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Gratuitous Motion

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Master of Fine Arts

in

Visual Arts

By

Naomi Nadreau

Committee in Charge:

Professor Danielle Dean, Chair
Professor Akosua Boatema Boateng
Professor Anya Gallaccio
Professor Alexandro Segade

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University of California San Diego

2024

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DEDICATION

To the ones who don't quite feel they belong
Let us walk together

EPIGRAPH

“To live is to fail, to bungle, to disappoint, and ultimately to die; rather than searching for a way around death and disappointment, the queer art of failure involves the acceptance of the finite, the embraces of the absurd, the sill, and the hopelessly goofy. Rather than resisting endings and limits, let us instead revel in and leave to all our own time it le fantastic failures.” Judith Halberstam, *Queer Art of Failure*

“When we dive into a deep contemplation, our minds depart from the present, creating a distance between our consciousness and reality.” Masaomi Yasunaga

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Gratuitous Motion

by

Naomi Nadreau

Master of Fine Arts in Visual Arts

University of California San Diego, 2024

Professor Danielle Dean, Chair

This serves as a record for the last three years of my practice, tracing the ideas that inform my work, research on acupuncture meridians, discard man-made materials, the process of natural materials, and entangling reality through methods of Science Fiction to estrange and emphasis existing in the in-between. This paper is a series of collections entangled with personal narratives drawing on science

fiction, discard, process, acupuncture, Black studies, Asian American studies to bring together the multiple realities one lives.

INTRODUCTION: What If

My work consists of a variety of collections included in my sculptures. I collect by dumpster diving, long walks, driving around, gifts, and thrift shopping. Rocks, plants, leaves, nuts, bottle caps, earrings, sticks, insects, discarded forms for human bodies such as massagers, baby furniture, parts, and any object that calls to me. They are used to construct sculptures, meshed with other materials through a drawing lens. Some go through salt crystallization, some are pierced through needles, and others are suspended or burned out through other material processes. There is power in the discarded object or displaced artifact; it feeds the imagination. A stone struck with the white outline of a crescent moon I found at Qixingtang Beach in Hualien, Taiwan — 七星潭, disappeared into the other rocks of varying greys, browns, and blues. Or the gold cross embedded with black, red, and white gems found on the alcohol-soaked floor of a club on Sunset Ave. These objects have their own stories, yet they build up new meanings and narratives. They portray the vulnerability of the body and vitality of the human and the object.

A plastic object is originally once a natural material like natural gas or oil, refined into ethane and propane, treated, heated, and combined to make polymers to be joined and formed into multiple human uses. (Anterior View, back point) Devices used for holding human bodies — infant, child, teen, adult when I started to notice the accumulation of used and intact baby furniture on the streets, expensive and available for future us. I thought what a peculiar form. To create furniture for a baby, bulbous, weird, that mimics the body, that acts as a parent, to carry, to hold, to rock, and to sing. Baby furniture used, spat on, bumped into, grew out of, placed in the street for others to use, or toss. Self-healing devices such as body massagers, neck support, back stimulation sweated on, lightly used, collecting dust, and any shape and form that could appeal to humans are odd and bulbous. When it comes to mobility products, they are not appealing. They are sold as cold and industrial - a possible view on disability and only seeing it as functional, not necessary to be attractive, unlike baby furniture. Pillows, rods, rubber, foam, and

curvilinear lines negate and accept the form into itself. The form animates itself as Other. To accept means something that has the possibility to hold another, versus to negate has the possibility to reject something from entering.

I investigate the Other within the found objects made for humans, but what if those objects are themselves? They accept another and negate; there is a push-and-pull of how to use these devices if they should be used. I want to amplify their slippage of function and their existence and fiction.

IS IT A THOUGHT ON ALIVENESS

My thoughts writing about a piece:

The vibration of the elsewhere
The animate and inanimate write
Trembling in space
Fulfilling its place
In the lack of empty.
Consuming s/place¹
Fulfilling itself
A world of invented forms
Exhale eternity

Dug up from the earth and grabbed from the trash, is a collection of broken, disparate pieces put together. Excavating and collecting are the languages in which my work begins to take form. Artifacts found, given, pierced, and carved are clues to how they speak.

Sounds of the Exterior is a piece made for the San Fernando Valley, discarded Los Angeles, the backdrop for the film industry. A creature's eye, a mirror that watches and is being watched, I highlight the objects' alien-like qualities extending out the wall. It comments on the weirdness of human objects, estranging an everyday object and retrofitting it for a new purpose to be intentionally animated. *Sounds of the Exterior* are objects found on the streets of Northridge and North Hollywood. Under the bright, pressing sun, dry air, walking to the car, on the side lawn off the curb lays baby furniture, beginning to sun bleach on Magnolia Boulevard. I carried you home. Bright fluorescent lights, scent of musty, dry racks of clothes. Overwhelmed, I headed to the kitchen section, traveled along the toys, and stopped at home decor. An opaque jar, not an urn, weighs more than an empty one. Filled with sand at the Valley Donation Center.

¹ Sharp, "In the Wake: On Blackness and Being" she utilizes s/place to indicate existing *in* both space and place. I am referencing her

The Valley is a site of no-place, with its projected plurality of imaginaries. My experience navigating the San Fernando Valley was experiencing the mundane, yet it features in multiple movie landscapes. One landmark I instantly recognize is the Oviatt Library, located on the California State University Northridge campus. Used as a building set in another dimension, on a distant planet, a futuristic building in science fiction media, such as *Sky High*, a high school for superheroes, *Star Trek*, the Starfleet Academy. The potential of architecture surrounds and objects that have a chance for transformation and exist elsewhere is represented through this library.

Objects are independent of us. It is its own being. As humans we place humanness in everything. To unsegregate categorization what has a soul, animals, and things are alive. “The concept of animacy can be regarded as some kind of assumed cognitive scale extending from human through animal to inanimate. In addition to the life concept itself, concepts related to the life concept –can also be incorporated into the cognitive domain of “animacy.” A common reflection of “animacy” in a language is a distinction between animate and inanimate and analogically between human and non-human in some measure.”² Animacy is related to body and humanness, but that is through a hierarchical ordering of types of entities. I am exploring the idea of un-fixing what is considered alive, is an object just an object, and can it exist as something else while still being itself.

² Chen, “Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect,” 8



Figure 1: Sounds of the Exterior



Figure 2: Sounds of the Exterior side

When we attempt to express a novel experience or thought— when we aspire to render the unspoken speakable and the unheard audible— we do so as functions of artificial memory, as functions of lifeless objects. That is, our experiences and thoughts assimilate with lifeless objects to form inextricable unities. ... It is not the case that we first experience or think about something and, subsequently, scour the vicinity for an object with which to record it. Rather it is already ... that we begin to experience and think. Material, lifeless objects (stones, bones, letters, numbers, musical notes) shape all of human experience and thought.³

The object itself is indifferent, it is part of the world, there is no separate world.

