Perpetually Fleeting

Allora McCullough
Ceramics Master of Fine Arts Thesis
December 2015
Table of Contents

Introduction 3
Defining Terminology 5
Historic References 9
Contemporary Culture 13
Artist Statement 16
Narrative and Open Questions 18
Methodology 20
Conclusion 36
Technical Specifications 38
Bibliography 40
Showcard 43
Introduction

Most cultures and religions agree that the body is some sort of vessel for a spirit or soul to move through. The search for the physical interaction of that intangible essence with the body has been an enigma through the ages. Medically speaking, we now understand the function of the brain for personality, memories, and physical control of the body. This knowledge has launched our culture into what Carl Zimmer refers to as, “the Neurocentric Age – in which the brain is central not only to the body but to our conception of ourselves” (7). This conception of ourselves is endlessly debated in the fields of psychology, philosophy, religion, and medicine. I propose that this intersection between the sciences and spiritual studies opens an opportunity to question what happens to the soul, or spirit, when we die.

My research is driven by an interest in consciousness theories of psychology, historical cultural practices in burial preparations, a lack of quantifying the “soul” in medical science, and our contemporary culture’s constant pressure for production and busy-ness. I will present a brief collection of my findings in these areas. The supporting definitions and histories will provide a context for the discussion of my work. Ultimately, I am concerned that the consumerist culture we inhabit now has lost a vital act in pursuing the ancient question of the ethereal presence. We rarely acknowledge this question’s existence except for the brief moments we allow ourselves to grieve. These moments are not enough.

I am approaching a representation of the ethereal body. I am exploring the sculptural figure as both a body and as a vessel for the physical body. By forming metaphorical vessels for the spirit through visceral abstract bottles, I desire to invent an avenue in which we can access the intangible and unperceivable realm. This is my effort to create a tangible space which allows viewers to reflect on what death means in their life and what happens in that moment of loss.
Defining Terminology

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, *psychology* is defined as “the scientific study of the nature, functioning, and development of the human mind, including the faculties of reason, emotion, perception, communication, etc.” (OED). However the etymological origin in the 1650s, literally meant "study of the soul" (Harper). Contemporary fields of psychology that are centered on the *Theory of Mind* and consciousness are continuing this search for the connection of an individual experience to the brain through neurological studies (Blackmore 93). We understand the brain and conscious experience better than ever before. While this topic of research may seem to be separate from religious studies, I believe that it comes from the same place of inquiry. The human desire to understand ourselves, our brains, and our minds is inherently connected to the desire to identify and reflect on the spiritual concept of the soul. I aim to bring the two together in conversation through my work.

In 1662, Thomas Willis gathered a group of medical professionals at Oxford for a dissection of the human brain. They were embarking on a deeper understanding of the brain and nervous system than had previously been charted. This was the founding of modern neuroscience. It was during this demonstration that the brain and its connections were identified as “chemical storms of atoms” (Zimmer 6). They were identifying for the first time publicly which parts of the brain contributed to emotions, memories, and dreams (Zimmer 3-23). This would eventually lead to modern neuroscience and consciousness studies.
Defining consciousness is extremely complicated. We know that the brain receives external stimuli through the senses that are then interpreted through a series of neural pathways (Dowling 84-99). These collective messages form physical experiences that allow for interaction with environmental surroundings. If this was the only function of the brain, there would be no difference between a human and a highly complex robot (Kirk “Zombies”). This problem is presented in psychology and philosophy as the “Zombie Thought Experiment” (Blackmore 10-13). The philosophical zombie is presented as an identical version of someone has no cognitive experiences, no conscious stream, and no self-awareness. The experiment explores the complications and implications of identifying consciousness as a singular or universal phenomenon.

We can measure cognitive thought, or consciousness, through electroencephalography, or EEG, in the cerebral cortex. This is the most developed part of the brain in humans and is commonly recognized as a major factor for separating us from other animals. We also exhibit complex communication skills through developed language. This too can be pinpointed to the Broca’s area and Wernicke’s area on the brain, both located in the cortex. These two sections of the brain form the language loop around the lateral sulcus, usually in the left hemisphere of right-handed people. This loop is responsible for the conscious and subjective act of speaking (Blackmore 84).

