

GRIT

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to support an exhibition of sculpture created throughout the past two years in the Department of Visual Arts and Art History at York University towards a Masters in Fine Art. *Grit*, takes multiple meanings and is used throughout this paper explore material connection and resolve. At the onset of an MFA, I sought to investigate contemporary propositions that recontextualize the tradition of sculpture; specifically, as a maker through a feminist and materialistic lens that highlights reciprocity between maker and material. The paper submitted has been organized within a braid, the main strand informed by a set of identified themes developed within a design vocabulary that offers a framework from which to investigate the work created and their material relations, a central theme to my thesis. Woven throughout an auto-fictional account is a technical investigation into three elements from an often-used glaze recipe. Materially, grit is the substance worked with in the studio; clay, glass, and various dusts extracted from the earth, utilized in specific ways combined with heat provide opportunities for alchemical transformations. As I tumble between the demands of motherhood, academia and art making, writing becomes the grit, a useful polish to bring forth relations and demonstrate how the act of making is entwined with daily life.

"I feel very strongly that I am under the influence of things or questions which were left incomplete and unanswered by my parents and grandparents and more distant ancestors."

Carl Jung in *Memories, Dreams, Reflection*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As I live and love on this land and commit to caring for it, I acknowledge the people who have been stewards of it for time immemorial. We stand on the traditional lands of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples; the GTA continues to be home to many diverse First Nations people. The area I reside in is covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit, and the Williams Treaties signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands. We are also part of the Dish With One Spoon Treaty, an agreement to share and protect the land so that no one's dish is ever empty. As I continue to figure out how to be a good treaty person, learning and speaking of its history helps keep its inhabitants human and non in living memory. The land we stand on holds a deep geological history which bears acknowledging, I express gratitude to the rocks and minerals that remain beneath our feet and those extracted to build and power this crazy world around us and from which I make my art.

I'll forever be grateful for the time and space allowed over the past two years to make art, pursue ideas, and grow my practice. Much appreciation to my advisors at York for their willingness to invest time in my work and words; thank you, Brandon Vickard for your encouragement, Marc Couroux, for the excellent resources and Holly Ward, for your perspective. A special note of appreciation to my external committee member Ginette Legaré whom I had the pleasure of being taught by during my undergraduate; thank you for continuing this journey with me, your insights have been invaluable. Appreciation to Barbara Balfour and Janet Jones, who helped me build a theoretical framework during the first year and put forth a successful SSHRC application, giving me the freedom to spend uninterrupted time in the studio. Many thanks to Dawn Burns for her organizational skills and for keeping things on track. I will be forever grateful for my cohort; it has been a privilege to make art and grow alongside each of them.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Images.....	v

Introduction.....	p 1
Provocation.....	p 9
Environment-Driven	p 11
Process-Driven.....	p 19
Wayfairing.....	p 31

End Notes.....	p 35
----------------	------

Works Cited.....	p 37
------------------	------

LIST OF IMAGES

Image 1. Bronze nut, made in collaboration with Squirrels, 2022

Image 2. Alligator Raku glaze detail, 2022

Image 3. Mixing clay, 2022

Image 4. Cradle, ceramics, glaze (alligator Raku), copper base, 4 x 4 x 6", 2022

Image 5. Max Streicher, We Will Name This Place, paper maché, wood, 1988

Image 6. Fireside Lounge plaque

Image 7. Trunk in process, 2023

Image 8. Break-away Ikea table, 2022

Image 9. Glass cast nuts, 2022

Image 10. Glaze detail, 2022

Image 11. Exhale, glass and copper wire, 14 x 13 x 6" 2022

Image 12. Detail of Mary Morton's quilt

Image 13, 14. Process shots of dandelion wine

Image 15. Glaze detail, Alligator Raku with Cobalt only, 2022

Image 16. Process shot of clay slip in plaster mold, 2023

Image 17. Untitled, ceramic, cement, 2023

Image 18, Alligator raku glaze detail, 2022

Image 19, 20, WIP, plaster, cement, wax residue, 2023

Image 21. 6 km to new suburbs, rural Whitchurch-Stouffville, land in transition, 2022

Image 22, 23, 24. Untitled process shots, bronze, 2023

INTRODUCTION

I initially started thinking with the term grit when I was introduced to the concept by American research psychologist Angela Duckworth in her book of the same title. At the time, I was struggling for answers on how to meet the needs of my neuro-diverse twins and reading as many parenting books as I could digest. Not only did her writing support me as a mother, but it resonated with my journey, attending art school when my kids started grade school and pursuing a career as an artist, a precarious endeavour that comes with no guarantees. Duckworth articulates thoughts on grit,

...there are no shortcuts to excellence. Developing real expertise, figuring out really hard problems, it all takes time—longer than most people imagine.... you've got to apply those skills and produce goods or services that are valuable to people.... Grit is about working on something you care about so much that you're willing to stay loyal to it... it's doing what you love, but not just falling in love—staying in love (54).

Fourth-born out of six children, my family size and birth order gifted me with a gritty youth; religious, authoritative, and unwaveringly patriarchal, we were brought up scrappy. The prospect of attending University right out of high school was not within reach; however, I counteracted the disappointment with an ability to work hard, and (many) years later, I am the first in my family to attend graduate school. At 17, I jumped at the chance to leave high school early to pursue travel and, for four years, travelled back and forth to Europe and parts of Africa on not much more than grit and tenacity. The art world has oft lauded the toxic myth of the male genius artist, as explored in Linda Nochlin's essay, *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists*, and while attempting to answer this line of inquiry proves complicated, it is evident throughout history, the grit and persistence required to achieve 'greatness.'

