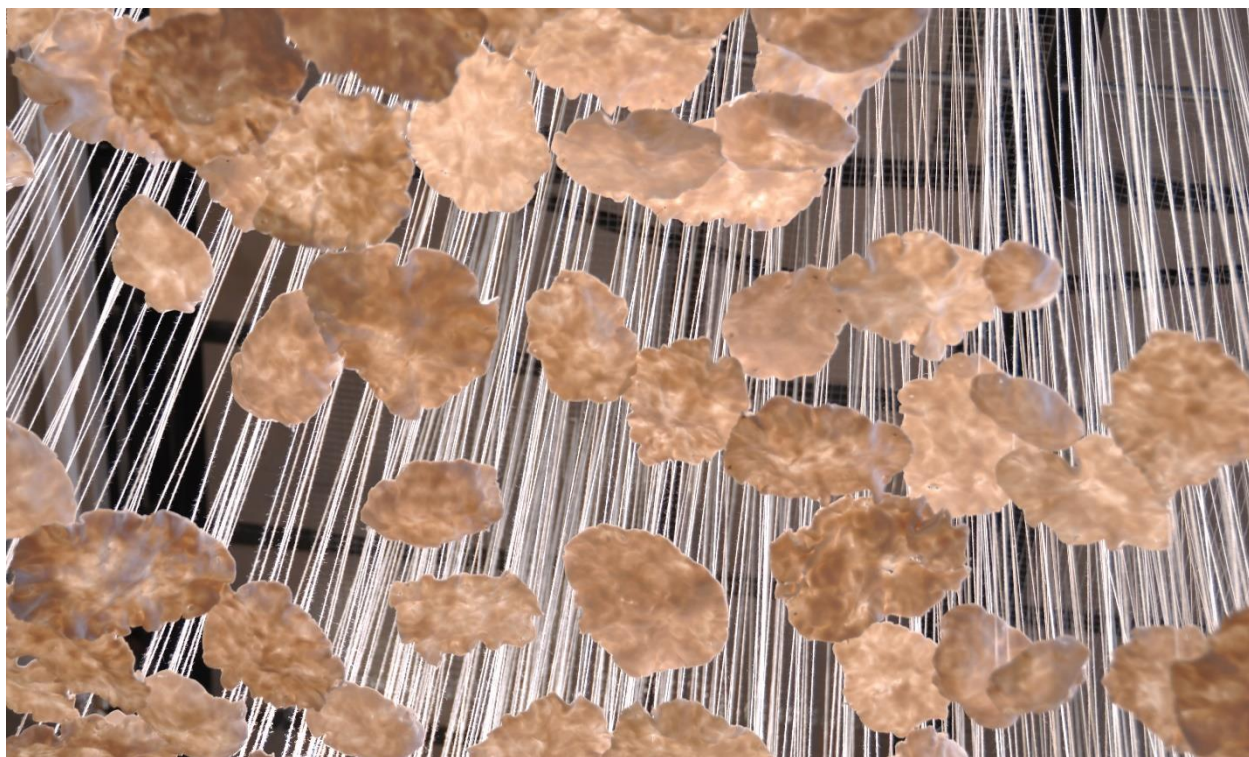


Figure 19. *Seed of a Universe* (detail), 2017



Figure 20. *Seed of a Universe* (detail 2), 2017

Refuge in Landscape

“A dreamer of refuges dreams of a hut, of a nest, or of nooks and corners in which he would like to hide away, like an animal in its hole. In this way, he lives in a region that is beyond human images.”³²

Following my candidacy exhibition, I turned my focus to protective spaces in landscape. Where does landscape provide refuge? *Grotto* was inspired by the prehistoric notion that caves were sacred passages into the center of the earth. People have viewed caves as symbolic of primordial origins. For instance, one theory suggests that Paleolithic caves, such as those at Lascaux (France), served as the site for male initiation rites. “The boys would emerge from this dark, damp womb of initiation into knowledge, no longer boys, but men”.³³

Grotto was composed of layers of press-molded components. Abundant textural detail contrasted with empty patches, and the white clay glowed against darker tones. I finally created an immersive installation by addressing the entire space contained within an old shed. The sense of an alternate realm was strengthened through the contrast between exterior and interior. Locating an underwater world inside an unassuming shed added to the surprise of finding such a portal. While creating this piece, I began to realize that the alternate worlds I longed for represented my desire for something

³² Bachelard, Gaston, et al. *The Poetics of Space*. Penguin Books, 2014. 30.

