

Milk from a Stone

by

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Approved:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ted Saupe". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "T" and a long, sweeping underline.

Ted Saupe, Major Professor

04/21/22

Date



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To Whom it May Concern:

As Isys Hennigar's major professor, I am pleased to report that she passed her final MFA thesis examination with distinction. Her thesis, "Milk from a Stone," was masterful and sophisticated, and with the unanimous consent of her committee, I am pleased to acknowledge the exceptional nature of her creative work, as well as its exposition and oral defense.

Sincerely,

Ted Saupe
Professor of Ceramics
Lamar Dodd School of Art

Introduction

The comparison of clay and ceramic vessels to the body is as ancient as the history of ceramic production. In its malleability and stages of transformation, clay suggests living properties and has been used across time and civilizations to depict and reference our own human “vessel.” In the ancient Akkadian epic of the *Atra-Hasis*, the goddess Nintu mixes clay and divine blood to sculpt figurines that become the first humans.¹ In Greek mythology, the first man is sculpted from clay by the Titan Prometheus and animated by the breath of Athena.² Khnum, the Egyptian deity presiding over the source of the Nile River, is known as “the great potter” and, according to mythology, formed the bodies of all human children out of clay on a potter’s wheel before placing them in their mothers’ wombs.³ The thematic recurrence present in these creation myths and countless others suggests that the impulse to mold clay as a means of thinking about the human body is longstanding. Although figurines make up the earliest known ceramic forms, the stories, traditions, and language surrounding pottery also bear bodily connotation. Anatomical terms are used to describe the components of ceramic vessels: the mouth, lip, neck, shoulder, body, and foot. Concavity is often connected metaphorically to a womb and pouring spouts to phallic symbols. Across time and geography, pottery also factors heavily into ritual and belief surrounding death and the afterlife. Mimbres mortuary pottery provides one such example: deceased were buried alongside ceramic vessels into which a “kill hole” had been pierced in a gesture mirroring the life cycle of the human body.⁴

This lineage of narratives that conflate flesh and ceramic materials in order to consider the nature of living things, their interactions, and their representation is the central point of departure for my work. Most recently, my research has focused on belief surrounding remedies, medicinal cures, and life-giving elixirs throughout myth, folklore, symbology, and early science. Within these narratives, I am particularly interested in the speculative ecologies that emerge from the strange interactions or chance relationships between creatures. Through primarily ceramic sculpture combining hand-built and slip cast forms with intricate surfaces, I create objects that explore instances of affinity between living things within the human imagination. With the metaphorical association of materials and bodies as guide, this thesis traces recurrent themes and frameworks in the artwork and research I produced during the course of the Master of Fine Arts Program at the Lamar Dodd School of Art, University of Georgia from 2019–2022.

¹ Stephanie Dalley, trans., “Atrahasis,” in *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 15.

² William F. Hansen, *Classical Mythology: A Guide to the Mythical World of the Greeks and Romans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 69.

³ Amy Tikkanen, ed., “Khnum,” Encyclopædia Britannica, accessed December 3, 2021, [britannica.com/topic/Khnum](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Khnum).

⁴ Jacob Brody and Rina Swentzell. *To touch the past. The painted pottery of the Mimbres People* (New York: Hudson Hills Press; Minneapolis: Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum at the University of Minnesota, 1996).

Taking Care

Taking Care (figure 1) was conceived at the end of my first year of graduate studies and held at the Dodd Galleries in January 2021. A self-curated exhibition of work by artist Jane Ritchie and myself, the show considered the complex ways in which humans engage with, use, and interpret the living world. The work examined the record of mutual influence between humans and other species, systems of defining the natural and unnatural, and the ways in which living things are culturally understood in relation to one another, human activity, and the cosmos. It envisioned a version of ecology that included the wild and domesticated, stories and ideologies, and the objects found in between ourselves and other creatures.