Grit is the family lore passed down through generations that reverberates, taking on mythic proportions and shaping identity such as the story of my great-great-great-grandfather, a young jail keeper in Norway who was converted into the Mormon faith by two missionary inmates. Later, he and his young wife journeyed by boat to the United States to walk across the Western plains pushing handcarts, unsettling Indigenous peoples with not much more than grit and blind faith. Knowing I come from gritty ancestors inspires me in turbulent times however, I acknowledge that their presence as settlers meant Indigenous

people were persecuted and severed from their land. While my ancestors benefited from the systems of colonization, I acknowledge its ongoing legacy and work actively to address the inequalities in the past and present. As I parent my children, make choices for their future, and teach them about where they come from, a reconciliation with the past takes place to strengthen future relations. Victoria Freeman, of European settler descent, writes in an introduction to her book, *Distant Relations: How My Ancestors Colonized North America*, about a journey to connect to a past and discover how she came to be Canadian. When considering traits we choose to carry forward, she cites anthropologist Edward Spicer in saying, "In their sense of identity every people moulds a vessel into which they pour from generation to generation the meanings of their historical experience" (Spicer, xvii). [i] In part, my work shares the same impulses that Freeman articulates; to establish positionality and a personal historical connection to colonialism in Canada when thinking through what it means to be from a place.

Not only do we work to reconcile with the First Peoples of this country, but a rectification must occur between humans and, as Donna Haraway describes the 'more-than-human.' A shift from treating the earth as a limitless resource and moving towards stewardship and kinship is necessary. Having recently relocated to the rural outskirts of Toronto, the need to protect green spaces and the agricultural infrastructure that feeds cities is immediate. While learning from Indigenous epistemologies is imperative to building a sustainable future (particularly in our environmental protection sectors), it is necessary to note the burden for workable solutions may be distributed between Settlers and First Peoples as we all share roots in primary cultures when we were dependent on land, a time when the long-term health of the land we lived on was extrinsically tied to survival.

During a studio visit with writer and artist Lauren Fournier, a braided essay was proposed as an opportunity to bring multiple narratives forward and be more experimental. Brenda Miller, an American writer, and professor, speaks about the potentiality of rubbing up form and content and writes,

The segmented essay sometimes provides a way into material that you otherwise might not be able to approach in a straightforward manner. I sometimes call it 'peripheral vision'. You sidle up sideways to your material, and then it isn't as scary (138).

When thinking through the term autofiction, Lauren Fournier writes of an aim to provide a working

definition of an auto-theoretical impulse which employs an assortment of terms, such as 'autofiction' or 'nonfiction novel'; all forms share the ways for writing to be "autobiographical and self-reflective" (263). This type of writing has been helpful when considering how to write about artwork created from a personal place. My studio-based research works on multiple things at once, the nature of ceramics requires this, and I work best when I bring along a series of works. Simultaneously, this juggling also has to do with how I integrate life and making art, constantly multitasking, mixing the slurry, hands in the dough, and folding the laundry. As Mierle Laderman Ukeles stated in her manifesto, "my work is the work."^[ii] On reflection, it made sense to apply my studio methodology to writing a support paper. As all these balls get tumbled, burnishing takes place; writing becomes the grit, a valuable tool to polish and bring forth relations within the organized form of a braid.

My main strand will be informed by a set of identified themes developed within a design vocabulary that offers a framework from which to investigate the work created and their material relations, a central theme to my thesis. Under the title of Provocation, the following subcategories are utilized to explore how the work is, Environment-Driven and Process-Driven. In conclusion, Wayfaring will speak to the overall journey and strategies used in the creative process that creates meaning to experience. Woven throughout will be a technical investigation into three elements from an often-used glaze recipe. Materially, grit is the substance I work with in the studio in all its fantastic forms. Clay, glass, and various bags of dust extracted from the earth, utilized in specific ways, combined with heat and entropy, provide opportunities for alchemical transformations as I explore the seemingly limitless potentiality of an elemental world. Grit is the granite dust released from granite boulders hidden since the last ice age saved after rock carving that gets mixed into clay and glazes. Grit is the silica found in the breakaway glass from a broken Ikea table. We are surrounded by many 'things' in the world; how can sculpture endeavour to provide a divergent relation with objects and the material they are made from?^[iii] Alchemy, with its ancient roots in many cultures, was not just about transmuting material into gold but exploring elemental entanglement. My work explores potentialities and expresses an affinity between art and alchemy, grit in an embodied form.