³³ Barrie, Thomas. *Spiritual Path, Sacred Place: Myth, Ritual, and Meaning in Architecture*. Shambhala, 1996. 77.

beyond my perceived reality. By containing my alternate landscape, the shed protected it from the elements and also limited the viewing opportunity. Viewers could only see it when I allowed them. Anticipation added to the wonder of finally seeing what was in this old shed. Furthermore, placing this underwater environment inside leaned into my desire to possess and protect this magical space which provided me with a temporary refuge from my cynicism.

I wanted viewers to want to enter *Grotto*, but I wanted to deny them that satisfaction. Rather than the physical experience of the space, I sought to prioritize the desire for it. Once inside the space, viewers may realize its weaknesses, just as I find holes in the fabric of whatever belief system I try to wrap around myself. The problem was that *Grotto* didn't speak for itself that viewer wasn't allowed in; so when I denied the viewers' request, they expressed disappointment and frustration. I was left with reflections on how the work could claim its own agency in disallowing entry, rather than having to direct the limited access myself. Furthermore, prohibiting access made *Grotto* into a tableaux or diorama, rather than an immersive installation. The weakness of a tableaux is that it is neatly contained and tends to have a directed point for viewing. This runs counter to the character of the sublime, which is too big and complex for a singular viewpoint.

Grotto also raised questions of real versus fake, as the wire armature was not always adequately disguised and the illusion was broken. Did I want the viewer to believe that this landscape could be real? I decided that I didn't want viewers to see holes in the fantasy.