The work was staged with allusions to early museums in which technology, art, and natural history were all shown together, often under the category of “curiosities.” Through reference to the mixed-bag “museums of wonder” and through lifelike forms defying classification, the show considered the problematic implications of archetypal taxonomic structures and imagined a collection with a more elastic organization. A collaborative work entitled *Folderols (#1-4)* (figure 2) recalls biological specimen boards. Typically used in taxonomic practice for the visual classification of organisms, these works instead conflate categories. The porcelain forms recall organs and organisms, but also tools and vessels. Rather than being displayed in fixed isolation, they are physically hitched to other “specimens” and mounted on magnets to be reordered and rearranged. In its staging, the show considered ordering, arrangement, and material engagement as a means for reimagining living things and their intersections with human systems.

In the show’s co-mingling of the scientific, mythic, improbable, and mundane, it interwove various epistemologies and used the narrative webs surrounding plants and animals as vehicles for thinking about interconnection and the entanglement of living things in a way that isn’t strictly biological. In the body of my work included in the show, the abstract conflation of vessels and lifelike forms speaks to the real and invented relations I engage through these stories. On the surfaces of these forms, I combine china painted imagery and collaged ceramic decals. Through collaged imagery (primarily photographed by me) the works invoke hybridity, fragmentation, and transformation in a surrealist spirit. *River Voice* (figure 3) explores the multispecies interaction implied by a fishing lure: invented insects, ducks, pheasants, humans, and fish in a constellation of artificial and living things. *Luxuries and Losses* (figure 4) compiles instances of plants and animals taken as symbols of good times and bad: wild blackberries, a summer treat loathed by an elderly neighbor who had consumed enough for a lifetime as a child during the Great Depression; foxes, included across the folklore of many cultures as a cunning figure, oscillating between a bearer of good fortune and mischievous obstacles; or lobster, a food source that once was relegated to impoverished and incarcerated populations, but through a complicated

turn of rebranding involving an expanded American railway system and, later, the rationing system during the second World War, became a hallmark of elegant dining, immune to the relatively stabilized pricing structure of most foods.⁵ These pieces joined a constellation of other lifelike vessel forms with tangled narrative surfaces surrounding animal omens (figure 5), the particular treatment of reptiles in ancient symbology (figure 6), the association of nylon mesh and nocturnal insects (figure 7), and Ritchie's rawhide and leather sculptures, made from scraps of hide undesirable for industrial use due to branding marks or scarification.

As it happened, *Taking Care* came together amidst a global pandemic, a year in which death and illness were close at hand, and at a moment in which conversations about care became urgently amplified: what care means, between whom it occurs, what it looks like, and what it *could* look like. In this light, the work's shared engagement with notions of care stood out through slow material processes, delicate balances, and meticulous adornment. Already engaged with entanglement and collectivity, the show's context highlighted the hand-in-hand relationship between these ideas and uncertainty, vulnerability, and disruption.

Thesis Show: *Downstream*

The body of work I present in the 2022 MFA group thesis exhibition, *Downstream*, consists of three sculptures and a hanging tapestry (figure 8). This work centers around systems of healing. I have always considered my ceramic practice a sort of cultivation: the constant negotiation of moisture levels, temperature, structural integrity and boundaries, and timing parallels the effort of encouraging the growth and wellbeing of living things. I am drawn to the lifelike plasticity of unfired clay, and in its fired state, the tension between strength and fragility suggests a precariousness echoed by the body. This grouping of pieces also represents the introduction of metalworking to my practice, complicating the themes of strength, fragility, and connection in my work and adding the narrative underpinnings of traditions. The writing that follows seeks to unpack the work included in the thesis exhibition through historical and material lenses.

⁵ Daniel Luzer, "How Lobster Got Fancy," Pacific Standard (Pacific Standard, June 7, 2013).