Image 2. Alligator Raku glaze detail, 2022



Image 3. Mixing clay, 2022





Image 4. Cradle, ceramics, glaze (alligator Raku), copper base, 4 x 4 x 6", 2022

Alligator Raku

Gerstley Borate 80%
 Bone ash 20%
 Copper Carbonate 5%

Gerstley Borate

- alt names; colemanite, calcium borate, boracalate

- Gerstley Borate was formed in marshes and drying lake basins during the Miocene (10 m. yrs ago). Gerstley borate is a calcium borate ore containing the mineral Ulexite along with accessory minerals such as Bentonite, Colemanite, and Proberfite. It is commonly used as an ingredient in low-range temp glazes and is a source of boron in glazes and acts as a melting agent. It is also used as an opacifier and prevents crazing.
- Gerstley Borate is named after James Gerstley, a former managing director of Borax Consolidated now called US Borax and Chemical Corp. located in the Mojave Desert.
- Gerstley Borate was mined up until 2000 by the company in a smaller neighbouring mine in Death Valley. This unique borate only comes from this mine so many in the ceramic community were dismayed when the operations ceased in 2000 due to unsafe working conditions.
- Laguna Clay Co. secured the remaining Gerstley Borate making them the only source world-wide.



Image 5. Max Streicher, *We Will Name This Place*, paper maché, wood, 1988

PROVOCATION

Provocation can be understood by considering the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that drive creative choices. Motivating attributes act as a catalyst throughout the creative process and the resulting installation. For this supporting paper, the driving factors behind the work created during the MFA program will be divided into subcategories, Environment-Driven and Process-Driven, underpinned with related theoretical proclivities. An essential influencing component to the installation has been the location, the Alumni Fireside Lounge located within the Center for Film and Theatre. Situated in an atrium across from the busiest Starbucks ever is an inviting light-filled space with vaulted ceilings, a preferred spot to recharge. Daylight streams through the windows, while comfortable chairs provide students a unique place to study, visit or rest between classes. Nearly ten feet of windows flank a red brick fireplace featuring three imposing streamlined dog-like gargoyles ready to pounce. The overall effect transports visitors to a grand yet congenial space, unique on York campus. The Lounge appealed to my methodologies of entwining work with the familial and offered an opportunity to be site-specific and interrogate the divergent distinctions between exhibiting art in galleries versus public space. Additionally, the terra cotta bricks speak to my work with ceramics; materially, I am attentive to creating conversations between the sculptural work and the room's physical properties.

Gaining access to show art in the room involved multiple emails and some polite convincing nevertheless, and the process was more accessible than foreseen, my main instructions being not to alter the turquoise wall and to leave the room as I found it after my five-day exhibition. The gargoyles, a work by former student Max Streicher titled, *We Will Name This Place* was created as a student in 1988 and originally shown in the Winters College Gallery on campus. The plaque is credited to the work of Larry Streicher, and I have it on authority that he changed his name a few years later, so perhaps a plaque intervention is required. Opposite the gargoyles, a plaque announces a work titled *Fish of the Seasons*, 1989, produced by students and directed by Italian artist Enzo Cucchi which I initially thought was for the gargoyles. By researching the work and the plaques found within the room, the layers begin to recast themselves in the exhibition. The work in question is a three-piece mural, stored in the Accolade East building and currently inaccessible for viewing. Lyla Rye, one of the students listed, has agreed to attend the exhibition for an informal ‘fireside chat.’ We will tape documentation of the work on the wall where it once hung and conduct a conversation about her experience working on the piece and thoughts on public art, a casual studio visit between two artists in which anyone is welcome to join. The room’s function will remain during the exhibition in mid-April, when fewer students are on campus, colloquial sitting areas will define the room, equally as important as the placement of artworks. Altogether, the room, with its display of art, artifacts and tree remnant, will evoke an artist's studio, a place where transformation and contemplation materialize.



Image 6. Fireside Lounge plaque

ENVIRONMENT-DRIVEN

“I’m not trying to make a monument to anything, I want to have a dialogue with the land”

Peter von Tiesenhausen (Grande, 177).

Living rurally on the outskirts of a large urban city surrounded by working farms, my current vantage point includes a soundtrack of goats at dusk (especially when coyotes are near) and the eternal movement of hay and manure. However, the creep of suburbia and large real-estate signs advertising acres of land signal oncoming change. In the spring of 2022, with the appearance of earth-moving machines, a large parcel of land 6 km from my property began a transition from farmland to housing, and throughout the seasons, I walk and ride my bike to visit the site, an act of being-with. As I undergo my own biological progression, the feelings of being-with deepen, and a perception of a post-human mantra that 'we are all in this together' is embodied. The concept of more-than-human comes at a time that actively challenges and decenters human exceptionalism, erasing the distinctions between human and nonhuman, nature and culture. Donna Haraway in *Staying with the Trouble*, outlines the importance of sympoiesis, the act of making-with while acknowledging that nothing is autopoietic or self-organizing (5). When thinking this through with the lens of a sculptor, I work towards understanding autopoiesis as interacting components continuously transformed and destroyed by a network of processes that form a whole and are self-sustaining.

The core of my research-creation examines the study of human interrelationship within the construct of 'nature' and undertakes the task of integrating creative and theoretical practices by reasoning and making. Timothy Morton, an eco-theorist argues that nature does not exist. How can one rectify thoughts about nature as being something other or 'over there' when we are bound up in one another? Through his deconstruction, he refuses to treat Nature and Culture as two distinct domains and shows that ecological thought is about how these domains are intertwined. How does



Image 7. Trunk in process, 2023

this change my thinking and how might it apply to artmaking? Central to the installation, positioned in front of the red brick fireplace a waist-high partial stump from a willow tree holds a primary position. Located on our property, the tree growing too close to the house was cut, and the stump burned many years ago, a practice common to prevent trees from holding energy in their roots after removal and sending new shoots when conditions stabilize. Although fragmented and burnt, the stump retains impressive grandeur, highlighted by bringing it indoors. The charred side facing out from the fireplace offers a perspective on human interaction with the natural world, a common theme throughout.

