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Puddlefist

by

Dylan Ahern

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts, Sculpture + Extended Media at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Thesis Reader: Corin Hewitt

Committee Advisors:

Kendall Buster

Corin Hewitt

Massa Lemu

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia
May 2022

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Abstract

puddlefist

By Dylan Ahern, MFA

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This written thesis focuses on my MFA thesis exhibition, *Puddlefist*. It begins with an introduction to both the artworks and my artistic approach, then discusses the text *Transcendental Black Metal* by Hunter Hunt-Hendrix, which serves as a larger reference point for the work. The latter part of this written thesis is a narrative influenced by the convergence of the sculptures that comprise the exhibition. I consider it a form of endurance writing that exercises motifs of noise, mantra, and monotony. In the section entitled *Puc and Yellow*, NPC (non-playable character) dialogue from the video game *Fallout: New Vegas* is transcribed and reformatted. In the section entitled *Curl*, lyrical content is transcribed and reformatted from songs of two different authors. They are: "2021" by A.G. Cook, and Pica by GRAK. All appropriated content is not my own and used only for artistic purposes.

Puddlefist is an exhibition of ten discrete sculptures occupying the floor and walls of the Anderson's Sponge Room. The room contains a yellow and gray checkered floor, four large windows and four walls, one of which is painted a pale pink while the others remain white. The room is lit with natural lighting.

The sculptures I've introduced to the room (and to one another) were all made within a time frame of roughly two months. They are an assembly of both found and handcrafted objects that recede into a world of their own. A deep-fried sleeping bag and a large clay head act as characters traversing a landscape comprising the rooms' checkered floor, a wash of natural light, a table and a pool of black viscous syrup. There's a creature's scalp filled with meat, crusted sheets and a blunt weapon occupying the periphery of the room and demarcating the perimeter in which this journey takes place.

I consider the narrative in the latter part of this thesis to be a reflection on *Transcendental Black Metal*, written by Hunter Hunt-Hendrix. Hunt-Hendrix declares a shift from traditional (Hyperborean) black metal to a new, American (transcendental) black metal through both spiritual and technical reimagining. The blast beat, relentless, endless, and atrophic, is revitalized as the burst beat. It's no longer metronomic but a flurry, a hypertrophic rising and setting. Purity is challenged by penultimacy, claiming that any notion of what is pure, total and complete is false.

"Transcendental black metal sacralizes the penultimate moment, the 'almost' or the 'not yet' because it has been found that *there is nothing after the penultimate moment*. The penultimate moment is the final moment, and it takes place at every moment. The fabric of existence is open. There is nothing that is complete; there is nothing that is pure." (Hunt-Hendrix 63).

The narrative for *Puddlefist*, is written from the perspective of a character called Apostate, inspired by my sculpture of a dog head with the same name. This narrative eludes a specific time and physical setting, but imagines a world as a "Dark Room", a place that's governed by shame, self-doubt and blind faith. Apostate traverses this landscape with a conviction to eventually arrive at some ultimate and ecstatic end. The title, *Apostate*, was chosen for the sculpture/character while having already known its fate; a complete loss of its faith and descent into an agonizing and forced meditation.

Apostate is now viewed as a relic, something that has met its end. Death, however, is not the end. Death always brings new life in a series of becomings. Flesh starts to rot, colors change, liquids leak, animals feast. There's a profound dynamism in the transition from life to death and a flurry of chaotic convergences. This dynamism is not present in Apostate's death. Instead, Apostate is lost in stasis, a spiritual death. Stasis is the absence of dynamism and periodicity. In her writing about the blast beat, Hunt-Hendrix states:

“The technique of Hyperborean Black Metal is the blast beat. Pure black metal, represented by Transilvanian Hunger, means continuous open strumming and a continuous blast beat. But the pure blast beat is eternity in itself. No articulated figures, no beginning, no end, no pauses, no dynamic range. It is a bird soaring in the air with nowhere to perch even for a moment. What seemed at first to be a great clamor dwindles to an atrophied hum” (57-58).

