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Tethered

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Abstract

Tethered explores the relationship I have built between music, the natural world, and the objects I make. Current ruminations as well as memories that influence my work are shared along with the techniques developed for this expression. In my ceramic practice, I work through multiple series simultaneously, often transitioning between projects that are sometimes seemingly disparate. This writing mirrors that exploratory process, cautious not to arrive at any conclusions, as such definitive answers are never my goal. These things of my constructed world, the illusions that enable my actions, are examined as both obstacles and tools for connecting to the viewer.

TETHERED

By:

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts in Studio Arts

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There is nothing more comforting than the assurance of one's immediate future. This is inherent in the power of music. By metering time, music solidifies a single reality shared by listeners.

One surrenders to the rhythm of music, relinquishing their solitary and meandering perception of time in favor of predictability in pattern; music holds the audience through the work, playing with their primal instincts of anticipation. Music exists in the context of time; we hear with it, within its order, its reality.

“The animals painted on the walls of Lascaux are not there in the same way as the fissures and limestone formations. Nor are not *elsewhere*. Pushed forward here, held back there, supported by the wall's mass they use so adroitly, they radiate about the wall without ever breaking their elusive moorings. I would be hard pressed to say where the painting is I'm looking at. For I do not look at it as one looks at a thing, fixing it in its place. My gaze wanders within it as in the halos of Being. Rather than seeing it, I see according to, or with it.” --Maurice Merleau-Ponty

The invitation into any work of art, the framework, implicitly or imperceptible understood, is often taken for granted. The context dictates the experience; It is the entry point to discovering the work of art, the lens through which the viewer completes the work with their imagination. Crafting this connection is its own art form. How the object physically touches this world, whether it be a table, wall, plinth or framing device, is how we begin to perceive it. This challenge has driven me to explore other materials, consider other artists' solutions, invoke narrative, ritual and write about these experiences. Tethered to our bodies, our spacetime, our illusions, I am in search of the elusive moorings that hold objects in otherworldly space.



Blaze, 2023

20"x7"x4"

Porcelain, mason stain, copper, concrete, epoxy

The blaze, or trail marker, signifies a path. [A path is a line we create when we move forward.]

Totemic communication, formal and primitive, leaves little question that human hands created it.

So ubiquitous is this reflexive stacking, I feel it must be ingrained in our DNA. The cairn, duck, and trail blaze have become symbols of man's relationship to nature. The simple message assures one's place and connects a thread of reverence and respect in the preservation of the natural world. The trail marker is a rearrangement of surrounding material, an intervention. I'm conscious, and I think we all are, of what we leave behind in any place we leave. Our connection and relationship to objects are domineering and continuous. We see ourselves in art and mundane objects alike. How we leave things matters. It is always communication.

The surface and form of *Blaze* were created simultaneously. The surface, shaved down, is sand-blasted and copper filled. The work was cared for, poured over with excess devotional time

forging a relationship with the object. [Creating a work of art has parallels to raising a child.

Needs are clear in the beginning when my hopes and dreams can be imprinted. As the work starts to grow and its needs become more complicated, collaboration is imagined. Through adolescence their needs are harder to figure out and they are mean about it. As a mature autonomous entity, their desires are dominant, and I merely need to listen].



Stoup, 2023

4"x15"x7"

Porcelain, mason stain

Fractal, lines, waves,

A stoup is a basin for holy water. Beauty amends the disconnection of man and nature.

After completing my degree at the music conservatory, I volunteered at San Francisco's arboretum where I propagated plants. Studying botanical form and landscape, I traversed the plant kingdom, discerning the differences among families, genera and species. Naturally, I cultivated my own garden dedicating thousands of hours to observation. This passion led to work as a gardener where I applied my foundation and language of music to conceptualize and install gardens. Ideas of form, structure, texture, motifs and style leant themselves to the construction of physical spaces. The seasons and the ephemeral nature of the garden became my meter and rhythm.