Figure 21. *Grotto*, 2017



Figure 22. *Grotto (interior)*, 2017

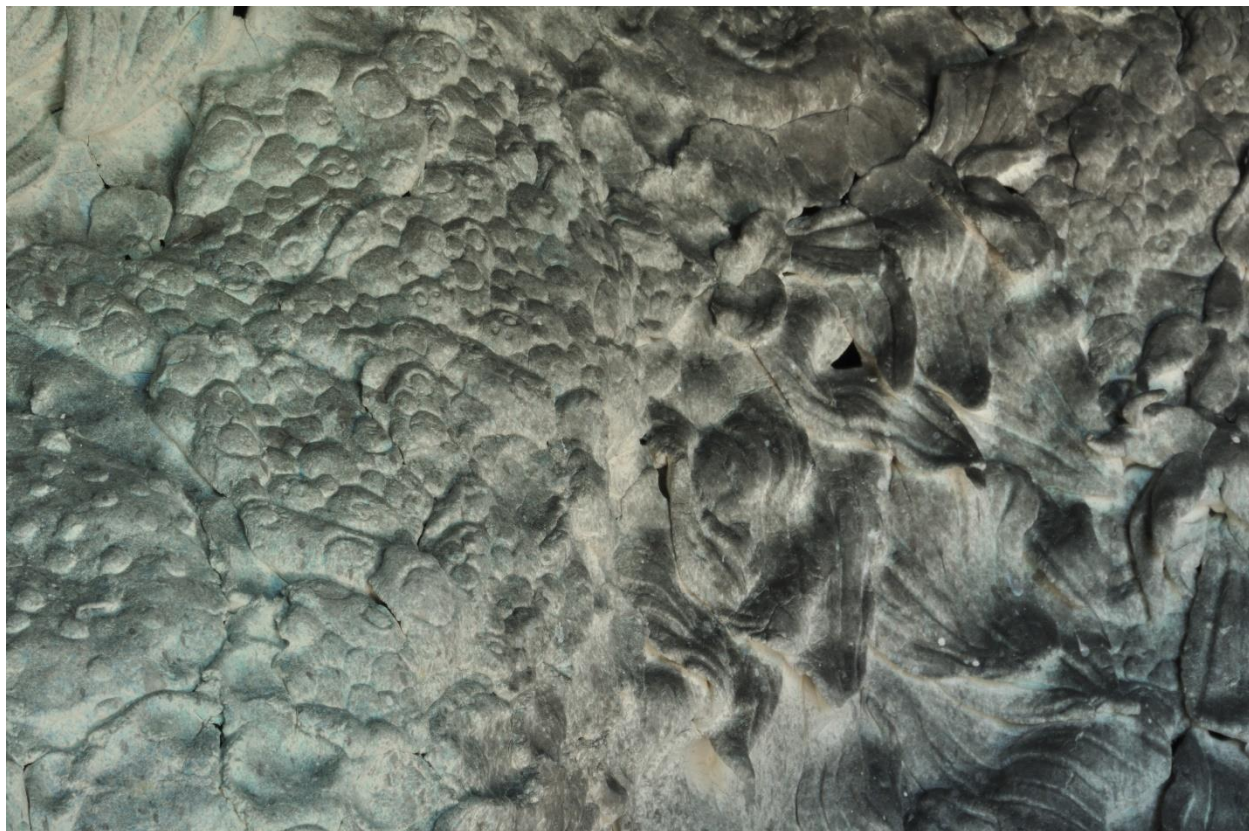


Figure 23. *Grotto* (detail), 2017

Continuing to look for examples of refuge in landscape, I turned to nests. These primitive refuges are filled with mystery as they harbor an entire universe. Within these precarious homes, we can dream of security – temporarily sheltered from the hostility of the world. *Nest* was placed high up in a corner to provide protection from those who might want to probe its secrets. The corner offers a half-home – part walls, part door. By interacting with the architecture of the gallery, one might believe that this *Nest* is a piece of animal architecture rather than an art object. How much is needed to suggest a life within this abode? Does it need to mark the wall with the residue of its creation?

The change in my colour palette was a response to my growing understanding of the binary between the sublime and the beautiful. Dark and mysterious, the sublime isn't attractive, light, or easy. It borders on the grotesque and is more difficult to observe.

