WIGGLE VEIL (OR, LOVE NEEDS OBJECTS)

A Thesis

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\(^1\) In ancient Egyptian mythology, the goddess Maat (associated with divine wisdom and with having wrought order upon the preexisting chaos at the birth of the universe) was believed to have measured the hearts of the deceased against a feather in the underworld (Duat). If the deceased person was pure of heart his/her heart would be lighter than a feather, and his/her soul would be granted access to the afterlife (equated with paradise).

\(^2\) This piece aims to affirm the many seemingly contradictory aspects of what-is (hemorrhoids/birthday cake). You are invited to add your own contradictions to the wiggle-veil.

\(^3\) Ancient Greek poetess Sappho appears to have created the word “Glukuprikon” to describe romantic love. While it has no proper translation in English, poet and classic scholar Ann Carson translates it as sweetbitter, indicating a complex experience whose sweetness is undeniable and whose finish on the proverbial palette is unavoidably tinged with (often painful) complexity. Carson devotes a whole chapter of her book “Eros, the Bittersweet” to defining this word, and to distinguishing it from our more familiar, less substantial “bittersweet”.

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4 In the spiritual philosophies of Buddhist and Hindu Tantra, it is believed that love does not manifest as real until channeled into an object or objects. Any thing, from a scrap of rusted wire to a human being, can become an object for love. As such, every thing is sacred.
ABSTRACT

The six sculptural works that comprise my thesis exhibition emerged from a prolonged series of investigations into the intricately interconnected phenomenon of embodied experience in the world as we know it. These works explore the connections between mysteries in our inner and outer worlds, taking as inescapable fact the notion that our bodily vessels, in all their complexity and subtlety, are the vehicles through which we encounter the world. As such, this work posits embodiment as both frame and anchor for all knowledge and experience.

These sculptures, made from ceramic materials and mixed media such as sugar, salt, string, and found objects, engage perennial questions through process, form, and language. From questions about the innate human longing to understand love or the human heart’s ability to experience levity even in the wake of incredible suffering, to questions about what a strand of hair or a beam of light are made of at their most infinitesimal essences, this work’s structure and content suggest such inner and outer mysteries are ultimately connected by an epic, invisible web that I call what-is-ness. My work seeks to investigate and to articulate that web.

This document extends my material inquiry into the realm of language, using both conventional prose and the mode of poetry. Knots (or, riddles) embedded in the sculptural works are teased out through empirical, philosophical, and figurative reflection. My hope is that this text will prove a fitting companion to the sculptural works themselves, and that both will leave the reader/viewer with more resonant questions than definitive answers.
WIGGLE VEIL (OR, LOVE NEEDS OBJECTS)

Enmeshed: Wiggle Veils to What-Is-Ness

Imagine an invisible web underlying and interpenetrating all things. Imagine you can see, and sense, its airy, interconnecting strands unfurling into being at every turn. A subconscious or even unconscious thought about another person arises and, woosh: a strand in this web is strung. You give a gift and, tsssszet: there goes another delicate sinew into the warp and weft. Step on a stranger’s discarded chewing gum, reel from the impact of a work of literature, art, or music, or wince from another’s harsh remark, and, zhooooop: more new threads emerge into this epic mesh. If the imaginative leap in question seems tenable, then I invite you to join me in an exploration of my recent body of sculptural work, entitled Wiggle Veil (or, love needs objects). This exhibition emerged from a prolonged series of investigations into the intricately interconnected phenomenon of embodied experience in the world as we know it.

Simultaneously dense and light, at once chaotic and filled with potentially discernable patterns, the omnipresent web invoked above registers in my awareness as fact, rather than some fanciful idea existing only in the imagination. I feel this web to be real. While my own involuntary mindfulness of its countless interconnections can be burdensome (if not overwhelming at times), its nature appears to me, above all, as an ever-unfolding ballet of sorts: a goopy, loopy, dripping ballet full of repeated arcs, criss-crosses, knots, grids, blobs, and tapers. This web maps the dance of what-is, and it is in what-is-ness⁵ that I find the greatest beauty and, oddly, the greatest spiritual refuge.

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⁵ The totality of all that exists in any given field of focus at this present moment, including both the itemized contents of a given focal orb, and the just-so way all these elements come together, which is inimitable, and full of
As an artist, I am moved to construct objects and even sites of devotion to the **what-is-ness** that I encounter in my experience of the world. I struggle to classify or even to name these objects/sites, because the words I instinctively reach for betray me with meanings that don’t quite fit the territory I seek to map. What is a name for a construction whose making is intended as, at once, an act of devotion to a phenomenon which eludes its maker’s understanding; as a mirroring-act (a mirroring game, in fact) of the phenomenon in question – in an attempt to understand, and to celebrate, it –; and as an embodiment of the very matter, energy, and behavioral characteristics of said phenomenon?…A monument is too mighty, too assertive of authorial certainty. A shrine is, by definition, too finite, and, opposite to “monument”, too deferential. I seek a word that matches the following definition (my own attempt at articulating this nameless form): *dynamic, porous constellation of matter into a physically and temporally local system for the purposes of channeling, dancing with, honoring, and meditating upon a phenomenon that simultaneously permeates and surrounds me, yet defies my full comprehension.  

For these objects/sites/constructions to authentically embody the intention just described, they must suggest a potential both for further embellishment, or, development, and for decay. In other words, they must be porous, in their own way, and they must suggest an in- and out-breath that keeps them vital, open-ended, and imbued with mystery. Perhaps “wiggle veil” (the title of my chaos and patterns, poetic collisions, and beauty, tragedy, and the mundane in ever-shifting proportions. As example, here’s a sample of such an inventory of my neighborhood right now: from floating dust-glimmer to pedestrian, to dirty feather and straw wrapper beneath pedestrian’s feet, to pedestrian’s emotional weather, to water tower looming over pedestrian, to vibrations from the hip hop music neighbors play, to meteorological weather enveloping and interpenetrating this microcosm, and including all parts never fully known or seen, like spaces between quarks and leptons comprising water tower, pedestrian, or feather; and like the countless acts of love, violence, and indifference going on behind the walls of buildings in this tiny world. Formally, this layered slice of what-is-ness appears to me filled with billows, summery haze, and shadowy acts played out within dilapidated buildings; with fecund vines and weeds weaving a matrix of spidery curlicues through holes and cracks within this sub-world; and with a simultaneous underlying torpor and thronging pulse (the weight of early summer heat coagulating with the low hum power lines would make if only you could press your ear against them).
exhibition, as well as one of its six works) comes as close as any term I’ve found to describing the things I seek to make, and have made to comprise this body of work. ‘Wiggle’ suggests a dynamic, unpredictable movement that feels true to the spirit of these works. A ‘veil’ is sufficiently porous for the purposes of my criteria, and while, at first glance, ‘veil’ suggests a nearly two-dimensional object of scant volume, most meshy materials can be fashioned to create volumetric forms, and are usually considerably malleable to that end.

