

Phantom Limb

by

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I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis.
This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required
final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically
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ABSTRACT

The living interact with the dead. We live in a funerary landscape that surrounds us, that is inside us. We fold memories of the dead into the space of the living. We embrace death, even while we turn away from it.

Phantom Limb presents a series of encounters with death, and a reflection on loss, in photographs and sculptures. *Phantom Limb* speaks to the relationship between the living and the dead as trace—vestiges of what is now absent. With photographs and sculptures, I turn towards death, deaths I have and have not experienced. I create a funerary terrain of my own making. I prepare for loss.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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To Will.

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Phantom limb.

*I am not interested in what Bourdieu, or Kristeva, has to say about grief. I don't want a grid, I want arms. I don't want a theory; I want the poem inside me. I want the poem to unfurl like a thousand monks chanting inside me. I want the poem to skewer me, to catapult me into the clouds. I want to sink into the rhythm of your weeping, I want to say, My grief is turning and I have no way to remain still.*¹

- Sina Queyras, *M x T*

Author Helen Humphreys wrote to grieve her brother's death, which later became the novel *Nocturne*. Scholar and poet Anne Carson created *Nox*, an epitaph in book form for her dead estranged brother. Artist Sophie Calle captured her mother's life and death in photographs and film, a eulogy exhibited in the serial installation *Rachel, Monique*. Philosopher Roland Barthes started a "mourning diary" after the death of his dear mother, published after his own death as *Mourning Diary*. Poet Sina Queyras amassed an anthology of poems *M x T* following her sister's death. Artist Jane Martin recorded

¹ Sina Queyras, *M x T* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2014), 10.

her husband dying in detailed drawings, a collection entitled *Something Happened*.

I have not yet been devastated this way. I haven't experienced a death that would spur the kind of writing, or making, I want to do. I have no turning grief. I have no open wound, only a strong desire for one. *That* is the crisis—a desire to commune with death in a time and place where I can't.

—

The living interact with the dead. Here are the ways. Here it is in rituals; here it is in customs; here it is in memories; here it is in everyday life; here it is in writing; here it is in sculpture; here it is in monuments; here it is marring the earth; here it is in wounds and scars within herself, himself, and ourselves. Drawn to the accumulation of these interactions, conditions, and artifacts, I read, and I collect quotations. I write short texts. I find images. I harbour all these small pieces. I arrange these encounters to describe aspects of the relationship between the living and the dead. I accept the infinite ways this relationship manifests. I assemble a collection of things that resonate with me. I allow myself to be affected by them. And then, I make things.

What I mean by “things” are objects and images. Each of them responds to the relationship between the living and the dead. Things, specifically sculptures and photographs, are closely tied to this union. Connecting the two realms, they occupy the threshold between the living and the dead. They simultaneously reflect the past and bring it into the present. They are born out of a need to “refuse to abandon the past,” the artist Louise Bourgeois describes of sculpture. She declares, “You cannot arrest the present. You just have to abandon everyday your past. And accept it. And if you can't accept it, then you have to do sculpture. If your need is

to refuse to abandon the past, then you have to re-create it.”²

Recreating the past gives it presence now. Sculpture, as tombstones attest, marks the past as something that cannot be “left behind.” Sculpture fills absence. Sculpture, like literature, “pulls the real up and out of the realm of temporality and insignificance and remakes it into a form that will never decay and never die.”³ Beyond capturing the real, literary representation also accomplishes what writer Louis Menand calls “an act of transubstantiation.”⁴ At the Eucharist, bread ceases to only represent the body. Instead, bread becomes body while still appearing to be bread. Therefore, the real (the past) is not only represented in a sculptural or literary form. The past *is* sculpture; sculpture *is* past. Sculpture persists. It fortifies. It preserves the past because it is the past. And we want to believe sculpture can do this for a length of time that is infinite.

In *Les archives du Coeur* (The Heart Archive), visitors give a recording of their heartbeat to Christian Boltanski. The artist adds these audio files to a growing collection. The significance of collecting heartbeats resides for Boltanski in the difference between two kinds of memory. He explains, “I am interested in what I call ‘little memory’, an emotional memory, an everyday knowledge, the contrary of the Memory with a capital M that is preserved in history books. This little memory, which for me is what makes us unique, is extremely fragile, and it disappears with death. This loss of identity, this equalization in forgetting, is very difficult to accept.”⁵ For most, memory will most

2 Louise Bourgeois, quoted from *Louise Bourgeois 1911 — 2010*, exhibition statement, June 22 - August 11, 2013, Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, Toronto.

3 Louis Menand, “Imitation of Life: John Updike’s cultural project,” *The New Yorker* (April 28, 2014): 76.

4 Ibid.

5 Christian Boltanski, “Christian Boltanski: Les archives du Coeur,” *Serpentine Gallery*, 2010, July 27, 2014, <http://www.serpentinegalleries.org/exhibitions-events/christian-boltanski-les-archives-du-coeur>.

certainly disappear with death. After death we only leave fragments of ourselves. Ironically, leaving a recording of a heartbeat in an artist's archive may be the most enduring deed for those that will not end up in capital M memory. Because The Heart Archive resides with a cultural institution—an institution that will house Boltanski's work long after even his own death—what is seemingly an insignificant contribution is, in this light, an act of immortalization.

Like Bourgeois, William Faulkner speaks of the artist's desire to arrest motion. Yet, motion (life) is not permanently arrested by the artist. Motion is reactivated with the immortal artifact—the form that never decays, never dies. Inhabiting the present, what the artist leaves behind is “immortal since it will always move.”⁶ Furthermore, Faulkner puts art at the threshold between life and death. It is, as he pictures, “the artist's way of scribbling ‘Kilroy was here’ on the wall of the final and irrevocable oblivion through which he must some day pass.”⁷ Taken together, art comes from a desire to leave something behind because you can't leave the past behind.

With photography, what's left behind comes directly from the real. A photograph is a trace. Writer Susan Sontag explains, “a photograph is not only image (as a painting is an image), an interpretation of the real; it is also a trace, something directly stenciled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask.”⁸ As a trace, the photograph attained its status as a record. A factual document. Yet, as the photograph of Yves Klein leaping into the air reminds us, photographs can narrowly escape reality. We know Klein didn't hit the ground.

6 William Faulkner quoted in Robert C. Williams, *Artists in Revolution: Portraits of the Russian Avant-garde, 1905-25* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), half-title.

7 Ibid.

8 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Picador, 1977), 154.

Beyond tracing the real, Sontag claims that photographs trap the real. “Photographs are a way of imprisoning reality, understood as recalcitrant, inaccessible; of making it stand still.”⁹ Looking at the intensity of time in photography, the philosopher Roland Barthes uses a striking portrait of Lewis Payne to pose a second *punctum*—the “detail” that pierces the viewer. This *punctum* is time. He writes, “This new *punctum*, which is no longer of form but of intensity, is Time, the lacerating emphasis of the *noeme* (“*that-has-been*”), its pure representation.”¹⁰ The imprisonment of the real with a photograph marks that exact moment as one “that-has-been.” And therefore, a moment that cannot be again. This is why a photograph reminds us of our mortality. It is a mirror (whether turned on another or on ourselves) that confirms death within us. “Death is embodied within us, like a fatal flaw: it is our teleology and destiny,” affirms author Ken Worpole.¹¹ Similarly Barthes concludes, “Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe.”¹²

Because a photograph simultaneously attests to the aliveness and deadness of all things,¹³ every photograph is both an index of life and a death mask. Its power resides in the fact that the thing was, at one time, seen by the photographer. The thing was captured in ‘real time.’ Hence photography’s ability to pull “the real up and out of the realm of temporality and insignificance,”¹⁴ while suggesting that it is already dead.¹⁵ In this way, a photograph substantiates our mortality. A photograph is always a memento mori.

9 Ibid, 163.

10 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 96.

11 Ken Worpole, *Last Landscapes: The Architecture of the Cemetery in the West* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2003), 199.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid, 79.

14 Menand, 76.

15 Barthes, 79.

In the 14th century, painted portraits first appeared outside tomb monuments and religious compositions. Because portraits immortalize, references to mortality were included on the back of portraits to acknowledge death and salvation.¹⁶ “From then on, skulls appear again and again on the backs of Netherlandish and Italian portraits, often combined with a scholarly evocation of death.”¹⁷ The portrait as an index of life was coupled with a reminder of death. With everlasting presence comes everlasting absence. The canvas: a thin surface between them.

—

Author Dashiell Hammett makes an incisive observation about trace. Describing detective work he writes, “... since matter cannot move without disturbing other matter along its path, there always is – there must be – a trail of some sort.”¹⁸ About the enduring presence of matter, critic and philosopher Boris Groys claims: “There is no fire without ashes – no divine fire of total annihilation.”¹⁹ There is no complete destruction of matter; there is always something left behind. And consequently, always something to trail. Recalling Sontag, photography also exhibits its origins as a trace of something real. It is constituted by light causing a permanent change. Matter is disturbed by other matter—evidence that something existed, proof that something happened.

With a missing limb, the evidence that something existed appears as absence. It is no longer there. However, for the person missing the limb, it often feels as if it is still there. This is its phantom quality.

16 Sybille Ebert-Schifferer, *Still Life: A History*, trans. Russell Stockman (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1999), 31.

17 Ibid.

18 Dashiell Hammett, “Home Dick,” *Nightmare Town* (New York: Vintage Crime, 1999), 46, quoted in Stan Allen, “Trace Elements,” *Tracing Eisenman: Peter Eisenman complete works*, ed. Cynthia Davidson (London: Thames and Hudson, 2006), 49.

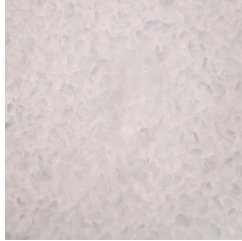
19 Boris Groys, “Becoming Revolutionary: On Kazimir Malevich,” *e-flux journal* #47 (September 2013): 6.

In many cases, the missing limb experiences recurring 'phantom' sensations, including extreme pain. These sensations are real.

One treatment to unlearn the learned pain is mirror therapy. In this therapy, the living (present) arm of the patient is a stand-in for the absent one. The mirror manifests the felt sense of oneself visually. Even though it is a known fiction, the patient is able to connect with the part of his or her body that is no longer there. The mirror makes what is absent present. The mirror becomes a threshold between what is there and what is no longer there. It connects the living with the dead.

Absence.

1.01
Drip (1 / 100),
2014

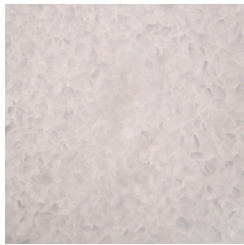


Drip: matter cutting matter

In *Drip*, matter wears on and through matter. A drip, under the influence of gravity, drips again, and again, causing—with its singular yet persistent action—a slow and irreversible change.

The viewer, turning page after page, experiences *Drip* as a protracted event. He or she traces *Drip* through a paralleled 'real-time', watching the incremental erosion of matter by matter. A dark growing void in a white field. Empty space boring through the page.

1.02
Drip (2 / 100)
-
2.01
Bronx Floors,
Gordon Matta-
Clark, 1972.



1.03
Drip (3 / 100)



In photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto's *Los Altos Drive-in, Lakewood* (1993), a rectangular screen radiates light. The base of the drive-in screen, sitting in the shadow of the burned-out screen, and propped up by spindly supports, isn't movie theatre like. Rather, it bears a likeness to a vacant construction site.