³ Flusser & Bec, "Vampyrotheuthis Infernalis," 62

DISTORTING BOUNDARIES

Representation to reclaim the grotesque and/or ugly, as a powerful aesthetic of exaggeration, crudeness, and distortion.⁴ Distorting the boundaries, changing its original ‘role’ to enable new possibilities to be explored. I reference science fiction throughout this paper as a subject I have always been fascinated by for its connection to the present, possible futures, alternative thinking, narrative, and visual intrigue. I tend to reference science fiction in its futuristic, visual language and often neglect to mention its correlation to the present. Science fiction is embedded with concepts such as estrangement, irreality, and most used as a narrative device. My research in Science Fiction has been everything except the story, the idea of estrangement and how to apply it to an object rather than a narrative as a visual device.

All the things except the story: visual, atmosphere, sound, everything except...

The remnants remain for exploration to map out where we have been, where we could go, and where we are. How transformation, experimentation, failure, and ambiguity entangle with each other to depict and fluctuate within the in-between. The in-between meaning two things combined that never quite be fully one or another, both, but not quite.

Science fiction is open to multiple timelines and nuanced present and future commentary. Widely impressed by its dystopian narratives, action-packed, central views on the apocalypse that comes with every generation. I would like to know the possibility of what happens when you focus on one and internal growth, and healing within the genre. Fiction describes reality, a different way of seeing things, a different reality. Science, thinking about reality objectively, these two words contradict each other. It's not about escaping reality; it is another type of reality. Ambiguous and reflective. It distinguishes hard science fiction, characterized by concern for scientific accuracy and logic. Soft science fiction, with two

⁴ Halberstam, “Queer Art of Failure,” chapter 1, *Animating Revolt*

different definitions, is defined in contrast to hard science fiction. It can refer to science fiction that explores the "soft" sciences, such as psychology, political science, or anthropology, as opposed to "hard" sciences, physics, astronomy, and biology. Does internal work and healing play a role in science fiction? Can it fall within the spectrum of the in-between?

To define science fiction in these terms and categories is an inadequate framework.

Science fiction is more than action and conflict. It is more than a messianic white boy hero, an interstellar war, invaders investigating, home planet ready to attack. Ursula K. Le Guin's *Carrier Bag Theory* moves away from the action-packed stereotype of sci-fi where I will touch on later in the paper. What if we pause? What if we look inside ourselves? What if we see our planet? What if there was someone who looked like me? What if there were more to the tropes of this genre?

Black Dimension

A dour fate for black people in science fiction movies, you can save the day and be killed before your shine. A black scientist, teacher, or leader to ultimately meet death. I am grateful that I live in a time where a non-Euro descent person could step into the future and live.

My first introduction of a black woman character in a sci-fi show was the character, Zoe Washbourne, second to Captain Mal Reynolds, is a tough and deadly fighter in 'Firefly,' a space western drama television series and 'Serenity,' it's concluding movie. A beautiful badass black woman with full hair, lips, and glowing brown skin, a character blended with power, grace, beauty, and intelligence. I will gladly meet the end of her Mare's leg.⁵ In awe. This type of stoic, machine collider type of character has often been given to white actors and this is refreshing to not be reduced to comic relief and other stereotypes. She has depth and dimensions, is a soldier, and a loving wife, not afraid to speak her mind and is respected by her crewmates and captain. The impact of representation is inspirational.

Nyota Uhura, is a groundbreaking fictional character in the Star Trek franchise, the first black character to not play a menial role. She is a polygot, translator and communications officer. "Uhura" comes from the Swahili word uhuru, meaning "freedom." Actress Nichelle Nichols wanted to leave after the first season in 1967 but was convinced by Martin Luther King Jr, a trekkie himself, to stay.

King explained that her character signified a future of greater racial harmony and cooperation. King told Nichols, "You are our image of where we're going, you're 300 years from now, and that means that's where we are and it takes place now. Keep doing what you're doing, you are our inspiration." As Nichols recounted, "*Star Trek* was one of the only shows that [King] and his wife Coretta would allow their little children to watch. And I thanked him and I told him I was leaving the show. All the smile came off his face. And he said, 'Don't you understand for the first time we're seen as we should be seen. You don't have a black role. You have an equal role.'"⁶

Afrofuturism is an intersection of imagination, technology, the future, and liberation, centering on the black diaspora within the United States. Through literature, visual arts, music, to redefine blackness for today and the future. Influenced by a variety of science fiction writers, such as Samuel R. Delany,

⁵ Whedon, "Firefly." Mare's Leg is the name of her favorite weapon, a custom Winchester model 1892 rifle

⁶ Wikipedia Contributors, "Nyota Uhura"

Octavia Butler, and Nnedi Okorafor, have written theories, philosophical thoughts and created terms to define how they differentiate within this large cosmic blanket of scifi. I will be touching upon Nnedi Okorafor's differentiation between Afrofuturism and africanfuturism to expand on the specificity necessary within this genre.

Nnedi Okorafor coins the term africanfuturism, to regain control of how she and her work was being defined. "Africanfuturism is concerned with visions of the future, it is interested in technology, leaves the earth, skews optimistic, is centered on and predominantly written by people of African descent and it is rooted first and foremost in Africa."⁷ It's non-western; its center is Africa. Distinctly different from "Afrofuturism." These distinctions and specificity are important to understand that there is depth within science fiction, such as distinguishing Afrofuturism from africanfuturism. Embrace the multifaceted identities and perspectives of how stories are told through the symbols, cultural references, and languages that are used.

Through language communication is enabled. It may not be what you expect.

⁷ Okorofar, 'africanfuturism'

Language is Thought

Thoughts Misfired

Reading *Babel-17*, written by Samuel R. Delany, I was inspired to play with language, symbols...a system. *Babel-17* is a science fiction novel that addresses the philosophical technicalities of linguistics and semantics. The title references the Tower of Babel, built to reach divinity, but...different languages created miscommunication and misunderstanding. “All the misunderstandings that tie the world up and keep people apart were quivering before me at once, waiting for me to untangle them, explain them, and I couldn’t. I didn’t know the words, the grammar, the syntax,” said Rydra Wong, the protagonist poet in *Babel-17*, who reinforces the central theme of the power of language.⁸ Playing with the possibilities of language and the difficulty of communicating feelings. It inspired me to apply the system of invisible meridians as a guide since it is a language of its own, but through the lines and points of the body. Guided by my upbringing with acupuncture is a way to be in relation with my body, and my thoughts and feelings of being hollow, fluctuating in a state of positive and negative, in the body, out of body, and an impression is what remains. A meat bag of solids, hollows, and invisible energy running to keep moving. A receptacle that holds thoughts that make vessels hold substance and memories and hopes and dreams. Using acupuncture meridians and points acts as a language in my work.

