

It Will Come Like a Wave

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~ Abstract

In an effort to understand the meaning of things, my art practice is concerned with the potential for spaces to apprehend individuality through the experience of introspection by way of entering and discovering a foreign landscape. This paper explores my theoretical and practice-based research which focuses on the garden as a place that is conducive to a stillness and contemplation. A state that can lead to meditation or imagination through its muted aesthetics, material reverence, dream-likeness and subtle cultural references.

The exhibition *It Will Come Like a Wave* is the result of my MFA in Visual Arts thesis research. Per the installation conceiving of moments of water dripping and pooling, plant life emerging from the seams and earthy formations that possess a history, I investigate how direct experiences of place allow the viewer to establish our vulnerability as human beings and even cultivate moral sensibility.

~ Acknowledgments

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¹ "CAUT." Guide to Acknowledging First Peoples & Traditional Territory. Accessed February 25, 2018. <https://www.caut.ca/content/guide-acknowledging-first-peoples-traditional-territory>.

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It Will Come Like a Wave

Stoneware, porcelain, acrylic mirrors, wood, resin, stones, dried plant.
2018

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Portrait: Crying Myself to Sleep

35mm photographic study
2017

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Porcelain Vessel

Sara Kay Maston and Véronique Sunatori

Porcelain ceramic, grass.
2018

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It Will Come Like a Wave

Stoneware, porcelain, acrylic mirrors, wood, resin, stones, dried plant.
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Screen-print on reflective fabric
2017

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It Will Come Like a Wave

Stoneware, porcelain, acrylic mirrors, wood, resin, stones, dried plant.
2018

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Perception // Perspective

“It will come like a wave.” my father told me once, when I was feeling low and hoping for things to turn around for myself. His metaphor suggests an understanding that events take course in patterns, much like they occur in nature. It is a metaphor that implies an organic conception of human activity. A hopeful outlook, the idea that it is comforting to think of my life’s ups and downs in comparison to something as dependable as the behavior of water. That a consideration of my likeness to the movements of water would alleviate my anxieties is an interesting approach to encouragement. One that inspires to perceive of oneself in a position that would lead to better their consciousness of the world around.

In an effort to understand the meaning of things, I create installations of surreal nature that question preconceived knowledge. My art practice is concerned with the potential for these spaces to apprehend individuality through the experience of introspection by way of entering and discovering a foreign landscape. I utilize a variety of technical skills—I have been particularly inclined to ceramics, wood work, digital 3D fabrication, to mention a few—in the creation of objects, that are centered on the situating of subjectivity.

Living in this age of information, where the line between the real and the virtual blurs, I feel compelled to create physical things that interact with the viewer on an immediate level in order to establish our vulnerability as human beings. I believe it is important to recognize the agencies and relations of non-human entities; the anthropocentric tendency of the western world gives me the incentive to bring attention outward, to shift this attention and have the features of

my artworks explore the disposition in the posthuman.²

“Imagine you are falling. But there is no ground.” artist and writer Hito Steyerl invites you to visualize yourself, in the article *In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective*. Steyerl uses the metaphor of an endless free-fall to illustrate the feeling of vertigo associated with new visualities of 3D vertical perspectives. In formulating this narrative of a dream-like sequence which develops like a story, one is able to better grasp the freedom she so eloquently relates to the sovereignty of distant aerial views of surveillance.³ The strategy seamlessly turns the explanation into a customizable account, using imagination as a tool for an experiential access to information.

The impetus behind my artworks’ function reflect this valuing of direct experience in how I attempt to re-establish contact with the world through the visual and haptic qualities of immersive approaches.

We have relearned to feel our body; we have found underneath the objective and detached knowledge of the body that other knowledge which we have of it in virtue of its always being with us and of the fact that we are our body. In the same way, we shall need to reawaken our experience of the world as it appears to us in so far as we are in the world through our body, and in so far as we perceive the world with our body. But by thus remaking contact with the body and with the world, we shall also rediscover ourselves, since, perceiving as we do with our body, the body is a natural self and, as it were, the subject of perception.⁴

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty presents this approach to analysis that fosters a discovering of the self by conceiving of the world and the ‘other’ in a new way. My approach to art and sculpture in particular aligns with these ideals. Wherein I attempt to create

² I refer here to a posthumanism as Karen Barad intends it: a refusal of the reductive representational tendencies of dividing and defining. An ontology that prioritizes the material world over humans.