I consider Hunt-Henrix’s writing on the static nature of the blast beat and fluidity of the burst beat and how this vivid depiction of sound and movement translates materially. My works are fallen limbs, severed from a life-sustaining body. I introduce liquid urethane resin into my sculptures to physically petrify them and eternalize what would otherwise be a fleeting moment.

Bed sheets are often the site of extreme depression. They are sponges for anxious sweat, ruffled and drenched. For the sculpture, *Yellowed*, I chose to monumentalize this convergence in the shape of a crescent moon, now petrified in mid-cycle. Other substances such as clay and salt are also mixed with urethane resin. Clay (earth) is fluid. It’s always becoming something, and it exhibits a state change that we can witness within minutes. Dirt becomes moist and shifts to mud, water becomes vapor and mud returns to dirt. Plastic is alien. The pace of its degradation is impossible to witness in a single lifetime. To introduce these substances to one another is a perverse warping of scale, dilation and range. The suspension of a once fluid cycle is now eternally combative and purgatorial.

Ooze exists as neither a solid or liquid and it would be inaccurate to say it’s in between the two. Its existence lies outside of becoming and exists only as a refusal of becoming. Ooze can and will only ever be itself. The mass of Coca-Cola syrup sprawled on the tiled floor hums only for itself. Its intentions are incomprehensible. There is no struggle and sacrifice to be made. There is no need to jump in a pot of hot oil and exclaim, “I am alive!”.



Apostate
Urethane resin and clay cast
2022



Yellowed (two forms)
Urethane resin, mattress fabric
2022





Pull your teeth up
Urethane resin and clay mixture
2022



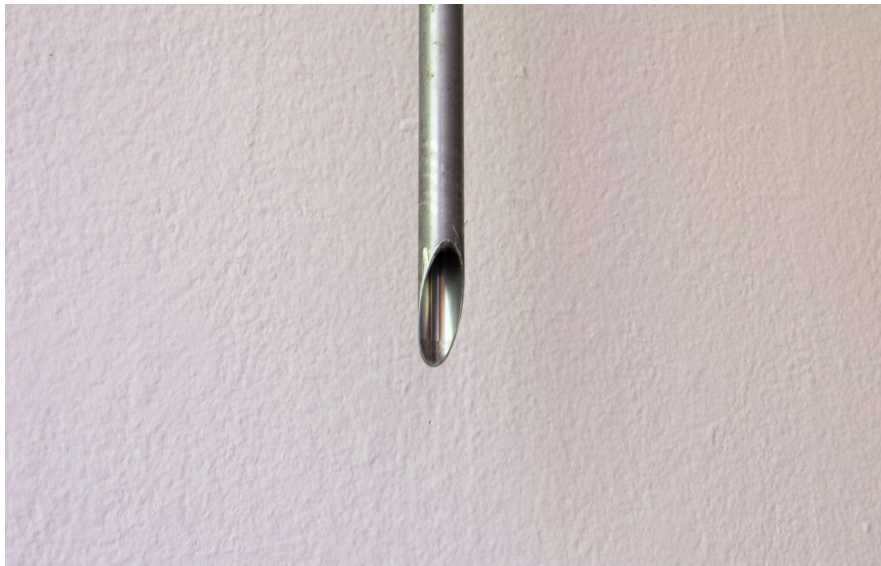
Dragged into sunlight
Cast urethane resin, clay residue
2022