So what exactly is consciousness? A Neural Theory of Mind suggests that objectively measurable neural activity is directly related to cognitive activity (Uttal 46-47). Consciousness then is the awareness that develops when all of the cognitive and
physical data combine to a point of focus. This simplification of the term then excludes such active mental states like sleeping and dreaming.

This connection between the mind and body is not a recent idea. Descartes believed that the body and soul were interconnected and not capable of functioning without each other. His substantial contribution through his last published works, *The Passions of the Soul*, stated:

Anything we experience as being in us, and which we see can also exist in wholly inanimate bodies, must be attributed only to our body. On the other hand, anything in us which we cannot conceive in any way as capable of belonging to a body must be attributed to our soul … we cannot properly say that it exists in any one part of the body to the exclusion of the others (Descartes 4).

Descartes did speculate that it was the pineal gland that served as the primary communication point between the body and soul, although he never declared a formal conclusion on the idea (Lokhorst). This particular gland and its theorized purpose was identified as far back in antiquity as Galen (Zimmer 16). Another possible location for the soul in the body is theorized by Van Helmont in the early seventeenth century. “The stomach, he reasoned, must also be the home of the primary soul of the body, which issued orders like a monarch” (Zimmer 88). This was during a time in the medical field where the body was thought to have several differing souls attached to the various functioning systems of the body including the nervous system and the skeletal system. Eventually Thomas Willis placed the rational soul with the corpus callosum (Zimmer 222), aligning more with modern neurological theories than his contemporaries.
One popularized idea of the physical nature of the soul is that it has a quantifiable weight of twenty-one grams. This specific number has been used in movie titles, song lyrics, comic books, and novels as a direct reference to one source. This theory comes from a brief series of experiments performed by physician Duncan MacDougall in 1907. He weighed a number of his dying patients at the moment of their death and concurred that a loss in weight measuring approximately three-fourths of an ounce must account for the mass of the soul leaving the body (MacDougall). Unfortunately this experiment was not corroborated by fellow practitioners of the time. It was eventually determined that the loss was due to the evaporation of perspiration.

It is of particular interest that the fields of anatomy and neurology have overlapped in their aim to identify the human soul. I propose that consciousness and the immaterial soul are a connection point beyond currently measurable material. I believe that we may someday be able to locate a connection between the physical body and another spectrum of measurability that is currently beyond perceptible means. Until that time, it is important to continue to reflect on this search for the immaterial spirit. If humanity stops searching, it may never be found.
Historic References

It is worth noting that much of what remains from ancient civilizations around the world are not necessarily artifacts from living practices, but rather the preserved items intended for the afterlife. Fortunately for anthropological and archaeological studies alike, we are able to infer some of the most important personal and religious practices of a culture. These relate to their ideology of the human soul and their burial rituals. Here I will provide a brief overview of my findings relating to objects that were intended to hold significance to the human body and the spiritual realm.

The Etruscans specialized in sarcophagi that portrayed the individual at the peak of their life. The height of this development occurred between the end of the fourth and the middle of the third centuries (Haynes 335). These masterpieces were formed out of
the local terracotta, painted to a significant level of realism, and frequently depicted religious symbols or mythological scenes along the bases. Forensic reconstructions have even confirmed that the faces carved into the sarcophagi bodies are artistic renderings of the entombed (Haynes 338). This practice of preserving the image of the deceased was very important to the Etruscans. Even when one could not afford a full sarcophagus made, their funerary urns would have a miniature version of their likeness created.

Many Greek and Roman sanctuaries offered votive deposits for offerings to be made to the gods. It was common for “terracotta models of intestines, male and female genitalia, limbs, and swaddled babies” (Haynes 184) to be placed at these offering sites with inscriptions of prayers. These miniature sculpted body parts were related to specific requests for healing or thanksgiving to the gods. The physical connection between the sculpted object and the spiritual realm is undeniable, and remarkably similar in practice to lighting candles in many modern places of worship.

A neighboring culture to the Etruscans were the Ancient Egyptians who believed that the lungs, stomach, intestines, and liver were specific organs essential in the afterlife. They were carefully extracted during the mummification process and stored in specialized
canopic jars. These jars were frequently made of limestone and pottery. They believed that the heart was the seat of the soul and it was left within the body. The Book of the Dead depicts an important scene where the deceased’s heart is weighed against truth and cosmic order, depicted as a feather. This judgment determines the fate of the soul in the afterlife (Graves-Brown).

