

HOUSE OF THE 3 RABBITS

An archaeology in reverse,
the unpacking of a lost symbol,
or daydreaming on the moon rabbit...



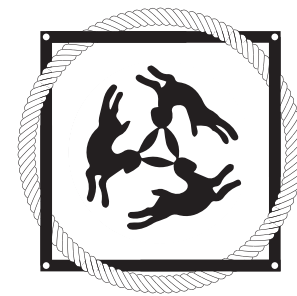
RANDOLPH S. ALBRIGHT

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with 172 illustrations



ESCOLA SUPERIOR DE ARTE E DESIGN

Edited and designed by Kristine Nørgaard Andersen
Produced by Woolooland, Ltd.

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Cover image: Sandstone graffiti, c.15th Century, Notre-Dame de Thiérouze, a former hermitage located a few kilometers from the three rabbits of Charmois l'Orgueilleux, Naymont, and Xertigny.

Printed and bound in Portugal.

In documenting my research and the ensuing collection of artifacts, I hope to embody the slippage Roland Barthes succinctly describes, in his collection of observations, *The Empire of Signs*:

”The text does not ‘gloss’ the images, which do not ‘illustrate’ the text. For me, each has been no more than the onset of a kind of visual uncertainty, analogous perhaps to that loss of meaning Zen calls a ‘satori’. Text and image, interlacing, seek to ensure the circulation and exchange of these signifiers, and in them to read the retreat of signs.”

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Abstract

This project charts the development of a brand inspired by the symbol of three rabbits with interlocking ears.

The process documented in this book details the evolution of the brand, charting its history and the deciphering of its language. The symbol is explored through a collection of artifacts in a variety of media: print, ceramics, glass, and metal. My practice develops a fictional archaeological history which evolves our brand identity.

The collection draws from diverse cultural traditions and will inspire our future projects in various fields of interest: organic streetwear, sustainable home décor, and holistic body care products.

In addition to producing limited editions of products and publications, and managing our home and forest garden, the creative team at Three Rabbits Farm also provides consulting services for natural building, garden and interior design, as well as food styling and event planning for a range of international clientele.

Keywords

alchemy, alloy, amulets, anthropology, archaeology, becoming, being, branding, bronze, casting, ceramic, collection, craft, Dasein, design, domestic arts, ethnography, food forest, glass, hares, iron, lithography, molds, moon, mythologies, mysticism, neo-classicism, ornament, pattern, permaculture, post-artistic, printmaking, rabbits, romanticism, sand, semiotics, silk road, silkscreen, surf, symbol, talisman, vernacular, wabi-sabi, Wunderkammer,

Introduction

This project explores an ancient symbol: three rabbits with shared ears. Believed to have originally symbolized transformation, balance, and fertility, this ancient pictogram travelled far from its origin in the Buddhist temples of western China, rolling along the Silk Road and cross-pollinating the fertile imaginations of Islamic, Christian, and Judaic cultures.

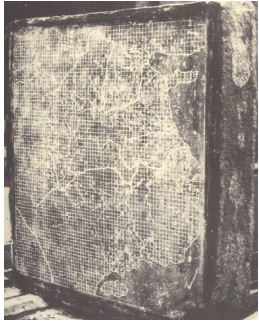
Since adopting this symbol as our logo in 2010, I have been renovating a country house, planting an edible food forest and developing a wide range of real and imaginary products. Our house brand embraces a natural lifestyle and slow design, creating a growing universe of objects. We also produce limited editions of organic edibles and beverages, holistic body care products, garden and kitchen tools, toys for children and adults, as well as garments and home textiles. We also curate publications, design events, and offer consultation services. We grow our brand through collaborations with international creatives, regional industrial partners, and cultural institutions.

The House of the Three Rabbits is a contemporary 'Gesamtkunstwerk' which is grounded in a physical as well as metaphysical space. Through a playful game of semiotics, I hope to reach across temporal and cultural borders, opening a window to the past and a door to the future, by shaping the present. Through a variety of techniques (printmaking, glassblowing, ceramics, and metal casting) I have labored to expand the vocabulary



Temple painting (Cave 407), c.800 BCE, Temple of One Thousand Buddhas, Western China. Situated around an oasis, Dunhuang commanded a position of strategic importance on the southern silk road, linking India to Siberia.

of our visual language. The resulting collection is composed of handmade objects - vessels, tablets, seals, and stamps - which are hybrids of contemporary digital technology and ancestral methods. As an open-ended series, the work alludes to the untold history of a mysterious symbol, both ubiquitous and auspicious, via a constellation of imaginary archaeological fragments. In the context of this fictitious ethnographical collection, the artifacts form the groundwork for further exploration.



Stone printing plate, c. 900 B.C. Map depicts the silk road, used for reproduction by rubbing, negative cuts in the plate create white lines in the rubbings, indicating routes and geographic features.

It began with a phone call on Easter morning. The year was 2010. On the other end of the line spoke my curatorial collaborator and longtime friend, Sixten Kai Nielsen, calling from Copenhagen with the chance of a lifetime. The opportunity was a proposal to develop a yet undecided property somewhere in the countryside of Portugal. Would I accept? My growing passion for the language and culture would be a key factor. This was a unique chance to create a life work, and we both knew it. It would not be an adventure without risk, but we soon set out to find our site. Our goal was to renovate an old farmhouse and establish a food forest, inspired by the principles of permaculture and natural agriculture. Neither of us had ever embarked on a journey like this before.



The Silk Road was utilized to transport not only goods such as wine, spices, and silk, but also ideas about art, song, and religion.

Jump to Search

The House of the Three Rabbits is the materialization of a desire to reconnect with the natural environment. By planting a diverse variety of trees and perennial species, and rebuilding our home using materials such as timber, clay, lime, wood-fiber and straw (whenever sensible and possible) my intention was to develop a set and setting where a symbiotic relationship to nature is the primary focus.

We began searching for our site 85 kilometers north of Lisbon, approximately 20 kilometers inland from the Atlantic Ocean, attracted to this area by several factors. The region possesses many favorable conditions: a moist micro-climate, highly propitious for the cultivation of diverse fruit and nut species, proximity to world class surfing beaches. The social resources in the surrounding townships of Caldas da Rainha and Óbidos are excellent, with active artistic, literary, and music scenes, antiques and farmers markets, as well as deep regional traditions in ceramics and glass making.

The surrounding landscapes are spectacular. Namely the mountain ranges and limestone caves of the Aire and Candeeiros, the extensive lagoon by the Mozarabic fortress village of Óbidos, and the still partially buried Roman settlement of Eburobrittium.

For surfers, the horseshoe shaped bay of Peniche receives omnidirectional swells year-round, with diverse bathymetric typologies. Baleal, a small island named for its whaling history, is linked to the mainland by a narrow tombolo. To the north, sandy beaches stretch from Almagreira to Rei Cortiço. This natural wonderland serves as the stage for dramatic sunsets and moonrises, and lunar cliffs as a sandstone backdrop, with the archipelagos of the Berlengas and Faroís hanging just above the horizon.



Illuminated medieval text, 12th century. The symbol has represented many different beliefs, it is a fluid sign charged with meaning, uniting diverse cultures and beliefs. Artist unknown.

Orchards of apple, pear, and quince, as well as wild chestnuts, figs, plums, and citrus share their bounty throughout the year. Centennial vineyards blanket the surrounding valleys, providing wine for all tastes and seasons.

Our selected location met all our prerequisite conditions, proximity to Lisbon and local beaches, while still being removed enough from the salty ocean air to allow for successful horticulture. The building also met our needs; a large open floorplan with solid foundations, running water and preexisting electricity, and enough property to begin an expansive forest garden without becoming unmanageable. The house sits upon a parcel of land which once belonged to an old estate, known as Mata Rica, which means, in Portuguese, rich woodlands. The property which we were to acquire in the autumn of 2010, by coincidence, had also once upon a time been a rabbit farm.

Over the course of the last ten years, with the generous input and creative energy of a growing family of carpenters and masons, artists and writers, gardeners and chefs, we are transforming an abandoned agricultural structure into an experimental rural homestead. The project has enveloped my existence and provided innumerable unique learning experiences in an endless process of exploration, as a designer, gardener, and builder.

This book documents the creation of a brand, which is centered around our farm. The text begins by examining a multitude of cross-cultural mythologies which feature rabbits and hares and continues with the documentation of the development of our first collection, and reflections regarding these objects and our future paths.

1. From the Womb to the Moon

*A rabbit sits upon the green,
believing it cannot be seen.
A man though, with a telescope
and watching keenly on a slope
Extending from a near-by knoll,
observes the little spoon-eared troll.
The man, in turn, from far is seen
by God, reposeful and serene.*

◊ Christian Morgenstern,
c.1933



Embroidery, Imperial gown, Qing Dynasty, 18th Century. In Chinese mythology the moon rabbit was thought to be mixing an elixir of immortality for the gods, while on the islands of Korea and Japan the rabbit prepares rice pancakes.

Rabbits and hares both belong to the family of lagomorphs, and despite their differences in physiognomy and behaviors, for the purpose of this text the two creatures are to be considered interchangeable. They have the honorable role as protagonists of creation myths around the world. Archetypal animals representing multiple aspects of a divine nature; the lunar cycle, fertility, renewal, the coming of spring, and transformation. In diverse pantheons, these quicksilver creatures have accompanied goddesses of the moon, spring, and love... serving as companions, messengers, or saviors. They possess a paradoxical persona: exhibiting both cleverness and foolishness, cowardice and courage, vital sexuality and virginal purity. We outline a selection of these mythologies, to let a bit of moonlight shine on their similarities and differences.

Moon Mythologies

Around the world, since memory began, people have told each other stories of a rabbit on the moon. Based on an illusory visual phenomenon, known as a *pareidolia*, the human imagination has consistently envisioned the contours of a rabbit, standing on his hind legs, in the surface of the moon. This optical illusion was the spark for innumerable stories of how and why a rabbit got on the moon. These stories are humankind's first attempts to understand and explain the moon, such a powerful influence, in plain sight yet so far from our grasp, forever waxing and forever waning.

*The moonlight seen through the tall branches,
is more, say all the poets,
than the moonlight seen through the tall branches.
But for me, oblivious to what I think,
the moonlight seen through the tall branches,
besides its being
the moonlight seen through the tall branches,
is it's not being more
than the moonlight seen through the tall branches.*

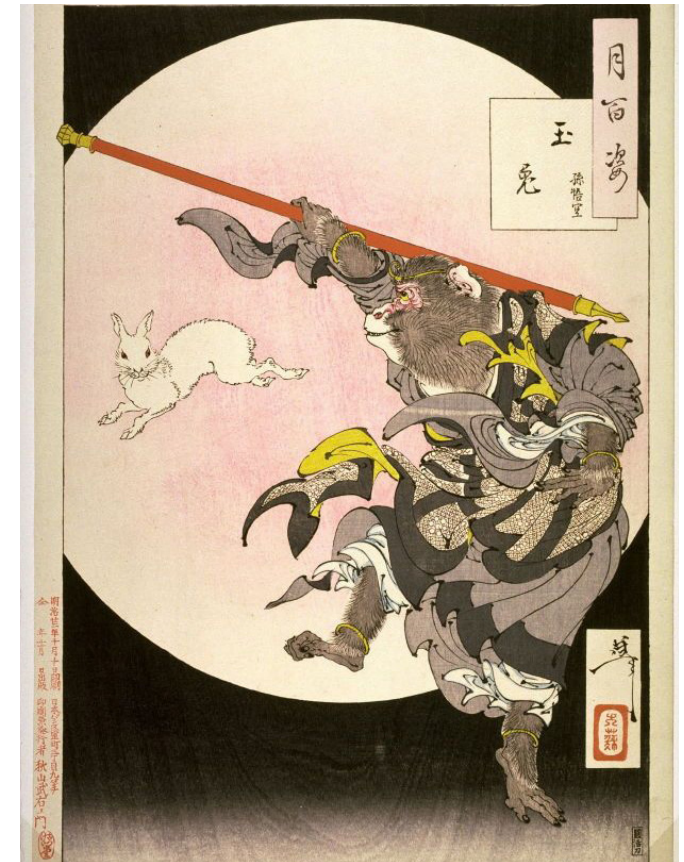
◊ Fernando Pessoa,
c. 1914

Asia

Chinese folklore traditionally visualizes a rabbit on the Moon as holding a mortar and pestle, used to grind herbs for the gods. However, in Japanese and Korean versions of this folk tale, the ingredients are of a simpler recipe, rice cakes.

During the Han Dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE) the colloquial names Golden Hare or Jade Hare were poetic euphemisms for the Moon. During the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE), regarded by historians as a golden age of Chinese cosmopolitan culture, the revered poet Li Po wrote his poem *The Old Dust* where in he describes the moon rabbit "pounding medicine in vain."

Woodblock print, 1889, Japan. Sun Wukong battles the Moon Rabbit (*Songokū gyokuto*), Carved by Tsukioka Yoshitoshi, from his series One Hundred Aspects of the Moon (*Tsuki hyaku sugata*)



As companion to the Moon goddess *Chang'e*, hares were considered the guardian of all wild animals and believed to be asexual, conceiving their offspring only when the light of a full moon shone upon their fur. Traditional Asian lunar festivals continue to celebrate the rabbit as a harbinger of longevity, fertility, and feminine power. The contemporary Chinese printmaking scholar, Han Xu Dong, who shadowed me as I created a series of lithographic moon calendars, informed me that the three rabbits represents the essential philosophical concept of *Chéngwéi* – which translates to *being* or *becoming*. This idea of transformation and process became increasingly influential to my vision and practice.

Wall painting on plaster, c.1350 BCE, 18th Dynasty, tomb-temple of Nebamun, Thebes.



Another poetic explanation of the image of a rabbit in the moon comes from a collection of Buddhist fables known as the Jataka tales. On the day of the full moon, four animals: a monkey, an otter, a jackal, and a rabbit, decide together to practice charity. For their virtuous behavior, they hoped to be rewarded. When an old man came begging for food; the monkey gathered fruit, the otter caught a fish, and the jackal hunted a lizard. The humble rabbit, only able to gather grass, offered up his own body, throwing himself on the man's campfire. The beggar, under the rags of a vagabond, was truly Sakra, a great ruler of an important realm in Buddhist cosmology. Deeply moved by the rabbit's selflessness, Sakra traced the rabbit's silhouette on the Moon. His silhouette is supposedly still draped in the smoke from the fire. In Sanskrit, one term for the Moon is *śaśaṅka*, which translated literally means "one with the mark of the hare".



Ancient Egyptians annually sacrificed a hare to the Nile river to bless the coming floods.

Popular in folkloric traditions throughout China, India, Sri Lanka, Japan, Korea, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam, this legend has inspired innumerable autumn celebrations in honor of the moon rabbit. The hare is also considered to be a *bodhisattva*, an elaborate Buddhist concept which refers to a sentient being, or *sattva*, who strives towards *bodhi* or enlightenment.

Pictogram on Mazinaw Rock, Bon Echo Provincial Park, Ontario. *Manabozho* was a trickster figure in Ojibwe (Chippewa) mythology, appearing in the creation stories of many First Nations.



The moon goddess of western Siberia is the shape-shifting Kaltes-Ekwa, who wanders the tundra disguised as a hare, and when she returned to her human form, she keeps the ears of a hare. She is traditionally invoked by pregnant women during childbirth and venerated for her influence at the beginning of the life cycle, she is also considered a goddess of rejuvenation and midwifery.

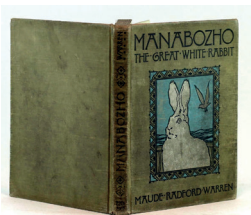
Africa

Carthaginians came to the Iberian Peninsula around 300 BCE and named the region Ispania (from Sphan) which means 'land of the rabbits'.