So if we have determined that I am crafting wiggle-veils to what-is-ness, perhaps further empirical qualification is in order to ensure some grain of common understanding. I imagine what-is-ness as Chance’s ever-shifting collage, and suspect there are patterns, truths, and secrets to be discerned within the logic of her juxtapositions. I study what-is-ness as a devotee studies a sacred text, seeking not only literal meanings but etymologies, interpretations, gaps between the visible (or stated). This pursuit has yielded an understanding of an anatomy of what-is-ness – a system that leaves much room for the unknown as it does the map-able. Its bones are comprised of moments, and of the tiniest particles of matter and energy, while its flesh (corpulent in certain regions; gauzy in others) is woven in layers upon these bones by interconnections and chance occurrences. Longing and emptiness, meanwhile, account for the gaps within and between this corpus’s constituent parts.

My acts of construction, then, begin with this notion of the anatomical structure of what-is-ness: bones (moments and particles); flesh (interconnections and chance occurrences); and gaps (longing and emptiness). Often, this structural template is applied to a specific form, such as a particular question, feeling, experience, or word. Such a starting point – both means and messenger – serves double-duty, weaving the container for the investigation as it unfolds, and signifying to the viewer the nature of the investigation once completed.

Stranded: Forms Informed by a Slender Notion

Just as an amorphous notion like what-is-ness might be rendered knowable through its interpretation as an anatomical structure (as detailed above), any baffling phenomenon can be provisionally tamed through a similar cognitive game. In this game, potentially analogous structures are held up to the phenomenon in question just as a shirt from a clothing rack might be held to the chest in search of fit. Should the chosen analogical structure (or source) appear compatible with that of the confounding phenomenon (or target), then the source’s elucidating properties may be further unlocked through the identification of relationships between particular aspects of source and target (like relating the bones of human anatomy to moments and essential particles within what-is-ness).

My own search for analogous structures which might elucidate the nature of the world has led me to the field of scientific speculation known as string theory, which posits that all matter and energy are, at their most essential levels, composed of vibrating strings. As Shing-Tung Yau and Steve Nadis write in The Shape of Inner Space, “At [string theory’s] core is the notion that the smallest bits of matter and energy are not pointlike particles but are instead tiny, vibrating pieces

6 I imagine Chance as feminine, quixotic as she is.
7 The word glukuprikon, a capital “YES” as affirmation, or the figure of a unicorn, for example.
of string, which assume the form of either loops or open strands." One aspect distinguishing string theory from other quantum theories is that it posits a single, common unit which describes all matter and energy – two very different yet highly interdependent ingredients in the universal soup. String theory suggests the world is united at its essence – an epic ballet of vibrating strings so infinitesimally small, we have yet to create instruments capable of decisively perceiving (or validating) them. To invoke my analogy-game once again, string theory’s epic ballet provides a thrilling analogical source for the target of my own invisible web of connective tissues, as described in the first section of this paper. Such uncanny alignment between the (potentially) real and the imagined/sensed seems to suggest both an inherent wisdom in one’s intuitive experience of the world, and a blurry boundary between the real and the imagined.

Formally, it seems I have been attempting to articulate my own webbed vision of the world – through the use of string – since the very beginning of my decade of working in ceramic and mixed media. I have long relished, for instance, how each satiny strand of embroidery thread (no thicker than a toothpick) can be dissected to reveal six delicate sub-strands, which can then be teased into knots and layered catenary arcs (mimicking entropy’s artful hand). While I have incorporated string (and string-like materials: wire, hair, etc.) into ceramic sculptures for years, I have more recently sought ways to enable ceramic materials themselves to speak in a similarly delicate way.

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 3:** Detail with thicker and thinner rainbow twine, an environmental element of *Unicornis*.

How can clay, I have wondered, be fashioned to embody the notion that everything solid consists of increasingly intricate substructures laced with emptiness? I have likewise sought methods for invoking the invisible and the intangible, as a way of suggesting they are equally real. Built into this formal quest has been a desire for methods of forming, building, composing, firing, and

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presenting that could also speak to the beauty, and the fact, of impermanence. For inherent in string theory and much quantum thought is the notion that nothing in the universe is stable. In addition to all matter and energy being comprised of ever-smaller structures, the smallest of which may be tiny strings, everything is moving (and thus, changing) all the time. Transformation, in other words, is a more enduring fact than the apparently incorruptible solidity of a mountain or man-made monument. In order for my work to ring true, I knew it had to find a way to wholeheartedly embody this reality.

The human figure marked the formal starting point in my practice for years, inspired by the fact that the ‘body-psyche-heart-mind-spirit-energy field’ is the Rube-Goldberg-Machine-esque vessel through which we encounter this mysterious world. The figure seemed like the most authentic starting point for addressing the confounding nature of lived experience. However, I repeatedly frustrated myself with the burdensome heaviness and solidity of my figures once sculpted – they seemed dishonest to me, and based on someone else’s notion of a way to represent human experience and human form.

A persistent affinity for things like rigging, scaffolding, buildings in the early stages of construction, bridges, grids, wispy cobwebs, seed-carrying plant-puffs, and skeletal preliminary drawings (webs and veils of a sort) compelled me, finally, to build ceramic skeletons with the goal of materially invoking the essence of a form. Emptiness, as both counterpoint and profound substance in its own right, needed a place in my constructions. I made sandboxes into which I dug out the shape of the bottom half of a three-dimensional form (I began with the shape of a skull), then laid ceramic coils into this hollow to construct a lattice work. I used balloons (easy to later deflate and withdraw) to occupy these forms’ empty centers, and built latticed coils up around them.

Figure 4: Two views of The Mystery of Levity (Maat’s measure), built using the sandbox-and-latticed-coil method, and “skinned” while suspended.
Once fired, I suspended this skeletal ghost from a chain in my studio, and made my first attempts at “skinning” the skeleton by stuffing delicate pinches of low-temperature porcelain-like clay and pigmented black clay into its negative spaces. After years of building physically and tonally “heavy” figures, working on porous forms that hung in the air felt like magic. A poetics of lightness, permeability, impermanence, and a new kind of entropy (for table-bound forms submit to gravity much differently than suspended ones) began to unfold.

These formal investigations eventually led me to my current working metaphor: On every level, from the ephemeral strata of the emotions and energetic field, to the most substantial levels of bone, flesh, and blood, we are mesh, not wall – so many hard and soft parts constellated as systems within a larger porous unit (the body). Further, the world beyond us is as porous and permeable as the world within us. This realization has compelled me to create works that unravel, dissolve, and open into the space beyond them, and to adorn the space around my sculptures in such a way that it, too, is rendered porous, imbued with agency, and set in relationship to my discrete forms.⁹

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**Im-pressed: Every Thing I Touch, Touches Back**

With our skin-coated systems of hard and soft, tangible and intangible, dynamic and infinitely porous parts and sub-systems, then, we project into the world, while the world extends itself toward us. Nothing is exempt from being touched or from touching. The gravity of this truth can change (even save) one’s life.