A more recent telling of physical objects encasing human souls was studied by Canadian anthropologist Wade Davis in his book *Passage of Darkness: The Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie*. He recounts and explains the cultural belief of dead people rising and becoming enslaved by someone who has captured their soul in a jar or other encased object (56-61). Most convincing is that the people who have suffered from this phenomenon truly believe that they were dead and had to recapture their soul to become alive again. The scientific explanation of these occurrences is given through a firsthand account of identifying the poisons used to induce a death-like state and the societal practices of Vodounism. As it turns out, mental preconditioning to the idea of becoming a zombie was a very large factor in the success of the controller’s attempt to enslave someone (213-215). Despite the clear scientific evidence that these zombies were not truly animated corpses, the evidence does suggest that it was the neurological state of the persons which allowed this practice to continue. It was their cultural belief in the body-spirit disconnection that fostered this practice.

Similarly, individual totemism is a belief in which a human has an intimate relationship with another being’s spirit. Totemism “refers to the use of plants or animals by social groups as guardians or emblems that are ritually celebrated” (Insoll 1007). In
practice, a natural object is given or chosen by the individual to hold or embody a special power granted by the animal or plant spirit. The physical object binds the spiritual connection and is carried by the owner. These totems are often deeply rooted in ritual practices and can sometimes require regular offerings to be kept “alive”. This practice is varied and reaches across several indigenous cultures including Northwestern Native Americans, Australian Aborigines, and Sarawak Malaysians to name a few. However, these totem objects often became regarded as dangerous and taboo. Some societies banned them completely because the belief held that if the object was damaged in any way, the owner would also be damaged.

Collectively, these instances provide a rich and varied history of humanity’s attempts to encase the soul or spirit. I am enraptured with the idea that the soul can be contained in anything other than a living, breathing body. I believe that it can only be done symbolically. Since we regularly form housings for the body after death, I have chosen to create my own system for encasing the soul, a precious and fragile substance that needs protection.
Contemporary Culture

In twenty-first century America there is an overwhelming pressure to be industrious, productive, and generally busy. This is evident in the way we structure school programs and extra-curricular activities for children as well as the average work week for citizens of all classes. Statistically, America provides employees with the shortest vacation periods and is the only first-world country with no national paid-maternity leave (Council of Economic Advisers). The only breathing room we allow ourselves is for serious medical illness and death of an immediate family member. Even under these circumstances, the allotted time for physical, psychological, and emotional recovery is too brief. It is as if the overarching goal of this lifestyle is denial. Denial of mortality through the constant drive to produce and accumulate more things significantly stunts the cultural understanding of life-purpose and the individual’s emotional maturity (Campbell 44-60).

In his book *Myths To Live By*, Joseph Campbell presents a compelling argument for the development of the human race’s need for myths, religion, and rituals. A recurring point throughout our history is the awareness of one’s mortality and how that is resolved within a society. I am certain that his conclusions hold truth for contemporary American society. When the surrounding structure of a civilization no longer supports a conduit to explore these discussions of the unknowable and mystic realm, it leaves a serious gap in the development of furthering humanity. While the study of philosophy and objective examination of religion do exist, they are not typically accessible or deemed important for the average person.
Several complaints have been made regarding the shift from humble, content, morality-driven lives to the consumption-driven capitalist machine of modern America in books such as Cross' *An All-Consuming Century* and Lasch’s *The Culture of Narcissism*. This type of culture ensures that its members are told to study well, work hard, get a good paying job, look a certain way, and buy more things. The assumed reward is happiness through object accumulation and status confirmation. In the end, families and friends are given the task of dividing and redistributing material belongings for the deceased. This inevitable waste has raised several questions on the morality of this cycle (Wilk 246-248). How can an individual in this environment create any semblance of purpose or understanding of self-worth? I begin to wonder where or if there is time to reflect on questions of life and death outside of this structure. This consumerism obsessed culture has pushed out any opportunity for this important aspect of being human. The sacred has been pushed out and in its place is a tchotchke covered desk.