Ancient Egyptians also associated hares with the cycles of the moon, believing their gender to shift from masculine (when waxing) to the feminine (when waning). *Osiris* was ceremoniously revered in an annual ritual with an offering to the Nile river, in the form of a living hare. His wife *Wenet* (also *Wen* or *Un*), was known as the Swift One and was often depicted beside *Osiris*, with either the head or ears of a hare. Her likeness can be found carved into the sandstone *stela* of *Unas* and painted on the walls of the temple at *Dendera*. *Unas* ruled in the 5th Dynasty, and was the only pharaoh to assume the name of *Wenet*. Around 2350 BCE, he was the first pharaoh to inscribe

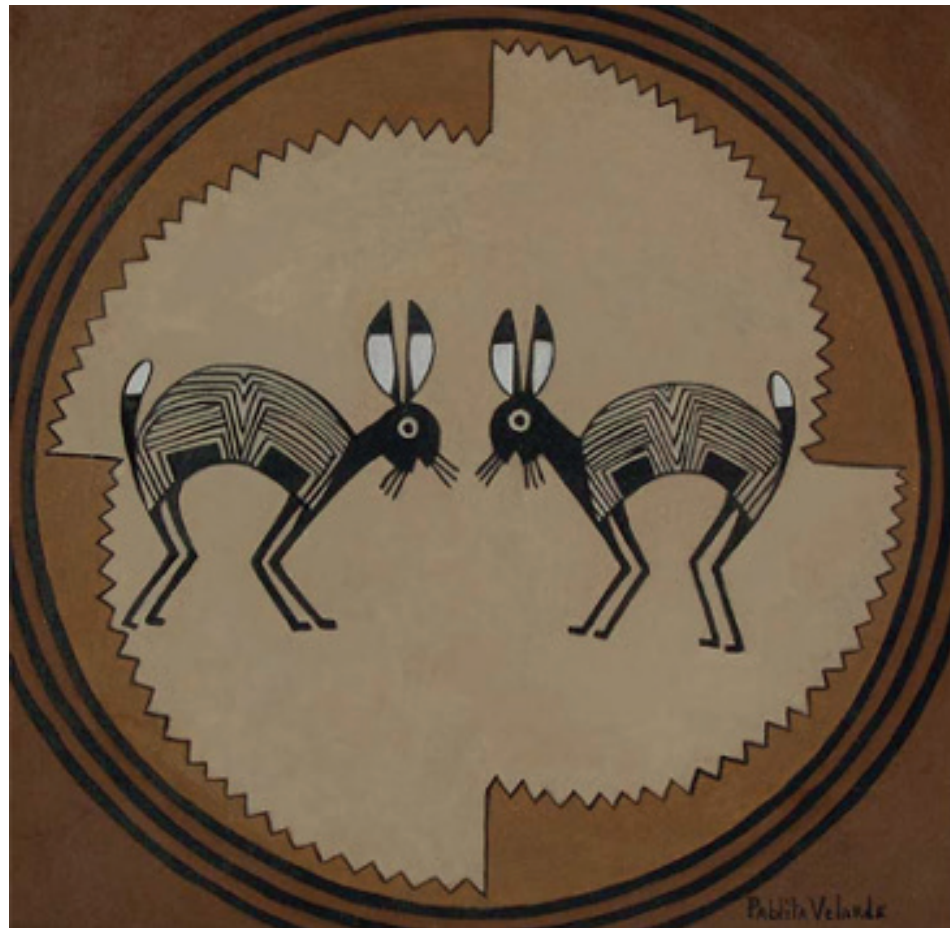
his burial chamber with the sacred Pyramid Texts. Perhaps this is the reason Wenet was revered in some cults to be the creator of writing. Wenet was also the standard deity of Hermopolis, known as The Hare Nome.

The Egyptians called the hare ‘*One*’, the ‘*opener*’, or the ‘*opening*’, because unlike rabbits, the hare is born with open eyes. Un also signified period, and the hare was the symbol of cycles. While images of desert rabbits are found from as early as 3000 BCE, hares were not utilized as amulets until the Old Kingdom (c.2686-2160 BCE). Bright blue faience figurines of hares were placed in tombs to assist the deceased in making the passage into the afterlife, in hopes to bestow upon the dead the strengths of the hare: speed, agility, and keen senses. The turquoise-blue color of the amulet was also thought to invoke the fertility of the Nile. The hare’s significance in Egyptian lore possibly derived additional meaning from its hieroglyphic representation; given the phonetic value of “wen”, the sound was most frequently used as a verb meaning “to be.” This recurring idea of ‘*beingness*’ attached to the hare is yet another instance of this small creature’s role as a cross cultural agent of change, symbolizing the essence of existence and the potential of transformation.



Stories about Manabozho, spoken tales, through numerous printed editions, captured the popular imaginations of early twentieth century readers.

West African cultures such as the Yoruba of Nigeria and the Wolof of Senegal told tales of a mischievous rabbit figure, and pan-African legend recounts a rabbit sent down from the moon to bestow immortality upon mankind, bearing the message: “Man and woman shall be like the Moon, dying and rising again and again.” However, the rabbit confused the message, and instead of blessing her people with endless life, brought mortality upon them. The Moon became furious and struck the rabbit on the nose, splitting it in half, as it remains to this day. As punishment for this error, the rabbit was assigned the unenviable task of leading souls into the afterlife.



The Americas

Above:
Mimbres Rabbits, 1978
earth painting by Pablita
Velarde. Santa Clara
Pueblo, Kha’p’oo Owinge,
Velarde ground her own
natural pigments by hand
and on a panel prepared
with pumice, applying
pigment and water with glue
in thin layers.

The Mayan moon goddess *Ix Chel*, often portrayed with a rabbit in her arms, was a goddess of midwifery, water, and weaving. As in Siberia, this was a goddess to be invoked during childbirth. In a striking similarity to the Buddhist fable, Aztec mythology tells of the god *Quetzalcoatl*, who was exhausted after a long journey and thought he couldn’t survive any longer. A rabbit grazing nearby, saw his suffering, and made an offering of itself as sustenance to the stranger. *Quetzalcoatl* was so moved by the sacrifice that he held the rabbit up to the Moon, telling her, “Small rabbit, your shadow is now upon the moon, and will be seen everywhere.”

Mesoamerican creation myths told of another young god, named *Nanahuatzin*, who sacrificed himself to ignite a dying fire during a festival of the gods. Rising heroically into the heavens he became the sun. Enraged with drunken envy, a lazy and vain god named *Tecciztecatl* (pronounced Texas-cattle) threw himself into the fire after him and in turn became the Moon. He was now destined to forever chase the Sun. In a mocking gesture, the other gods threw a rabbit to the moon, to help quicken his Sisyphean pursuit.

The ‘Great Hare’, or *Manabozho*, is a respected deity in Ojibwe (Chippewa), Algonquin, Ottawa, and Winnebago tribes. The hare plays many different roles in the oral histories of the First Nations: clown, thief, and trickster. This comic hero is simultaneously earth’s creator, the giver of fire and light, and a shaman for sacred rituals.

The Ute tribe tells of Little Rabbit, or *Ta-Vwots*, who shatters the sun and destroys the world. Omaha legend tells of how a rabbit, while trying to catch his own shadow, pulled the sun down to earth. Cree legend tells of a young rabbit who wished to ride upon the Moon. A passing crane offered to lift the rabbit up to the heavens, his legs stretched long by the rabbit’s weight. Reaching the moon, the rabbit marked the bird’s crest with red, by touching the crane with a bleeding paw. They reckon the same rabbit can still be seen riding the full moon on clear nights, and the crane still bears the marks of their celestial journey.

Europe

In the Hellenic imagination, they symbolized abundance and fertility. Rabbit meat was believed to cure sterility and impotence, due to the animal’s abundant fecundity. Their hunting traditions taught woodsmen to spare the lives of newborn hares, and instead of killing them, rabbit kittens or kits were offered to *Artemis* (revered in Rome as *Diana*), the goddess of the hunt, vegetation and childbirth. Sacred to *Aphrodite* (later known



The Egyptian mongoose (*Herpestes ichneumon*), above, and the Iberian hare (*Lepus granatensis*), below. Two endemic species which inhabit Mata Rica, the woodlands surrounding the House of the Three Rabbits.

as *Venus*), the Grecian goddess of pleasure, passion, and procreation; the gift of a rabbit held the power to aid infertile women in conceiving.

In Teutonic myth, the earth/sky goddess *Holda* was accompanied by hares bearing torches, and was revered as the mistress of the hunt, and a powerful spirit who could summon storms. *Freja*, the Norse goddess of love was also surrounded by hare companions. The Christian celebration of Easter was inspired by the goddess *Eostre*, a Celtic variant of the Germanic *Ostara*, and her breath brings to us the first warm winds of spring. Eostre was said to also be capable of changing form, morphing into a hare during the full moon. As her private messengers, all hares are held to be sacred.



Smithfield Decretals, c. 1341. This volume was embellished over decades, its wide margins filled with narrative imagery and ornamental motifs. Southern France, probably Toulouse.

realm, carrying messages beyond the threshold of the living. Ancient rituals were performed involving the reading of patterns found in their tracks, or more grotesquely in their entrails. Celtic wisdom likens eating a rabbit to consuming a female ancestor, possibly due to the superstition that witches would often transform into hares. Said to return to human form when wounded, witches inspired many tales about unsuspecting men being led astray by chasing a wayward hare.

Rabbits and hares have been used for centuries to adorn the tombstones and sepulchers of many cultures, symbolizing the cycle of life, death, and rebirth. Together, these tales weave the fabric of a collective imagination, explaining and mystifying in the same breath.

Just as the light of the moon shines on everyone, these tales illuminate deep commonalities across vastly distant cultures.

A Slippery Slope

By playfully positioning myself in the role of anthropologist or archaeologist, I am engaged in an increasingly familiar contemporary artistic practice, one which is not free from critique and contradiction, as Hal Foster observes in his collection of essays, *The Return to the Real*:

“Recently the old artist envy among anthropologists has turned the other way: a new ethnographer envy consumes many artists and critics...these artists and critics aspire to fieldwork in which theory and practice seem to be reconciled.”

He cites *“the allusion to prehistoric art in some earthworks, the art world as anthropological site in some conceptual and institution-critical art, [and] the invention of archaeological sites and anthropological civilizations...Thus did art pass into the expanded field of culture that anthropology is thought to survey.”*

While Foster rightfully finds fault in the fashion of artists naively attempting to assume the role of serious social

academics and dedicated field researchers, I find solace in an earlier echelon of eccentric collectors and explorers which exist before and beyond the contemporary art world and its fickle fashions and regurgitative modes of representation. While wishing to pay homage to the fields of archaeology and museology, I hope to sidestep the morass of complex ethical questions implicated by the hunt for decontextualized and stolen artifacts. Despite the ethical dilemmas, I remain fascinated by the potential for archaeological artifacts and narratives to create massive undulations of popular interest in our modern times.

A fetish for the Antique

It is widely recognized that the rediscovery of the lost civilizations at Herculaneum and Pompeii had a remarkable influence on aesthetics and art education. With excavations having commenced in 1738, the idea of travelling to these sites and witnessing, even collecting these historic artifacts was soon seen as a necessary rite of passage for any scholarly investigation into art and beauty, and these ancient relics in turn became *loci-classici* of human creation. These discoveries and their implications create a deeply nostalgic effect, stimulating broad public interest in ideas about ancient life, often highly romanticized, and spark further ethnographic investigation.

In a similar manner, interest in ancient Egypt was catalyzed by the secrets revealed in the wake of the 1824 deciphering of the Rosetta Stone, following on the heels of Napoleon’s Egyptian campaign. Widespread fascination for Hellenic culture was bolstered by the 1876 discovery of the (supposed) death mask of Agamemnon, at Mycenae, by the German archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann. In my practice, I overtly borrow from multiple cultural wellsprings, not with ahistorical irreverence, but in the sincere hope of unearthing a native sensibility to engage with a symbol which has been shared by humanity across centuries. In the process,

I have expanded my appreciation of these cross-cultural influences by opening an excavation into the past.

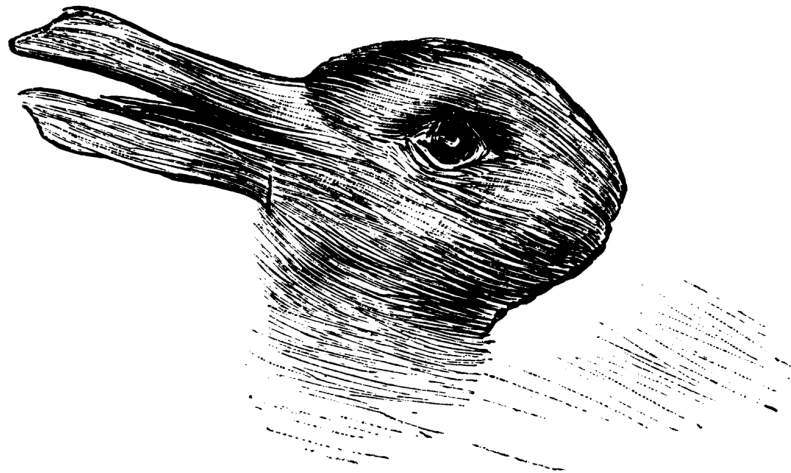
The current atmosphere in the art world mirrors that of society at large, and is justly hyper-critical of cultural appropriation and the exploitation of otherness. Flaccid and fashionable exoticizations of the unfamiliar are to be roundly condemned. However, I find myself liberated by a methodology which embraces historical free association and post-artistic play, and I feel that it is not only valid, but also rewarding and vital, despite the risks.

As the pragmatic Schliemann famously quipped when his discoveries were put into doubt:

*"So this is not Agamemnon...and these are not his ornaments?
All right, let's call him Schultze."*

"Kaninchen und Ente"
("Rabbit and Duck"), 1892.
from the October 23rd issue
of the humor magazine,
Fliegende Blätter. The text
reads, "Which animals are
the most alike? Rabbit and
duck" The illusion was later
made famous by Ludwig
Wittgenstein and included in
his *Philosophical Investigations*
as a vehicle to explain
different ways of seeing.

**Welche Tiere gleichen ein-
ander am meisten?**



Kaninchen und Ente.

2. The Pleasure of the symbol

*Drei Hasen teilen sich die Ohren drei,
Und doch hat jeder von ihnen zwei.*

Three hares share three ears,
Yet each one has only two.

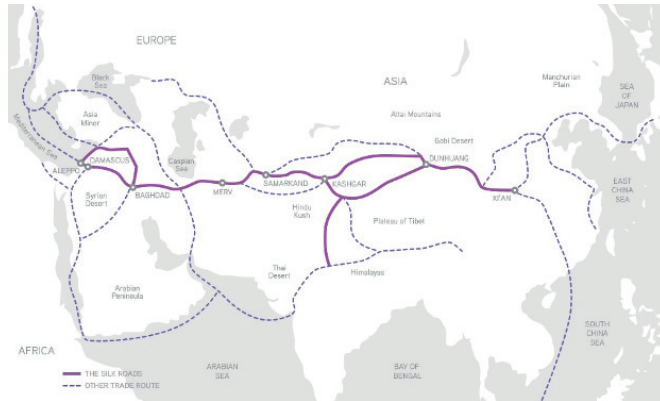
◊ German riddle

As I began to dream and to develop our identity, I found in the three rabbits a symbol which could encompass the potential of this project. My initial intention was an acknowledgement of the historicity of our site and to enrich future development of our homestead, our forest garden, and our brand. While delving into my role as a fictive archaeologist, and 'discovering' and unearthing self-made relics, I found solace and encouragement reflecting upon the slippery concept of 'Dasein'. In unpacking the German philosopher Martin Heidegger's concept of 'being in the world', as it applies to excavation and archaeology, Matt Edgeworth states:

"Human beings not only discover; they also explore, investigate. The horizons of their shifting fields of awareness expand and contract rather than remain constant. They bring ever more entities into the light, while inevitably sending other entities back into the darkness again."

Digging deeper into the history of this symbol, I was delighted to discover that it permeated innumerable cultural lineages, while still maintaining an aura of

The Silk Road was not travelled in its entirety, but through a series of relays, similar in structure to modern data networks, consisting of over 15,000 km of trails.



mystery surrounding its significance after the ensuing centuries. The symbol awoke in me a multitude of sensations, as though I was seeing something again for the first time. Unknown to me, it felt somehow oddly familiar, as if I had known it all along, familiar and mysterious, decidedly ancient yet refreshingly present. The symbol effectively functions as a universal signifier for the natural cycles of birth, life and death, and this is coherent to our goals of stewardship for the house and forest garden.

Into the Rabbit Hole

Seen through the lens of a gardener and surfer, the connections between this symbol and the moon were also intriguing and encouraging. Life by the sea is inextricably linked to the phases of the moon as its gravitational pull is the principle factor influencing the ocean's tides. On land, traditional agricultural practices have been intricately associated with understanding the influence of the moon. The sowing of seeds, transplanting, pruning, and harvesting are all activities in which the phases of the moon play an elementary, even if often misunderstood role.

The earliest known examples of the three rabbits were found in a cave system known as the Temple of a Thousand Buddhas, located in Western China. These subterranean temples are one of the most notable land-

marks of Dunhuang, an oasis which flourished around 581-618 BCE, positioned at an important crossroads of two major trade routes on the silk road. Over the course of the last two and a half thousand years, the three rabbits with interlocking ears have appeared in countless graphic interpretations. While some depictions are surrounded by highly decorative ornamentation, others are rendered in naive and stylized versions. The three rabbits are hidden in frescoes and murals in chapels, synagogues, and temples dating back centuries. They are found in illuminated manuscripts and carved into stone, memorialized in naturalistic wooden carvings, modelled and molded in clay and porcelain, and cast in precious and useful metals. While all the various adaptations are distinct and unique, they are all related and similar. Was it a zoomorphic development from other sacred geometries?



Temple painting (Cave 406), c.800 BCE, Sui Dynasty, Dunhuang, Western China. Lotus motif with three rabbits, found in the Temple of One Thousand Buddhas.

Evidence has been presented to this effect by Laurie Smith in her contribution to the principle work on this symbol, *The Three Hares Project*:

“The familiar six-petalled daisy wheel, is a symmetric compass drawn symbol that was used throughout the medieval period as a geometrical design tool. Because the circle’s radius is used to draw the arcs within the circle, the six petal points on the circle’s circumference and a seventh point at the circle’s axis are all exactly one radius apart and form the geometrical symmetry at the heart of the Three Hares design.”