Twist, 2022

14"x14"x4"

Porcelain, mason stain

Tessellations on a line that meanders

A rattlesnake skin, splayed and mounted to the wall, marked the entrance to my grandfather's study. A macabre celebration of life, it was beautiful and scary. As a youngster, I'd scurry past

averting my eyes and then at a braver time looked with scrutiny as if to pay homage. I'd count the years on its rattle, follow the hombre diamond pattern that faded outwards to its belly. The predator was a curiosity and a testament to a naturalist's love, a machismo trophy, decoration, souvenir. And it was beautiful.

Before the idea of mounted skins and trophies, this series began with process. I aimed to create a surface using many recurring patterns of nature and explore how many of these patterns I could layer. The process led me to this particular version of lines, cracks, waves, and branching. Its resemblance to skin was inescapable. I contemplated the actions of skin- stretching, creasing, scarring, folding- and quickly found the twisted forms. The thin porcelain's fast drying time and the nature of the surface-worked clay demanded quick decisions. I folded and wrapped the clay until the porcelain skins felt alive. This working order of surface, concept, form, allowed for discovery, intuitive making and narrative development. The voice of the work awakens, and we argue. The final form is hard-won.



Untitled, 2019

10"x10"x.1"

Porcelain, mason stain

With nerikomi lending itself as easily to abstraction as music, my interest was unsurprising. My first works imitated the symbols of river and lightning seen in Navaho weavings at the De Young Museum as seen in *Untitled, 2019*.

My modified variation of nerikomi dissects and rearticulates layers of contrasting porcelain to exhibit the distorting effects of systemized manipulation. Initially, my intent was to showcase the direction and movement of energy through the material, as strata shows the effects of natural forces. I believed this approach would highlight the material's behavior and raw form. My inspiration stemmed from the material expression in the work of Lynda Benglis. However, the pressure-formed lines indirectly showed my hand in the work. This question of where and how my hand is present began to be important.

For a large part of my life, the clarinet served as an extra limb. My fingertips feeling through its surface, the reed vibrating, and I sensed its entirety—the hollow as clearly as my bones. The musician's crafted physical connection holds a strange intimacy. The instrument embodies the musician's personal triumphs and failures, a collection of actions; Humanity is found in the musician's physical limits, whether flawed or virtuosic. Now, holding raw porcelain, I feel its mass, its entirety, the space it holds between my hands, the heat it steals. Physical connection lies at the heart of materiality. I often ask myself how to reveal the material: what it does, how it moves, its raw form, its truth. I thought the forces of nature would expose these: gravity, erosion, fire, all ways of depicting energy moving through the clay. Throughout these experiments, I could always see my hand.



Untitled, 2022

7"x5"x.1"

Porcelain, mason stain

Experiencing the tiles involves contemplating their construction; they present a puzzle for the viewer. After seeing Sol LeWitt's *Wall Piece* at SF MOMA, I understood the validity of this experience. Recognizing pattern is satisfying, its predictability comforting, as rhythm and meter establish trust in a listener. They are love notes to my fellow ceramicists to decipher.



Spore Series No. 5, 2022

20"x20"x18"