My exploration through ceramics has uncovered a similar pattern. Continual production of objects that already exist in a mass-produced factory world seemed redundant. The amount of waste and loss that occurs from such an incontrollable and volatile medium can be disheartening. The academic world has little room for serious discussion on the spiritual or sacred realm because it is immaterial and too deeply set in personal experience. The existing social construct has little flexibility for overlapping these contexts. Eventually, my aim was set to create an environment where these discussions could be facilitated.
Artist Statement

What happens when you die?

This is as ancient a question as the first conscious awareness of mortality. Conversations about the meaning of life, death, and the spiritual unknown are difficult. In a world where so many disagreements and distractions impede these topics, it is important to pause and reflect.

My art practice is a meditation on these eternal questions of life, death, and purpose. I use my own body as a tool and as a reference to hand-build and hollow clay forms in terracotta and porcelain. Mixing, building, soaking, breaking, smoothing, joining, firing, repeating—this is a semblance of rite, ritual, and practice in an attempt to create meaning for the unknown.

I am approaching a representation of the ethereal body through an exploration of the sculptural figure and vessels for the transcendent soul.
Narrative and Open Questions

When was the last time that you had a conversation about death? How was it facilitated? Did you lose a friend or family member? Did you see an animal in the road or in your yard? How long after this conversation did you let it affect your behaviors, if at all?

I came into my studio one Wednesday morning and began to clean, as is my usual routine. I found a water bucket that I had been using and saw a small dark object floating near the surface with porcelain residue on top. Assuming it was a dirty sponge I reached in to grab it and wring it clean. As soon as my fingers clutched the item, I knew it was not a sponge. A small brown mouse had fallen into the bucket overnight and drowned. I shrieked in surprise and grief and quickly dropped the poor thing back into the water. I felt both pity and disgust. Quickly and discretely, I took the bucket out back to the dumpster and poured off the contaminated contents. Unsure yet of my attachment to the useful bucket, I left it out to dry and scrub clean later. I washed my hands at least four times.

About one month later I entered my studio from the back door. There at the doorstep lay a large woodpecker. It was serene and perfectly still. I presumed the bird had flown into the glass window above my doorway and fallen dead from a broken neck. After taking some photographs, I decided it needed a proper burial. I found a cardboard box just the perfect size for it and placed the dead bird inside wrapped in a brown paper towel. I needed a shovel, but was only able to find a crowbar for the purpose of digging in the soft ground. Fortunately, it had rained the night before. I walked across the campus and found a private spot underneath a willow tree. The woodpecker was buried at the base of the tree and a stacking of branches was placed to temporarily mark its location. I took more notice than usual of the sounds of birds that morning, particularly the drumming of woodpeckers.
What is the difference between these two encounters? Or better yet, why should one creature warrant more respect than the other? When was the last time you took notice of an insignificant death?
Methodology - Description of Process

My approach to giving physical representation of a spirit-mind-body connection and the disconnect that occurs at death was to create a composition in space with three major focal points. First there needed to be a grounding in reality that related to historic burial practices of vessels for the body. Second there needed to be a resolution for a possible containment of the intangible soul. Third, in relation to the second, there needed to be a means of display that alluded to transportation, protection, and inaccessibility. These parts came together in one final installation creating an intentional space for reflection on the question of what happens when you die.

I took my inspiration from Etruscan terracotta sarcophagi and designed a life-sized terracotta figure lying on a lid-like structure. In order to make this work at such a large scale I had to make some of my own tools for the construction process, including a plaster mold of my body. I designed a clay body that would have low-shrinkage and could withstand firing up to cone 02. I modeled a one-third scale sketch in clay to test the proportions and firing stress points of the figure and lid. After making edits to the structure of the lid and gesture of the form, I hand-built the full scale lid and then the female figure. Finally, the surfaces were treated with a variety of texture and color treatments to enrich the content and color palette.

To create a negative that would be reusable with clay, a twenty-two part plaster mold of my own body was made with the assistance of a partner. I used a marker to section my body parts into visible halves, for example the front and back of the lower leg into shin and calf. Layers of petrolatum jelly were applied to the skin as a release
agent. Pre-cut sections of medical gauze were dipped into freshly mixed pottery plaster and carefully applied within the boundaries of one section at a time. After the plaster had set, the shell of the section was removed and the process was repeated. The casting covered the area from below the neck down to the wrists and ankles. This left the head, hands, and feet for individual modeling.