The Spirit of the Underground

Since the three rabbits symbol incorporates such a strong rotational symmetry, Smith goes even a step further, drawing parallels between this symbol and the meditative aspects of mandalas. *Mandalas* are circular geometric figures which represent the universe in Eastern religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Shintoism. They are used as maps representing spiritual realms, where the viewer is presented with a complex and rich configuration of symbols, and their gaze is guided successively from the outer (*earthly*) realms to the interior (*eternal*) points of focus. In various spiritual traditions, mandalas are employed to focus the energy of believers. They are tools for spiritual guidance and an aid to inducing trance-like states of meditation.

Aurel Stein “discovered” the Cave of One Thousand Buddhas, in 1907, negotiating the purchase of many texts from the Abbot Wang Yuanlu, who discovered the hidden Library Cave in 1900. Among these texts was the Diamond Sutra, the earliest known dated book (11 May, 868 B.C.), and the first known creative work with an explicit public domain, created “for universal free distribution”.



Mongolian Coin Urmiya, northwest Iran c.1282
Despite the fact the earliest examples of the symbol have been found in Western China, it is possible the three rabbits originated elsewhere: India, Persia, or Mongolia.



The Cathedral of Saint Paul, Münster (1225–1264)
Romanesque and Gothic, the nave was destroyed during the Second World War and rebuilt between 1950 and 1960. The three hares are found in the south transept near the organ.

Christians travelling along the Silk Road re-interpreted the three rabbits as the Holy Trinity, and since then the symbol was assimilated into church architecture, adorning stone tombs, wooden roof bosses, illuminated manuscripts and stained-glass panels. Due to the supernatural pretense that rabbits and hares reproduce without sexual intercourse, connections have also been inferred to the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary.

In developing this collection, I have attempted to expand outwards from the earliest language systems of symbols. An object can be identified through many processes of marking, and one of the earliest forms of identifying through symbols is branding. Although the etymological roots originate in the Germanic *Brennen*, to burn, the earliest known branding was of Egyptian livestock. The branding of animals and goods in ancient times served to not only identify and distinguish property, but also served mystical and preternatural purposes, such as warding off evil spirits and protecting valuable animals from illness and predators.

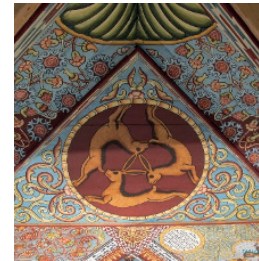
Inspired by this early use of symbols, and their transcendental capacity to protect and preserve, I appropriated a selection of hieroglyphics. These glyphs were cast in iron, to mark these symbols onto textiles, ceramics, wood, paper and leather. The chosen pictograms represent three main areas of interest: agriculture, gastronomy, and recreation. This reconciliation between ancient symbols and our present-day life is representative of my perspective regarding the domestic arts, or activities which can be alternately classified as either vernacular art or post-artistic practice. The inclusivity of diverse activities is articulated with great precision by the teacher and researcher Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. In conversation with Suzi Gablik, she describes a fresh vision: a strategic approach to contemporary artmaking where Art and artmaking is interwoven with life and living.



Unterlimburg Synagogue
Germany 1738-39
The House of Moses Mayer
Polychromatic wooden
ceiling, held in the Swabian
Hall, Hällisch-Fränkisches
Museum. Paintings by
the Ukrainian Elieser
Sussmann.

“It involves everything. It includes domestic interiors, the table, food, language. It also includes the arts of sociability, conversation, etiquette and dress. On a larger scale it’s about gardens, parades, processions, all of which are very much alive in our time.”

She expands upon this perspective by describing the self-imposed limitations in the academic world, and how they are in turn reflected in the artworld. I identify with her sentiments, and they have emboldened, or more precisely, have liberated my practice from the constraints of unnecessary predetermined compartmentalization.



The bemah of Gwoździec Synagogue was reconstructed in 2013, and is now in the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, in Warsaw. The bemah is an elevated platform used as an orator’s podium since Athenian times. In Judaism it is used for Torah readings.

“I experience myself on ground in which tectonic plates are shifting, that’s how I experience the world in which I live professionally. These tectonic plates are the historical disciplines – history, literature, art history – that are relatively recent disciplines from the late nineteenth century. Particularly in the academy, a hundred years of human history is nothing, it’s a spit in the bucket. But because it’s the hundred years that has defined our moment, it seems like it’s been there forever. My sense is that, within this ground of tectonic shifting, disciplinary lines are blurring. As we become much more aware of the political formation of knowledge, and how it gets institutionalized in departments and programs, it becomes much harder to defend those arrangements. And so, I consider my era a kind of post-disciplinary era. It’s beyond disciplines – anti-disciplinary. I’m not interested in upholding the boundaries of purity and integrity of whatever it might be – literature, history, art history, whatever. Inter-disciplinary says the more disciplines the better, but post-disciplinary says, “Forget them.” Who needs them? Take a problem and go anywhere you need for the material.”

Through this inclusive approach, one can begin to decipher how symbols function, by fulfilling the desire for individual identity in a materialistic society. Brand affiliation and loyalty in late capitalism replaces or substitutes religious affiliation. Even the rejection of branding is considered a statement within many contemporary identities. In many contemporary urban tribes (punks, goths, b-boys, e-girls, as well as the trance/rave/hippie subcultures) individual visual identity as well as integration within the group is based upon the *nonacceptance* of branding. In the negation, inversion, or denial of certain status symbols, underground cultures tend to embrace alternative symbols from unrelated and even esoteric sets of signifiers. These countercultures have subsumed a wide range of symbols - from Sanskrit characters and Nordic runes to sacred geometries and computer codes. Symbols of all types continue to play an important role in our social spheres.

Within mass marketed fashion and design, and improvised unregulated contexts, symbols are actively employed by individuals and groups. Overtly or subtly codified, applied in earnest or ironically, religious or corporate, symbols help us signify. These logos, signs, and ciphers create the visual projection of our constructed identity, whether virtual or real, profound or idiotic.

I saw Dasein

Besides ancient mythologies and supernatural legends, there are many layers of philosophical associations which can be unpacked along with this symbol. In 1927, Heidegger defined *Dasein* or “being there” as a way of being that is not passively, but *ecstatically* oriented toward our own possibilities. He later addresses the problems of historicity and authenticity, but favours the standpoint of an individual’s *beingness*. In the concept of Dasein, social and historical concerns are considered foreign. Nevertheless, he indicates that historical questions and themes are legitimate topics of inquiry. He suggests that Dasein or beingness always acts within a larger social and collective past. This concept implies the embodiment of a common heritage, and it is on this legacy which we must act. We can call the process of actualization or becoming by many names: *Dasein*, *Chéngwéi*, *Wen*, or even *Schultze*, if we wanted to.



Gwoździec Synagogue, 1940. Initially destroyed by fire during the first world war, it was reconstructed only to be completely destroyed during WWII. The inner sanctuary was elaborately painted with colorful depictions of plants, animals, zodiac signs, and texts. image courtesy of the Ethnographic Museum in Lviv.

Regardless of the terminology, the concept of our own ecstatic existence implies making decisions regarding our personal actualization and drawing upon the most outstanding elements of our collective past. Dasein is future-oriented: it examines the past, in context of the present, for the sake of the future. Unfortunately Heidegger was a Nazi bastard.

Some have argued that the original concept of Dasein is directly drawn from Eastern philosophy. Although he declined to comment on the matter, Heidegger’s thinking was undeniably influenced by the Taoist concept of worldliness, as outlined in Okakura Kakuzō’s *The Book of Tea*, which had been given as a present to him in 1919, some eight years before he published *Being and Time*. Parallel concepts are found not only in Japanese thought, but also in Indian philosophy and Native American lore. These concepts inspire my approach to the use of symbols from other cultures, in the search for our own brand identity.

3. Reading Plants: Print and Sign

*Despite knowing several authors who
have opted to live like vegetables,
I still don't know a plant that can write.*

◦ *Systema Nature*, José Roseira

Just about 155 million years ago, near the end of the Jurassic era, a warm and shallow sea covered much of Germany. The coral and sponges grew on the headlands in this body of water and formed reefs which divided this sea into isolated lagoons. When cut off from the open ocean and freshwater runoff, the salinity levels rose, eventually depleting the oxygen in the placid lagoons, becoming toxic swamps. Only bacteria and certain microscopic protozoa could survive the bottom waters. Any land animals that fell into these lagoons or which drifted in from the ocean were soon buried in the soft carbonate mud. In this toxic environment the structures of delicate organisms trapped in the silt were neither destroyed by the current, nor scavenged by other creatures.

Left below:

White Rabbit Brand, printing plate used for advertising sewing needles. Song Dynasty (960 to 1127). The print featured a white rabbit crushing herbs, known to be a lucky omen, and considered the first trademark in design history.

Right:

Three hares in a river, woodcut, 1547. From the *Hortus Sanitatis*; a medieval incunabulum of composite texts and original observations, regarding the natural world and the preparation of herbal remedies. An english translation was produced under the title *Thee Noble lyfe & Natures of man, of bestes, serpentys, fowles & fisshes*.



The stone is placed in a sink and thoroughly wetted. Carborundum powder of increasingly fine granularity is then sprinkled over it. Then, the surface is thoroughly reground either with a heavy steel disk with a handle (known as a *levigator*) or by rubbing two stones together.

In the brief period of time which has passed since then, these carbonate muds formed a special type of limestone known locally as Plattenkalk. This fine-grained limestone has a particular structure which allows it to be split clean into large flat slabs. Due to this quality, it has been quarried since the Neolithic era for its useful role as shingles, roof tiles, and flooring. Around the village of Solnhofen, north of the blue Danube, between Nuremburg and Munich, special fossils are to be found. Organisms which under normal conditions left no fossil at all, in this region exhibit a highly exquisite level of detail. The fossils are not very numerous but are truly spectacular. They include fascinating imprints of jellyfish, dragonfly wings, lost feathers, and over 600 species of early bird-like dinosaurs, most notably the *Archaeopteryx lithografica*. Both vertebrate and invertebrate animals, and many plants are all represented as fossils in these deposits of Solnhofen limestone.



Upper left:
The surface of the wet polished stone is a pleasure to touch but try to avoid it.



Upper right:
After the transfer is finished with oil crayon, the image must be protected by carefully rubbing rosin and talcum powder on the stone. The rosin is acid-resistant and protects the drawing; while the talc absorbs excess grease, allowing adhesion of the gum to the contours of the drawing.

In 1796, lithography was accidentally invented by an unknown Bavarian playwright named Alois Senefelder. He serendipitously discovered he could replicate the scripts of his plays by transferring them in grease crayon onto slabs of limestone and then inking them. Because the smooth local limestone retained all the crayon marks on its surface, after repeated experimentation, he soon realized this method could be used to print in almost limitless quantities.

The economic implications of the reusable printing surface placed lithography in a unique position, finding itself applied to a wide range of applications. Lithography was embraced by the most talented painters and illustrators as a subtle artistic medium without comparison, as well as the choicest mode of reproduction for advertisers. The coterie of Romantic painters appreciated the delicate tonal quality which was exclusively possible with lithography. While Gericault and Delacroix created dramatic maritime scenes, impressionist painters captured

成為

Chinese calligraphic characters representing Chéngwéi, the concept of being or becoming. The three rabbits are recognized as depicting this state. Dasein, an influential concept of Hegel and Heidegger's philosophical anthropology also relates to the concept of being.

ethereal and ephemeral effects of atmosphere and sunlight. Another American expatriate who made his life in Europe, James McNeill Whistler, used lithography in order to render misty seascapes, and to create ambient nocturnal images. Towards the end of the 19th century, artists from the Symbolist movement employed lithography to evoke unconscious dreamworlds through metaphoric images.

As improvements in lithographic technology made color printing possible, commerce took interest. Advertising exploded in the 1880s and large color prints began to become commonplace, as did lush illustrations in artbooks and prints. A highly skilled technician is needed to produce a good lithograph, so lithography is mostly carried out as follows: under the guidance of a master printer artists would draw on prepared stone plates. When the artist finishes their work, the master would etch and print their image.

Wet Stone Mirror

The first step is the preparation of the stone. The surface of previously printed stones must first be reground. The stone is made thoroughly wet in a sink, and an abrasive powder called carborundum is sifted onto the face of the stone it. Using a heavy steel disc known as a levigator, and progressively finer grained carborundum, the surface is thoroughly polished. The stone must dry thoroughly before it is ready to be worked. Care should be taken to grind the center and the perimeter of your stone evenly to avoid cratering the printing surface. The surface of the wet polished stone is a pleasure to touch but avoid it.

It is important to keep the stone clean because any dirt, particularly grease, will appear on the print. Smudges and dirt can be cleaned off with fine sand paper. Metal plates of zinc or aluminum may be used, and can also be reground. Metal plates are satisfactory, but stone is known to be far superior for producing subtle tones and details.



The drawn and etched stone is constantly dampened with a sponge while ink is deposited on the drawing but not on the wet stone, by a massive inked roller.

With oil-based crayons and tusche the artist can work on the stone as he would on paper. A whole arsenal of effects is available, including pen, pencil, splashing, sprinkling, spraying, transfers, and scraping. When the drawing is the image is then fixed by rubbing rosin and then talcum powder on the stone. Rosin protects the drawing because it is acid resistant while talcum powder serves to absorb any excess grease, ensuring the precision around the contours of the drawing.

Hydrophobia

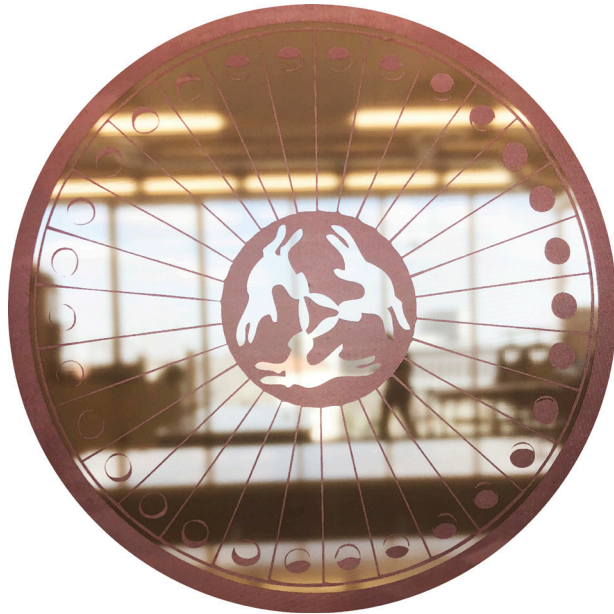
The magic of lithography lies in the mutual repulsion of water and oil. This basic principle is building up a positive image with oil based media (pencils, crayons, tusche, or transfers) which are water-repellent, or hydrophobic, while the negative or blank portions of the image are left naked in order to be water-retaining, or hydrophilic.



Powdered magnesium carbonate is added to the greasy lithographic ink to stiffen its texture and shorten its drying time.

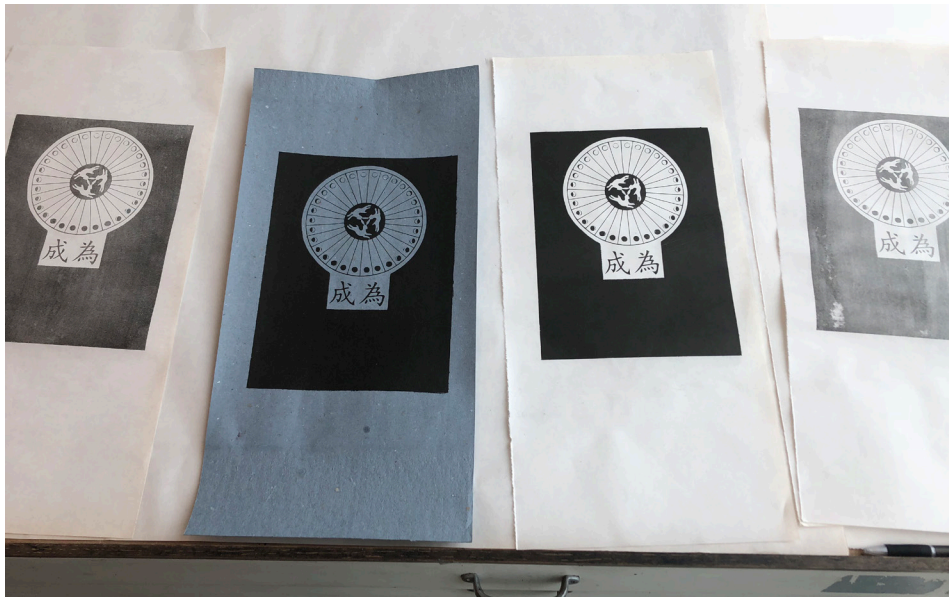
To achieve this duality, the entire surface of the drawing is coated with a solution of gum arabic and a few droplets of nitric acid (HNO_3), softly and evenly applied with a soft wide brush, and allowed to dry. The gum is mildly acidified to create the hydrophilic layer, forming microscopic calcium nitrate salts ($CaNO_3$) on all of the surface area which is not to be inked. This type of printing, as opposed to intaglio, woodcut or linoleum, is planographic. Meaning that lithographs are produced from a completely flat surface, with no incisions made in the printing plate.