³ Steyerl, Hito. "In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective." *E-flux journal*, no. 24 (April 2011). Accessed March 2, 2018. <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/24/67860/in-free-fall-a-thought-experiment-on-vertical-perspective/>.

⁴ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Colin Smith. E-Library: Taylor & Francis, 2005, 184.

conditions for furthering perspective achieved by way of reaching a state of self-awareness. The three-dimensional mediums of sculpture and installation offer a direct corporeal confrontation that is essential to the type of experiences I aim for the artwork to induce. In Sara Ahmed's essay *Orientations*, she shows interest in phenomenology insofar as it "[...] emphasizes the importance of lived experience, the intentionality of consciousness, the significance of nearness or what is ready to hand, and the role of repeated and habitual actions in shaping bodies and worlds."⁵ This speaks to the physicality of my work and its experiential aspects by which the navigating of our bodies within a landscape can be a humbling.

This phenomenological methodology applies to more than just my making practices, it also manifests in the language of my writing. The analytical tone of the text reflects how I perceive my artworks functioning as experiments. The impartial wording in my affirmations demonstrate how I tend to lean towards an objective approach as an access point for the reader. This shows in this paper, but it is also apparent in the way I express myself in general. Only making suggestions, never imposing an opinion – a strategy of tentative nature.

In applied terms, the output of the aforementioned method is an investigation of space⁶, carried out through my personal interpretation of aesthetic ideologies that cultivate moral development by encouraging slowness and respect.

⁵ Ahmed, Sara. "Orientations Toward Objects." *Queer Phenomenology*, 2006, 25-63. doi:10.1215/9780822388074-002.

⁶ Space as the form of external experience.





Emptiness // Light // Garden

“If light is scarce then light is scarce; we will immerse ourselves in the darkness and there discover its own particular beauty.”⁷

– Jun'ichirō Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows*

Two summers ago, when I visited Japan for the third time, I was able to visit what is known as the *art islands* off the shore of Okayama. On Naoshima island I went to the Chichu museum, part of the Benesse Art Site, it was designed by architect Tadao Ando in collaboration with artists Walter de Maria and James Turrell, along with the work of the late Claude Monet. The building alone is arguably a work of art in itself. It houses commissioned site-specific works to create an aesthetic experience whose architecture and environments are constructed symbiotically to view and experience the artists' works of art. It is a common practice for artists to work according to a space, but the reverse is an opportunity that rarely presents itself. It was some kind of revelation to me to experience art and architecture on the same level, there was practically no distinction to be made between the two, or rather there was no need for one. Walking on the elegant white tile leading to the Monet room, I was moved by the surrounding environment whose immaculate lightness gave me a whole new experience of impressionist painting. My attention was turned to the simple elements that made the space so remarkable, the tapered black marble stairs before entering the blue abyss of the Turrell room, or the single narrow crack along the wall allowing natural light to illuminate the hallways which appeared structurally impossible. I recall very vivid memories of the experience; that moment felt surreal.

⁷ Tanizaki, Jun'ichirō. *In Praise of Shadows*. New Haven, CT: Leetes Island, 1977, 31.

This experience led me to appreciate the framework behind the atmospheric conditions of a space. The crafting of an ambience calling on only a minimal amount of constituent forms would require a careful control of the impalpable features of a space. As the designer, taking into account every aspect (scale, path, lighting, etc.), enables the spectator to abandon themselves to the moment. From here I became interested in this idea of the shaping of space with an emptiness that fills it and equally contributes to the experience as the objects do. And further, the shaping of *space* into *place*.

