

# **The Seeds of Morrow**

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Master of Fine Arts

with a

Major in Art

in the

College of Graduate Studies

University of Idaho

by

Kelsey LuAnn Kegel Grafton

Major Professor: Stacy Isenbarger, MFA

Committee Members: Delphine Keim, MFA; Ruby Fulton, DMA

Department Administrator: Gregory Turner-Rahman, PhD

May 2021

## Authorization to Submit Thesis

This thesis of Kelsey LuAnn Kegel Grafton, submitted for the degree of Master of Fine Art with a Major in Art and titled "The Seeds of Morrow," has been reviewed in final form. Permission, as indicated by the signatures and dates below, is now granted to submit final copies to the College of Graduate Studies for approval.

Major Professor: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Stacy Isenbarger, MFA

Committee Members: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Delphine Keim, MFA

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Ruby Fulton, DMA

Department Administrator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Gregory Turner-Rahman, PhD

## **Abstract**

This thesis is a reflective overview of my artistic research and practice within which I discuss my multi-disciplinary body of work consisting of sculptural ceramics, found object installations, video, and live performance. Reflections on our interconnected relationship with our natural resources, our sense of home, and the impacts of our origins are major themes in my work. Various visual metaphors and iconography are used to reinforce deeper meanings. This work created in pursuit of my MFA culminated in my Thesis Exhibition, "*The Seeds of Morrow*" shown in the Prichard Gallery in Spring 2021.

## **Acknowledgements**

My Esteemed Graduate Committee:

Major Professor, Stacy Isenbarger, and members, Delphine Keim and Ruby Fulton, DMA

Practicum Professors: Aaron Johnson, Roger Rowley

Art & Design Faculty: Val Carter, Casey Doyle, Johanna Gosse, Dave Gottwald, Lauren McCleary,  
Gregory Turner-Rahman

Mentors and Outside Educators: Maggi Fuhriman, Kassie Smith, Linda Scott, Rob McKirdie,  
Deon Douglass, Chelsea Cordova, John Patterson

Cornish College of the Arts

Lewis-Clark State College Center for Arts & History

Recreation & Well Being, Graduate Assistantship: Marketing & Graphics

Marie Haasch Whitesel Scholarship

Idaho Commission on the Arts,

## Dedication

To my dear children, *thank you for your patience and perseverance. You are my guiding stars. The sacrifices you made to help me fulfill this lifelong goal will joyfully be repaid helping you to fulfill yours.*

To my parents, *thank you for leading by example.*

To my sisters, *thank you for being the glue that keeps us all together.*

To my ancestors, *thank you for your legacy. You are not forgotten.*

To my friends, *thank you for supporting and embracing me as I am.*

To my foes, *thank you for making me resilient.*

To Delphine Keim, *thank you for taking the word “just” out of my vocabulary.*

To Ruby Fulton, *thank you for always meeting me where I am and amplifying my voice.*

To Stacy Isenbarger, *thank you for being my spirit guide and reminding me that I’m a “bad-ass.”  
I have grown so much because of your dedication to teaching excellence.*

To G0d, *thank you for your perfect timing and right connections that lead me to my perfect path.*

## Table of Contents

Authorization to Submit Thesis .....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Dedication.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vi
List of Figures.....	vii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: The Seeds of Morrow.....	2
Chapter 2: The Call of the Morrow .....	5
Chapter 3: The Roots of Morrow.....	7
Chapter 4: Finding Home .....	10
Chapter 5: Alternative Media Plein Air.....	13
Chapter 6: Building the Morrow.....	15
Chapter 7: The Garden.....	18
Chapter 8: Turmoil .....	22
Chapter 9: Nostalgia .....	24
Chapter 10: Among the Trees of Morrow .....	26
Chapter 11: The Morrow .....	28
Chapter 12: The Gatherer .....	30
Chapter 13: Nest and Nesting.....	32
Chapter 14: Resonating.....	34
Chapter 15: The Echoes.....	37
Chapter 16: Becoming .....	40
Chapter 17: The Protector.....	43
Chapter 18: Cultivating Resilience.....	48
Chapter 19: Embracing the Morrow .....	50
Literature Cited.....	51

## List of Figures

Figure 1.1. <i>Forbidden Fruit: Vices &amp; Virtues</i> , Ceramic, found object, gilding, confession, shame, remorse, acceptance, 15"×15"×12", 2020 .....	3
Figure 3.1. <i>Kegel Family Homestead: Tool Shed</i> , Oil on wood panel, 8"×8", 2018 Plein Air .....	7
Figure 3.2. Bisque fired hand-harvested earthenware clay, sourced from Kegel Homestead, 7"×5", 2020 .....	8
Figure 3.3. <i>Remnant: The Remains</i> , Ceramic, 14.5"×11.5"×6.5", 2020.....	9
Figure 4.1. Pictured: Works by Gina Freuen, <i>Trailing Vine Teapot</i> , Soda Fired Porcelain, 11"×12"×5", 2016; <i>Trailing Vine (Detail)</i> Diptych, Soda Fired Porcelain with Porcelain Attachments, 24"×24"×8", 2016.....	10
Figure 4.2. <i>Portrait of Peace</i> , Mixed Media, 20"×20", 2004.....	11
Figure 4.3. <i>The Guardian Series: Apis</i> , Mixed Media, 28"×15"×5", 2018; Figure 10.3. <i>Aura</i> , Mixed Media, 29"×15"×5", 2019; <i>Aquarius</i> , Mixed Media, 28"×15"×5", 2018.....	12
Figure 5.1. Alternative Media Plein Air, Work in Progress, 2020 .....	13
Figure 5.2. Plein Air Paintings: <i>Moscow Farmers Market: Through the Rain</i> , Oil on wood, 10"×10", 2020; <i>Krassely Hay Barn</i> , Oil on panel, 4"×4", 2019 .....	14
Figure 5.3. <i>Going Home</i> , Hand-Harvested Earthenware Clay & Found Object, 1.5" to 3.5" each, 2020 Plein Air.....	14
Figure 6.1. <i>Morphosis: The Trade</i> , Ceramic, 5"×4"×2.5", 2019.....	15
Figure 6.2. <i>Moldering: The Remains</i> , ceramic and organic materials, 7"×4"×7", 2021 .....	17
Figure 7.1. <i>First Taste</i> , Ceramic, approx. 2.5"×2.5"×2.5" per pc, 2020 .....	18
Figure 7.2. <i>Forbidden Fruit: Tree of Knowledge of Good &amp; Evil</i> , ceramic, choices, conviction, 15"×15"×12", 2020.....	19
Figure 7.3. <i>Thirst: Consequence</i> , Ceramic, pigmented wax, organic materials, and caution, 36"×8"×6", 2021 .....	20
Figure 7.4. <i>I w l nt tk knowledge fr grntd.</i> , Remorse, white chalk, archival book tape, Richards Topical Encyclopedia, time and repentance, 2019 .....	21
Figure 8.1. <i>Lost</i> , 14"×9"×7", 2019; <i>Endless Retreat</i> , Mixed Media, 10"×8.25"×10", 2019 .....	22
Figure 8.2. Carbonized wood sculptures by Italian artist Aron Dementz, 2011 .....	23
Figure 9.1. <i>Nostalgia</i> , Mixed media installation, video and sound, 9'×7'×7', 2019.....	24
Figure 9.2. <i>Descendant Vase</i> , Ceramic and mixed media, 8"×9"×16.25", 2020.....	25
Figure 10.1. <i>Mum</i> , Ceramic, pigmented wax, organic material, 9.5"×5"×21", 2021 .....	26

Figure 10.2. <i>The Veiled Virgin</i> , Carrara Marble, Unknown artist (possibly Strazza), c.1850s; <i>Mum: Work in Progress</i> , Dundee Red clay, 2021 .....	27
Figure 11.1. <i>Evolve: The Morrow</i> , Ceramic, pigmented wax and organic material, 16"×14"×3", 2021 .....	28
Figure 11.2. Liz Lescault, <i>Sporeadoc</i> , Ceramic wall piece, 14"×15"; 2019, <i>Cracked</i> , Ceramic, 12"×15"×15"; 2012, <i>Medusa</i> , 11"×13", 2018.....	29
Figure 12.1. <i>Findings Series</i> , Mixed Media, 2019 .....	30
Figure 12.2. <i>Mar-Oak Tree</i> , Mixed-media, 4'×4'×11.5', 2019.....	31
Figure 13.1. <i>The Nest</i> by Nils-Udo, earth, stones, silver birch, grass, 1978, Germany.....	32
Figure 14.1. <i>The Mar-Oak Tree</i> , Live Performance, Prichard Art Gallery, 2019 .....	34
Figure 14.2. Margaret Noble, <i>Head in the Sand</i> , 2015 .....	35
Figure 15.1. <i>The Rivers' Plea</i> , 5:01, 2020.....	37
Figure 16.1. Detail of <i>Becoming</i> .....	41
Figure 16.2. <i>Becoming</i> , Ceramic, organic materials, and found objects, 8.3'×3'×5', 2021.....	42
Figure 17.1. <i>Work in Progress, The Protector</i> .....	45
Figure 17.2. <i>The Protector</i> , Ceramic and found object, 4"×3"×5.5", 2020.....	46
Figure 18.1. <i>Resilience</i> , wood, fire and found object, 11.5"×9"×9", 2019.....	48
Figure 18.2. Waste picked up by fifth graders as they walked to the bus. ....	49



## Introduction

### *Sprouting the Seeds of Morrow*

Over the past few years, I have been tilling the fields of discovery through personal reflection and acceptance, combined with artistic practice and response. I planted seeds for understanding myself and for growing my artistic research practice. These seeds have been sown in fertile soil and are primed to reap the fruits of continued growth.