In comparison to the extensive preparation involved in the lithographic process, silk-screening offers a quick fix for more graphic printmaking.



Test prints are often necessary as the wet stone requires several pressings before it begins to carry its full capacity of ink.

The simple solution works by penetrating the miniscule pores of the stone, surrounding the image with a layer that will refuse the ink. Any excess is promptly wiped



Washing Out and Inking Up



Over inking the stone results in a muddled image with poor definition and smudging at the edges of the design.

off, and the whole stone is buffed up to the very edge with a small pillowful of cheesecloth, creating a clean smooth layer. This motion is done quickly and deftly until the stone appears to be dry, but still a bit shiny. It should be allowed to rest for a couple hours before the next step, washing out.

Washing out is achieved by distributing a small amount of turpentine over the drawn areas and cautiously but firmly rubbing the etched area with a soft dry rag removing the grease through the thin skin of gum. The image is preserved due to the grease absorbed in the porous limestone. The stone is then rubbed with liquid *asphaltum*. This helps to saturate the image and simultaneously protect it.

After the stone is dry, it is ready to be inked, or *rolled up*. The stone is first moistened with a wet sponge. Between inkings, the stone must be continually remoistened. The stone should be inked methodically, gradually building up ink on the image. To evenly distribute the ink, it is essential to use a roller wider than the image. When printing, the stone is kept continuously wet. Water is molecularly attracted to the layer created by the gum and acid. Water repels the greasy ink, while the hydrophobic areas made by the oil-based drawing absorb the ink. When the hydrophobic image is loaded with ink, the stone and paper are run through a press which applies a downward pressure evenly over the surface, transferring the ink off the stone and onto the paper.

Magnesium carbonate powder is mixed with the lithographic ink to stiffen the greasy texture and reduce its drying time. Several test prints are often necessary as the wet stone requires multiple pressings before it begins to carry ink at full capacity. The application of the ink is an art in and of itself. Too much ink results in a muddled image with poor definition and smudging around the contours.

A lithographic print, like a fossil, is made under immense pressure. The press consists of a metal frame supporting a travelling printing bed, which moves the stone and paper under a *yoke* or scraping bar. The bed is lowered to position the plate and raised to print. Lithographs can be printed on either dry or wet paper. The advantage of soaking the paper is that it is possible to use less ink and less pressure, minimizing the risk of clogging your image.



Above left:
A selection of leaves from the edible forest at our property, pressed and dried.

Above right:
Carob (*Ceratonia siliqua*), leaf detail, scanned and rasterized, printed and transferred to a photo-sensitized aluminum plate.

Right:
The plate is exposed on a light table and developed with an alkaline solution, and rinsed with water creating a positive hydrophobic image.



The wet printing plate is inked and paper is registered on top, and covered by a thick rubberized felt blanket. Under immense pressure the printing bed travels underneath.

To print, paper is placed on the stone, followed by a sheet of newsprint and blotter paper. Then a sheet of smooth resistant material known as a tympan is laid on top. The tympan can withstand the enormous pressure without deforming. The bed is raised into position and small amount of grease is evenly distributed along the scraping bar. It is all fairly simple.

Press print

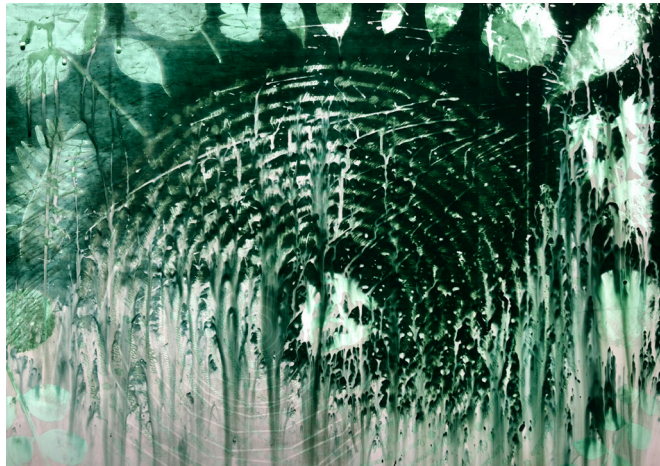
I chose to use the traditional style Chinese calligraphic characters for the Chinese concept of *chéngwéi* (to be, being, becoming). The three rabbits are recognized as depicting this state.

For my experiment with a larger image, a photosensitized aluminum plate was used to capture the fine detailing in a selection of leaves from the newly planted forest at our property. A collection of assorted leaves was first pressed and dried, and then carefully scanned and rasterized, printed onto a paper positive and exposed onto photosensitive aluminum plate. The plate is exposed for a short time on a light table and then developed in the printing studio with an alkaline solution, and rinsed with water creating a positive hydrophobic image.

I sought to reproduce twin images in both lithographic and silk screen techniques to further observe the nuances, benefits and drawbacks of each method of printing. In comparison to the extensive preparation involved in the lithographic process silk-screening offers a quick fix for more graphic printmaking. After printing, the silk screen becomes a work of art: as the emulsion weakens and dissolves, an expressionistic feeling of immediacy overtakes the static imagery.



I sought to reproduce twin images in both lithographic and silk screen techniques.



After printing, the screen itself becomes a work of art.

Silkscreen offers a more immediate result and can be explored with minimum resources.



The detail of lithography as well as the potential for tonal subtlety has made it an essential medium, yet the technical requirements, and specialized chemistry all require a dedicated workshop. Silkscreen, despite having technical drawbacks, offers a more immediate result, faster reproduction, and can be explored with minimum resources.

4. Burnt Earth: Ceramic Tablets

Roman Ceramic Seals, 1st-2nd century, pair of impressed seals featuring stylized rabbits.



My initiation into the world of ceramics has been, admittedly, thoroughly touristic. I wanted it all. The turquoise blues of Egypt, the pale terra cotta of Pompeii, smokey Balkan sourdough glazes and the marbled patterns of Japanese *nerokomi*. Working with clay, I am overcome by a tactile sensation of the most infantile pleasure. It is probable that wet clay slipping through one's hands has a scatologic attraction which is hardwired into the human soul. Yet it is in the kiln, that the work is given a trial by fire. I enjoy the suspense of opening the heavy door, still warm after hours at full blast, or the spontaneous combustion of dry straw smothering a glowing hot plate. There is a primordial duality in the joy (and agony) of crafting forms which may or may not survive their hellish rite of passage. For the most part, if all goes well, the works are hardened into the closest thing to stone mankind has created, but more often our creations suffer, at the least, minor

abrasions and less frequently, utter destruction. Perfection in ceramics is the result of many errors, tedious refinement, and endless experimentation.

It is a primal art, this marriage of disparate granularities of moist earth into a homogeneous paste. Alchemic reactions are common fare, metallic solvents and powdered minerals are fused by prolonged and intense heat onto vessels designed to store, transport, and conserve - oil, wine or garum -- to serve sumptuous feasts and daily meals, or the most delicate tea and the strongest coffee. Earthenware, stoneware, and fine porcelain have, over the course of hundreds of years, come to function as coded signifiers of wealth and status to their owners and users. Some families cherish their collections of fine porcelain so greatly that they are strictly reserved for special familial occasions - weddings, baptisms, and other ceremonial celebrations - being relegated to the high shelf when not in use, only to remind us of their value from behind glass or out of reach. Ceramics are elevated in this context, transcending their use-value to perform a symbolic and pecuniary function.

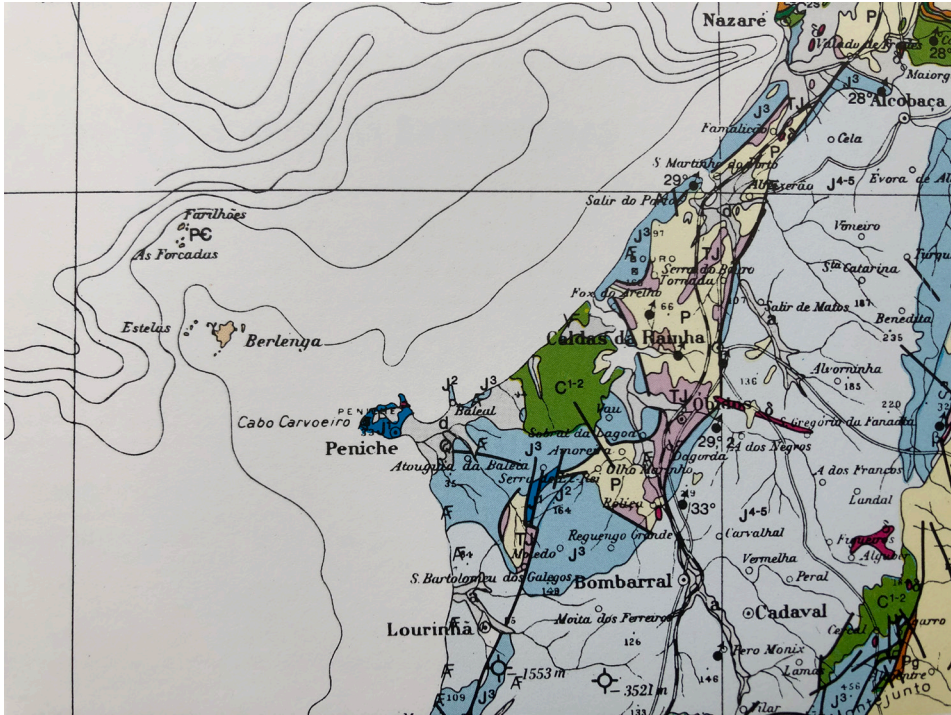
Non-utilitarian or decorative ceramics are often imitations mimicking real antiquities which entered the marketplace at the beginning of the industrial age. These mass-produced artworks found their home in a new

Left: Imperial Roman Oil Lamp, Late 1st to 2nd century, A.D. Mold-made terra cotta, featuring rabbit insignia.



Right: Polychromatic ceramic shard of Syrian or Egyptian origin, presented at the Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris. From the collection of the Cairo museum.





Topographical map showing the mineral composition of the various limestone, sandstone, and clay deposits around the region of the House of the Three Rabbits.

dimension – *the living room* – that domestic sanctuary of the newly formed middle class. Eager to decorate the social space of the private home, many middle-class families position decorative ceramics as their centerpiece, epitomizing the fabrication of desire. The correlation between status and home décor, fueled by the augmented capacity of industrial production, has evolved ceramics in an adaptation to market trends. The industry in turn developed techniques and strategies to maximize profits while minimizing waste and most importantly, unsold stock.

The most prolific pioneer of this intriguing development in design and ceramics was undoubtedly Josiah Wedgwood. His methodologies took the division of labor amongst ceramic craftsmen to a new level, and his penchant for following fashion, and then feeding it back to the consumers was as effective as it was revolutionary.



Above:
Vector images are first arranged in a gang.



Above right:
A CNC laser cutter was used to create a series of circular templates on 3mm plywood.



Right:
These forms, both negative and positive, proved to be invaluable as stencils and stamps for ceramics, but also in the creation of patterns and molds for glass and metal works.

The Allure of the Ancient

Many interesting aspects surround the Wedgwood aesthetic and production strategy, and we are privy to his thinking largely due to lengthy correspondence between Wedgwood himself and his friend and eventual partner, Thomas Bentley. Possibly the greatest irony of the production of Wedgwood is as follows: an intense distaste for the realities of industrial production and the ensuing conditions resulted in a romanticization of the concept of cultures from the distant past, creating the conditions for neo-classicism to take hold of the popular imagination. These tendencies were not only the result of an aversion to industrialism but were the fruits of a newfound fascination for classical antiquity. The *re*-discovery of ancient life at Herculaneum (1738) and Pompeii (1748) sparked interest for ancient cultures, and the remnants unearthed at these sites filled the popular imagination with a nostalgic illusion. Namely, that ancient societies were as stable and as pure as the forms, styles, and artworks which were created in their era.

Grog, also known as firesand or chamotte, served as the base for this selection of circular seals and tablets. After air drying for several days, the discs are then ready for their initial or biscuit firing.

Wedgwood, driven by a desire for commercial success, sought after technical consistency in his wares as well as dedicating himself to fervent research and experimentation



Once fired, the stoneware and porcelain discs were glazed with cobalt chloride (CoCl_2), manganese chloride (MnCl_2), copper sulfate (CuSO_4), and calcium copper silicate ($\text{CaCuSi}_4\text{O}_{10}$) in varying concentrations.

to diversify his glazes and bodies, but he also cleverly used his growing associations to the neo-classical movement as a strategic marketing tool.

In 1970, the Metropolitan museum of art paid an astounding one million dollars for a terra cotta bowl, used for mixing wine with water, known as a calyx, or krater. The vessel had been painted around 515 BCE by Euphronius, known for his role as part of the Pioneer Group of Greek vase painters, responsible for the transition from black to red figures, and is recognized as one of the first artists to ever sign his work. The importance of this acquisition was not only its beauty, nor its rarity, nor the extraordinary price paid for it, but because it was stolen.

For decades, *tomboroli* had been plundering underground graves throughout the southern part of Italy and

The resulting seals range from rich vibrant blues to soft muted greens. On the rose patterned nerikomi seals, a transparent glaze composed of sodium oxide (Na₂O) was applied to heighten the pattern of the colors naturally present in the clays.



fencing their bounty to mafioso middlemen. However prolifically scheming these dusty amateur tomb raiders were, they were certainly no comparison to the upper tiers in this global criminal enterprise. Throughout the second half of the last century, a renowned American antiquities expert, named Robert Hecht, had been responsible for channeling stolen antiquities, not only into the hands of elite private collectors but also into museums. Collections such as the Louvre in Paris, the British Museum in London, and the Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen, as well as high profile American institutions such as the J. Paul Getty in Los Angeles and the Metropolitan in New York.

Below left:
Egyptian faience paste, seen here unfired, is fragile due to its low clay content. Composed mostly of silica, sand and feldspar, soluble salts migrate to the surface during drying.

Below right:
A porcelain seal in a small shrine along with a vial of lavender oil.



An international investigation, spanning several years, led dedicated detectives from an Italian “Art Squad” to a private residence in the north of Italy. It was there they found an unexpected cachet. They discovered an indoor swimming pool transformed into an acid bath for cleansing ancient pottery, which was part of a high-end clandestine restoration laboratory. With fresh evidence from this laboratory, they followed the breadcrumbs into Switzerland, where a shockingly vast quantity of artifacts had a temporary safe haven in a small warehouse inside the Geneva freeport. However, it was during yet another raid, on the home of a relatively minor go-between, where they made a key discovery, a hand drawn organigram which led authorities to one single individual, Bob Hecht. With the willing cooperation of an international cast of both legitimate and less than scrupulous dealers, auctioneers, and restoration



An irregular circular tablet, with egyptian blue glaze. A misunderstanding with a laboratory technician resulted in the ‘discovery’ of another historic material, egyptian paste.

The trunk of a black locust *Robinia pseudoacacia*, being sliced to produce 3 cm plates for use as a ceramic stamp. Black locust is a pioneer species used to enrich the soil through its nitrogen fixing properties.

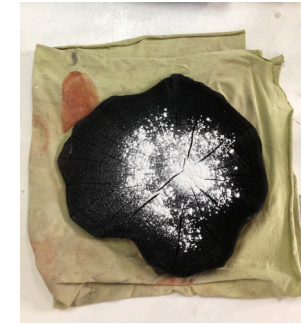


A visual representation of the primordial essence of the chakra, known as the seed sound of Om or Aum, considered to be the oldest vocal sound in existence, one of the sacred, single syllable sounds of the Vedic language.



specialists: Hecht had managed to manipulate the provenances of innumerable *amphorae*, *hydrie*, *kylixes*, *psykters*, and other ancient vessels, effectively masquerading them as seemingly authenticated antiquities. These objects were destined to play starring roles in the most highly esteemed public exhibitions and private collections throughout the world.

Looted fragments were often the result of intentional breakage and were peddled to top curators and collectors in a confidence game. The scheme involved promising collectors and institutions exclusive access to any future finds of additional complimentary fragments.



Above left:
The slice of robinia is burned with a torch and the carbonized wood is removed with a wire brush, leaving the hard winter growth rings in relief.

Above center:
The burnt plate is powdered with talcum to prevent the clay from sticking to the form.

Above right:
A heavy roller and a piece of cloth were used to pressure a slab of softened clay into depressions in the burnt plate.

Purposefully shattering the vessel not only permitted easier trafficking of the looted artifacts, but provided Robert Hecht a convenient premise for bargaining; when the sale of an exceedingly expensive artifact hung in the balance, fragments from other vessels were brought to the negotiating table to sweeten the deal. The acquisition and subsequent exhibition of such fragments sparked not only the imaginations of museum goers, but fanned the flames of desire in the hearts of museum directors, who dreamt of one day, hopefully, acquiring the coveted missing pieces of the puzzle. The irony lay in the fact that, not only were these missing pieces not missing, but the puzzle was already complete. The remaining sherds were simply being held for a type of subtle ransom by Bob Hecht, the mastermind of this dusty scheme.