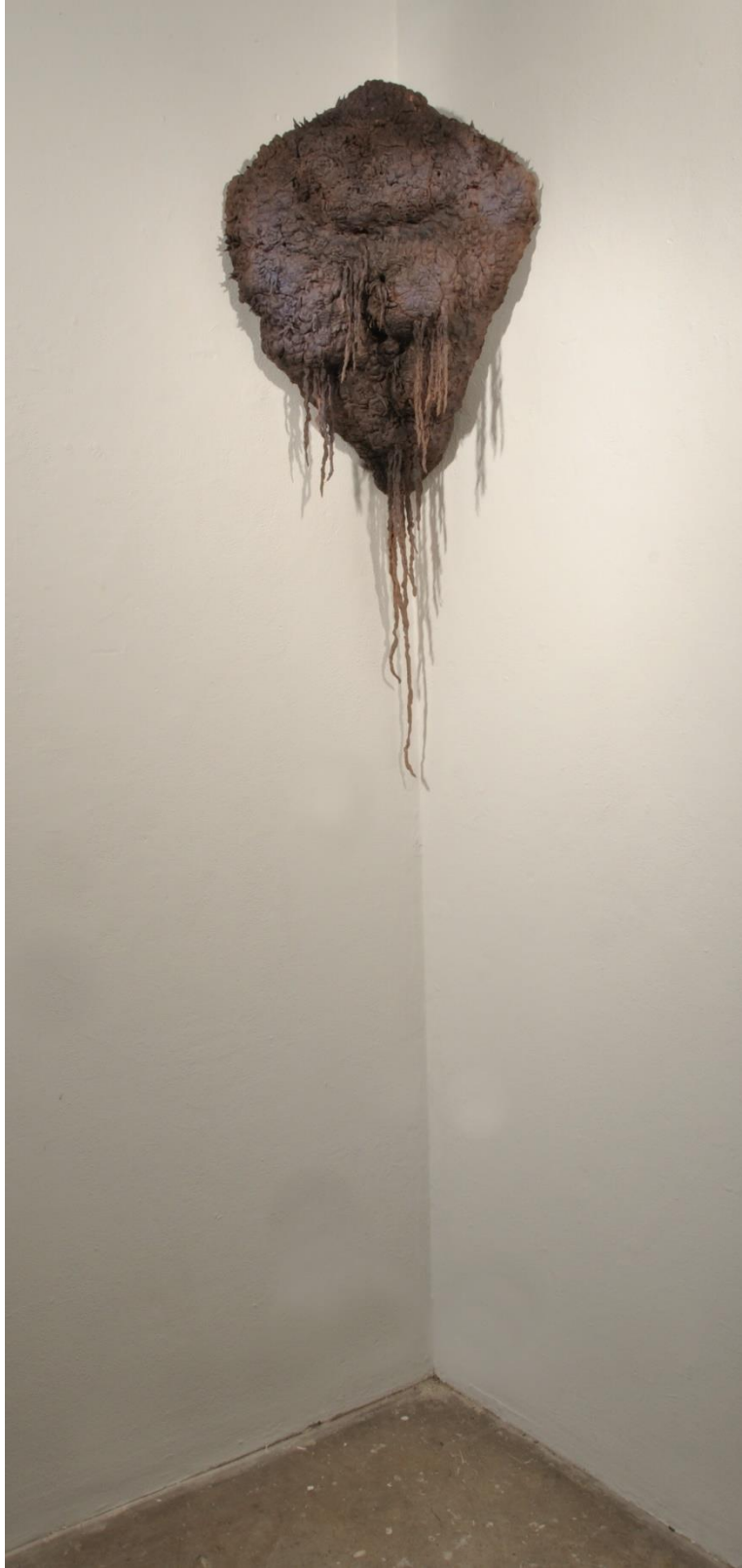


Figure 24. *Nest*, 2017



Figure 25. *Nest* (detail), 2017

Looking down through the lens of a microscope allows me to dream of life within life. In *Le Rhin*, Victor Hugo wrote that in the elaborate multiplicity of the microscopic universe, “Here, too, was an entire world”.³⁴

What would it look like for these landscapes, part microbiology and part fantasy, to protect themselves? *Colony* accumulated masses of microbial forms, and grew spikes to ward off invasive inspection. It extended draping tendrils to protect the cavity at its core, and sent delegates out into the gallery to claim further territory. Although the smaller pods were approachable to the point of cuteness, these little sentinels obstructed the viewer from getting too close to the larger mass of life.

But I had forgotten: the sublime isn’t neatly contained. If it were, my pursuit might be a little easier. *Colony* was too neat, easily consumed and easily escaped; it behaved itself in the corner. The sublime is messy and uncontainable. I had to let the work relax into its natural disorder.

³⁴ Ibid. Bachelard et al, 160.



Figure 26. *Colony*, 2017



Figure 27. *Colony* (detail), 2017

Nostalgic Sublime

In our childhood, reverie gave us freedom ... We dream of everything that it could have been; we dream at the frontier between history and legend. ...

The little becomes big. The world of childhood reverie is as big, bigger than the world offered to today's reverie. From poetic reverie, inspired by some great spectacle of the world to childhood reverie, there is a commerce of grandeur. And that is why childhood is at the origin of the greatest landscapes. Our childhood solitudes have given us the primitive immensities.³⁵

I acquired a sandbox from a man whose children had out-grown it. I wanted to create my own dream landscape protected in this abandoned relic of childhood, the time when my faith was abundant.

The sandbox attempted to protect its contents, but piles of earth reclaimed from its original reality for an alternate one poured out of its boundaries. The forms that emerged from the sandbox piled on top of each other, overwhelming their vessel with messy, unfamiliar, uncontrolled life. The dark, dirty composition evoked fear and discomfort in confronting a rather disgusting terrain. What broke that tension? Was it the lopsided forms flopping over with their hair in disarray that were mildly comical? Upon closer inspection, it became clear that this mass accumulated through reproducing cells. Was there a systematic pattern of growth? There was such a plethora of textured detail that it seemed overwhelming and chaotic. The subtle shift between dark tones and lighter highlights allowed the viewer's eye to move at varying paces. The areas where

³⁵ Ibid. Bachelard and Russell, 101-102.

the clay dissolved offered moments of visual quiet compared to areas with dense, detailed forms. The dark palette, sinking forms, and the wilting tendrils placed this landscape in a state of decay; but even still there was potential for continued accumulation of cells to continue the growth of this terrain. The imagined life grew beyond the setting provided for it, spilling out onto the gallery floor where the earth dissolved into a formless residue. Composed of raw clay, this terrain was never fixed in its form. It could have continued to spread, or it could have melted away.

In creating an imaginary landscape in this abandoned sandbox, there was a sense of longing for the wonder found in a child's imaginings. Knowing I cannot return to the time when it was easier to believe in magic, my dream-world could not withstand the effects of time; so it rotted in this reality. There was a deepening sadness in witnessing the decomposition of this land; yet there was also hope that this life form could continue to grow. *Sandbox* needed a chance to take up the whole gallery. As installed in this iteration, it was a sculptural object, but I wanted to surround the viewers in this strange terrain. My interpretation of the sublime had to be deterritorialized from the discrete object.