Los Altos Drive-in, Lakewood isn't a photographic moment; it is a whole movie. Sugimoto's large-format camera, set at a wide aperture, opens itself to the bombardment of thousands of images—each successive image obliterating the one that came before it until only light remains.

1.04
Drip (4 / 100)



“It signifies nothing, and at the same time, because of that negativity, everything. For the negative, logically, is all-encompassing; it harbours everything that its positive counterpart does not stipulate.”

Mieke Bal, *Of What One Cannot Speak: Doris Salcedo's political art* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 236.

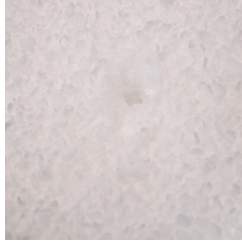
1.05
Drip (5 / 100)



“Somebody said I should also put half-a-person in the show [*Half-a-Room*]. But we are halves already.”

Yoko Ono quoted in Alexandra Monroe, *YES YOKO ONO* (New York: Japan Society and Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2000), 126.

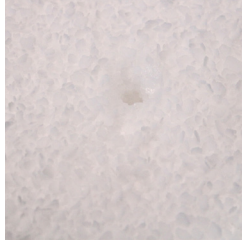
1.06
Drip (6 / 100)



“The pigment pieces worked with ideas around architecture and the body. The void pieces take those ideas one step further as they go beyond architecture; they live as holes in the architecture rather than objects in the space. They bring a new complexity to the problem of space from the point of view of the body. They are about darkness and the uncanny, something half-known or half-remembered. Darkness is something we all know; it is the condition of things when the lights are switched off, but in a way it is also an internal view of ourselves.”

Anish Kapoor, *Anish Kapoor: Past, Present, Future*, ed. Nicholas Baume (Boston, MA: The Institute of Contemporary Art, 2008), 50.

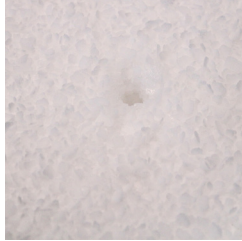
1.07
Drip (7 / 100)



“To the uninitiated, Shanghai appears to be a city where no one dies. Indeed, in the city’s urban districts it is difficult to distinguish anything resembling a funeral ritual, a *binyiguan* (funeral parlour) or even a hearse.”

Maylis Belloq, “Dealing with the Dead: Funerary Rites in Contemporary Shanghai,” *Invisible Population: The Place of the Dead in East Asian Megacities*, ed. Natacha Aveline-Dubach (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2012), 98.

1.08
Drip (8 / 100)



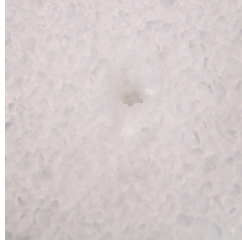
Suprematist Composition: White on White (1918) is a tilted white square within, or on, another white square. The painting by Kazimir Malevich measures 31 ¼” x 31 ¼”. This is the precision of the artist’s expression. Its whiteness, and the perceived quality of its gliding or floating is part of its expression too, but these characteristics also start to point beyond its visuality to its meaning. Symbolically, white “receives the projection of all or nothing,” deceives our perceptions of scale and depth, evokes emptiness and silence.¹ Graphic designer Kenya Hara, in his book on white, describes it as “a particularly unusual color because it can also be seen as the absence of color.”² In this apparent absence is a denotation of emptiness, which is for Hara a condition “which will likely be filled with content in the future.”³

1 Ami Ronnberg and Kathleen Martin, eds, “White,” *The Book of Symbols* (Koln: Taschen, 2010), 660.

2 Kenya Hara, *WHITE*, trans. Jooyeon Rhee (Zurich: Lars Muller Publishers, 2010/2012), 8.

3 *Ibid.*, 36.

1.09
Drip (9 / 100)

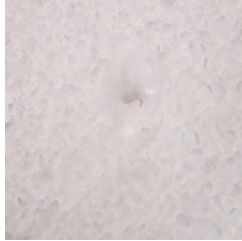


“Swim in the white free abyss, infinity is before you.”

Kasimir Malevich quoted in *Inventing Abstraction 1910-1925*, MoMA exhibition text, “The Collection,” *Museum of Modern Art*, accessed March 4, 2013, http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=80385.

Ritual.

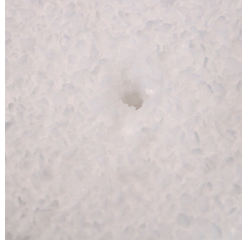
1.10
Drip (10 / 100)



“If anything is central to the creation and maintenance of a unified Chinese culture, it is the standardisation of ritual. To be Chinese is to understand, and accept the view, that there is a correct way to perform rites associated with the life-cycle, the most important being weddings and funerals.”

James L. Watson, “The Structure of Chinese Funerary Rites: Elementary Forms, Ritual Sequence, and the Primacy of Performance,” *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China*, ed. James L. Watson and Evelyn S. Rawski (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 3.

1.11
Drip (11 / 100)

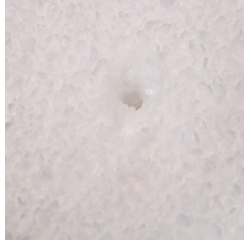


Bone Picking

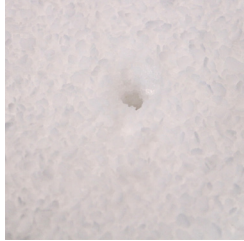
It was a hot and humid day in early May. I can't remember if we rode the air-conditioned coach—rented by my grandmother to transport the family for the day's proceedings—from the funeral service to the crematorium, or if they were on the same property. Everything bled into everything. The death. The heat. The distance.

While my grandfather's corpse was cremated, we ate bento lunches in an open-air room at the crematorium, sweating in our funerary clothes. After lunch, we gathered in another room where his bone fragments were laid out on a large metal tray. Starting with the eldest male descendant, and using over-sized wood chopsticks, we took turns putting his bones into the urn, accompanying each bone with a saying that conveyed our good wishes for a peaceful journey to his new home.

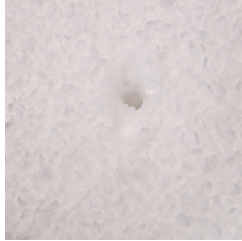
1.12
Drip (12 / 100)
-
2.02
nothingtoodo
(*eliade*), Terence
Koh, 2011



1.13
Drip (13 / 100)
-
2.03
nothingtoodo
(*böhme*), Terence
Koh, 2011



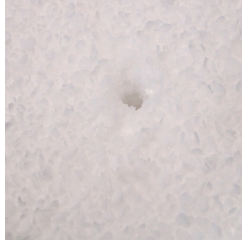
1.14
Drip (14 / 100)



“Amazingly, every early civilization had high priests, created religious monuments aligned in careful relationship to sun, moon and stars, and buried its dead using elaborate ceremonies.”

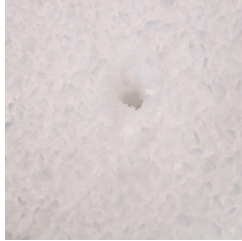
Timothy Taylor, *The Buried Soul: How Humans Invented Death* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 4.

1.15
Drip (15 / 100)



My grandfather's funeral ceremony was held over a month after his death so that he could be 'put to rest' on an auspicious day. It wasn't, however, an auspicious year for him to be interred. His heavy stone urn—lifted to its place by his eldest grandson, my younger cousin, on the highest tier of burial chambers on the eleventh floor of a columbarium on a hill—was placed on a sheet of paper, literally and figuratively separating it from its final resting place. A year later, the paper was removed and the urn set facing the 'right' direction.

1.16
Drip (16 / 100)



“In order for the spirit of the deceased to be properly settled, these vital forces [killing airs] must be absorbed back into the flesh of living people ... However, kin and neighbours—alone—cannot absorb all of the killing airs released at death. The full dissipation of death pollution requires that someone actually accept money for taking on this burden.”

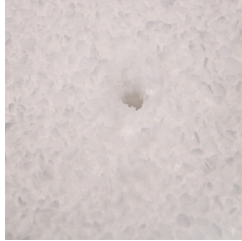
James L. Watson, “Funeral Specialists in Cantonese Society: Pollution, Performance, and Social Hierarchy,” *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China*, ed. James L. Watson and Evelyn S. Rawski (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 114.

1.17
Drip (17 / 100)



We wear black every day. The colour of mourning. My mother takes this a little less strictly. She says she can wear white too. White, after all, is the colour of death. She does not tell me why she can wear white. She's never been good at that. It is just what I surmise.

1.18
Drip (18 / 100)



On Casting

In Robert Smithson's "Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan," he never uses the word "I," even though it is clearly he that undertakes this epic journey, and he that places the mirrors. I mention him not to create a parallel between my work and his, but because I look to Smithson when attempting to write about work I've made or a journey I've taken. He has a particular way of capturing the particulars.

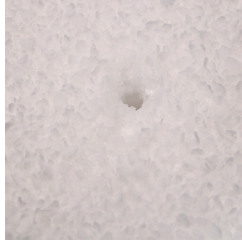
For the last several months I've been working outdoors. This is significant. I don't cast when it's raining. I work in a shade when the sun is strong. Soon, as the cold settles in, I'll have to decide whether to press-on indoors, or stop making altogether.

Outside I feel a sense of freedom. There is an openness outside that an indoor space, unless vast and unfinished, could not provide. I toss the pieces of soil I don't want into a garden patch. I wash the sculptures with a garden hose. I let water dribble out of the watering can. Even that I use a watering can is specific to working this way.

Yet with all this openness, I work within certain confines. The soil lives in a large pail. A plastic drop sheet defines a working area. A plant pot and vase serve as

temporary storehouses for soil displacement. Plaster is mixed in repurposed yoghurt containers.

Through repetition, I become more confident working with plaster. At ease with the process, I am less bothered by trying to make the perfect pour. As I trust the mounded soil to hold formwork in-place, I am able to work completely alone. All my actions become patterns. Go outside. Open the garage door. Take out the pail of soil, drop sheet, and gardening gloves. Set up the drop sheet. Place the soil on the sheet. Move the pot and vase beside the pail. Fill the watering can. Make the 'in-ground' form—the 'bottom.' Dig a hole. Place the form. Pack soil around it. Remove the form. Fetch the plaster, containers, and stiff spatula. Mix plaster. Pour plaster. Let plaster harden. Go inside. Take out mould-making supplies: form board, millboard, Mylar, glue, tape, knife, scissors, and cutting mat. Build 'above-ground' form—the 'top.' Go outside. Set up mould. Register top with bottom. Mound soil around mould. Press soil firmly. Crack off dry plaster from containers. Mix plaster. Pour plaster. Wait for plaster to harden. Unearth sculpture. Remove mould and discard. *It occurs to me it is strange to always discard the mould—the*



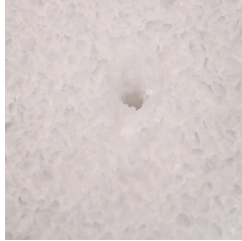
object from which the index is formed—only to remake it again. Wash with garden hose. Let dry. Return soil to pail, destroying the bottom form. Crack off dry plaster. Dispose of plaster. Fold drop sheet. Return to garage. Sweep working area. Go inside.

Of course this list only describes casting as a series of repetitious actions, a script for a performance perhaps. It doesn't describe the consistency or colour of the soil, its spray of fine particles, or the dirt under my fingernails. It betrays the force of liquid plaster. It overlooks the heat produced by the exothermic reaction. It fails to capture the phases of plaster transforming from fine powder to liquid to solid.