During excruciatingly lonely moments, I have realized to my astonishment that everything I touch touches back. At times that I was so lonely I felt myself almost disappearing, the smooth, cool sensation of blank paper against the dominant pad of my pointer finger, or the powdery-then-squishy feel of a marshmallow hitting my tongue and being punctured by my teeth, revealed themselves as acts of salvation. This paper, this marshmallow, they reminded me of my own boundaries – of the fact of my substance – and proved to my doubting mind my ability to engage with the world. When I look to scientific notions like string theory, for which there is much mathematical and theoretical evidence, such human-to-paper and human-to-marshmallow encounters (incidental from a certain taxonomic perspective) seem all the more moving. At my core’s core, I may be the very same as that white page, that white puff, or as the light skating my fingertips as I type. No one and no thing can be alone in a universe such as this.

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**Bound: Codex of Clots, Syntax of Knaps**

Knots seem to be the way of things, and all knots start as threads. Individual strands seem a more apt signifier for phenomena than discrete points – for phenomena unfold, and rarely keep to themselves. Knots recur in my work, in physical and symbolic form alike. Actual knots (made of ceramic) can be found in Speaking of Love, Thing Temple, and The Mystery of Levity. Their formation involves a process of rolling out a thin, tapering coil from soft clay, then looping it, threading its ends through successive loops, and gently pulling these ends until they disappear

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⁹ See, for example, Figures 2, 6, and 9.
into the knot as a whole, causing the form to become an apparently infinite material riddle. Snarled threads (knots of a sort) occur in the frayed fabric covering the body of Unicornis, and tangles can be found at the jumbled intersections of suspended green string above Speaking of Love. Verbal knots (such as the leap, at the end of the poem, String Theory, from “strand and gap” to “agape”) punctuate the poems which accompany these sculptural works under the collective title of Words within the Work (wiggle veil verse).

Empirically, the more closely I attempt to follow a tangled thread to its source, or the more I try to examine a strand in isolation from the complications of its context, the more tangles and puzzles I seem to uncover in my search for absolute clarity and order. It seems to me we are intended to make friends with knots. The notion of a world in which each hair could be expected to remain obediently in place, in which, for every word, one could locate a clear, fixed definition, and in which one could hope to find finite answers to questions about our most deeply felt, most baffling experiences (love, death, individuation), appears, at best, a naïve illusion. While we humans seem preoccupied by an interest in the discrete – relegating knots to the realm of troublesome-phenomena-with-which-to-be-reckoned – the very preponderance of knots suggests they are integral to the nature of things. Any reliable dictionary challenges knot’s branding as purely pejorative, telling us a knot is not untidy tangle only, but also mooring device (eminently functional), small grouping of elements (free of qualitative implications), and enduring bond (as in marriage – the sort of knot one would hope, in the best cases, never to unravel).

A-wake: Tragedy as Invitation

When I was six years old, I saw a Vietnamese-American teenage boy crushed to death by a speeding car. Not long after, a dear uncle in his early 30s fell mysteriously ill, encountered a cruel series of medical mishaps and physical degenerations, and, after 6 years of decline (still

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undiagnosed), finally died improbably during low-risk stomach surgery. Around the same time, an incredibly loving aunt—a doting mother of two—drowned mysteriously during a family vacation on the Hudson River. Several years later, my grandmother fell dead at 63 of a heart attack, just following my parents’ painful separation after 18 years of marriage. Soon after, my grandfather died in his early sixties of cancer. As a toddler, my younger brother developed a crippling seizure disorder, and spent the following 10 years of his life in and out of children’s hospitals, subject to rounds of experimental treatments including heavy drugs, and forced to wear a hockey helmet (socially crippling) to prevent traumatic head injuries during seizures. Starting with my brother’s epilepsy (when I was 3 or 4), every few years or so, a major tragedy—often unforeseen—befell my family. Without realizing it, I learned to view life as a sort of misleading spectacle unfolding within a faulty box. The spectacle would proceed in a seemingly normal fashion for a while, and then suddenly, without warning, the box’s bottom—barely set in place by tape, string, or discarded wads of chewing gum, it would seem—would give way. I learned to shun complacency. I practiced a sort of pained vigilance instead.

We are sacred and fragile beings. Our fragility makes the ecstasy and bliss we can experience even more sacred, impossibly sweet—outrageous gifts. The accident, it would seem, is that we can find happiness, enjoy substantial and healthy pleasure, or know peace at all. In most cases, an alchemical transformation by way of the fire of loss, grief, and struggle is necessary to enable us to access joy, love, and peace at their deepest levels. This irreversible transformation—much like the process of quartz inversion by which clay becomes hardened into ceramic—yields, in the best cases, an ability to love the world without attachment or expectation.

Figure 6: Yes, my stupid former smoking habit: Detail and installation view of Dead Ends (on having sought respiratory pleasure to quell pulmonary pangs).

*Every thing* matters. *Every thing* is sacred. Instead of letting this drive me mad (like if I were a Jainist\(^\text{11}\), sweeping constantly ahead of my feet to remove any beings I may otherwise crush) or letting it keep me from fully participating in the world (through a monastic sort of renunciation), I want to put this belief into action by participating more fully and more joyfully in the world. By

\(^{11}\) Jainists are followers of Jainism, an Indian religious tradition dating to at least the 9th Century BC, which regards every being as sacred and every action as responsible for its agent’s ever-unfolding karma.
embracing, affirming, and looking squarely at what-is: Yes, death; Yes, jealously and deceit; Yes, tiny generosities; Yes, distraction; Yes, hemorrhoids; Yes, birthday cake; Yes, juice fasts; Yes, dog shit on the bottom of your sneaker; Yes, the first flowers of spring; Yes, miscarriage; Yes, a newborn baby; Yes, bankruptcy; Yes, carelessness; Yes, fear and grasping; Yes, the ability to grow beyond fear and grasping; Yes, regression; Yes, transcendence; Yes, regression following transcendence; Yes, Mardi Gras; Yes, Sunday mass; Yes, projecting our own troubling aspects onto others; Yes, telling someone to fuck off; Yes, being humble enough to apologize; Yes, being kind to someone who makes our life difficult; Yes, being too tired to extend such kindness; Yes, a gluttonous trip to the shopping mall; Yes, donating really nice clothes to the thrift store; Yes, junk mail. These are my mantras.

The work Wiggle Veil (the only answer) is a mesh quilt of such mantras, handwritten in permanent marker upon 140 or so delicate ceramic tiles. The tiles are light and dark: light terms are written in gold (associated in the Christian tradition with Heaven), and heavy terms are written in silver (associated with Earth). This curtain of polar affirmations hangs from a large, three-dimensional ceramic “YES”, glazed canary yellow. These affirmations are unequivocal, and they gain power through the devotional act of being materially invoked.