Figure 28. *Sandbox*, 2018



Figure 29. *Sandbox* (detail), 2018



Figure 30. *Sandbox* (detail 2), 2018

Infectious Landscape

Invasion imagined a foreign life seeping through the seams of the gallery: where the walls meet each other and the floor, and forgotten openings. The largest form hovered between asserting its presence and retreating into the corner. Beyond relying on the gallery architecture for its support, it sent out vine-like extensions to lay claim to a broader space. Not only did it reach out to grab hold of the track lights and pipes above, small growths spread along the floor evidencing the root system from which they sprouted.

Even though *Invasion* began to demonstrate the messy chaos of the sublime, it still operated as an art object – easily viewed from one angle. It still limited my portrayal of the sublime to a tableaux. The work needed to expand to command the entire space. I tried incorporating smell and sound, but these overwhelmed the visual experience. Instead of exploring the life-forms in front of them, viewers were fixated on identifying the smell and the uncomfortable sounds. Instead of relying on a multi-sensory experience that reads a bit too much like a haunted house, the landscape must dominate the viewing experience.



Figure 31. *Invasion*, 2017.



Figure 32. *Invasion* (detail), 2017



Figure 33. *Invasion* (detail 2), 2017

The Relevance of Reverie

Like many times in history, the world seems to be at a breaking point. Twentieth century philosopher Ernst Bloch believed that art was political in offering escape from tyrannical reality. Escape in dreaming allows my brain to recover enough to process the unstoppable stream of reality, but the escape is never total. Even the products of my reverie reflect qualities of reality. In this way, my imagined worlds subtly reveal aspects of this one.

Do I need to state the realities that I long to escape?

- Realizing how alive racism is in America and Canada,
- approaching more of the details of our campaign of cultural genocide in regards to First Nations and indigenous people,
- seeing how American political discourse has become increasingly polarized in an us vs. them struggle,
- seeing how many women have experienced harassment and assault,
- seeing someone struggle to move through the sludge of their past,
- watching someone's life become increasingly small and hopeless ...

I have no solutions for any of these problems. They are too complicated and multidimensional, like the sublime. I am frustrated with not knowing how to fix them.

Searching for the sublime allows me to exit the difficulties of operating in this world. In *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer writes about the window of escape possible in contemplating nature:

[W]e no longer consider the where, the when, the why, and the whither of things, but simply and solely the what ... we do not let abstract thought, the concepts of reason, take possession of our consciousness, but, instead of all this, devote the whole power of our mind to perception, sink ourselves completely therein, and let our whole consciousness be filled by calm contemplation of the natural object actually present, whether it be a landscape, a tree, a rock, a crag, a building, or anything else. (WWR 1, 38, 178).³⁶

Poetic reverie calms the mind by engaging it in active observation. Author Neil Gaiman is a strong advocate for people continuing to exercise their imaginations, regarding it as an obligation for all citizens. Imagination helps us to build empathy, allowing us to “function as more than self-obsessed individuals”. Poetic reverie encourages an individual to step outside of their consciousness to encounter something foreign. This is important practice.

While escapism can simply shut out the world, it can also be a statement of fervent belief that this reality isn't good enough. It is the prayer of the discontented, begging for the world to be different, better. This may be the first step towards actions that will craft a better reality. “As J.R.R. Tolkien reminded us, the only people who inveigh against escape are jailers.”³⁷ Escapism marks a belief in freedom. I am fulfilling

³⁶ Ibid. Brady, 94.

³⁷ Gaiman, Neil. "Why Our Future Depends on Libraries, Reading and Daydreaming." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 15 Oct. 2013. Web. 05 Jan. 2018. <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/oct/15/neil-gaiman-future-libraries-reading-daydreaming>>.

my obligation as an artist to trigger imaginations to dream of alternatives to this reality which is simply not enough.

I understand that it is a privilege to withdraw from the fray, and I understand that many people can't do that. I'm not sure how to bridge the separation between my privileged retreat and another's unending struggle. Is it enough to share my escape?

The entertainment industry thrives on offering its public various brands of escapism, including science fiction and fantasy stories. My work has been compared to the "upside-down" in *Stranger Things*, and I have come to claim this parallel dimension as akin to my alternate world. In the story of *Stranger Things*, the "upside-down," a dark, forbidding dimension empty of human life, is accidentally opened by scientific research directed by the United States Department of Energy. Supernatural forces begin to leak out into the town particularly affecting the family and friends of Will, a young boy who is abducted by a monster from the "upside-down." We are also convinced of how evil the government's research is as we learn more about the traumatic childhood of a young girl named Eleven. Family and friends unite in their mission to fight the heartless schemes of the U.S.D.E. and save Will. Let the magic begin!

