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half of two hungers

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aida lizalde

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Fine Arts in Sculpture + Extended Media at Virginia Commonwealth
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Abstract

half of two hungers is an extension of my sculptural practice; a weaving of the ambiguous borders of memory, trauma, disease, identity, assimilation, survival, spirituality, love, erotics, and desire. It is a psychological and sensorial landscape, where I travel consciously and subconsciously to pull shapes and material experiences out into the world of bodies and objects.

home, was a dream where the stench of the male goat's piss mixed with the smell of the wet polished concrete floor that looked like red tiles, wet from the drip from the roof, caused by the avocado tree sponging the roof. The smell of my feet when I wore shoes with no socks, and that of an earthenware clay pitcher sweating water slowly.

home, was lifting a greasy bucket from under the kitchen sink to dump the water out back because the drainage was clogged. It was a tan-yellowish bucket, translucent, it felt like someone rubbed it with lard, it was flexible, like skin. Its circular form would bend to the shape of an eye with the pull of the metal handle, precariously dripping water at the sharp edges, like crying, if moved too abruptly. I balanced it carefully.

Home sometimes is the dream of a companion machine organism that slowly drips with control, mischief, and hesitancy, heavy like a baby, but made of mud. Becoming unbecoming. Hair brushing the floor like when I sat on the couch upside down or when I swung on the swings too hard to feel my blood rush to my head.

She is the memory of my mother with a huge swollen pregnant belly, hanging dripping clothes on the clothesline while I watched from the swing set. El Señor Columpio whistled songs to me with its old hinges and its creepy smile, soothing me when I cried.

It was a vessel who was a horse and a frog and a couch-swing my grandfather built for the porch of the other ranch, the one in Zacatecas. A goat's udder, coniferous and plump, and my own breast, the same.

homes

A framed embroidery with the phrase “Home is where the heart is,” hung above my parent’s bed in their bedroom of the ranch house where I grew up. It contrasted with the bricks of a creepy closet that made up the end wall. I don’t know why the message was in English or where it came from. It had a cross-stitch heart marquis with pastel thread and a tiny pink house inside. It was mounted in a brown frame that had broken glass. I translated it, word by word, with a yellow pocket Spanish-to-English dictionary that had a plastic sleeve cover. I thought that phrase would have proven useful if I had just remembered it every once in a while as I grew older. I am not so certain about it now.

When I went back to the ranch house ten years later, the frame was no longer there. The avocado tree that had been next to my bedroom window was gone too, cut because it sponged the roof. Its leaves gathered in the corners making a mush when it rained and the moisture slowly seeped into the concrete throughout the late summer rains. The ramp to the second story of the house was also gone, with three stairs taking its place; their new stained red polished concrete didn’t match the rest of the floors, it was chalkier, porous, whitening at the edges of each faux tile, white powder falling from the moisture damaged ceiling covered these things, a sugar coating of what was once my home.

The next house was on Aurora Street. A small two-bedroom, one-bath, with a dirt yard the same color as the house. The whole house was brown, from the old carpet to the standing tin vent of the heating system. Even the kitchen counter had a yellowish cream tint and the linoleum was stained brownish. Brown like I would later become in this country. The tiled and cool floors of the homes in Mexico didn’t curl and crack at the edges, they didn’t have small gaps that gathered lint and mold. The houses here were temporary, made out of plastic and wood. The rock, brick, and concrete of the houses I knew in Mexico, whose paint would peel off from the wall slowly for decades, even centuries, before the roofs caved or the floors cracked and protruded with roots from the vines that took over the walls, those were permanent, they were real, they didn’t require air conditioners. They didn’t feel like cardboard or smell like sawdust and old newspapers. They didn’t sound hollow.

Andrea y yo íbamos a un hoyo lleno de agua que se formaba temporalmente en la colina del rancho que no tenía nogales, donde la tierra era más roja y quebradiza. A veces el hoyo era profundo y su agua clara y nadabamos, pero luego luego se estancaba. El hoyo había sido llamado ‘el bordo’ por mis tias cuando ellas eran chicas e iban a nadar ahí.

‘In English, ‘lagoon’ means a shallow body of coastal salt water, separated from the ocean by a bank of sand, and lakes are inland. But in the ancestral languages of Colombia, there was only one word for water, and centuries later, we still use the words subjectively—laguna, lago. We consider a body of water and seem to decide whether it’s female or male, haunted or mundane. Spain says a lagoon is shallower than a lake, fifteen meters deep or less, and this is the notation that Europeans tried to force onto the territory. But our water is ten meters deep and we call it a lake; twenty meters and we call it a lagoon.

Chibcha language, after which most of our Native languages are based, the word for water is sie. Suffixes and prefixes delineated the meaning—whether the water in question was hot, was yet to be heated, had been used to dilute fermented drink, had engulfed a person, or made a pair of hands disappear.”¹

lagoon

There was a drip in the nice living room where my brothers did back-flips from couch to couch playing spiderman. We'd put a bucket on the floor and move the good couches out of the way. Once in a heavy storm, the bucket overflowed and the drip turned into a lagoon of redness that spread to the hallway. I was lazily trying to mop it, when my father snatched the mop from me and said "*No saben hacer nada chingado!*" and then showed me how to properly hold it. I spaced out. He left and I kept mopping the red-tiled lagoon in the living room where my little brother Luis had stuck a fork into the outlet one time and got shocked.

The wet floor I mopped smelled like the clay jar my mom had in the kitchen. The moist clay flesh of the round jar mineralized the water making it taste delicious. The lagoon wasn't there anymore when I went back, nor were the drips or the tree but there was moisture damage in my parent's old bedroom. My grandpa had fixed and re-sealed the roof after we abandoned the house to follow my dad to the United States.

I said I didn't want to go see my grandpa because he hit me. I didn't know what words to use to say I was intimidated by him. My heart raced when his amphitheater voice said "*Ahí vienen las momias de Guanajuato, hijole que feas!*" when we arrived. But after the first shock, I wanted to be in the same room to hear him speak. I didn't care that he was brusco. I wanted to feel the exhilaration of his playfulness and then the settling down of my heart rate again after he turned me upside down or pinched my butt, but not in a creepy way.

He taught us to swim in Valladolid. We went on Tuesday morning at 8 am. They refilled the pools on Monday nights so we got to the *balneario* early and had the place to ourselves before the families with the round brown faces, ice chests, and *chiquillos miones* got there. The water was hot and smelled like sulfur, coming from the natural spring that hid underneath the town.

He grabbed us by one leg and one arm and flipped us into the water like our limbs were the strings of a hay bale and the pool was the truck. He has *manos de cachimba*. His almond eyes have a wrinkle that looks like he just told a joke and is waiting for you to get it.

At the ocean, he waited for the moment before the wave broke and dived under it against the current until he came out of the other side, making moons underneath to avoid all crashing power in a majestic and sneaky

swoop. I got rammed by the waves and cried every time, with saltwater in my nose and scraped knees and elbows. I cried because everything was a lot, but I tried it again when my skin itched from the sand sticking to it and the sweat started to gather on my forehead. He warned us not to ever swim in lagoons because their undercurrents are deceitful. We didn't encounter many swimming lakes or lagoons until we left Mexico. Our most accessible swimming place was *el hoyo*.

El hoyo and other places on the ranch made out our world while we avoided interacting with anyone. '*¿Saluden que son de rancho o que?*' My father would say. We were not, but we were, after all, we lived at "the ranch." Being sociable required us to put on a costume that we didn't have, and we pieced it together out of other hand-me-downs, pants too big, shoes too small, a shirt with only one button, and a hat that itched and smelled like the old yellow-stained duck feather pillows in my parent's room.