Figure 7: Full and detail views of Wiggle Veil (the only answer), featuring affirmations of light and dark things written by the artist and by participants in silver and gold sharpie on ceramic slabs and added, one by one, to the “veil.”

See Figure 7.
Be-spoken: Worlds within a Word

We desperately long to understand one another, in order to connect and to make comparative sense of our respective experiences. I am interested in the nobility of this longing, as well as the veils, walls, slippery slopes, and chasms we encounter in our movements towards one another (as well as ourselves) in this regard. Rather than clarity itself, the very mysteries and contradictions (knots of a sort) that we encounter in our search for mutual understanding could be the answers we seek. An embrace of these puzzling gifts and a willingness to be present with them without judgment or demand seem necessary to permit movement toward the heart of any meaningful riddle – most of all, love’s Celtic knot.

My own investigation of love begins with a nearly-extinct Greek word. Amongst works of art which hinge on a word, there are those which broadcast the word in a deliberately blatant way in order, simply, to call into question our associations with the word itself.13 Speaking of Love (Sappho’s last word)14, however, proposes the ancient Greek word glukuprikon12 as but a formal and conceptual framework for an investigation of broader scope: namely, a meditation on, and tribute to, love’s inherent complexity. This investigation is enacted through material and compositional choices intended to suggest analogical relationships, beginning with the use of sturdy earthenware letter blocks which spell out G-L-U-K-U-P-I-R-I-K-O-N, and are intimately skinned by a layer of fleshly low-fire porcelain clay.

Chief among the work’s lengthy and loaded material roster are sweet, sticky sugar; vivid, piquant Chartreuse liqueur; and the earth-toned, waxy-smelling cocktail mixer, bitters. These materials fill a series of glass vials that hang from the letter boxes, as well as three ceramic troughs positioned on the floor beneath the boxes and vials. Sugar, Chartreuse, and bitters are offered as admitted analogous approximations which invite the senses’ participation in contemplation of the human urge to understand love’s sweetness (represented by sugar), its bite (represented by bitters), and its alchemical blend of the two into something transcendent and intoxicating (denoted by Chartreuse liqueur).

By employing materials which possess not only a visual presence, but a multi-sensory appeal, I seek to elicit a visceral reaction from the viewer, so that the full range of the viewer’s senses (not only sight, but smell, taste, touch, even sound) might be engaged even before (or as) her intellect comes into play. I arrive at these visceral signifiers through an intuitive and associative process that begins with a question like, “What substance is sweet the way love’s sweetness is sweet?”, and is followed by a stream of freely-associated responses (cupcakes, frosting, cotton candy, marshmallows, sugar-water…sugar). An option feels right when it not only meets the associative requirements, but provides promising visual and/or compositional possibilities. As such, sugar and sugar cubes were chosen as stand-ins for love’s ambrosial aspects both because they offer the most elemental shorthand for “sweetness”, and because their glistening white granules bear resemblance to the glistening pinkish-white porcelain skin of the letter blocks on which Speaking of Love hinges. Similarly, the mixer bitters was chosen to stand in for love’s less savory

13 Such as Barbara Kruger’s Untitled (You Invest in the DIVINITY of the Masterpiece), in which the confrontational text of its subtitle veils the iconic image of God’s creation of Man from Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel.
14 See Figures 5, 8, 9, and 10.
15 Whose mysterious meaning is rendered doubly elusive by its lack of exact equivalent in English, with “sweetbitter” being Classical scholar and poet Ann Carson’s closest attempt at translation.
component because its name, color, and smell all evoke unpleasant or at least pungent
associations, and because its orangey-brown color relates visually to the color of the letter boxes’
inner earthenware structure.

Through a less direct associative gesture, the liqueur Chartreuse was chosen here as a stand-in
for love in all its complexity, based on a leap of poetic logic inspired by the word glukuprikon
itself. An exposition of this logic must begin with a question: What worlds lay within a word, and
what mysteries can the apparent clarity of a name conceal? The ancient poetess Sappho
invented glukuprikon in an attempt to give love a fitting descriptor – one capable of articulating
not only love’s duality (sweet/bitter), but its complexity (something more and decidedly other
than just these parts). To do its nature justice, any substance that might be used to signify the
totality of the experience of love must be an alchemically blended concoction whose end result
obeys and, indeed, transforms its constituent ingredients.

The liqueur Chartreuse has been made by Carthusian monks in the French Alps for roughly four
centuries. Purported to contain 130 herbal and floral ingredients, its recipe is said to be known to
three monks only, each of whom keeps one-third of its ingredients secret under a vow of silence.
Even after its many components are distilled and combined, Chartreuse must be aged for five
years in oak barrels in order to reach maturity. The shocking yellow-green, syrupy sweet and
herbaceous-tasting liquid that results from this involved process has a simultaneously bracing
and intoxicating effect when consumed. Its vivid syrup is potent, precious, enigmatic, and
irreproducible. The intensity of its color, moreover, – simultaneously beautiful and alarming –
renders it impossible to ignore. Given its formidable nature and history, then, this substance
struck me as a fitting (if less than obvious) material approximation for love.
And yet, even given the fact that Sappho managed to create a word capable of describing love’s elusive nature, this naming act – an attempt at clarity in the face of mystery – has been subsumed by the instability of meaning from culture to culture and age to age. We have no direct translation in modern English for Sappho’s ancient invention. Even a scholar such as Ann Carson, who has devoted her career to the understanding and translation of Classical Greek texts, can only offer an approximation (“sweetbitter”) for this quality Sappho once managed to elucidate in her own (now inert) tongue.  

16

Figure 9: Speaking of Love (Sappho’s last word), installation view.

And so, my construction Speaking of Love (Sappho’s last word) aims not to answer, but rather to explore and to honor the complexity of the previously-stated question (asked more specifically now): “What worlds lay within the word glukuprikon, and what mysteries can the apparent clarity of this name for love conceal?” The work attempts to unpack the word itself by capturing some of its qualities and relationships through material, structural, and compositional choices, while simultaneously gesturing to its layered and ultimately enigmatic nature. The distance between the subtly shimmering, cracking and peeling porcelain skin stretched over the outside of each letter block, for example, and the rectilinear red substructure beneath yields sanguine-toned shadows, a feeling of precariousness, and a sense of tension indicative of forces at odds (sweetness and bitterness, seduction and heartbreak, etc.)