The soil is dark brown. It's made of compost. Rich. Moist. It stains my gardening gloves. Decaying matter. It contains small pieces of wood, and the occasional small stone or shredded plastic fragment—all of these I pick out. I use a trowel to stir the soil before moving it to other containers, working its rounded back to push the remaining soil into its angle of repose. Soil compacts under its own weight, and when wet enough, gets stuck in the pot. It holds its own form, but with the slightest disturbance, falls apart.

A cloud of white dust shoots out when I open the plaster bag. Hydro Cal White. It resembles all-purpose flour. Outside, it has no smell. I know I can fit 1 ½ cups of it into a yoghurt container. Sometimes I need less. When I need more, I split the mix between two containers. When I pour the water over the dry plaster, it bubbles. I push the stiff spatula into the powder, twist and repeat, slowly incorporating the two distinct materials into one. I dredge out chunks of undissolved plaster, scrape them along the side, and push them back in again. After working out the lumps, I pour the plaster into the mould. Sometimes I wait too long—preoccupied with achieving an even mixture—and the plaster is no longer malleable. It's heavy as it starts to harden.

After a day or two, I brush loose soil off the sculpture's bottom half. This I also do outside. Brushing is a habit that formed early on. It has no clear necessity other than reducing how much loose soil falls off later. Debris management. A few more days later, I sit on the edge of the deck with various grades of sandpaper and an old drafting brush. I cradle the sculpture in my lap. Plaster dust settles on the ground beside me. When the plaster's



too wet, it gums up the sandpaper. I retire the sculpture to its place inside, and take it out again a few days later.

There are multiple sculptures, repeating forms, but none exactly the same. Each cast produces something similar to, but different from, its predecessor. Not only is each mould remade, but each sculpture handmade. The whole process subject to weather conditions, misalignments, and material inconsistencies.

If there is an axiality to these sculptures, it is one (with few exceptions) that only exists in the ground. These are conceptual plugs for, and of, the earth. When removed from the earth—the site of their making—they have an uneasy relationship with new sites. This new ground is a foreign ground. It cannot support the sculptures as the earth did. Being effectively unearthed and siteless, they become nomadic. They are itinerant gravestones. They enter the space that art critic and theorist Rosalind Krauss calls the monument's "negative condition."¹ They are base and (abstracted) figure as one. They are from the earth, and about the earth, but not rooted in the earth. They are about the encounter

1 Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *October* Vol. 8 (Spring 1979): 34.

between the living and the dead. They mark the past in the present.

Limen.

1.21
Drip (21 / 100)



“These two worlds—the visible and the invisible—are intimately connected, but their reciprocal differences are so immense that the inescapable question arises: what is their boundary? Their boundary separates them: yet, simultaneously, it joins them. How do we understand this boundary?”

Pavel Florensky, *Iconostasis*, trans. Donald Sheehan and Olga Andrejev, composed in 1922 (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1996), 33.

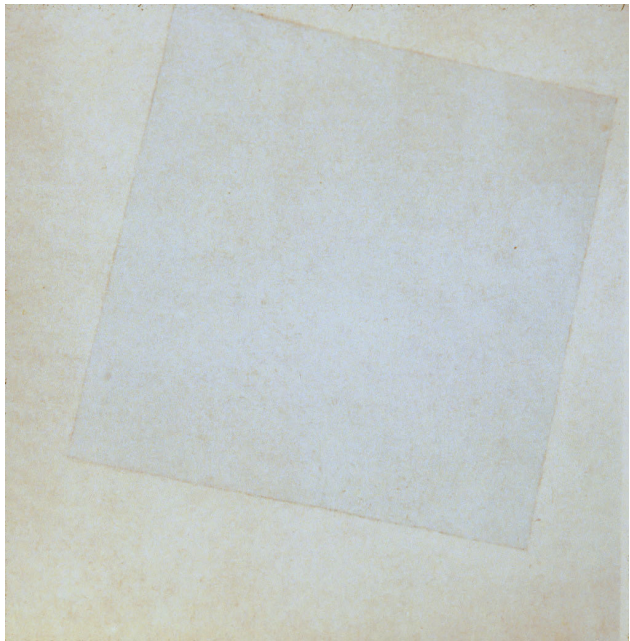
1.22
Drip (22 / 100)



“In those photographs moisture in the tunnel appears white. There is a foreman’s white shirt, there is white lye daubed onto rock to be dynamited. And all else is labour and darkness.”

Michael Ondaatje, *In the Skin of a Lion* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, [1987] 1996), 111.

1.23
Drip (23 / 100)
-
2.04
Suprematist
Composition:
White on
White, Kasimir
Malevich, 1918



1.24
Drip (24 / 100)



There's a shrine at my late grandmother's house. It is where her spirit lives. We take her to her funeral service, and return her to the house separating her spirit from her body, which is cremated. At home, someone is always with her. We 'feed' her. We 'ask' her if she's done with her meal. We greet her when we come and go. A monk comes every other day to tend to the shrine. Two small cups are filled daily with rice and other food. Each holds a wood chopstick standing upright. These are servants for my grandmother in the afterlife as she moves towards enlightenment. This is what I'm told.

1.25
Drip (25 / 100)
-
2.05
Brion
Monumental
Complex, San
Vito d'Altivole,
Treviso, Carlos
Scarpa, 1969-78.



1.26
Drip (26 / 100)



“There was a continuity that was my breath since birth, and the anesthesiologist cut that, tied a knot in it, put me on monitors and respirators, then started a new thread, and while I was stopped, the continuity that was my skin was cut, and I was altered, and then sewn shut with thread and knots.”

Rebecca Solnit, *The Faraway Nearby* (New York: Viking, 2013), 134-5.

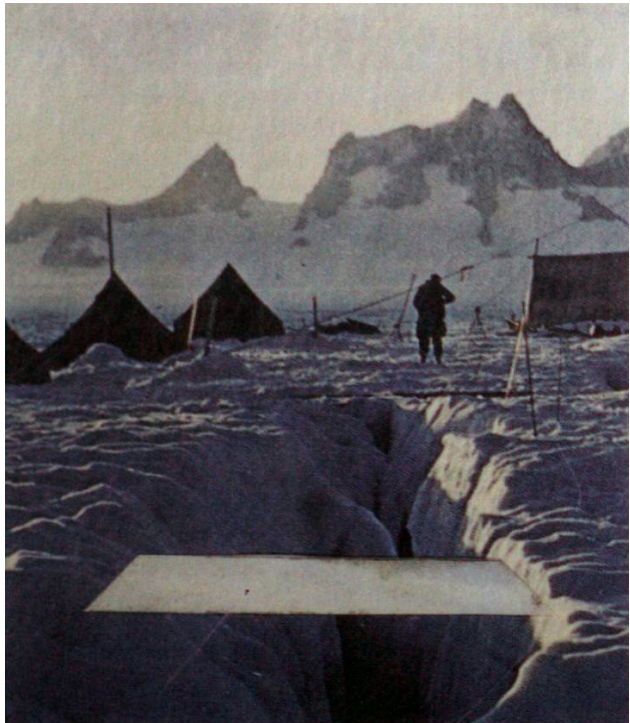
1.27
Drip (27 / 100)



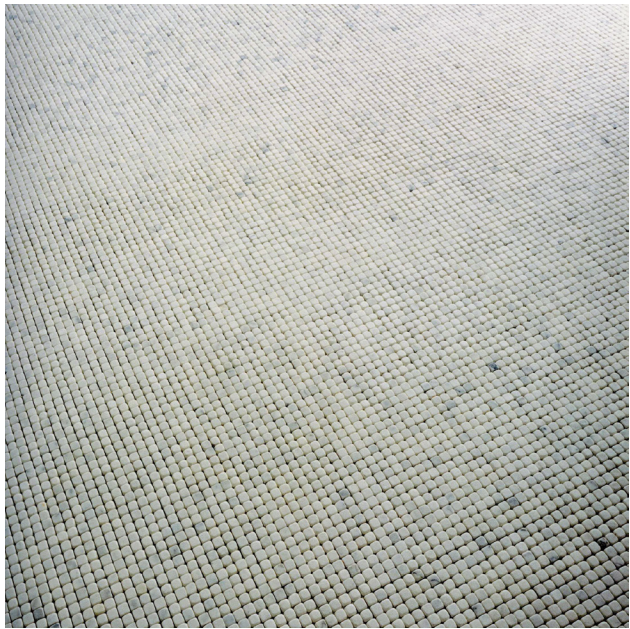
A dear friend returned from a summer's adventure in Armenia. Over beer on a hot August afternoon, she recalled this saying from her grandmother:

It happens and it happened. *Ge bahadi yev bahadav.*

1.28
Drip (28 / 100)
-
2.06
*Study for Glacial
Mirror*, Robert
Smithson, c.
1969



1.29
Drip (29 / 100)
-
2.07
Chichu Art
Museum (floor
detail), Tadao
Ando, 2004



1.30
Drip (30 / 100)



Shirasu in Levitation

Levitation (2013) is a 70”x48”x16” three-dimensional work. Its “upper body,” a stiff shroud of black foam board, gives way to four thin wood legs, painted white. On one of its long sides, the presence of a rectangular slit transforms this body into a viewing theatre. It provides a glimpse into the radiant, yet stark, space inside. It focuses the viewer’s sight on the thin space between a rock and the membranous surface beneath.

In her novel *Fugitive Pieces*, Anne Michael writes, “It is no metaphor to feel the influence of the dead in the world, just as it’s no metaphor to hear the radiocarbon chronometer, the Geiger counter amplifying the faint breathing of rock, fifty thousand years old”¹ I imagine this rock to be ticking in geological time. To have a pulse. To radiate what is invisible and infinitesimal from within. At the same time, I feel the force of levitation countering the pull of gravity. Even a small rock wants to rest on the surface of the earth. To press down instead of being lifted up.

1 Anne Michaels, *Fugitive Pieces* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1996), 53.

In Nō theatre, space is reduced to three floors: the main stage (*butai*), the spectator floor (*kenjo*), and the space between (*shirasu*). The spectator floor is the present, the space of the here and now, whereas the stage is the otherworld, the space of spirits of the dead. Traditionally made with white pebbles, *shirasu* simultaneously separates and connects this world to the other.² Architect Kengo Kuma notes how the *shirasu*'s whiteness indicates its special quality, and was originally considered to have symbolized water.³

Consider *Levitation* through the lens of Nō. In drawing a correspondence between the surface beneath the rock and *shirasu*, the membranous surface—starting at the edge of the viewing slit, extending under and behind the rock, and outward at its sides—functions as a boundary between the present and a geological past, between the viewer outside *Levitation* and the rock within it. In Nō, Kuma explains, “Matter and volume are reduced until they are virtually eliminated, making

2 Kengo Kuma, *Anti-Object: The Dissolution and Disintegration of Architecture*, trans. Hiroshi Watanabe (London: AA Publications, 2008), 63.

3 Ibid., 64.



it possible to come and go freely between the immaterial and the material worlds, between life and death.”⁴

Persistence.

1.32
Drip (32 / 100)



“Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe.”

Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 96.

1.33
Drip (33 / 100)



“Your face is skeletal in the photo, and when Mum wanted to include it in your memorial slideshow, I told her not to because it didn’t look like you. But really, it did look like you. It just looked like you dying.”

Helen Humphreys, *Nocturne* (Toronto: Harper Collins Publishers Ltd, 2013), 171.