We were free when we were alone, or left alone, climbing fences, wearing looney toon t-shirts and elastic shorts and old navy flip flops gifted to me by my tias las gringas, staring at decomposing bodies of goats with bellies of fur and dirt and maggots, gathering mushrooms, playing pretend with our yet genderless bodies by the bodega where the bees were kept and the honey extracted. I got stung so many times that I grew to like it, the burning and pulsing, like a painful orgasm, before I knew one; a wide lagoon of heat and pulsing undercurrents.

*'Newborns delivered by C-section tend to harbor in their guts disease-causing microbes commonly found in hospitals (e.g. Enterococcus and Klebsiella), and lack strains of gut bacteria found in healthy children (e.g. Bacteroides species). Because it is known that gut microbiota is in close communication with the immune system, this difference in birth microbes may set the immune system up for later dysfunction.'*²

Los anostráceos, o camarones de agua dulce se criaban en ese estanque en el cual se transformaba el hoyo parecían pececillos transparentes con ojotes de mantis religiosas, de todos colores. Les creíamos una criatura mágica la cual nos habíamos inventado nosotras, alguna vez pensé que eran larvas de libélulas, pero Andrea me dio el nombre científico.

surrogate sisters

Andrea and I were scheduled to be born on my mother's birthday, the 16th of May, but she had bronchitis and she coughed so hard that her water broke before her contractions came, thunder and then rain. We had to be taken out by her belly being split in half. My mother says my stomach didn't develop well in the womb because I needed four more days there. Every cough made her split open again while I constantly had cólicos. Maybe my stomach curdled instead of cuajarse with the wrong microbiome mixture, maybe I took some of my mother's stomach pains.

The Yoruba thought twins were both sacred and dangerous. If one of the twins died the other one would be given a small doll as a surrogate to carry the spirit of the sibling. They would have to carry it always. If they both died the mother would be given two figurines. The Yoruba have one of the highest rates of twin births in the world, possibly attributed to eating so much yucca, and their twins are protected by the deity of thunder. The thunder of my mother's coughs woke us up and its intensity almost drowned us. Because of it, we were split from her. We were never scared of real thunder though, we played in the rain and darkness, and we knew the ranch like the palms of our hands.³

We addressed boredom by taunting the sheep named *Cappuccino*, who was nearsighted. If he saw a figure from afar he would charge to headbutt it. We caught tadpoles or fairy shrimp on the various ponds of the ranch until they got too soupy and green and stunk. After that, we made spells in them, our natural caldrons.

We explored the pond, the eucalyptus trees, and the seasonal water pools at the end of the property where the dirt was red and clumpy, we played dress-up, played in the swings, pet the kid goats, caught fireflies, frogs, tadpoles, and lizards, we climbed trees, searched for ladybug eggs, found mushrooms, and pottery shards in the dirt, and built fairy houses in the small creek that formed by the pomegranate trees in the springtime. Play was thrill, forbidden things, rituals.

We rode our bikes a mile or two on the dirt road and parked them under a bush, we jumped a barbed wire fence and then walked up a hill on private land to a walled structure with a metal door that was chained loosely enough to squeeze by and be voyeurs into death at the old cemetery. There were broken alcohol bottles, old plastic flowers stuck to tin cans filled with cement, discolored by the sun, crypts dating to the 1700s, and bones. Recently, my grandfather denied the existence of this place.

A void is perhaps a vessel. A vessel is perhaps a body or an organ becoming an entity. An ambiguous vessel takes up the space of that missing collective consciousness, and it can metabolize or fail to metabolize, discern, digest, filter, and define. It can be a rock with light hitting its surface just so, emphasizing its amorphous becoming. It could be my own right to opacity,⁴ an unfixed identity because being a hybrid implies only my provenance but not my orientation forward. Being half two hybrids even less so.

IV

a ghost

While playing outside on a full moon, we saw a shape in the distance. It could have been a big rock being hit by the moonlight a certain way, or Cappuccino coming our way, or a stranger that hopped the fence into the ranch breaking and entering, or a ghost or spirit we summoned in a made-up ritual. We stared intently looking for movement. Sometimes when the brain is trying to discern if something is moving, it creates a mirage of movement. The rhythmic dance of the pupils focuses and unfocuses, creating patterns on flatness and textured surfaces that were ignored before. We stared and stared at the shape until one of us asked, "Is it moving?" to which the other one responded "I don't think so," then the thought of movement was discarded because two people were 40-ish percent sure, meaning that sixty percent is doubt, multiplied by two 120% doubt. The next question one asked without words was "Does it have a head? or is the light hitting a semi-round surface in such a way that it creates a shadow similar to a neck dividing the pseudo-head from the pseudo-body? "I think it's just the light," one says and then that becomes certain. The affirmation was not always a sentence but a stare or a slight movement of the mouth and a squint of the eye while looking at each other. We discerned reality collectively. We communicated with minimal shifts in our facial expressions.

I played with these rhythms of discernment again in California, years later, seeing a tree across the river turn into a peacock feather while on acid. Staring at the mirror and seeing the small veins underneath the skin of my face turn into red lizards and chameleons, and my outward skin turn into my sister's, mother's, and grandmothers' faces while on psilocybin mushrooms.

I am missing that reaffirming external subconscious now. That collectivity has a void.

'The Huichol paint their bodies with abstract representations of their gods, paintings they associate with the representation of their food. The Mouth, as the orifice for the ingestion of food, gains special importance in the social eclosion. The mouth is used for kissing, to speak, to make faces, for oral gestures. Nonhuman mammals and children use the mouth to examine, attack, manipulate.

*The spectacle offered by children becomes a repetition of a man's early stages of life. The inability of early man to satisfy its great necessity, hunger, can be identified with the newborn's inability to satisfy his desires on his own."*⁵

consumption

I was camping near an orchard and I got woken up by the noises from a gathering. I was told by an indigenous man that I wasn't supposed to be camping there. I apologetically started picking up my stuff but he said not to bother since I was already there. I remained while he and other indigenous people did a sort of ritualistic battle re-enactment. I watched from up the hill to the orchard valley as they moved around with horses. After a while, I entered a hole in the side of the hill, carved out and bowl shaped like a swallow's nest, and walked through a long hallway of mud walls where women were carrying and showing each other textiles. I turned left at the end of the hallway and I saw a doorway, where the man stood and handed me a small cup with pink corn grains inside. He told me to eat the corn and that it would either heal me or it would poison me. I ate the corn, then woke up.

Corn made its way to Spain when there was a famine and the conquistadores took it as a gift to the queen, saying it would save their people. The Spanish started growing and eating the corn and getting sick with Pellagra, *la Maldición de Moctezuma*, where they got rashes and diarrhea, dementia, and died. They took the corn but did not take respect for it and the ways corn taught us about how to prepare and eat it, breaking the fibers by boiling it with cal, an alkali, and mashing it with a metate made of volcanic rock.⁶ Perhaps the Spanish hadn't heard of King Arthur getting stuck in the fairyland because of eating their food, maybe they were too hungry to care. I wonder what would happen if someone stole food from Avalon and fed it to people outside. Tomatoes also poisoned the europeans with their acidity in lead plates. The warning of eating the food of another world or the forbidden food could be deemed a universal myth related to death or doom, creation, and (re)birth.