Response to experience in place — specific locations where I find resonance — is a consistent source of inspiration for my work. It leads me through a process of observation, meditation, and gathering which prepares me to create through making, movement, and vocalization.

My openness to this response, engaged with a rigorous artistic practice and material investigation has culminated into a multi-disciplinary body of work consisting of sculptural ceramics with found object installations, video, and live performance. Visual metaphor and iconography allow access to the deeper meaning of the work which reflects my values, concerns, and hopes for this world.

The resulting thesis exhibition, *The Seeds of Morrow*, weaves these pieces together, considering further an allegory of interconnected relationships with our natural resources. Trees and waters are personified to lend a kindred voice in hopes that we might see ourselves tied to their fate. If we fail as stewards of our collective ecosystem, we will all suffer the consequences. Performative response to the work has been offered and distilled into echoes throughout the space at the Prichard Art Gallery where this work is exhibited.

I will continue to bask in inspiration, gather, observe, and respond, again. As a multi-disciplinary creative practitioner, I will toil in the continued hope of positive change that will lead to balance and regeneration for all living beings.

## Chapter 1: The Seeds of Morrow

*We can make a difference, one choice, one action at a time.*

I find myself wanting to contend with complex stories regarding our dealings with the environment. I consider how all living things are connected through an equal dependence on the elements and how we all must depend on each other to maintain harmony and balance to sustain them, and in turn, sustain ourselves. Our relationship with the Earth and the other living beings that share its resources is highly problematic. The balance has been broken and we humans, as stewards of this Earth, must take corrective action to regain it.

I am a visual storyteller, an illustrator. I use my making to spread awareness about complex contemporary issues that prevent us from achieving unity and balance with our natural environment. Through my work, I invite open conversation offering a new perspective in hopes of stirring conviction, but not to pass judgment. My work and its message are an attempt to scream at the top of my lungs just quiet enough for people not to run away, but loud enough for them to take notice, and become more reflective.

As I reflect on engagement with my art practice, I often consider how I can create pauses just long enough for viewers to draw their own connections and become more rooted in their understanding of nature's offering to support us and our neglect as stewards of the earth. How do I strike a chord with my audience that helps better link cause and effect to the role they play in the collective devastation to our shared environment? I ask them to see their own impacts in a way that is inviting enough for them to reflect, reconsider, and reground.

Along with these guiding questions, I have spent my time working toward my MFA focused on understanding myself more deeply as a person and a creator. In this document I look back at the seeds I have planted in my past, and how I've thinned and weeded out what is not necessary so I can become more focused and intentional with my actions and resources. I am freeing up resources to make a more fertile space to nurture and tend to my children, my family, my community, my education, my creation, and my future. Through this thinning process, I will reap higher yields of the fruits I value most.

For example, with the work *Forbidden Fruits: Vices & Virtues*, I began to reflect on and shed my past to move forward and become my best me, acknowledging myself as a mother, artist, woman and

being of this earth. I became self-partnered and self-reliant. I overcame my fears and stepped into a world of unknowns; better rooted, I have now situated myself to grow at an exponential rate.



Figure 1.1. *Forbidden Fruit: Vices & Virtues*, Ceramic, found object, gilding, confession, shame, remorse, acceptance, 15"×15"×12", 2020

Through *Forbidden Fruits: Vices & Virtues*, I explored my temptations, secrets, sins, and regrets. I unearthed the transgressions of my past and typed my confession onto labels assigning each to an apple. Then I put them on display for everyone to see. They sit within a vanity case with a mirror to perform or signify further reflection. Each fruit placed inside the container directly reflects how the corresponding confession played out in my life. Many temptations are left whole, some tasted, while others have been devoured to their core. The tags tied to each fruit show a different level of wear, correlating to the amount of time that has passed since the transgression. The results have been impactful. By revealing unsettling details of my past, I allow others to peer inside and see for themselves that they are not the only ones with burdens, secrets, and regrets.

Originally *Vices & Virtues* was not intended to be such a deep dive into my personal trespasses, but a general portrait of our collective sins. Instinct provoked me to share more intense moments and expose my hidden past through an iterative act of confession. Pounding out each heavy letter of each word on a typewriter was cathartic. Allowing others to open the case and read the labels tied to apples creates an intimate conversation, placing the viewer in an active role with the choice to judge or not judge. Their interaction bears witness to my confession and releases me. The process and the resulting work became an unintended gift of healing.

The reservoir of knowledge gleaned through self-analysis led to self-realization. I have shed these past burdens, so I can move forward more openly in an effort to discover a truer self as a contributing

human of this earth. This effort has culminated into a body of work connecting one lesson learned to the next, weaving together a chorus of pieces into a plot that unfolds as a rich dialogue through visual imagery.

## Chapter 2: The Call of the Morrow

### *A summons to a way of life*

It is hard to put into words the “call”<sup>11</sup> that I feel to create, but it is important to note that there is a spiritual practice surrounding my making. I sit and meditate or wander in a state of awareness and gratitude. In my active, intentional observation, I am drawn to respond as a maker. It manifests in performance, prose, or song released into the air to become air, captured by a simple recording device to wait in silence until released again. Other times it is a call to plein air, with my ever-ready easel stowed in the back of my Forester, or the raw clay in my studio.

An empathetic feeling, with undertones of sadness or despair, joy, or even enlightenment accompanies these “calls.” These feelings are passing and often trigger a revelation of thought that guides my process. It feels like I am tapping into a collective consciousness or qi, the “life force” or “energy flow” described in traditional Chinese culture.

Through this channeled energy of connectedness, my process of making shifts from a fixed originating intention to a more guided response. Invitations to create evolve and are reinforced by objects that cross my path at a specific moment of contemplation. I take these discoveries as confirmation that I am being gifted a piece to a larger puzzle and these tokens are destined for a new place within my assembled work. This intuitive process was present in the creation of my works such as *Becoming* (fig. 16.2), *Mar-Oak Tree* (fig. 12.2), *Mum* (fig. 10.1) and *Vices & Virtutes* (fig. 1.1).

There is usually a truth or revelation I embed in the work that I hope will serve as a catalyst for conversation, inspire an awakening, or simply educate through the story I illustrate. I pose a mix of elements in ways meant to suggest a history or a rooted relationship with place. These entwined forms present themselves with an openness similar to the freedom I cherish in my own seeking. My aim is for these soft echoes—of loss, heartache, joy—to resonate with those drawn to them.

Much of my work discussed in this document will also carry an echo of the process or materiality of prior work, but any lineage found was not made by a forced design process or formulaic timeline. Instead, this work is an ever-evolving searching, a collection of attempts to seek, gather, and then make witness to the messages unveiled to me in the creation of each piece. I am acutely aware the

---

<sup>11</sup> Call: 1. A cry made as a summons to attract someone’s attention. 2. A strong urge toward a particular way of life or career; a vocation.

connections others will make to the inevitable results of my gathering and layering processes will be of their own distillation through their personal experiences and perspective.

### Chapter 3: The Roots of Morrow

*I am living in the cambium<sup>2</sup>, the space of life*

I am constantly dissecting the clues to the past with investigations into my own family histories, and even further back, into biblical and cultural origin stories. Much like dendrochronology<sup>3</sup>, I am reaching back into my deepest core, sampling the rings of the past, our history. As our past, the wood is no longer living, but it stands in evidence of the life that came before. It shapes and supports who we are today. This investigation has helped me appreciate that the choices we make now in our lifetimes will shape the future for those who follow.



Figure 3.1. *Kegel Family Homestead: Tool Shed*, Oil on wood panel, 8"×8", 2018 Plein Air

Spending time at the Kegel Family homestead, in Colville, WA, about 20 miles south of the Canadian border, brings me back to my roots and keeps me connected to my personal lineage. Pictured above is

---

<sup>2</sup> Cambium: The only part of the tree trunk that is living. It rests between the bark and wood.

<sup>3</sup> Dendrochronology: the science or technique of dating events, environmental change, and archaeological artifacts by using the characteristic patterns of annual growth rings in timber and tree trunks.

a plein air painting of the tool shed painted one early morning before the sun crested the hill and my kids remain sleeping in a tent, on the last full weekend in July, during our annual family reunion.

Last year when we gathered, I stayed behind to allow my two children and me to run feral in the blessed wilderness. I hand-harvested a green-tinted clay from the edge of the creek on the property. I spent hours sifting through the grog. I let it dry and slaked it back to life. I captured impressions of the seven varieties of trees that currently stand in the Kegel Family Forest and pulled textures from the last remaining structures on the land. These borrowed textures were bisque fired, turning them into a rich terracotta from the high iron content in the earthenware clay.

I have tried many times to capture the homestead. I have painted the decaying structures and landmarks in plein air several times. To harvest the earth, and push and pull impressions of textures from these fallen structures captured the wrinkles of age, wearing deeper with each passing season. It became an act of reverence, transforming the earth into a physical snapshot of time that I can see, touch, hold, and cherish.

Integrating impressions from specific places into my works gifts me with the residue of experiences and feelings from the place and time that the marks were pulled, which elevates the making process for me. The objects I create with these impressions resonate beyond their intention, into the personal.



Figure 3.2. Bisque fired hand-harvested earthenware clay, sourced from Kegel Homestead, 7"×5", 2020

I captured the knot pictured above from the weathered wood to the right of the left-leaning pole on the *Tool Shed*, about eye level. I used it as a stamp impressed into Dundee Red Clay to form the belly button of my piece *The Protector* (fig. 17.2). The knot of the breast of both *Remnant* (fig. 3.3) and



*The Protector* was pulled from the ruins of the oldest structure built on the homestead. The cabin served as my great-grandparents first home, which was built from the trees cleared from the fields so they could farm the land. The cabin now lays in ruins, overgrown by hop vines planted over a century ago.