The identity of a place is difficult to pinpoint as it is often about an aura provided by a space's particular appearance, activities and meanings. A sense of place is determined by its given setting as well as feeling. My understanding of the Japanese concept of 間 or “ma” is representing the ubiquitous presence that exists in between things. The word itself is commonly used to describe an “interval” or “negative space”, yet it is employed to define them spatially just as much as temporally wherein the aesthetic paradigm conceives space and time as reciprocal, collapsing the distinction of the two. The ideogram for ma is a combination of the symbols 門 (“door”) and 日 (“sun”—originally 月, “moon”), which poetically illustrates this defining feature via the imagery of a ray of light peering through a doorway opening. This resonates with me in how the factor of light in this scene is what elevates the moment to something special. In my own artwork, I have made use of light for a similar purpose of emphasizing, and involving the substance to introduce an element of ineffable quality. And often the materials that I am most drawn to are ones that can refract and reflect light, or translucent materials. What I find most interesting is how the physicality of light isn't immediately visually apparent, i.e., it requires objects to project on for it to manifest itself. The light casts, however, imply that the light exists amid the intermediate empty spaces. This property of light to foreground these gaps makes the

emptiness a palpable element.

I was able to appreciate and make use of empty spaces in the installation-based work I have made over the last year. An installation in particular, *Crying Myself to Sleep* (2017), is based on the thought of the reflection of the sky in pools of water collected in the ground after a rainfall. Envisioning a dream-like moment of walking around clusters of mirrored substance, the artwork consists of a series of platforms embedded with reflective material cut in uneven shapes. Like traces, the vestige of these representational bodies of liquid suggests a former presence in time. I understand the concept of *ma* to be fluid, employing it as an ideological starting point from which to experiment and interpret. In this installation, I find the physicality of the objects in space informing a grander narrative as what can be read as the kind of *place*-making that characterizes *ma*.

In a physical and visual sense, the forms in *Crying Myself to Sleep* also act as metaphorical voids or spaces. I used mirror for this material's ability to have a kind of portal effect, generating a hole or an open space. Its visual as well as conceptual properties are a way for me to establish a dialogue between interior and exterior spaces by creating a tension and letting the eye consider both at once. Wavering between flat planes and deep thresholds, the outcome perpetuates and accentuates the surrounding spatial openness.

The exhibited work was the outcome of a new working method of an intuitive sort, alternative to operating with a plan, introducing revisions to my ideas throughout the making process. I had to remedy issues of compositional imbalance of the positioning of objects, and overly simplistic material combination by adding some stones and dried plants I had been collecting over time. I bored a small hole in one of the mirrors to plant a twig through to reiterate the mirrors' intended semblance to water. The resulting rendition of the installation *Crying Myself to Sleep* showcased in the York University's end-of-year MFA exhibition is evocative of a dry

landscape garden much like the ones found in Japanese Zen Buddhist temples. The materials' candor and the overall clean appearance, with natural elements of rocks, plants, and the allusion to water, yield a peaceful climate conducive to stillness and contemplation.

This aesthetic happens to resonate with the notion of self-awareness that I have pursued in my work via moments of awakening such as feelings of empathy or encounters of sublime⁸. This new take on the subject matter bears the presentness and grounding approach of meditation. I have found applications of *ma* aesthetics to be closely related to this practice of introspection in the context of Zen gardens wherein the bareness of this minimal landscape is used as an entry point for a meditation through staring. In Günter Nitschke's writings on *ma*, the German author speculates it to be the consideration of composition that makes it a favorable landscape for it. "For here, the *object* — the natural rocks — is aesthetically so perfectly arranged in *space* — the finely raked white sand surface — that eventually the onlooker ceases to be aware of either the one or the other separately. The flow of energy is reversed and one is thrown onto the experience per se — consciousness."⁹ I conceive my work to simulate the garden in trying to achieve the same aesthetics and spiritual effects by finding a proper balance between form and emptiness can allow for meditation or imagination.

In an invitation to be grounded in the present, for this thesis research project, I am using the structure of the garden as a strategy to create a space in which the physicality of objects is emphasized by situating it within an introspective enclosed environment. I am interested in the properties of the garden landscape that seek to reconcile oppositions. In how a purposeful arrangement of natural objects is an attempt to mediate tension between dichotomies, whether it

⁸ I intend this as a reference to the philosophical concept of the sublime as initially introduced in the 18th century. In Immanuel Kant's romantic conception, the sublime is relative to the experience of overwhelm by the magnitude (size or power) of forces of nature, an aesthetic experience of beauty through awe.

