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## ABSTRACT

Parallels can be drawn between sex, death, and spiritual communion. Their commonality is a wholesale release of bodily possession. Both freeing and enslaving, such a release isn't simply a lack of body-awareness, it is a personal offering of complete physical control. To release is to hemorrhage the lining between body and soul. Such a schism allows the eradication of personal identity and the reclamation of spirit. In this spectacle "we" are unified. "We" being defined as ourselves once compartmentalized into a body-defined humanity. The release of spiritual communion serves to sever our human barriers, creating the paradox of a full emptiness.

My art making and process is a declaration of this philosophy. My work consists of bent sheet metal, charcoal drawings, and woven metal furniture. The animalistic, shamanistic, process of making these containers inhabits their being like an energetic residue. However, my work is also accompanied with an existential doubt manifesting itself as the antithesis of my own ideological conception of reality. My fears of body as singularly chemical, and of the loss of my identity through the loss of physical control, are not anti-productive to my craft, but are part of the reason for its making.

My thesis also explores the fear of spiritual ecstasy as a chemical lie. This fear of spirit as hormone strongly weights my work in the figure. It also manifests itself in the idea of the body as container—and my obsession with the container as equal to the filling, or absence thereof. My charcoal drawings project subjects that are incomplete or physically mutilated and unsure of their existing ground. My metal sculptures are furniture-spaces for ritual, sacrifice, or baptism. They are places where a figural action has occurred or can occur. Although my art is about a fear of, and interest in, the nothingness of death and the shamanistic experience of process, it inevitably reinforces the "bodyliness" of worldly existence.

Body as Container: An Exploration of the Sacred Through  
Material

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Parallels can be drawn between sex, death, and spiritual communion. Their commonality is a release of bodily self-possession and personal awareness, a relinquishing of physical control to a force separate, perhaps greater, than our own. This release hemorrhages the lining between the body and the self. Such a schism eradicates personal identity and allows for the discovery, or reclamation, of spirit. Release exposes an internal paradox of full emptiness.

Art making is a method of understanding this release. Through a ritualistic, trance-like process I manipulate a material and explore its relationship to craft and concept. Release by and from this seductive materiality is the foundation upon which my sculptures and drawings are made. Materials used include 1/8 to 1/2 inch round bar stock, sheet metal, charcoal, graphite, ink wash, handmade paper and molasses (with an occasional trip to the honey pot). Made from these materials are body-drawings, sheet metal tables, kinetic objects and woven metal furniture. The bending resilience of sculptural materiality allows for physical immediacy and a relationship of continual revision. This consistently renewable release through process enables surprise, conceptual flux, and a steady desire to make.

The idea of submissive versus dominant materials also plays a large role in my artwork. Steel is a submissive material. If pressured, it will do anything. Paper, on the other hand, is dominant. In order to make paper you must bow to the will of the fiber. Conversely, the action of weaving transforms the thin metal bar stock into a dominant material. In order to hold the weave, the metal must not

bend but be held in tension, placing the maker in a position of submission to the metal rod. The irony of steel as both a submissive and dominant material also lingers in the counterpoint between process and product. Hammered low tables of sheet metal, made under wild and ecstatic domination, are pithy. The softly woven metal furniture is expansive, skewering space with an easy force. The process of weaving is both meditative and calmly euphoric. Here, the most penetrative objects are made with the smallest actions.

My art consists of bodies or spaces for bodies. My drawings are inherently body-oriented and have evolved from thinking about Yoko Ono's social concept of humans as "Container minders." In the poem *Water Talk* she argues that we are more obsessed with our bodies than with our consciousness (Water Talk, 1). The drawings in *Container Series* became the epicenter of a personal obsession with the finite capabilities of a human body and the fear of losing control over my own physical identity. The sudden realization of the interconnectedness between physical pain and mental stability allowed doubt to creep into a personal understanding of the soul as reality, and I began to wonder if the soul was a hormonal trick. *Container Series I* spoke explicitly to this simultaneous release of physical identity and mental awareness. Large washes of ink, reminiscent of blood and bodily fluid, pour from the tape-censored genitals of the prone female figure. Her eyes, a symbol of personal identity, are masked off and spilling liquid. This liquid becomes a metaphor for the physical release of

soul at the instant of death. This drawing was pivotal to the evolution of the *Container Series* as a whole.