Craft and Witchcraft: *Sap Rising*

The American Arts and Crafts Movement of the late 19th and early 20th century saw the establishment of numerous studio pottery companies throughout the United States, including Rookwood, Newcomb, and Paul Revere Pottery. Production within these studios was divided between one or several male master potters and a group of female china painters. During this time, women were not taught to wedge, throw on a wheel, or handle the material prior to its decoration.⁶ By the 1890s, china painting was a do-it-yourself hobby or light vocation marketed to and adopted by women across the U.S. Again, the work involved handling no clay, but rather consisted of decorating commercially produced and pre-glazed porcelain ware using china paint. Today, this remains the activity for which china paint is manufactured and marketed. I adopt this historically gendered kitchen table craft as one of the central components of my practice, subverting the artist–decorator divide and employing the medium in non-traditional ways in a sculptural context.

Within my work, I find connections between the history and process of ceramic surface decoration and another form of

traditionally feminized labor: caregiving and healing of the sick. Prior to the professionalization and eventual industrialization of medical practice in the western world, women were the unlicensed doctors of most societies.⁷ In rural southern Appalachia, this was the case well into the first half of the 20th century.⁸ I find productive resonances between practices of craft and witchcraft (a term I use loosely here in reference to esoteric healing practices and divination more broadly). Similar to the close observation and attunement required of witchcraft, I think of the ways in which slow or laborious craft processes may function as a means of developing awareness and bringing out the mystical and monumental properties of slow, uncertain things. Both require engagement with multiple systems of knowledge and both are marked by an effort to produce miraculous occurrences through habitual practice.



Newcomb Pottery Studio, 1905

(Source: <https://www.artstudio.org/equals-in-the-craft/>)

⁶ Jenni Sorkin. “Feminist Ceramics (and Materiality in General).” (Lecture, The University of Iowa, April 13, 2021).

⁷ Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English. *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History of Women Healers*. (New York: City University of New York, 2010).

⁸ From a 1921 account by John C. Campbell: “There is something magnificent in many of the older women with their stern theology— part mysticism, part fatalism— and their deep understanding of life. “Granny” ...if she has survived the labor and tribulation of her younger days, has gained a freedom and a place of irresponsible authority... In sickness she is the first to be consulted, for she is generally something of an herb doctor, and her advice is sought by the young people of half the countryside in all things from a love affair to putting a new web in the loom.” see: John C. Campbell, *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland*. (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1921).

Sap Rising (figures 9 and 10) blends plant and animal symbols of rebirth, immortality, and springtime renewal. Slip-cast deer hooves, chicken bones, and electric fencing insulators merge with organic hand-built forms suggestive of both vessels and flesh. On one end of the piece, bones (understood symbolically across many cultures as seeds of the body to be resurrected) form a supportive base: the origin point for the rest of the form.⁹ The image of a gray daffodil rises from one of these skeletal origins. A honeycomb texture fades into the young leaves of an oak tree (a symbol of perpetuity and a disease deterrent in agricultural contexts), which sprout from the claw of a crayfish hatching from a bird's egg. An ouroboric black snake weaves in and out of the imagery, head reaching for tail on the opposite side of the piece. Inside split halves of the other form, an unnaturally pink cardinal fights its reflection in a field of platinum luster. Cicada wings trail rabbit fur and a snail shell sprouting red clover. The facets of a prism merge with the geometry of laurel flowers. A raccoon paw reaches through a hexagonal mesh of chicken wire, echoed by the blackened crazing in the glaze and the pink honeycomb structure on the opposite piece. Connecting all components of the piece are copper fittings, chain, and wire (a metal used widely for its conductive properties, both physical and spiritual). These umbilical linkages imply that nothing is isolated and, coupled with the cast references to utility, convey the sense of a process in motion.

Verdant though the individual symbolism may be, in concert, there is a certain violence to the simultaneity and implied consumption in the work. With no opening for release, the forms have a pressurized quality and, as one visitor to my studio suggested, a sense of amniotic confinement. This combination of the decorative and grotesque spans my work. Defined by hybridity, perceived incongruity, and departure from categorizable forms, the grotesque raises questions about boundaries. From an anthropological perspective, Rémi Astruc contends that the grotesque arises in visual culture during eras of unrest and disorientation as a mode of thinking about change and alterity.¹⁰ Thus, the grotesque is a tool for speculation. The central preoccupation of my work in *Downstream* (as in *Taking Care*) is the unknowable connectedness between living things. This work explores connections—between organisms, systems of knowledge, and stories—with particular attention to the links that are, like thin copper wire, tenuous. Adopting the intensive work of china painters and referencing that of folk healers, *Sap Rising* explores the affinities between living things that function in the human imagination as symbols of the promise of renewal within chronic cycles.