After the initial plaster form casting, I needed to strengthen the shells. By using additional layers of plaster in its thixotropic state, I was able to reinforce the exterior of the mold parts. These units became the press molds with which I could quickly create rough proportions for sculpting. The benefit of this process was a shell which provided a general proportion and form, similar to doll parts. Thus, I could alter and render the body in a variety of positions based on the connection points and manipulation of the clay. While these thick pressed slabs are firm enough to hold their shape, yet moist enough to be modeled, I would be able to piece together the parts to create the full figure as a hollow sculpture. This process allowed me to construct the large sculpture relatively hollow from the beginning, eliminating the need to work solid and hollow out later. By approaching the construction this way, I could build the figure from start to finish with very little distortion from handling.
Developing a clay body was crucial to the success of constructing and firing such a large scale project. I began by testing eight terracotta recipes. Narrowing my choices to three options based on fired vitreosity and color, I did a second round of tests adding in a paper pulp and vermiculite. The paper added working strength and relieved some of the water weight. The vermiculite reduced shrinkage, provided a subtle glimmer of gold flecks, and instigated minor points of breakage to mimic aging. The final recipe I chose provided a workable texture, was not too dense in its plastic state, and kept its integrity up to cone 02. This recipe was used for the lid and the figure alike.

The lid-like structure for the figure to rest upon presented a separate technical challenge. Construction of large clay slabs presents a number of problems including uneven drying, warping from handling, and distortion or cracking during firing. I cut wooden support boards to measure thirty inches by thirty inches then laid them out on a table surface exactly ninety inches long. Using seven to nine pounds of clay at a time, I wedged and threw large fat coil-slabs. Each one was at lease thirty-two inches long, and approximately two by three inches thick. These were scored and slipped with a fork then
compressed together from one end of the table to the other. In the end I had a single continuous slab measuring thirty by ninety inches. I let this rest on the wood overnight to homogenize and completely set up together.

Once I had this singular slab, it presented a special opportunity. I had designed a faux-religious symbol to carve into the top surface where the figure would lay. It was important to create an intentionally ambiguous sign that was similar to religious markings and scientific symbols. This would relate to the practice of ritual while remaining universal. I spent an afternoon researching all the crosses, hexes, moons, alchemy figures, mathematical signs, swastikas, stars, hands, circles, spirals, and more that I could find. I drew all of them on a single page, filling the space and sometimes overlapping. It became clear that all of these markings were defined by clear intersections and simple geometry. I let my intuition guide me to develop my own marking that was reminiscent of these and came up with the intersection of infinity and two circles that you see on my sculpture.
After two more days covered in plastic to homogenize, I cut the continuous slab into three equal sections. I gained the assistance of three other people to flip the large slabs over. We used a second set of pre-measured boards and a layer of paper to prevent distortion. With the backside revealed I could recompress the connection seams and begin to build up the walls. Along with the walls, I built an interior grid to assist the clay with uniform shrinkage. I also attached a thick lip on either side of the middle section to prevent any light from showing through in the final presentation. Once this was all set up, I began to carve a texture into the exterior walls. Allowing my mind to wander, I simply wrote whatever I was thinking. This stream of consciousness varied from my academic reading reflections to emotional outbursts. The layers overlapped and overlapped many times until the legibility completely disappeared and all that was visible was the unique texture in depth of my mark making.