From that point the drawings became headless and limbless torsos floating in a black ether. Weighty, distorted and melancholy, they appear helpless but apathetic. As the series unfolds the figures become confrontational, staring with a physical gravity from thick bodies. This is most apparent in *Container Series 5*, where the figure is unashamedly immobile. On deflated breasts the nipples become eyes and the unseen vagina takes on the role of a silent mouth. Headless, handless, and footless, all of the figure's weight seems to rest on a curl of blank paper at the bottom of the drawing, circling out from the wall and lying on the floor. It adds a surprising materiality to the already bulbous but somehow fragile body of the drawing.

In retrospect I found that process and content were in conversation. For me, the act of drawing is wild and euphoric, shamanistic. It is a potent letting go of personhood and mental awareness. This powerful offering up of identity foiled the active cyclical fear and physical pain. Process guillotined content, revealing a mysterious counterpoint between the action of drawing and the stasis of the drawn figures. They became a physical manifestation of my internal war over the existence of a soul. Each figure awaited her maker's judgment on her identity as a soulful object.

Foucault's understanding of madness as a penultimate spiritual freedom has helped me explore the relationship between fear, desire, and the process of art



making. Process oriented release is at once terrifying and desirable. The drive for this release is not merely a mental or emotional want; it is the physicality of craving a necessary fear. However, this submission to art making asks from its benefactor a complete loss of self-control and thus loss of the relationship between identity and body. In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault articulates this existential fear of madness to the anxiety of death.

The substitution of the theme of madness for that of death does not mark a break, but rather torsion within the same anxiety. What is in question is still the nothingness of existence, but this nothingness is no longer considered an external, final term, both threat and conclusion; it is experienced from within as the continuous and constant form of existence. (16)

Whether dictated by hormones or by soul, this uncontrolled state of unreason is a type of existence. Existence, especially when felt as nothingness, is the connection with the divine inside of us. It doesn't matter if my ecstasy of process is hormonal, it matters that I am experiencing it.

*Container Series 6* and *7* are empowered, alive. They are the figural outcomes of an intrapersonal confrontation with these fears and desires regarding both the trepidation of process and the acknowledgment of nothingness. The small drawing (*Container Series 7*) and large drawing (*Container Series 6*) of women's bodies are monoliths embracing process and refusing self-pity. The symbolic sexual nourishment and power of the full breasts coupled with the energetic attack and release of the drawing process create a rising momentum rather than an abject statement. They are bodies of release.

In viewing a body, or the space for a body, we find ourselves confronted with likeness. In an artwork, the inclusion of body, or its void, formally announces our collective humanness. It is an act of witnessing. We become aware of our physical nature in relation to the objects or drawings that either violate our sense of security or are spaces of sanctuary. Violent objects witness human mortality and invoke nausea. *Bed with Hook, Spikes* examines the relationship between threat and body. Existing in a realm of semi-functionality, the cantilevered levers of the steel sculpture hold a physical utilitarian dialogue with the viewer. This foundation for communication allows the sharpened ends of the levers, poised over or resting on the bed, to convey the message of a dual release. *Bed with Hook, Spikes* places the viewer in the role of actor and subject, mirroring bodily vulnerability with sexual power. Its emotionally graphic and harsh constructivist aesthetic makes use of the inherent power of minimal design. Installed outside, it breathes with subtle movements, perhaps suggesting that it is itself a silent controller. When the levers dip with the wind they cleave the air like strokes in a drawing. As viewers imagine themselves lying on the bed or acting with the levers, they become a part of potential bodily disfiguration and dissolution. The sculpture finds itself activated by their fleshy interjection into its private space. Through this act of witnessing *Bed with Hook, Spikes* gains momentary self-consciousness through a discomfited harmony.

Witnessing is equally vital in my process and performance art. Performance art, deeply ingrained in my working-process, is a purging and a

cleansing mechanism. For me it is the most clear and urgent form of communication. I desire to expose the most inward part of myself so that, through the reflection of my actions, the viewer might understand his or her own.