⁹ Hans Biedermann. *Dictionary of Symbolism*. (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1996), 45.

¹⁰ María Goicoechea de Jorge. "Shelley Jackson's Grotesque Corpus." In *Digital Media and Textuality: From Creation to Archiving*, ed. Daniela Cortes Maduro, (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2017), 89.

Vessel as Mediator: *Like Milk from a Stone*

In combining references to functional vessels in forms that highlight non-functionality, I imagine the speculative potential of collective bodies, bodies considered anomalous, or those that do not perform at normative capacity. In a literal and poetic sense, I consider vessels as mediators in the interactions that they might indicate or facilitate. Again, as tools for speculation, I think about how the “vessels” I make might constitute a site for exploring possibility and fluidity among seemingly fixed bodies or disparate narratives.

Like Milk from a Stone (figures 11 and 12) explores the numerous instances of association between milk and lunar forces in symbology. The work’s surface design interweaves images of white lilies, oysters, cows, crabs and other emblems of lunar cyclicity with details from stories connecting milk to the substance of moonlight, both also carrying feminine associations. The *Physiologus*, a 2nd century bestiary of sorts, asserts that pearls are formed when purple oysters drink the dew of heaven. Pearls, in their lunar resemblance that presumably inspired this proclamation, decorate the surface of the piece.¹¹ On one form, mice (the livers of which, according to ancient zoologists, waxed and waned with the phases of the moon) morph into the ambiguously amorphous forms of freshwater pearls in a column reminiscent of moon phase calendars.¹² An iridescent glaze flows across the partially obscured image of the texture of white silk and the wings of silk moths coalesce in the folds of the ceramic form. A toad and an eagle feather face one another at opposite ends of a copper chain. In alchemy, the toad symbolizes the watery component of “primal matter,” while the eagle represents the volatile. The union is often represented by the two creatures chained together. On its way to becoming philosopher’s stone (a substance sought for centuries that would be capable of turning base metals into gold and curing all human ailments), primal matter was to be drenched in maiden’s milk—an encoded name for the light of the moon.¹³

The substances included in the work’s title suggest not only these lunar associations but also the production of something vital by an inanimate material or object. Similarly, if vessels give temporary form to their contents, then they can be understood as interpretive devices for composing and recomposing possibility. Via tangled forms and assemblages of association, these “vessels” envision complex living systems, transtemporal relationships, collective bodies, and non-biological taxonomies. As most of the forms I make are in fact false or porous containers, the narrative presented is meant to be fleeting.

¹¹ The *Physiologus* gives moralizing descriptions of animals, plants, mythic creatures, and stones. see: Michael J. Curley. *Physiologus: A Medieval Book of Nature Lore*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

¹² Biedermann. *Dictionary of Symbolism*, 229-230.

¹³ *Ibid*, 345.

Combined with, or perhaps absorbed in, these bodily vessel forms are slip-cast tools, hardware connectors, and parts of machinery. Casting, as a replicatory method of working, functions in its reuse and recontextualization as a method of sculptural storytelling. Known forms are reanimated, becoming unfamiliar again. Like bodies known very well and not at all, these hybrid forms pair material plasticity with the allegorical and symbolic elasticity of meaning on their surfaces.