In the Hopi tradition, "Corn is our Mother" is a common saying. Is there an Oedipean side to the idea that the corn is my mother and if I consume her I could either heal or be poisoned? Like cypress mother trees send their last nutrients to their offspring when threatened by diseases through underground mycelium. Is corn, in a twist of faith, able to do this and send the wrong nutrients and poison their whole lineage into oblivion? Eating my mother may heal me and give me immunity or poison me from what killed her, through my umbilical cord-mycelium. I could be poisoned through my gut's microbial fairy world being entered by a stranger welcomed by my mother to contaminate my gut lining with salmonella. My mother Malinche as the vessel bowl and spoon holding the treacherous white milk, sugars, and yeast. If corn is my mother and the mother of the peoples of the Americas would my father be Europa with its milk, sugars, and yeast? My father is my oppressor, I must not reject nor embrace him but devour him to "adapt its strengths and incorporate them into the Native self."⁷

A red lipsticked mouth slightly open lets out a thread of smoke by opening wider, showing the bottom of some gapped teeth, on a Twitter post with an embedded digital video recording of a performance on blurry Super 8 films.

Then the scene changes to a close-up of another mouth and the bottom of a nose, nostrils flaring, the mouth closes and opens again hesitantly, sticky lips stuck to each other slightly, the tongue moves, the nostrils keep rhythmically flaring, and the video ends. This is all I could find of Anna Maria Maiolino's 'In - Out (Antropofagia)', 1973.

*'Representations like this one of the mouth and ingestion gained particular currency in the Brazilian films and videos of the mid-1970's. They were a response to the resurgence in the late 1960s and 1970s of the post-colonial theory of antropofagia (cultural cannibalism), which had originally emerged in Brazil as a cultural strategy of decolonization in May 1928, when the poet and catalyst of Brazilian modernism Oswald de Andrade published his 'Manifesto Antropofago' (Anthropophagous Manifesto, fig 2). De Andrade's interest in antropofagia was based on the cannibalistic rituals of the Tupinamba Indians, who inhabited Brazil at the time of the European conquests. He was fascinated by their practice of capturing and eating their prisoners, a ceremony that the Amerindians believed would enable them to absorb their enemies' strength and assimilate their identities.'*⁸

‘The cradle of faith is the digestive system, because the continuity of the individual is understood by man well before he understands the continuity of the species through sex. Man’s first concern is to keep himself alive by absorbing food.’⁹

consumption II

After a 7-hour flight to California, I binge on whatever is in my mom's kitchen, old morning pancakes or scrambled eggs with chorizo, a crusty biscuit with refried beans, and a slice of square costco jack cheese, half a muffin, and flop on the leather couch. My stomach is bloated and the slow swing of my brain lullabies itself. Then my body gets stuck, me empacho. I hate the feeling of being full, it makes me want to sinch my belly down with a corset until I cross the top of the arch and come on the other side, clear-minded and clear-breathed and clear-stomached and intestined.

"Do you ever want to take your organs out and clean them? Rinse them slowly with warm water." Said a lover.

"Yes, wash them in the sink like a vintage silk dress and put them back in before they dry out." I responded.

Tabula rasa, not a clean slate but a clean table, a clean gut, a primordial state, the first hunger at birth that introduced us to feeling human.

Senna tea helps with the purge, but sometimes it makes the lower right side of my back hurt, my kidney possibly. It's hereditary, my sister and mom have this pain too, and they drink cola de caballo tea to heal it. We talk about it while I tell them about my great-grandmother who was so hungry and poor that she had to hunt rabbits to make stew for her kids.

I grew up picking pecans, blackberries, pomegranates, and figs, chewing on honeycombs and gathering mesquite fruits to suck the meaty parts surrounding the seeds inside the pods, looking for bisnagas and hoping to find one with the small red fruit and share its sweetness with Andrea. We gathered verdolagas so my mom could make us *huevitos* with them. I am malnourished, I try to nurture myself with my mother's fridge without satisfaction, my cornucopia abandoned miles and miles south of my memories.

My grandpa and his siblings' blood was poisoned by sugar, yet he still loves to eat those paletas de cajeta and candied fruit. My mom made cajeta from goat's milk by boiling it with lots of sugar in a copper pot. We used to scrape spoonfuls from the copper walls of the pot after she canned the rest.

When my parents started making cheese they had not figured out that keeping the male goat with the females affected their hormones and made the milk more alkaline, making the cheese more stinky. Some people like stinkier cheese, it's an acquired taste. My mother made pizza

My stomach machine system grid girlies consume themselves and each other and get consumed by their environment, one of sugar, milk, wheat flour, white power, supremacy, capitalism, mass-produced food, mass-produced addiction, and indulgence. I should bring them south to visit my grandfather.

with one of her earlier batches of cheese and my sister and I didn't want to eat it. My father forced us to stay seated at the table until we finished it. "*Comanselo o se los meto a la boca con un palo hasta que se lo traguen*" he said. He didn't do as he taught though. Just a few days earlier he'd thrown a plate of food out back at my mom because the beans were cold, supposedly, and how dare she serve him cold beans. He turned to me and asked me to promise him I'd never serve cold beans. I refused. I said I couldn't promise because I would surely forget.

I remembered the cold beans one spring when I made huevos rancheros for someone who was then my lover and he didn't eat them because the whites were a bit raw. I had just moved to a house with an electric stove and I didn't know how to wage radiating heat like a flame. I remembered once before when I made chicken of the woods, which I had harvested myself, for another lover. He got sick and threw up as we tried to watch *Sweet Movie*, but I believe it was the movie that made him sick, not my cooking. I don't cook for men anymore. That movie has become the one thing that I never finish with anyone I date. If I ever watch the whole thing with someone, they'll be my true love, and I'll cook for them again.

*I'm always splitting
a trail of fragmentations*

*from my mother
umbilical cord no longer binding us after the transgression of scissors
my external gut tied into a knot and left to dry and rot until it fell out of my
belly
like a small root or an earthworm toasted by sun exposure*

*from my motherland
traveling north across the border at my father's whim, while he tried to
escape himself, but failed
my mother following with all of her children
getting farther and farther away from her own mother*

*from my mother tongue
being surrounded by another one, a new brain wiring, fewer poetics*

*'No fue triunfo ni derrota, fue el doloroso nacimiento del pueblo meztio que
es el México de hoy.' Dice en Tlatelolco.¹⁰
Entonces ninguna escisión es triunfo ni derrota, solo una bifurcación, o un
cuajo.*

*'¿Cuáles son las políticas de la fermentación? La habilitación de redistribu-
ciones físicas y cognitivas del poder. La fermentación nos enseña que las
burbujas no son estáticas, que el fervor es emocionante y posible y que el
cambio siempre está presente. En tiempos de oscuridad y desesperación,
cuando la más aterradora subjetividad parece ser la que está en el poder,
gritamos por nuestra oportunidad de ser expansivos.'¹¹*

VII

colonization

I stuck \$30-vaginal-probiotics from whole foods in my denim jacket's pocket. I did pay for the fermented ginger kombucha and goat's milk plain yogurt to stick in my vagina, so the prokaryotes living in this milky syrup would overpower the foreign ones I was given. A gift from the mayflower. A pregnancy of a million unicellular babies that came from twenty different tinder girls some of which ended up smeared on his bedsheets and some caught by his whitish papillae hiding under his yellowish teeth, hiding behind his mustache, sugar-coated by cocaine, hiding behind his fragile masculinity. A sampler deal inside my vagina, cooking for a few days and then hatching into a foul smell. The smell of something piglish, profane, past ripeness.