With the lid-structure complete, my working table was free again. I could proceed with the building of the figure. My first attempt was to build from the torso out to the extremities. I thought that allowing the bulk of the form to dry and become strong would make the construction of the limbs easier. However, this presented a major problem. I was unable to compress the interior spaces and the seams between the mold parts were weak. I was also attempting to construct the figure in one orientation, lying on its back, then turn it up on its side. After three days’ struggle, the sculpture collapsed. I needed to reconsider my approach.
I revisited some reference notes from a couple workshops I had attended and decided to start over. This time I would build the figure as though it were a coil pot, allowing each section to firm and strengthen before moving forward. I began at the feet and slowly worked along the body in the final position it would be so that I would not have to move it. Moving from legs to torso to shoulders, I used my plaster mold for the initial sections and reinforced the interior with spiraling slabs. This prevented any slumping from gravity and allowed me to work quickly. I built the neck and head separately then connected them at the collarbones. After that was in place I built the
arms and hands. These last parts needed supporting columns to be placed in their upward gesture without adding too much stress on the clay. The figure was cut apart into three sections that followed a natural curvature of the body. These three parts dried to a leather hard state and were then once-fired in a gas kiln.
I refer to the lid and figure together as a sarcophagus. While not literally able to house the body of a deceased, it is an homage to days when burial preparations were of a major life priority. The surface treatment of these needed to reflect the heavy tangibility of death in our lives now. I chose to use a combination of glaze, handmade milk paint, cow’s blood, and mineral oil. The black glaze was used as a wash over the carvings from my conscious stream of writing along the walls of the lid. The milk paint was applied in a thin layer on the flat surface of the lid to deepen the iron tones and provide a matte finish. The cow’s blood was carefully pooled into the carving of my ritual-like symbol as a reminder of an actual death. The figure was polished with mineral oil to bring a softness and saturated hue to the hardened vitreous clay. This warm and dark palette added to the grounding purpose of the sculpture.
My second point of focus for the installation was a series of vessels to hold the disembodied spirit. I decided that a preciousness and coldness would be best in juxtaposition to the warmth and earthliness of the terracotta sculpture. A porcelain clay body was chosen for its plastic density and cool color when fired in a reduction atmosphere at cone 10. Post-firing each bottle was painted with an intuitive series of strips and swirls of a low-fire clear glaze which fired to cone 04. Finally, a mother of pearl lustre was applied over the clear glaze to create the reflective and jewel-like finish.
The lids were sealed shut with a dipped layer of encaustic wax.

I studied the organs of the body believed to house the soul throughout history. I made a list of them and put together a collection of medical anatomy diagrams. Focusing on one organ at a time, I quickly modeled a rough abstraction in solid clay. After forming five to seven of these rough handheld forms, I would spend time compressing, smoothing, and burnishing all the surfaces. Each “soul bottle” was given individual attention and took approximately one hour just to smooth. This allowed me time to meditate on the significance of the object in my hands and imbue a unique preciousness onto each one. Once set and strong enough to hold their shape, each bottle was cut into
parts and hollowed out. After rejoining the parts, a bottle-stopper or lid was formed. They were fired as described above and each bottle was breathed into to symbolize the breath of life before being sealed shut.
The final aspect of my installation was the means of display. I knew that I wanted the sarcophagus to be on or near the ground with a burial linen. That part was relatively easy to accomplish, but I wanted the soul bottles to be hanging in space. This was important for several reasons. The objects needed to be at eye-level and approachable, but also seemingly in transition or movement. They needed to be visible but inaccessible at the same time. I envisioned them hanging from the ceiling and floating within orbs like bubbles or jars. I tested several possibilities and concluded that I must design this aspect myself.

The design began as a series of sketches in various shapes. Two of these were transposed to digital drawings. After careful consideration to the hanging function, a three-dimensional sketch was made. I had a specific measurement for the length, widest width, opening diameter, and variation of the neck. The form was referential of eggs, seeds, foot-less jars, specimen containers, bubbles, and droplets. They needed to carry and protect the soul bottles.
Perpetually Fleeting

McCullough

Fixture Requirement:
- 10 mm Wide Lip
- 120 mm Total Diameter
- 1 Notch for Hanging Wire Loop

Interior Opening Diameter: 100 mm

Height: 300 mm

Width Diameter: 200 mm
I interviewed a handful of glass studios and distributors in New York and Vermont, but was given quotes far beyond my fiscal limits. I was encouraged to search internationally for a factory that could produce my design at a level of regularity and scale that I desired. Through an extensive Internet search, I was able to find several companies in China who were interested in working with me. One in particular took notice of my personal website and offered me a quote that was within my budget.
I proceeded to discuss my plans with their engineers and they made some minor
changes to the lip where my wire would attach. After many weeks of emails, I was
eventually sent a prototype. I was very happy with the quality, integrity, and clarity of
my design given form. I approved the prototype and an order was made for the
originally agreed upon cost. To my dismay, the manufacturer backed out of providing
the shipping costs at the last minute. I was handed the responsibility of payment for
transportation with no time left to procure an alternative. In the end, the amount I
spend internationally for the production, shipping, and customs process was close to the
quotes I had received from domestic suppliers. While this was an extremely educational
experience, I do now and will always in my future recommend buying local!