1.34
Drip (34 / 100)
-
2.08
Displaced/Replaced
Mass 1:1, Michael
Heizer, 1969



1.35
Drip (35 / 100)



“Death is embodied within us, like a fatal flaw: it is our teleology and destiny.”

Ken Worpole, *Last Landscapes: The Architecture of the Cemetery in the West* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2003), 199.

1.36
Drip (36 / 100)



“Even decay is a form of transformation into other living things, part of the great rampage of becoming that is also unbecoming. It is cruel, it is death, and it is also life, degeneration and regeneration, for nearly all things live by the death of other things.”

Rebecca Solnit, *The Faraway Nearby* (New York: Viking, 2013), 79.

1.37
Drip (37 / 100)



“For death *although utterly unlike life* shares a skin with it. Death lines every moment of ordinary time. Death hides right inside every shining sentence we grasped and had no grasp of.”

Anne Carson, *Men in the Off Hours* (New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 2001), 166.

1.38
Drip (38 / 100)



This time we picked over Ruth's belongings before she died. In fact, she is still alive as I write this. We did this to ready her house before her death. A house that she no longer lives in. A house to which she won't return from the care facility. A house where the water has been shut off.

From a house where Ruth's daughters and daughters-in-law cleaned out the cupboards with care, we now keep a 'lawyer's bookcase,' French press, budvase, and checkered wool blanket—objects from a not-yet-dead relative that we fold into our lives.

1.39
Drip (39 / 100)



“These found and dragged craggy forms functioned as mediated art objects, or as if a personal treasure kept within a shoe box. But another structural parallel to [Michael] Heizer’s juxtaposition of an irregular mass placed within a horizontal rectangular container is that the configuration resembles a corpse within a coffin. Heizer’s actions then call up a body that has been initially ‘displaced’ and then ‘replaced’—interred into his ‘depressions’ three times, as if ‘surrogates’ for attempts to put something to rest.”

Suzaan Boettger, *Earthworks: Art and the Landscape of the Sixties* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 194.

1.40
Drip (40 / 100)



“Later, Klein had himself photographed by Harry Shunk lying underneath the object [‘Here Lies Space’], which acts as a monument or tomb for the artist (who would die a mere two years later) and places him in the role of the force creating levitation”

Kerry Brougher, “Involuntary Painting,” *Yves Klein: With the Void, Full Powers* (Washington, DC: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, and Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Center, 2010), 39.

1.41
Drip (41 / 100)
-
2.09
Untitled,
Francesca
Woodman, 1975-
1980



Presence.

1.42
Drip (42 / 100)



“Because you died at the beginning of winter, the earth mound above your coffin couldn’t be levelled and grass couldn’t be planted there until spring. During that first winter there was this enormous frozen hill of dirt there, with bits of your funeral flowers stuck to it, and small holes where mice had burrowed. It was our raw grief made visible and I rather liked it.”

Helen Humphreys, *Nocturne* (Toronto: Harper Collins Publishers Ltd, 2013), 10.

1.43
Drip (43 / 100)



“The levels of the churchyards outside tended to rise with the constant cycle of burials, one on top of the other so that it often seemed that the church was drowning in a sea of bodies. As old bones were dug up to make room for new bodies, charnel-houses and ossuaries were filled to the brim with remains.”

Edwin Heathcote, *Monument Builders: Modern Architecture and Death* (Great Britain: Academy Editions, 1999), 16.

1.44
Drip (44 / 100)



“Swelling suggests a sudden disorder caused by an external agent. The earth swells, due not only to the presence of a foreign body placed within it but to the pressure it is subjected to by the (fermented) air of which the evanescent soul is composed [...].”

Pedro Azara, “The House and the Dead (on Modern Tombs),” *the last house*, ed. Mónica Gili, trans. Paul Hammond (Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, SA, 1999), 29.

1.45
Drip (45 / 100)
-
2.10
Nishi Otani
Cemetery, Kyoto.



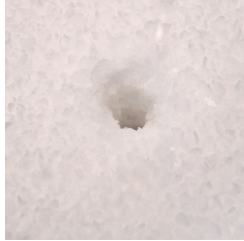
1.46
Drip (46 / 100)



There is this curious thing that people do after an elderly family member dies. I hadn't experienced it before until Will's grandfather died, which was a short couple of years after Nan passed.

After Bernard's memorial service, the immediate family went back to his house where Will's aunt and father had already been cleaning and separating things, preparing to sell the house. We were instructed to take a cardboard box, and take anything we wanted, which seemed like such an odd undertaking—picking through someone else's quotidian belongings. Will's father insisted we take the mid-century modern teak shelving unit, and, by chance, nostalgia, or desire, we have also been harbouring a half-broken umbrella, a blue painted travel trunk, a typewriter, six cut crystal wine glasses, a glass stove-top coffee percolator, three patterned tea towels, and a trombone.

1.47
Drip (47 / 100)



Lisa died. She died, and on my bookshelf, behind a wood sculpture on a white box of CDs, bridging a row of softcover books, sits *the way we describe goodness*—a set of twelve small artist's books belonging to her.

1.48
Drip (48 / 100)
-
2.11
*Untitled (Funerary
Box for a Lime
Green Python)*, Cy
Twombly, 1954



1.49
Drip (49 / 100)



“[...] every destruction is a material destruction and leaves traces. There is no fire without ashes – no divine fire of total annihilation.”

Boris Groys, “Becoming Revolutionary: On Kazimir Malevich,”
e-flux journal #47 (September 2013): 6.

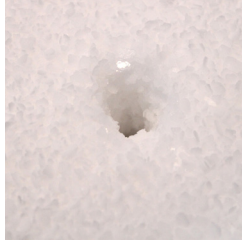
1.50
Drip (50 / 100)



“Burning the body and mixing the ashes with food and drink was a fairly common, more refined form of cannibalism. In this technique of the digested dead, the space of death is quite simply that of another body. Continuity of the life of the clan is thus absolute.”

Michel Ragon, *The Space of Death: A Study of Funerary Architecture, Decoration, and Urbanism*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1983), 5.

1.51
Drip (51 / 100)



Tomb

After the 1986 explosion of Chernobyl Reactor No. 4, with great efforts to contain the radioactive fuel and plumes of smoke that carried radioactive particles, and amidst pressing concern of possible future explosions, the nuclear power plant was posthumously encased in a huge concrete sarcophagus. While lava flowed through the core of the reactor's structure and hardened in motion, local scientists protected by no more than plastic suits, knowingly under threat of biological damage, descended into the tomb on an investigative expedition.

1.52
Drip (52 / 100)



I felt the monk's chanting in me. In front of the alter, on my knees, I felt my heart pounding for escape.

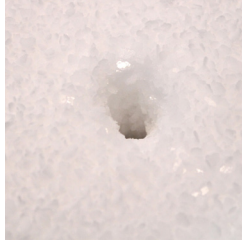
1.53
Drip (53 / 100)



“Contrary to what is often believed, the mummified corpse of the Egyptian was not a naive way of cheating eternity of the the body, but a representation intended to attract, by means of this physical body, the psychic double. The mummy was merely a pivot intended to trap the “astral body” [...].”

Michel Ragon, *The Space of Death: A Study of Funerary Architecture, Decoration, and Urbanism*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1983), 7.

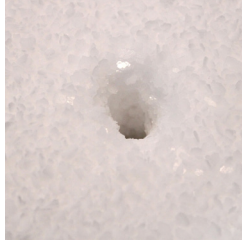
1.54
Drip (54 / 100)



The realm of the dead resembles of the realm of the living through the house as a real construction, but also as a stand-in for the unknown.¹ The house, therefore, becomes a symbol of death, but also a symbol of a life after death. It represents a continuance of life in death, and one that we need in order to grapple with the void.

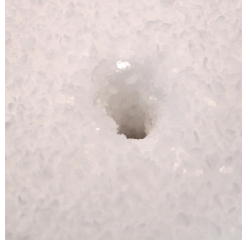
1 “What we know of past life always comes out of the ground. It is the tomb, the house of dead souls, which shows us how the house of the living was.” Pedro Azara, “The House and the Dead (on Modern Tombs),” *la última casa (the last house)*, ed. Mónica Gili, trans. Paul Hammond (Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, SA, 1999), 25.

1.55
Drip (55 / 100)



Despite any kind of turbulence that might have affected their life as husband and wife, Le Corbusier conceived of, and had built, a tomb for them. In the cemetery of Roquebrune-Cap-Martin—near the Cabanon, their one-room summer retreat—it was first inhabited by Yvonne, and then eight years later by the esteemed architect.

1.56
Drip (56 / 100)



“In this sense [because the story is already complete], fiction, the great life-giver, also kills, not just because people often die in novels and stories, but, more important, because, even if they don’t die, *they have already happened*. [...] Yet fiction remains the game of *as if*. Characters do not stay dead; they come back to us the second or third time we read their story. The laugh of fictional life lasts longer than the bloody cough of death. One of the “shortcomings of history” is that real people die. But fiction gives us allowable resurrections, repeated secular returns.”

James Wood, “Why? The fictions of life and death,” *The New Yorker* (December 9, 2013): 38-39.

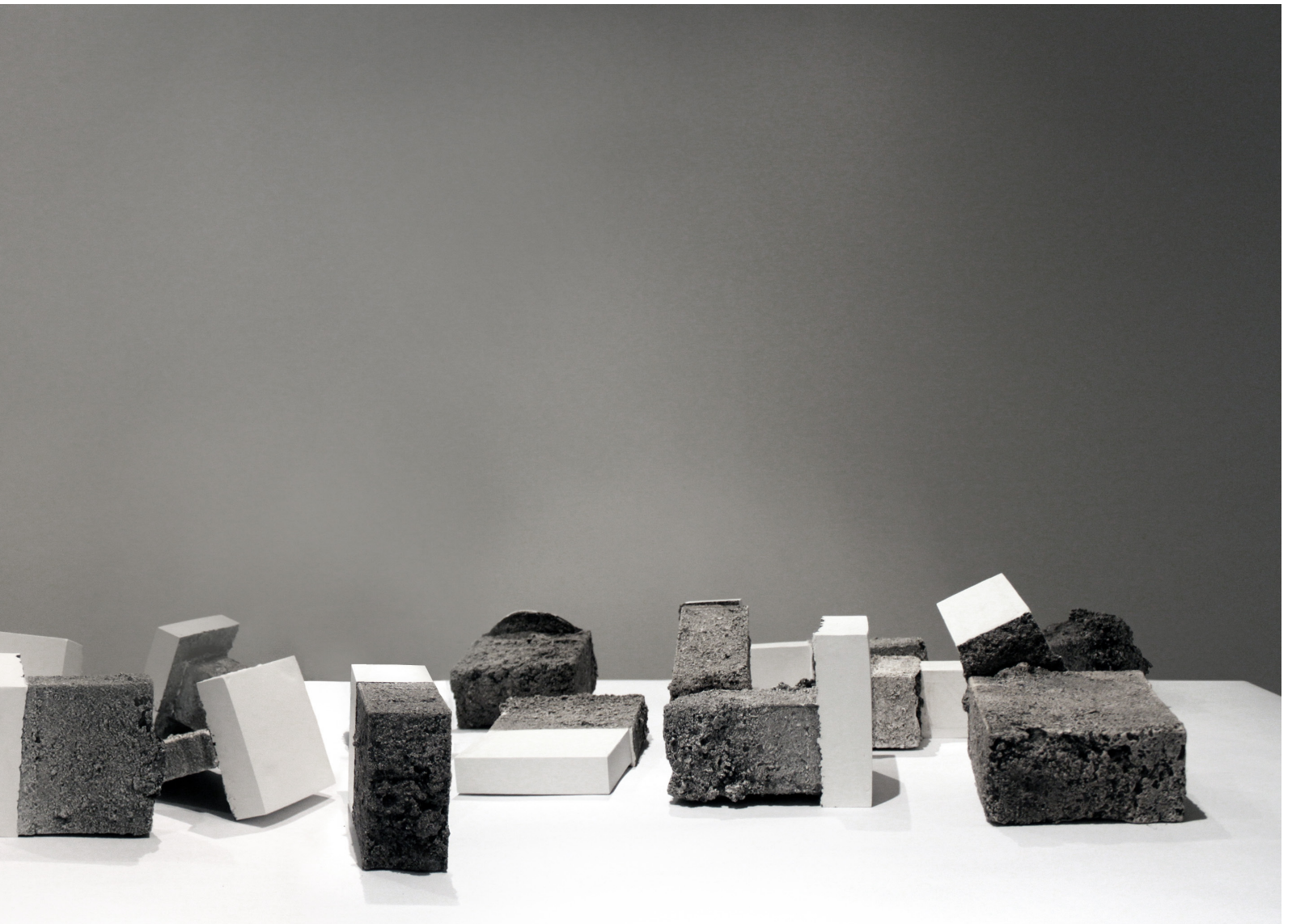
1.57
Drip (57 / 100)
-
2.12
Ossuary detail,
Cemetery of San
Cataldo, Modena,
Aldo Rossi, 1971-
84.