The most resonant performance I've seen that embodied both personal authenticity and a communicatory witnessing was *The Artist is Present* by Marina Abramovic. I stood in line for six hours to sit with her for two minutes. Standing in line was just as vital to witnessing the performance as any action in the performance itself. Abramovic was a wall of dark love, constant in grace and power, channeling a sticky holiness from within herself and her viewers—folding it thickly into the air against our bodies. Letting her energy cohabit with mine was inevitable and un-retractable. Blinded from her face by her force, the memory became as real as the event. This authenticity of memory is one of the ultimate aspirations of performance. An irreproducible action or experience that can only be preserved in the memory of the witness is the most fundamentally honest act of communication born out of art. It is what I hope to achieve in all of my work.

It is only through losing control in the state of process, a channeled madness, that I am most precise and honest in my actions as a maker. Such authenticity is the marker of success. My sheet metal tables and beds are constructed through the performative process of endurance hammering. Like drawing, it is a private action with public awareness. The objects become a document of personal performance by capturing the energetic residue of mark

making. The tables and beds fold into fragile but aggressive shapes through my blows and the residual sound of the hammer. Some appear starkly violent in the crudeness of their making. *Milk Pockets* reflects this madness in its physicality. It is tottering and unstable, but full of small blows that form bowls filled with a milky substance endowing it with life and an unreasonable function. It is a table of small, unwanted offerings.

While most of my sheet metal sculptures are molded into their basic shape in a single sitting, they are often continuously refined after this primary action. Many go through three stages of being with different meanings. Two sculptures reflective of this action are *Body Tables 1* and *2*. Both structures began as flat tables made in the fall of 2010. *Body Table 2* evolved into a trough filled with honey and molasses exploring the concept of baptism by sacrifice. However, the suggestion of body was not strong enough. Although the sculpture evidenced a performative history, the keystone of a sacrificial baptism was not self-evident within the sculpture. The idea of body was forced and unexamined. Therefore, in the final revisions of *Body Tables 1* and *2* a marriage of paper and molasses to the metal surface of the tables transformed the sculptures with a physicality beyond finite definition. Such an immediate sense of body relieved the trough of its religious duty and opened paths for a pure emotional reaction and a sustained sense of texture and holding. *Body Tables 1 and 2* have become not just spaces for a body, but the body itself.

Yayoi Kusama and Eva Hesse were catalysts for the metamorphosis behind *Body Tables 1* and *2*. Both artists work with objects of holding that become not just the spaces for bodies but the bodies themselves. In her *Accumulation* series Yayoi Kusama transforms furniture by covering it with protruding phallic fabric objects, enlivening and sexualizing spaces of comfort. This treatment of human holding adapts our relationship to the furniture as living entities. They transform into bodies that we physically interact *on* and not just with. This suggestion of personal interaction on a modified familiar form creates physical tension between a hesitation to be held by its organismal design and a desire for its holding.

Eva Hesse builds similar spaces of bodily holding with hollow metal and plastic cube sculptures titled *Accession i* and *ii*. Like Kusama, Hesse suggests bodily association in *Accession i* and *ii* with her internal placement of small protrusions lining the cubes. Rather than phallic, their placement *within* reads as womanly but not vaginal. Their pseudo hair-like quality is contrastingly plump. They resist all connotation except for an unexpected atmosphere of body.

Spaces for body are just as important as body. *Hook Chair* and *Cradle Chair/Chariot* are designed to inherently suggest the lack of body. Last fall I began to make a swinging hook chair designed specifically to fit my body. It moves with a thrust when sitting on its curve. The end of the hook, which rests against the pelvis, becomes a phallic object, endowing the rider's presence with sexual power and force. The wire woven onto the hooked end transforms into

pubic hair. When empty the chair harmonizes with sexuality and violence but does not preach them. It is softer and more holy.