⁸ Delany, “Babel-17”

A STUDY FOR PAIN

Never quite in my body, chronic pain, and growing up with acupuncture, I found relief from the day to day. Done wrong as a child, pain persisted throughout my body. Nothing wrong with me. But it's not 'normal.' Growing up with a parent who does acupuncture and herbal medicine, I learned the importance of your body, being balanced, and learning how to do acupuncture, and to rely on ourselves. I've always been good with needles and interested in the body, but also interested in dissecting its form. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) defines meridians as the energetic pathways that run through your body. TCM is vast in information and knowledge - I will only write about Earth and Fire, pathways, and points which I am studying and working with. The meridians act as highways for energy - called Qi. The body is home to 12 meridians, and along these paths the acupuncturist inserts thin needles along the energy highway. There are two energies - the Yin and the Yang. The energy of Yin moves outward while Yang energy moves in toward the core. Imbalanced energy leads to poor health. One of the benefits of acupuncture is that it helps rebalance Qi.

In TCM, earth element - is the foundation for not only the physical body in terms of its shape and structure, but also it is the sense of knowing who you are and where you are and being able to orient yourself on the earth. It is connected to the stomach and gallbladder organs. This is in direct relation to digestive health. People with digestive system problems or weight or eating disorders, often psychologically and spiritually struggle with feeling at home on the earth. Asking questions such as, "Are they oriented in their lives? Do they feel like they have direction? Do they know where they came from? Can they read the landscape patterns in terms of issues in their life?" These struggles resonate physically and digestively. The flesh and the shape of the tissues. Physical contact with the earth is a practice for nourishment, to be hooked in. Look at the context you live in, and what is inherently skewed too much or too little then make a lifestyle, dietary, or herbal recommendation or change, to compensate, to hopefully achieve balance.

The current state surrounded by concrete, tall buildings, monotonous, surveillance lights, cameras, helicopters, and military test jets.

My practice addresses the ground and the soil to compensate for the earth. The dirt under my nails, the complexity of various soils, the attempt to grow from seed, to feed, and to share. I incorporate taking care of plants as part of my practice, I take care of them, they take care of me. Here I observe and interact life and death cycles and spirals of plants. Surrounded by concrete, a prison-like structure, I consider part of my research to be the Visual Arts Facilities garden plot, hand built by previous graduate students before me, I am continuing this history of students craving for something green to care for. I walk across from my studio to water and to talk with the plants, trim away the decayed, plant new seeds, pick strawberries, cut onions, and integrate chicken manure or compost into the dirt that was disrupted by construction byproducts. It changed the ecosystem of the soil to provide nutrients for future plant generations. In adding chicken manure, I compensate for the lack of nutrients needed for growth. Similarly, how we act to compensate for our surroundings.

EARTH

“When you dig, you destroy a universe.” - E.O. Wilson, biologist who studied ant behavior⁹

Soil is a material worthy of study, an element of ecological importance, as a substance used as building material and a fundamental means of fusing form and function.

Soil as body. Soil as history.

“When we stand on land, we stand on the ones who have come before. We stand on our ancestors. We realize we have inherited their legacy, the way they perceived their land, the way they lived with the ground, the way their hands worked the soil or didn’t. When I dig, I have feelings of pain, grief, guilt, anger, and thirst for these untold stories, these connections to place, these embodied knowledge, these disturbed histories.”¹⁰

Soil is an interesting material to work with, not all soil is the same, it differs from dirt, it differs from location to location. Soil has a certain quality to it that is malleable and texturally intriguing and connected to place. Artist Wangechi Mutu uses soil in her work to capture the essence of soil, its texture, its malleability, and its essence. Her views on soil in New York differs from Nairobi, where she has no sense of identification with the soil. She doesn’t trust the soil because there are other things put in that wasn’t part of nature.¹¹ From her monumental works to her collages, Mutu creates hybrid female, animal, and plant forms, I look to her for her use of nontraditional materials (bricolage), fusing historical and fictional figures that sheds familiarity into these fantastical chimeras. From known objects to anonymous ones meshed together, wherever they came from, it is now in the work, and she magnifies each individual material in a distinct way.

⁹ Klehm, “The Soil Keepers: Interviews with Practitioners on the ground beneath our feet,” 17

¹⁰ Ibid, 14-15

¹¹ Mutu, “Between the Earth and the Sky”

Within the meridian system there is an earth phase meridian, that runs from your cheeks, down your neck, through your chest, into your hips, along your legs, wraps your knees, all the way to your toe. It is considered the stomach and spleen, organs used for digestion, mixture, and transportation that fuels every organ and function. I am using clay, ceramics, dirt, soil, and sand as a metaphor for the earth element.

My second-year solo show, *The Wet Spaces Behind Your Eyes*, I restricted myself to show work with everything on the ground and nothing on the walls. Interested in how we navigate space and objects, I wanted to focus on space that we usually don't pay attention to. How do you pay attention to your surroundings and the details below? Ritualistic objects buried underground. Through the framework of nothing on the walls and all the objects placed three feet and below, we are forced to bend, squat, and squint towards what we are not used to. Anchored in possibility and dysfunction, a central inquiry emerges: How does one effectively manage spatial dynamics, the fluid relationship between humans and the space around us? This inquiry transcends the mere act of designing individual objects; it encompasses the broader system within which these objects reside.

Vacuity Detriment is made of glazed ceramics, acupuncture needles, plastic tubes, and crystallized salt on a metal form lain on a table. It's based on the anterior view (frontal), conception vessel, kidney, and gallbladder meridians, this is a study for how I can apply these invisible meridian lines into ceramics. Where a person or other was potentially dissected, studied, or in the process of healing through the use of acupuncture needles inserted into the ceramic body. Objects placed around and, in the body, held crystallized salt, powdered incense, stones, jujube, and ginger, a private ceremony for the things I make. They carry things within it to whisper its potential stories. Transformation stage.

Its meridians are energy pathways that flow through the body, and they are associated with specific organs and functions, the stomach and spleen, along with hidden intersection of symbols. Through the coexistence of contrasting elements of metal and ceramics, I hope for ambiguity of its existence and place. This intersection can create ambiguity as it straddles the boundary between the material world and the world of energy and a speculative being.