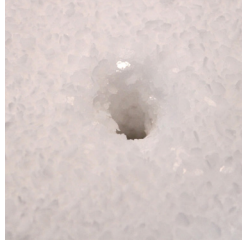
Here lies.



2.13
Earth Plugs

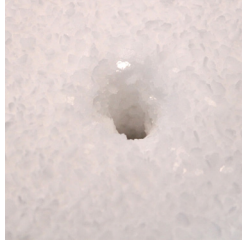


1.58
Drip (58 / 100)



“To whom we turn to be
momentous, to be
monumental, to be
meant. As I browse
among the statues it appears
that marble is the way eternity
confers itself on breasts, it seems
that even pubic hair (David’s,
for example), if redone in fine Carrara
marble, can become a simulacrum of the absolute,
one flare of graven
everliving fire.
But then,
on my way home, I take
a shortcut through the graveyard

1.59
Drip (59 / 100)



and get mixed signals from the stones.

Are these the sculpted entrances to rooms

(*de lux*, I guess) located elsewhere?

Or should we think of them as exits –

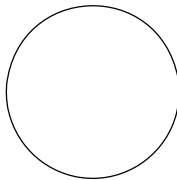
holes the dead fell through

which we have squared up, plugged, and,

putting the best face on it,

polished?”

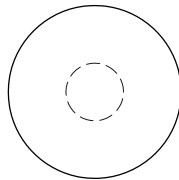
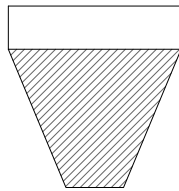
Excerpt from Don McKay, “Specific Gravities: #76 (Marble),” *Strike / Slip* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 2006), 28.



2.14
*C-09 (shallow
cylinder), sketch,
from the series
Earth Plugs*

-
2.15
*C-09 (shallow
cylinder), photo,
from the series
Earth Plugs*

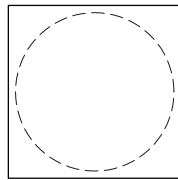
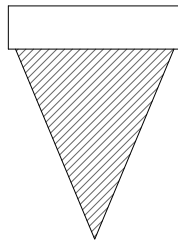




2.16
*C-08 (shallow
cylinder on part
truncated cone),
sketch, from the
series Earth Plugs*

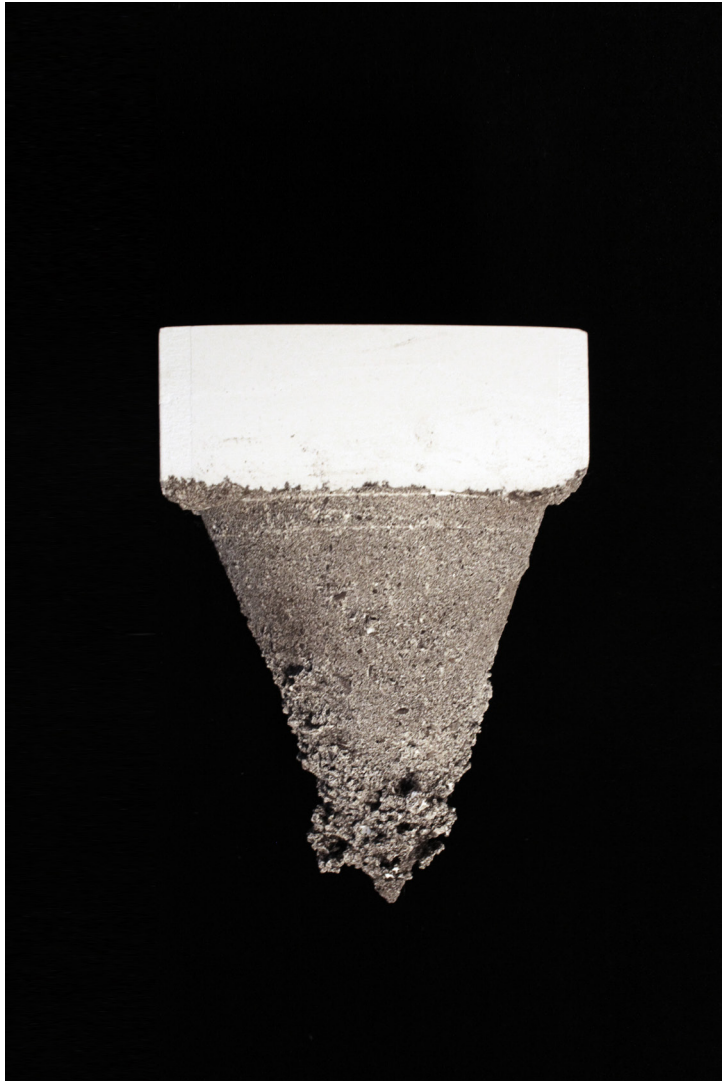
-
2.17
*C-08 (shallow
cylinder on part
truncated cone),
photo, from the
series Earth Plugs*

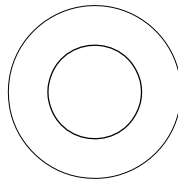
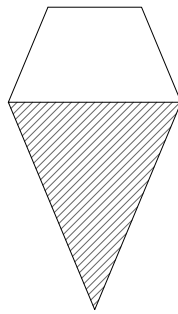




2.18
*H-05 (flat cuboid
on full cone),
sketch, from the
series Earth Plugs*

-
2.19
*H-05 (flat cuboid
on full cone),
photo, from the
series Earth Plugs*

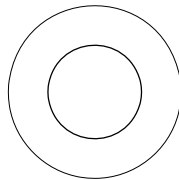
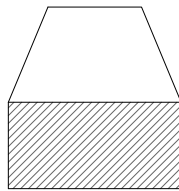




2.20
*C-02 (half
truncated cone on
full cone), sketch,
from the series
Earth Plugs*

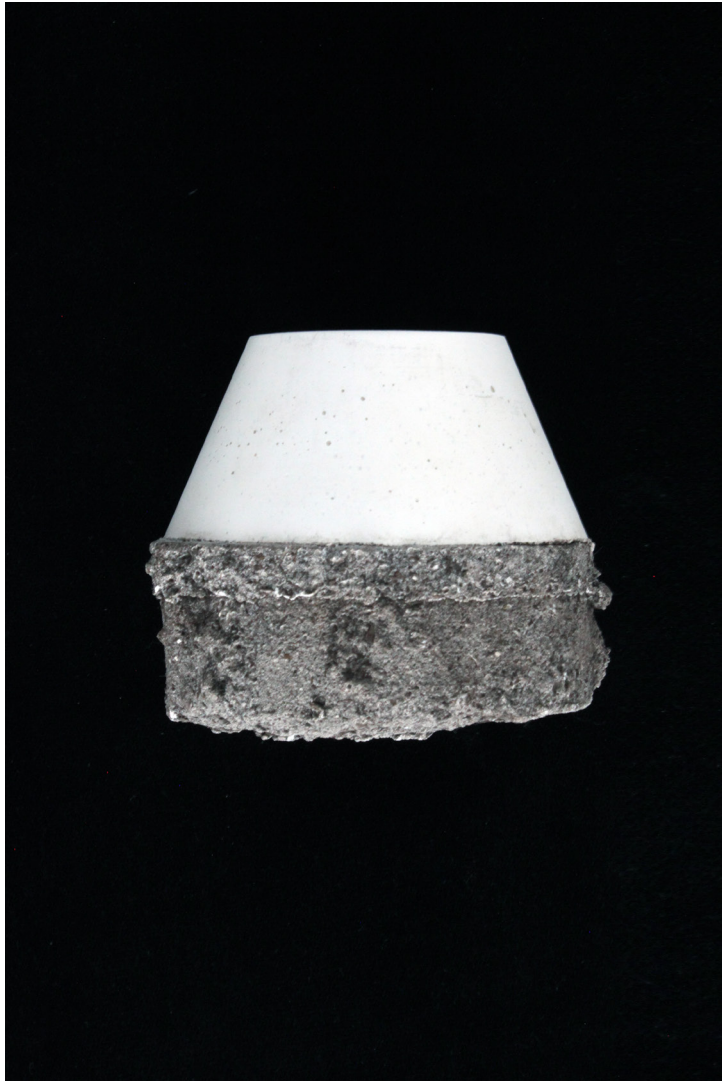
-
2.21
*C-02 (half
truncated cone on
full cone), photo,
from the series
Earth Plugs*

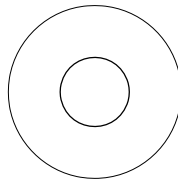
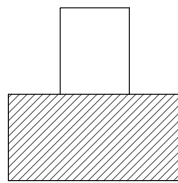




2.22
*C-10 (half
truncated cone on
large cylinder),
sketch, from the
series Earth Plugs*

-
2.23
*C-10 (half
truncated cone on
large cylinder),
photo, from the
series Earth Plugs*

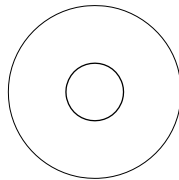
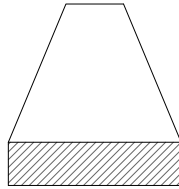




2.24
*C-06 (small
cylinder on large
cylinder), sketch,
from the series
Earth Plugs*

-
2.25
*C-06 (small
cylinder on large
cylinder), photo,
from the series
Earth Plugs*

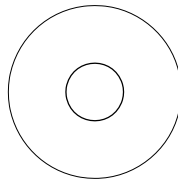
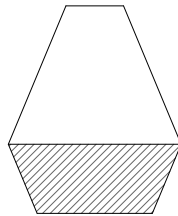




2.26
*C-07 (part
truncated cone on
shallow cylinder),
sketch, from the
series Earth Plugs*

-
2.27
*C-07 (part
truncated cone on
shallow cylinder),
photo, from the
series Earth Plugs*