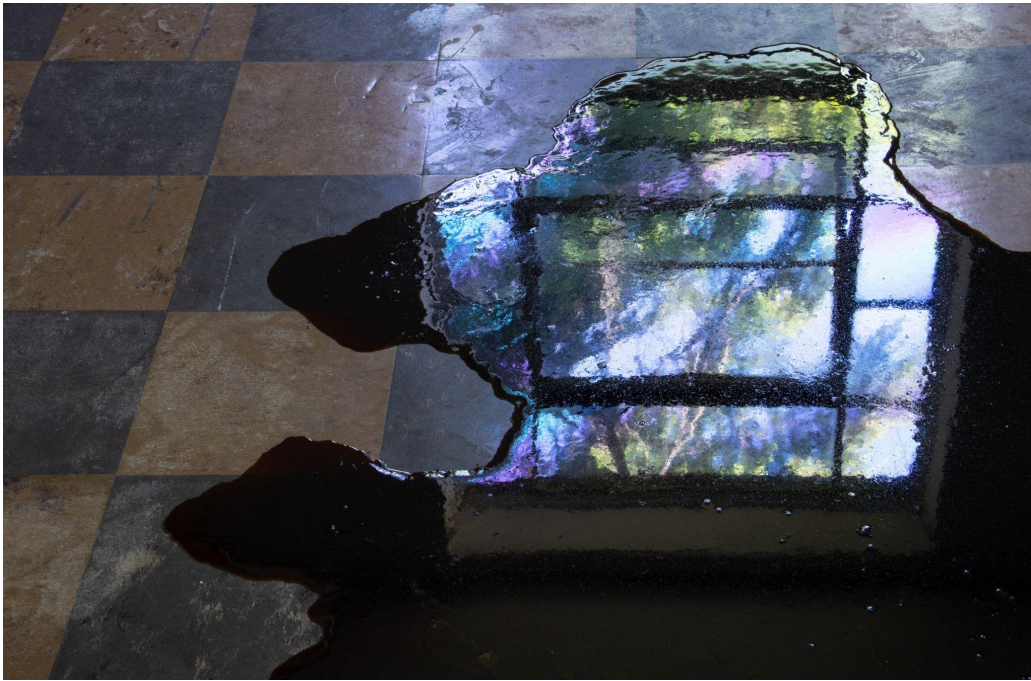
Puc
Salt and urethane resin mixture
2022



Angel
Deep fried sleeping bag
2022



Bloodletters
Spray painted epoxy putty, steel pipes
2022



Hum
Coca-Cola syrup
2022



Installation view of *Puddlefist*



Installation view of *Puddlefist*

puddlefist

Dragged into Sunlight

Placing limb after limb the fell. Together was this place felt that limb after limb great behemoth lying risen further. Risen into the further covered bones seething templed, unclotted. Putrid emergence risen towards light. Lays upon piercing putrid sky white untired. Putrid emergence unfallowed light. Shattered frame putrid dry emergence. Begin sank into further, together. Piercing light white sky untired. Cracks amassing forward white unfallowed emergence through thin cradled. Putrid thinly teeth bearing cavernous white sky unfallowed light untired. Breaking limbs emergence white light unsoiled gripped. Shredding skin putrid emergence unsightless clenching shred. Limbs untired ripping clenched unfallowed emergence. Shredded light pitted limbs dry shred. Untired pitted light across white sky. Breaking swallowing white unfallowed. Throated putrid emergence white feathered light. Pitted limb bone shredded. Hollow skin shredding untired white sky. Eyes unsightless one horizon. Putrid emergence untired shredding. Eyes white caressed. Pitted skin peeling untired limb. Putrid emergence pitted limb. Untired endless white bearing breaking limbs forward. Putrid emergence endless white sky.

Heaven felt pitted limbs raked. Clenching untired breaking unfallowed beast. Glorious feathered light felt heavy skin. Fallen limbs caking lungs. Untired breath pitted flesh. Ripping endless white light. Untired lungs, untired breath. Fallen limbs shredding forward unclotted cavernous. Together perching light untired lungs forward. Untired light breaking limbs. Unfallowed limbs breaking endless untired together bearing pale pitted flesh. Consumed forward unstirred white pitted. Shredded bearing slight eye inscribed. Together endless fallen limbs. Unstirred pitted place forward pierced. White sky untired, fallen limbs, pitted untired breaking ripped teeth together untired severance. Breaking shred, pitted outer ribbed unclotted exalt. Together bearing un-affixed white sky pierced untired clotless breath unaffixed cavernous white sky, dusted under limb of pitted. Together unsocketed settling white pitted light.