Figure 3: Wangechi Mutu. Tree Woman. 2016



Figure 4 : Vacuity Detriment

FIRE

The fire element is connected to the heart and small intestine. It is directly related to nervousness, insomnia, and the development of heart or circulatory problems. Emotionally joyful, intimate, and connected. This is dynamic energy where you listen to your heart and gut of mental processing and file and sort through information. Growth stage.

Dear Nightmare Dreams, you continue to intercept my reality, from dreaming to consciousness. It takes time to distinguish between the two until the two realities separate from each other. I dream in black-and-white. I dream of the wooden artifacts that darken the house that haunt me. I remember not touching the wooden carved figures of pronounced phallic members and pointy breasts, standing side by side. Masks hung on the walls, watching over the house in West Adams for better or worse. I would sit in the wooden chairs of two planks while my hair was being brushed and braided. Have you ever had the feeling of not being able to touch a drum that you wanted to play because IT told you to? This is a past that kept crossing my consciousness, sometimes reality blurs into this state. I incorporate vèvè into my pieces to reach out and to see this nightmare dream a reality. Some of it happened, some of it didn't, it changes, and it moves. The masks, the figures, the drums, the bowls, they move and breathe. Certain loa spirits emerge through the hung sequined pieces in these dreams, it is complex and confusing. They morph, they are truths, they are lies, and they are symbols of resilience, adaptation, and preservation in these dreams. A possibility that they may have been my reality.

A dream where my question was answered-
Came to me in a dream, running and fighting
Swirling worlds connected
Running and running and running and running forever
It's a fantasy it's a dream
A woman, a face I do not recognize
Appears
Dark skin dark hair pinned back
How do I get rid of dandruff
Oil in my hair
Rubbed into my scalp
*Camillia oil and tno\$plx*n.....*
The pair jumbled into the universe
The last ingredient lost in the subconscious
A visitor
An ancestor

never talk to people in your dreams

I listen to the dreams, why are you in black and white, reminds me of charcoal drawings, the density, lightness, and complexity it has in its material which oddly reflects these dreams, vivid and slow. Charcoal is a lightweight carbon residue produced by heating wood or other organic materials with no oxygen at around 2,010 degrees Fahrenheit (1,100 degrees Celsius).¹² I make my own charcoal from bamboo in a DIY trashcan fire, where a smaller metal bin is filled with bamboo sealed from oxygen, a larger external bin has a venting top hole and lower hole at the bottom, where the wood is to control the fire. It's not a perfect method, but it's one way of doing it. Another way I've done is going to the beach with a bonfire pit, with my metal bin of organic material to make charcoal. It's a time of chilling with others and enjoying each other's company while waiting for these materials to be transformed into charcoal.

It feels like drawing with fire, the scent of freshly burnt bamboo, a residue of what once was at my fingertips, easily manipulated and transformed into another vision. Moving charcoal as drawing and beyond drawing, I use it as material in my objects. Sifted, soft powder blackness starts to clump together on top of each other, filling in crevices with a slight glisten in its absorbing void.

For Fuel. For Drawing. Without Air, this piece is part of my plaster negatives from clay, with handmade bamboo charcoal. Loose sifted charcoal is applied to the surface, watching how the material falls and piles onto each other, ultimately creating this optically dense surface, soft and powdery, with carvings, casted, some form of symbols within the surface, exhumed, and yet also hollow. Drawing and object-making has always been entwined in my practice, where they feed from each other, this is where I attempted to merge the material, I use to draw with the objects I make. Set in another place where the ground is covered in charcoal, a landing pad ready to accept transport, a model of a large environment to come, surging with circuitry and doorways.

The meridian theory and elements are used to merge into the objects to create forms and languages. With this integration of meridian lines with objects reality traveling and estranging is possible.

¹² Wikipedia contributors, "charcoal"

Balanced, integrated points practiced on the body of things reflect the practice on humans, seemingly mirrored, left to right and back to front. How to open the channels of the thing.



Figure 5: For Fuel. For Drawing. Without Air

EARTH & FIRE - REACTIONS

Created by alchemy an erratic, temperamental, and forgiving material, clay. Dug up, dried, ground up, mixed with water to be molded into our desires with plasticity. Clay originating from this earth, has a high amount of minerals of aluminum and silicon adhering together making it plastic-like. When dried and exposed to high temperatures it hardens. It is a material of the earth that requires you to be patient, to adapt, and to experiment with.

A student of material, willing to experiment without fear, I break everything I touch. Until there is an understanding with the material through doing. From making vessels, small and large, to making my own glazes, to mixing clay with soil, rocks, ash, charcoal, and to dipping organic materials into ceramic slip. How do I push the materials to be what they already are, to become materials that cross and question our sense of reality?

Through the process to create this surrounding, I use clay and the process of ceramics. I create glazes, acting as a chemist with basic ingredients — a glass former, silica, a refractory, alumina, a melting agent, flux, and a beautifier, colorant. In addition to making glaze, I use wood ash from people's fireplaces, salt from the kitchen and from a swimming pool, soil from the garden plot, sand from La Jolla Shores, and metal as materials to make a surface that doesn't inherently look like glazed ceramics. To question what this is made of, where did this come from, and when. Using various materials makes it possible for an object to be in relation to its original form, the material surrounding it, and my interjection.

Masaomi Yasunaga explores sculptural possibilities in ceramics, instead of clay, glaze is his choice of material. Feldspar, whole rocks, metal or glass powders, he then buries his forms in layers of sand and kaolin, then firing them. Once fired he digs them out like archaeological artifacts. He used his grandmothers' ashes mixed into glaze to mourn her in his own way. He believes that processing and filtering her remains through fires created a change in state from material to memory.¹³ I use wood ash

¹³ Preece & Yasunaga, "Stillness in the Midst of Chaos: A Conversation with Masaomi Yasunaga"

that act as remains of grief of everyday life. From personal experience to our current destructive, grief-stricken state in this world, to react, to sit with and to transform these feelings through material distances and reflect on our present.

An ancient, archaeological material that undergoes transformation and exceeds time is concrete. Concrete is used as one of the ways to investigate how my forms interact with the architecture of interior and exterior spaces. Concrete is quite extraordinary, a mixture of sand and aggregate. What is happening at the heart of concrete when it is settling? The concrete is still curing and the stone still reacting. Concrete and cement (the glue that keeps concrete together- limestone, clay, sand, iron oxide + water = calcium and silica react to be gel-like) + gravel and sand, the gel glue itself around the gravel or sand and it becomes liquid stone. *Magical. Lacks a sense of place. A product of architectural merit, anonymous grey blocks, reconstituted grain and stone.*

In the world of concrete, mundaneness often sits alongside the mystical and wonderful, seemingly dead rocks are in fact alive. The ancient is molded as something resembling the future. Incredibly old or incredibly new people have been cooking lime for ages.¹⁴

I use boring and unfashionable concrete as material, just as sand and dirt.