Sympathetic Magic: *Mirror Images in Rot and Renewal*

Mirror Images in Rot and Renewal (figures 13 and 14) takes the garden as its subject. In a sense, a garden might be defined as an artificially established and maintained collection of living things in service to their human cultivators. Throughout history, the garden has also been used as a symbol of biblical paradise, protection, purity, and of ideal society. The garden as a symbol is embedded in myths involving human origins and destinations as well as in attempts to demonstrate paradise within the present.¹⁴ Though plants have been used medicinally throughout human existence, in Europe, their cultivation for healing purposes was popularized during the Middle Ages, often in monastic contexts, blending Christian theology with pharmacology and botany. In *Capitulaire de Villis*, an 8th century treatise outlining miscellaneous best practices within the kingdom, Emperor Charlemagne decrees that an index of plants with medicinal properties are to be grown on every farm.¹⁵

In much of the early writing on the subject of gardens, this human interface with the natural world is discussed in metaphysical, moral, and mystical terms. The garden is understood as a tool not only for healing of the body, but also as one for accessing the divine. These texts consider Earth as a medium by which people might access God, and earthly medicine takes on additional significance as a route to heaven. This indistinct territory between the spiritual, scientific, medical, and agricultural located in the garden is intriguing to me. Rooted in this conflation is the concept of sympathetic magic, a belief that certain plants were designed by God to indicate their medicinal use value for the human body. (By way of a simple example, leaves resembling the shape of a human hand were to be used for ailments of the hands and so on). This alluring and hubristic idea that plants—and, by extension, perhaps all species—were created in the human image to act on our sick or wounded behalf forms the basis for much of early medicine across cultures. Described by Richard Mabrey, sympathetic magic represents a “complex view of natural creation, in which all components are connected and have resonances with other components of

¹⁴ John Dixon Hunt. “Gardens in Utopia, Utopia in the Garden.” In *Gardens and the Picturesque* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992).

¹⁵ Werner Telesko. *Wisdom of Nature: The Healing Powers and Symbolism of Plants and Animals in the Middle Ages*, (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2001), 8.

a similar form or seasonal rhythm or position in a cosmological hierarchy.”¹⁶ This search for patterns and meaning in the relationships between ourselves and other species indicates an underlying belief in an entangled world in which components are connected, either physically, emotionally, or magically.

Mirror Images in Rot and Renewal cites the garden’s associations with healing capacity and moral ideology in the abundant chaos of a walled garden. In its composition, it references 16th and 17th century depictions of Eden, illuminated manuscripts portraying herbal remedies, and artistic renditions of *hortus conclusus*, symbolic enclosed gardens. Manuscript illustrations of herbal remedies often placed plants in the context of a story portraying their (typically dramatized or imagined)

effects.¹⁷ The enclosed garden was used in art throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance to symbolize the Virgin Mary, indicating the garden’s connection to notions of purity. Drawing botanical information primarily from medieval herbals and southern Appalachian folk remedies, the woven work entangles both botanical and animal symbols of healing, pain alleviation, and renewal. Split in half, it echoes ecclesiastical diptychs and the sliced form of *Sap Rising*.

Embroidered to the tapestry’s surface with a reflective yarn, manufactured primarily for its use in making fishing lures, are decorated ceramic shards. The shards are almost completely obscured, contributing to a layered, accumulative effect and playing on the idea of resonances within the botanical



The Garden of Eden with the Fall of Man (1615) by Jan Brueghel the Elder and Pieter Paul Rubens (Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jan_Brueghel_de_Oude_en_Peter_Paul_Rubens_-_Het_aards_paradijs_met_de_zondeval_van_Adam_en_Eva.jpg)



Early 15th century *hortus conclusus* by Upper Rhenish Master (Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Meister_des_Frankfurter_Paradiesgärtleins_001.jpg)

¹⁶ Richard Mabey. *The Cabaret of Plants: Botany and the Imagination*. (London: Profile books, 2018), 144-46.

¹⁷ Telesko. *Wisdom of Nature*, 13.

imagery that need only to be decoded. Illegibility is central to this work, not only through the riotous imagery and layering, but also through the abstraction inherent in translating the design into a woven textile. Details apparent up close disappear from a more distant vantage, and broader imagery legible from afar is distorted up close by woven texture. This indeterminable visual quality speaks to a fluidity within material and method that spans my work in this show.