The walking practices of environmental writers such as Nan Shepard, Annie Dillard, Rachel Carson, Robert Macfarlane and Suzanne Simmard have been profoundly influential to my practice; the following passage by Nan Shepherd in *The Living Mountain* stays close in mind when I am making work from an instinctual place that speaks to the senses and begs to be felt,

The hands have an infinity of pleasure in them. The feel of things, textures, surfaces, rough things like cones and bark, smooth things like stalks and feathers and pebbles rounded by water, the teasing of gossamers... the scratchiness of lichen, the warmth of the sun, the sting of the hail, the blunt blow of tumbling water, the flow of wind- nothing that I can touch or that touches me but has its own identity for the hand as much for the eye (102, 103).

Shepard practiced a careful looking employed in my art making by "...living one sense at a time to live all the way through.." (105).^[iv] Perceptible links are made with Merleau Ponty's writings on phenomenology; in *Phenomenology and Perception*, he outlines how we learn and feel through our bodies in contrast to how other-than-human bodies encounter the world around us. Lining the back wall opposite the entrance one will notice a grouping of tables on a trestle. On approach, each table will be recognized as drawers from a curio cabinet topped with glass barriers, frustrating the viewer's touch while asking for an attentive look. The collected assemblage of found and made curiosities highlight elemental substances and material transformation. Bronze corn husks, glass walnuts and brass wheat stalks are displayed on a grass-flocked ground alongside pieces of raw copper and found rocks. The construct of what is nature is challenged by placing items immediately recognized as 'natural' with recycled items such as a glass dish made from an Ikea breakaway table. Their inclusion within the installation invites the viewer into the artists' studio, where wonders are gathered, provoking experimentation.

Growing up, my family moved across the country multiple times; however, we always lived rurally or in small towns. Access to green space was not mitigated by car, and we had the freedom to explore our surroundings on foot or by bike. Summers were spent visiting my grandparents on their cattle ranch in the foothills of Southern Alberta, situated on hundreds of mind-blowing acres. Returning to 'back to the land' was always a goal once I had children but have I romanticized rural

life, or is it simply a wish to provide my children with similar experiences? Is there a chance of doing so, given the changing landscape? In thinking these questions through, I turn to independent scholar Alexander Wilson. *The Culture of Nature; North American Landscape from Disney to the Exxon Valdez* was written 30 years ago in the early 1990s. In the chapter "City and Country" (187), Wilson cites a popular response to industrialization and collapsed communities to "retreat to an imagined place and time outside of economy and history" (199). Fortunately, the realities of country living, including chores all weekend, sub pumps in basements (not on a generator that requires manual emptying during power outages), poor internet, septic systems and well water is not new to me, and the move has helped me appraise a notion of stewardship and building a partnership with my surroundings. Wilson calls for a culture that builds on its relations with food production, a chance to strengthen the interconnectedness between city and country that is not based on nostalgia.



Image 8. Break-away Ikea table, 2022

Recently in the news, a large swath of protected green space and farmland, the Greenbelt, has come under attack by the Ford government, which proposes to swap out green spaces to meet the demand for affordable housing. I reside in the Oak Ridges Moraine Boundary, directly North of Markham, where we drive past evidence of sprawl daily. The area has many municipally protected forested regions and the Rouge National Urban Park. However, checkerboard development threatens many rivers, plants and animals. Much as feminists fought for rights, it is now time for humans to fight for the rights of the other-than-human. In this, my philosophies align with ecofeminism as defined by Yenestra King. In *The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology* she explains,

Life on earth is an interconnected web, not a hierarchy. There is no natural hierarchy; human hierarchy is projected onto nature and then used to justify social domination. Therefore, ecofeminism theory seeks to show the connections between all forms of domination of nonhuman nature, and ecofeminist practice is necessarily antihierarchical (263).

Within the studies of Environmental studies, the term New-Ruralism has been developed and identified by Sibella Kraus, that advocates for ‘conserving agro-ecosystems’.[v] New Ruralism, is a construct to provide a workable bridge between sustainable agriculture and New Urbanism. Kraus concludes, “The urban-rural dichotomy doesn’t work anymore in metropolitan regions because sustaining cities and sustaining regional agriculture can no longer be separate efforts; they must be interdependent efforts.” My work aims to create a visual reference for rural spaces, to make visible the labour and care happening on the fringes that stitch the outskirts of urban environs and asks if nostalgia and romanticism towards primary cultures are viable routes towards building economic and ecological stability.[vi]

When thinking through the ways human activity has shaped environments and an ideological approach to living within nature, my studio has provided a metaphor for the ongoing struggles of living-with. On our nearly 2-acre property, I work out of a detached garage, this arrangement works well for firing my kiln and mixing glazes as the amount of open-air ventilates any harmful fumes or particles. As a person that prefers to be outside as much as possible, I am not usually deterred by weather, bugs, or other visitors; however, a red squirrel and I have been having differences. Our property, surrounded by

black walnut trees and a healthy population of squirrels have been quarreling over dominion of my studio. Once fall hits, nuts can be found all throughout my studio in the most unlikely places including many of my sculptures. I prepare for their attack all summer while making work, holes in walls found out and patched only to find new entries burrowed through cement and wood. By thinking through what it means to “become with” and how is this a practice of ‘becoming worldly’ I leave traps and poisoned bait aside to wonder at the affinities I share with the squirrel who desperately wants to live in my studio (Haraway, 4). [vii] This thinking has led to the creation of direct casts from the husks out of bronze and glass that are beautiful in their deconstruction. Throughout the installation, one may discover hidden walnuts cast in glass and bronze, squirreled away within sculptural work.