16 Classical scholar and poet Ann Carson devotes her book Eros: the Bittersweet to an exploration of the elusive nature of love as well as the delicate relationship between love and language. She devotes an entire chapter to glukuprikon, speaking around that-which-cannot-quite-be-named in solidarity with Sappho’s etymological pursuit of Eros.
As an embedded gesture towards love’s inherent riddle, a white ceramic knot\textsuperscript{17} rests within each letter-cube, anchoring a white thread that flows from a tiny hole in the bottom of each box, eventually suspending alternating vials of sugar, bitters, and Chartreuse. These slender threads – on their descent toward three skinned ceramic troughs containing love’s alchemical signifiers (sugar /Chartreuse/bitters, as previously explicated) – wind around and around white nails inserted into the wall to spell \textit{glukuprikon}’s approximate English translation in a shadowy-white whisper. Floor-bound piles of sugar and sugar cubes (marked upon close inspection by scattered drops of bitters) frame this site, while chartreuse-colored string falls in tangled catenary arcs above it all, studded also by sugar cubes. The site appeals to the senses as much as the intellect, positing this strange word (\textit{glukuprikon}) and its referent (love) as layered phenomena worthy of teasing out and ultimately resistant to definitive understanding.

\textbf{Netted: Unicorn as Collaboration}

While I did not initially understand the impulse that drove me to construct a unicorn\textsuperscript{18} as part of this body of work, the unmistakable urge to do so arose as an initially quiet yet persistent one, and developed into something akin to a dare. I had been a “unicorn magnet” for years, attracting unicorn tchotchke as gifts from friends without ever explicitly declaring myself a collector. As I examined my growing compulsion to construct a life-sized unicorn, however, I began to understand my affinity for the beast as related to my affinity for rainbows, hearts, balloons, and

\textsuperscript{17} See Figure 5.
\textsuperscript{18} See Figures 11 and 12.
the color canary yellow: all of these things, it seemed, symbolized that which is unabashedly joyful, virtuous, and tender. To display, much less to create, such things seemed to suggest an almost-absurd optimism and faith in the good. I noted what profound respect and solidarity I’d always experienced upon encountering others\textsuperscript{19} willing to profess childlike open-heartedness and unequivocal optimism. The thought of building a massive material tribute to notions that might otherwise be dismissed as naive or laughable kitschy, came to seem at once comical and sacred.

Two things were clear from the beginning of my endeavor: any material manifestation of this mythical creature would A) have to be life-sized (trading the scale of kitsch for the scale of something almost-believably real), and B) have to achieve a material presence akin to an apparition. I wanted to create a form which almost transcended its materiality – something that seemed caught in the process of shimmering into, or perhaps just fading out of, sight. I knew I had the perfect material – a low-fire porcelain paperclay that could be fashioned as thin as skin, became translucent when fired, and, when over-fired, could be made to melt and slump in a manner reminiscent of fondant or fresh taffy.

In keeping with my “scaffolding and skin” approach, I first constructed a life-sized, horse-head-shaped scaffolding from ceramic coils no thicker than a finger. Eyes made from hollow clay balls were inserted into the sockets, and lidded by tatters of porcelain clay as wispy and softly wrinkled as torn scraps of gauze. I continued to “skin” the scaffolded bust with such porcelain tatters, taking care to leave ample negative space within the composition. The mane was fashioned by folding thin slabs of porcelain in half repeatedly, then stuffing them with their layered sides visible into openings along the back of the head. The lynch-pin – the horn itself – was built separately and similarly to the mane, by folding tiny bits of porcelain into increasingly

\textsuperscript{19} Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh, Kundalini Yoga instructor Ana Brett, or creativity coach and author Susan Ariel Rainbow Kennedy (a.k.a. SARK), for example.
narrow squares, skewering them onto a spear of fire-safe wire, and treating them with enough glaze to cause desired slumping.

When I opened the kiln post-firing, I found the bust possessed even more of a sense of flesh disappearing or decaying, yet frozen in time, than I’d thought possible. When the horn was epoxied in place and when the bust caught the late-afternoon sunlight, the form seemed activated by an energy beyond what I’d built into it. As images from my exhibition belie, a body was ultimately constructed for the unicorn, as well, from a combination of wood, steel, string, and fabric. I took care to build as much porosity, or translucency, into the body as I could manage while ensuring it would support the weight of the bust.

![Figure 12: Installation view of Unicornis, with shadows, sugar, rainbow twine, and ceramic clouds.](image)

Sometimes you make the work in order to figure out why you need to make it – in order, in other words, to understand why an image or form is compelling you to give birth to it. I think I learned the most about this unicorn through others’ responses to it. Of all the layered imagery and concepts embedded in the other works in my thesis exhibition, the unicorn seems to have had the most direct appeal while requiring the least explication. As viewers encountered the piece, I’d notice a look of fascination and recognition in their eyes – a look which made me feel as though we all harbored some secret, archetypal connection to this symbol. Perhaps this connection arises from a need to believe in things that are beyond us, things that amaze and inspire us.

It was as though, in the “net” of my ceramic scaffolding, I caught this mythical beast in the flesh, and put its light-filled body on display as proof to all of us that enchanted things exist, and merit our conscious consideration. Above all, I consider this work a collaboration – with the kiln, with chance, with light and shadow, and with every viewer generous enough to devote time to an encounter with it, for their encounters taught me that a work’s reception can be part of its creation. I am grateful to have left space in the work for others’ visions to help shape it.
Polarized: An Alchemical Poetics

My color choices, and their material anchors, describe the poles of an aesthetic and conceptual alchemy in which the base matter is comprised of two classes: nothingness (signified by white), and lowly or burdensome things (signified by black or dark gray\textsuperscript{20}). The hoped-for gold of this alchemical poetics can best be described as an \textit{everything-ness}, in which all that is challenging, all that has been lost, and all that is hoped for merge to form an entity so potent, it must express itself as a radiant, nearly-blinding yellow.

While the dark matter found at the lowly end of my chromatic-alchemical spectrum may comply with traditional alchemical notions of nigredo\textsuperscript{21}, the white matter also found there begs some explanation. Best evinced by the fondant\textsuperscript{22}-like, gently shimmering ceramic bust of \textit{Unicornis}, and the sugary glazed surface of \textit{The Mystery of Levity}, \textit{white} (as base matter in my ontology) stands in for ghosts and apparitions – for that which is either absent, imagined, or otherwise transcendent of material bounds (an admitted – and intentional – contradiction, since this transcendence of materiality is expressed through matter). The porcelain-like clay draped in tatters over the scaffolding of the bust and comprising the mane of \textit{Unicornis} enacts the material transformation of which it speaks, arrested -- through the magic of the firing process – in a dissolution towards nothingness. These skin-like drips and slumping folds act as visceral

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image}
\caption{The white and black matter comprising the “nigredo” end of my alchemical spectrum, as exemplified by these details of \textit{The Mystery of Levity}’s ghostly heart-cage, and \textit{Dead Ends}’ ashen black sand laced with salt.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{20} The black sand fashioned in heart-shaped form surrounding – and worked into the surface of – \textit{Dead Ends (on having sought respiratory pleasure to quell pulmonary pangs)}, and by dark clay tiles in \textit{Wiggle Veil (the only answer)}, for example.

\textsuperscript{21} Alchemy’s excremental dregs – whose very humility as a starting point in a quest for gold renders the creation of the elusive chrysopoeia all the more miraculous.