A Simpler Time

Bernard Leach was an English potter turned cultural ambassador. He is considered to have, almost single-handedly, been responsible for introducing the subtle craft of Japanese folk ceramics to the western world. However, recent cultural critiques surround his fascination with Japanese craft culture with more questions than answers. Leach's role as cultural 'translator' has come under fire in the ceramics world and is being red flagged as an exoticization; a case-study in orientalist fetishism parading as enlightened multiculturalism. The justification for this persecution arises from several facts regarding the context of his appreciation.



The finished plate shows the growth rings in a web like pattern, extending concentrically outwards from the central sigil, stamped prior to glazing and firing.

Firstly, Leach associated himself exclusively with westernized Japanese intellectuals as he himself did not read or speak Japanese. Furthermore, his selectivity in promoting the decidedly simplistic work of unnamed artisans is, in some perspectives, subject to interpretation as a colonialist tendency. His penchant for reflecting cultural

The firing of heavily glazed raku ware. Discs of stamped and dried grès were first biscuit fired in a gas kiln at 1200 C°. The discs were then dipped in white slip and dripped with metallic glazes.



A handmade wood fueled kiln on the grounds of the Escola Superior de Artes e Design, in Caldas da Rainha, Portugal is used to fire pieces at a lower temperature of 800-1000 C°. Once the glazes have begun to vitrify, the pieces are removed glowing hot from the oven and immediately covered with sawdust to reduce the oxygen, triggering unpredictable effects.

traditions which did not challenge western ideals of beauty and intellectual rigor, deceptively depicted the entirety of the Japanese ceramic tradition as being technically rudimentary and naive. Neither of these generalizations holds fast and true, yet current trends of ceramics exemplify this highly romanticized western fascination with raku ware, wabi-sabi, and imperfection. The western perception of this aesthetic has effectively become an inadvertent pastiche of Japanese cultural heritage. In summary, it can be said that the movement he celebrated can be characterized by an affinity for the functional as opposed to the decorative, and the unique and imperfect as opposed to the uniform and standardized.



Left:
An under drawing is made in graphite on the bowl following the bisque firing.

Right:
Earth tones on a white engobe underglaze before firing.



There is little to no doubt that this movement was largely, if not wholly, exported from Japan to the occidental world, and explicitly through Leach's efforts. Yet the first spark, the seminal interest, and principle proponent of Japanese folk craft was not Leach. The genesis of the glorification came initially from a young philosopher and scholar named Yanagi Soetsu. His cultural mission of promoting the simpler arts began in Korea and spread



Earthenware bowl with overglaze luster painting of a hare, c.11th century. Fatimid period, Egypt. Modern overpainting removed. Collection of the Cincinnati Art Museum.

The replica of the bowl has found its home in the House of the Three Rabbits.



Hare Amulet, Egyptian faience, 21-26th Dynasty, c.1069-525 BCE. Provenance Unknown

to Japan, developing from his interest in Korean Yi dynasty ceramics into a lifelong passion for Japanese folk craft. His exaltation fermented a species of oriental romanticism in combination with Zen Buddhism. Along with several notable potters who, in keeping with their values shall remain unnamed, he promoted this new 'old' movement, elevating the work of anonymous craftsmen.

This enthusiastic receptivity to folk craft was an intuitive response to the westernization and industrialization that was consuming Japan at the time. The need for nostalgia took root in the imaginations of the new consumer class in Japan and was even championed by several major retailers. This commodification of a collective romanticism profited from an allusion to a common memory of a simpler time in Japan's rural society, one which was slowly but surely disappearing into the past.

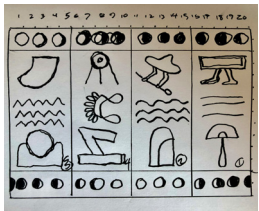


Self-glazed during low temperature firing, a vibrant turquoise blue is obtained by the inclusion of 3% copper carbonate (CuCO_3).



The earliest cylinder seals date to the Late Neolithic period (7600-6000 BCE), centuries before the invention of writing and were used as a signature, jewelry, and as amulets.

Regardless of the muddy impropriety of Leach's oriental obsession, or the massification of a false nostalgia, many have found the irregular forms and rugged beauty of Japanese pottery worthy of emulation. Just as neo-classicism distilled the essence from the gaudy rococo styles which characterized early 18th century European taste, the pared down aesthetics of *mengi* and *wabi-sabi* were in response to the elaborate ornamentation of a decadent empire, and the onslaught of Westernization.



An initial sketch of the seal, incorporating hieroglyphs of meteorological and agricultural significance, along with moon phases, helps to map the drawing onto the plaster cylinder for engraving.



Above and below right:
The resulting impression is shown here before and after firing. Note that no glaze has been applied, the vitrification is obtained through salts travelling to the surface of the drying paste.

A travelling spirit



Red water or czerwona Woda, a clay traditionally found in the region of Lower Silesia, is seen here drying after being pugged and rehydrated. Left in cloth lined trays, the clay is workable when enough water has evaporated.

Around the same time the Euphronius vase was acquired by the Met, a Danish potter who had befriended Leach was busy creating her own historical works. Digging her own clay, mixing her own glazes, and turning her own vessels, the work of Gutte Eriksen was inspired not by Greek kraters, but by the mingei craft. Her body of work exhibits the key tenets to this movement: an appreciation of simplicity, the divine essence of nature, and the transcendence of imperfection. These aesthetic values, along with the existential concept of 'being at peace while alone in nature' are deeply intertwined.

In a small cottage on the north side of the island of Sjælland, Denmark, I once had the privilege to spend the afternoon with Gutte Eriksen, but her hands were no longer able to work the potter's wheel. Her home studio, however, with its thatched roof and horse hair stools



Nerikomi, or kneading, is a traditional Japanese ceramic technique for creating complex patterns by carefully composing amalgamations of different clays.



Using a retired printing press, I first formed thin slabs of two different clays, 3-4 mm in thickness, and then pressed the alternating layers together.

Depending on the desired pattern, different colors clay are layered on top of one another in a specific manner, massaged together, and finally rolled into a homogenous roll. This nerikomi pattern results in a white and red rose pattern, seen here unfired, the lighter grés is still in its raw dark color.



was replete with examples of her skills. The elegant lines and graceful proportions of her teapots and vessels, coupled with her insistence on using only self-made glazes made palpable her quiet renegade spirit. Gutte's temperament was such that she simply refused to use commercially produced supplies, disallowing them from intruding upon the purity of her practice: she dug her own earth, seeking out local minerals and veins of clay. Her connoisseurship was not an exoticization. A permutation yes, but far from any imitation of Japanese culture, she has come to represent, in my mind, an authentic and profound sense of being, and one worthy of emulation.

Her approach successfully infused the ancient traditions of a distant culture with that of her own practice, absent

of any irony, and devoid of so-called cultural appropriation. Her approach to ceramics, and to beingness, was rooted in a melding of a foreign otherness with her deepest self. And just as glaze vitrifies in the kiln, becoming one with the vessel, so did Eriksen with the traditions which fascinated her. Impressions of her spirit fall across my mind like the growing shadows on that late summer afternoon.

Through my initiatory experiments I have sought to engage numerous idiosyncratic techniques from the multiverse of ceramic traditions. My tablets and seals represent a bridge between non-functional ceramics and the semiotic functionality of the three rabbits. While the objects may serve as a talisman, charm, or amulet, their use-value is highly personal and interdependent to the meaning or significance ascribed by the user/owner/collector. Its use is decorative, while its function is abstract.

Before firing the rose patterned discs were stamped with our insignia. The white powder seen here is again talcum, used to help release the stamp from the moist clay.



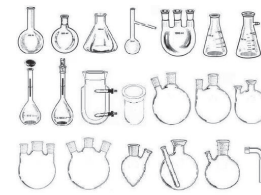
5. Liquid Sands: Glass Vessels

*I stand amid the roar
Of a surf-tormented shore,
And I hold within my hand
Grains of the golden sand -
How few! yet how they creep
Through my fingers to the deep,
While I weep - while I weep!
O God! can I not grasp
Them with a tighter clasp?
Oh God, can I not save
One from the pitiless wave?
Is all that we see or seem
But a dream within a dream?*

◊ Edgar Allen Poe, 1849

According to my parents, as a small myopic child I would sometimes lay uncharacteristically still, entranced, dazed on the beach, marveling at the small gemlike quality of the translucent grains of sand cascading through my fingers, transfixed on the infinite, on the liquid quality of the sand as I lay in front our summer home. During the rising tide when the sand became fluid, and reached the proper density, I would gather up in two hands a quantity of liquid sand, and as it would slowly drizzle out between the palms of my hands, I experienced the ecstatic joy of creation: forms reminiscent of the towers of Gaudi, minarets of the Alhambra, and subterranean calcareous stalagmites, flowing not only from my hands, but back into the sea.

Interior of the David Collection, Copenhagen, Denmark. An invaluable reserve of Islamic art, the collection contains not only glassware, but metalwork, calligraphy, ceramics, and textiles.

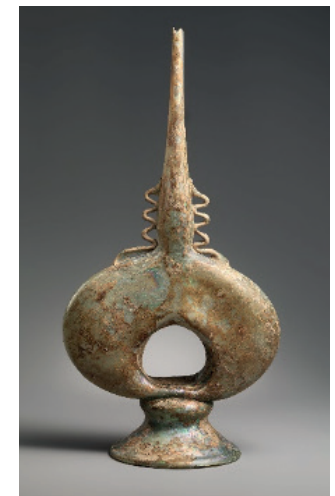
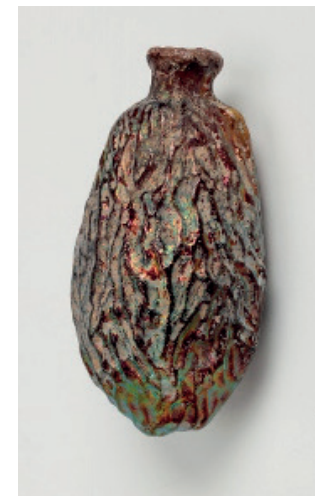


Line drawings depicting the extensive variations in the forms of blown glass vessels.

Approximately twelve years later, as a sophomore in high school, I had the opportunity to study in a small rural village in Tuscany. As part of the exchange curriculum, we travelled to many cultural landmarks throughout Italy. On a study visit to Venice, we had the chance to visit the island of Murano situated just north of the floating city. Despite being thoroughly impressed by the carefree manners of the glassblowing masters performing for the tourists, one even lighting his cigarette upon the glowing wing of a Pegasus, I was not taken in by the finished product. The flashy colors, sinuous lines, and the kitsch choice of subject matter – dolphins, clowns, balloons, and other fictional creatures – were abhorrent to my burgeoning sensibilities. I suffered an

Right:
Perfume flask (amphoriskos)
Syria, 3rd-4th century
Irregular ridges simulate the wrinkled skin of a dried date. The visible side seam is indicative of the use of a two-part mould.

Left:
Perfume sprinkler (Qumqum) Syria, 11th-13th century, An ornate handblown glass vessel used for rosewater, traditionally sprinkled on guests following meals.





On a granite worktable, the process of constructing a viable plaster mold for glassblowing begins. The particles on the bottom left is cork, added to the first coats of plaster, along with woodglue. This recipe ensures a reinforced and more elastic mold.

aching preference for the weathered, the inconsequential, and the forgotten. Suddenly, I turned my attention away from the goggle-eyed crowds of perspiring tourists, and followed my nose to the back canal, escaping the heat of the glowing furnace for a fresh if odorous breeze blowing in across the lagoon.

Out behind the colorful facades, in the shadows of the furnace chimneys, I slipped down a slick wooden pier where I found my treasure. Thousands upon thousands of burnished colored glass shards were awaiting me at the tideline. On an island which is also home to a chapel rumored to hold the skeletal remains of a slain dragon, I found my own personal hoard of jewels. In an endless variety of colors, polished by endless waves of time, the salt and sand working together to buff away any sharp edges, glimmering shards tumbled into smooth matte pebbles, colorful stars peeking through the misty clouds of sand, some still brilliant, some further along in age, gradually being returned to their original state by nature's slow reversal of man's invention.



A traditional hinged two-part wooden mold. Although more resistant and durable than plaster, wooden molds require that the glass being blown inside them is constantly spun to prevent sticking. Wooden molds are immersed in water for several days before and after use.



Above:
The finished mold is left for several days to cure. The nodules on the interior are *keys* which help to register two parts of the mold.



Above right:
Following the first use, the mold already appears scorched as details quickly begin to deteriorate.



Once the formed glass is removed from the mould, it is briefly reheated or *flashed*, in the furnace, and transferred to a metal rod called a punty.

Once finished the glass vessel is placed in an annealing oven, to slowly cool for up to 20 hours. This allows the glass to evenly cool without the different thicknesses creating tension and cracking.

Here the vessel is being tested in the atelier with homemade Georgian wine.



It was this physicality, this slow reworking by time and pressure which attracted me to this translucent detritus. Unintentionally, I had found every souvenir I could desire in this little sliver of backwater behind the artisan's workshop. Their trash was my treasure. For a moment, I saw in that sandy embankment an entire universe of creation, splintered into the inconsequential refuse of these glassmakers. I was, once again, observing the cosmos in the minutiae of silica and quartz, the poten-

Blown Away



Above and right:
Glass coin weights
9th -11th century, Egypt,
Fatimid Period.

tiality of transformation within the grains of sand, my young imagination sent into orbit by a change of phase: the liquid into solid, the particle into form, and the form reduced into particles again -- creation, dispersal, rebirth. What was the origin, and what was its destiny? The conservation of all matter and the interconnectedness of everything became even more apparent to me on that day in the sand, the pale green Adriatic lapping the shore behind the furnaces and the giftshops.

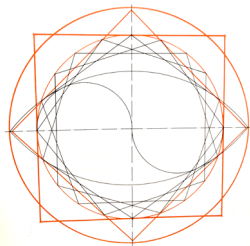
It was only quite recently, that I became transfixed once again by glass. This time around in a different form, in another land, on a hot and rainy summer day. In a relatively small museum on Copenhagen's Kronprinsessengade, the David Collection holds an unparalleled collection of Islamic art. An invaluable reserve of not only glassware, but metalwork, calligraphy, ceramics, and textiles. The absence of figurative depictions in Islamic art led to elaborate geometric designs and decorations in a wide



Despite the lower melting temperature of bronze (~950°C), the stamp proved capable of withstanding the considerably higher temperature of molten glass (~1400° C).



array of techniques. What enchanted me the most were mold blown vessels found in present day Iran, produced using Roman techniques. The blowing of glass originated on the Siro-Palestinian coast and spread along the eastern borders of the Empire. The earliest evidence of the craft are remnants of a workshop, hurriedly disposed of in a ritual bath, located in Jerusalem dating back to approximately 20 BCE. Early mold blowing developments are also evidenced by Byzantine works found in Samarra in central Iraq. Phoenicians were among the most prolific glassworkers, creating the first large scale productions and spreading the technique into Egypt, then onto Rome. Centuries later, the revitalization of glassworks during the Italian renaissance gave rise to the traditions still being practiced in Italian workshops like those found in Murano. From Italy, at the risk of persecution, some these artisans escaped along with their secret knowledge, into the further reaches of Europe: The Alps and Rhineland, as well as what is now present day Slovenia, Croatia, Belgium, France, and Spain.



Mathematical diagram featuring two squares incised in a circle, a star polygon (dodecagon 12/2), and a yin-yang symbol intersecting the central vertices.

Clockwise from top left: Molten glass is gathered on a blowpipe, deftly cut with shears, and allowed to momentarily settle on the steel worktable, known as a marver.

The bronze stamp is briefly warmed in the gloryhole to avoid thermal shock, then pressed firmly into the semi-liquid glass.

The clear glass glows pink on the steel marver table, upon removal of the bronze seal.

A wooden paddle, which has been soaked in water, is used to transfer the stamped coin to an annealing oven. Despite the wood being saturated with water, small flames still appear upon contact with the glass disc.



It is this extensive travelling of knowledge and craft that fascinates me, the passage and evolution of recipes and techniques, temperatures and fluctuations which characterize the creative spirit. The harnessing of the transformative power of primal forces and setting into motion the fusion of matter into a new structure and learning how to develop this new material to delightful results. A true dance between adjacent molecules and the threshold of their bonds. And the incredible beauty which results from the alchemic process; the resulting crystalline structure is no less than the result of air pushing liquid into the solid mold. A reciprocal pressure of balance and restraint, of pressure and acceptance, followed by release. These innate dualities began to shape my understanding of the essence of materiality, in that

through these negative/positive working methods, one begins to work more so with what is not there, what is absent, finding shape within the void. All materiality rests on its non-existence.

Heart of Glass

My experiments were, by necessity, channeled through the experienced hands of several craftsmen and women, allowing me to explore forms which I could never have accomplished alone. Together, we produced several mold-blown pitchers with variations in detailing, and colorful handblown vases with the seal added on a globule of molten glass. I also explored the potential of a more elaborate mold, based upon an elaborate flask for holy water.