These specific marks pulled from the homestead provide even deeper resonance because they reflect a place that I am deeply connected with. It is inseparable from who I am. It is the place that laid the roots of my gratitude and of the values I am reflecting in the body of work I create.



Figure 3.3. *Remnant: The Remains*, Ceramic, 14.5"×11.5"×6.5", 2020

*Remnant: The Remains* reminds me of my grandma, not just because of the connection with the place. It reminds me of her battle with breast cancer. Her grave marker lays just a few feet below the knot that was pulled to form the breast. I am reminded of her loss, and I feel nostalgia when I look at the simple beauty of this piece which reflects the nurturing female form, the humanity, and the mortality.

I capture these textures to honor and preserve our family legacy so it can be passed along to future generations. The pieces I make from them become the placeholder and echoes of forgotten knowledge, connections, and history.

## Chapter 4: Finding Home

*It has memory.*



Figure 4.1. Pictured: Works by Gina Freuen, *Trailing Vine Teapot*, Soda Fired Porcelain, 11"×12"×5", 2016; *Trailing Vine (Detail) Diptych*, Soda Fired Porcelain with Porcelain Attachments, 24"×24"×8", 2016

One of the more personally impactful exhibits that I hosted as an exhibit coordinator at Lewis-Clark State College Center for Arts & History was *Gina Freuen: The Trailing Vine*. Freuen is a Pacific Northwest artist and educator from the Spokane, WA area. Her high-fired atmospheric ceramic work weaves together textures like patch-work quilts and combines wheel throwing and hand-building techniques with porcelain. Through an artist demonstration she presented at the Center, I learned the basics of her techniques. Combining what I learned through her approach and drawing upon my basic ceramic knowledge from high school, I started working with clay again. As soon as my hands were in the clay, I felt at home. I began to gather objects for their texture and started to develop my own visual language through imprinting. This process laid the groundwork for using found objects as molds, such as showcased in my *Guardian Series* (fig. 4.3), where I cast objects and reassembled textures into mosaics on the back of old kitchen drawers.

I have always been drawn to texture and its play with light and shadow. By working a surface, I can elicit a sense of a specific environment and ask a viewer to recall their own tactile memories. My first works of art that I created in response to my time spent in Africa was an attempt to capture the rich textures and patinas I experienced there. My main medium at that time was painting, and so I built up textures using cloth and Fix-it-All, a spackling compound, on particle board to then apply paint.



Figure 4.2. *Portrait of Peace*, Mixed Media, 20"×20", 2004



Figure 4.3. *The Guardian Series: Apis*, Mixed Media, 28"×15"×5", 2018; Figure 10.3. *Aura*, Mixed Media, 29"×15"×5", 2019; *Aquarius*, Mixed Media, 28"×15"×5", 2018

*The Guardian Series* was my first attempt at personifying the elements. As an illustrator, I recognize that the human figure is the most relatable form. Our eyes find eyes and we create empathetic connections. By depicting the elements with human characteristics, I hoped to connect our empathy to their struggles and plight. *The Guardian Series* represents the guardians of our natural resources and life-sustaining beings of the earth. Represented are the land and the bees, the air and the trees, the waters and our needs. The figures themselves are enigmatic when it comes to race, though all of them are emblematic of women who are known as the caregivers and nurturers of humankind. The gestures of the figures are subtle but are intended to show sorrow, pain, and conviction and are meant to shame the viewer in a Greta Thunberg <sup>4</sup>way.

There is something about the natural characteristics of clay, such as memory, tactility, and malleability that I missed during the making of this series. Clay is a medium that is open, expansive, expressive, and challenging in ways that allow me to be part of a conversation with the medium as I create works about what I am most passionate about. This is the reason for my return to the medium in my later works.

---

<sup>4</sup> Greta Thunberg: A Swedish environmental activist who started a movement at 16 years old by skipping school to challenge leaders to take action on climate change. Her actions began a movement all around the world. She is direct and shames leaders into action.

## Chapter 5: Alternative Media Plein Air

*I have recognized and embraced my intrinsic response to materials and place.*

The Earth's rich and rewarding ecosystems—its histories, offerings, and inviting textures—all inspire me to create. Through the materials I explore in my work, I want to express personal moments with concepts of home to broad, shared experiences with the environment and its crossroads with humanity.

Often an experience will-spark my curiosity and I beg for further tactile discovery. With heightened awareness, I enter a gathering phase exploring material possibilities to create new connections to reveal stories, purpose, or meaning.



Figure 5.1. Alternative Media Plein Air, Work in Progress, 2020

One example of this was when sitting on a rocky shore on Lake Coeur d'Alene. Inspired by texture, landscape, and my inherent desire to document it creatively, I explored a new way of observing and consider my sense of place. Captivated by the sound of lapping waters and the dancing reflection of the sun, I considered my sensibilities toward form and how fixed states on a surface can reference time. Gathering material from the site, I set to work on created in a way that paralleled my understanding as a practicing plein air artist. I found a rock and molded its imprint into the wet clay and then began emulating the textures I saw around me. The rhythm of the water, and the rise and fall of the distant mountains. In this experience, it was the object's touch that drew my attention, and it was the clay I recently hand-harvested and processed from the homestead that yielded my most intrinsic response.



Figure 5.2. Plein Air Paintings: *Moscow Farmers Market: Through the Rain*, Oil on wood, 10"×10", 2020; *Krassely Hay Barn*, Oil on panel, 4"×4", 2019

Working onsite in this way was similar to the experiences I have had with Plein air painting, a consistent part of my artistic practice for the past seven years. Regardless of my surroundings, whether I find myself on the side of a rural road painting an old barn, or in the middle of the bustle of the Moscow Farmers Market, I become steeped in observation, becoming acutely aware of my surroundings.

However, working clay in a Plein air approach was in many ways unique, offering me a new way to reflect on my process. It was a tactile experience, I scouted for textures that drew me in and borrowed from objects gathered from the area. I applied the cool moist clay to the sun-warmed rocks. Working the clay, pressing it, poking it with sticks found within arms' reach, I could feel it desiccating and holding form.



Figure 5.3. *Going Home*, Hand-Harvested Earthenware Clay & Found Object, 1.5" to 3.5" each, 2020 Plein Air

A storyline unfolds: Three-legged beings *Going Home*, part rock, part earth, taking the journey to the sea. The first piece leading the way has reached its goal, taking on characteristics of the waters.

## Chapter 6: Building the Morrow

*Once you have gained the ability to see and explore materials, it is time to add personal expression.*

*After all, your life, your passion, your time, and your dedication to craft, is personal.*



Figure 6.1. *Morphosis: The Trade*, Ceramic, 5"×4"×2.5", 2019

Similar to the unfolding stories of rainforests being exchanged for cattle ranching, *Morphosis* is an allegory of unequal exchange trading natural habitats and living things for something that will last beyond lifetimes but without lasting purpose. The bottom element within this piece is referencing the cholla cactus skeleton, a hardy and adaptive dessert plant of the American Southwest known for its endurance to survive ranging environmental conditions. Here, its skeleton merges with a remnant of a tire, a symbol of fossil fuels and waste, which is what we exchange for its natural environment.

Working in clay in this way allows me to take pieces I have gathered, such as the tire and the cholla cactus skeleton, and weave them together as a solitary form. I can manipulate them in a way I cannot with the original objects. The ability to evolve textures and colors and make choices about scale, movement, and intention open the doors to endless possibilities.

It took me eight hours to carve this piece. In this time of making and observing I realized that all of the larger holes had corresponding holes opposite to them. I began to see the geometry of the symmetrical structure where I once saw randomness. I honored this, embracing the finite pores and subtle details in my sculpting of the piece with dedicated accuracy.

The wasp's nest embedded in the hollow of *Morphosis*<sup>5</sup> is a symbol of control over your life choices and circumstances, as many believe in some African cultures. The wasp also signifies fertility, evolution, progress, development, and order.

I was pleased with my use of Rutile and Cobalt oxides to tone the bisque ware and create a smoother transition between the combining forms while also avoiding unintended glaze reactions. This also added a successful layer of depth and complexity to the glazes I placed over them. For its color complexity, I chose an Amaco Chai Matte Shino mid-fire glaze for the cholla cactus. Deeper pools turned cream where raised elements transitioned between warm oranges and browns.

Though I was extremely happy, and even proud of the resulting color after firing, I was disappointed in the loss of information from the hours of detailed carving. In future work, I began to solve this issue by experimenting with oxides, mason stains, and glaze washes, used in *Moldering* (fig. 6.2), allowing me to preserve the textures and honor the hours of work I dedicate to the sculpting.

As an experimental test, I took a hollow form I created in Dundee Red clay when experimenting with textures, creating round protrusions and pushing the elasticity of the clay until it began to pull and crack, I used my needle tool to form pits and valleys until it finally felt like something that either could be or once was a living thing. It sat on my shelf after bisque fire for months before I needed it as a test tile. It was a risk, but it was a piece worth risking. I mixed the Weathered Bronze glaze and brushed it on. It pooled in the deep crevices and on the convex curves I sponged it off, leaving only traces of the glaze. Once fired, it revealed the nature of the glaze I began to understand and control as

---

<sup>5</sup> Morphosis: The manner in which an organism or any of its parts changes form or undergoes development



an asset for the first time. It was revisited for this specific property in *Becoming* (fig. 16.2) and *The Protector* (fig. 17.2).