I now knew not to eat the white flour, or the white milk, or the white refined sugar those men brought to this land because it would hurt my guts but I guess their white secretions are just as fucked up for my body. My smell before contamination was sweet, crushed pecans, honey, warm goats milk, and salt. Now I am pregnant with a billion babies invading my culture like the settlers, moving westward and north with their stench. Manifest Destiny of bacterial vaginosis. I was a baby that small once, like the prokaryotes, an egg that split into two and grew swelling my mother's belly, ripping it in half, past her endoplasmic reticulum.

She made cheese by heating up the milk to 65 Celsius and pouring vinegar on it, *se cuajaba*. The word cuajo does not have the same *cj* in it in English. It symbolizes a solidification into a thick gelatinous goo of the jelly *cj* becoming and becoming and stinking and separating from the lactic acid, protein split from acid, and whiteness split from translucent yellow/brownness. Afterward, she used a strainer to separate the gelatinous solid from the lactic acid. A split after colonization like the creation of those like me.

‘La fermentación nos enseña a entender el suelo como algo sustancialmente tumultuoso. Hace visible el invisible potencial de las cosas que parecen en calma.’¹²

ferments

"Jamila & Jitterbug 'the inseparable sisters,'" said the print on the aluminum top of the whole foods yogurt container.

I lifted it half an inch to stick my middle finger in three times and then into my vagina intermittently.

"To understand the beautiful bond between sibling goats all you have to do is watch Jamila and Jitterbug curl up together in what we affectionately call 'The Cuddle Puddle.'" it continued to narrate.

I opened the gray bathroom stall door with my pinky so I wouldn't smear the yogurt and vaginal secretions on the stainless steel lock. I washed my hands staring at my blurry face on the hardly reflective metal plate screwed at the wall in lieu of a mirror, and then I went back into the stall to get the yogurt sitting on the plastic container where the rolls of toilet paper go. It had not occurred to me to clean my yogurt finger with toilet paper, I was in a hurry.

Andrea and I were also inseparable but not in the Cephalothoracopagus way, or the Jamila & Jitterbug way. We did not like to cuddle though, my mother was not very affectionate, the pudor of adolescence and pseudo-catholicism, and our unknown queerness made us connect only through facial gestures, hardly a touch.

I would have been Jitterbug and Andrea Jamila, I am more jittery and she is kind and motherly and homestead-y and makes jam. Motherly as in passive but protective. I am jittery as in transgressive and stubborn.

I wonder if her motherliness was a curse that began that one time when Salma the goat (after Salma Hayek) was having a bad birth, and one of her twins had gotten stuck because she was coming in backward. My father told us to help because our hands were small and we would not rip the goat's labia. Andrea put her right hand, the stained one with the witch's mark, inside the goat's vagina and pulled the slimy cocoon of boney legs and hare-like body, it came out in one pull. Salma rejected the baby afterward, a weakling, a runt, like me.

I recently attended a performance where an artist said "Sometimes I notice myself for the first time in weeks, and I think I find myself beautiful."¹³ This reminded me of a song that says "I'm looking for the place where the spirit meets the skin."¹⁴ I felt like I recently noticed myself for the first time in weeks and found myself disgusting. Not in a self-esteem way but in a bodily dysfunction way. I feel like noticing myself was like finally cleaning

*'All that's left is the trail of brown juice on the bench and seeds between the floorboards. But my dreams are full of apples, and in the dark, my body slowly transforms into fruit: tonsils shrinking to seeds and lungs to cores. I dream of white flowers blossoming under my nails, as if under ice. Then my nails break, opening up like clams, and in the finger flesh there are little sticky fruit pearls.'*¹⁵

the moldy cup of tea I'd left in my room for two weeks after seeing it'd grown black, green, and white circular patches like lunares or islands in the leftover infusion. This mold comes from my saliva, from the walls of my old spongy wood house brewing since the 1920s in Virginia's humid template, perhaps from the Whole Foods warehouse where the tea was stored before being put on the shelf and being bought by me. Perhaps it also has some lover's salivae and germs imported all the way to Mexico from Japan and licked by me there to be brought back to the U.S., a delicacy.

I keep getting sick. I don't know if it's the stress or if it is the food, or if it is the anxiety-induced IBS from *the trauma*, or my ancestors giving me warnings through my genes communicating with my microbiome. I am fermenting while appearing calm. I have been going through a perpetual breakup for two years.

Before refrigeration, the way people could preserve food was by way of transforming it through fermentation. The only way to preserve something is to change it. The irony. I should remember this next time I'm smitten with someone fickle and fragile, and fantastic, and I get my heart broken, and the next time, and the next. I heard a podcast where it said having friends extends one's lifespan. I am going to pickle my lovers into friends so I can live to 106 like my great-grandmother. Some of them I am sure will fill with rot and stench or grow dull and stale and be left behind. The tequila my great-grandmother drank every day at 11 am well into her hundreds came from the ferment of her secret lovers. Rows and rows of prickly agave suitors chopped and boiled and left to rot to create Pulque. Then when Cortez came, he brought distillation with him, and Tequila and Mezcal were born. The mestize drinks contain the intoxicant but not the probiotics, splitting the healing-poisoning cycle of rebirths and making it disease-only. The sacred from the profane. A disease my father and one of my lovers caught and that made them hate themselves, self-hatred spilled on everyone they loved like car oil without a drip pan. I was the drip pan once. A vessel capturing fluid extracted from the earth violently and then burned by a masculine machine into a dark viscous goo. This goo was once, thousands of years before, live cells and microbiomes. One spring I buried myself in it, with my spit and guts and tears and piss and it grew and spored and spread into a new self.

*saliva seeping slowly down my trachea
touching the tenderness around a tickle in my throat*

*sweet and then salty
sweet and then salty*

*a never-ending cycle
of opposing taste bud erections
a synchronized wave crowd ovation
papillae making up a mother tongue*

spit

I walked around Roma at night with a lover reading wheat-pasted signs on the walls that I translated for her. “*Se mas de lamer que de amar*” said a wise one.

We licked bacteria and viruses back and forth as we drank *Pulque* and ate blue corn *empanadas*, potato chips with lime and *salsa*, and fruit, from the street vendors, as long as it wasn't red. (She said she didn't like red fruit but I later found she loved strawberries.) I do know more about licking than I know about love. I've licked things and people thousands, maybe even millions of times, more than I could ever think or use the word lover.

Umico and I sat on the outdoor patio table at a restaurant in Roma when an old man dressed in all white approached us. I'd seen him walking around the neighborhood before, he appeared to me like one of those intellectual tricksters that people often mistake for homeless in the city. He sold me a poem for her, which I translated on the spot. His parting goodbye was “*Que el mar te sepa dulce.*”¹⁶ It turned out bittersweet, like most ferments.

I heard of an artist who made fermentation jars and asked the public to spit on one and then turned that saliva into a ferment. *Kuchikamizake* is a type of sake made with chewed rice that is left to ferment. Similar drinks were found in Peru (of yucca or corn) and Africa.

The swallows mix their saliva like glue to make their nests. Made of mud and hair and straw and spit. Maybe if I can chew and spit enough mud I can make myself a home which I can visit seasonally only after mating in the winter.

There were nests in the corners of the roofed porch in the ranch, every spring we'd sit and eat pecans and watch the bald baby birds chirp hungrily calling for their mothers. Often, one or two would fall prematurely from the nest and we watched their oversized pink heads, crushed by the red-tiled floor, fill with ants. They left a whitish stain on the tiles like slug trails, dry crystals, after their skin, feathers, and bones were consumed.