⁹ Günter Nitschke, "MA: Place, Space, Void," *Kyoto Journal*, accessed January 12, 2018, http://www.kyotojournal.org/the-journal/culture-arts/ma-place-space-void/#_ftn14.

would be a balance between organic and artificial forms, static and changing states, or wild and domestic spheres. This pursuit for a certain stability via the demonstration of control is ultimately an optimistic act. A hopeful affirmation of authority over one's own fate.¹⁰ Introducing a terrain that approximates a variety of minor trusts, the garden form symbolizes this human desire to grasp their natural surroundings.

The main aspect of the garden that I explore in this project is the fourth dimension – temporality. Garden spaces are designed for the purpose of organizing the experience of time. Whilst thematizing geological time to situate human transience, the experience of a garden occurs in real time, ridding us of external concerns which translates, to me, as timelessness.¹¹ In my studio research, I have been experimenting with fabric and other sculptural elements hung from the ceiling, as if suspended in time. Lace curtains dipped in thick plaster stiffen in an upright standing position, and the holes in its fabric continue to let light through. In appearance, these fabric structures sway between static form and dynamic objects. Other elements include ceramic of stepping stone shapes flattened and imprinted by feet like relics of a previous passage. All of these experiments have the quality of slowness and remanence that fits true to the temporal essence of the garden. Without necessarily incorporating all of these examples together at once, the intention is for the corporeality of the installation to be infused with a pregnant nothingness.

¹⁰ Mara Miller, *The Garden as an art* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 25.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 38-42.



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Time // Wabi-Sabi // Materiality

“And with our legs, our eyes are manipulated, and our visual input from spatial phenomena is structured over time.”¹² As the stepping stones of a garden controls the pace of walking – slowing down the stride, they force us to look down and notice the differing sizes, shapes, textures and colors of the rocks.¹³ Pay attention to how things change over time –they inevitably flourish and/or deteriorate. Conceiving the universe as being in constant motion toward or away from potential is just what the Japanese religio-aesthetic paradigm of wabi-sabi suggests. In resisting the despair of my own nihilistic beliefs, I like the idea of finding beauty in the fate of impermanence. Not limited to the acceptance of the inevitable, wabi-sabi is about appreciating and respecting the cosmic order. Following the spiritual principle that truth comes from the observation of nature, the words 侘 (“wabi”) and 寂 (“sabi”) together symbolize a way of life through material objects and the arts.¹⁴

In applied terms, this would mean taking away any unnecessary extravagance to focus on what is intrinsic. Therefore, a wabi-sabi approach, in an artistic context, would entail obeying the request of the object or material at hand. Letting the material guide its manipulation, meaning to shape it according to its individual form by being attentive to the substance’s natural inclinations. Not working against, but working with the object under consideration.

This attitude captures what I find to be my relationship with clay as a material. The

¹² Günter Nitschke, "MA: Place, Space, Void," *Kyoto Journal*, accessed January 12, 2018, http://www.kyotojournal.org/the-journal/culture-arts/ma-place-space-void/#_ftn14.

¹³ Bhatt, Ritu, and Yuriko Saito. *Rethinking aesthetics: the role of body in design*. S.l.: S.n., 2013.

¹⁴ Leonard Koren, *Wabi-sabi for artists, designers, poets & philosophers* (Point Reyes, CA: Imperfect Publishing, 2008).

porcelain being so stubborn to work with, it is crucial for me to follow its wishes as I work to reach a good compromise. As it turns into ceramic, there are always elements that are out of my control. When the dry clay goes in the kiln for firing, some circumstances such as quick changes in temperature, or contaminants infiltrated in the clay make it especially prone to accidents like cracking. As I worked collaboratively on a large vessel of cast porcelain slip, the scale of the piece made it very challenging to manipulate. The fired pot fractured in the curing process. It was decided that we would finish the piece regardless, incorporating this crack as a feature. The resulting piece is a very simple enlarged version of a curving lip tea bowl with a single fissure at the edge. This idiosyncrasy defines the object in a way that acknowledges the nature of its materiality and accepts the unpredictability of the process. Echoing the unpretentious approach of a wabi-sabi dogma, this methodology respects the value of material and asserts that there is beauty to be found in the flawed.