A historic image of glassblowers working in front of the furnaces in the former Eugeniusz Geppert Academy inspires new generations of aspiring artisans.

Inspired by exemplars from the David Collection I also made a handful of stamped glass coins. In ancient times, these were used as weights to regulate and measure



many different commodities including grain and oil, and currencies minted in precious metals. Commercial usage of these glass weights was so prevalent, medieval merchants often used the Arabic verb *wazana*, which translates as “to weigh”, instead of the verb “to pay.” The coins featured inscriptions of their weight, monetary equivalence, and the name of the ruling family. I envision our coins to be useful as paperweights, to help keep fermenting vegetables under the surface of the brine, or as an amulet which brings solace to the beholder.

I am enthusiastic about producing more small hand-blown vessels with our insignia for bottling fragrances which I am currently experimenting with. I also plan on collaborating with a regional glass fabricator to create an industrial mold to produce a large volume of glass bottles. Embossed with our own graphics, these collec-

Right and below:
Casting a holy water bottle from the town of Częstochowa, an important pilgrimage site for catholics, in the Silesian voivodeship of southern Poland.



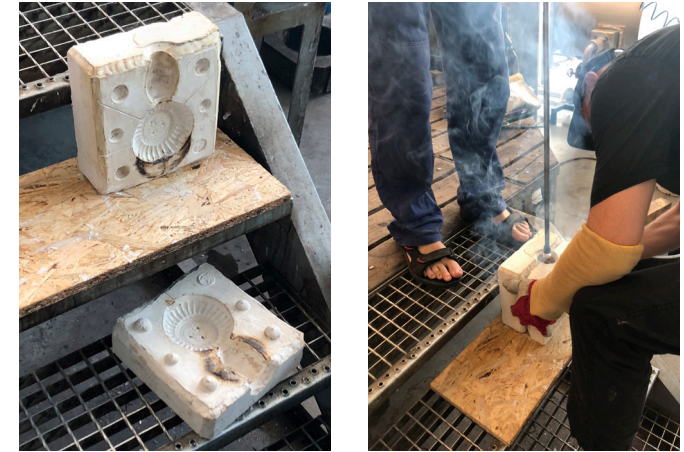


An image of the Virgin Mary, surrounded by scalloped indentations, has been replaced with the three rabbits insignia and a star polygon. The oversized neck will be reworked and elongated following removal from the mold.

tible bottles can be filled with a wide variety of syrups, concentrates, and ready to drink beverages: cider, ale, champagne, sake, mead, and wine.

The hot shop is where the furnaces run all day and all night, hence its name. The necessity of constant supervision, technical assistance, and the priority given to glass apprentices, meant that my experiments had to fit

The open mold is placed in a secure position below the standing position of the glass blower, and the pre-formed bubble is carefully lowered into position. The mold is promptly closed and held together while the molten glass is inflated into the waiting form, through the now vertical blowpipe.

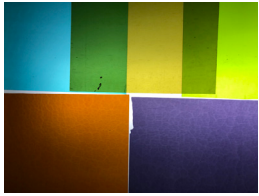


into relatively small openings in a tight schedule. The cooling or annealing time also required prolonged pauses in my pursuits, so I began to inquire about the plausibility of executing a stained-glass work in my 'spare' time. I had seen the laboratory in passing and was fascinated by the potential of this medium, however it was the intermittence of the workflow in the hot shop which led me back. From start to finish, the work was far more demanding of precision than I had imagined. My good



Above and right: In the cold shop, rotating lathes are fitted with fine abrasive bits in a wet process to gently sand and polish the jagged edges where the vessel was attached to the blowpipe.





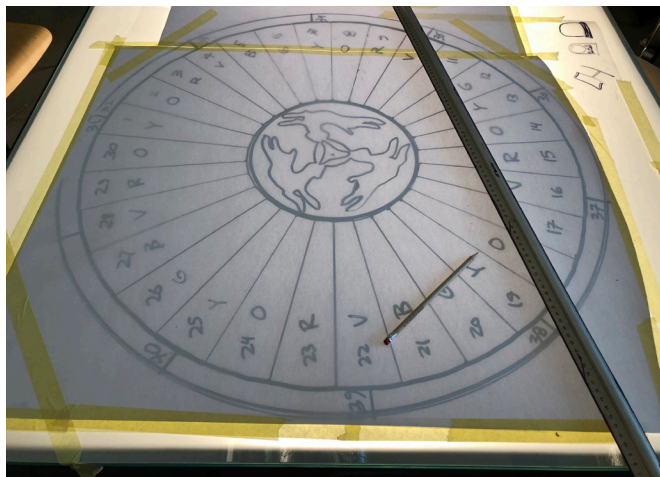
Once the sheets of antique colored glass were chosen, several color studies were drawn up in order to achieve a rhythmic and cohesive pattern.

fortune was finding many sheets of antique colored glass with its characteristic textures and hues from which I was able to select from.

I scaled up an adaptation of the moon calendar graphic I had previously used in my lithography experiments, and under the guidance of my professor and fellow students, I set to work. Carefully tracing the individual panes, and cutting each shape from the fragile antique glass with a diamond-cutter, I learned to feel the tension in the glass, cut by cut I slowly developed a sensibility for

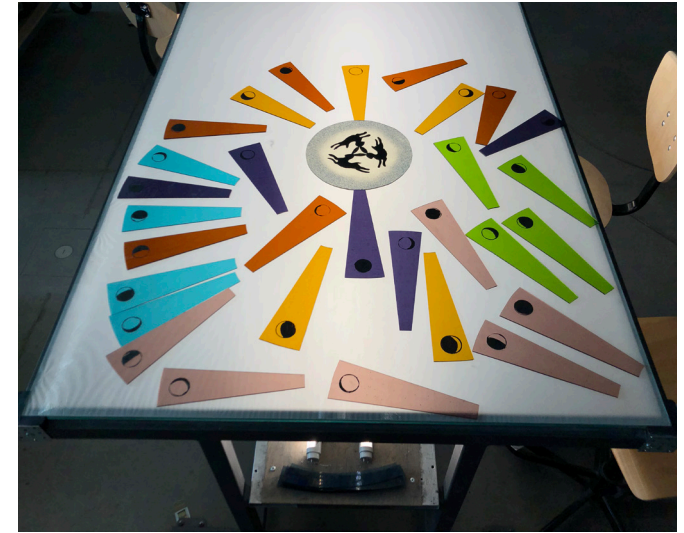


Powdered enamel is rehydrated and applied by hand to articulate the three rabbits insignia. A tonal gradation is delicately created with a large brush.



Above right and right: To realize this stained glass project, a 1:1 scale print is traced onto vellum and each individual pane is numbered and annotated with a color code.

The enamel used to apply the moon phases and logo must be baked in a kiln to harden the design and fuse the enamel to the glass.



Below: A final inspection is made once all the elements have been polished to ensure the joining edges have a suitable fit.

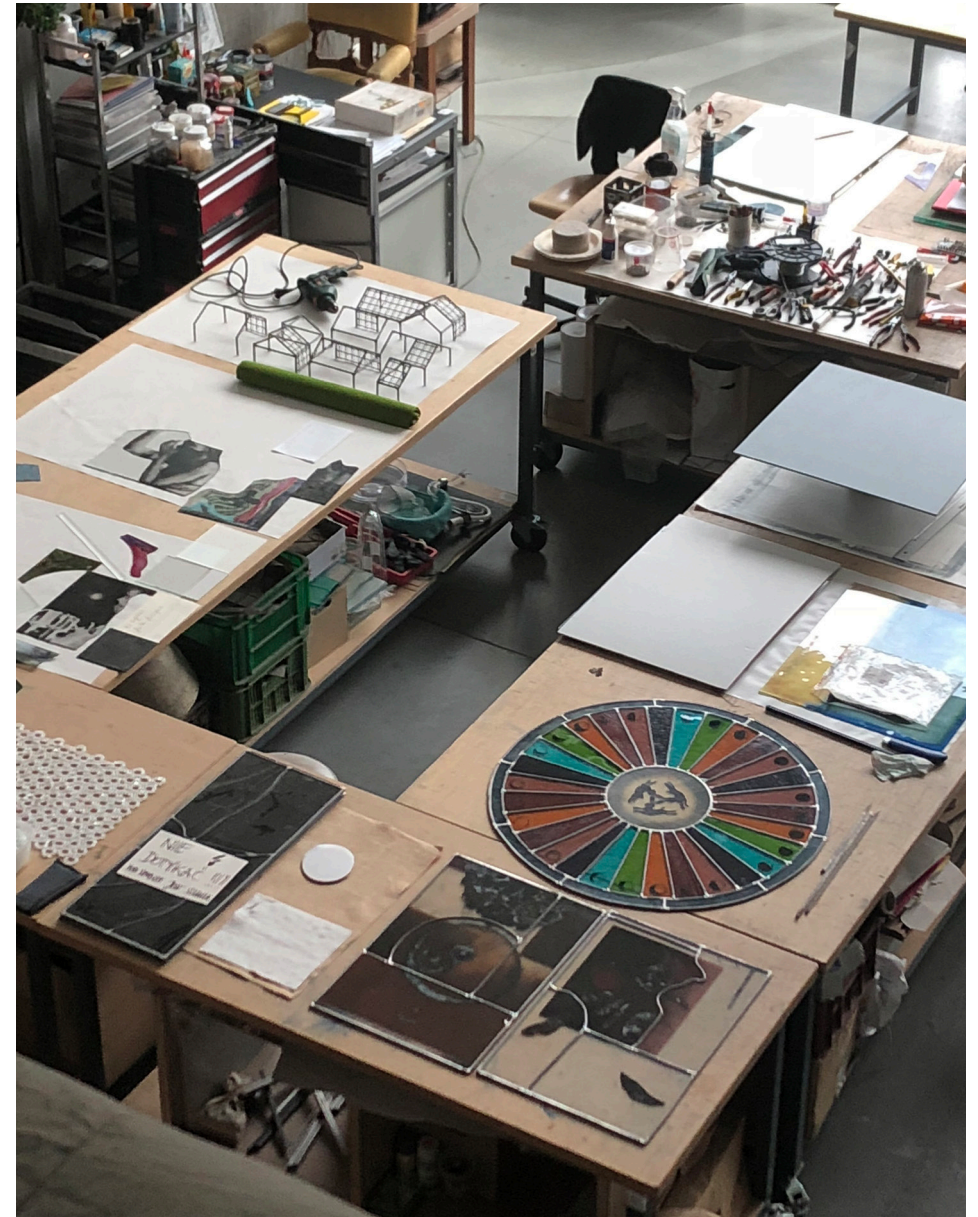


After assembly the joints are soldered together using a special tin alloy. Liquid *flux* must be first applied to the lead to prevent oxidation after the pieces are joined. It also provides a durable bond between the different alloys.



this ancient craft. This slow methodical working pace was a welcome relief – a dramatic contrast from the immediacy and urgency required with molten glass, and the work became more contemplative, even meditative, without the pressure and infernal heat. After countless hours of cutting, rehearsing, and making the necessary millimetric adjustments at the grinding wheel, the completed work was eventually ready to be assembled and soldered together by a visiting specialist. The process of stained-glass illustrated here were as rewarding and illuminating as my time spent in front of the furnaces, and seeing the sunlight shining through that old colored glass transported me magically back, for just a moment, to the shores of Murano.

Following the color scheme individual panes are fitted into the central ring, edged with lead *came*, and secured using small wooden shims with a rabbeted edge.



The completed circular panel is seen here in the stained glass atelier, alongside the works of my colleagues.

6. Lost Ore Found: Cast Alloys

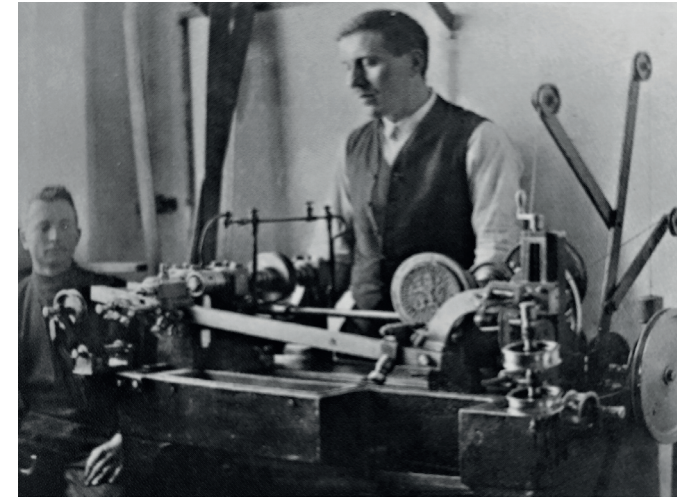


These bronze rabbits are brooches, or fibulae, and were most probably created using the casting technique known as “lost” wax.

When I was around ten years old, I developed a strong affinity for coins. The rare and ancient specimens in the museum vitrines seemingly hovered in midair, ready to float away if the glass case was suddenly opened. I enjoyed envisioning distant cultures and contemplating the vast causality of a small metal disc which had travelled from far corners of the world to find home in a collection. It was a giant mental leap for a young boy from the countryside. I fantasized about taking the coins home with me, but I only found postcards and reproductions in the museum gift shop. And so, I set out to begin my own collection, buying coins from the inexpensive assortments I would encounter at flea markets and antiques shows. At home I would pour over coin catalogues I had withdrawn from the town library -- this was before the internet -- hoping to discover details about my recent acquisitions. I soon realized the monetary value of my growing collection was entirely inconsequential to my personal preferences.

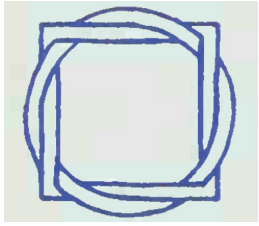
While the unfamiliarity of their origins, imagined notions of ‘rarity’, and their imperfect, worn, or freshly minted condition were also estimable qualities - their importance to me was not about their face value or their worth as ‘collectibles’. There were other value systems at play in my childmind. Their value to me was as elements composing a collection and was attached to my own affection for details: idiosyncrasies of the lettering, markings upon the edges, the imagery, as well as the context of their acquisition. It was the holistic object, marked by

This pantograph lathe is a reducing machine, and was used in coining, or minting, until the 21st century. Traditionally dies were engraved by hand, however this invention, perfected in 1899, by the French engraver Victor Janvier, allowed larger designs to be automatically scaled down.



A selection of four coins featuring rabbits and hares from different cultures and periods. Coins are traditionally stamped onto metal blanks by an incised die of a hardened metal.





The symbol of the square and circle is a reference to harmony between the physical and spiritual realms.

The atelier of Professor Mateusz Dworski, displaying a collection of plaster models and patterns used for casting plaques, medallions, and other small metal reliefs.



its imperfections and peculiarities, which inscribed for me a magic journey onto the object, its past life if you will, effectively removing it from any standards as currency, elevating the coin to an aesthetic object and effectively re-valuing the fetish.

Coins are not typically cast, but minted. Minting is the process of stamping metal blanks, or planchets, with an incised die of a hardened metal. Traditionally dies were engraved by hand, however an invention at the end of the 19th century by a French engraver named Victor Janvier, allowed for larger designs to be mechanically and precisely scaled down. Instead of diving into the tedium of creating a die to mint coins, I was advised by my professor that I could more easily realize my vision through the casting of a positive. The result would be a one off medallion, but the original plaster pattern could, in theory, be cast repeatedly, allowing for some seriality. As stone was to the Neolithic era, the Bronze Age was defined by humanity's relation to the materials they employed for weaponry, as tools, in cooking, and as



Above:
Initial designs are sketched onto a small rectangular plaster block, approximately 2cm thick, using a stencil, straight edge and compass.

Top right:
Customized tools are used to gradually carve the design into the soft plaster.

Right:
Visualizing the shallow negative impressions is aided by the use of soft plasticine, which can be pressed into a moistened pattern to create an instant reveal of the positive relief.



ornament. The broad application and utility of bronze is due to combination of two metals. Bronze is an alloy consisting mainly of copper and is typically combined with approximately 12% tin. Depending on other metal or non-metallic additives, the melting point can vary but is typically around 950°C. The resulting alloy is relatively

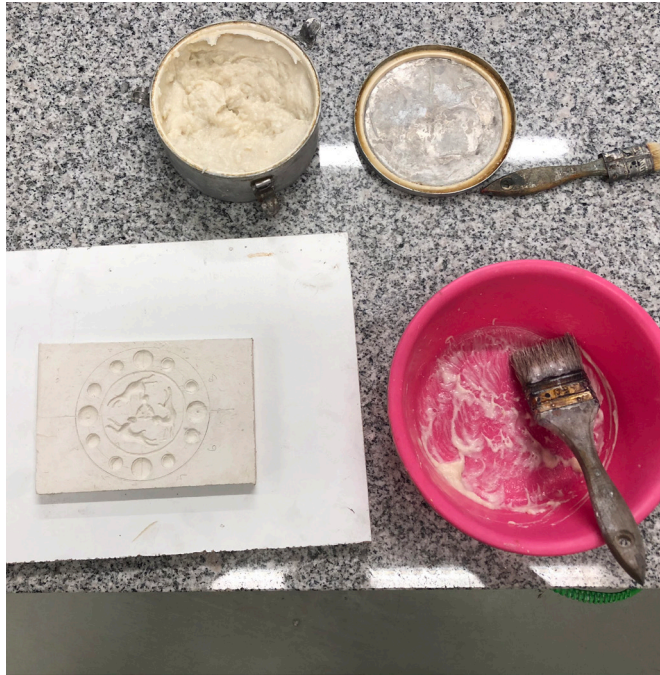


Above:

When a satisfactory image has been etched into the plaster negative, the plate is then dabbed with a soft brush and soap paste.

