We Inherit The Fire

A THESIS

SUBMITTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY OF MAY 2024

TO THE DEPARTMENT OF FINE ARTS

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

OF THE SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS

OF TULANE UNIVERSITY

FOR THE DEGREE

OF

MASTER OF ART

BY

Caitlin Ezell Waugh

Caitlin Ezell Waugh

APPROVED:

DocuSigned by:
Gene Koss
DE2B176E1B94495...

Gene Koss,
Director

DocuSigned by:
Diana Antohe
D0887AEF038142C...

Diana Antohe

DocuSigned by:
94207B7B49214BA...

Blas Isasi Gutierrez

DocuSigned by:
Allison Truitt
09ADCD66BAD54AA...

Allison Truitt

Acknowledgments

My efforts have been very well supported during my time at Tulane. I am grateful to have been chosen to be a Community Engaged Research Fellow with the Mellon Institute, and to have co-built a meaningful, ongoing, collaboration with my community partner. Our work together is the basis of my why.

I'd like to thank Lucas Diaz and Ryan Mcbride of the Mellon program as well as Pamela Broom and Allison Truitt for their guidance and support as community members and scholars. I was lucky to have generous and brilliant committee members, including Allison, Diana Antohe, Blas Isasi Gutierrez, and Gene Koss. Our cohort was blessed with Aaron Collier as our graduate director and professor; it is rare to receive such charming, diligent and caring support.

Working at the heart of the Tulane glass community for two years has been an immense honor. I soaked up every moment of the play, laughter, dedication, experimentation and enthusiastic collaboration. The experience has fundamentally shifted my studio practice, my relationship to teaching, and the way I approach working with others and with glass. My time in the glass area allowed me to discover new depths to my own work ethic and commitment. I met several lifelong friends and intellectual partners in this program, for which I am deeply grateful.

"...[T]he most central, archetypal symbol of the essence of femininity has always been the vessel."

- Aschkenasy, Nehama. *Eve's Journey; Feminine Images in Hebraic Literary Tradition*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986. 70

Table of Contents

Introduction

(Artist Statement displayed on the wall in the back gallery of the first exhibition of We Inherit The Fire*, Carroll Gallery, Tulane University, April 2024.)*

Made of earth, the first woman is the original vessel, the place from which all of humanity flows. Her womb is the seat of society's potential. While humanity is a source of great hope, it is also the source of evil and grief; the imperative to control women's potential to give birth to the chaotic unknown is reinforced by the use of containers (the apple, the box) to tell the origin story of the first woman.

Community-based research has led me to collaborate with herbalist abortion doulas, directly informing my studio practice. Much of our work is shrouded — it is light and shadow on the wall. Some of this work is peer-reviewed and published. The process of expressing this data through sculpture has included a need to expand my definition of *vessel*. This work is an exploration of how material and shape contain information and convey history. The radically fragile vessel forms in this exhibition demonstrate ambiguity between *full* and *empty* and encourage the conviction that objects do not need to be preserved in order to be of value.

I endeavored to expand my vessel definition for almost a year before I understood that it is related to my desire to dissolve binary thinking. Vessels are sculptures. Books are vessels. Brooms are vessels. Scrolls, tapestries, baskets and bodies are vessels. Vessels expand and contract, they are multi-functional. Vessels are common, ceremonial, coveted, discarded, resilient, fragile, burgeoning, barren, virginal, welcoming, lidded, leaking, expectant, exhausted, exalted. Vessels are actors; they have agency.

Overt and unconscious belief about the feminine impacts our response to forms of containment; in decoration and design, vessels inform beliefs about the individual and collective function of people with wombs. *We Inherit The Fire* is an investigation of several historically ubiquitous domestic objects that attempts to expand what we identify as a vessel and its function. Perhaps this is a path to public policy that prioritizes the ability of people to choose how their own bodies function. A generous understanding of vessel could lead to a less confined definition of the function of woman.