The experimental piece felt like a decaying cactus, which led me to nest a broken piece of a cholla cactus skeleton within its hollow. A few broom tines we plucked and plugged into a few of the larger needed holes and *Moldering*<sup>6</sup> was born.



Figure 6.2. *Moldering: The Remains*, ceramic and organic materials, 7"×4"×7", 2021

This unexpected chorus member bridged gaps and fit snugly into my unveiling storyline. *Moldering* continued the conversation, warning that even the most adaptive living things will struggle to survive in their swiftly changing natural habitat. If the hardy, adaptive, and resilient cholla cactus can't survive, what will?

The cholla cactus skeleton and organic materials juxtaposed to the ceramic materials serve as a memento mori<sup>7</sup>, a warning or reminder of death, in reference to our own mortality and the impending demise of the ecosystem as we know it.

---

<sup>6</sup> Mold·er /'mōldər/ verb: slowly decay or disintegrate, especially because of neglect.

<sup>7</sup>Memento Mori: A Latin phrase that translates to "remember you must die." A memento mori is something that serves as a reminder or warning of death and mortality.

## Chapter 7: The Garden

*Oh, the Lord is good to me, and so I thank the Lord for giving me the things I need:*

*THE SUN*

*THE RAIN*

*THE APPLE SEEDS*

*Oh, the Lord is good to me<sup>8</sup>.*

*First Taste* highlights various successes I've had in experimentation with new ceramic techniques. By creating an easy-to-replicate apple from a two-part mold, I had a form I could create variations of easily. With my growing collection of apples, I investigated a number of glazes, which resulted in the cacophony of colors held in the vanity case of *Forbidden Fruits: Vices & Virtues*. The Weathered Bronze exterior was unique and felt like a rare, lost variety. In many ways it is beautiful and enticing yet inedible, reinforced by the green hue which holds an undertone of "Mr. Yuck" warning. I continued experimenting with the casting further by taking a bite out of one apple. This developed into a three-part mold, and finally to a four-part mold when I ate it to the core.



Figure 7.1. *First Taste*, Ceramic, approx. 2.5"×2.5"×2.5" per pc, 2020

What I love most about this series is the conversation between the pieces. They ask the viewer to consider what are their forbidden fruits. What are their temptations? Do they walk away or desire to sample a taste? Perhaps, they have tried it and liked it, and are going back for more. These connections become provocative and emotive reflecting a myriad of feelings evoked after a first taste of forbidden fruit. The desire for more, the remorse, the doubt, the longing.

---

<sup>8</sup> Jonny Apple Seed song by Anonyms

I continued to explore the iconography of the most globally recognized apple icons and began playing with the concept that the biblical Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil has a contemporary counterpart, in the form of the Apple computer, as a contemporary conduit to unfettered knowledge, both good and evil.



Figure 7.2. *Forbidden Fruit: Tree of Knowledge of Good & Evil*, ceramic, choices, conviction, 15"×15"×12", 2020

In 1979 Macintosh's Apple logo was developed as a tribute to Sir Isaac Newton. This was before the internet was born in 1983. The designer added a bite to the apple to make it more recognizable as an apple. As an unintended consequence of this design choice, it resembles an icon of Eve's first bite of forbidden fruit.

*Forbidden Fruit: Tree of Knowledge of Good & Evil* draws parallels between the metaphoric apple from Eden's Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and the self-fulfilling prophecy of the Macintosh Apple logo. In the biblical garden, Adam and Eve lived in harmony with the land. When Eve took the bite their relationship with the land was altered. The land was cursed to grow "thorns and thistles" and Adam must labor to till the soil. A parallel consequence of our indulgent consumption of technology and our modern-day conveniences is the imbalance we see playing out in our ecosystem.

In this scenario, we are all Adam, and we are all Eve and collectively to blame for our current struggle. Consequently, we work to avoid and outsmart the lasting inconvenience of our sentence to

labor and till the soil. In our modern situation, as consumers of information and the land, we use technology to genetically alter seeds to become resilient, and we use chemicals to kill pests that might feed on the spoils of our labor. There must be a better way. I wish for my work to be in conversation with these ideas.



Figure 7.3. *Thirst: Consequence*, Ceramic, pigmented wax, organic materials, and caution, 36"×8"×6", 2021

*Thirst* is a reflection of our problematic excessive consumption. A tumbleweed, as a stand-in for dry and barren landscapes, stands tall like a tree. Roots, which typically rest just below ground level, reach down, searching for water. This reflects the dwindling water table and unpalatable surface waters. The ceramic exterior is woven like the roots of a tree into a heart that cradles the scene, a reminder of our protectors. Wasp nests are embedded above and below the scene as a reminder that this circumstance is a result of choices we have made and a reminder that we still have choices we can make.

The hope is that along the way we learn our lessons. We may fail, but in that failure, we could learn a better way. *I wl nt tk knowledge fr grntd* is a performative installation that speaks to this hope. I wrote these words in white chalk on a blackboard like a school kid being punished for misbehavior. I sat in an old wooden school desk with archival book tape pasting back together volumes of Richard's Topical Encyclopedia that I had regrettably sawn in threes.

There are years of knowledge packed in books and entire cultures of knowledge that have been lost over time. We tend to look at past knowledge as old news, but perhaps there is something we should hold onto and honor. As our contemporary knowledge feeders are run by artificially intelligent

algorithms, feeding information for likes and clicks. They are not looking out for our best interest, so how do we know we are being fed the right and full information? We take it as truth just because it rises to the top of the search engine. We take books and the once hard-earned knowledge for granted.



Figure 7.4. *I w l nt tk knowledge fr grntd.*, Remorse, white chalk, archival book tape, Richards Topical Encyclopedia, time and repentance, 2019

The vowels have been dropped, except in the word knowledge, to represent the knowledge lost and the knowledge yet to be found. Our ability to still read it and understand represents our shorthanded complacency.

## Chapter 8: Turmoil

*Sometimes the unknown is a safer place to be.*

This multi-media series of works is based on personal experience but is not self-portraiture. Instead, when assembling it, I was reflecting on my connections to many close to me who have dealt with loss or a sense of dislocation. The house form framing each mixed-media construction suggests the ideals and constraints of domesticity. *Lost* is a commentary on the residual weight from relationships haunted by mental disease, the weathering of the soul bound by emotional conflict, and the struggle to find a better way. The rock is a symbol of the weight of responsibility. It is tied to an un-swinging hinge, reflecting a feeling of being trapped and bound by the weight of the situation. *Endless Retreat* is a reflection on the debilitating spiral of PTSD, the loss of innocence, and the search for relief. The brokenness within each form reveals the flaws and reality of the lives lived within.



Figure 8.1. *Lost*, 14"×9"×7", 2019; *Endless Retreat*, Mixed Media, 10"×8.25"×10", 2019

The burning of *Endless Retreat* and *Resilience* was inspired by Italian wood sculptor, Aron Demetz. His figurative work drew me in through its textures and process. His results were evocative, and I had to try. The experiment was captivating, as fire often is. I documented moments of the process through photographs and video. It was controlled yet left room for unexpected results. I could let it smolder into ashes or determine the right moment to say “when.”

These experiments and their textural aesthetic influenced my emulating burnt wood with clay, as seen in my larger figurative works, *The Protector* and *Becoming*, and in more subtle ways on *Mum* and *Remnant*.



Figure 8.2. Carbonized wood sculptures by Italian artist Aron Dementz, 2011

## Chapter 9: Nostalgia

*We deposit memories into placeholders, such as trinkets, songs, sounds, smells, or old furniture that was with us “when.”*

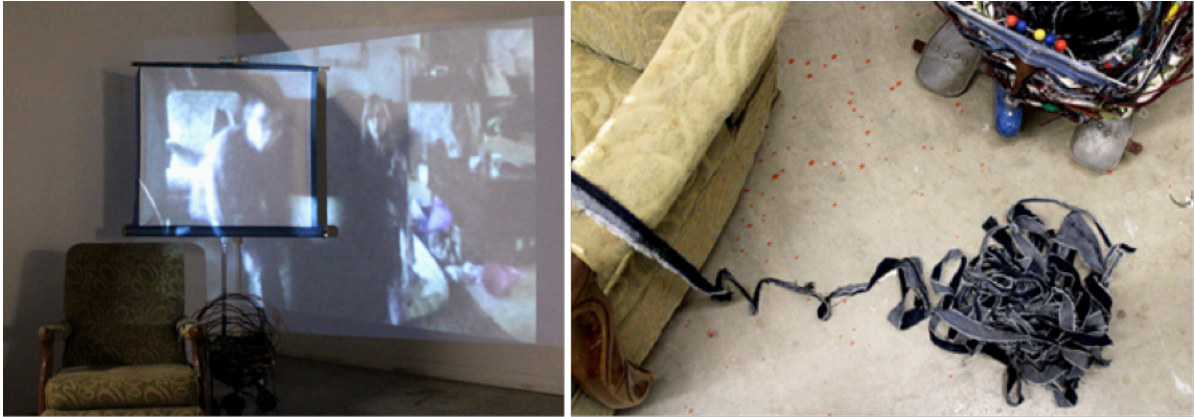


Figure 9.1. *Nostalgia*, Mixed media installation, video and sound, 9'x7'x7', 2019

*Nostalgia* contains my grandmother's old rocking chair, a place I sat many times as a child. I wove a nesting basket from torn fabric and willow branches onto a mid-century baby stroller fitted with a projection screen from the same era. The image that plays is a home movie of my children, projected and re-recorded with my children speaking over the top of their play, creating layers of past and present. Through ambient noise and manipulation, the resulting sound mimics fading echoes of the past. My children make shadow puppets in the projection while their past selves pop in and out of the screen.