Growing up in a pungent smelling home, scent, something invisible forms identity and memory. The house is filled with the scent of a mixture of woods, citrus peels, and fermentation, masked with cooking herbal medicine. A smell you can never escape. Overwhelmed with sensation, scent floods every cavity of your body to activate a memory, a past, or another location than the present. Sometimes I see an object and can smell the aged wooden masks, once wrapped in straw in wooden crates transported from Haiti or a video of the night market in Taiwan, with vendors serving stinky tofu, and get a brief whiff of this fermentation. Bringing in an active scent, along with the materials I am using complexifies and

¹⁴ Conway, "Material World," Chapter 2: Built upon Sand

expands our senses of s/place of this surrounding I am forming. Incense is made of biotic material meant that burns with fragrance. It is made of aromatic plant material used during ceremony, worship, meditation, or repellent. Agarwood/Aloeswood incense drives negative energy out. This is another example of where earth and fire combine. With the use of scent creates a sense of place.



Figure 6: Masaomi Yasunaga Empty vessel, 2021

A LOVE FOR OBLITERATION

Flowers dipped in slip. Fired and turned to ash. The ash remains in the interior of the ceramic exterior, like a coffin or an urn. The clay slip interior takes the impression of the flowers exterior. Because of the instability of the clay slip, it breaks in places and sometimes exposes the texture of the now ashed plant. A love for obliteration.

Why a love? It's the process of destruction, it's kind of apocalyptic. I find it to be beautiful and transformative.

Future Flowers to Give are based on the crystallized plants I killed.¹⁵ Where I am furthering my collection of the dead and ways of transforming them. The installation *Noir Botany Dreams* are ceramic pieces meant to blend into the landscape and by walking the path of the labyrinth you would encounter plant, floral like entities.¹⁶ When you congratulate someone with flowers, they are slowly and beautifully dying. I see these flowers for friends, mentors, people who have made an impact in my life. This original idea transcended beyond what I thought of and it has barely begun. These flowers were gifts, and donations, found in other trash bins and the streets of San Diego meant for this experiment. The idea to see otherworldly flora rooted in our reality is the drive and obsession to eventually make a surrounding of otherworldly flowers. Instead of dried up flowers they are ceramic flowers, where the exterior has transformed and the interior impressed, but the original gone, and remains inside a ceramic shell.

I use traditional and alternative mold making techniques to create various works. Interested in negative and positive space, taking the negative of a thing to be filled with a positive, I make my unusable mold that resembles writings and carvings in ancient stones and artifacts.

¹⁵ Crystallized plants I killed is an ongoing passive project where I save the plants that have died by my hands and I cannot seem to throw them away.

¹⁶ *Noir Botany Dreams* is an installation at the residency 'Labyrinth' in Ojo, New Mexico. For a month, Mark Rodriguez and Sarah M. Rodriguez, both artists, hosted an outdoor sculpture environment, creating space and time for other artists and creators.

Mold making has been a way to communicate my interests in the positive, negative, interior, and exterior relationship with the invisible meridians and organ correlation and even the visual influences of sci-fi. These methods and words reflect a hollowness, a vessel, a container, something to hold. Something to hold is what a collector needs, someone to hold is what people needs, something to hold is a thing often overlooked, it's not loud or flashy, its everyday, it's the mug you drink your tea from, it's the bag you hold your food in, it's the bowl you hold your precious items in, it's the body that holds your heart and soul in. Something or someone to hold is a beginning without an end. I am making things influenced by science fiction, not by its story, everything but...¹⁷

The transformative process of its landscape and objects, often overlooked by the heroes and the violence.

¹⁷ Le Guin. "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction"



Figure 7: Nameless is the Origin



Figure 8: Future Flowers to Give I&II



Figure 9: untitled

EVERYTHING BUT...

“A book holds words. Words hold things. They bear meanings. A novel is a medicine bundle, holding things in a, powerful relation to one another and to us.”

- Ursula K. Le Guin

In search of a place to exist, to belong, or live. Surrounded by collections of things I've picked up, received, and ultimately transformed, constantly searching to fill the void. From making vessels in ceramics, to the body as a vessel, to an object as a vessel, these are things that have the possibility to hold some form of belonging.

Stones collected from three feet tall continue to this day. I am drawn by the pull of the stone and the pull of 'what's right.' Am I allowed to displace the stone from which it resides touching others of its kind, supporting the insects underneath or its habitat? A moment's pause I pick it up and hold it in my hand. The energy I feel in my hands calms me. The magic of collecting and holding stones, flowers, shells, and found things that live throughout time enters transformative existence.

What is going on? Science fiction is what is going on, what we do and feel, and how we relate to everything in this belly, this blanket, the tomb of this story. I have taken a role as a character, if I was to be narrated into a story, as a caretaker for the discarded and collection. I use the transformation of the discarded and the invisible to help flesh out this -scape.¹⁸ Instead of -scape, I've been drawn to use 'surrounding.' Lee Bontecou's *worldscape* indicates her desire to summon a landscape that is both imaginary and based on the everyday world. Her surfaces collaged from various found materials retain references to their earlier functional uses, keeping the sculptures from being read symbolically. I saw my

¹⁸ Bontecou, Smith, De Salvo, *“Lee Bontecou: A Retrospective.”* Uncertain what kind of '-scape,' but I am referencing Lee Bontecou's use of the word 'worldscape' indicating the range of her visual and scientific interests in plants, airplanes, jets, and space exploration. I am not satisfied with landscape, *worldscape*, or environment. Surrounding has been intriguing to me as term to use, since it feels like it is a space which can be in relation with.

first Bontecou, *Untitled* (1961), at the Museum of Modern Art a couple years ago; she took canvas from conveyor belts discarded by laundry, stretched across steel armature, and tied by copper wire. Drawn to its materials, it straddles discourses of painting and sculpture, being invited into its destructive void. Ultimately, how I relate to it. Relating to its raw assumed ugliness, mystery, and hope and fears of that time. Drawn by her use of materials and summoning an imaginary place, I connect the dots of the things that were once lost or broken, either found or by my own hand, guided by the meridians to attempt to make sense of being in-between, as a person or as a thing or as other.