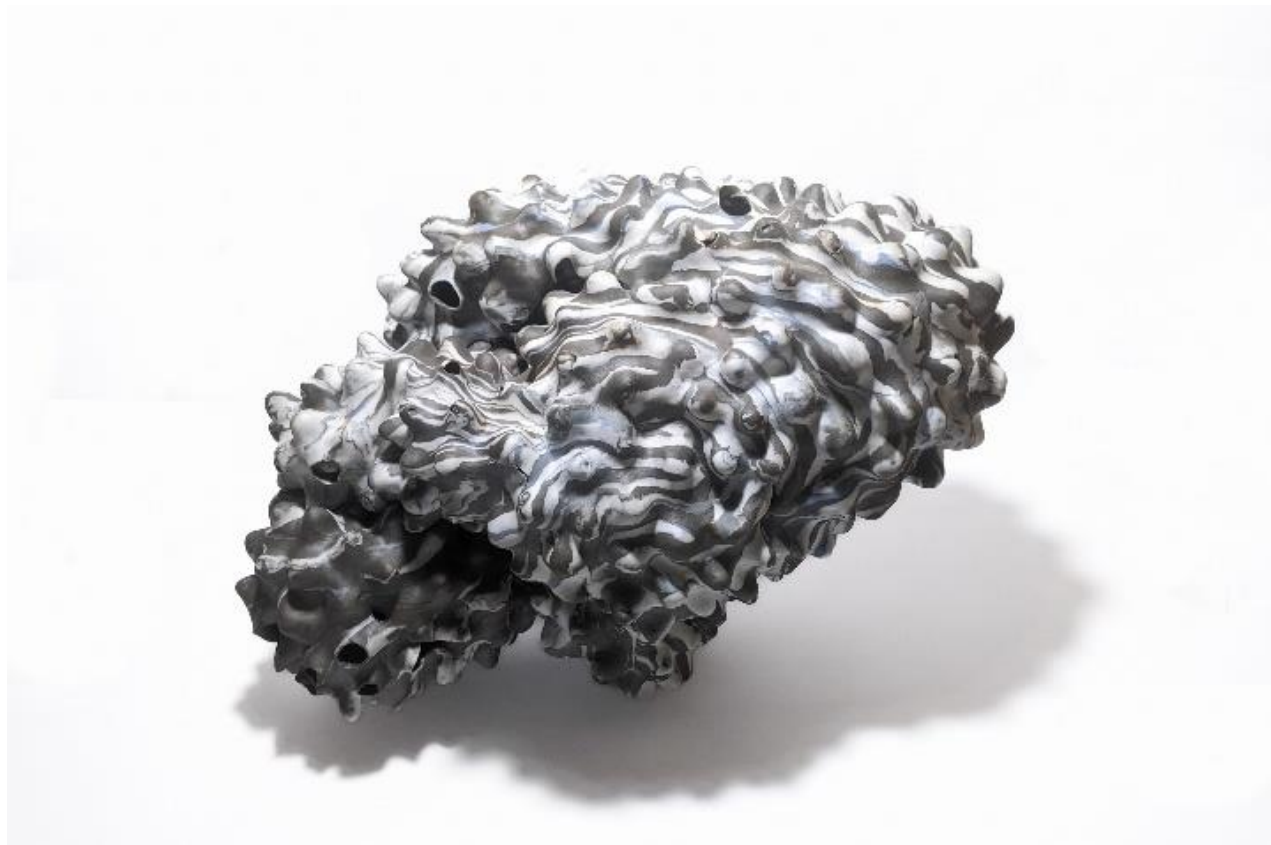
Porcelain paper clay, mason stain, oxides

Fractals, bubbles, meandering lines

Cultivated narrative during the making process has given some objects autonomy. They stand, activated, on their own, holding space in any context.

Deep in the woods of the Sierra Nevadas, I found a peculiar object: A perfect tube constructed from a hundred multi-colored pebbles lying at the river's edge. Plucked from the water, it stretched across my ten-year-old hand. I marveled at the curiosity. Surely some creature had built this home, but it had since been abandoned. I brought my find to share with the other adventurers. They looked humoring me but showed little interest shrugging off the mystery.

Before venturing east to graduate school, I made one last trip to the northern Californian woods. While wading in the Smith River, chasing a salamander, I noticed a cluster of twigs moving against the current. I inspected. Legs poked out, then a head to reveal a caddisfly larva that had covered itself with surrounding debris. Dozens of these insects appeared with variations of this camouflaged home, some with pebbles just as I had seen thirty years prior. I was elated for the closure of this forgotten conundrum and for new mysteries of my subconscious.