As I reflect on the constants in nature that make up the world, I am inclined to integrate natural phenomena as subjects in my work for their fundamentalness. These references are emblematic but they sometimes extend to the inclusion of organic materials and the reproduction of the irregular shapes that can be found in natural environments. I try to negotiate the geometrical and smooth forms I make amidst these aforementioned elements with an exploration of substances like clay to bridge the differences. As I delve into matter from a theoretical standpoint, I recognize other theses that observe material's constant state of flux. Coming back to my previously mentioned installation *Crying Myself to Sleep*, the laser-cut acrylic mirror sheets that create the irregular shapes embedded in the floor material represent a moment in which water collects on the ground after rainfall. The inspiration for this scene is in itself a fascination for the water as a substance –how droplets of water will gather on the earth to form basins. This inherent vitalism of water and its cycle of transformation that leads it to determine the

atmosphere that we must navigate. Thus, the artwork captures this instant of wonder to be experienced in the stillness of the space. I interpret the potential of matter identity aesthetically in my work, which I believe is what introduces an aspect of narrative among the inert objects. Actually, author Manuel DeLanda, another pursuivant of materialist ideas –offering a theoretical framework for analyzing assemblages, notes that “even the humblest forms of matter and energy have the potential for self-organization.”¹⁵

Of course, installation as a medium would be the result of collaborations and interferences between various bodies and forces, a complex material system. This is best exemplified by the tensions provided by the juxtapositions of substances of different material qualities I am currently working to combine to form my thesis exhibition: the organic stones and plants placed amongst the smooth geometric structures of my making, mirror shapes inlaid in wooden surfaces, the silk fabric draped over thick wood dowels diffusing the directional lighting. The associations these tensions inevitably generate are important as they inform our interpretation of the work.

Contemporary New Materialist theorist Karen Barad demonstrates the problems associated with language and opposes representational means, suggesting a relational ontology.¹⁶ In her book *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, Barad speculates that things or objects do not precede their interaction that, rather, objects emerge through particular “intra-actions”.¹⁷ Unable to dissociate these at first glance, the synergetic network of forces defines the materials’ agencies. The performativity and relationality occurring in real-time in this autonomous environment creates an ecology. As things puddle on the ground and hang from the ceiling, with its forms, materials and movements, the carefully constructed assemblage foregrounds material idiosyncrasies as it

¹⁵ Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant matter: a political ecology of things*. Duke University Press, 2010, 7.

¹⁶ Barad, Karen. "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 2003, 802.

¹⁷ Barad, Karen. *Meeting the universe halfway: quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007, 139.

oozes through on the floor.

Contiguously, my studio research has been exploring visual representations of the concept of openings or portals. I have been experimenting with mirrors and the suggestion of liquid substance. In this case, the mirror object is not reduced to its historical reference, it is its material quality that really conveys my idea more than the objectness of the stuff. I want to draw attention to the agency of these materials and let them exist with other elements which characterize the new-found form. I turn to Jane Bennett's materialism, which highlights the importance in the acknowledgment of vitality in objects, in matter, and favors the fostering of a non-hierarchical relationship between human and non-human, this connection being something that I really seek to achieve in my art practice.

As a matter of fact, for the garden installation, although the intention is to create a dreamy scene, I am not concerned with presenting an illusion. I am merely offering a thought. The mirrors are not attempting to fool one into believing that they are liquefying, but they do suggest a desire for them to be so. Reflective and glossy glazes on ceramic pieces and pools of clear solidified resin merely explore the idea of wetness in various ways. Not attempting to conceal the materials and making everything appear flawless, I am less concerned with form than I am with matter. The intra-actions formed within the complex bodies in my installation emphasize the materials to appear as they are: the plywood is plywood, the rock is a rock, and the mirrors are mirrors. Which, together, assert themselves as artificial. The work prompts the spectator to experience the pleasures that come from meditating on the intrinsic precepts of materiality.

Meanwhile, I have found myself to personally identify with a lot with the ideas brought forth by New Materialism. In her essay *Form/Matter/Chora: Object Oriented Ontology and Feminist New Materialism*, Rebekah Sheldon explains:

Assimilating matter as the reverse side of cultural construction [...] feminist new materialists have

sought to inhabit the concept of matter as a site in which to build a materialist account of complex causality within open systems—one that adheres neither at the level of a closed totality nor from the perspective of the atomized individual but rather as a trans-individual assemblage whose motions are greater than the sum of its parts.¹⁸

This theorizing advocates for a multiplicity of subjectivities to inform the whole, valuing individual experiences. Sheldon's definition of New Materialist speculation argues that individuals should be perceived as their complex material beings. I am embracing these feminist ideals through my own personal pursuit to embody an authentic and vulnerable woman and person; being in touch with my emotions –my humanity. Demonstrated through the specificity of materials or meanings emerging from feminism, my artwork is created with a voluntary vulnerability and openness, rendering it more accessible and engaging.