The armchair in *Nostalgia* remains central in the frame bearing witness to the past. This chair is a placeholder for memories of my childhood in my grandma's house, and now my children, from years ago in my house. It cradles me once again and bears witness to the present moment as I sit and tare fabric, representing time while singing an old hymn of gratitude.





Figure 9.2. *Descendant Vase*, Ceramic and mixed media, 8"×9"×16.25", 2020

The personal knowledge of our ancestors is only three generations deep. Over time, knowledge is lost and a new (history, memory, era, legend, etc.) begins. *Descendant Vase* reflects my acknowledgment of the fading echo between generations. The chair in *Nostalgia* is dear to me because it once belonged to my grandparents, but it bears no resonant personal connection for my children. They never knew my grandparents. To them, they are soft-spoken legend and a picture that hangs on our wall.

The *Descendant Vase* merges my love for found objects and ceramic. I took cues from objects, which dictated the experimental art deco-influenced shape and let the raw Dark Chocolate clay speak for itself.

## Chapter 10: Among the Trees of Morrow

*Trees are silent observers holding the forgotten wisdoms of our past. If only they could talk, they could remind us of when we knew a better way. They might even be able to help us return.*

The pandemic has forced me into stillness to pause, think and reflect. With idle contemplation, I have begun to live like the trees, bounded and connected by my roots. I am more conscious of the breath we breathe; in this time of wildfires, when breath has been threatened, and in some cases, with Covid, taken away.

*The Seeds of Morrow* is a body of work composed of resonant performance, ceramic, and mixed media sculpture. Organic materials are used throughout this body of work as a memento mori<sup>4</sup>, a warning or reminder of death, in reference to the peril to our ecosystem and our own mortality.



Figure 10.1. *Mum*, Ceramic, pigmented wax, organic material, 9.5"×5"×21", 2021

Like *Remnant: The Remains*, *The Seeds of Morrow* collectively serve as an allegory for our interconnected relationship with our natural resources. The personification of organic forms lends a kindred voice to the waters and the trees, in hopes that we see ourselves tied to their fate. Could we

find a better balance if we begin to see ourselves as life-sustaining elements, too? If water gives life and trees give breath; what is it that we, as humans, could give in return?

*Mum* is the piece that most people respond to in an intimate way. The female likeness expressed in the bark-like form provides access to relate and shift our perspective, so we see these life-sustaining resources as beings, with thoughts, needs, and feelings, worthy of equality.

This piece is named *Mum* for its dual meaning of silenced and mother, as in Pachamama, or Mother Earth. As a flower, the mum is traditionally used as a memorial flower or representation of death. In Asia, it signifies life and rebirth. This duality of symbolic meaning also plays out through the partial figure bearing signs of burnt wood represent the loss while a sprig of green rises from the top of the upturned branch, as a reminder of hope.

When mimicking textures freehand through observation, it awakens an intrinsic sensibility allowing the making to become an art that is beyond my learning. While working on *Mum*, I intended her to form a great crescent, but she refused. The clay revealed a knot, and from that knot a bare branch rose upward, reaching. The making became an interactive intuitive process that overrode what I had planned. I was open and I accepted it. Clay has memory and she reclaimed her preferred form.



Figure 10.2. *The Veiled Virgin*, Carrara Marble, Unknown artist (possibly Strazza), c.1850s;  
*Mum: Work in Progress*, Dundee Red clay, 2021

*Mum* is loosely modeled after a study of *The Veiled Virgin* by an unknown artist, c.1850s. This was a common classical study to showcase the skill of marble sculptors. My emulation of this study in clay laid the groundwork for revealing facial features while maintaining the detailed characteristics of the bark.

## Chapter 11: The Morrow

*The thing that happens next.*



Figure 11.1. *Evolve: The Morrow*, Ceramic, pigmented wax and organic material, 16"×14"×3", 2021

*Evolve*<sup>9</sup> is a series of biomorphic<sup>10</sup> forms born from the speculation of what is to come as our ecosystem shifts and adaptation becomes essential to survival. What in time will resilience look like? What we once knew may evolve into something that appears otherworldly, or a bit grotesque, as illustrated in this series. It stands to reason that the most resilient, like the Cholla cactus, will remain resilient because it is in its nature to be so. Though, it may be necessary to adapt and evolve into its new best form.

---

<sup>9</sup> E·volve: develop gradually, especially from a simple to a more complex form.

<sup>10</sup> Bio·mor·phic: resembling or suggesting the forms of living organisms.



Figure 11.2. Liz Lescault, *Sporeadoc*, Ceramic wall piece, 14"×15"; 2019, *Cracked*, Ceramic, 12"×15"×15"; 2012, *Medusa*, 11"×13", 2018

The *Evolve* series and my experiments with oxide stains were inspired by works by Liz Lescault. I have been drawn to her works because of her textures, colors, and movement inspired by living forms. Her biomorphic sculptures create an illusion of life and her exhibitions mirror that life with layers of sound, movement, and installation.

## Chapter 12: The Gatherer

*I grew up knowing that being called a “litterbug” was the absolute worst thing someone could be called. Period.*

I come from a long line of gathers and collectors. My great Aunt Birdie walked her five dogs every day looking for cans like their next meal depended on it (perhaps it did once.) My father continues similar pursuits, still today. Observing moments of object discovery, collection, and dumpster diving with my father has stuck with me and re-emerged at different times and in different ways throughout my life. My *Findings Series* is an homage to my father, the gatherer.



Figure 12.1. *Findings Series*, Mixed Media, 2019

On road trips, my Dad would play “I spy” giving us things to look for as we traveled. “Find a green bottle on the side of the road”, “Find a windmill”, “A black cow”. When your eyes tune in, they can’t stop tuning in. It triggers a part of the brain and it takes over. If you take a walk down the street and have your eyes “tuning in” you will begin to see the little piece and parts of discarded debris. If you are charged with picking up all of the trash you cross, what will you start to see? For me there is little distinction between trash and treasure, it is simply perceived value through an individually assigned hierarchy. Rusted metals and unique textures are my treasures.

I gather as I walk. I stick my gatherings in my pockets. I empty them into a vessel when I arrive home. When I was assigned to make a series of 20 collages, these were the pieces I sifted through. I wanted the discards to be elevated into totems. A symbol of reverence and acknowledgment of a

purpose they once had, now awakening into something anew. Tension and gravity reinforced intuitive connections between the objects and are what holds the pieces together.

I was curious to work with this same conceptual process on a larger scale. I began scavenging the roadside. Eyes were trained and the obsession began. Many times, when a texture drew me in, I stopped my vehicle, donned an orange vest, and wandered the roadside. Up close the amount of waste is overwhelming. Endless remnants of tires that will remain longer than life itself littered the freeway. Sadness and disdain for our way of living burnt into me.

Just outside of Genesee, ID on one of my many trips from Lewiston to Moscow I found a spool of wire. I had been eyeing it for weeks before I finally stopped to retrieve it. It now sits in the representation of chaos in a large-scale totem, *The Mar-Oak Tree*.



Figure 12.2. *Mar-Oak Tree*, Mixed-media, 4'×4'×11.5', 2019

## Chapter 13: Nest and Nesting

*The nest is home. It is a vessel nurtured into being. It is a place built from maternal protection and a symbol of hope. It is a place for keeping what is most precious to you. It is also a place for leaving.*

Once a clutch, or group of eggs, has been laid, the mother will vigilantly tend the nest until the chicks grow strong enough to take flight. At that time the nest is typically abandoned. A bird does not reuse a nest. It will begin anew.

I am reminded of this new beginning and nature's ability to adapt when I come across a nest. Rarely have I found a nest that does not contain a man-made object. Plastic bags, ribbon, nylon string, etc. Our waste has become inseparable and indistinguishable from the environment. The nest held in the hand of *Becoming* has a plastic bag tucked between the interwoven twigs and a plastic packaging tie hanging down. When I discovered this nest, it felt like an offering placed in my path and I knew where it belonged.



Figure 13.1. *The Nest* by Nils-Udo, earth, stones, silver birch, grass, 1978, Germany

German artist Nils-Udo's giant nests capture me. When I walk through the Homesteads' recently devastated woods, from thinning, in response to increased fears of wildfire, I consider his work and the possibilities of mobilizing the slag piles into something to honor the space and the lives that once lived there.



Like Nils-Udo', one of my primary recurring metaphors is held within the icon of a nest. For him, it is about how it is the start and endpoint of procreation and its representation of shelter. For me, it is about maternal protection and a prepared place for nurturing.

A 4'x4' nest sits at the top of *The Mar-Oak Tree* to cradle my clutch of two gilded eggs, representing the things I cherish most: my children, Molly Oak and Marlow Scout. To mimic my discoveries of finding man-made elements in birds' nests an orange nylon rope was found along the roadside and woven between the twigs.

When a mother bird finds its nest has been disturbed or compromised it will often abandon it and build a new one. This was the case for me. I lived in a place that I had built with a partner. It felt safe and full of the domestic ideals, set and ready to nurture. It was not an outside force that disturbed the nest, it was internal, and trapped within our fortified walls. The implied security and domestic ideals represented in a picket fence encircle *The Mar-Oak Tree*, to reflect a false embowerment<sup>11</sup> of protection. The only escape was to flee and rebuild a new nest, a new life, one outside of the deceptive ideals of domesticity.

Trapped at the bottom of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, protection and survival were all that was hoped to achieve. Rising up from the chair where I once sat, complacent and accepting of unearned punishment, I pushed through the chaos, represented by a spool of barbed fencing wire, and founded a new palace of protection far above and out of reach of the dangers that threatened our wellbeing below.