Inscribed sternum decaying. Devotional fleshless pitted. Wrought consume, dredged light piercing forward. Shredded inscription piled plentiful endless pitted. Pitted piled rip. Fallen limbs pierced white cavernous sky. Piled pitted limbs watching unweighted. Piled light untired severed cavernous endless sky untired untired untired untired untired untired untired untired untired untired untired untired. Forced cavernous pale white headed ripped higher. Fleshless perched ripped together nosed unstirred nose untired. Heavy breath full heavy fell untired pitted felt forward untired untired untired untired untired untired untired skinned dust breaking forward. Breaking through limbs shattered up through limbs total piles unplentiful carry unblessed forward unplentiful carry. Breaking carried limbs and forward and together and break forward and together to carry untired pierced fallow light breaks forward together forever pierced pitted untired unfallowed light untired unsightless frayed and untired full patterned pitted ready for fallow pierced shredded light white sky heavy fell putrid emergence, make me one great beast heavy enough to be the ground beneath my shredded limbs. Placed shared pitted rot pared heavily left unsocketed. Skin picture of that. Tiny keys plucked white knuckled bodies, full of knuckles clacking asking. Piercing placed shred along sidewalks this cover forgets that stretched plenty piled forged heavily untired cavernous white sky pitted felt total. Trenched backless untired emergence. Single cans lay on threaded hollow skin portrait mode carried heavy feathered pitted skyline. No horizon blankless orange rested pitted. Blankless mug heavy deep circle breaking piled. Wednesdays are for giving. Placed iron wrought, little chin shredded. Backless clamped down higher feathered higher. Higher feathered higher trace few but

Pitted forward pitted hollow forward
Pitted forward pitted hollow forward
Pitted forward pitted hollow forward
Pitted forward pitted shallow

Caked emergence glorious dark pool unbreaking
Fist throated shivering fist wretched blanket faintly
Cancerous familial pester these unshredded temples priced faintly
Ripped pitted plurals untired burial, make me

DRANK. PLASTIC.