¹⁸ Sheldon, Rebekah. "Form/Matter/Chora: Object Oriented Ontology and Feminist New Materialism." In *The Nonhuman Turn*, edited by Richard Grusin. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015, 204.





Dream // The Unknown

When I was younger I remember hearing the speculation that the purpose of dreaming is to present your mind with scenarios to confront as a way to mentally prepare for ‘real-life’ situations. Although not yet fully understood scientifically, the content of dreams appears to be a mixture of familiar information with an infusion of strangeness. I believe this unexpected quality of the dream is what allows the mind to revisit its acquired knowledge and memories to enable a situating of the self. In his famous work *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Sigmund Freud ends the book by stating that dreams lead us into the future by playing out our aspirations.¹⁹ What is interesting about Freud’s understanding of the dream is that it condenses the past, present and future at once. This other experience of temporality contributes to the special attention we give to dreams.

In my own work, I consider surreal landscapes – the hypnagogic type. You know these are not real but their ideas open up possibilities. As I reflect on some constants in nature that make up the world: the sublime moment when the moon eclipses the sun, the reflection of the sky in pools of water collected in the ground after a rainfall, a plant sprouting from between asphalt and sidewalk, for example. I speculate on their origins by imagining alternative functions for these phenomena that have such significant symbolic qualities.

Coming back to the subject of Phenomenology, I want to bring up this passage from Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* in which he speaks of his own dreams relative to his experiences of reality:

My field of perception is constantly filled with a play of colors, noises and fleeting tactile sensations

¹⁹ Sigmund Freud and Ritchie Robertson, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. Joyce Crick (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 493.

which I cannot relate precisely to the context of my clearly perceived world, yet which I nevertheless immediately ‘place’ in the world, without ever confusing them with my daydreams. Equally constantly I weave dreams round things. I imagine people and things whose presence is not incompatible with the context, yet who are not in fact involved in it: they are ahead of reality, in the realm of the imaginary.²⁰

I am interested in how the queering²¹ of this field of experiences within reality could trigger similar speculations to become in such a manner “ahead of reality” as an act of dreaming.

In my latest work, I have incorporated the earth’s moon as reference in multiple projects. Notably in the piece *Blame It on The Moon*, a screen-print of a ghostly image of a gibbous moon on a flat piece of reflective fabric. Only applied with a subtle transparent finish, the resulting object only reaches full effect when seen from the specific angle where light is shining towards it. The round-shape and cratered texture of the artwork are what references the moon as an iconic image, its form however is unusually malleable and performative in nature. The defining feature of this piece is how its reflective quality mimics that of the moon glowing from sun light, but this effect is emphasized and heightened in the process. Along with the buttery flexibility of the fabric material, the final piece has a melted look which disrupts its initial origin. Recognizable as an industrial material typically used for high-visibility clothing, this fabric is imbued with this antecedent. I use the material’s properties for a different purpose in this case, yet the knowledge of its origins translates as a longing for attention. Printed in a two-dimensional image, *Blame It on The Moon* acknowledges the fact that we only have visible access to this face of the moon’s surface, thereby our familiarity to it is limited to this plane. This artwork almost suggests that the moon

²⁰ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Colin Smith. E-Library: Taylor & Francis, 2005, x.

²¹ I am using the word “queering” contingently as a way to delineate how the act is only deviant insofar as the context from which the subject deviates from is socially made present as deviant. Coming back to author Sarah Ahmed whose writings on queer phenomenology outlines the importance of orientation in within the field of study.

could soften and fall to the ground. A proposition that is evocative of the surreal, yet it is not presented as pretentiously as an illusion.