It is in this new place that my offspring and I reside today. It is different than imagined but safer and more nurturing than where we once were. I can finally appreciate the joys through the simplicity of being, growing, and mothering. Finally, I have climbed the rungs of Maslow's hierarch and I find myself perched in a place with a new point of view where I am able to seek self-actualization and become the most that I can be. Far too soon will come the day where feathers have grown in and lessons have been learned and it will be time to gently nudge my fledglings out of the nest, in hopes that they too will not just survive, but thrive.

Within the context of "*The Seeds of Morrow*" I have begun to see this piece communicating how leaving the confines of domestic life to grow closer to nature will rebalance and reclaim harmony with our relationship to the natural world. This shift will lead to a more sustained and regenerative ecosystem where we can all find balance, again, not just to survive, but truly thrive.

---

<sup>11</sup> Embowerment: surround or shelter, especially with trees or climbing plants.

## Chapter 14: Resonating

*Heave ho. Heave ho. Heave ho, heave-ho.*



Figure 14.1. *The Mar-Oak Tree*, Live Performance, Prichard Art Gallery, 2019

Through performance, I am expressing ideas that resonate through the material manifestation of the work. This is not fully rehearsed, but a quasi-improvisatory reflective act that becomes a merger of the tangible, conceptual, and ideological. My resonant performance *The Mar-Oak Tree*, was a response to birthing and the joys and struggles of motherhood, the push and pull, and finally letting go.

The goal of my performative practice is to wake us from our willful apathy and to provoke us into action. Whether or not the goal was achieved for any of the witnesses of the act, it leaves an indelible impact on me. When working on a performative piece I feel called to service, and I obey. To share with others, I must override my consciousness of self and grow indifferent about being exposed and vulnerable.

Margaret Noble, a sound and installation artist, awakened me to the powerful intersection of sound and visual art. Her invitations and cues to instruct and direct her audience to elicit response and interaction inspire my practice. Through welcomed audience interaction with installations she creates, the participant physically completes the sculpture. I relate this to my performative acts in response to my sculptural pieces. They stand in waiting as a placeholder. When in waiting, a layer of movement and sound is missing, and the sculpture is not in its complete form. Without an audience to witness the act, it only exists in personal experience, though residual echoes of my performance are carried through recorded sound, memory, and imagination.



Figure 14.2. Margaret Noble, *Head in the Sand*, 2015

I gave a docent tour to a blind woman through Margaret Noble's exhibit *Resonating Objects*. It was an incredible experience and I realized at that moment that I wanted my own work to interact and engage with a multitude of senses. It wasn't until I was introduced to the works of Mary Caroline "M.C." Richards that I realized how interconnected my various artistic disciplines and approaches could become to fulfill this goal.

When I was first introduced to, M.C. Richards, I knew her as the poet, potter, and writer who penned *Centering: in Pottery, Poetry and the Person*. Upon reading more into her past, and her experiences at Black Mountain College, I learned that she was part of the famed "first happening" with John Cage in 1952. In "Live Form: Women, Ceramics, and Community," by Jenny Sorkin, she accounts for M.C. Richards' one night only "happening," performed in 1958, when she hosted *Clay Things to Touch, to Plant in, to Hand Up, to Cook in, to Look at, to Put Ashes in, to Wear, and for Celebration*. This title and popup nature of the exhibit implied that she was combining exhibition with performative acts in a kind of "happening".

I had a moment of sudden realization and felt a kindred connection to M.C. Richards when I encountered her intersection of physical works of art paired with action and prose. For the first time, I gave myself permission to embrace all of me and my own myriad of creative outlets, mediums, and voices, becoming more experimental, expressive, and multi-disciplinary in my approach. I saw the potential of my own artistic presentations becoming a "happening" in their own right.

I believe my hesitation to embracing this sooner came from my undergraduate experience when my tendency toward expansive media was criticized. Possessing a consistent body of work within a limited range of media was seen as mandatory in developing the skills to be successful in the field of illustration. With this imposed expectation to limit my media use, I found it necessary to also

compartmentalize my interests, mediums, and outlets into various categories and subcategories. I built a framework of restrictions and barriers around my creative practice.

Now I see my propensity for diverse approaches as an asset that can be harnessed as interconnected chorus members, leaving room to cast spotlights when needed to add drama or emphasis to a specific storyline. This diversity adds layers of depth and texture to form a more complex, yet cohesive body of work allowing even more opportunities for engagement.

With this newfound freedom paired with my deeper understanding of process and self, I grant myself permission to explore a more interconnected and holistic response to inspiration. As a result, I have begun to create more frequently, openly, and freely.

## Chapter 15: The Echoes

*I am a River. I am the sea. Come flow with me.*

There was a time before covid where I lived like the waters. Flowing, rushing, and finding my way to wherever the current took me. I have come to recognize this action as my reaction to my changing personal circumstances. Rather than erode, I began to flow.

Water is life. They are ever moving, ever-connected, life-bearing, and sustaining, yet fragile, fierce, and impacted by our actions. If we can acknowledge our dependence and honor our interconnected relationship, we might make choices for the betterment of our mutual wellbeing.

Because the waters flow in and out of us, connecting and sustaining each and every living being on this earth I began to view these waters as a catalyst for the Great and Holy Spirit. I wondered if this is how G0d knows and understands my innermost thoughts, and the entirety of me. Reverence and empathy for this elemental force have begun to manifest through my work.



Figure 15.1. The Rivers' Plea, 5:01, 2020

In the book “Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water”, by Marc Reisner, it is estimated that it took a half million years to deposit the groundwaters left behind by glaciers. It will take only about fifty years to consume them. The water being pumped out of the ground is as nonrenewable as oil but being drained faster than they are being naturally replenished.

When the states recognized that there was a time cap of twenty-five to fifty years at this rate of consumption, they determined it was a “reasonable” period of time for them to last. No regulations

were put into place to create more lasting or regenerative solutions. What happens once they run dry? How do they source a reliable supply? Redirect rivers? That is one of the “solutions.”

Continuing to turn desert land into farmland only exacerbate the depletion of the water source, and increased salinity levels. Eventually, desalination efforts were put into place in an attempt to clean the waters to almost acceptable standards before they flow into Mexico. More recent attempts to mitigate the compounding problem are why you see miles of uprooted fruit and nut trees as you drive down the California interstate. I filmed a few of these miles on a trip through California a few winters ago. This footage is embedded in *The Rivers' Plea*.

Similar to the personification expressed in *Mum*, *The Rivers' Plea* gives voice to the great waters which have not yet been heard, even when they roar. If we can begin to see these life-sustaining elements as beings, acknowledging their thoughts, needs, and feelings, could we come to a place where we begin to honor them as one of our own? When we stop simply using them for our wasteful use and consumption and begin to see every drop as precious, we may begin to acknowledge their lives as though they are worthy of equality.

Meredith Monk<sup>12</sup> lends inspiration with her interdisciplinary performance, expressive vocalization, and experimental approaches. I see parallels to her work in my intuitive performance tendencies. I often refer to my work as resonant, referring to both the long-held tones and my ability to evoke emotions through the sounds created.

Breath often plays a significant role in my compositions as a way to call attention to its importance. Breath becomes a texture in a place that would normally hold a pause. It becomes exaggerated, audible, and amplified. In a tangential way, Caroline Shaw's<sup>13</sup> Pulitzer Prize winning composition, “Partita for 8 Voices,” has sections composed entirely with breath alone. She, along with Meredith Monk and M.C. Richards are among the artists that inspire me through their limitless creative exploration and expression.

*The Rivers' Plea* also has a John Cagean<sup>14</sup> approach in the way it uses a mixture of traditional musical instruments like the violin, guitar and the singing voice layered together with non-musical sounds like typewriter clicks, a toilet flush, running faucet, and ambient sounds of nature.

---

<sup>12</sup> Meredith Monk (1942) is a composer and singer known as a pioneer in interdisciplinary performance and extended vocal technique.

<sup>13</sup> Caroline Shaw (1982) is a violinist, composer and the youngest recipient of a Pulitzer Prize for Music.

<sup>14</sup> John Cage (1912-1992) was an American composer known for his experimental Prepared Piano pieces, composing the “first happening”, and his 1952 composition 4'33”.

My children were active participants in the making of the sounds. I would type and my son rolled the ocean drum, we silently took cues from each other and switch roles without missing a misshapen beat. The final composition holds evidence of a conversation with my 11-year-old daughter. When I asked her to say, “I am the river”, she willfully replies, “I am a long snake-like body of water, that leads to an ocean.” She has never been one to do as others do. I love her for this quality and each time I hear her voice layered upon whispers, I shine with pride.

Due to Covid-19, what would have become a live performance piece turned into a menagerie of recorded sounds, phrases, and textures. It needed a delivery method, so I began to play with video. Much like the song I began to layer moments of my children at play, capturing their feet as they journey through the screen.

My children are my greatest collaborators and my guiding inspiration. Their involvement in this project serves as a representation of hope for our collective future. It captures an indelible moment in time as we completed this project among isolation and lockdown. It was a time that could have overcome us with confinement and worry, but through creative exploration, we embraced our togetherness. This is why, in the credits of *The Rivers' Plea*, I give thanks to Covid-19.

## Chapter 16: Becoming

*"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"<sup>15</sup>*

Trees are life-givers. No matter how much we take, they continue to give. We share breath and they capture the carbons we spill into the air. They provide shade, food, and refuge to countless creatures and organisms. Birds build their nests and raise their clutches in the protection of their branches, yet we continue to cut them down, and at what expense?

I want my viewers to consider the cost of our consumerism, waste, and impact when confronting *Becoming*. With a base comprised of shipping cardboard boxes and single-use items, its trunk suggests the burdening of growth of our consumerist tendencies. There are consequences to our “need” for more things fast. Its form attempts to push beyond the bounds of the suggested tree form’s grounding limits. Its burnt and rotted core is evidence of the price paid for free shipping. *Becoming* acts as a massager, a statuesque warning of our choices.