'At first I licked everyday things around the house, such as knives and spoons. Then three years later I began to lick places that had specific cultural meaning such as the Great Wall and the Ming Tombs... My use of the tongue also has other meanings: it has a sexual dimension to it and it is also the basis of speech... It begins as an impulse that is instinctual, but it's gradually closed off by society as one grows up.'"¹⁷

'The mouth is the meeting place of the sacred and the profane; sacred texts are salivated by the mouth's viscosity; the Word is born in a cavity that tears, chews, licks, spits. The mouth negotiates numerous ways into and out of itself; it is the conduit for air, voice, food, fluids. The collision of these disparate elements constitutes the noise of the mouth, purity is rendered impossible in such a contaminated corporeality. The strength of the rational is contingent on language's ability to evince itself from its mode of production. Language, in its very moment of inscription and emission, is awash amidst the slides of the slippery body. In other words, the mouth is not only an articulating engine that cites, that voices language, but also an organ that is present as site.'"¹⁸

'For birds eating dry foods, the mucus moistens and lubricates the food to be swallowed. Salivary glands are usually present in the pharynx, and in seed-eaters are not only abundant but secrete a starch-digesting enzyme. Many swifts and swallows use the dried saliva to cement their nests. The so-called Edible Swiftlet, Collocalia, of the East Indies, builds its nest entirely of saliva. Sometimes as many as three and a half million nests are shipped from Borneo to China in one ear to be made into that well known delicacy, birds' nest soup.'"¹⁹

'And what if, after having bitten into a few things, he found they were all lemon meringue? That the wall, the chair and the floor tasted and slipped down his throat just like the street and the sky outside. What if the mouth, like the eye, did not feel a difference when the space of the room ended and the chair began. How would he know things separately, one from another, the subtleties? Didn't he have the right to demand of life that the sky taste different from the table! And what if the objects were just similar thoughts strung along together? They all seemed to go together, didn't they? All leading to the sofa, the sofa to the lamp, the light to the book, the book about the ocean, the ocean he walked in last summer. And like the table and like the lamp, wouldn't he, standing in the room, be one of the similar thoughts? Maybe he came before chair and after book. Sooner or later then, the couch, the lamp and the rug would lead to him. And having begun like a wave to put the room and everything he loved inside his body, finally have to eat himself?'"²⁰

‘The paper’s makeup, if examined through lenses and tested in a laboratory, would resemble a porn magazine more than your typical old manuscripts might, because of the conspicuous number of stains smudging the text. Some paragraphs are practically illegible; they feel rough to the fingertips and page after page sticks together. The chapters on punishment and torture are particularly difficult to decipher without having to resort to the digitized edition. The book has been subjected to some rigorous use over the centuries.’

‘[...]A stain is also an imprint, an imprint from one person’s situation, something that stretches out of the body and is projected, involuntarily, into the future, where another body in another time, in another space, will open that same page and study the stain. We can pick up a print copy of The Hammer, and assume it contains traces of another reader’s kinks, the mounting desire, the climax ”[...]”’²¹

She lures a new lover onto her ship and seduces him on her floating bed and stabs him while he was being consumed by its white sugar, in place of bed sheets and blankets. Red spilled out of his stomach and spread through the crystals of the sugar, reminding us of a warning she’d given him ‘if you fall in love with me I will kill you.’ The vibrancy of the red of that climax slowly infected the pureness of the glistening white sugar.’²²

the stain

I split the joining edges of a meaty green eye-shaped peel, rough like the worn part of a leather shoe on the outside, spongy and humid on the inside. Its juice wet my fingers, a faint yellowish tint that in a day would turn dark like iodide. The hard and smooth shell with black stains stared at me on the inside, and inside of that one, a creamy heart of two parts rested. We picked them out in the buckets that the townies brought to get paid by my father after harvesting. The townies that picked were mostly brown-skinned thin young teenage boys with jeans, worn-out cowboy boots, and slightly loose ragged shirts, tucked in, with leather belts. I was not interested in them. I was just me then, a weird creature with one foot in this world and another in a trance with my other half-person. We were not only not interested in boys, or other girls, we weren't interested in anyone else. I was interested in the stains on my fingers and how the light passed through the pecan branches and made abstract movies on the ground, and picked up toads from their heads at night, so their piss would not give me warts.

I felt something silky and wet pass through, and then I saw a ruby shine its bright eye at me, poking out of the double-layered part of my white cotton underwear, the ones with a tiny rose at the front made of a crinkled and sown ribbon. I cleaned it as best as I could. It became a reddish-brown crust and stained my clothes, it kept happening from age twelve to sixteen. My sister had menstruated first, producing a stain so potent in its job of placing her in a certain time and context that we no longer shared a realm of reality. I thought I'd catch up, not that I wanted to, the announcement of her menstruation was a warning to me. I got mine within the year, but it wasn't a shared place with her that I entered.

Lupita, the goat that Andrea helped birth, had amniotic fluid stains in the white fur of her ears, her mother didn't fully clean her up. That was how we could tell which baby goat needed to be bottle-fed. She also had poop stains on her tail and legs from diarrhea, possibly caused by the lack of nutrients from her mother's milk. What we fed her was a mixture. Sometimes other mama goats would pick up a runt, but this time it was one of the odd-season births so there weren't many options.

Andrea had a stain to be recognized apart from me, it was on her right hand and it appeared a few weeks after our birth, it was a mark by nature that served as a cue of who was who. This other stain differentiated us to others but not fully from ourselves. The new stain, the one of iron and aging secretion was a red brick road to elsewhere. A split predating many more splits.

Shameful if ours and disgusting if others.' Disease, horror, sipage, rot, violence, or rupture. Their provenance can be a curse. Sometimes their prove-

nance is just a residue of the passing of time and its vestiges.

In the times of the Inquisition, the mark on her hand would have pointed her to execution based on the *Malleus Maleficarum*, the hammer of witches. I found out Ana Mendieta had a mark like that on her shoulder. The sex workers of the aztec empire stained their teeth red with cochineal. I wonder if it was pure aesthetics or if the cochineal protected them from something their mouths may be exposed to.

The bunga bangkai's rotten meat stench was designed by nature as a spell of desire for pollinators for the specie's own survival.

El olor más codiciado del mundo viene del fruto de una orquídea que viene del cerro de Totonacapan que es parte de la sierra madre. Este fruto se ponía a secar al sol en linos por los Totonacos, los cuales fueron conquistados por los aztecas y les proveía la vainilla para enriquecer el sabor del xocolatl. ²³

'For people could close their eyes to greatness, to horrors, to beauty, and their ears to melodies or deceiving words. But they couldn't escape scent. For scent was a brother of breath. Together with breath it entered human beings, who couldn't defend themselves against it, not if they wanted to live. And scent entered into their very core, went directly to their hearts, and decided for good and all between affection and contempt, disgust and lust, love and hate. He who ruled scent ruled the hearts of men.' ²⁴

peste

Andrea and I geared up with plastic gloves and aprons, hairnets, and facemasks. We picked up tripes from one tray and untangled them as we sprayed them with water on a giant colander. When they were fully cleaned, weighed them in four-pound bags and put them on a separate tray. At first, the smell was unbearable, worse than cleaning the pig or goat stables on the ranch back in Mexico. The smell of feces was combined with blood, ammonia, and the perpetual humidity of the kill floors and not the dirt, hay, milk, and fresh air of the ranch. We grew used to it intermittently, the discomfort came and went. It was never strong enough to make us gag or vomit and not mild enough to grow pleasant. We were not squeamish.