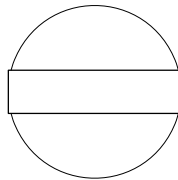
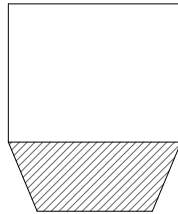




2.28
*C-01 (part
truncated cone
on half truncated
cone), sketch,
from the series
Earth Plugs*

-
2.29
*C-01 (part
truncated cone
on half truncated
cone), photo,
from the series
Earth Plugs*

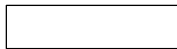
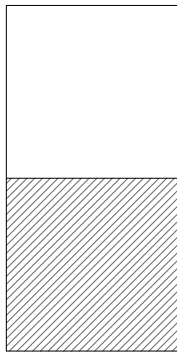




2.30
H-04 (thin long cuboid on half truncated cone), sketch, from the series Earth Plugs

2.31
H-04 (thin long cuboid on half truncated cone), photo, from the series Earth Plugs

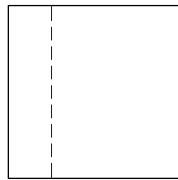
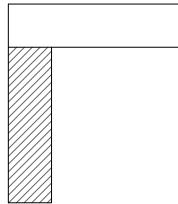




2.32
*S-01 (thin long
cuboid on thin
long cuboid),
sketch, from the
series Earth Plugs*

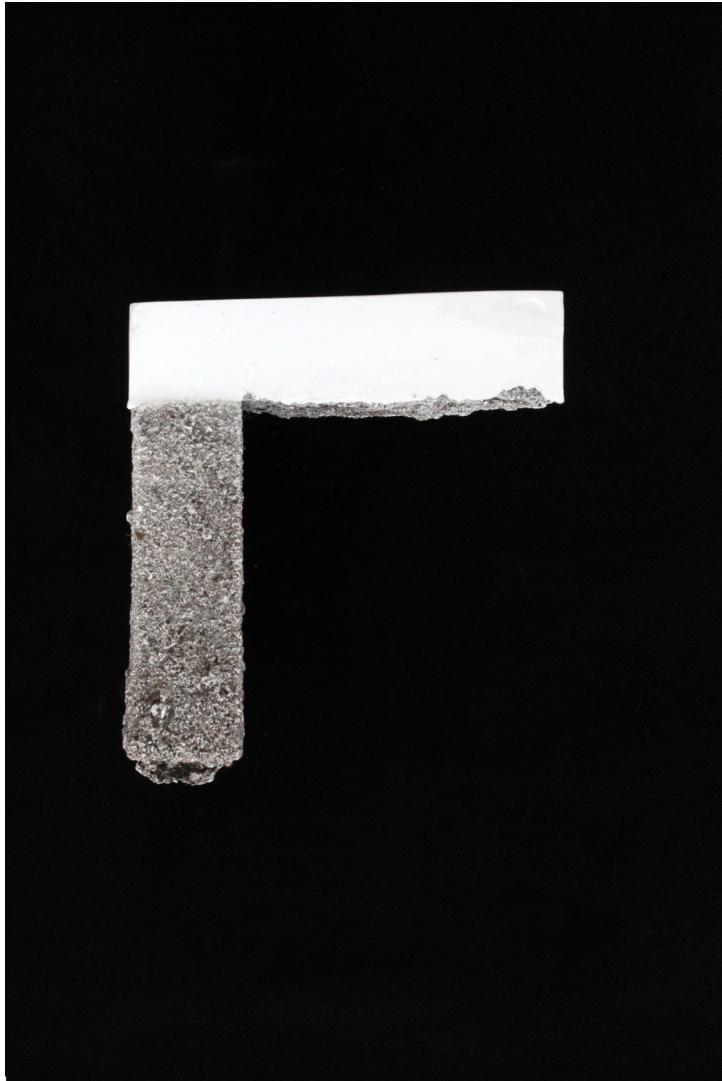
-
2.33
*S-01 (thin long
cuboid on thin
long cuboid),
photo, from the
series Earth Plugs*

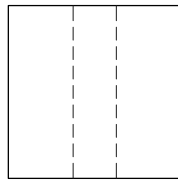
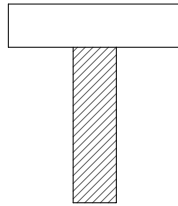




2.34
*S-10 (flat cuboid
edge-aligned on
flat vertically-
oriented cuboid),
sketch, from the
series Earth Plugs*

2.35
*S-10 (flat cuboid
edge-aligned on
flat vertically-
oriented cuboid),
photo, from the
series Earth Plugs*

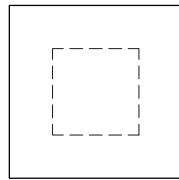
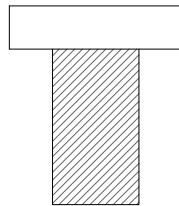




2.36
*S-11 (flat cuboid
on flat vertically-
oriented cuboid),
sketch, from the
series Earth Plugs*

-
2.37
*S-11 (flat cuboid
on flat vertically-
oriented cuboid),
photo, from the
series Earth Plugs*

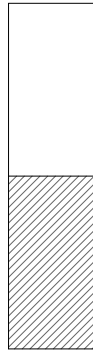




2.38
*S-08 (flat cuboid
on long square-
based cuboid),
sketch, from the
series Earth Plugs*

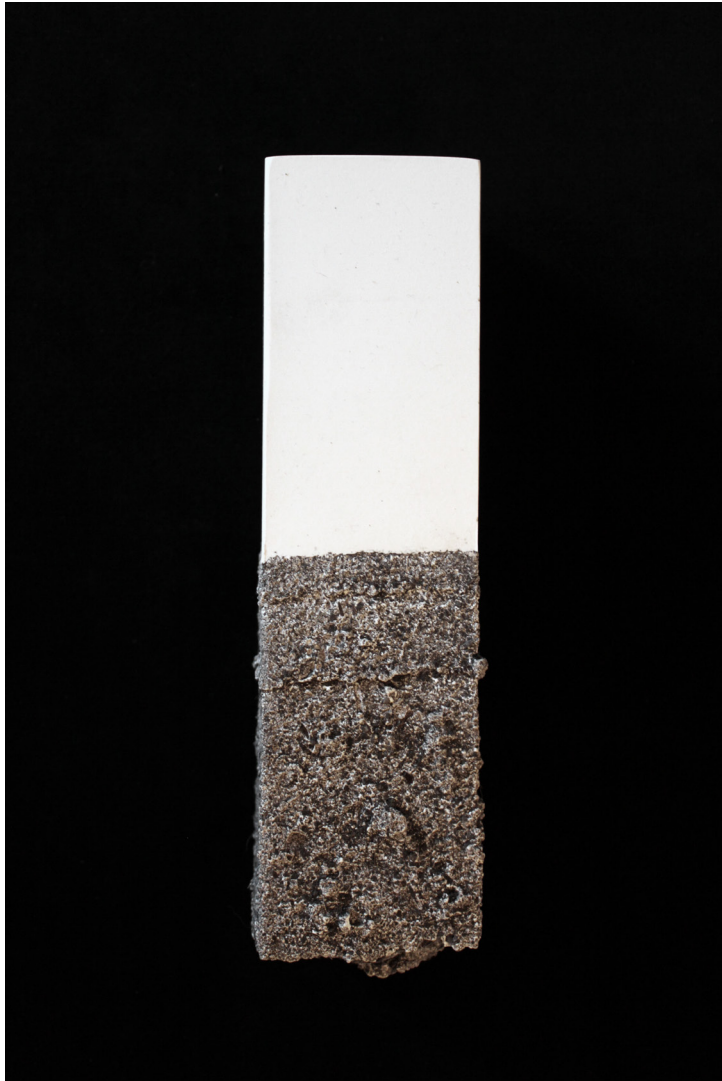
-
2.39
*S-08 (flat cuboid
on long square-
based cuboid),
photo, from the
series Earth Plugs*

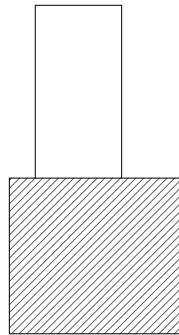




2.40
S-07 (long square-based cuboid on long square-based cuboid), sketch, from the series Earth Plugs

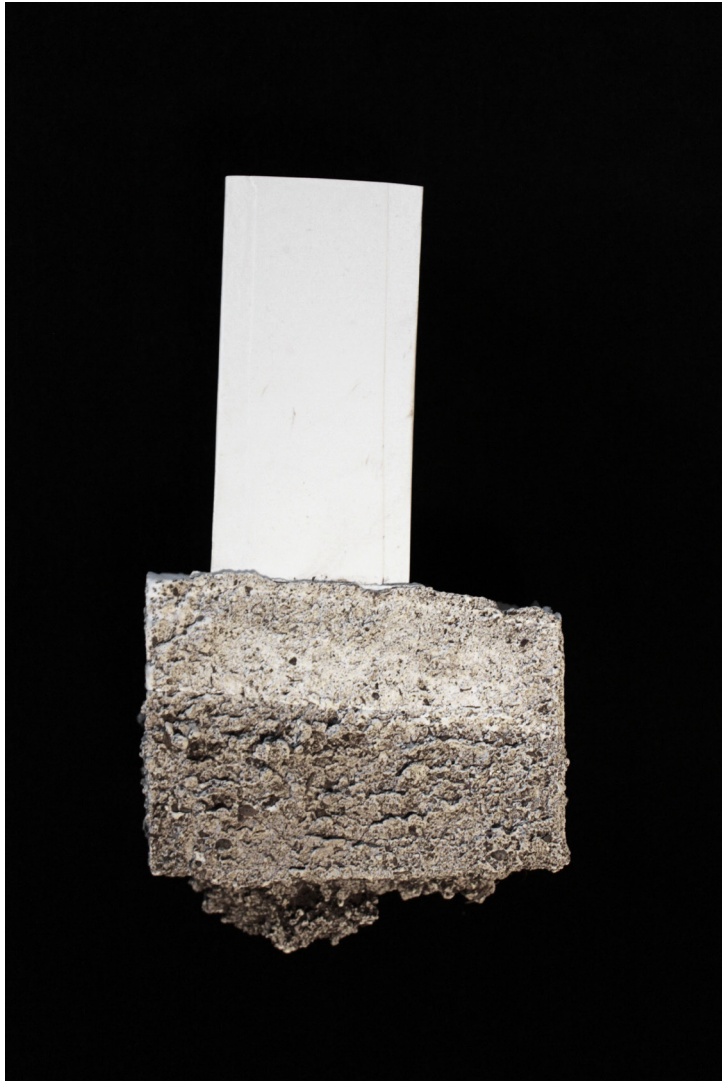
2.41
S-07 (long square-based cuboid on long square-based cuboid), photo, from the series Earth Plugs

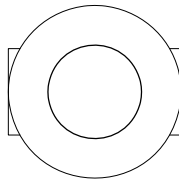
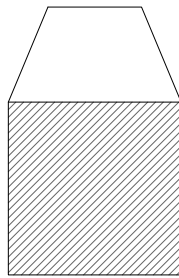




2.42
S-03 (long square-based cuboid inset on long cuboid), sketch, from the series Earth Plugs

-
2.43
S-03 (long square-based cuboid inset on long cuboid), photo, from the series Earth Plugs

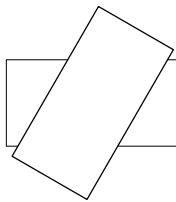
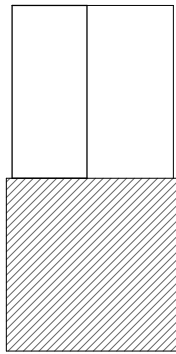