\textsuperscript{22} A gently glistening, opaque white dough made of sugar, water, and gelatin and used chiefly for decorating cakes (esp. wedding cakes); distinguished by its white, creamy consistency and soft, rounded edges.
At the apex of my alchemical poetics, vivid canary yellow functions – in works such as *Wiggle Veil (the only answer)* and *Thing Temple (love needs objects)* – as signifier for and material embodiment of sublimation, transcendence, and surrender. This highly saturated color appears to vibrate when met directly with the eyes, and this sense of vibration elicits (for me) a quickening, warming sensation that begins in the belly and heart centers, then radiates outward toward the head and extremities. I associate this experience with the feelings of wholehearted release and elevation that arise when one manages to accept the complexity of *what-is, as-is,* and, subsequently, as one begins to *dissolve into* this acceptance. This can be felt as a sort of visceral carbonation, as previously held tensions (the physical manifestation of a divided consciousness) yield to a new, all-permeating openness. As such, yellow (in my lexicon) is the color of that which is fully *in* and of *the world* – the gold born from the chrysopoeia of an undifferentiating love for *all* things: light, dark, and murky alike.

![Figure 14: Representing the apex of my alchemical spectrum are the canary yellow “Y-E-S” of *Wiggle Veil*, and the bottom and top layers of *Thing Temple*.](image)

**Dowsed: Influence as Divining Rod**

Perhaps this is what it means to count any source as an influence: some quality which we encounter in a given influential source enables us to recognize something central and emergent within ourselves. The closer we draw to this source, the more precisely *it* points to our own

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23 In alchemy, the transformative fire that yields gold; also used to signify the alchemical apex itself.
embedded gems. Like a y-shaped dowsing stick in the hands of an occult master, an influence can fill us with a clearer sense of the nature and locus of our own creative ore, and can instill in us an urgency to excavate, refine, and give meaningful form to this precious matter.

I respond to work which seems to give voice to something beyond its own materiality and beyond the facts of its maker’s personal story alone. Indirect meaning compels me, by proposing disjunctions and by leaving room for the viewer’s own improvisatory process of making sense. Contemporary American installation artist Ann Hamilton has long served as my patron artistic saint. Hamilton manages to give voice to troubling, contradictory, and forgotten layers of cultural history through choices of site, material, form, and performative action on the part of her live attendants. She synthesizes these complex elements into works which achieve extraordinary elegance and intimacy even at their epic scale. My Wiggle Veil work shares (in the humblest of ways) two qualities above all with Hamilton’s: it holds a space for ghosts, and asserts a belief in physical matter’s ability to carry content by virtue of its nature and material history – aspects which can be drawn out, but not fabricated, by the artist’s hand.

Contemporary African-American found-object sculptor Leonardo Drew joins Hamilton in possessing a profound sensitivity to the inherent history of objects and materials. Drew roams his urban neighborhood on bicycle, collecting the dregs of 21st Century American life, then orchestrates these loaded raw materials into large scale, highly formalist works which, in their muted earth tones, blacks and whites, and in their often gridded organization, both memorialize the human refuse of which they are often made, and coax this refuse to speak in whispers, as a shaman might do in some sacred ceremony. Drew’s ability to craft symphonies from lowly materials requires a belief in their value, and a sort of second sight, in which the mind’s eye magically reconfigures the apparent, glimpsing (through an awareness of its past use, present decay, and future transformation from nothing to something new) its infinite potentiality. My own reverential use of found objects, my incorporation of elemental materials like salt, sugar,

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24 The work of “Young British Artist” Tracy Emin has long served as my most reviled example of confessional art. Her work makes a trumped-up spectacle of the intimate details of her personal life precisely because, it would seem, such shameless exposure succeeds at shocking audiences and garnering press and sales. Works such as 1998’s My Bed exemplify, for me, art that fails to transcend the personal details of its maker’s life. The work lacks artistry in my estimation, and leaves me feeling stifled as a viewer by its heavy-handed, one-to-one relationships between form and content.

25 Such as whitecloth (sited at the Aldridge Museum in Ridgefield, CT, in 1999), in which a piece of white cloth, not much larger than a handkerchief, moves throughout a two-story building by virtue of its attachment to a rope rigged to a hidden pulley system running throughout building. The building as a whole is sparsely staged with a few choice objects (in one room, a wooden table is covered by a white cloth which appears to levitate just above the table’s surface, and is, in fact, suspended by air being forced through imperceptible holes drilled into the legs and surface of the table). A viewer visiting this building would roam curiously through its apparently mostly-empty rooms, until suddenly she’d feel a rush of air, hear a faint “swoosh”—perhaps even catch a glimpse of a white “ghost” rushing by in her peripheral vision. This single ghostly handkerchief, and its twin cloth hovering over the aforementioned table, refer to Hamilton’s research into the Puritan and Spiritualist religious heritages associated with the building’s history itself, and with that particular part of New England (Ridgefield, CT and surrounding region).

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26 In works such as Thing Temple.
and gold powder, and my formal and conceptual address of the notion of decay, all speak to the strong affinity I feel with Drew’s work.

The delicate jagged edges of Drew’s stacks of compressed fabric and paper in *Number 56* (1996), like the reiterating black-wax-coated flower petals in contemporary American sculptor Petah Coyne’s *Untitled #1163 (Homeland)* (2002-2004), were some of the first works to alert my eyes to their own fascination with slender, irregularly-edged forms grouped to foreground the interplay between matter and nothingness. Through such groupings, both Drew and Coyne employ a sense of micro-scaled plenum within a unified macro system, a characteristic I associate with another beloved influence – Jain cosmological diagrams.

Jainists over the centuries have gone to eye-boggling schematic lengths to represent just how the universe’s multitude of constituent parts fit into its larger systems. Jain cosmological diagrams are marked by a dynamic and highly saturated color palette, and by an impressive density of minute imagistic, textual, and numeric detail orchestrated into larger systems in the shape of wheels, grids, and (my favorite) an abstracted human body (*the cosmic man*) as the shape of the Universe (*loka*). These graphics’ ecstatic color schemes and underlying compulsion to describe a cyclical and timeless universe in which every single element bears accounting, have empowered my own instincts that *every thing* matters, and that color possesses an agency of its own. The hypnotic effect produced by sitting in contemplation of these extraordinary depictions activates a unified awareness of large and small, while eliciting both heightened alertness and increased calm. I aim to create work which offers the viewer such an experience – one in which visual complexity resolves into a salient super-unity.

**Context-you-all-eyes-ed: Keeping Company**

If a thesis exhibition marks one’s launch into the ranks of contemporary makers and thinkers, the debutante is well-advised to know her tribe – those preoccupied by similar concerns and against whose more well-established work the debutante’s is likely to be compared. My work shares a formal and conceptual kinship with a mostly-younger crop of American ceramic-based mixed media sculptors and installation and performance artists who take impermanence and interconnections as their central themes. These artists address their content through precarious structures or situations which either directly incorporate entropy and transformation, or reference these phenomena indirectly through form or action.