One key strategy of the empiricist philosophers was to deny the very existence of objects, replacing them with ‘bundles of qualities’. Strictly speaking there is no such thing as ‘moon’ but only qualities such as ‘white’, ‘round’ and ‘luminous’, which appear together so frequently that we come to use ‘moon’ as a sloppy nickname for this rough set of qualities. The greatness of phenomenology lay in its reversal of this prejudice. For Husserl, ‘moon’ as a unified phenomenal object precedes any particular qualities it might display. The object of experience comes first, and it endures despite considerable ongoing shifts in its evident features.²²

While *Blame It on The Moon* has features that remind us of the astronomical body, the artwork exists as a separate entity that admits the reality of its reference by asserting its own object identity.

Such acts of suggestion are a type of theatre; performances serving to present the experience of an imagined event. In coming across gaps in previous theories around “unified realities”, or objects, Graham Harman in his writings on Object-Oriented Ontology justifies the need for nonrelational perspectives on objects. Especially in the case of artworks in how the “literalist” alternative is reductive in its paraphrasing. Failing to get at the object itself, this approach prioritizes outward effects over inner reality of things. Instead, Harman advocates for a theatrical praxis, implying that theatre is a place that enables becoming via mimesis.²³ My approach to sculpture revolves around this frame of mind. I allocate roles to the art objects – they serve as actors: portraying into being. The actor is then enabled to interpret the part and take liberties with its verisimilitude.

²² Harman, Graham. "Art Without Relations." *ArtReview*, September 2014.

²³ *Ibid.*

In a close investigation of my art practice, I have come to the realization that the materials I choose bear an important role in the conceptualization of my sculptures and installations. Although the dream-like landscapes and objects that take shape in my work have surreal tendencies, they do not aim to be illusionistic. On the contrary, I use a lot of unaltered raw building materials like plaster, wood, metal and plastics in their natural or found states. This serves my intentions to demonstrate a desire for unearthly phenomena. The resulting artworks are, and assume themselves as, constructions. It is this use of physical matter with its innate properties that acknowledges my motive for art-making.

Outer space, the laws of physics, gravity, light, etc. –these are the themes that determine the elements I choose to use and the way I intervene with abstraction to introduce strangeness in order to overthrow initial impressions. Strangeness is characterized by unfamiliarity. The unknown factor of the artwork deviates from the feeling of comfort provided by the simplicity of the bare materials. By apposing these qualities, I hope for the unknown to become useful in letting it inform knowledge. In presenting a dreamscape installation, I wish to engender situations in which awareness is diverted to the environment, whereby the experience of the unexpected becomes a way to access reality. By using this non-literal suggestion of strangeness applied to an environment without forcing an illusion onto its audience, I want my installations to allow for the rediscovering of something familiar. By doing so I hope to foreground the transcendence in the everyday and situate the role of the unknown from a more detached point of view.





Heritage // Tradition // Departure

These works I have been making have been indirectly addressing my own personal cultural heritage, specifically my paternal lineage that I have only recently been getting to know. My father has worked to disconnect himself from his past, and consequently I grew up shielded from those influences. My grandparents have very traditional Japanese values; my grandmother teaches the 茶の湯 tea ceremony and my grandfather is a practicing Shinto, to give you an idea. My growing interest in their tradition and culture has lead me to research Japanese aesthetic ideologies to incorporate in my practice. It has become a way for me to feel more connected to their beliefs. The aforementioned aesthetic concepts of *ma* and *wabi-sabi*, while contributing to this process of self-discovery, have also been the subject of my artistic explorations; their points of view on aesthetics' symbiotic relation to moral principles are inspiring the ways that I design my work.

For instance, in *Crying Myself to Sleep*, the elevation of the wooden platforms is an important feature of the artwork. The spectator is invited to take their shoes off and embark on the installation to walk amongst, and integrate, the artificial landscape to experience the work first hand. I came up with this idea while investigating the concept of openings –where I was concerned with movement strategies, considering ways to guide participants within an immersive installation. Concerned with how I could create an enclosed environment without surrounding it with walls, the thought of building an elevated platform in order to create a subtle threshold came to mind. The concept originated from remembering the entryways in Japanese homes where what is called the 玄関 (“genkan”) is one step lower than the rest of the house. The act of

mounting the step is a marker of an entrance in the space. The solemn execution of taking off the shoes is so distinctive of the culture, and a marker of reverence. These kinds of affect qualities brought forth by such gestures are what I look to draw on.