2.44
*H-01 (half
truncated cone
on long cuboid),
sketch, from the
series Earth Plugs*

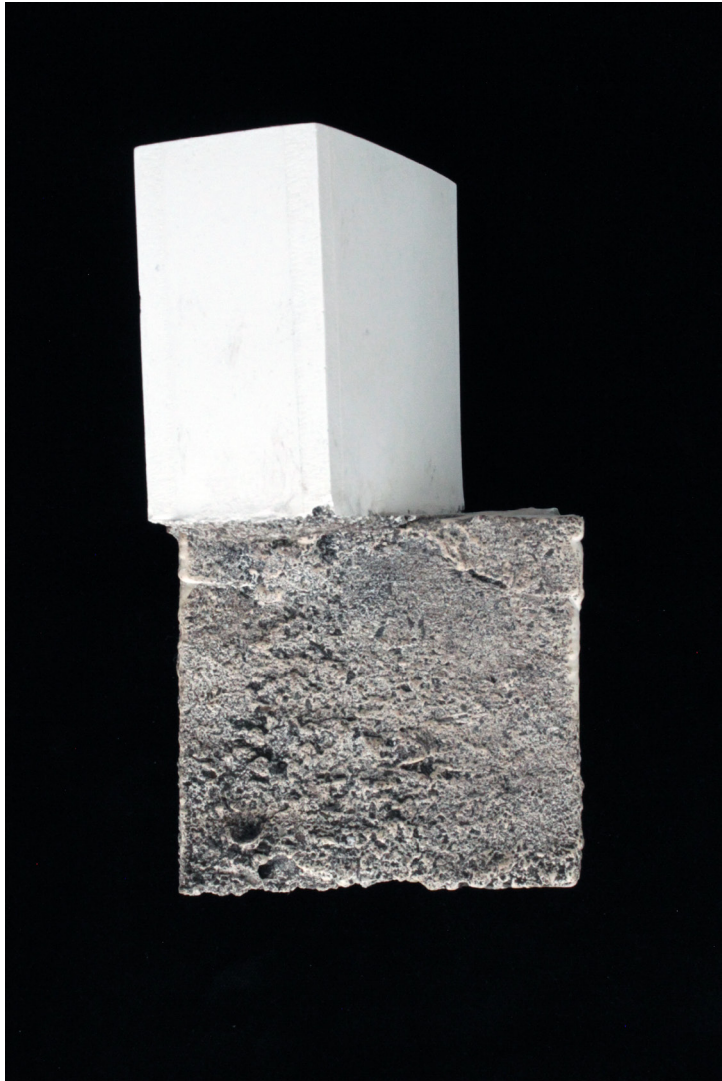
-
2.45
*H-01 (half
truncated cone
on long cuboid),
photo, from the
series Earth Plugs*

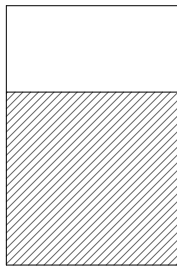




2.46
*S-02 (twisted long
cuboid on long
cuboid), sketch,
from the series
Earth Plugs*

-
2.47
*S-02 (twisted long
cuboid on long
cuboid), photo,
from the series
Earth Plugs*

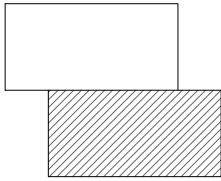




2.48
*S-04 (short cuboid
on long cuboid),
sketch, from the
series Earth Plugs*

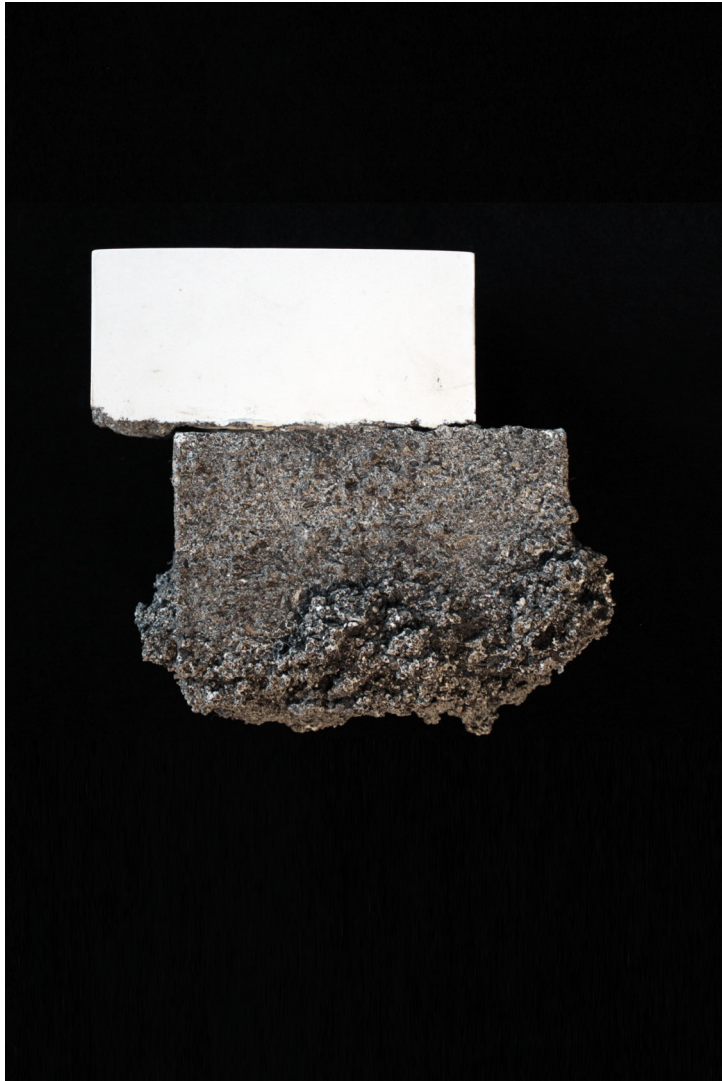
-
2.49
*S-04 (short cuboid
on long cuboid),
photo, from the
series Earth Plugs*

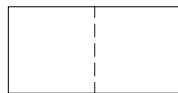
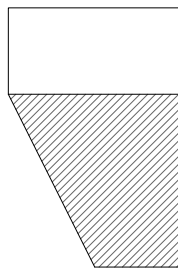




2.50
*S-09 (short cuboid
shifted on short
cuboid), sketch,
from the series
Earth Plugs*

-
2.51
*S-09 (short cuboid
shifted on short
cuboid), photo,
from the series
Earth Plugs*

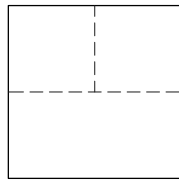
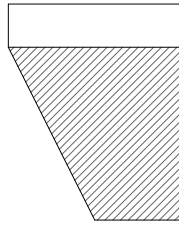




2.52
*S-05 (short cuboid
on long cuboid
with angled side),
sketch, from the
series Earth Plugs*

-
2.53
*S-05 (short cuboid
on long cuboid
with angled side),
photo, from the
series Earth Plugs*

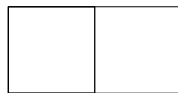
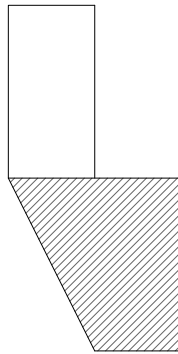




2.54
*S-12 (flat cuboid
edge-aligned on
long cuboid with
angled side),
sketch, from the
series Earth Plugs*

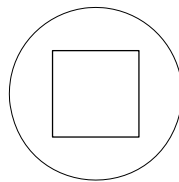
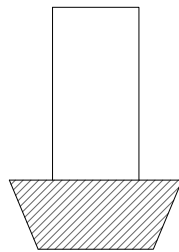
2.55
*S-12 (flat cuboid
edge-aligned on
long cuboid with
angled side),
photo, from the
series Earth Plugs*





2.56
S-06 (long square-based cuboid on long cuboid with angled side), sketch, from the series Earth Plugs
-
2.57
S-06 (long square-based cuboid on long cuboid with angled side), photo, from the series Earth Plugs

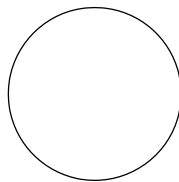
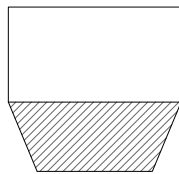




2.58
*H-02 (long
square-based
cuboid on half
truncated cone),
sketch, from the
series Earth Plugs*

2.59
*H-02 (long
square-based
cuboid on half
truncated cone),
photo, from the
series Earth Plugs*

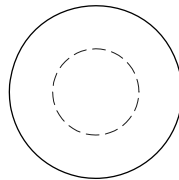
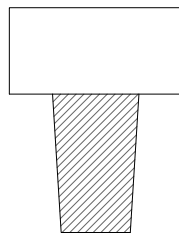




2.60
*C-03 (large
cylinder on half
truncated cone),
sketch, from the
series Earth Plugs*

-
2.61
*C-03 (large
cylinder on half
truncated cone),
photo, from the
series Earth Plugs*

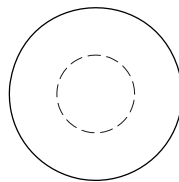
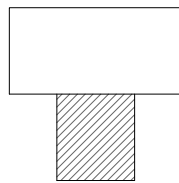




2.62
*C-05 (large
cylinder on small
tapered cylinder),
sketch, from the
series Earth Plugs*

-
2.63
*C-05 (large
cylinder on small
tapered cylinder),
photo, from the
series Earth Plugs*

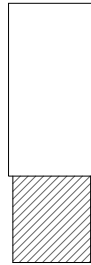




2.64
*C-04 (large
cylinder on small
cylinder), sketch,
from the series
Earth Plugs*

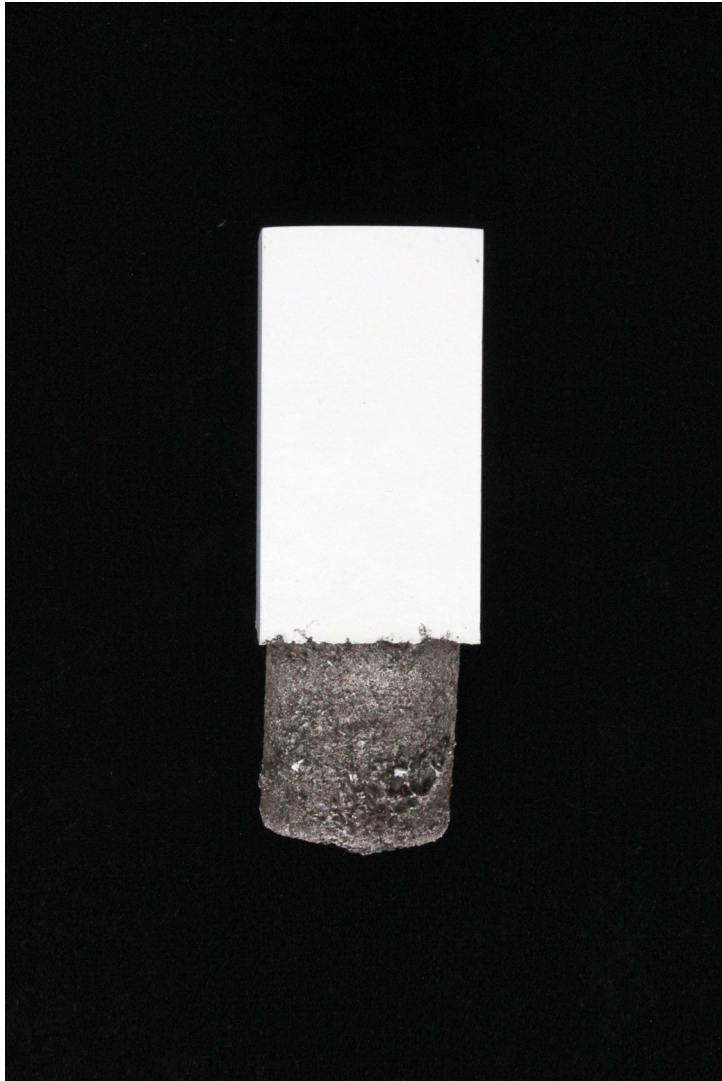
-
2.65
*C-04 (large
cylinder on small
cylinder), photo,
from the series
Earth Plugs*