I posit contemporary American ceramic and mixed media artist Jeanne Quinn as the imperial auntie of this tribe. She has managed to parlay Ceramic art’s tradition of exquisite craftsmanship and devotion to a central object, into more complex works that verge on environments and bear the conceptual weight of ontological riddles. Formally, Quinn’s ability to explode the singular

27 In four out of six works in this show: *Unicornis, Speaking of Love, Dead Ends*, and *Thing Temple*.
28 Coyne is known for her often large-scale, visceral sculptural works involving Catholic iconography (statues of Mother Mary, in particular), large groupings of synthetic flowers covered in black or white wax, and hair, which speak more broadly to the intertwined sacredness and brevity of human life, and the mysteries we rely upon to ease the suffering of loss.
29 See note 11 above.
30 *Me*, in this case.
object into a kaleidoscopic microcosm of tiny, expertly-crafted parts (often ceramic) which work in concert with supporting two- and three-dimensional materials, has blazed a trail for subsequent mixed-media works made up numerous parts to be nonetheless taken seriously as cohesive works of Ceramic art. Quinn earns her right to combine disparate media within singular works by achieving a seamless interplay between various materials, dimensions, and light effects, a quality for which my own work The Mystery of Levity strives. Through her titles, Quinn calls attention to language and history as vehicles capable of calling assumptions into question and of connecting her own compositions to larger thematic conversations. In my own work, references to the Egyptian goddess Maat and to language’s instability (through the use of the ancient Greek glukuprikon as conceptual puzzle and formal conceit) share a resonance with Quinn’s wordplay.

In terms of a family tree, I see my work as first cousins with the fragmented, delicate ceramic and mixed media works of Julia Haft-Candell and Benjamin DeMott (both recent graduates of MFA programs). Their skeletal forms, which bear evidence of entropy, fracture, and mending, relate to my own Unicornis, Dead Ends, and The Mystery of Levity. Their artist statements express an interest in charting processes of change and describe their work as an effort to make friends with the tensions and ambiguities of human experience, in ways that relate directly to my own statement, and its expanded referents (detailed within this paper).

The work of ceramic sculptor and architectural interventionist Linda Sormin stands as a sort of older cousin to my own work and that of Haft-Candell and DeMott. Sormin uses salvaged materials as well as her own formed and reformed ceramic bits to construct precarious forms that verge just on the edge of collapse. She invites collaboration as further relinquishment of authorial control, and speaks in her statement of an interest in the treasures to be found in that slender territory that begins just where things start to transform due to instability, and ends just before they give way to ruin.

I think of the work of J.J. McCracken as the “cool older sister” to mine – that sister one longs to emulate, but whose hipness and worldliness exceed one’s own, more limited experience. While her performative installations are more ambitious in scope, more breathtaking in their use of

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31 Like abstractly shaped fields of color painted onto the wall in her Rorschach Curtain series.
32 Such as straight pins inserted into the wall as suspension mechanisms for her delicate ceramic forms in the same series.
33 Like my own Speaking of Love.
34 Particularly in a work like 2010’s All That Is Still Melts into Air.
35 In The Mystery of Levity (Maat’s measure).
36 In Speaking of Love (Sappho’s last word).
37 In works like Haft-Candell’s Hull (Dahlia), fired porcelain and terracotta, glaze, epoxy, cotton, silk, polyester, thread, paper, ink, metal, wire, pins, 65”x 37”x 28”, 2011; and DeMott’s Elegy Umbrella, terracotta, paint, glitter, glue, altered music boxes, dimensions variable, 2008.
38 Such as Salvage, of 2008, a room-wide installation crafted over the course of three weeks with residents of New Orleans and incorporating materials salvaged from the wreckage of Hurricane Katrina, which devastated the city in late August, 2005. Installed at Louisiana Artworks, New Orleans, Louisiana, with the help of myself and several other colleagues from LSU.
39 Such as 2009-10’s Hunger: Philadelphia, a three-phase project designed to address the global issue of hunger using the local site of Philadelphia. It involved a performance piece (staged at Philadelphia’s Painted Bride Art Center) in which a cast of women saturated and covered with tan clay ate unfired clay casts of vegetables from a banquet table situated within a clay-covered tableau. The clay used was mined from a local quarry, and was
ceramic materials to transform space and enact processes of change, and more dynamic in their use of live participants to execute repetitive actions, relationships exist between our respective palettes, themes, and interest in the body and the senses as potent vehicles for our related content. In her own expansive conceptualization of ceramic materials’ possible applications, and in her *work*’s broad appeal to the senses, its implicit sense of connection to shared themes of the human experience, and in the palpable sense of urgent authenticity that fills her works with a fierce beauty, I find aspects of my own ambition mirrored back magnified.

**Wrapped: To Make a Long Story Short**

This text trades the brevity that is possible when positing one’s work as the result of foregone conclusions, for the authentic complexity that follows from acknowledging an interconnected series of bottomless questions as the work’s starting point. How can we understand and find models for the interconnectedness of our own experience with that of *every other entity* (living and non living, solid and seemingly immaterial) in the world around us? How do we anchor ourselves when enmeshed in such a layered infinitude? How can we walk bravely into encounters with love, even though we know its nature will always ultimately confound us? How can we affirm our tragedies and losses as gifts, while squarely acknowledging the scars they leave behind? What might a wholehearted embrace of the sublime, the painful, and the utterly mundane look and feel like, and how might such a stance inform our lives? How can such questions *themselves* be befriended and cherished as much for what they withhold as for their tease-able threads?

These are the questions this body of work seeks to engage, to embody, and to celebrate. Underlying the exhibition as a whole is the notion that giving material form to these questions emboldens one’s investigation of them, empowers any clarity gained in their pursuit, and most aptly honors their renitent mysteries. The works in question (and the reflections that follow in this document) aim to elevate the lowly, to affirm both light and dark, and to hold a space for the unknown, the unseen, and for the enchanted. The hope is that the viewer/reader will feel invited to revel in these mysteries every bit as much as do the work and the words themselves.