The shipment of glass arrived within days of my installation date. Fortunately I
had already designed, obtained, and measured out my hanging system. This was made
up of a lattice grid for the ceiling rafters in the museum and several thousand feet of one-sixteenth inch galvanized steel cable. I developed a double-noose system that would self-level each individual glass piece. This worked by looping the two self-tightening ends around each glass neck. The only downside to this method was that there was no easy way to adjust the length of the wires once the installation was in place. The glassware functioned very well, providing an atmosphere of delicate transparency for the soul bottles. Each bottle rested at the base of each glass piece on a bed of clear silica gel beads. While not literally floating, I am confident that the overall atmosphere created was light and airy. They were secure and strong, yet allowed for subtle movement in space.
Conclusion

My intention was to create a space that would inspire viewers to pause and reflect on their subjective thoughts about death while referencing specific historical and scientific points of inquiry on the continued quest to identify the human soul. I have provided in this writing a collection of those points of inquiry and a larger framework for the discussion on an interpersonal level through my making process. The intentional ambiguity of the origins for the sacred notions in my work provided a universal platform to extend the invitation to people of all backgrounds.

The final installation of the various parts was an overwhelming success. The work managed to instigate many conversations and direct questions regarding death and the question of the afterlife. The suspended soul bottles were immediately gripping of attention and curiosity when entering the museum. They became specimens of an unearthly nature, floating in space and only barely untouchable. The terracotta figure and lid conjured comments and references of sacrifice, death, victimization, something almost ancient, and an earthbound tie to the physicality and heaviness of burial.

The connection to consumption culture and contemporary attitudes toward death rituals is not blatantly clear. It may have been a fuel for my conception of the work, but can only be brought to the work from the viewer’s perspective if it is already in their mind, if at all. This is coincidentally a wonderful illustration of how one person’s conscious experience cannot be perfectly conveyed to another despite multiple forms of written and visual language.
Having seen the installation in its entirety now, I am left with several possibilities for alteration in the future. The suspension for the glassware should be adjusted to allow for greater variance in height. This will allow for a wider sweeping gesture of movement for what I envision as objects in transitional space. The hanging works and the sarcophagus are separate pieces, and could be installed separately from one another. I look forward to the opportunity to present the pieces distinctly and discover what they may convey individually. The body of hanging soul bottles can be displayed as a single mass or as a select offering of fewer pieces. And finally, the figure sculpture has the potential to be segmented, dissected, or installed in different orientations because of its intended flexibility. I anticipate a variety of different reactions to the individual parts and look forward to how they may further the conversations I have just begun to facilitate.
Technical Specifications

Recipes:

### Sarcophagus Terracotta Δ04-02

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredients</th>
<th>Amounts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RedArt Clay</td>
<td>65.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GoldArt Clay</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawthorn Bond Clay</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OM-4 Kentucky Ball Clay</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talc</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wollastonite</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepheline Syenite</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bentonite</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Also Add:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barium Carbonate</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wet Paper Pulp</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermiculite</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Grog</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine Grog</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Low-fire Black Glaze Δ04-02

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredients</th>
<th>Amounts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gerstley Borate</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albany Slip</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.V. Clay</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepheline Syenite</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mason Stain 6657</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>105</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Worthington Clear Glaze Δ04

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredients</th>
<th>Amounts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gerstley Borate</td>
<td>55.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silica</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPK</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Jeff Cole’s Porcelain Δ10 Altered for Handbuilding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredients</th>
<th>Amounts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grolleg</td>
<td>55.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soda Feldspar</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silica</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>105</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Also Add:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VeeGum T</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molochite</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Duncan Mother of Pearl Lustre was applied over the clear glaze and fired to Cone 020.
Bibliography and Related Readings


<http://joc.sagepub.com.libdatabase.newpaltz.edu/content/1/2/245.full.pdf+html>.

Master of Fine Arts Thesis Exhibition
Allora Jay McCullough

Exhibition Dates:
December 4th to 8th, 2015

Opening Reception:
Friday, December 4th, 2015
from 5 to 7pm

Museum Hours:
Friday to Tuesday, 11am to 5pm

Location:
Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art,
State University of New York at New Paltz,
Alice and Horace Chandler & North Galleries,
1 Hawk Drive, New Paltz, New York 12561

www.BeAwestruck.com