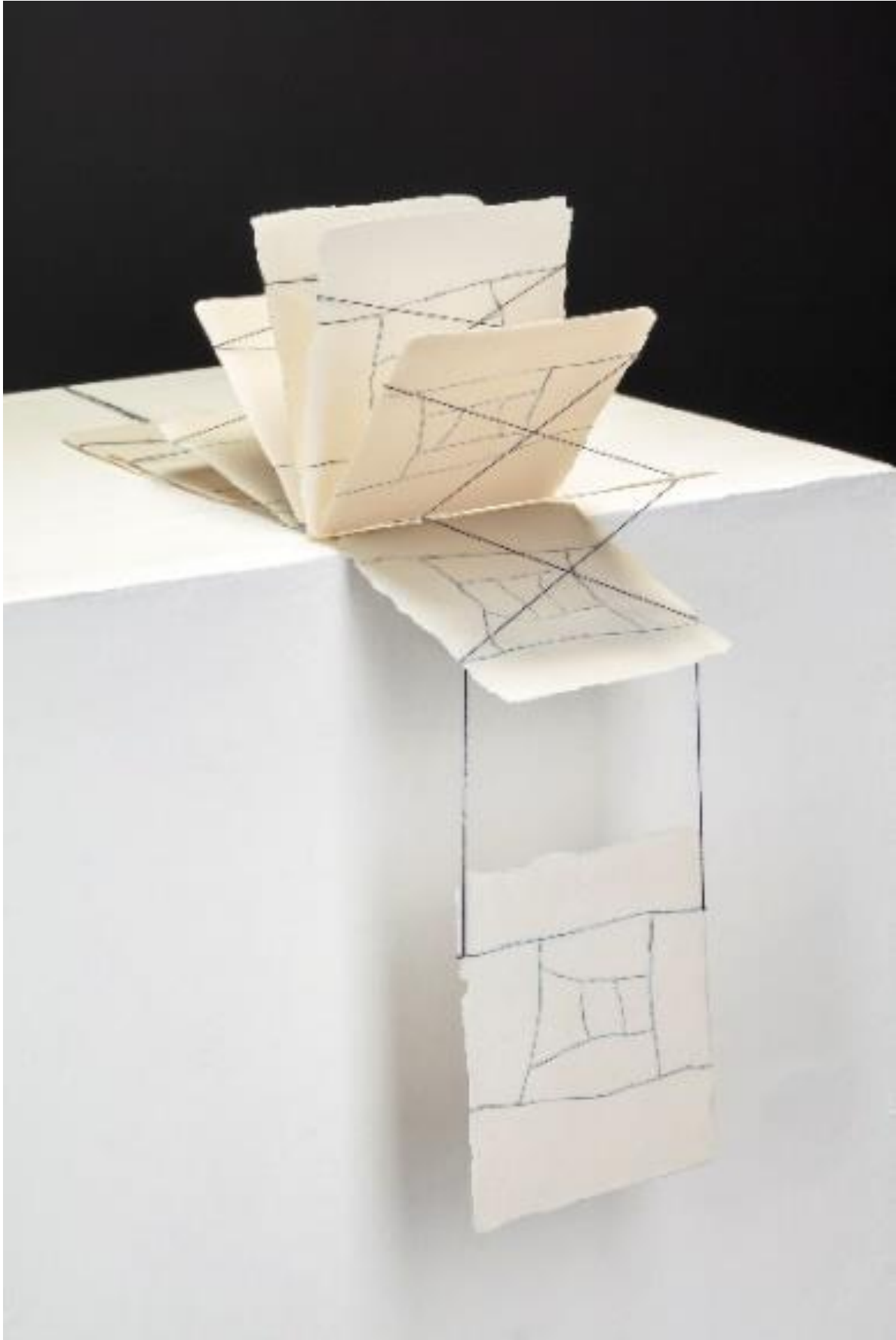


Spore Series No. 6, 2022

24"x18"x14"

Porcelain paper-clay, mason stain, oxides

As a work of art is the composite of actions, the nerikomi lines allow me to evince every action, recording every touch, preserving a history. Each piece in the *Spore Series* shares the same origin. The same molds and set of instructions are used to produce an infinite variety. While constructing these works, I follow a narrative of evolution; Three molds in the shape of spores act as the DNA from which I create a hundred partial impressions. Piece by piece I connect the fractions. This process allows for the form to be discovered.