This space desiring a body offers a tension for the viewer similar to that of Yayoi Kusama's *Accumulation*. The protruding ends of the hook chair resonate with the formal elements Eva Hesse and Yayoi Kusama employ in their art. It is through the threatening and explosive quality of the edge that personal loss of control and relationship to body are examined—without it the chair would lack vitality. Steel is woven through the bar stock skeleton, achieving a wicker-like form. The soft use of a hard material invites the viewer to pause and sink into the making of the object. It allows for a closer reading. Here, the woven metal also creates the illusion of both transparency and pattern, changing form with every angle. This chair is a throne. It communicates intention through silent presence and potential action. However, it is a non-functional chair, too fragile to hold the power it suggests. Aside from the grace of the woven metal, the only fully realized element of it as a chair is its movement.

The movement of the *Hook Chair*, a bouncing swing, relates back to the movement of the kinetic levers, the quick rubbing action of drawing, and the constant swing of the hammer. This motion is in all of my work: it is cradling, rocking, and sex. This is the premise of *Cradle Chair/Chariot*. Although begun as a traditional cradle-like form, the structure evolved into a rocking chair. The back is peaked and hooked. The bed is woven perpendicularly to the back, creating a bi-directional momentum. The sides, or arms, of the chair are woven

so that the ends of the steel bar stock jut out into space two feet, parallel with the bed. These interacting edges relate with aggressive and forward dynamism. As the chair rocks, the edges spear the air, but move softly. Formal inspirations for this piece came from Futurism and the Bauhaus school. Although I find Futurism arrogant and small-minded, the movement's glorification of dynamism and action was essential in the ideation of *Cradle Chair/Chariot*. The concept of design as a harmonious or a formal combination of art and domesticity was also influential.

The forces of dynamism in the sculpture are exciting, and so is its functionality—an idea that has become increasingly important in my artwork. Functionality intrinsically contains a relationship between the sculpture and personal body or humanity as an industrially dependent organism. With function also comes the insinuation of purpose, which allows for a paradoxically expansive and intimate reading of the work. I also plan to focus on the tense power of the edge. The charge between the body of the sculpture and the space around it carries great energetic potential.

Formally, I plan to create another cradle. The sculpture will have two floor rockers like the *Cradle Chair/Chariot*, but will be longer and closed on both ends with woven steel. The bed will be closed as well, and only visible through the semi-transparent weaving of the body. The edges of the structure will be slightly above eye level. It will be functional in movement but not in form. It hope it will speak broadly about dysfunctional domesticity while still effusing an experiential

rawness. Overall, I would like to explore the concept of furniture as sculpture more deeply and with a greater sense of personal and societal value.

I am also interested in drawing industrial architectural forms in relation to the body. I feel I need distance from the figure in order to understand its spatial relationship to the modern world. Widening my lens in all areas of artistic interest will help to develop this concept of relational being. Part of art's power lies in a physical/visual human connection. The ability to bodily witness and be witnessed through art is becoming more and more necessary in a world where physical communication bows to the digital age.



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## CD-ROM Information

1. *Container Series 1*  
2010 Drawing      22 x 30  
Graphite, Ink Wash, Black electrical Tape
2. *Container Series 5*  
2010 Drawing      36 x 48  
Charcoal
3. *Container Series 6*  
2011 Drawing      22 x 30  
Charcoal
4. *Container Series 7*  
2011 Drawing      8 x 15  
Graphite, Ink Wash
5. *Bed With Hook, Spikes*  
2011 Sculpture      60 x 167 x 72  
Sheet steel, Metal rod bar stock, found wood object, pipe, found railroad track
6. *Milk Pockets*  
2011 Sculpture      18 x 69 x 11  
Sheet steel, Non-dairy creamer
7. *Body Table 1*  
2011 Sculpture      48 x 22 x 5  
Sheet steel, handmade paper (kozo, gampi, and abaca), molasses
8. *Body Table 2*  
2011 Sculpture      58 x 15 x 10  
Sheet steel, handmade paper (kozo, gampi, and abaca), molasses, stockings, dress scraps.
9. *Hook Chair*  
2011 Sculpture      60 x 24 x 96  
Metal rod bar stock (1/8<sup>th</sup> inch, 1/2<sup>th</sup> inch), aluminum wire
10. *Cradle Chair/Chariot*  
2011 Sculpture      66 x 60 x 81  
Metal rod bar stock (1/8<sup>th</sup> inch, 1/4<sup>th</sup> inch, 1/2 inch)