Containment | Pithos

Hesiod's telling in *Works and Days*[1] is the first known written record of Pandora's myth, a story that has changed a great deal through centuries of retelling. In Hesiod's account, Prometheus, who was sympathetic towards mortals, gave fire as a gift to man. Zeus was incensed and damned Prometheus:

> [...] with glee you stole the fire and deceived my mind;
> for you will be great sorrow, and for future men.
> As fire's price I'll give an evil thing, which all
> shall cherish in their hearts, embracing their own scourge.[2]

Zeus ordered Hephaestus to create the exquisite Pandora, the first woman, from clay. All of the Olympians assembled at Pandora's 'birth' in order to animate her with their gifts. Aphrodite bestowed upon her 'the wiles of love', Hermes taught her inconsistency and deceitfulness, Athena shared with her the 'secrets of the loom'.[3] Once filled with cunning, beauty, and all the skills of a 'perfect' woman, Hermes presented Pandora to Epimetheus, brother of Prometheus, along with a wedding gift of a pithos (a lidded jar also made of the earth) which she was told not to open. As was the destiny gifted to her, Pandora became Epimetheus's wife. Overcome with curiosity (a trait given to her by the gods), she did open the pithos, out of which flew all of the evils with which mankind has since grappled. Pandora was able to close the lid to the pithos before it was totally empty, trapping the only good thing that had been sent to the mortals, hope.

Pandora's story is a parable, malleable in its meaning. The vessel given by the gods to Pandora was uniformly described as a pithos by Greek writers from Hesiod through the twelfth century.[4] Pithoi were massive lidded jars used to store oil, wine, grain, and also employed as caskets in ancient Greek culture. In the sixteenth century Lilius Giraldus of Ferrara translated Pandora's pithos as a box, which changed the perception of the container to

---

[1] Pressly, William L. "James Barry's Syncretic Vision: The Fusion of Classical and Christian in His 'Birth of Pandora.'" *The British Art Journal* 14, no. 3 (2013): 27–35. 28.

[2] Hesiod. *Works and Days,* lines 53-105. trans. MacLennan, Bruce. Diotima. 1995.
https://diotima-doctafemina.org/translations/greek/pandora-hesiod-works-and-days-53-105/
The first two lines of this stanza were displayed on the wall in the back room of the Carroll Gallery for *We Inherit The Fire*, along with my artist statement, a short description of the Pandora allegory, and the Nehama Aschkenasy quote included in the forward of this document.

[3] Hesiod. *Works and Days,* lines 89-106. Cooke, Thomas, trans. *The Works of Hesiod.* 2nd Edition. London. 1740

[4] Harrison, Jane, 'Pandora's Box', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Vol. 20.(1900) 98.

something portable. Since then, jar and box have been used interchangeably to describe the form, marking a shift in the visual representation of the myth to a container that Pandora herself can carry, over which she has agency.[5] In the third century, Babrius left Pandora out of the story entirely as it was man who opened the pithos, and it was blessings, not evils, that came pouring out from the jar.[6] Pandora's story sometimes focuses on her birth, or on her marriage, or on her lack of discipline in opening the vessel. The interpretation of hope being trapped in the jar is alternately seen as hope being kept for or from humanity. Another interpretation is that hope, *elpis*, is a distorted translation for *realistic awareness of a situation*— humanity is able to maintain hope because we can't access full understanding of our plight.[7] The malleability of the story's details, the shape of the vessel, its telling as a casket or a decorative wedding gift, the nature of the contents of the vessel, the primary actor as male or female, are what make it ripe for mimetic repetition. Every iteration conveys the themes of fate and agency or control. It is a story about containment and potential, but the approach to these themes shift with the intentions of the translator. Pandora's myth is a time-tested parable because it narratively functions well in many iterations; as a cautionary tale it has evolved as society's norms have evolved.

Vessels in many forms are quotidian signifiers of the feminine— the pithos Pandora carried to her own marriage is as important as the woman herself, just as the apple is central to the understanding of Eve. The womb (the apple, the box) is the seat of society's potential. The imperative to control populations is reinforced by the use of containers to tell the origin story of the first woman. Pandora's allegory and the ubiquitous making of woman into a symbol of containment are examples of what Michel Foucault refers to as *biopower.* Biopower refers to 'numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations.'[8] *We Inherit The Fire* explores the way several common vessels act as signifiers for our understanding of women's

---

[5] Harrison, 'Pandora's Box', 99.

[6] Harrison, 'Pandora's Box', 99.