Below:

The negative is placed in an adjustable wooden frame. A fresh batch of plaster is prepared and poured and allowed to harden.



Above:

The circular forms are cut from the plaster plates with a hand saw, and the round edges are sanded evenly with a metal mesh.

Below:

The resulting positive patterns can be then further refined and detailed, readying them for the





The metal foundry at ASP is an organized chaos.



Above:

Green sand is sifted onto the treated pattern, gradually covering and filling the bottom part of the flask, also known as the drag.

Clockwise from top left:

The finalized plaster patterns are dusted with talcum powdered graphite to facilitate removal from the mold.

A single pattern is placed inside one half of a two-part metal frame known as a flask.

The moist sand is built up layer by layer and compacted using an aluminum wedge.

The sand is then levelled with the top edge using a or metal strake.





In the casting of these medallions a small induction furnace was used to melt scrap metal from previous castings, which has been recast as ingots.

soft and forgiving to work with while still being incredibly resistant. Ores are metals found in their natural state in deposits in the earth, which when smelted together allow for their further purification, and as the metals blend, the alloy formed takes on characteristics of the two (or more) parent metals.

Cast into the Void

Having had practically zero personal experience with furnaces and foundries, I found myself starting quite literally, from scratch. The process for casting metal ironically begins with one of the softest materials: plaster. Plaster is a dry powder, consisting of limestone or gypsum, which is rehydrated to form a pourable liquid. The mixture quickly heats up in a chemical reaction known as crystallization and should be poured into a frame or recipient quickly before it hardens, or sets. It is this blank plaster form which will be used to create a model, or pattern, and soon after pouring can be etched or scratched into with a variety of small tools with various tips resembling miniature blades, chisels, and spoons.

Left:
When the upper half of the flask, or cope, is placed on the drag, lines are drawn in the sand to delineate the sprue.



A ladle, known as a crucible is used to transfer molten metal from the furnace to the flasks. Preheating is essential for reducing thermal stress on the crucible.

An initial sketch is typically drawn onto the plaster blank to help guide the process. I incorporated into my design the historic symbol of the square and circle. The symbol is related to an ancient geometer's dilemma, Euclid's 47th problem of "Squaring the Circle," or constructing a square with the same area as a given circle. However, in this case it is a reference to harmony between the physical and spiritual realms. As I slowly began to scrape away the soft plaster, the positive form seemed to reveal itself to me, as finer details begin to emerge. The mental challenge of visualizing the shallow negative impressions in reverse is aided using soft plasticine, which can be pressed into a pattern to create an instant reveal of the positive relief.

When a finalized image has been etched into the plaster form, the pattern is dabbed with soap by means of a soft brush. Great care should be taken to coat the porous and minutely detailed surface evenly, removing all excess soap and brush marks. After allowing the soap to set for a few moments, the negative carving is placed in



Once impurities have been removed from the melted charge, and adequate temperatures have been achieved, the liquid alloy is carefully poured, or tapped, into the crucible.

Green Sand

an adjustable wooden frame. A fresh batch of plaster is prepared and poured onto the soapy face of the negative and allowed to harden. Following a brief interval, the frame surrounding the plaster sandwich is removed and the two facing plates are carefully separated from one another. When executed properly, this will reveal a precise positive impression. The resulting positive pattern can be further refined still in preparation for the next phase.

While the atelier for producing plaster models was almost surgical in its cleanliness, the metal foundry was the scene of organized chaos. Here the dirty work would begin. Finalized plaster patterns are first dusted with talcum and graphite to prevent them from sticking to the mold. An important technical strategy is using inclined angles known as draft, (and avoiding undercuts) to facilitate the successful removal of the pattern from the mold. Green sand derives from its wet state, as in green wood. A plaster pattern is first placed inside a metal frame known as a flask. Sifted onto the treated

Carbonized sand is first removed by brushing and later by sand blasting.





Here we see a finished medallion, with a slight imperfection due to a pocket of gas trapped in the mold, creating an incomplete casting.

pattern, the sand gradually covers the form, and fills the bottom half of the flask, or drag. Moist sand is compacted layer by layer and then levelled to the top edge using metal strake. A board is then placed on top and the drag is flipped over. When the upper half of the flask, or cope, is placed on the drag, lines are drawn in the sand to delineate the sprue, the passageway by which molten metal will enter the flask, several gates to fill the mold, and one or two vents to allow excess metal and combustion gases to exit the mold. Talcum powder is again sifted over the pattern, and sand is pounded into the cope. Once the cope is straked, the critical part of



A patina was achieved by sprinkling the medallion with copper sulfate (CuSO_4) and prolonged exposure to urea ($\text{CO}(\text{NH}_2)_2$).

the operation is separating the cope from the drag. Carefully removing the pattern leaves an empty void, or molding cavity. The two halves of the flask are then reassembled, ready for metal to be poured into the mold.

In casting the medallions, we used a small induction furnace to melt scrap metal from previous artworks, some of which had been recast as ingots. Impurities, or slag, begins float to the surface and are discarded before pouring. A ladle made of refractory material, known as a crucible, is used to transfer molten metal to the flasks from the furnace. Once cooled, the resulting rough castings are removed from the sand, and reveal the desired form.

The Nebra Sky Disc, 1600 BCE, is reputedly the oldest depiction of the cosmos known in the world. At 30 centimeters in diameter, and weighing 2.2 kilograms, the bronze disc has a verde-gris patina and is inlaid with gold.



A Sister Artifact

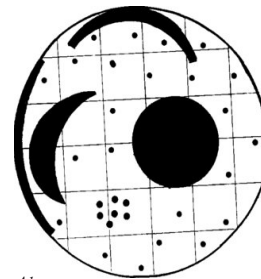
For my second investigation into casting, I chose to replicate an object considered to be one of the most important archaeological discoveries of the 20th century. The Nebra Sky Disc, found in 1999 by German treasure hunters, has been dated to 1600 BCE, and is reputedly the oldest depiction of the cosmos known in the world.

The Lepus (Hare) constellation is located just south of the celestial equator, immediately below Orion, and is known as the prey being pursued by Orion's hunting dogs.



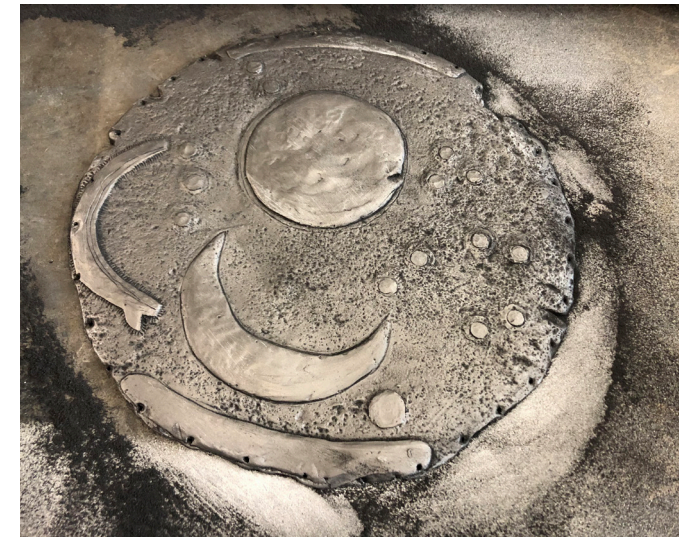
A detailed clay model was altered to feature Lepus, as opposed to the Pleiades, creating a type of sister artifact. Next, a negative mold of the clay model is made in plaster, and a wax positive was created to be cast in aluminum.

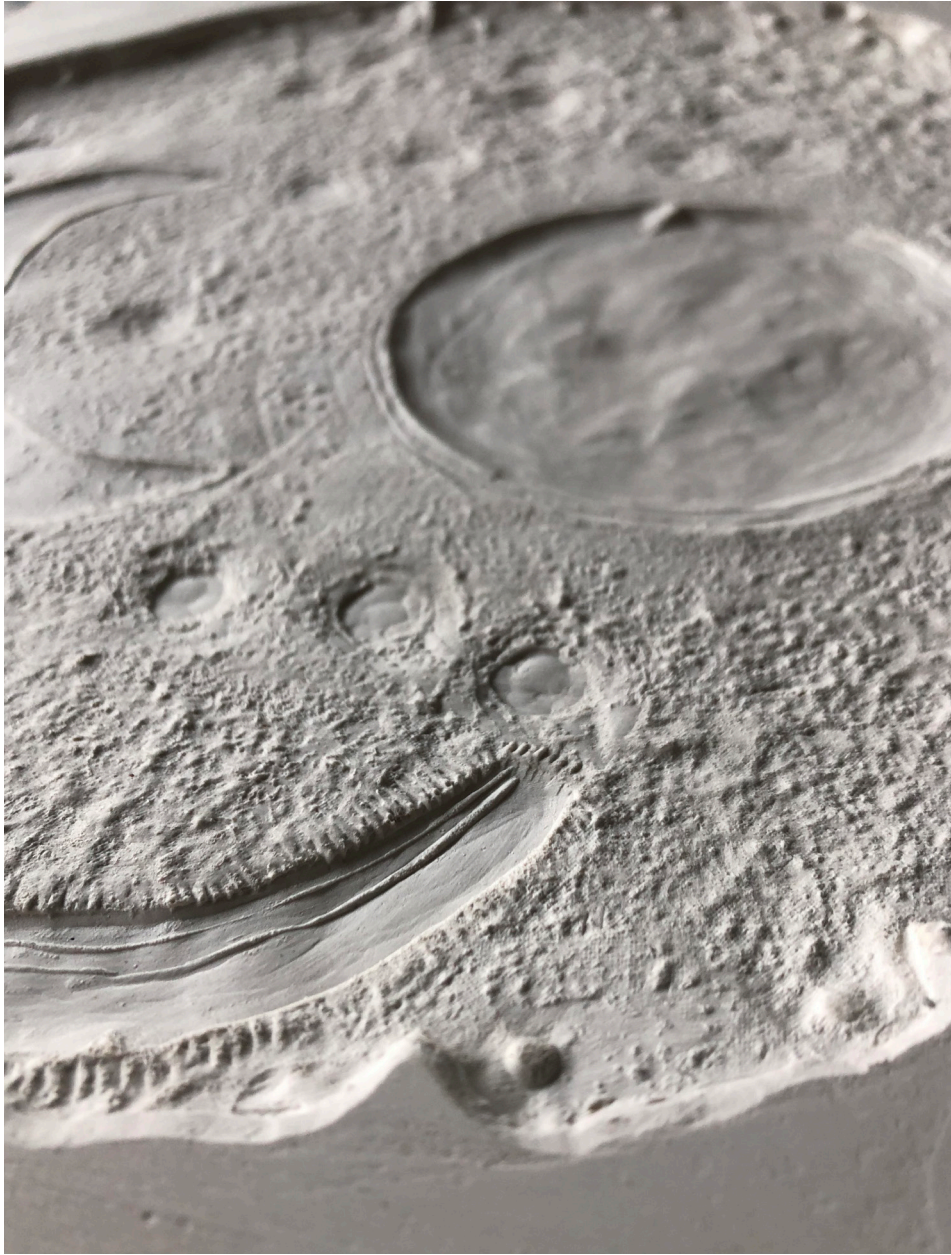
At 30 centimeters in diameter, and weighing 2.2 kilograms, the bronze disc has a verde-gris patina and is inlaid with gold of varying origins. The surface is decorated with circles thought to represent the Sun, a crescent moon, and a cluster of stars interpreted as the Pleiades. Arches on the sides, which were added later, mark the precise angles of the summer and winter solstices, essential knowledge for agrarian civilizations. An arc near the bottom has been alternately interpreted as a rainbow, the "sun boat", or the Milky Way.



Above: Symbols generally interpreted to be the Sun, a crescent moon, and a cluster of stars (the Pleiades). The side arches mark the angles of the solstices. The bottom arc is interpreted as a rainbow, the "sun boat", or the Milky Way.

The wax positive is coated with graphite powder, in preparation for casting.





Plaster molds have the capacity to replicate original patterns with extraordinary detail.



The rough casting is complete with its large sprue, multiple gates, and two V-shaped vents.

The Lepra Sky Disc is still in process, awaiting gold plating and eventual discovery.



My version of this object would have some slight modifications, altering the original locations of the stars to feature Lepus, as opposed to the Pleiades, creating a type of southern sister artifact. Lepus is one of 48 constellations identified in the 2nd century by Ptolemy and continues to be recognized as one of 88 modern constellations. The Lepus (Hare) constellation is located just south of the celestial equator, immediately below Orion, and is pursued by Orion's hunting dogs.

I drew upon reference images to create a detailed clay model on a 1:1 scale. A negative plaster mold of the clay model was created which in turn was used to produce a wax positive. Details in the resulting wax pattern were carefully retouched and coated with graphite powder in preparation for casting. I had been intending to experiment with the lost wax technique, however sand casting was soon determined to be the most viable method for efficiently producing this form. This work is currently still in process, as I go about patiently creating the proper patina and applying the gold inlays.

An Ancient Brand



Digitized to create a series of laser cut figures, the glyphs represent various aspects of agriculture, gastronomy, recreation, and nature.

Below:
Following discussions with experienced foundry artisans, suitable figures were selected and glued to wooden plates.

For my final and most ambitious experiment, I proposed the casting of a series of branding irons, as part of the annual High Temperature Festival (*Festiwal Wysokich Temperatur*). I selected twenty-eight hieroglyphs representing activities in the fields of agriculture, gastronomy, recreation, and nature. The chosen glyphs were appropriated from Gardiner's Sign List, considered the standard reference for the study of Egyptian hieroglyphs. Compiled in 1927 by Sir Alan Gardiner, the British Egyptologist, linguist, and independent scholar.

Laser cut figures were glued to wooden plates and once dry, their contours were edged with natural beeswax to ensure sufficient draft. The experience of the foundry team was invaluable as they helped me to determine not only the proper depths for the symbols in relief, but also advising me regarding which designs were simplistic enough to be successfully realized in iron. The finalized patterns were arranged in gangs of five glyphs each and aligned inside four custom wooden forms of oriented strand board (OSB). Manually compressed green sand would not be able to withstand the violence of the molten iron, so a different composite sand was utilized.





Above:
Silicate sand produces a single use mold capable of withstanding extremely high temperatures

Middle:
The casting voids are brushed with a solution of graphite and petroleum to help preserve the image and aid in releasing the mold.

Bottom:
Carbonized sand mold after pouring and shakeout.

Left:
Hieroglyphs appropriated from Gardiner's Sign List, the standard reference for egyptologists.

Silicate sand hardened by CO₂ produces a single-use mold capable of withstanding extremely high temperatures. Mixed thoroughly with a polymer resin, the chemical sand is packed around the wooden patterns. Holes are perforated at regular intervals on the backsides of the mold and carbon dioxide is injected under pressure, catalyzing the resin and creating a rock-like substrate: $\text{silica gel} - (\text{Na}_2\text{SiO}_2 \times \text{H}_2\text{O} + \text{CO}_2 \rightarrow \text{Na}_2\text{CO}_3 + (\text{SiO}_2 \times \text{H}_2\text{O}))$ A solution of graphite and petrol is then painted on the hardened to preserve the image and minimize carbonization. The molds are carefully closed, secured with steel bands, and readied for transport to the pouring site.

An artistic iron pour requires a coordinated team effort to be successful. It is an extremely intense and dangerous procedure, with temperatures reaching over 1500°



Above:
A charred fragment from a less successful pour appears as if it was unearthed from another millennium.

Right:
Cupola furnaces were used in China since approximately 400 BCE. Once the furnace has been tapped, molten iron flows into the crucible and the tap is plugged with clay.



Above:
Pure iron is carefully ladled into the awaiting molds, often resulting in dramatic fireworks.



A hare glyph, discovered in the temple of Edfu, on the Western bank of the Nile. The carvings recount creation myths and unintentionally bear a resemblance to the negative void of the sand mold.

Celsius. To charge the furnace, air is blown across an ignited fuel source, either wood, coal, or coke. Once the proper temperatures have been reached, buckets of coal and scrap or pig iron are layered with buckets of limestone gravel, which functions as a flux. As the heat rises in the stack, the melted metal drips down, collecting in a pool just above a door at the bottom of the furnace. When enough iron has pooled in the furnace it is tapped, and molten iron flows into a massive crucible held by two strong assistants. The tap is quickly and bravely plugged with a fistful of clay. Slag is scraped off the top and the refined iron is carefully ladled into the awaiting molds, often resulting in dramatic fireworks.