The sight as we had arrived was of the goats lined up while one of them hung upside down by its two legs on a chain, its throat was sliced open with a knife in a confident and quick motion. It stopped screaming and moving eventually, sometime after, the man who had sliced its throat mumbled half a prayer in Arabic, the goat's body was slid hanging like a suit on a dry cleaner's conveyer, and the next one was slit. Upon meeting the next man, its underbelly was split open to remove the organs, and then the skin was slowly peeled into a thin layer the man used his arm and elbow to push it open and split like a sci-fi movie where an alien is born out of a cocoon.

The tripes became a material, they were slimy and stretchy and thin, more delicate than a balloon, I can see why the Egyptians used them as condoms. The process of cleaning was meticulous and hyper-fixating. The cleaning tripe shift was a punishment for something or another that my father had made up. We got paid for the four hours and were taken home, the smell stuck to our clothes and hair. We were ashamed to go to school the next day so we pretended to be sick. Maybe we were sick, my mother didn't question it. We spent our money buying clothes at goodwill.

There are rumors about the indigenous peoples of the Americas lighting herbs and trying to convince the colonizers to bathe because they stunk so badly. Somewhere along time, these wires got crossed and the white people started to say that "subversive" races stunk, but earlier accounts with indigenous populations described them as smelling sweet, in the north. They bathed often and moisturized with beer grease. In the south, the cities had technologically advanced potable water and sewer systems, they also cleansed themselves in temazcales with the steam of herb infusions.

Stench is a warning. To get away from something rotten or to be lured to the irresistible.

The smells we repudiate are corruption and poison, impurity, and refusal.

The ones we love are desire and consumption to be soothed or satiated. To smell is to crave or be repulsed.

An unannounced intruder to our senses, saturating anything porous.

The belly of the beast

The hunger
devouring all
unable to digest
inflamed intestines
bloated to excess

Eat the pink corn, the native said in a dream
it will heal you
or it will kill you

But it will not kill the hunger with its barren seeds
or heal stomach pains with its new genes
not the clenching teeth at night with fertilizers
nor the bloatedness with its bleach

dairy, wheat, yeast
poisoning the belly of the beast

just a belly, not a womb
of hunger
that hunger moving east to west
and back

hunger for stability, for roots, groundedness
in a foreign land, en tierra ajena

toda la tierra es ajena

if you dig deep enough
roja de la sangre
roja del destierro

red of an unfertilized womb on a full moon
staining the whiteness of sheets

the whiteness of bread
the whiteness of milk
the whiteness of lime
that breaks down the fibers of corn
to help the belly of the beast
make the fértil ground
take her roots somehow

split into two lands
this hybrid beast has half of two stomachs

half of two hearts
half of two lands
half of two hungers

boca abierta
estómago torcido
entrañas enredadas
lengua partida en dos.

Vita

Aida Lizalde (b. 1990) immigrated from Aguascalientes, MX., to the Central Valley of California, U.S., with their family at fifteen years old. They received a Bachelor's degree in Studio Art and a minor in Art History from the University of California, Davis in 2018, and a Masters in Fine Arts in Sculpture + Extended Media from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2023.

Aida Lizalde's practice is deeply rooted in their cultural background, immigration experience, and upbringing in a multi-faceted agricultural family project that included raising goats and honeybees, and harvesting pecans. Their work explores themes of metabolization, the inner workings of the body, and the ways in which it struggles to metabolize the vast array of data that it processes in relation to post-colonization, generational memory, identity, disease, and trauma. Through systems that drip, rot, and dissolve, Lizalde investigates the complex interplay between the physical and the psychological, and the natural and the artificial, alongside the potential for harmony and failure in these relationships.

Lizalde has received a number of awards and fellowships, including the Dedalus MFA Fellowship in Painting and Sculpture, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts Fellowship, the Vermont Studio Center Fellowship, the Young Space Grant, the Hopkins Endowment for Studio Art Students, the Crocker Kingsley Art Award, and the Herb Alpert Scholarship for Emerging Young Artists.

Endnotes

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- 2 Prof. Hania Szajewska, MD, and Kristina Campbell, MSc, (2022, July 18). A pediatrician's perspective on C-section births and the gut microbiome. International Scientific Association for Probiotics and Prebiotics (ISAPP).
- 3 Twin figure (Ibeji): Yoruba peoples. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. (n.d.).
- 4 Glissant Édouard, & Wing, B. (2021). *Poetics of relation*. University of Michigan Press
- 5 Pedro Neves Marques, *The Forest & the School: Where to Sit at the Dinner Table?* (2014). Germany: Archive Books.
- 6 Felix Kristina Ibarra, "Recipes from a postcolonial kitchen vol 1: maize a cookbook."
- 7 Oswald de Andrade, "Cannibalistic Manifesto," trans. Leslie Bary, introduction by Leslie Bary
- 8 Gillian Sneed, "Anthropophagic Subjectivities: Gender and Identity in Anna Maria Maiolino's "In-Out (Antropofagia), 1973-1974" (April 2020) First Annual Symposium of Latin American Art. Vistas. Institute for Studies of Latin American Art.
- 9 Flavio de Carvalho, "Hunger," *The Forest & the School: Where to Sit at the Dinner Table?* (2014). Pedro Neves Marques, Germany: Archive Books.
- 10 Tlatelolco Plaque
- 11 Mercedes Villalba, *Feverent Manifesto* (2019), Calipso Press
- 12 Translation: Fermentation trains us in seeing the ground as inherently shaky. It makes visible the invisible potential of those things that seem still. From *Manifiesto Ferviente* by Mercedes Villalba.
- 13 Malcolm Peacock, (January 31, 2023), Visiting Artist Lecture, Institute for Contemporary Art at VCU, Richmond VA.
- 14 Liz Harris/Grouper. "Living Room." *The Man Who Died in His Boat*. 2013.
- 15 Jenny Hval. "Paradise Rot: A Novel." VERSO BOOKS, 2024.
- 16 Translation: May the ocean taste sweet to you. (Umi-ko) Ocean child.
- 17 "Cang Xin (b. 1967)." Christies.com
- 18 Christof Migone, *Sonic Somatic: Performances of the Unsound Body*. Errant Bodies Press, 2012.
- 19 From Kayla Jones' text thread. March 17th, 2023
- 20 MacLennan, T. (1994). *How will I know I'm here*. Burning Editions. (shared by Michael Jones Mckean)
- 21 Jenny Hval. "Girls against God." 2021.
- 22 Dušan Makavejev, *Sweet Movie* (1974)
- 23 Quintana Bustamante, R., & Zaragoza Quintana, E. P. (2018, January). *La Historia de la Vainilla, Un Descubrimiento de los Totonacas*.
- 24 Süskind, P. (2015). *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer*. Random House.



Foreign Absorber, 2023

Ceramic, natural rubber, wool, retired fire hose, copper, metal hardware, found hose, and water.





Untitled, 2023
Ceramic, wooden stool, sink, and water.





La bebe, 2023

Ceramic, wool, high temp wire, plastic buton, retired fire hose, stocking holders, belt buckle, natural rubber hose, copper, and water.