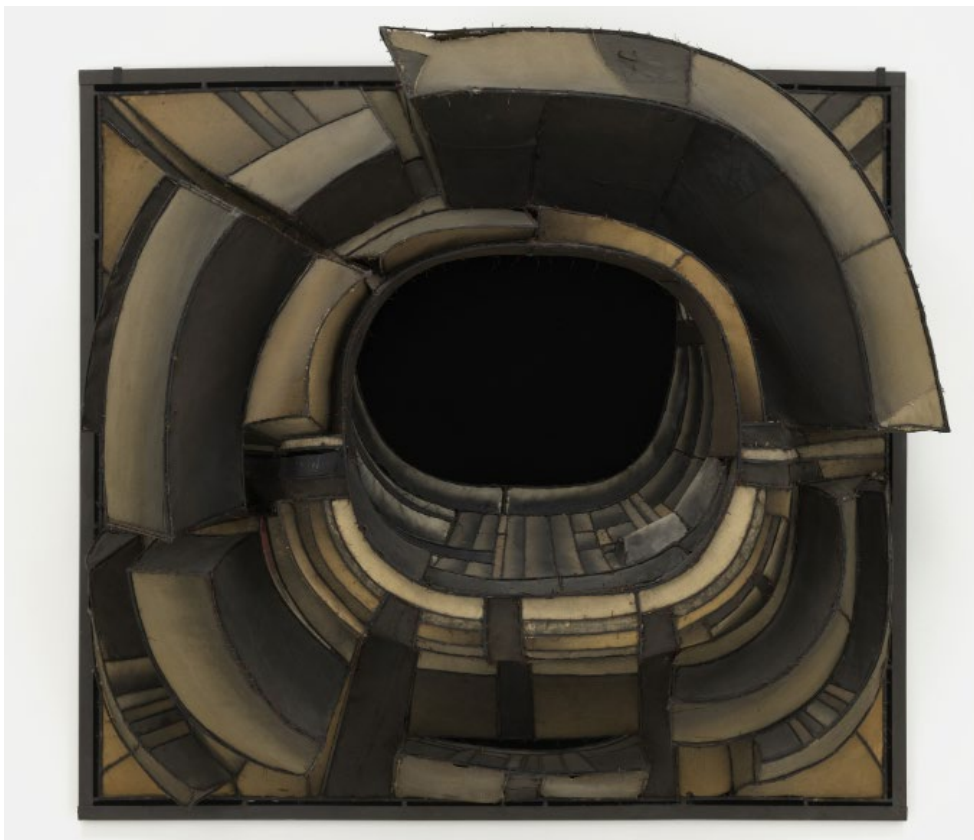


Figure 10: Lee Bontecou. Untitled. 1961

ASSEMBLING THE DISCARD AND FALLEN

Using the discarded/trash/dead is my choice of materials and beings to care for. Use the knowledge of its history to create this thing beyond yourself to become itself. The found objects, discarded, and forgotten, are transformed into something different but still carry their history.

Objects have their own history, and through my application, they are part of the history of assemblage. Assemblage is made of disparate elements, often made of everyday objects. It was also considered the basis of surrealist objects combining found objects to become unsettling and uncanny, beyond reality. My first encounter with assemblage was with Noah Purifoy's work in Joshua Tree and Watts Towers in Watts, California. Fascinated by the level of construction, imagination, and commitment to making and transformation. Noah Purifoy's work resides in the desert; objects once had their own life, he repurposed them to be objects that you can cross through, contemplate in, and investigate. He used debris from the Watts riot as material to work in assemblage, African sculptural traditions, and black folk art. This applied to using the rubble to become art to recontextualize by residents of Watts. He used abstraction and the everyday to critique our consumer society reflect our relationships in life for its fluctuations.

I use objects found on the streets, dumpsters, in nature, whatever form catches my attention. What was its previous function? Who held this memory? How can it slip into another.

Slipping into ambiguity. The surroundings I am building lies in the irreality (of being unsubstantial or imaginary, not existing objectively or as fact). The irreality I am thinking and working with dwells in curiosity and ambiguity. Alienate, estrange, to make the familiar and unfamiliar seem familiar. Works such as *SP.8 Sense Organ* and *Different Marrow Sucking* are examples of using the discard and hybridizing them to become another. Building a world of different theories, processes, and concepts rooted in reality, addressing trash and its politics, linked to its values which are time and place-specific. No material is trash, but socially and culturally constructed. Trash as material is shifting, and the concept of trash remains in a state of flux, which is why I use trash to build this surrounding. What is the value of my work? Is my work trash? Or is it material I am working with, and I am adding to its narrative?

ESTRANGEMENT

“Sf does not estrange the familiar, but rather makes the familiar strange.”¹⁹

Making the familiar unfamiliar and making the unfamiliar familiar. Straddling between what it is, what it could be through the combination of materials. I am learning about estrangement as science fiction, this is information I was able to grasp and try to contextualize to my understanding that is in relation to my work and why I am interested in science fiction as something to investigate within visual arts.

Estrangement holds a variety of meanings to different people who have written about it. Breaking down some key words will hopefully give us a better understanding. Shklovsky, Brecht, Bloch, and Suvin all write about estrangement, yet they all mean different things by it. These are not signs of pure academical finickiness, but, on the contrary, point to the very core of sf. The interactions among naturalization, defamiliarization, and diegetic estrangement are vital for the way sf works and how it affects an audience, and Spiegel collecting these writers definitions believes his distinctions can aid a better understanding of the genre.²⁰ Sf naturalizes the strange, the marvelous. Whenever a marvelous element is introduced into a seemingly realistic world, a collision occurs between two systems of reality, producing an estranging effect. The familiar appears in new surroundings and is thereby recontextualized. Making the alien normal is naturalization while making the familiar strange is defamiliarization. Estrangement can be achieved in two ways by defamiliarization and diegetic estrangement (in terms of story), the collision of contradicting elements on the level of the story produced by unexpected character reactions.²¹

There are many ways of defining sf estrangement, focusing on Suvin’s definition, it is important to know that’s the beauty of how expansive, complex, and unknowing it is. Estrangement, cognition, and

¹⁹ Spiegel, “Things Made Strange: On the Concept of ‘Estrangement’ in Science Fiction Theory,” 373

²⁰ Ibid, 382

²¹ Ibid, 382

the novum are known terms by Darko Suvin in his 1972 essay, 'On Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre,' specifically focused on the 'imaginative framework' (formal framework).²² SF involves the presence and interaction of estrangement (making the familiar seem unfamiliar) and cognition (the process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses) where readers are encouraged to think about new possibilities and ideas. For readers to do so, there is an imaginative framework for a narrative to unfold, it could be in space or an alternate timeline. Through this imaginative framework is estranging the setting. The stories often revolve around a central concept or "novum" where meaning makes sense within the context of the story's universe. In essence, this definition suggests that SF is characterized by its exploration of unfamiliar concepts and its ability to prompt readers to think critically about the implications of these concepts within a fictional framework.²³