Hours later, once the iron has had a chance to cool, the casting is ready to be removed from mold in a process known as shakeout. After the two halves of the mold have been split, a hammer is used to carefully liberate



Right:
Once cooled, the branding irons are ready to be removed from the sand mold in a process known as *shakeout*.



Still embedded in the mold, the resulting designs are crisp and detailed indicating a very successful pour.



After the two parts of the mold have been separated, a hammer was used to break apart the rock hard mold.

Below:
Back in the atelier, the branding irons are cleaned of excess mold remnants.

the branding irons from their sandy tomb. The resulting irons featured crisp and defined details indicative of a successful pour. The branding irons are then cleaned in the studio of any excess mold remnants using a combination of wire brushes, pneumatic tools, and sand blasting before finishing. The irons can now be used either hot or cold to produce endless combinations of symbolic impressions on a wide assortment of possible materials: paper, glass, ceramic, wood, and leather.



7. Infinite reverie

*Within the development of culture under an exchange economy,
the search for authentic experience and correlatively,
the search for the authentic object become critical... "Authentic"
experience becomes both elusive and allusive as it is placed
beyond the horizon of present lived experience,
the beyond in which the antique,
the pastoral, the exotic,
and other fictive domains are articulated.*

◦ *On Longing*, Susan Stewart

As a small child, I had the good fortune to visit several museums on a regular basis. My most vivid memories, the most impressive of all the impressions, were for me the dioramas in natural history museums. They were worlds within worlds, the complete illusion, total immersion. In the greater sense of the word diorama, an 18th century French term meaning “to look through”, I find the museum itself posited as a house of illusions. I became interested in the power of display and these first trips to museums were the gateway for my appreciation of images, objects, and documents as well as in the modes of their production, conservation, and exhibition.

I was also fascinated by the supernatural simultaneity of display cases filled with artifacts which ranged from African masks to Spanish armor. How had this dense web of history been woven? Museum collections opened a wormhole in the fabric of time, representing a compressed vision, comparable to peering through a telephoto

lens, cultures and eras are flattened and compressed in this vision. Overlapping and intermingling within my imagination, I was too young to be able to distinguish the truly ancient from the recent past. How had these objects survived, how were they found, and what stories are they telling us? My childhood fascination with the lives of objects, their trajectories and their influence still compels me to collect, and also to produce – to contribute something from my own mind into the vast catalogue of human production.

Lifting the Veil

In 1994, I became enamored with the groundbreaking work *Mining the Museum*, conceptualized by Fred Wilson, who came to Baltimore to re-examine one of our city’s most prized collections, the Maryland Historical Society. Wilson’s brilliant deconstruction and covert engagement with the museum’s archives, unlocked a hidden potential for the museum to tell new narratives about power, language and display. His work opened many questions for me as an artist and consumer of culture, and later in life I had the pleasure and privilege to befriend and assist Wilson. His tactics of working with historical objects – or representations thereof – and the inherent power of the language of display implicated a reevaluation of historicism which continues to inform my own practice and vision.

Later that same year, in Florence, I was first haunted by *La Specola*, on a balmy June morning. Situated just down from the Ponte Vecchio, almost hidden outside the barren plaza of the Pitti Palace, La Specola was the first public Wunderkammer of its kind. Opened to the public in 1775, earning it renown as Europe’s oldest natural history museum. Named for the observatory which first occupied the premises, the museum possesses an entire microcosm within its densely populated galleries. An overstuffed collection of renaissance taxidermy, the findings of innumerable entomologists, and a formidable assembly of intricate wax replicas of the human body;

it is the closest thing to Noah's Ark I had ever experienced. I was struck by the audacity to exhibit hundreds of animals: endless species of primates, birds, small mammals, rodents...even a preserved hippopotamus. So many beings on display under one roof, together, forever. I've never quite gotten over it. Everything in this museum was dead, but at least they had company. I find it tragic but metaphoric, how our faulty attitudes about nature and culture are revealed in the manner in which we once memorialized nature, and are implicit in this eerie and awkward collection.

Walter Benjamin observed, late one night while unpacking his library, that *"there is in the life of the collector a dialectical tension between the poles of disorder and order. Naturally his existence is tied to many other things as well: to a very mysterious relationship to ownership, [...] to a relationship to objects which does not emphasize their functional, utilitarian value – that is, their usefulness – but studies and loves them as the scene, the stage of their fate. The most profound enchantment for the collector is the locking of individual items within a magic circle in which they are fixed as the final thrill, [...] One only has to watch a collector handle the objects in his glass case. As he holds them in his hands, he seems to be seeing through them into their distant past as though inspired."*

A Narrative of Origins

I do love collecting. Records, stones, stories, bones, seeds, recipes, friendships. Collecting can have its drawbacks, but the rewards are far greater. At markets however, I began taking photographs of objects instead of acquiring them. Now I have a collection of the images of forgotten desires, a registry of postponed urges for the joy of possession. I transposed my desire to take these random objects home into capturing them with my lens. In this way I have saved myself from troubling with their physicality. I can't help but recall a mental image I keep of Henry David Thoreau inside his modest cabin. Upon his windowsill there sits a rock he once

admired, and seeing how it had gathered dust, he simply tossed it clear out from his pane-less window. One thing about collecting is certain, we can't take it with us.

Although the cultural, material, and contextual syncretism which characterizes the collection is ripe for critique, the symbol of the three rabbits is deeply poly-cultural. It is a zoomorphic pictogram, a serendipitous byproduct of geometric precision. I have concluded that it defies post-colonial critique through a type of prehistorical universality, and just like the mercurial rabbit, the symbol itself makes a home between the surface and the depths, the illuminated and the obscure, the living and the dead.

To attempt to reconstruct a story, the threads of which have either been lost or never existed, is a gamble. Susan Stewart's writing helped me to begin to understand the potential traps of the objects I would create to try to understand this journey of the symbol. Her investigations pushed me to try and understand the peculiarities of the object-type known as souvenirs, the complications of collecting, and how select groups of objects function as a source of identity, for both collector and viewer.

I quote her at length with great pleasure,

"What is this narrative of origins? It is a narrative of interiority and authenticity. It is not a narrative of the object; it is a narrative of the possessor... The souvenir displaces the point of authenticity as it becomes the point of origin for narrative. Such a narrative cannot be generalized to encompass the experience of anyone; it pertains only to the possessor of the object. It is a narrative which seeks to reconcile the disparity between interiority and exteriority, subject and object, signifier and signified. We cannot be proud of someone else's souvenir unless the narrative is extended to include our relationship with the objects owner, or unless, as we shall see later, we can transform the souvenir into the collection."

Instinctual Collecting

Among other occupations, my father was an antique dealer, and we often came to possess the amateur collections of formerly living persons. These ephemeral collections ranged from figurines and dried flowers, to fountain pens and paperweights, to coins, stamps, postcards, shells and fossils. Of all other chordates, the creatures which most closely reenact our human tendency to build and collect are the bowerbirds native to Papua New Guinea.

Their mating rituals encompass an exhibition of extraordinary song and dance and are adorned with elaborate plumage. But their most interesting habit is an uncanny urge to collect and arrange objects based on color, form, and size. They assemble these collections into semi-private *Wunderkammers* composed of bright green leaves, shimmering seashells, plump berries, bits of ribbon and tinsel. All these objects have been carefully arranged to attract the female of the species. The objective is to garnish her attention for long enough to have an opportunity to excite her with his dance moves or an exquisite exhibit of colored feathers. By displaying a highly developed sense of color, form and order, or simply put, good taste, the male hopes to reproduce.

The California woodrat, another clever creature which has greatly influenced my practice, “*arranges nails in a symmetrical fortress-like pattern around his nest, but the objects collected – silver, tobacco, watches, tools, knives, matches, pieces of glass – are without seriality, without relation to one another or to a context of acquisition.*” My point in mentioning this low-level type of collector, is that this type of collection is not tied to culture and economy in the same way as a *proper* collection. This is a different sort of collection altogether, outside of traditional relationships and linearity, because the collection of the woodrat is composed of intrinsic objects, complete in themselves, owing to the sensorial qualities which made them attractive to the rodent. Despite having encountered

antique dealers with rat-like qualities, the difference between these two collectors is that the mercantilist antiquarian “*removes the object from context and places it within the play of signifiers that characterize an exchange economy.*”

Stewart continues to drop knowledge on the peculiar topic of collecting: “*while the point of the souvenir may be remembering, or at least the invention of memory, the point of collecting is forgetting*”...

she proposes that a finite group of elements is a fresh start, and by virtue of their combination, together they can produce “*an infinite reverie*”. A collection is constructed not only by its elements but comes into being by way of its organization. This ponderance forces me to consider how I am to present this self-sprung collection. Stewart determines that if the principles of a collection are bound from the beginning, then the collection will also be finite, however if one can bend the tendency towards infinity, then the resulting collection will be open ended.

Organization, in Stewart’s perspective, is the key to discerning what the collection is about, and this is one of my primary interests -- discovering what my own work is about. “*To arrange the objects according to time is to juxtapose personal time with social time, autobiography with history, and thus to create a fiction of the individual life, a time of the individual subject both transcendent and parallel to historical time. Similarly, the spatial organization of the collection, front to back, behind and before, depends upon an individual perceiving and apprehending the collection with eye and hand. The collector’s space must move between the public and the private, between display and hiding.*”

It is precisely this jouissance between what is hidden and what is revealed which is crucial to the playfulness within the collection. Incorporating objects as diverse as their origins...glass coins, bronze medallions, and

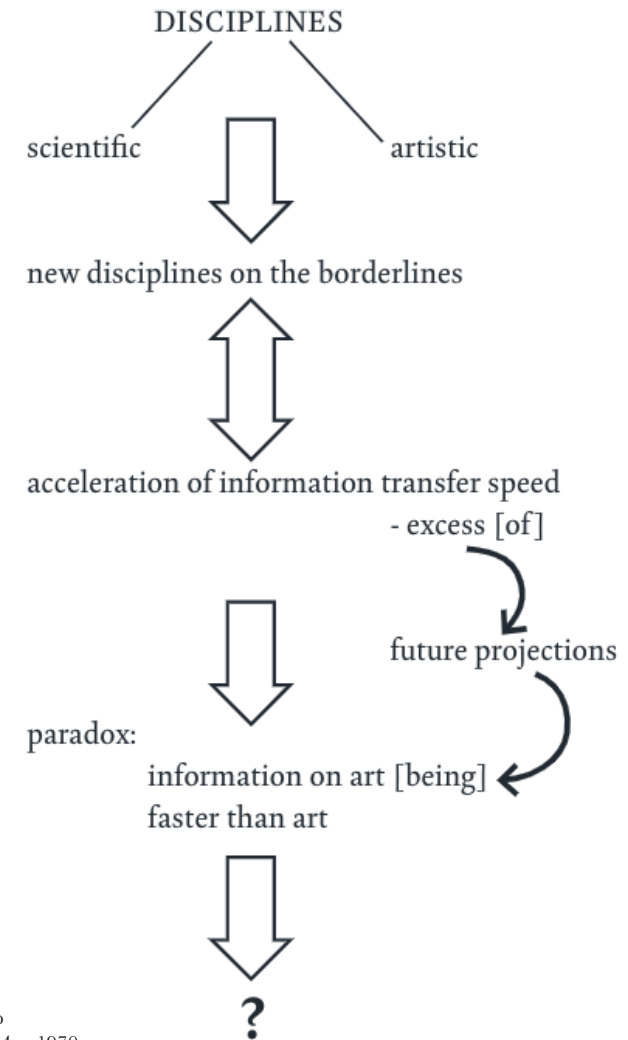
stoneware seals...as well as the inclusion of esoteric symbols functions to provide a sense of historicity, not in the original conditions of the primitive/exotic culture, but analogous to the “radical otherness” of my own childhood.

The French theorist Jean Baudrillard’s 1964 work *Le système des Objets*, is also based upon his thesis research and identifies authenticity and interiority as the remote qualities which are served up in a collection. He designates the primitive/exotic object as functioning just like the antique, that is, akin to his notion of the primitive as childhood. Baudrillard also proposes that it is through the mechanism of *anteriority* that indigenous objects hold the power to fascinate us. To the collector, the now fetisized object, like our childhood toys, is placed in the remote past, yet persist in contemporary mythology precisely because the objects have been removed from any consumer realm.

His thoughts reflect my own personal doubts regarding the futile materialism of collecting:

“It remains characteristic of the collection that sooner or later a radical change will occur capable of wrenching it out of its regressive system and orientating it towards a project or task (whether status-related, cultural or commercial is of no consequence, just so long as an object eventually brings one human being face to face with another - at which point the object has become a message). All the same, no matter how open a collection is, it will always harbour an irreducible element of non-relationship to the world. Because he feels alienated and abolished by a social discourse whose rules escape him, the collector strives to reconstitute a discourse that is transparent to him, a discourse whose signifiers he controls and whose referent par excellence is himself. In this he is doomed to failure: he cannot see that he is simply transforming an open-ended objective discontinuity into a closed subjective one, where even the language he uses has lost any general validity. This kind of totalization by means of objects always bears the stamp

of solitude. It fails to communicate with the outside, and communication is missing within it. In point of fact, moreover, we cannot avoid the question whether objects can indeed ever come to constitute any other language than this: can man ever use objects to set up a language that is more than a discourse addressed to himself?”



Jerzy Ludwiński,
Note #5, Appendix to
Art in the Post-Artistic Age, 1970

8. Breaking the mold

*A cup of wine, under the flowering trees;
I drink alone, for no friend is near.
Raising my cup I beckon the bright moon,
For he, with my shadow, will make three men.
The moon, alas, is no drinker of wine;
Listless, my shadow creeps about at my side.
Yet with the moon as friend and the shadow as slave
I must make merry before the Spring is spent.
To the songs I sing the moon flickers her beams;
In the dance I weave my shadow tangles and breaks.
While we were sober, three shared the fun;
Now we are drunk, each goes his way.
May we long share our odd, inanimate feast,
And meet at last on the Cloudy River of the sky.*

♫ Drinking Alone by Moonlight, Li Po

It has been my hope that in this discourse to myself I have not become stamped with solitude but have opened my horizons and those of my colleagues and collaborators in the shared spirit of growth, creativity, and transformation. Nowadays I find myself more interested in objects which find me, sometimes mistaken as trivial and unnecessary, they sometimes hold the potential to embody an entire story through personal associations. This can be a complex and rich narrative, a lengthy dream that no one could ever bear to hear recounted, but there you have it in your image-repertoire, memorialized in a half-torn ticket stub. If I am almost liberated from the vice of collecting, why is it that I have I returned

to the production of falsified relics. Is there any usevalue of this collection? Is it just to attract the females of the species with bright blues and shining glass? I can only venture to say that I have made these objects with a joie de vivre and a spirit of self-discovery which helped to remind me how little about the material world I actually understood, let alone the metaphysical.

This project explores an ancient symbol: three rabbits with shared ears. Believed to have originally symbolized transformation, balance, and fertility, this ancient pictogram travelled far from its origin in the Buddhist temples of western China, rolling along the Silk Road and cross-pollinating the fertile imaginations of Islamic, Christian, and Judaic cultures. Through a variety of techniques -- printmaking, glassblowing, ceramics, and metal casting - I have labored to expand the vocabulary of our visual language.

The resulting collection is composed of handmade objects - vessels, tablets, seals, and stamps - which are hybrids of contemporary digital technology and ancestral methods. As an open-ended series, the work alludes to the untold history of a mysterious symbol, both ubiquitous and auspicious, via a constellation of imaginary archaeological fragments. In the context of this fictitious ethnographical collection, the artifacts form the groundwork for further exploration.

The House of the Three Rabbits is a contemporary 'Gesamtkunstwerk', grounded in the physical as well as the metaphysical. Through the play of semiotics, I have reached across temporal and cultural borders, opened a window to the past, and a door to the future, by shaping my present.

Acknowledgments

I would like to recognize the opportunity entrusted to me, which has culminated in the realization of this project, as an extreme privilege. I am humbled and grateful for having been not only allowed to but encouraged to pursue such utopic ideals and esoteric wanderings. This adventure has often consumed my thoughts and daydreams, enveloping my existence with ambitions and doubts. It is a journey which would not have been possible without the total support of my artistic partner Sixten Kai Nielsen, and the inspiration from our late friend and mentor Leslie James Walton.

I want to also express my gratitude to both of my parents, Jennifer Lake and Gerald Franklin Albright, for their perpetual encouragement, their youthful curiosity, and genuine interest in my experiments, always giving me the space to dream.

To my dearest friend Candice Lee Soave for so graciously hosting me during my period of asylum in New York. To Elizabeth Hoeckel for breakfast in the Sahara, and to Tuana Inhan for breezing me into Asia. To Florian Sylvester Ludwig for generous technical assistance and esoteric clubbing.

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A warm wave of gratitude goes out to the international cast of carpenters and masons for their creativity and muscle, since the House of the Three Rabbits was just skin and bones. You all know what you have done: Andree 'Auge' Juergens, Thomas

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