When considering the importance of place to research and the resulting installation, Indigenous scholar Eve Tuck and Marcia McKensie provide a definition as,

...in examining critical place inquiry, we are referring to research that takes up critical questions and develops corresponding methodological approaches that are informed by the embeddedness of social life in and with places, and that seeks to be a form of action in responding to critical place issues such as those of globalization and neoliberalism, settler colonialism, and environmental degradation" (95).

Throughout *Place and Methodology*, examples of why this research is critical in the social sciences are discussed, drawing attention to the complex ways in which environmental issues intersect with social life. Critical place research troubles itself to examine how place is entwined with embedded lived histories as it is informed by issues of race, gender, capitalism, and settler colonization. A slower part of my practice has always looked to examine place, its history, and the ways in which we occupy land. Materially, the resulting sculptural work investigates extracted elements, geological histories, and their use in world-building. Plaster, cement, ceramics, copper, glass, and stone are all materials employed when building the structures that make up our infrastructures and are employed throughout, providing a convergent link to an elemental world.

Image 9. Glass cast nuts, 2022





Image 10. Glaze detail, 2022

Bone ash

Alternative names: Calcium Phosphate

Bone ash is created by calcining bone up to 1100 c then allowing to cool and mill. Traditionally, bone ash was added to porcelain (bone china) to produce a high degree of translucency. Today there are many more effective processes for porcelain so not used. Bone ash is not as common in glazes as it tends to flocculate however, I'm all for the cracking and blistering but do modify by adding a deflocculant (like Darvan). When used in Raku, the fast rise in temperature that is not easy to control adds to potential 'happy accidents' which with practice can become more predictable.

Commercially produced bone ash (cattle bones being the most common) can be found as a food additive, in shampoos and detergents, pharmaceutical uses and fertilizer. Bone ash is also used to separate precious metals from base material in a process called cupellation. Synthetic bone ash has a higher melting point so real bone ash is preferred in glazes.

* More research can be done on alchemy and its history. Calcination as one of the twelve gates of George Ripley:
 1) Calcination 2) Solution 3) Separation 4) Conjunction 5) Putrefaction
 6) Congelation 7) Cibation 8) Sublimation 9) Fermentation
 10) Exaltation 11) Multiplication 12) Projection

PROCESS-DRIVEN

An ongoing relationship with mud and grit is where I feel most grounded. It is the substance I have spent the most time with, and while I know it well, there is always more to learn. It is the quiet time in studio, working-with when my materials give back, helping me find reprieve from a racing mind. My work is concerned with pulling things apart and putting them back together, everything is in a threatened state of collapse. As Louise Bourgeois said close to her 90th birthday, “I do, I undo, I redo”. [viii] Fragments enter a process of transformation that I sometimes think of as my imagination forest; buried within, decay, time, entropy, hope, regrowth, and crystallizing into something new. Specific grit and dust from various parts of North America are extracted, processed, and intermingled before application to bisque clay then introduced to fire to produce glass and otherworldly results. The kiln’s heat represents deep time and geological events, teaching me to decenter the human and learn through the processes of material indeterminacy as I explore form and anti-form. These processes are applied when approaching the tradition of sculpting, the materials, and methods visible in their making as they are theoretically and physically pulled apart.

Throughout my MFA, I have used a large ceramic form shaped by an embrace as a substrate for new work. In part, this work was made as an expression of my experience with nurturing, a way to translate my experience of always holding into clay and speak to the qualities my material affords me through touch. The main body of this work was presented and shown during a solo exhibition, *Affordance*, at Station Gallery in Whitby. The fragments are not a wish or desire to leave this experience, it is more about thinking through how this care changes over time. Notions on nurturing have deepened and expanded, and I hope to share that mothering is universal and not an exclusive action. Care, reciprocity, and understanding of how we are all connected are integral to rebuilding a sustainable future, and I hope to point to this in my work.

Within the installation, placed on plinths made from wood, plaster and cement, one finds a continuation of my main body of work from the past ten years, exploring material-led processes, personal histories, and the corporal act of making. My experience as a principal sculptor on a bronze monument for the War of 1812 informs much of my technical knowledge however, I aim to recontextualize thoughts on the monument, specifically through a feminist and materialistic lens that highlights an exchange between maker and material, nonhuman, and human. While my understanding of monuments may be tethered to tradition, I monumentalize moments on a personal scale. Work in bronze, cement, stone, ceramics, and glass are presented in this grouping with an aim for the viewer to feel the connection between each element and the processes by which they were made.