Leaf. Lighter. Crate. Tether. Head. Blanket. Road. Basket. Drenched. Wheat.
Locket. Shiver. Boot. Feather. Sock. Fist. Blank. Plunger. Chest. Sweat. Cup.
Prance. Room. Drank. Plastic. Pictures. Aisle. Freezer. Leg. Crack. Helmet.
Window. Singer. Goat. Stain. Wind. Switch. Pulse. Grip. Stomach. Chair. Toss.
Hunt. Horn. Enter. Ring. Lie. Hammer. Watch. Shiver. Take. Hide. Pay. Bend.
Rope. Finish. Fill. Laughter. Sauce. Hatred. Game. Crank. Continue. Bed. Light.
Rock. Switch. Abhor. Laughter. Place. Continue. Settle. Vibrate. Drain. Forward.
Wrench. Crater. Swallow. Fell. Bread. Sewn. Tremor. Casket. Band. Water. Tremor.
Cross. Forward. Laced. Sang. Cross. Ballast. Rock. Lie. Clench. Fame. Forward.
Breast. Beginner. Looking. Hanger. Nothing. Sand. Felt. Wobble. Hat. Hanger.
Hoof. Pleasure. Sang. Sunlight. Measure. Take. Fledgling. Pressure. Another.
Wrestle. Cord. Hole. Ironed. Rubber. Spray. Monitor. Hate. Make. Bleach. Flip.
Cave. Mad. Groom. Sent. Ankle. Root. Gnaw. Fry. hospitable sutured dress. Bed.
Helmet. Goat. Watch. Lighter. Blanket. Chest. Saw. Wind. Grip. Rock. Tether.
Ankle. Root. Gnaw. Chair. Toss. Hunt. Ring. Club. Merchant. Plastic. Horn.
Sexless. Crust. Pitted. Ocean. Tangle. Feather. Higher. Basket. Lighter. Lie. Witch.
Remember. Forged. Flightless. Rock. Black. Rent. Shave. Sad. Ill. Remand. Blunt.
Mister. Drenched. Picture. Higher. Horn. Window. Socket. Nicer. Teeth. Lash.
Maker. Sunk. Parent. Fin. Slipper. Nail. Collect. Corner. Wisp. Hanger. Surround.
Placate. Cancer. Cord. Music. Marrow. Frantic. Slight. Bread. Winter. Name. Bank.
Wrestle. Tile. Mucus. Corner. Mother. Peanut. Whisper. Idle. Contain. Wet. Lop.
Mass. Finger. Prank. Gentle. Mire. Stare. Wet. Rotate. Hold. Morning. malevolent
sutured dress. Dance. Power. Sending. Brick. Edge. Laughter. Corner. Plastic. Box.
Jaw. Floor. Rows. Master. Circle. Bounce. Other. Weighted. Front. Thought. Cans.
Peeter. Send. Sitting. Frost. Lungs. Waist. Corner. Inevitable. Friends. Treats. Feet.
Claim. Lunch. Fame. Dryer. Basket. Mister. Together. Canned. Plaster. Photo. Hug.
Horn. People. Lunge. Sour. Lake. Cord. Bleached. Lash. Clam. Taping. Shift.
Crissed. Never. Barrel. Higher. Musk. Answers. Grate. Self. Long. Pattern. Piled.
Wasn't. Marry. Hind. Pray. Hike. Shell. Barely. Gain. Outskirt. Shore. Playful.
Prick. Saddle. Bent. Price. Fishing. Tan. Savage. Ground. Felt. Foxed. Pain. Sand.
Miser. Humming. Burned. Focus. Heft. Tail. Help. wry sutured dress. Tame. Sank.
Ripple. Judge. Screen. Cape. Ended. Salvaged. Hence. Blaring. Iridescence.













Puc and Yellow

I've seen what those creatures do, and I don't know how you trust them.

Don't bother me, please.

I'm glad to see you.

I hope you're doing well, friend!

He was a brave soldier, what could've driven him to despair?

I'm sick of the sob stories you hear around here. If you don't know when to stop gambling, that's no one's fault but your own.

I've seen what those creatures do, and I don't know how you trust them.

I'll get in, win big, get out. Take those winnings back home
where they'll do some good!

You hear the losers around here complaining how they lost their shirts? It's pathetic.

Don't bother me, please.

Don't dump your ghou here, we've already got enough shit around us.
Don't dump your ghou here, we've already got enough shit around us.

You're not going to cause any problems, right?

You're a model citizen, thank you.

You're a model citizen, thank you.

You're a model citizen, thank you.

Good to see a friend of our government.

You're a model citizen, thank you.

Wish I could've seen that dog suffer.

Wish I could've ~~seen~~ kill you myself for what you did, and fuck the law!

I should kill you myself for what you did, and fuck the law!

I guess those "Kings" finally got who's the real boss around here.
Never seen a guardian dog like that before.

I'm glad to see you.
What the hell's going on in your crazy head?

I'm glad to see you.

I don't waste my time with troublemakers.
I'm glad to see you.

What makes you think I give I'm glad to see you

Word is you're getting popular.

What makes you think I give a damn about you?

I came east to strike it rich, and now I'm broker than ever. What do I tell my family back home?

I'm glad to see you.

I should make you pay for your crimes!

Never seen a guardian dog like that before.
a guardian dog like that before.

That's a true friend of this wonderful place. Lady Luck shines only on you.
Our victory is a worthy story to tell in my travels. I'm having the time of my life!
What the hell do you want?
Lady Luck shines on you.

I don't talk to "nobodies," not when I'm having the time of my life!

You're a model citizen, thank you.
What the hell's going on in your crazy head?
I really have more important things to do, sorry.