[7] Gantz, Timothy. *Early Greek Myth : A Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993. 157
Gantz suggests that Elpis may mean expectation ("a realistic awareness of just how bad things are and are likely to get"). By trapping Elpis, Pandora saved us from true awareness of our predicament.

[8] Foucault, Michel. *The Will to Knowledge: History of Sexuality Volume 1,* London: Penguin. 1976
Biopower is a social theory coined by Michel Foucault in 1976 which relates to modern nation states' regulation of citizens through a wide variety of cultural means. Foucault describes biopower as having a "focus on the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary."

agency. The pithos, as the vessel carried by the first woman, is the starting point, the grandmother vessel in this exhibition.

The ancient ubiquity of the pithos (urn, vase) turns the form, however degraded or hastily crafted, into a symbol. Though the name is not a common noun, the pithos is the visible ancestor of all jars and vases. The pithos has an unadorned sturdy flat foot. Its narrow bottom widens into a smooth curve at its shoulders. It is a domestic container with a tight collar and a flared lip.

When I make a pithos, I am referring to the historic use of vessels as symbols of woman, wombs and tombs, tools used by women, and objects used to control/instruct women. In ancient Athens, common household Attic vases (small versions of the larger storage pithoi) were used as a canvas onto which instructions for how to be a respectable woman were painted, including how to dress, marry, labor, and associate with other women.[9] This was an early tool used to manage citizens which proved effective enough that the Catholic church co-opted it, along with many other classical vessels, in later centuries.[10] The vase shape has also been used as a signifier throughout Chinese history to refer to women, a reduction of the whole body to just the womb, similarly intimately connected with death.[11] Control over objects in the home equates to control of women; they are both vessels and domestic objects. Control of people's homes and how they behave inside them equates to immense power.

---

[9] Blundell, Sue, and Sorkin Rabinowitz, Nancy. "WOMEN'S BONDS, WOMEN'S POTS: ADORNMENT SCENES IN ATTIC VASE-PAINTING." *Phoenix* 62, no. 1/2 (2008): 115–44. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25651701

[10] This can be construed as common knowledge, as there are thousands of texts about this topic. One example that is salient to imagery of Pandora is: Pressly, William L. "James Barry's Syncretic Vision: The Fusion of Classical and Christian in His 'Birth of Pandora.'" *The British Art Journal* 14, no. 3 (2013)

[11] Ancient Chinese policy beginning in the Zhou Dynasty asserted that 'men plow and women weave'; vessels and weave are both symbols of the function of women. Kinney, Anne Behnke. *Exemplary Women of Early China.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.

Containment (Pithos) glass, 2.5ft x 11in x 11in

The pithos in this exhibition is the form that is most commonly identifiable as a vessel. It is entitled *Containment*. Like all of the sculptures in the show, it is entirely made of glass. *Containment* stands alone, curving upwards from the tallest wooden pedestal, a position of reverence for the eldest ancestor present. From the front door, the viewer confronts the form as a whole, a vessel monument with a grainy, opaque white-clear surface underlaid with a loose cross-hatch of translucent glass strands. The first view proves to be a facade; less than half of the pithos shape is defined by glass— the rest of the form is empty and it contains the whole room, its interior and opening. The form trails off at the edges, a tattered glass grid that references woven textile. Its completion is hallucinated by the collective zeitgeist. It is a queen form, holding space for all of the other forms around it, self-possessed, generous, palpably private and reserved. Whereas most of the other sculptures in the space are built of many parts or shown as multiples, the pithos is singular, on display as ornamentation as well as signifier.

The ‘original vessel’ was the final sculpture I made for this exhibition. I envisioned and executed it with straightforward confidence gained from repetition and lessons learned from all of the other sculptures. The book and the broom, to which we will soon turn, taught me a great deal about how to use fiber frax[12] to build mold forms in the kiln. I made the pithos form as a flat sheet of fused powdered glass and then pulled the glass sheet onto the frax form in the kiln at 1330F so it could slump smoothly down the curving sides and be manipulated sharply into a right angle to form the foot. The off-white fibrous frax mold, laid horizontally, looked just like the bodice of a dress form in the kiln. The pithos is so recognisably a woman’s torso that we only need to see a fraction of Pandora’s curves to conjure the fabric of women’s history.