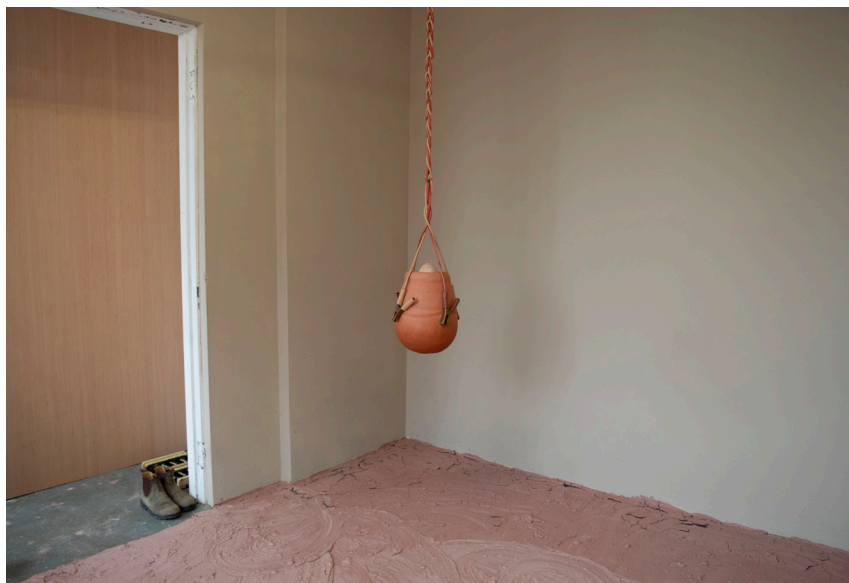
Untitled, 2023

Ceramic, wool, extension cords, copper, failed compost, and waxed cotton thread.





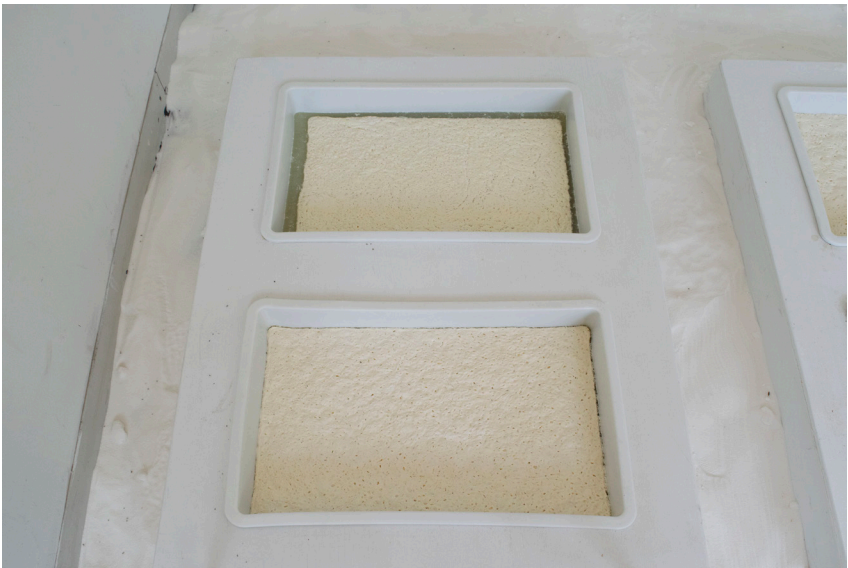
Jarring Language, 2022
Ceramic, jumper cables, metal nuts and bolts, and water.



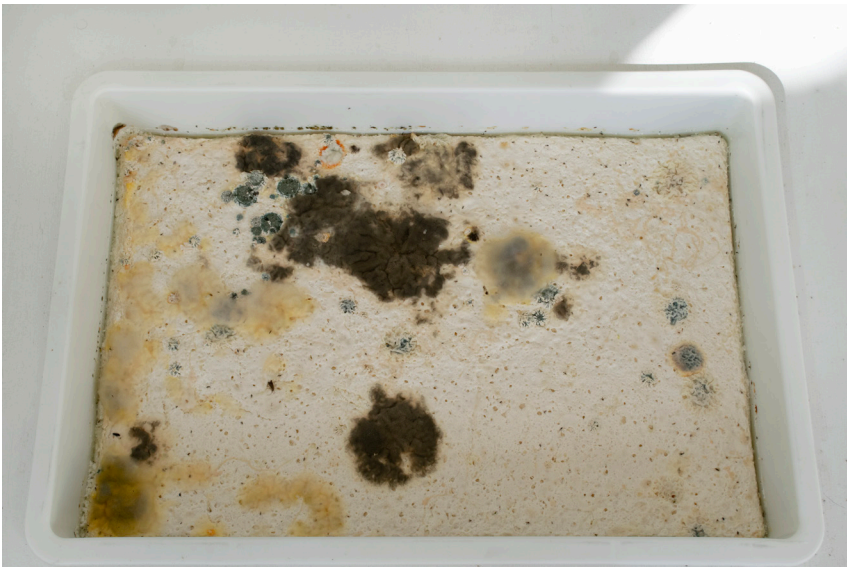
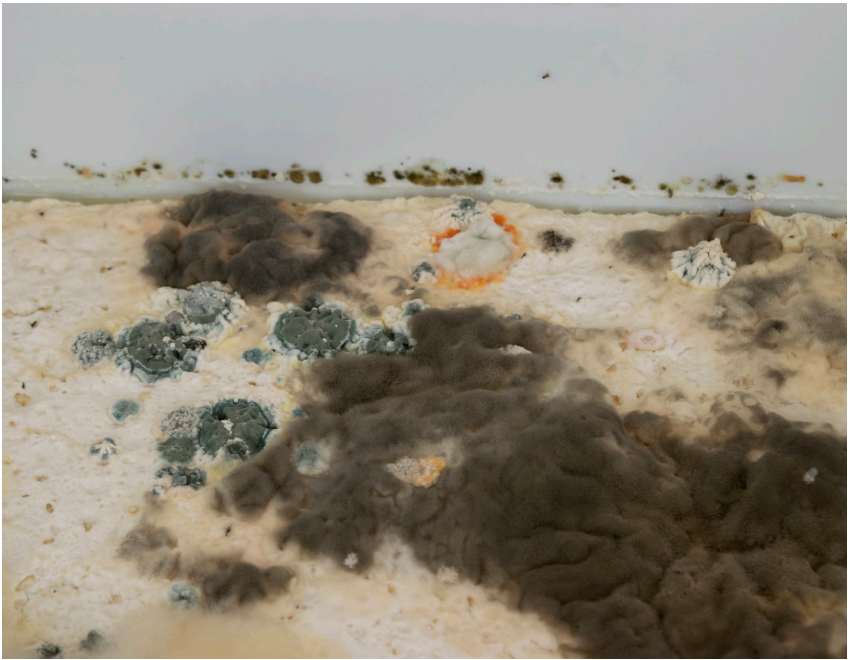


Untitled, 2023

Goats' milk, spit, vaginal bacteria, apple cider vinegar, plastic trays, wood, sugar, poly-cotton drop cloth, guajillo pepper stain, bugs, and stench.









Lagoon, 2022 (Top image, left to right: *Reciprocation / Morbid Relief*, *Ancestries of Interest*, and *Jarring Language*)
 High and low fired ceramics, hair, leather, water, jumper cables, cotton, retired fire hose, metal hardware etc.