The open halves of three sliced onions, purification devices for the home of a sick inhabitant, bridge the two halves of the tapestry. A disproportionately large nest of bird hatchlings reach with open mouths toward red raspberry leaves encircled by a snakeskin, ingredients believed, when used correctly, to counter pain during childbirth. A peony flower joins a host of other symbolic flowers on a trellis: necklaces made of peony seeds are believed by some to help alleviate pain when worn by teething infants. The petals and roots improve symptoms of asthma, and the flower provides protection to seafarers in the event of storms. Red beans on a red string, worn around the neck, prevent nosebleeds. Chunks of sulfur float above a line of acorns in the sky: keeping sulfur in the shoes helps to prevent rheumatic disease and an acorn in the pocket helps ensure a long life. Green tomatoes sprout from a poison ivy plant: the poison and its remedy. In the left panel, a swarm of butterflies emerge from ceramic bowls perched above a pile of shards in an ambiguous process of formation and destruction, birth and death. The garden is perhaps as dangerous as it is restorative, and the myths of purity and control fold away at the edges.

Alchemical Transformation: *Moments Between Dog and Wolf*

Often involved in stories of fabled natural healing agents are the histories of adornment and jewelry. While some “remedies” are concoctions to be consumed, others are objects kept in proximity to the body in the form of a talisman, ring, or charm. From the French phrase *entre chien et loup* (“between dog and wolf”), describing the time around dusk when dim light renders shapes indistinct, *Moments Between Dog and Wolf* (figures 15 and 16) explores symbols, objects, and tools of transformation. Again, assigning living qualities to ceramic forms, this work takes up the transformative nature of bodily adornment on the bodies of vessels.

The larger component of the piece is a conglomeration of forms, stacked in a way reminiscent of a machine or some sort of distillation device. The top half is covered in raised imagery taken from engravings on medicinal rings. In ancient Europe, physicians often prescribed charms and magic rings



Natternzungen-Kredenz, 1453 (Source: https://www.portalkunstgeschichte.de/meldung/objekt_der_woche_natternzungenk-6716.html)

Ornamental structures with shark's teeth called Natternzungen-Kredenz adorned the tables of Renaissance nobility and these hanging tooth amulets (dipped into liquid to neutralize poisons) evolved into the seaside souvenir necklaces common today.

with engravings and inscriptions either believed to counteract specific ailments or to perform more preventative tasks, such as driving away “poisonous air.”¹⁸ The piece features a patchwork of this imagery: a toad swallowing a snake, a fawn leaping from a nautilus shell, a unicorn horn, a stone on fire. The gray green of this section bleeds into the lower part of the piece, which is covered in intersecting circles of fragmented marigolds, enlarged images of lichen that look like they *could* be marigolds, wolves, butterflies, bay leaves, pearls, and sheep's wool. Shark's teeth set like stones in bronze hang from the sides of the piece in allusion to the medieval and Renaissance belief that fossilized shark's teeth could detect and neutralize poison.¹⁹ On the smaller form, rings made in reference to protective and healing ring superstitions hang from six hooks: the heads of elephants and lions, the words *bon coeur*, a black button, and, in a breakdown of form, refuse dripped from the wax injector collaged onto vintage industrial ring waxes.

The dog and wolf invoked in the title of the work are common characters in stories involving animals and humans. Dogs were the first domesticated animals and arise as symbols of loyalty and protection, while the wolf most often symbolizes mischief, falsehood, and “the enemy.” In this duality is of course man versus animal, but also the known versus the unknown and the controllable versus the uncontrollable. In a work about transformation, the boundaries between these categories are indistinct. The work's imagery references several stories and superstitions that engage this impulse for controlling

¹⁸ William Jones. “Ring Superstitions.” In *Finger-Ring Lore: Historical, Legendary, Anecdotal*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1890) 91-176.