Through the process of making this piece, I discovered that the name was not *Reaching*, as I had intended, but *Becoming*. I started out sculpting a solid form from ground to waste, but during the process of making I discovered cardboard mesh packing material inside the box, I was using to hold the wet clays’ shape. Its Amazon label touting “free shipping”, the protruding dowels, the wooden 2x4 I beam bearing all the weight spoke to me saying, “*Look what I’ve become!*” The ironic resonance of the materials I was using to build the base of the “tree” originated as a breathing, life-sustaining, tree, that was sacrificed in an act of consumerist “need.”

I chose not to hide the parts of the process that went into this creation but to expose them and invite them into the conversation. I felt a moment of revelation in my being. It was a gift of confirmation; one I knew should be headed and honored. So, I gathered the boxes and packing materials that were in residence under my own roof. I discovered the hypocrisy of my own consumption, and the trend this piece now speaks against.

---

<sup>15</sup> Excerpt from “The New Colossus” sonnet by Emma Lazarus, 1883, cast in bronze in the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty, or officially known as “Liberty Enlightening the World”.



Following these moments of intuition requires an ability to be present and aware, with a willingness to release a level of control and let go. The end result has a different aesthetic appeal than I had originally intended, but I believe it gained its authentic voice in return. In the end, this process strengthens the voice of my visual litany.



Figure 16.1. Detail of *Becoming*

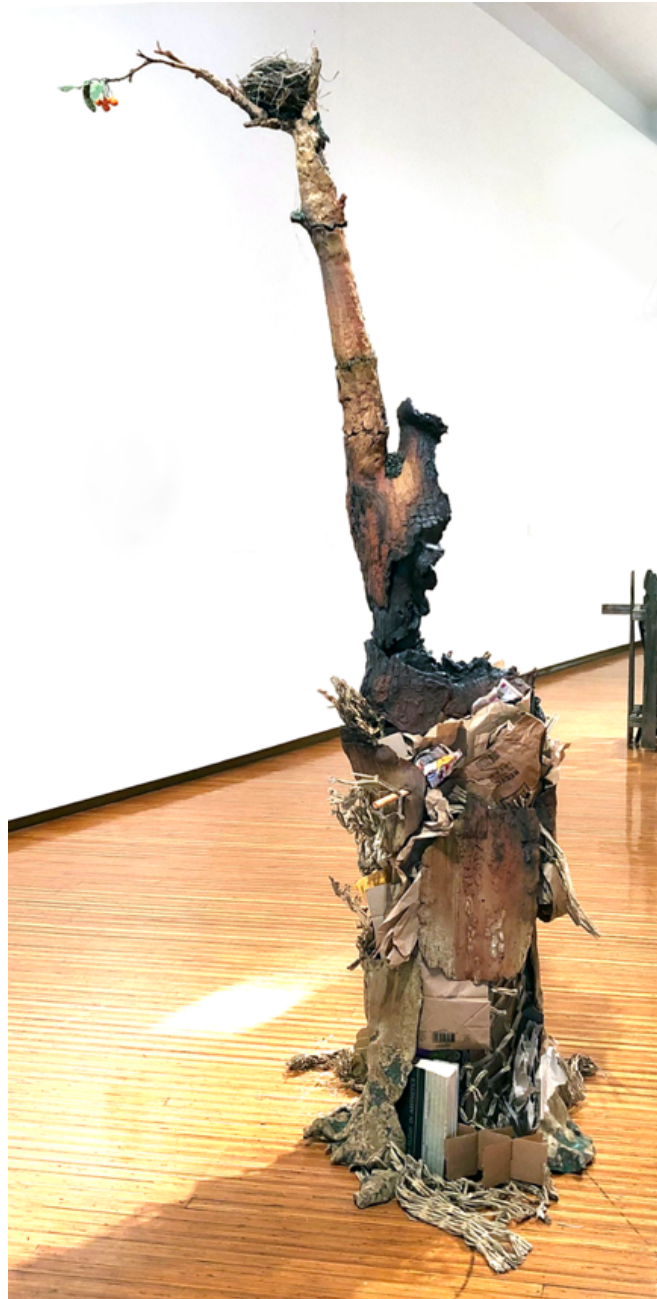
*The Statue of Liberty* is a symbol of our freedom and liberty. “Humanity must mature and realize that every individual has a right to life, liberty, and freedom.” It also represents a common goal shared across the seas with international ideals and connections.

Here the arm reaches upholding a nest, versus the torch, which lights the path to freedom and enlightenment. On the left side, where a book of laws, representing justice and freedom for all, is lost and destroyed. At Lady Liberty’s feet lay broken chains, representing freedom from oppression and servitude. *Becoming* has packing materials and single-use items, representing how we are currently bound and oppressed by our materialistic consumption. Some of the packing materials and boxes are dismantled and broken as a reminder that we have a choice to break these bonds.

There is a permanence to creating in clay. There is a beauty in the ability to play with raw clay and push the boundaries of its memory and elasticity. When it fails it can be recycled, simply by drying, slaking, and re-wedging. This process can be done again and again, but once fired it will last beyond lifetimes. It may crack or break, but it will never behave in the way it once did in its raw state. It is transformed into something new. No longer living or malleable, but fixed and frozen in time. There is a responsibility here. One that I am only recently understanding.

Because sustainability and regeneration are part of my practice and life's goals, I question how my future work will account for the carbon footprint and studio waste it creates. I recognize that the process of making has an impact, but I am hopeful the message housed within the final work will also have an impact and wonder if the ecological impact could ever be measurably offset by the impact it makes on others.

Figure 16.2. *Becoming*, Ceramic, organic materials, and found objects, 8.3'×3'×5', 2021



## Chapter 17: The Protector

*We can learn from their actions if we choose to.*

The parallels between the life of a tree and the life of humans are remarkable. Many of these correlations are outlined in “The Hidden Life of Trees” by Peter Wohlleben. From the way we age and weather the elements, to how our brains work by sending electrical impulses through a neural network. The discovery that trees have brains lends proof that they feel, and they respond.

So, why is it so difficult for humans to see that their lives are worthy of our respect? Perhaps, it is their idleness that leads us to believe that they are less-than. We dismiss them as almost inanimate due to their lack of perceptible movement. We act as if they are put here for our use when we are truly interconnected and rely on them for our survival. Instead, like pests, we are prolific, and we devastate. We cut them down, destroy their communities and build our homes out of their bones. The full impact of our intervention cannot be known, but it is certain that we have interrupted a cycle and denied their prosperity.

On my last trip up the Snake River with my father we stopped at the first beach outside of Asotin, WA. I found a bobber overhanging the water, held tight by outstretched limbs. I climbed out and untangled the snag. On my journey back to the shore I found another line and followed it back. It had been absorbed by time and had become engulfed by the cambium. It was now one with the tree.

We found the yellow bucket on this same trip, the metal stakes, rusted cables, a Marlboro pack, cigarette butts, bottles, cans, plastic bags, PVC pipe, and a nerf dart, and all are given in a new purpose as they gather at the foot of *The Protector*.

A year earlier I visited this same beach where I found an old tarp, a rusted-out bed frame, rusted cables, a soiled plastic baby diaper, fast food containers, an arrow, cigarette butts, more cans, more bottles, more everything. Two full trash bags, and then some. It was on this trip that I realized that most of my finds were held by the roots of the trees.

It was here, standing at the water’s edge in the smoke-filled air from devastating wildfires, that I envisioned *The Protector*, a mythical being that stands vigilant at the water’s edge with outstretched roots combing the waters to gather what we have left behind.

For years my father combed the shore of the Clearwater River on his lunch breaks. A part of his fishing lure collection hangs from the flanks of *The Protector* as trophies of the hunt. This piece

stands as an homage to my father, the gatherer, and as a tribute to the trees, the protectors, for their diligent work and sacrifice.

The making of this piece required welding a scaffolding to hold the weight of the bust and roots. Accounting for shrinkage of the clay was another challenge, along with unintended slumping during the firing process. Making adjustments and accepting what each individual piece became was instrumental to the success of this piece coming together in the end.

The size limitations of the kilns played into the overall aesthetics of the work. 24" was my limit. I created a breast that sat upon the torso using my knowledge of how lids sit upon their vessels. This posed a challenge in the final glaze fire for fear of slumping or misshaping during the ^6 firing. With vessels and lids, you fire them together. The torso and breast stood at 26.5". Through conversations with one of my mentors, it was suggested to fire the piece by removing the lower stilts under the kiln shelf to gain those few precious inches. It was a perfect fit and fired without incident

The front skirt that hangs below the torso, had further issues and slumped under its own weight pushing her right-hand flank forward, which prevented it from nesting with the torso. I had to make a difficult decision to take a hammer to the once well-fitting piece. The break allowed the fit, but a large gap was the trade. A critical piece fell during installation and shattered on the studio floor. Gratefully, I kept a few pieces from a previously failed attempt, glazed, and fired them. Each piece layered and fit together better than it had ever done before.

There is a consistent inconsistency of ill-fitting joints which creates a rhythm that contributes to a trompe l'oeil driftwood aesthetic. Each weathered piece of wood seems to come together magically in a defiant act against gravity to support and become this majestic being, *The Protector*.

One of my biggest triumphs of this piece was understanding and trusting my intuition on glaze combinations and stains. I used two starkly different clay bodies in the build of *The Protector*. This was an attempt to create a shift from the feeling of wood being weathered by exposure to water in contrast to rich dark wood, turning to charcoal from being hollowed out by fire.