The Never-ending Story, Lord of the Rings, The Chronicles of Narnia, Harry Potter. In these alternate worlds, it is clear what the problem is and what the solution must be. The Nothing must be stopped, and it is defeated simply by giving the Empress a new name to continue her life and the land of imagined fantasy. Sauron must be defeated by destroying the ring of power; loyal friendships ensure that Frodo succeeds

in this task. In these worlds, good and evil are clearly defined, and good will always prevail. Unfortunately, the real world lacks clarity; good and evil are not undeniably distinct. There is not just one bad guy, and the way forward against the elements of doom is unclear. Fiction elucidates reality with the nuance that is often missing in the daily news cycle. Thus, make-believe does a better job of exploring the shifty terrain of truth than more rational pursuits.

“[Ernst Fischer] even believed in the necessity of apocalyptic visions in the hope that they would act as warnings.”³⁸ My work imagines another world, but it decays when it floods into this one. This spreading disease can be widely interpreted. For example, some viewers can interpret the work as referencing environmental collapse; but the true edge of my work is subtler than that. Rooting my work in escapism begs the question: why is this escape necessary? “[W]hy is our own existence not enough?”³⁹ And what is causing the death of this imagined reprieve? “In a decaying society, art, if it is truthful, must also reflect decay. And unless it wants to break faith with its social function, art must show the world as changeable. And help to change it.”⁴⁰

My thesis exhibition, *Polyanthroponemia*, visualizes the poison we put out into the world creeping back to us – pushing through the holes in our well-ordered façade. Just as fluke-infected snails defend themselves by excreting cysts containing the parasites, what if the earth had a sort of immune system that built masses in an attempt to contain the infection? In James Lovelock’s *The Vanishing Face of Gaia*, he stated that humanity is a virus that spreads from site to site, claiming more of its host to the

³⁸ Fisher, Mark. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Winchester, UK, Zero Books, 2010. 2.

³⁹ Fischer, Ernst et al. *The Necessity of Art*. London: Verso, 2010. 16

⁴⁰ Ibid. Fisher, 59.

point of destruction. Lovelock theorized that we will eventually shape this planet into a place that doesn't support human life. At that point, the earth will shake us off like the flu. Lovelock named the illness where humans overpopulate the planet, doing more harm than good, "polyanthroponemia".⁴¹

In this installation, imagined life forms inspired by microbiology interact with the architecture of the gallery. The forms jump from the pipes and slip through the vents. They slide down the walls, hang from the rafters and ooze along the floor. The viewer is surrounded by unfamiliar life which is sometimes fragile and sometimes threatening as it looms overhead. The wonder lies in questioning how this life-form arrived in the gallery. Is it still spreading, or is it dying off? Is it safe, or does the viewer risk infection by exploring the work?

⁴¹ Lovelock, James. *The Vanishing Face of Gaia: a Final Warning*. Penguin, 2010. 233.