¹⁹ From approximately the 13th to 16th century, shark's teeth were believed to have fallen from the cosmos, spontaneously generated from rocks, or existed as the fossilized tongues of dragons. See: George Zammit-Maempel, “Fossil Sharks' Teeth: A Medieval Safeguard against Poisoning,” *Melita Historica* 6, no. 4 (1975), 391-410.

the unknowable. A Spanish tradition stipulates that anyone harvesting marigolds must carry a wolf's tooth wrapped in a bay leaf for protection (the marigold is nearly universally regarded as a powerful flower, noted sometimes for its healing effects and sometimes for its danger). In another rendition of this remedy, found in Albertus Magnus's 1560 *Book of Secrets*, an amulet is made of marigold petals, a bay leaf, and a wolf's tooth to ensure that only "words of peace" are spoken of the bearer.²⁰ In the "miracle of the wolf" performed by Catholic Saint William of Montevergine, the saint successfully orders a wolf to do the work of a donkey. In alchemy, the aggressive symbol of the wolf is associated with the purification of contaminated gold.

In the history of alchemy, the study of materials and bodies exists as a single pursuit. Alchemists were concerned with transmutation: of one material into another (most famously, lead into gold), but also sick bodies into healthy ones. I am interested in the alchemical notions of mythic transformation and of making something precious out of things that are not. Hanging from the taller form are glaze drips set in metal. As the drips form as fragile refuse of the firing process, this preservation is a play on the simultaneous qualities of strength and fragility that run through my work and are epitomized by the body. Like a healing ring, the encased glaze drips are absurd, likely futile attempts at harnessing and protecting something unpredictable or beyond control.

Conclusion

Central to both ceramic and metal processes is constant reuse. In my studio, dry clay scraps are slaked down and reused to make casting slip or wedged back into clay. Bronze and silver refuse is cleaned and melted down to make new forms. This material fluidity reflects and informs the fluidity in my methodology, which is grounded in an associative logic, exploring connections between disparate creatures and stories. In the ceramic process, working potential is determined by moisture level. As long as clay is kept moist, it retains plasticity. In the work discussed in this essay, the stories with which I am working are similarly kept alive through their plastic reimagining. Speculation, material response, and, at times, the conspiratorial notion that everything is connected drives the decision making in my work. The goal is not to clarify, dispel mystery, or dismiss the absurd. Instead, the work dwells in the strange complex relationships that keep the world large and unknown.

²⁰ Michael Best and Frank Brightman. *The Book of Secrets of Albertus Magnus of the Virtues of Herbs, Stones and Certain Beasts; Also a Book of the Marvels of the World*. (York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, 2004).



Figure 1

Taking Care (January 2021)
Gallery installation from two-person exhibition with Jane Ritchie.



Figure 2

Folderols (#1-4) (2020)

Collaborative work with Jane Ritchie

glazed porcelain, copper, silver, leather, sheep skin, garnet, cotton, pearls, glass, onyx, cork, and gar scales on steel



Figure 3

River Voice (2020)
glazed stoneware, china paint, ceramic decals



Figure 4

Luxuries and Losses (2020)
glazed stoneware, china paint, ceramic decals



Figure 5

Black Dog, White Horse (2020)
glazed stoneware, china paint, ceramic decals, cork



Figure 6

Things Alive and Swimming (2020)
glazed stoneware, china paint, ceramic decals, wire



Figure 7

To a Flame (2020)
glazed porcelain and stoneware, china paint



Figure 8

Thesis Show installation at The Athenaeum (2022)



Figure 9

Sap Rising (2021)
glazed stoneware, china paint, ceramic decals, luster, copper



Figure 10

Sap Rising (2021)
glazed stoneware, china paint, ceramic decals, luster, copper



Figure 11

Like Milk from a Stone (2021)
glazed stoneware, china paint, luster, ceramic decals, copper



Figure 12

Like Milk from a Stone (2021)
glazed stoneware, china paint, luster, ceramic decals, copper



Figure 13

Mirror Images in Rot and Renewal (2021)
embroidery and ceramic shards on cotton jacquard tapestry



Figure 14

Mirror Images in Rot and Renewal (2021)
Digital illustration for tapestry design



Figure 15

Moments Between Dog and Wolf (2022)

glazed porcelain, china paint, ceramic decals, copper, bronze



Figure 16

Moments Between Dog and Wolf (2022)
glazed porcelain, china paint, ceramic decals, copper, bronze