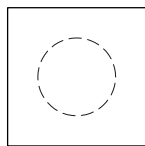
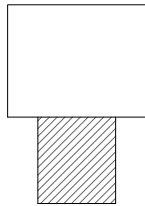




2.66
*H-06 (long
square-based
cuboid on small
cylinder), sketch,
from the series
Earth Plugs*

-
2.67
*H-06 (long
square-based
cuboid on small
cylinder), photo,
from the series
Earth Plugs*

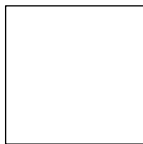




2.68
*H-03 (cube on
small cylinder),
sketch, from the
series Earth Plugs*

-
2.69
*H-03 (cube on
small cylinder),
photo, from the
series Earth Plugs*



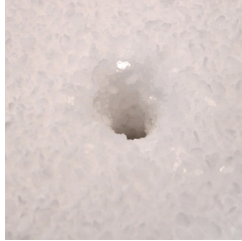


2.70
S-13 (cube),
photo, from the
series *Earth Plugs*

-
2.71
S-13 (cube),
photo, from the
series *Earth Plugs*



1.60
Drip (60 / 100)



Elegy, Epitaph, Epilogue

1.

My grandmother dies September 13, 2014.

The whole funeral is conducted in Mandarin. Will, being the only grandson-in-law to attend, executes the offering ritual by himself. The funeral director, having no way to communicate with him except by hand gestures, conducts. We all watch—a chorus of mourners in black robes. Will, the farthest removed of all my grandmother’s descendants, is the last one to perform this ceremony. After, other relatives and friends pay their respects with less elaborate acts. Less incense. Less bowing. Less outward mourning. Less ancestor worship.

We hold onto a red string around an outdoor incinerator. This is the part where the funeral notice, stamped with the fingerprint of each descendant present, is burned along with offerings. We send to our dead paper money and a scale model of a four bedroom house.

When Rosalind Krauss writes about how artwork viewed in succession unfolds as a cinematic narrative, and how “that narrative in turn becomes

an explanatory supplement to the works,”¹ I think of how ritual becomes an explanatory supplement to the experience of death. Ritual orders. Ritual defines experience. Ritual makes sense of the whole mess of death. It structures lurching grief. It gives the mourning something to hold on to.

Later, when nothing else *is there*, mourners will feel comforted that they sent their dead off well. We will persevere knowing that her body is in this place.

Because my grandfather died 12 years earlier, I knew what to expect this time. That’s the trick with ritual: once you know it, it’s almost always the same. It is maintained by performance, and fortified by repetition. I knew they would find an auspicious day for her funeral. I knew we would make the long journey to Taiwan. I knew there would be a shrine, which we would feed and keep company. I knew we would wear black every day. I knew the chartered bus would be our cortege. I knew we would eat lunch between the funeral service and the cremation. I knew we would pick her bones. I knew we

1 Rosalind Krauss, “Notes on the Index: Part 2,” *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1985), 219.

would take the urn to the columbarium. I knew which chamber was theirs.

Ethnographer James L. Watson writes about the significance of ritual in Chinese culture. He states, “To be Chinese is to understand, and accept the view, that there is a correct way to perform rites associated with the life-cycle, the most important being weddings and funerals.”² To understand, to accept, to perform correctly, are actions I recognize, not only with this experience of death, but with life too. At my uncle’s wedding, I held a tray of oranges to greet the bride upon her arrival for the tea ceremony. An umbrella was held over her head to shield her from bad luck. 27 years later, I raised a bowl of fruit to my head as a sign of respect and parting. An umbrella was held over my cousin, carrying my grandmother’s urn, to shield them from bad luck. To the monk’s chanting, in front of an elaborate shrine, we cried. Later, at the family dinner, there were no more outward expressions of grief. It was all over. It is all over.

2 James L. Watson, “The Structure of Chinese Funerary Rites: Elementary Forms, Ritual Sequence, and the Primacy of Performance,” *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China*, ed. James L. Watson and Evelyn S. Rawski (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 3.

Memory, like grief, fades with time. This loss happens within a person, but its effects become more pronounced over larger scales of time. Anne Carson sides with Faulkner and Louise Bourgeois when she reminds us that “The purpose of the monument is to insert a dead and vanished past into the living present.”³ Carson, being a writer and poet, also includes epitaphs as part of the exchange between past and present,⁴ where language memorializes as much as architecture does.

2.

I became Facebook friends with Aniko Meszaros two weeks after she died. At the time, I did not know she had died. I learned this by accepting her friend request. This fact, and this twist of timeline, is even more intriguing to me now because I never met her while she was alive. I only know of her through others, and by way of an incomplete virtual version of herself.

3 Anne Carson, *Economy of the Unlost (Reading Simonides of Keos with Paul Celan)* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 73.

4 Ibid, 85.

Built in the 1880s with patient labour from the Provincial Lunatic Asylum, the Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital opened in 1890 as the Mimico Branch Asylum. It was later known as Mimico Asylum, Mimico Hospital for the Insane, the Ontario Hospital (New Toronto), and finally as the Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital, before closing in 1979. Shadowing the asylum's name changes, its cemetery was called the Mimico Asylum Burial Grounds, Mimico Hospital Cemetery, Ontario Hospital (New Toronto) Cemetery, Ontario Hospital Cemetery (Mimico), Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital Cemetery, Potter's Field Mimico, Evans Avenue Cemetery, and finally—recognized on a long-anticipated provincial plaque—the Lakeshore Asylum Cemetery.

1,511 are buried at the Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital Cemetery. All but 154 of these graves are unmarked, which was customary at the time. You could argue that these patients were forgotten long before they died, but without gravestones, not even chance visitors could acknowledge them by name. The institutionalized dead were not relegated to this asylum cemetery alone, but buried at Mount Pleasant, Prospect, and Park Lawn cemeteries too. They form a network of present absences throughout the city.

In 2004, the Lakeshore Asylum Cemetery Project (LACP) formed with the aim of maintaining and restoring the cemetery, which had been severely neglected. They petitioned the province to have all the cemetery's graves marked. In the interim, faded plastic flowers ensure that gravestones are only partially obscured by leaves and debris. A fence, a cemetery sign, and a historical plaque, signal the cemetery's existence to passersby.

Notwithstanding that asylum cemeteries are “a reminder of psychiatry's undoubtedly problematic past,”⁵ the ‘missing dead’ (more broadly) occupy a tricky place in our conception of memory and memorialization. That is, we are disturbed by them. They are in effect somewhere, but nowhere. They escape our communal desire to know and record. They evade our need to put the dead to rest.

Today I learn through Facebook that there's a stone bench for Aniko. There's also a black walnut tree dedicated to her there. It is likely I will never visit this place. Online,

5 Chris Philo, “Trouble proximities: asylums and cemeteries in nineteenth-century England,” *History of Psychiatry* 23, no. 1 (2012): 100.

family and friends leave notes for her. They also exchange photos and messages with each other. In effect, Facebook is one of her gravesites. It's the only one I've been to.

3.

There's a photograph of the artist Gordon Matta-Clark cutting the ceiling of a suburban house in New Jersey. He's working on both sides of what will be a continuous 2-inch gap. He's fixated on the cut. Standing on a ladder, he exercises as much precision as can be applied to a tool on a gypsum ceiling. There's another photograph of Matta-Clark working on the same house. He's dangling from a rope on the outside of the building. He appears to be sitting on a small platform. A ladder and its shadow frame him. The upstairs window is broken. These—and other photographs and films of his work, and of him working on his work—are important because they are all we have left of his site-specific sculptures at the scale of architecture. Having died at the age of 35, they're also all we have left of him. This fact is inescapable. When I see a photo of Matta-Clark, I know he is dead.

Writing about *shirasu* in *Levitation*, I describe how *shirasu* simultaneously separates and connects this world to the

other. In architect Kengo Kuma's design of a Nō theatre for Toyoma, all architectural elements are reduced to their material limit, a minimal framework to support the performance.⁶ Set in the woods, the *shirasu*—the space between the main stage and spectator floor, the otherworld and the present—is rendered (unconventionally) with crushed black stone, so that it extends beyond its own boundaries seamlessly into the forest floor. Kuma explains how “the *shirasu* maintains its abstract state by continuing to flow out and spill over, from the stage towards the woods.”⁷ At the Itsukushima Shrine in Hatsukaichi, water is used to represent this separating and connecting space. Significantly, the stage and spectator floor float on the *shirasu*, one that fluctuates with the tide.

In the context of *shirasu*, memorials of all kinds, while very much residing in the world of the living, also connect us to the dead. Because the dead are actually put to rest *somewhere*, burial places maintain their particular significance as a site where the living and dead come

6 Kengo Kuma, *Anti-Object: The Dissolution and Disintegration of Architecture*, trans. Hiroshi Watanabe (London: AA Publications, 2008), 61-64.

7 Ibid, 65.

together. Memorials as markers are a stand-in for what's missing. Even everyday objects of the dead offer proof of life. They remind us of the complex relationship between the living and dead.

I wrote earlier on the memorial nature of photography and sculpture. Photography unites us with death in its essence as trace, an imprint of the real, whereas sculpture rescues the past and “remakes it into a form that will never decay and never die.”⁸ Language does the same. Each exists on the threshold between life and death. Each is like a mirror for a specific life, and a specific past. Each delivers to the present something, or someone, that once was.

The poet Don McKay writes about gravestones as sculpted entrances or exits. They are “holes the dead fell through, which we have squared up, plugged.”⁹ Being distanced from deep loss, my *Earth Plugs* are sculptures, not yet memorials. For me, they synthesize what *Phantom Limb* offers as a comprehensive, though

8 Louis Menand, “Imitation of Life: John Updike’s cultural project,” *The New Yorker* (April 28, 2014): 76.

9 Don McKay, “Specific Gravities: #76 (Marble),” *Strike / Slip* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 2006), 28.

not exhaustive, contemplation of life and death. The sculptures sit at the metaphorical boundary between life and death, the surface that simultaneously connects and divides air and earth. They are contemporary reminders of death within life. They speak to presence and absence, to the creation and maintenance of ritual through performance and repetition. They also remind us how making is precise because the precision of meaning is achieved in the thing itself.

It occurs to me that the weight of each sculpture could be the weight of grief. Heavy. Gnarled. Diverse. This is what I imagine deep grief to be. But I have not yet been devastated this way. I have no open wound. Instead, I create a funerary terrain of my own making. And then I wait.



2.72
Earth Plugs



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