A mould made of my hand holding my son's arm over ten years ago at the onset of my art studies has been central to this exploration and utilized in various processes. By returning to this mould, I identify the work as an origin story, an inspiration to the *Affordance* series and a methodological framework from which to communicate a personal narrative within a sculptural vocabulary. A bronze cast from the mould is placed on a prominent plinth, supported by a sliver of carved alabaster in the negative space, referencing the casting process and the sculptor's labour. Alabaster, a fine-grained gypsum, is processed for plaster and has been used throughout history for carving sculptural works. Bronze casts of respired Birds of Paradise leaves accompany the central sculpture on various plinths surrounding, salvaged from a tropical house plant I failed to keep alive. After letting go and slowly allowing to dry, the leaves fold into themselves, recalling the contours of arms holding; a moment fixed to memorialize through the lengthy casting process. When considering the act of keeping close and letting go, wax and clay casts made from the original arm mould were then encased in cement, capturing a moment, alluding to the complicated enmeshment that comes with caring and nurturing others, self and the places we occupy. The weight and materiality of a body, both interior and exterior, are encountered when contemplating the void and the residue left behind.^[ix] Parts of production plaster moulds are included in the installation, an invitation into the process of making, drawing attention to the unseen labour of sculpting.

Finding myself less interested in a final product, the work communicates a preoccupation with the methodologies of making spills, ruptures, and all. In this, I see myself as part of an autopoietic system as discussed earlier, where the work regenerates itself in its making.

When approaching the Lounge, the large double rust-red doors are open, and a ceramic rendition of a cement lion will be stationed at the entrance on a mobile plinth. During the summer, I took impressions of a cement lion in sectioned strips of clay, the fragments re-arranged and subsequently glazed. The resulting abstract work features a copper glaze that recalls the aged patina on bronze sculptures and speaks towards entropy and time. Silicone carbide, combined with copper carbonate, creates a lava-like effect, calling to mind geological processes. Wall mounted within the room in similar glaze, fragments taken separately from my body were worked together as a whole and then glazed as a singular piece. During the summer, I pushed this idea by experimenting with firing actual lava rocks and glaze, creating collapsed forms that speak to deep time and elemental transformation, some of those tests to be found in the curio drawers.

Another work in the installation that has been informed by process is the entwined glass wine jugs and copper wire placed in the southern windowsill. The genesis to this work lies in the substantial dandelion patch my nearly 2-acre property grows every spring and a practice of preserving and putting food away learned from my grandmother and mother. Most of my familiar experience is in preserving and canning as fermenting foods would not be in a Mormon housemaker's vernacular; however, in the spirit of working with what is on hand, I harvested and processed enough to make many litres of dandelion wine, which I plan on sharing in celebration with my cohort and of-age family. Once supplies had been gathered, they intermingled with my studio work, and I began to wonder at the relationship between copper and glass as they share similar melting points. The resulting work explores notions of entropy, volume, and a visual depiction of a state of collapse.

Image 11. Exhale, glass and copper wire, 14 x 13 x 6" 2022



Zoë Sofia explores the origins of the technological object that are containers in her article *Container Technologies*, 2000. Drawing attention to Heidegger's essay, "The Thing" published in 1962 he describes the function of a jug, "The emptiness, the void, is what does the vessel's holding. The empty space, the nothing of the jug, is what the jug is as holding vessel" (1971c, 169). In this we see the maker of the jug shaping the void just as much as the materials of the container, a preoccupation common throughout the installation. As a sculptor, I am very interested in 'sculpting the void', the empty spaces and their traces. The container, the jug, often compared to the mother, are all tasked with taking and keeping, but what of a container that is on a tentative edge of holding it together? What are the implications of a container that no longer contains? As not all containers are made to do the same job, the temporal nature of containment is explored throughout.

The installation functions as an inviting place to spend time with various objects and artworks to explore. My home and studio have always been protected places to rest and process, where I work on many things at once having mastered the art of multitasking; my art practice and childcaring are intrinsically entwined. I can be found picking ceramic shell off nuts while watching a movie with the family or setting up a plaster mould on the kitchen table to pour slip into while making dinner. When considering the title *Grit*, I thought of the women in my family who have demonstrated hard work and tenacity. A 1940s quilt created by my grandmother in rural Alberta came to mind when hearing Sarah Millroy speak about the show, *The Uninvited*, and I knew I wanted it to be part of my thesis. My grandmother, Mary Morton, was the fourth daughter of six girls in a large Norwegian family that came to Southern Alberta to homestead a large parcel of land in the early 1900s by way of Utah. Her mother passed away when she was young, and Mary was taught domestic duties by her sisters and members of her church group. The amount of work that goes into a single quilt can be enormous; making time for one's art alongside domestic duties is a way to connect across the generations. Quilting was an expression of how she viewed her world, which she had ultimate control over when farmers' lives depended on natural forces. "In this context, the home was studio, art school, and gallery" (Cooper, 17). This amalgamation of place and function is a concept explored throughout the installation.

Instead of displaying the quilt for the exhibition's duration, I will mend the stitching while gallery-sitting from the comfort of the chairs within the lounge. Over 80 years old many seams are coming apart and need careful attention, which will likely take the exhibition's duration. Attending to an MFA has meant all my time has been occupied, so I welcome this action as a chance to mark the completion of a Masters. The performance will not only make me sit down and not do a million things, but it will welcome conversation from visitors as I am sure people will feel welcome to sit and speak of their own relationship with what I'm doing or the art they discover within.