Through my imaginative framework, I am collecting, cutting, repurposing, assembling found objects and materials together undergoes a transformative process which alters the appearance of the original forms, embedding natural materials, such as dirt or sand to anchor these forms to this current earth even though the forms I create from an existing object no longer appears to be what it once was. What it once was lingers exposed or heightened in its form but covered to become something else. It activates more than what it was before, it stimulates a potential of what it was and what it could be and where it belongs. Through the combination of these materials, I am defamiliarizing these objects. Working with sf and trying to understand how and why I want to use it. It has been difficult because it is something where a story is necessary to recontextualize the present. Sf depends on the naturalization of the marvelous, of the alien. What does that mean. Normalizing these settings and situations. Do we want to feel at home? Do we want an alternative reality to better digest our present. Sf "make us feel at home

²² Parrinder, "Learning from Other Worlds: Estrangement, Cognition, and the Politics of Science Fiction and Utopia," 36

²³ Ibid, 37

in a particular future provided that it offers a new angle of perception and so familiarizes us with a different view of the present.”²⁴ The purpose of SF is truth-telling.

*SF not as a genre, but a fictional-aesthetic mode *** mode abstract and is partly ahistorical concept.*

²⁴ Parrinder, “Learning from Other Worlds: Estrangement, cognition, and the politics of science fiction and utopia,” 40

ENDING WITH ORIGINS

Investigate the first attempt to go back to the belly, to the matrix, to the root, to the personal. Attempt to be personal. Is the personal beginning? Is the personal the belly? [the needles in the belly are at an angle - do not pierce the organs] My personal life is uncertain due to an unreliable memory. The past and belly is the root. I view the abyss as the past, part of the present and future.

The unknown parts of reality are to travel to the past and future. Is there room for irreality, estrangement, and fiction? Glissant writes about partaking in the abyss linked to the unknown, in the belly of the boat and the surrounding ocean in which it travels.²⁵ "A boat has no belly; a boat does not swallow up, does not devour; a boat is steered by open skies. Yet, the belly of this boat dissolves you, precipitates you into a nonworld from which you cry out."²⁶ This space of simultaneity becoming/unbecoming occurs unnaturally but mechanical and dehumanizing, resulting in this nonworld experience. What is nonworld: a margin where everything you know of doesn't exist, treated as something you are not, and being something you do not recognize.²⁷ The boat operates in multiplicity (state of being various), being a belly, in the abyss, the people are marked as cargo, marked as ungendered, and marked as objects, where there is no distinction between women and men, blurring the lines of gendered people. To this day, people are objects; it is subconsciously and consciously passed down into the 21st century. A person is not a person. "My body is not my body."²⁸ a recollection.

What's in a name? A surname passed down to mark your family, who owned you, where you came from, and even what you chose to name yourself. Nadreau, adapted French, Charente-Maritime, Haiti, Old French, "nadre" stingy, nasty, vile: first found boat bottomer (recently found sweetheart or my

²⁵ Glissant, "Poetics of Relation," I needed to point to the root, but not tell you who I am or what my work is about through my ethnicity, but a nod towards where my history has been. The simultaneous becoming/unbecoming in multiplicity will be thought out throughout this paper.

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ A core moment within myself and found to relate with others

²⁸ Something I told myself since I was a child. Distancing myself from my body to not exist.

love). Lin (林), Chinese-Mandarin, Taiwan, is composed of two trees to make a forest or sun goddess, a place where protection is found. Naomi (追美), Hebrew, Japanese, pleasantness, straight beauty.

American-born. Immigrant parents. A name is one aspect of identity, a root identity, an identifier to who and where you belong "founded in the distant past in a vision, a myth of the creation of the world."²⁹ The word root has a definite sounding implication of 'this is it,' 'this is who I am,' and 'this is my place in the world' without any room to expand and change; it makes it finite, but it's only the beginning.

When you are more than one, more than two, more than three, more than - every aspect of ethnicity, gender, and sexuality is connected. Still, through assimilation, one may be considered better than the other. Glissant establishes the variety of identity, where root identity is founded in the distant past in a vision, a myth of the creation of the world, is ratified by a claim to legitimizing that allows a community to proclaim its entitlement to the possession of a land, which thus becomes a territory; rooted the thought of self and territory and set in motion the thought of the other and voyage. Whereas "relation identity is linked not to a creation of the world but to the conscious and contradictory experience of contacts among cultures; it is produced in the chaotic network of Relation and not in the hidden violence of filiation (legal relationship between parent and child)."³⁰ Identity as shared knowledge is part of the chaos: "*chaos-monde* (the immeasurable intermixing of cultures) are unforeseeable and foretellable." The attempt of searching and understanding is limited, but to accept not knowing is just as important. Accepting and resisting no endings. To be in relation with...

My thoughts on my identity manifest through an attempt to figure out where an object was from or what it once was and how I approach my practice. There are names given to objects, surroundings, and things and a history that it came before its acquisition. Apply this mindset of something not being entirely identified and allow the exploration of how you relate to it, what could have been its past, what could be its future, and what it is now.

²⁹ Glissant, "Poetics of Relation," 143

³⁰ Ibid, 144

This research derives from the personal. To begin or to end, I explain the origins of my interest with ambiguity. My identity plays a role in my work, as how I exist in this world.

I identify as both Asian and Black, Taiwanese and Haitian, an experience of being in a continuous state of in-between.³¹

I am interested in ambiguity to analyze the role in which I exist in and so many others. Jennifer Ann Ho in *Racial Ambiguity in Asian American Culture* analyzes Asian Americans through the lens of ambiguity to recognize the complexity of race and the complications of “Asian American” existing as a nascent political, cultural category, resisting the finite constructions of themselves within US society.³² My work is rooted in my identity and interests that make up myself, as these are subjects that create further integration into a person, existing in multitudes, and in relation to others and things. “Interpreting culture through ambiguity becomes one of the only means of truly seeing race for what it is: an open signifier and overdetermined mirror of the widely held assumption that race is an absolute, knowable, quantifiable substance. Race is an abstraction that we treat as concrete material; it reflects our desires, fears, anxieties, hopes, and queries about humanity.”³³

Is race like materials, knowable, but undergoing transformation and contains worlds within itself and you don't “expect to understand how it was made or how it got to you”³⁴ This quote resonated with me on how a person is perceived, there is no expectation of understanding, with questions of “Where are you from?” along with “What are you?” are reminders of alienation of Asian Americans, the ways in which we cannot simply be from the United States or only identify as American – these questions

³¹ Even though I am both ethnicities there has always been an erasure of my Asianness, as a multiracial person, like others can pick and choose who I am when it is most convenient for them. Invisibility and convenience has been a common reoccurrence within the Asian community, being the so-called model minority, and yet being rejected and exoticized. Push against being labeled as one, what is the need to simplify complex racial phenomenon into a binary black and white, erasing anyone who doesn't fit inside?