The installation and exhibition *It Will Come Like a Wave* constitutes an ecology of made and organic objects, together forming a terrain out of the gallery space. Wooden podiums of varying size and height delineate the layout of the space. Inlaid with materials mimicking water; puddles of materials like mirrors, resin and metallic glaze are dispersed across the wood surfaces. There is an aesthetic pleasure in seeing the material parts fit perfectly into each other. The acrylic mirrors, much like the ones found in *Crying Myself to Sleep*, crop up in gold and bronze shades as well as the original mercury silver colour of sheeting which are found spilling onto the floor of the gallery. The artwork seeps on the ground and beyond the stages meant for display. Meanwhile, placed over these levels are ceramic sculptures showing traces of body gestures – the weight of body in footprints from walking and sinking into the material. Left in a mostly raw stoneware finish, they are punctuated with varied patinas that complexify the objects. As I chose to have tall grass and weeds sprouting from the figurative water and wood, creating cavities for them to emerge from the ceramics naturally ensued. Small bud vases appear to grow and stem from the clay containing the sprigs. Odd noodle-shaped porcelain pieces outline forms that are similar to the puddles or take on a life of their own. The ceramic elements establish a material conversation with the stones of various shapes and sizes that are interspersed together, so do the few blocks of faux stone which are used to elevate some of the other objects in the installation. Overhead, a vaporous sky of silk organza drapes over the landscape, contributing to an atmosphere of calm. Through this tent of tinted fabric, a mirrored yet translucent moon can be found glowing from above. On the whole, the installation creates an environment that exteriorizes a personal comfort found in nature whilst being bound to a human framework.

The Japanese Zen garden has been a primary source of inspiration for this project. The Buddhist values it is based upon are from a school of thought that has molded the Japanese culture. The Zen branch of Buddhism infuses Monastic qualities to the original form. Against conceptualization, the focus is on lived experience as opposed to verbal implantation of realities. Zen is based on direct action where it applies to the practical side of daily life, everyday activities are perceived as wondrous and mysterious.²⁴ In effect, the very praxis of Buddhism, which is said to be akin to philosophy in how they're established from experiences of realization, combines practice and thought through exercises like meditation.²⁵ The aesthetics that stem from the school of thought have the ability to command and extend respect. In creating a path in the space for my exhibition, choreographing the walk by which to experience the artwork, I aim to replicate experiences that I have had visiting a number of ancient temples in Japan. There is something for me to learn from their age-old practices. Although I do not directly ascribe to Zen Buddhist beliefs, I am grateful to be able to gain knowledge from the school and apply that to my work and life.

Being born as at the intersection of two sets of culture and tradition, I was not raised according to any specific belief system. Instead, I was presented with options that allowed me to pave my own way. Traditions come from a long line of passing things through generations. When something interrupts that line, it takes a new tangent. I am in this position where I have only been exposed to artifacts. Having grown up with these traditional Japanese visual references that were decontextualized, my relationship to them was more aesthetic. I think I channel or reference their practices in my work which then exists as an homage rather than the embodiment

²⁴ Suzuki, Diasetz T. *Zen and Japanese Culture*. Princeton University Press, 1959, 1-16.

²⁵ Marcus Boon, Eric M. Cazdyn, and Timothy Morton, *Nothing: Three Inquires in Buddhism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 3-9.

of them. It is not so important to me to return to their original forms, it is more about forming something new.

It Will Come Like a Wave is a work that conceives moments of water dripping and pooling, plant life emerging from the seams and earthy formations that possess a history. The exhibition presents its audience with a surreal landscape, a hypnagogic context from which to set aside preconceived knowledge and enter with a fresh, open mindset. Meant to immerse, the installation is affective through the immediacy of a lived experience of subjective resolution. The quiet modest appearance of the whole is enriched by a balance of roughness and sharpness. The aesthetics of the installation, derived from the Japanese ideologies of *ma*, *wabi-sabi* and Zen Buddhism cultivate moral development by virtue of praise and respect for the ordinary. *It Will Come Like a Wave* cites traditions of my eastern and western backgrounds, the work has been a way for me to aesthetically and materially think through my personal hybrid identity.



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