Entrelacs, 2021

14"x5"x14"

Porcelain, mason stain, string

Cracks, lines, fractals

Each panel in *Entrelacs* is broken and repaired with black slip in the same manner to create variations of the cracked linework. The title, meaning interlaced, is borrowed from a piano etude of the same name by composer Gyorgy Ligeti.

There is tension in our temporal experience. We process the immediate past to anticipate the future. Our bodies blindly move forward while our minds play catch-up and thus we have adapted to become "anticipation machines" as Carlo Rovelli states. How do we manipulate our temporal perception? Is it compulsory? Can it be willful? Our malleable perception of time takes its own shape like a wave in the ever-present tension of the tides. We are tethered to the present in space and time, though our perception of both fluctuates.



Untitled, 2023

12"x9"x.125"

Porcelain, mason stain

The shape of infinity bubbles and folds over on itself.



Spirit Series No. 6, 2023

16"x16"x.25"

Porcelain, mason stain

I wanted the *Spirit Series* to encourage the acceptance of dissonance. The works are challenging to look at; our eyes fight for order within the chaos. They are hard to grasp, like fleeting spirits,

disturbances between two worlds or interactions of invisible forces. However, the works reveal themselves slowly with scrutiny, as the eye fatigues and the gaze softens to take in the whole. Like two audible clashing frequencies grinding against one another, the rhythmic pulsing of dissonance, barely detectable, can feel like an annoyance. In music, this phenomenon is relieved as frequencies align. Though these porcelain works are stuck in time in unyielding tension, an act of imagination from the viewer can resolve the image. Otherwise, accepting this dissonance is our only choice. Our existential experience is full of accepted tension: effects of the moon, gravity, moving our bodies through space and time, and perception of reality. Resignation to the tension changes it. It can become a texture or color. As a musician, I had embraced dissonance as a tool that could exist without the need for resolution. Tonal systems are cultural. In Balinese Gamelan, this discordance between notes is fixed in the metal percussion to create a shimmering effect similar to vibrato.

I could spend the rest of my life learning to control this pressure-formed linework. The nature of the process is exploratory and serendipitous. The panels typically go through many iterations of a particular process. Each iteration involves chance, or chaos, and reaction.

At the beginning of this exploration, I would neatly trim up each panel, squaring them off to make a picture. It felt compulsory. The offcut material was full of information, yet it ended and contained the work. The cut edge framing of the panels functioned as windows inviting the viewer to peer in, as we are conditioned. A world outside the frame is therefore inferred. This unknown world outside the frame is limitless. I came to think of this as the infinity edge.



Spirit Series No. 3

16"x10"x.25"

Porcelain, mason stain

The grid acts as meter, allowing our eyes to travel and read the work rhythmically. The picture, or information, is cut into palatable square packages, easy to download on the surface of our minds. The grid invokes science and reason, what we know about the universe, the unseen waves passing through us, the workings of our brain. It manages our perception. The grid suggests infinite space and time. It asks what gravity does an object hold?



Raven, 2023

14"x5"x2"

Porcelain, mason stain, redwood

Creating mood drove *Raven*. Fire produced the iridescent black surface of both porcelain and wood. At age 10, I acquired decades of accumulated sheet music for piano from my grandfather, who had also gifted me his piano. A book of Beethoven opened naturally to his Pathetic Sonata in C minor. Dark, moody, and exciting, the piece embodied my tween years and began my love for the man and the sublime.



Untitled, 2023

12"x9"x.125"

Porcelain, mason stain

Time and space are equated through a process in which value fades through every iteration. This depth through the translucency of the porcelain is important. I want a sense of peering into the stone.