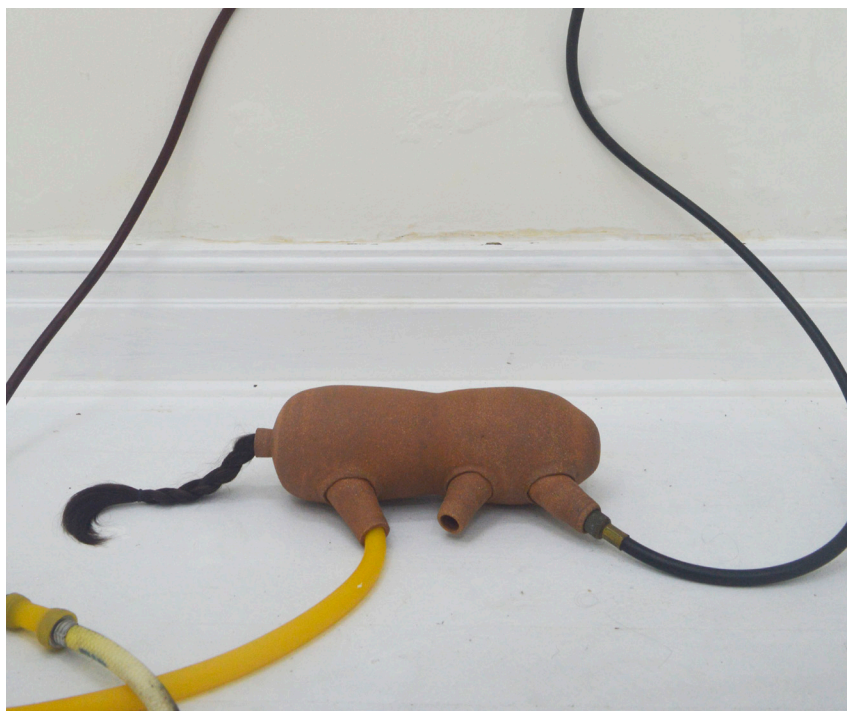


Hard Time Holding Silence, 2022 (Left to right: Reciprocation / Morbid Relief, No oracles, no gracias, Quasi-socialist rethoric)

High-fired clay, niece's hair, found objects, retired fire hose, metal ring, guajillo peppers, rope, ethernet cable, and dysfunctional pressure valve, natural rubber hoses, waxed cotton thread, door peep-hole lense, ethernet cables, a jumping rope, found plumbing hoses, casting waax, molten metal, and water.





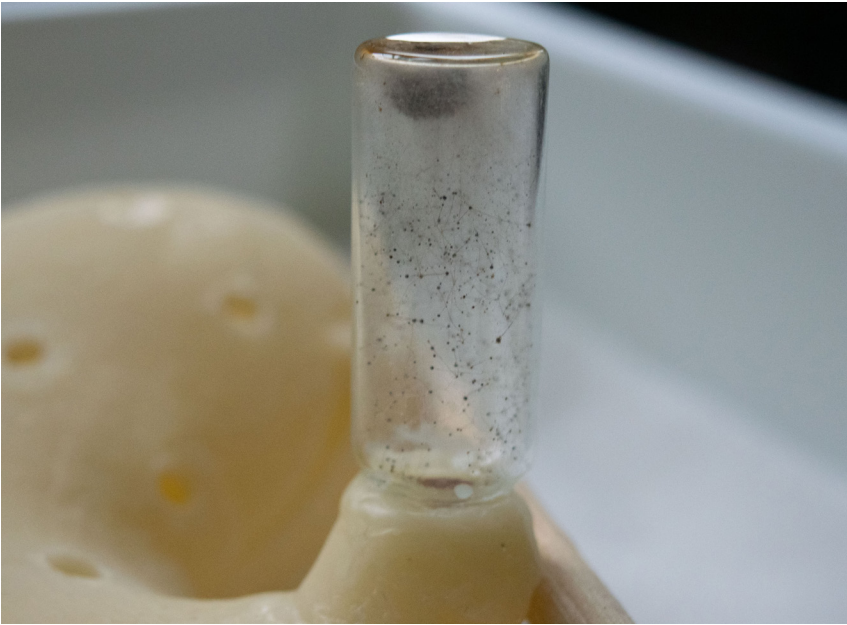
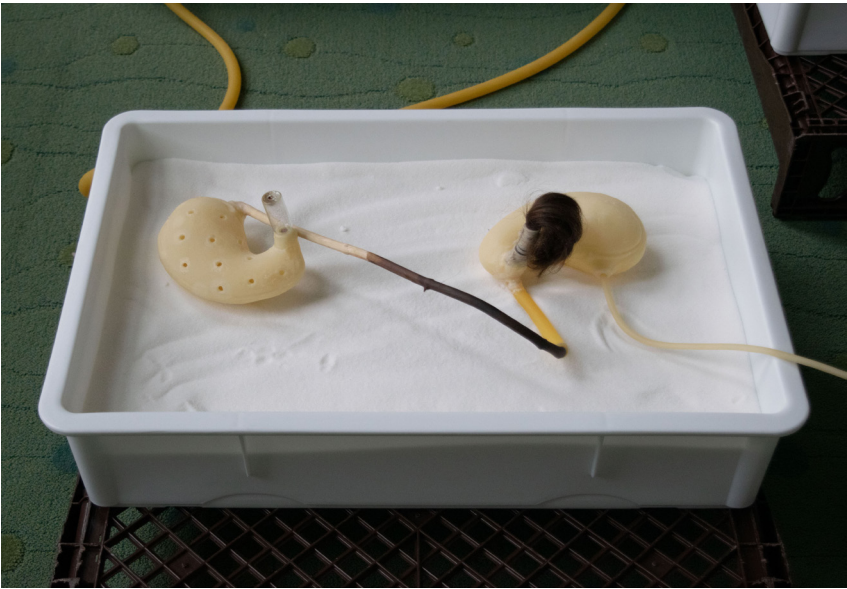


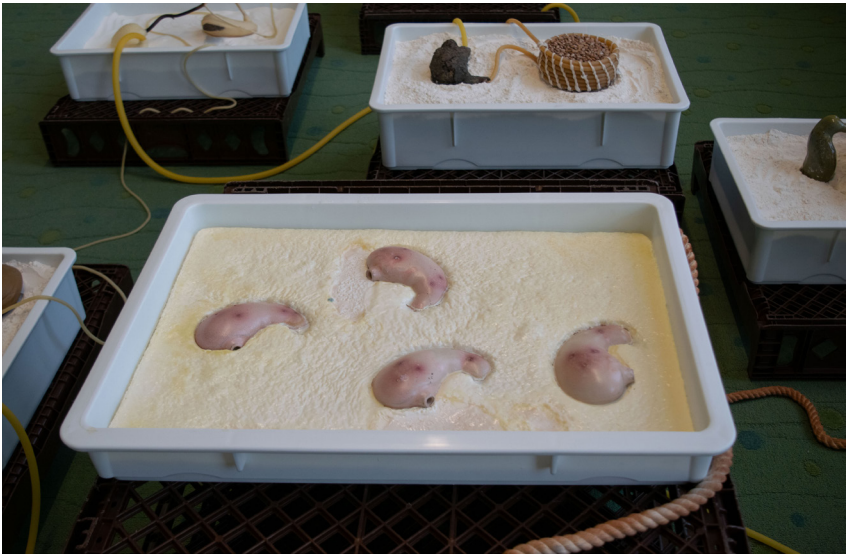


Maquinas de Lolita Panza, 2022

Ceramics, unfired clay, glass, beeswax, natural rubber hose, flour, sugar, vinegar, milk, cheese, mold, wood, beans, baskets, avocado-dyed cotton rope, cotton thread, lactic acid, probiotics, walnut dyed wood, christian's hair, plastic, casting wax and more.













Viscera, 2021-2023
Cotton, pinto beans, guajillo pepper stains.