Figure 34. *Polyanthroponemia*, 2018



Figure 35. *Polyanthroponemia* (detail), 2018



Figure 36. *Polyanthroponemia* (detail 2), 2018



Figure 37. *Polyanthroponemia* (detail 3), 2018

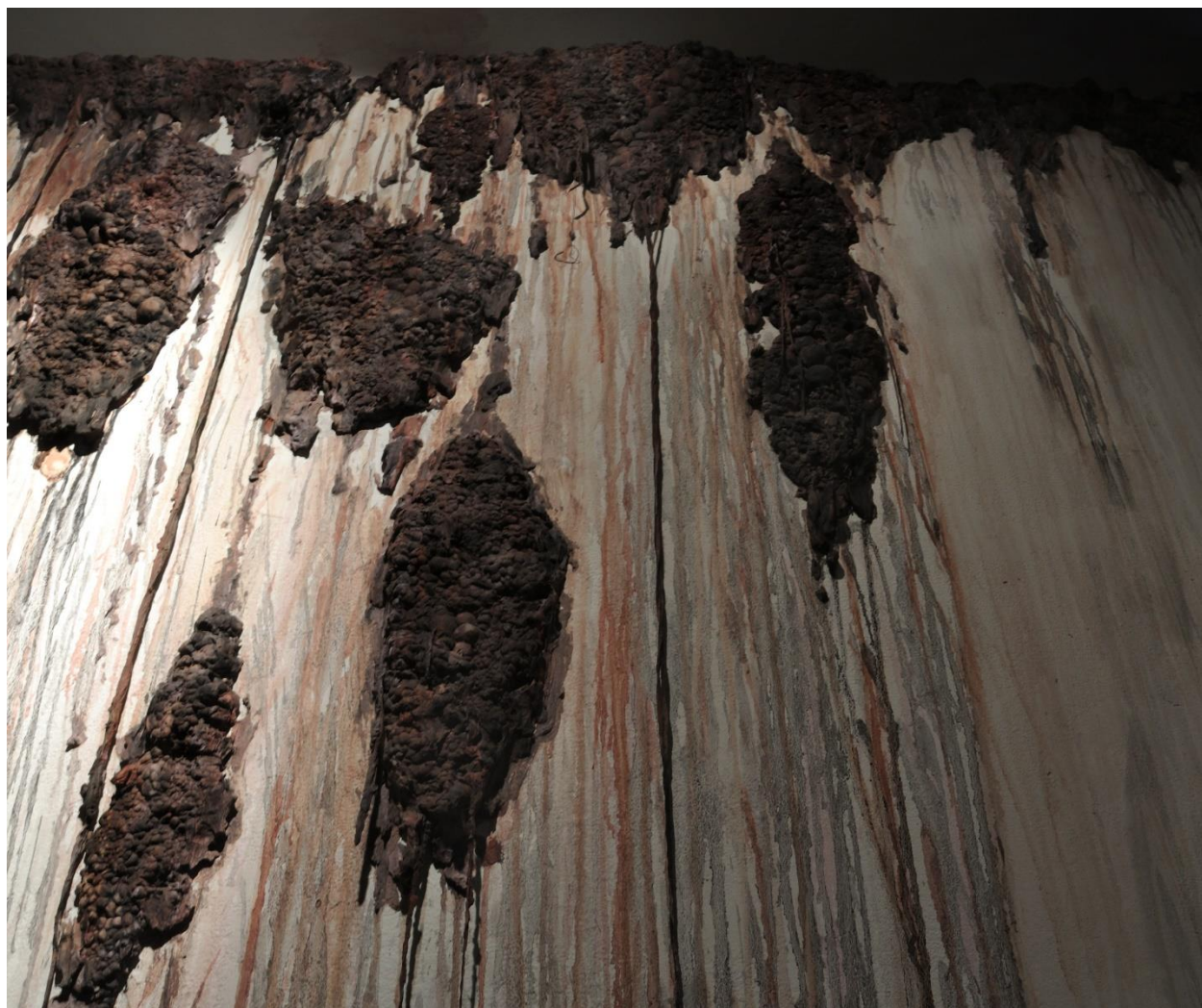


Figure 38. *Polyanthroponemia* (detail 4), 2018

Conclusion

So where do I experience mystery? Where is my sublime? It is not in religious architecture. It is not in clean visualizations of infinity, which remind me of the limits of my mind. Nor is it in pleasant landscapes that imagine all is well. My sublime lives in the dark underbelly of reality leading me to question my understanding of this world. It is the fearful amazement of confronting something unusual, unfamiliar, and beyond my understanding or control.

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- Morley, Simon. *The Sublime*. Whitechapel Gallery, 2010.
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- "Robert Smithson, Spiral Jetty." *Dia Art*, Dia Art Foundation, diaart.org/visit/visit/robert-smithson-spiral-jetty. Accessed 17 Jan. 2018.
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- Stewart, Susan. *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Duke University Press, 2007.

Twomey, Clare. "Clare Twomey." *Clare Twomey*, Clare Twomey, www.claretwomey.com/. Accessed 15 Jan. 2018.

Zizek, Slavoj. "The Sublime Object of Ideology." *The Sublime*, Whitechapel Gallery, London, 2010, pp. 56–63.