“For all of us, becoming indigenous to a place means living as if your children’s future mattered, to take care of the land as if our lives, both material and spiritual, depended on it.”

Robin Wall Kimmerer

Image 12. Detail of Mary Morton's quilt







Image 13, 14. Process shots of dandelion wine.

Image 15. Glaze detail, Alligator Raku with Cobalt only, 2022



Image 16. Process shot of clay slip in plaster mold, 2023





Image 17. *Untitled*, ceramic, cement, 2023

Copper Carbonate

alternative names: synthetic Malachite, CuCO_3

Copper Carbonate is a chemical compound that is properly called copper (II) carbonate hydroxide. It is derived from naturally occurring malachite from which it gets its green colour. Often the mineral azurite is used which affects its composition for a bluer cast. Both malachite and azurite are used in the verdigris patina that may be found in weathered brass, copper and bronze. A true copper carbonate or cupric carbonate does not naturally occur and undergoes a process of decomposition by water in combination with high temperatures and high pressure, a process that became properly synthesized in 1973.

In ceramics, it works as a colourant and a powerful flux that melts at lower temps but will flux and become volatile at higher temps. Raku post-firing reduction gives a metallic copper penny surface which will continue to oxidize over time.

* Extreme caution needed when in powder form as can affect lungs and internal organs. *

Most of the world's copper found in four areas, Western United States, Central Canada, the Andes, Chile and Zambia.

WAYFAIRING

Zoe Sofia's *Container Technologies* asks us to consider the various functions and conditions of the assorted containers we encounter in our lives. My traditional role as a mother beyond a container for my children comes to mind, as I toil unseen with domestic containers of all sorts (washing machines, dishwashers, stoves), ensuring a 'smooth functioning' environment in the home I regulate. This becomes muddled up with my artmaking, and on appraising my studio as a container, my potential space of transformation becomes porous as squirrels and demands of family chew literal and metaphorical holes through wood and plaster, distracting me from my work, a bothersome but intrinsic part of my process. While working on the bronzes, I had many quantifiable hours to deliberate on the similarities of the unseen labour required in running a house and making art, as both do not happen concurrently. As I find myself enfolded by the domestic, I have always searched for approaches that allow motherhood to be a generative part of making art rather than subtractive.[x]

My hole-ridden studio is filled with a vast number of containers of various sizes, with at least 35 air-tight, squirrel-proof plastic receptacles dedicated to holding glaze ingredients. All the materials I use come with their own culture, and I aim to be responsive to their capabilities. I am forever amazed at the alchemical processes that occur when making glazes. In a simple three-ingredient glaze, parts of the earth come together in almost unbelievable ways toward something new. For example, Nepheline Syenite (an often-used ingredient) comes from Nephton, Blue Mountain, Ontario, an igneous Precambrian feldspathic rock containing soda feldspar, potash feldspar, nepheline, and small amounts of muscovite and iron minerals. Combined with bone ash harvested from cattle and copper carbonate (which has its own complicated processes), all come together in specific ways to form an effect. This intermingling of material through ability creates a 'skin' on the clay and is fused into glass by the power of extreme heat. [xi]

When investigating contemporary propositions in material relations, Jane Bennet's New Materialism puts forth a concept that asks us to recognize that 'all matter is pulsing with life' and involved in complex interrelationships and entanglements (vii). While Realism and New Materialism philosophy may be unique to the social sciences, "... it should be understood that Indigenous thinkers and scholars developed ideas about nonhuman agency thousands of years earlier than contemporary philosophers of science" (2). Throughout my readings and theoretical wanderings, I differentiate my involvement with material by emphasizing the term working-with and continuing to build on an understanding of the term *affordance*, coined by American psychologist James J. Gibson in 1966. [xii] In general, affordance describes what the environment or object offers an individual however, this offering is very much dependent on the individual's skill set or capabilities, which describes a relationship built on reciprocity, an ongoing cyclical exchange of giving and taking through perception and the body with a material world. Makoto Fujimura describes this relationship well in his book *Culture Care*,

At our best we work with our raw materials, honouring their properties and respecting their limits, not working against the grain or twisting them out of context. In short, we need to love both nature and culture to exercise proper stewardship (53).

My involvement as a sculptor when making art is not to exert ideas or will onto materials but to create art that demonstrates entanglement. I aim to share my observations and deep love of the natural world to nurture the concept of reciprocity as a solution towards building ecological stability for future generations as quite simply; the more people care about the environment, the more often they will act to protect it.