For the upper body, I used Dundee Red clay, also used in *Remnant*, which was actually born out of a failed first attempt at this piece when I tried to use a mannequin bust as a form. It fell to pieces under its own weight when transferring the piece to make a base. I was happy for the defeat because I had already realized I wanted a thicker, fuller figure that would more closely resemble the strength of a trees' trunk. The breast was my favorite part of the experiment and I worked to salvage it. Other broken and discarded parts of the failed form were curled into the inner rings of the arm. *Remnant* was named for both the concept of the finished project and the process in which it was made.



Figure 17.1. Work in Progress, *The Protector*

The left side panel was also salvaged and incorporated into the torso of the new attempt at *The Protector*. Its leather-hard state acted as a keystone for the rest of the build, helping the wet clay oppose gravity and hold its shape

As I moved down the form, I switched from Dundee Red to Timberline Sculptural clay body which becomes a warm white when fired. I determined a “water line” to make the transition. I watered down the two clays into slips and painted one with the other to help ease the transition.

I have grown to understand the importance of failure and how it leads to successful outcomes. I had many disappointments working with Weathered Bronze glaze on my series of apples and failed applications on the exterior of vessels before I understood its fickle nature. It took time and many attempts to understand how to achieve the effect I was looking for in a consistent way. I discovered

that this glaze would not reach its characteristic rich green patina if applied too thin. Instead, I would achieve a remarkably ugly, yellowish color. I also noticed I could achieve a third transitional color with this glaze in the shade of a deep burnt umber just before it pooled into the characteristic green of weathered bronze. It was the disappointing yellow that I discovered to be the perfect solution when used in this new context. I brushed on a thin layer and sponged it off. I used stains and oxides in a similar way on the white sculptural clay body, watering them down and sponging them off, just enough to tone the deeper textures in the “wood.” I relied strictly on the natural warming of the clay body in the final glaze fire to help bridge the transition. The results were spectacular, and the hoped-for transition was achieved.



Figure 17.2. *The Protector*, Ceramic and found object, 4"×3"×5.5", 2020

Our nature and commonalities as living beings should bear more weight upon our actions toward the trees. We share breath, and we both rely upon water to sustain our lives. Trees are our physiological equal in the plant world because more than 50% of a tree is composed of water, which is remarkably close to the humans' 60%. Though the way we treat the waters is vastly different. We dam them, irrigate and desalinate, pollute and then purify, bottle, and flush them. We shelter and run from the rain, while the trees stand with leaves outstretched, welcoming and accepting the gift as it comes.

By all accounts, a trees' very nature is giving and protecting. Research<sup>16</sup> has proven their intention and value for guarding their own survival. To protect themselves they must also protect their community because their survival is mutually intertwined. Perhaps the trees, as long-standing observers, taste the rains and the groundwaters, sensing the imbalance and have identified what it is that contributes to the overall distaste for what once was so pure.

Does it not stand to reason that the trees would take action to protect themselves by contributing to the betterment of their ecosystem? My piece, *The Protector*, reflects the theory that the trees stand as vigilant guards along the waterways. Their exposed roots act like combs that entrap the plastics, fishing line, and other debris that we have made and discarded. We can learn from their actions if we choose to reflect more on them.

---

<sup>16</sup> Wohlleben, P. (2016). *The hidden life of trees: what they feel, how they communicate: discoveries from a secret world*. Carlton VIC, Australia: Black Inc.

## Chapter 18: Cultivating Resilience

*Through nature's resilience, we learn that tragedy and hardship can become an opportunity to rethink, rebuild and redirect.*



Figure 18.1. *Resilience*, wood, fire and found object, 11.5"×9"×9", 2019

If water is life, and trees give breath, what is it that we humans contribute? My work will continue to explore this question. I will continue to observe and gather to create pause and reflection. I will continue to honor the gifts of knowledge, conviction, and confirmation I receive. I will respond to inspiration and bear the responsibility of sharing boldly.

One of my greatest hopes is to engage with others to awaken their senses and help them to learn to observe. I see this desire as the residual residue of my exhibit programming background. In a church, there is a sustaining philosophy that states if they do not have representation by all generations, most critically the younger generations, the church will die. By this model, early engagement is proven to be both impactful and sustaining.

When my son's teacher contacted me, she said they were in the middle of a program talking about Earth and sustainability and how art activism intersects. My ten-year-old son mentioned my work and recognized that what they were studying was like what I was creating. When she asked if there was a project I could do with the class, my *Findings Series* immediately came to mind.



During my presentation, I challenged the students to take notice and then take action. Even if they only made an effort in their own community and picked up one piece of garbage each day, and if everyone did that, just think about the impact that could make. I challenged them to start taking pride in their school property. If they see something, pick it up and put it where it belongs.

After my presentation, I sat reading a while waiting for my son to finish up his school day. The bus kids passed firsts. As they saw me, they started looking around. They each brought me one or two pieces of garbage and presented it as a gift. I praised them for being change-makers. It takes one person to lead and one person to follow, and then others begin to follow. That is how we create a movement.

What will be the lasting impact of these little touchstones of engagement? It is hard to say, but to see their eyes open, even for a moment was encouragement for me to continue on. I will strive to generate pause and help people think differently about their relationship with the waste we create and how it impacts the environment. My hope is that they will recognize that they have control over their choices and the impact they make and then take action.



Figure 18.2. Waste picked up by fifth graders as they walked to the bus.

## Chapter 19: Embracing the Morrow

*“Listen to the mustn'ts, child. Listen to the don'ts. Listen to the shouldn'ts, the impossibles, the won'ts.*

*Listen to the never haves, then listen close to me...*

*Anything can happen, child. Anything can be.” — Shel Silverstein*

Over the past few years, I have been exploring and pushing, and pulling myself in many new directions. I have begun to understand my creative motivations and intuitive tendencies. I have recognized myself as a gatherer, a responder, a maker, an illustrator, and an educator. Each label and the active stewardship they imply, are influenced by my connection to motherhood and humanity.

My work is an offering, an embrace of what I've come to understand through the roles I take on as a maker. Through this sharing, I hope to make an impact that ripples through our culture like a stone on water. It will take many stones and many voices to work in chorus with one another to make a real impact and catalyze real change. I believe this begins with personal experience, which cultivates empathy and awareness.

In parallel to the iconography of the wasp's nest I employ, I hope my work will remind others that we have control over our life choices, which impacts our life circumstances and outcomes. The choice to take action to preserve what is good and to change what is not is ours to make.

## Literature Cited

The Holy Bible, *New International Reader's Version*, Zonderkidz, Grand Rapids, MI, 2007

Alter, Charlotte, et al. "Time 2019 Person of the Year: Greta Thunberg." *Time.com*, 2019, <https://time.com/person-of-the-year-2019-greta-thunberg/>

"biomorphic." *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, Web. 23 Apr. 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/biomorphic>.

Cage, John. "John Cage." *Tate.org.uk*. Tate Art & Artists, Web. 23 Apr. 2021, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/john-cage-845>

Demetz, Aron. "Aron Demetz" *arondemetz.it*, Web. 29 Apr. 2021, <http://www.arondemetz.it/>

"embower." *Fine Dictionary.com*, Web. 1 May 2021, <http://www.finedictionary.com/embower.html>

Larson, Larry. "John Cage." *JohnCage.org*, The John Cage Trust, 2016, <https://johncage.org>

Lazarus, Emma. "The New Colossus." Nps.gov, National Park Service, 14 Aug. 2019, <https://www.nps.gov/stli/learn/historyculture/emma-lazarus.htm>

"memento mori." *Art Terms*, *Tate.com*. Web. 23 Apr. 2021, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/m/memento-mori>

"molder." *Lexico.com. Oxford English Dictionary*. Web. 13 Mar. 2021, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/molder>

Monk, Merideth. "Merideth Monk," *ECM Records: Edition of Contemporary Music*, EMC Records, 2018, <https://www.ecmrecords.com/artists/1435045990/meredith-monk>

"morphosis." *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, Web. 23 Apr. 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/morphosis>

Powers, Richard. *The Overstory : A Novel*. First edition. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018. Print.

Reisner, Marc. *Cadillac Desert : the American West and Its Disappearing Water*. New York, N.Y., U.S.A. :Penguin Books, 1993.

Richman-Abdou, Kelly. "Exquisite 19th-Century Sculpture Cloaked in a "Translucent" Marble Veil." *My Modern Met*. 27 Jan 2019. <https://mymodernmet.com/the-veiled-virgin-sculpture/> Kelly Richman-Abdou

Shaw, Caroline. "Partita for 8 Singers: No. 3. Courante" *Roomful of Teeth*. Music on Main. 10 Aug. 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-x3MuU8i3pY>

Silverstein, Shel. *Where The Sidewalk Ends : the Poems & Drawings of Shel Silverstein*. New York: HarperCollins, 2004.

Swansen, Dave. "Nils-Udo." *Biodilloversity*, Ringling College of Art and Design, 7 Dec. 2011, <https://biodilloversity.wordpress.com/2011/12/07/nils-udo/>

Traditional. "Jonny Appleseed" *nurseryrhymes.org*, Martin Granum, *Web*. 28 Apr. 2021, <https://www.nurseryrhymes.org/johnny-appleseed.html>

Udo. Nils. "Nils-udo 'Volcan.'" *domaine-chaumont.fr*, Domaine De Chaumont-Sur-Loire, 2018, <https://domaine-chaumont.fr/en/centre-arts-and-nature/archives/2018-art-season/nils-udo>

Wohlleben, Peter. *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate : Discoveries From a Secret World*. Carlton VIC, Australia: Black Inc, 2016. Print.