³² Ho, “Racial Ambiguity in Asian American Culture,” 21

³³ Ibid, 23

³⁴ Conway, “Material World”

reinforce the ambiguity that is faced due to racial difference, with an undertone of *why are you here*.³⁵

Then why understand, when you will be outcast in this world of needed transparency. “This same transparency, in Western History, predicts that a common truth of Mankind exists and maintains that what approaches it most closely is action that projects, whereby the world is realized at the same time that it is caught in the act of its foundation. Against this reductive transparency, a force of opacity is at work. Now longer the capacity that enveloped and reactivated the mystery of filiation but another, considerate of all the threatened and delicious things joining one another (without conjoining, that is, without merging) in the expanse of Relation.”³⁶

Through exploring the realm of ambiguity, I use my personal history, relationship with acupuncture, material interests, and speculating on science fiction. Through the combination of these experiences and interests, I draw relations to each subject and relations to objects. Science fiction has been a way to try to sift through the present and past to communicate a possible future or alternative reality.

GRATUITOUS MOTION

Birds of paradise plant in full flower look like several birds hidden in a clump of foliage. A small bird hops onto the smaller, lower petal, and the birds weight exposes the antlers, which brush pollen on the birds’ feet and chest. The blue structure is the tongue housing the male and female parts. The burned-out flowers in *Gratuitous Motion* are all birds of paradise, collected and dried for their unique appearances, combined sex organ, and durability.

Black paradise (heptapod 7), is named after the aliens in the film ‘Arrival,’ whose film is based off of Ted Chiang’s short story “Story of Your Life.” Heptapod A and Heptapod B uses two separate

³⁵ Ho, “Racial Ambiguity in Asian American Culture,” 150

³⁶ Glissant, “Poetics of Relation,” 62

languages to two different concepts of time, both with its own distinct languages crafted through vocal communication and the other in smoky circular script, arrives to earth in attempt to communicate with humans. I think about the film 'Arrival' as a point of reference towards how to communicate with those you cannot communicate with you — language barrier. The film follows a scientist who learns the language of an alien species who arrives on earth. She then understands a new way of perceiving time through their language. This movie explores the limits of human society, thinking, and language in an innovative way. It makes me think about how language changes our perception of time and reality, including the capacity of human emotion in the face of the unknown.³⁷

³⁷ Villeneuve, "Arrival"



Figure 11: black paradise (heptapod 7)

Hull, is a plaster negative covered in sand from La Jolla Shores. It references H.R. Giger's work on how he combines and builds his creatures and world. His work has rich complexity in combining different languages, symbols, shapes, and themes from occult influences, even archetypes of magic, alchemy, and astrology.

Whereas I am drawing from my dreams of the past, meridians hidden in the body, and forms found in the everyday. The carvings or lines, sometimes cross the line or can be interpreted as seemingly useless and only act as signifiers of an artifact. illusions, texture, and scale of surroundings. Greebles is a design technique, notably recognized in Star Wars, Battlestar Galactica, a trick to imply complexity. They indicate function, a mounted space weapon, or a vent. It texturizes the world and gives a sense of place. Even Lego builders greeble to add complexity to everyday objects. Sweet, useless greebles, wiggers, nurnies, names of the useless details sounding like little creatures that ride the skin of the huge. Greebles are raw materials for our brains to piece together the puzzle. Non-functional busyness that saturates ships and structures. I utilize some of these techniques in my work for this very reason: to enforce assumed uselessness and complexity. Enforce the discard and the trash. They become indelible designs of the surrounding. Within the useless seeming symbols and lines are hidden directions of amplified currents, circuits, energy, and the meridians of things.



Figure 12: Hull

Gratuitous Motion, to experience and embrace the slow. To appreciate the moments in-between the supposed purpose. The title comes from an interview with Hayao Miyazaki and aligns with how I view my approach of thinking about installation. Japanese word “ma” meaning emptiness. It’s there intentionally. “The time in between my clapping is *ma*. If you just have non-stop action with no breathing space at all, it’s just busyness, but if you take a moment, then the tension building in the film can grow into a wider dimension. If you just have constant tension at 80 degrees all the time, you just get numb.” says Miyazaki.

A traditional white cube, four walls, double doors, a straight shot rectangle the moment you walk in is changed through the placement of the objects. The *Hull*, placed on the wall to your left at 10 ft tall, illuminated by white light, while other objects are occupying spaces on the ground, hovering, embedded, and interacting with the architecture of this space.

This show and individual works have been more about drawing than previous works, where I am drawing directly from the meridians of my own body. Selecting pathways and points which I have had applied to me during treatment, relating them to earth and fire to connect with material processes the works undergoes. Drawing the pathways on paper to applying it to steel rods and tubes, I bend and shape the metal through leverage, my strength, and heat to conform the material to my lines, then intuitively contort them to not be flat, but exist in the space to make a type of body that references, creature, bug, animal, and human.

Lung line drawn on the ground made with sand from La Jolla Shores pier connects with the architecture and the pieces themselves. The line is embedded in the existing concrete line and flows out to create an arc on the floor itself, seemingly a part of the concrete, it is not. It is slightly raised, made of sand high in iron, giving it its dark grey appearance. A line overlooked or thought of as already there. Integrating aspects of the existing architecture materials into the pieces was one of the guides in deciding how alchemical everyday materials are. From concrete to sand, to steel, and to clay. These materials

function the way I hope to translate the slippage of our reality into others, through material and through fiction.

I find myself in silence, overcome with a sense of melancholy and stillness. Deep pressure in the diaphragm and the body exhausting air from my lungs. Dimly lit, ambient of whites, greys, and blacks, drifting in and out of curiosity and internal thoughts. The show and works reflect the internal processing of the self, the world, and nature. Dealing with the internal and external, absorb and repel, accept and negate, the pieces guide you in and out of itself and into the space where they are interacting with each other. Ultimately, interacting with us as well, through investigation, minding how we navigate space, and activating our imaginations of what is possible.



Figure 13: Gratuitous Motion Installation Shot

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