Image 18, Aligator raku glaze detail, 2022

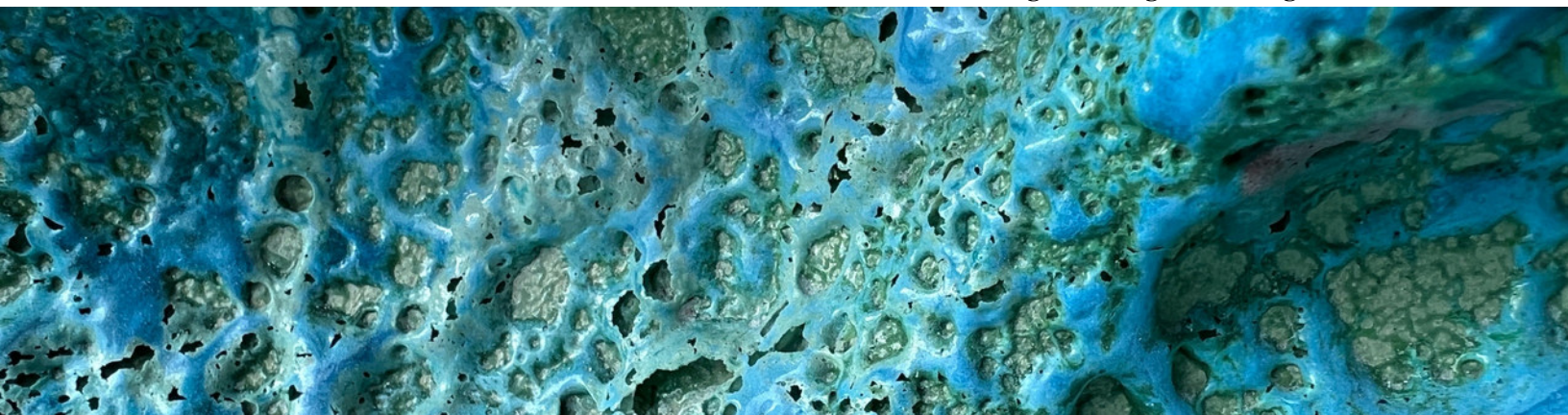




Image 19, 20, WIP, plaster, cement, wax residue, 2023

Intending to create new associations with monuments, my initial research throughout the Masters's program has centred around building reciprocal relations with sculptural materials routinely affiliated with traditional monuments, such as bronze, clay, and stone. While this remains the case, through my theoretical wanderings, I have identified many divergent paths and when the last two years have felt fast and still in process Natalie Loveless in *How to Make Art at the End of the World*, talked about the aims of research within an Academic setting stating,

I turn to research-creation to encourage modes of temporal and material attunement within the academy that requires slowing down in a way that does not fetishize the slow but which slowness comes from the work of defamiliarization and the time it takes to ask questions differently (107).

In many ways, as I prepare to depart the academy, I have just begun to ask questions differently when thinking through the meaning of the word monument, challenging conventional associations by memorializing the often unseen and commonplace moments that make lives extraordinary. From a grounded position as a mother, artist and human that consciously chooses to live on and with the earth, I approach my materials with respect and curiosity; through my labour and care, the work created weaves a dialogue between material, place and time.

END NOTES

- [i] Found in Victoria Freeman's introduction, within her notes she came across the comment second- and and provides reference to *A Short History of the Indians in the United States* (N.Y.: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1969.)
- [ii] A full copy of Mierle Laderman Ukeles MANIFESTO can be found online through the Queens Museum (Museum in Queens, New York). Written in 1969, she wrote the manifesto as a proposal for an exhibition that never went forward but was a pivotal moment in helping her connect to core ideas and provide opportunities later.
- [iii] *The Object Reader*, edited by Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins, 2009 is an excellent multi-disciplinary collection of essays dedicated to the study of objects.
- [iv] The full quotation noted here as it is quite beautiful! "Here then may be lived a life of the senses so pure, so untouched by any mode of apprehension but their own, that the body may be said to think. Each sense heightened to its most exquisite awareness, is in itself total experience. This is the innocence we have lost, living in one sense at a time to live all the way through." Nan Shepherd pp 105, *The Living Mountain*.
- [v] Kraus S, A Call for New Ruralism. www.farmlandinfo.org/documents/37270/new-ruralism.pdf (2006).
- [vi] Chapter 13 in Anna Tsing's *The Mushroom at the End of the World* outlines a project by a Japanese Professor, and environmental activist in taking students out on the land to return areas to peasant forests and demonstrate sustainable relations between humans and nature. (182-184)
- [vii] Donna Haraway goes deep into this line of questioning in *When Species Meet*, University of Minnesota, 2008.
- [viii] From Louise Bourgeois's *The Unilever Series* commissioned for Tate Modern's Turbine Hall, 2000. The Installation consisted of three steel towers titled I Do, I Undo and I Redo. <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/unilever-series-louise-bourgeois-i-do-i-undo-i-redo>
- [ix] More thinking on Foucault's ability to link materiality to the body in *The History of Sexuality* posed interesting questions when thinking about the use of my own body in the fragmented clay pieces I have been making such as, "what is it about the materiality of bodies that makes it susceptible to the enactment of biological and historical forces simultaneously?" (127).
- [x] There are two texts by Lisa Baraitser that I have encountered in the past two years that I would like to bookmark for future areas of study, ironically I ran out of time to give them their proper attention, *Maternal Encounters; The Ethics of Interruption* and *Enduring Time*.
- [xi] *Reciprocal Landscapes: Stories of Material Movements* by Jane Hutton is an excellent example of the important work around tracing what matter is doing, where it came from and how it came to be where it is in an exact moment. Yet another bookmark placed here for possible fields of study.
- [xii] James J. Gibson was an important psychologist working on visual perception and coined the noun *affordance*; however, I take this opportunity to acknowledge his wife, Eleanor Jack Gibson, also a prominent psychologist whom he worked closely with on many of his theories. *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* published in 1979 elucidates further on the idea of natural vision.



Image 21. 6 km to new suburbs, rural Whitchurch-Stouffville, land in transition, 2022

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