War doesn't forgive anybody, but what did we do to deserve this?
I hope you're doing well, friend. War doesn't forgive anybody, but what did we do to deserve this?
You know it's illegal for us to gamble back home?

What do you want with me?

Uh-oh, back off and leave me alone.

Our victory is a worthy story to tell in my travels.

Good to see a friend of our government.

Your friend seems out of place here.

It's time to pack and leave these lands until the dust settles.

Never seen a guardian dog like that before.

Maybe when this is all over, they'll find time to look after us.

DRANK. PLASTIC. (CONTINUED)

Heart. Crab. Wreck. Tinted. Flaked. Palette. Gained. Fabric. Tension. Plank. Hardened. Taste. Stretch. Pall. Innard. Fragrance. Mantle. Molecule. Prayer. Never. Olive. Shimmer. Dome. Horses. Pending. Scalp. Tucked. Able. Wretch. Fur. Marked. Pewter. Organ. Vision. Higher. Hunger. Revere. Susceptible. Vertical. Western. Cart. Remand. Rectal. Stone. Sewn. Civilian. Capital. Retrospect. Violent. Orange. Habitat. Fuck. Sank. Delicate. omnipresent sutured dress. Barnacle. Freedom. Splinter. Crank. Particle. Drunk. Represented. Suppress. Drip. Holy. Sigh. Wither. Mansion. Release. Sank. Outer. Diamond. Heckled. Mister. Ceremonial. Welcome. Vibrate. Wall. Wish. Handle. Hadn't. Sake. Velvet. Impression. Bask. Want. Signified. Visit. Able. Sank. Total. Cluster. Drench. Finalize. Wretch. Fellate. Combine. Strategy. Nomenclature. Bask. Pucker. Ate. Friend. Sicken. Televised. Corner. Acetone. Simple. Pop. Shake. Tube. Height. Bake. Taxed. Hello. Bucket. Render. Nondescript. Valley. Vinegar. Callous. Shelved. Spectator. Wound. Dinner. Demand. Bags. Liquid. Agent. Felt. Vagrant. Pin. Remain. Lying. Nausea. Pork. Lake. Naked. Understood. Highway. Brand. Steam. Chop. Blanket. Coerce. Victor. Source. Pool. Heighten. Erase. Figure. Garish. Tame. Without. Halo. Maid. Lichen. Plaque. stop looking. Celibate. History. Pant. Hoof. Cuticle. Broad. Temple. Porch. Fly. Pepper. Croak. Bash. Article. Hack. Tortured. Family. Sheen. Fabric. Let. Sent. Fragile. Commend. On. Amenable. Crank. Practiced. Sucked. Kindness. Else. Forward. Destitute. Answer. Feline. Beneath. Fairly. Mask. Belie. Torpid. Pitted. Cavernous. White. Sky. Wood. Circled. Shiver. Blew. Remain. Under. Angel. Bagged. Honor. Center. Shallow. Hog. Place. Fanciful. Lotion. Wracked. Berate. Sickness. Latitude. Blunder. Blue. Towel. Saccharine. Minor. Validate. Corridor. Pidgeon. Think. Shale. Take. Brow. Gavel. Acted. Ahead. Sculpted. Meadow. Crease. Interrupt. Carry. Pelt. Sake. Many. Precise. Cable. Ship. Veneer. Ox. Cobble. Schism. Tyrannical. Curvacious. Bore. Wear. Oval. Partisan. Write. Supple. Braid. False. Hither. Syllable. Went. Alleviate. Relic. Dead. Kissing. Menace. Covered. Baby. Dust. Surface. Bass. Plate. Beckon. Rise. Matter. Convey. Mast. Vilify. Combination. Missed. Ate. Vision. Revere. Chirping. Calcify. Lunch. Reverberate. Ending. Whirl. Water. Silver. Shed. Ants. Caress. Blister. Route. Ail. Season. Honest. Nimble. Block. Sever. Flank. Corrupted. Carried.

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