Curriculum Vitae
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Education

2018 Master of Fine Arts, Virginia Commonwealth University (Richmond, VA)
2005 Master in Science of Education, Niagara University (Lewiston, NY)
2003 Bachelor of Arts, Houghton College (Houghton, NY)
2003 Bachelor of Science, Houghton College (Houghton, NY)

Teaching Experience

2018 Professor of Record, Virginia Commonwealth University (Richmond, VA)
2017 Professor of Record, Virginia Commonwealth University (Richmond, VA)
2016-2017 Graduate Teaching Assistant, Virginia Commonwealth University (Richmond, VA)
2005 – 2016 Secondary Teacher, District School Board of Niagara (St. Catharines, ON)
2010 – 2011 Instructor & Studio Technician, Tutor in Art Studios, York University (York, UK)
2010 – 2011 Workshop Instructor, New School House Gallery (York, UK)

Residencies

2015 Artist in Residence, Medalta International AIR Program (Medicine Hat, AB)
2010 – 2011 Artist in Residence, York University, Tutor in Art Studios (York, UK)
2009 – 2010 Mentorship Program for Ceramic Artists, Mentor: Ann Roberts,
Art Gallery of Burlington (Burlington, ON)

Selected Exhibitions

SOLO

2014

Watch, Art Gallery of Burlington, Burlington, ON

2013

34 Faces, David Kaye Gallery, Toronto, ON
Deliberations, Carnegie Gallery, Dundas, ON

GROUP

2018

Contemporary Clay, Western Colorado Center for the Arts, Grand Junction, CO
7th Annual National Juried Exhibition, Marshall University School of Art, Huntington, WV
Nature and Neon, Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts, Gatlinburg, TN

2017

Emerge, Page Bond Gallery, Richmond, VA
Critical: VCU Craft & Material Studies Candidacy Exhibition, Hohman Designs, Richmond, VA

2016

Toronto Outdoor Art Exhibition, Toronto, ON
San Angelo National Ceramics Competition, San Angelo, TX

2015

Fusion Clay & Glass Show, Toronto, ON
Tool, Medalta, Medicine Hat, AB
Carnegie Craft, Carnegie Gallery, Dundas, ON

2013

Hot Mud, Art Gallery of Burlington, Burlington, ON
Toronto Outdoor Art Exhibition, Toronto, ON

2012

Queen West Art Crawl, Toronto, ON
Toronto Outdoor Art Exhibition, Toronto, ON
The Artist Project, Toronto, ON

2011

Craft '11, Ontario Crafts Council, Toronto, ON
Un-Wedged, Pottery Northwest, Seattle, WA
Seventh International Biannual of Ceramics, Kapfenberg, Austria
Ceramics Exhibition, RBSA Gallery, Birmingham, UK
Featured Artist, Jordan Art Gallery, Jordan, ON
Making Sense, John B. Aird Gallery, Toronto, ON
OCC Award Winners Exhibition, OCC, Toronto, ON
NCECA Biennial Exhibition, Tampa Museum of Art, Tampa, FL
Critical Path, Art Gallery of Burlington, Burlington, ON
I Am Human, New School House Gallery, York, UK

2010

Toronto Outdoor Art Exhibition, Toronto, ON
OCC Award Winners Exhibition, OCC, Toronto, ON
Masterworks Southwest, Ontario
The Artist Project, Toronto, ON

Selected Awards**2018**

Honorable Mention, *7th Annual National Juried Exhibition*, Marshall University School of Art

2017

Graduate Teaching Assistantship, Virginia Commonwealth University

2016

Graduate Teaching Assistantship, Virginia Commonwealth University
Crafts Project Grant, Ontario Arts Council

2015

Craft Ontario Mid-Career Award

2014

Crafts Project Grant, Ontario Arts Council

2012

Bruce Cochrane Ceramic Talent Award, Ontario Crafts Council
Exhibition Assistance Grant, Ontario Arts Council

2011

Hey Frey Memorial Award, Ontario Crafts Council

2010

Clay Supply Grant, Ontario Crafts Council (donor: Tuckers Supplies Ltd.)
Crafts Project Grant, Ontario Arts Council
Sculpture Award, Thames Art Gallery Juried Exhibition

Publications**2014**

Smith, Nan. 500 Figures in Clay, Volume 2. New York, Sterling Publishing: 2014

2013

Haggo, Regina. "The Eyes Have It". *The Hamilton Spectator* Feb. 14, 2013

2011

Tokita, Chiho. "Critical Path: Ceramic Sculpture and Pottery Mentor Project at the Burlington Arts Centre". *FUSION* Vol. 35, #2 (2011)

Collections

Medalta Historic Clay District (Medicine Hat, AB)
Gardiner Museum (Toronto, ON)
Art Gallery of Burlington (Burlington, ON)
City of Kapfenberg (Austria)
Private collections in Canada, the UK, & Australia