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reclaimed following the performance, in part to create plates, which were drawn on by children at a local homeless shelter. These plates were fired and sold for $100 each, with proceeds going to construct a greenhouse at the shelter, so local homeless families could enjoy fresh, nutritious food. In addition to making an ethical and practical impact, images from the performance itself are stunning.
APPENDIX

Words within the Work: Wiggle Veil Verse

1. Owed (*Ode*) to a Butt

2. what to do when you are about to disappear

3. Palimpsest

4. String Theory

5. Chrysopoeia

6. Chrysopoeia

7. Artist’s Statement
Owed (*Ode*) to a Butt

When the surrogates surpass the *sir’s i’ve got (zed’s an empty lot),
soothing *aches – breathing b_r_e_e_k_s_s_...* 

…be-
gets re-
grets;

D r i
n k emptiness s t r a i g h t;

s t o k *nobler* s m o k e...
_(or kindle heart’s revoke)_.
what to do when you are about to disappear:

1. *jump* (the ground will greet you upon descent, its other-ness confirming your substance)

2. *sing* (the sound of your voice will remind you You are source, and not void only)

3. *eat* (the march of liquid or solid across lip and tongue, through throat and stomach, will prove you are a site)

4. *look* (when the eye falls upon something stirring, you will know your inner contours: that which has inner, has outer – all of which suggests a thing-ness)

5. *breathe* (you are a container, and a container is not nothing)

6. *touch* (_anything_: *everything* touches back)
Palimpsest

There were “* * *“, until I thought that’s all life was: one clean-up
after another: ‘again, I scrape’ (the Vietnamese boy’s body off the speeding car’s
underbelly)

A father’s mickey mouse tee shirt can only accept so much
blood before, glutted,
it wrings; (true)

Now it’s been years since death; calamities

*come* more
(casually)

Their wreckage can be *managed* more
wreckers to reach,
(for instants)

Ground’s indelible stains – veiled
by new wrecks, reined by rains – show us death
(doesn’t kill us.)

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40 In Ancient Rome, a writing surface (papyrus, wax-coated tablet, etc.) that was written on once then scraped clean and reused, suggesting both the traces of previous inscriptions, and the moment of scraping away (and what is lost in this act). The word *palimpsest* derives from the Greek roots *palin* ("again") and *psao* ("I scrape").
String Theory

All resolves into tangles.
Tease ‘em out or don’t;
order (oh tenuous aberration)
defers in
time to
entropy.

Clarity’s naut – at best, scant:
separate, straighten, gather,
clamp – still hair dreads
a straight line,
napping into
lumps mothers wield
shears to conquer (outdone
by tangles’ tease). The urge
to unhinge
a pattern what
cannot be
understood –
the compulsion to
eradicate an infestation
forged by friction and fidgets –
these surge blind in a
mother’s bones (– her
instinct
to pick nits, 
if nits were knots).

Be-headed with entanglements, we
orderlies anticipate antagonism (brushes brandished, 
scissors ripe to splice) – unsuspecting how encoded 
languages may long for 
cradling in oral 
cavities – may be agitating 
for unlocking, some 
invocation…Perhaps 
the more resistant to 
persistent fingers 
the many-looped 
lump, the more insistently its 
seams seep hints 
of a hidden tongue’s 
existence (a 
codex of 
clots, perhaps? 
syntax of knaps?)…

As urges to unfurl renitent 
tendrils swell, gaps between 
tangible strands lodge 
demands as well (Can we 
unwind emptiness? Does
unbinding a snarled strand

only etch the speck of a

starting point? Is it,
in fact, an infinity we

must extricate – one

which renders \textit{strand} and \textit{gap}

tagape?)
Chrysopoeia

Through ethers of sweetlight\(^{41}\), till they thought they’d catch flame, they came:
one egged the other, its yolk on them, both.

The evening’s mellow goose caught it, the brash azaleas were brassed by it;
green became a blaze – still green but stranged.

Their world was changed; this fleeting shift spilled into their circuit like gold ink let down a sink-pipe (-a gold so briefly ripe);
they made haste to keep time with its fey tide.

One arch ached, the other: no complaint; on they paced till flame tamed to hushed periwinkle, punctured by new-moon’s sickle (on the scant edge of its cycle).

Gold goes black, and then it’s back to the fire-pit, with faith it can be worked in reverse: nigredo\(^{42}\)

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\(^{41}\) Southern colloquial term for the otherworldly glow cast by a radiant sunset; particularly a function of summer sunsets.

\(^{42}\) See note 21 above.
cum *chrysopoeia*\(^{43}\); hope hangs on such hooks

\(^{43}\) See note 23 above.
we humans have this grasping-bone: we’d like to freeze what we love – capture it under a bell jar in its most idyllic state, as though this slender temporal slice were summarily representative of the thing’s nature. all the while, it’s impermanence that makes the now sparkle. pry a finger beneath the skin of a thing, and touch the ecstasy of its perpetual transformation.

when you’ve stood by, ice cream cone in hand, as a boy’s warm body was crushed by a speeding car, when you’ve watched a beloved uncle suffer years of mysterious physical degeneration, when you’ve ached with a loneliness so deep you were certain it rendered you resonant (like a Tibetan singing bowl), it seems the real accident is that substantial joy, peace, love, even breath, can inhabit us at all. they arrive as graces; when they go, they leave shimmering traces. likewise, when you’ve caught your nephew’s fresh, fragile, and noble body as it emerged from between your sister’s thighs, when you’ve immersed your naked body in salty water under a full moon in a moment when air, water, and skin seemed indistinguishable, and when the sweet pink lace of spun sugar has dissolved into blissful nothingness upon your pink tongue, it becomes clear that we inhabit a “both/and” universe of sublime contradictions. you learn to love the totality of experience as a rich and mysterious gift you will never fully open.

my spiritual practice, and my play, is to construct ceramic monuments to the perfection of what-is, and to the nobility of what is most potential within us. i erect scaffolding structures to foreground processes of change, and to serve as nets for processes of imagining. light and shadow bathe and breathe these skeletons of their own accord. often, i drape these structures myself in ceramic skin, and subject them to just-a-bit-too-much heat to create a decaying material ballet, frozen in time by the magic of quartz inversion. a choreographer of tatters, i affirm the majesty of the lowly, the imperfection of perfection, the perfection of imperfection, and the enchantedness of the bottomlessness of mystery. i affirm the faculty of touch, for it is our primary means of identifying the threshold at which the world interpenetrates us, and we, the world (it proves to us we're real). i leave space for you to fill in the blanks, while reminding you the ghosts need room to dance, too.
Adrienne Lynch was born on the cusp of dawn in the wake of Niagara Falls, New York’s infamous “Blizzard of ’77.” Things she recalls from her nomadic childhood include: cicada carcasses clinging to the tree outside the kitchen window, too-small home grown watermelons too-sweet as candy, a neighbor girl’s torn toenail, the strange feelings grown-ups gave her, and how much her terrier mutt, Harvey, loved chasing cars and rolling in dead fish. Adrienne spent much of her childhood and teen years performing in plays, writing and drawing, listening closely to music, and tacking more photos of rock musician Michael Stipe to her bedroom wall. The growth spurts of her young adulthood never quite seemed to align with cultural rubrics for this phase of life: she tried college, tried hiking, tried altruism, tried not to try. She earned a bachelor of fine arts in ceramics from The University of Georgia in 2005. She earned a master of fine arts in studio art from Louisiana State University in 2011. She loves to teach. She is compelled to construct vehicles for visual and verbal communication. She aspires to do work she loves. She aspires to eradicate (her own, at least) student loan debt. She aspires to soften in the face of uncomfortable feelings and to greet the unknown with a “Welcome...”, a cup of coffee, and a fresh roll of yellow art tape.