From microscopic life to deep explorations of the universe through time, the recurring patterns of nature are universal. Ever more of our world is visible, tangible and demystified. When physical measurements eclipse our instruments, we have equations and theories that conceive the smallest particle or the shortest measurement of time. These ideas, though I can barely grasp, facilitate a practice of deeper looking and honing of my senses. I imagine my senses are super-powered, able to see the smallest particle, hear the farthest sound. My cognitive energetic output and perception of time are forever linked. What senses have become numb or evolved out of consciousness? I wonder about the mundane forces on our bodies we take for granted as we reflexively breathe and understand the space that our bodies occupy.

While creating this series of porcelain sketches, I immersed myself in a book about granular quantum physics, The Order of Time by Carlo Rovelli. This layman's guide to our understanding of time describes the string of events that we blur into perception of time. These panels depict these quantum events. These ideas are not novel, but well known in popular culture such as 'Star Trek,' a household favorite growing up.

The sketches also function as a mapping of my 4D process. The added colorant, within the repeated process, fades with each subsequent iteration. This creates depth in the surface and traces time. I aim for the experience of looking into the panels to resemble peering through a telescope into spacetime. I want the viewer to imagine seeing in four dimensions a moving image.



Folding Space, 2023

24"x1"x9"

Porcelain, mason stain, steel, epoxy

The 34 stacked wedges in *Folding Space* were cut from the same nerikomi slab pie (with the black porcelain at the center). The complete pie was used and arranged sequentially creating an infinite loop, a Mobius Wedge of sorts, that is condensed into 34 frames. The surface and form were simultaneously arrived at. The metal transforms from sculpture to frame from the contact of porcelain to the wall.



Snack, 2023

8"x10"x4"

Porcelain, cork, plaster, stoneware, silicone, mason stain, cobalt

My practice is anchored by my education in music. This training broke down music into its components, sparking my interest in minimalist exploration, such as “how does rhythm become texture.” With *Snack*, I wanted explore texture and material as the central theme eliciting a haptic response from the viewer. The quality of line created by the meeting of the different materials was essential to the work; the beveled line between cork and porcelain in the front of the sculpture constructs a different relationship from the creased linework of the back.



My Little Pony Fucks Harder, 2024

20”x20”x12”

Top: porcelain, 06 glazes, luster Bottom: cork, rayon flocking powder, acrylic

This work is a response to the joyous art that has been embraced lately. Many artists are influences and referenced: Katie Stout, Katie Stone, Christina West, Linda Sormin, Ken Price. I wanted to glaze like Kathy Butterly layering through many firings, treating the surface as a canvas. Similarly, the form is found through multiple firings. The clay body is over-fired, slumping and distorting many fragments together. With each firing the work is repositioned, e.g. flipped upside down. This series began with an inquiry into the interplay of rhythm, structure, and texture in form. In such dark times, making something beautiful and fun was an easy decision. My objects during this phase seemed to all hold my desires.



Queen, 2024

7'x4'x5"

Porcelain, mason stain, stoneware, epoxy

The title pays homage to Noriko Kuwabara, a ceramic artist and friend that shared her nerikomi process with me. Long ago, Noriko left her hometown of Sapporo after learning that the band, Queen, would not be performing in such a small town while on tour.

The context and framing element of *Queen* was established first. A stoneware base sculpture was enacted over one continuous duration. Inspired by the visceral and performative work by Brie Ruais, I created an intuitive and bodily stoneware sculpture to serve as a mold for porcelain veneers. This allowed me to react with the porcelain veneers adorning and ultimately replacing

the sculpture as only hidden fragments were used for mounting. I wanted to enclose spaces within translucent porcelain edges to create different atmospheres utilizing light as material. A step closer to Merleau-Ponty's elusive mooring lines, the framing element and contextual information is created in order to elicit reactive and intuitive making. Beauty remains my snare and sublime my guiding light.

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