[12] Fiber frax is a ceramic fiber insulation blanket created from refractory ceramic fibers made from alumina silicate. I use it to create molds onto which I slump glass. Glass can be melted to take on the form of the fiber frax, the frax does not shrink or burn, and it does not fuse to the glass.

Carriage | Amphora

As symbols in my work, there is a content difference between a pithos, which is larger and has an autonomous foot to stand on, and amphora, which were ancient disposable (clay and glass) vessels meant for shipping lots of smaller quantities. Amphora were the first blown glass forms, invented in the first century BC in what is now Syria.[13] When I make amphora I'm thinking about disposability, cosmetics, multiples; that which is transitory, like uteruses, unfertilized eggs, breath.

One of the amphora from the pile (2024) 6in x 6in x 9.5in

Sometimes I get a vision that nags at me until I sculpt it. So it was with my desire to see a massive pile of blown glass amphora. I named this installation *Carriage* and placed the pile to the left of the gallery's front door. The amphora are reds, pinks, browns with some purple, a full range of menstrual hues. They are piled up on spanish moss, a traditional bedding material, and mugwort, an herb that induces vivid dreaming.

---

[13] Zerwick, Chloe. *A Short History of Glass*. Corning Museum of Glass, 1980.
Buckley, W. (1926). *European glass : a brief outline of the history of glass making / with notes on various methods of glass decoration, illustrated examples in the collection of the author, by Wilfred Buckley, C.B.E ; with a foreword by Bernard Rackham ; and with an essay on Dutch glass engravers by Dr. Ferrand Hudig*. Benn, 1926.

Carriage (2024) blown glass, mugwort, spanish moss, 36in x 36in x 36in

I learned what the amphoras were as I made them. I got better through iteration— after a couple of weeks I learned how to better control the way I was 'messing up the bubble', to blow it out unevenly in order to get thinner and thicker parts, to create tendinous stretching and binding. It was a freeing process, there were no mistakes, only pushing forward until I'd created an evocative, hand-holdable form. Some of the curves of the vessels are ancient Greek, others Victorian, gaudy. The amphora evoke bottles for medicine, perfume, poison, makeup, remedies, oils, potions. They are surgical, sutured, fallopian tubes, boxes, shells, dendroids, clots, masses. They exist gorgeously in the form they've captured, and surely they cannot 'survive' or turn into something else functional.

Binding has often recurred in my work over the past five years as an emotional gesture I make to express the feeling of being constricted in a relationship or situation. Noticing when I bind material helps me identify how I'm feeling. The binding carries more accessible content as well, such as medical intervention, the

bound feet of women, constriction before release and expansion, and helped me discover how to make glass look more bodily. Making *Carriage* led me to the connection between binding and uterine actions.

There is a traditional mandate in Japanese basket-weaving that the opening should always be finished, carefully considered and not left trailing off. Some contemporary weavers defy their grandfathers,[14] leaving a tattered unfinished fray. I thought of this, and the ceramic traditions around the opening of a vessel, as I snipped and tugged and torched the edges of each amphora, considering how the lip leads from interior to exterior and back again, informing the observer of its function, provenance, potential.

Wrapped behind the pile and stretching sixteen feet to the right of the front door, runs a line of stained pine shelving, eight inches deep and 50 inches high along the wall. Besides (mostly) clear and (some) red glass, wood is the other material in this exhibit. Using unpainted wood to create the pedestals, shelves, and tables in this show was a choice to ground the work with plant material, and to give the clear glass a dark surface on which to be read along with the shadows of the white walls. The stain color hints slightly red towards the red colors in the amphora and book.

A whisper network was enacted to induce participation with the installation. I told many people, and they in turn encouraged others, to choose an amphora, or several, from the pile and individuate them by arranging them on display on the long shelf. They were also encouraged to move some pieces off of the shelf and back to the pile, which no one did except my closest friends after much discussion. I placed a wooden bowl filled with wooden rings on a pedestal near the amphora pile. Participants dug through the bowl in search of a ring that was the right size for the amphora they had chosen. The rings were for stability, to help prevent the round objects from rolling off the shelf; they formalized the display/altar aesthetic and added another opportunity for the participant to exert agency, to tend the safety of the form and whatever it symbolized for them.

---

[14] "Shono Tokuzo, son of a Living National Treasure, Shono Shounsai, the first bamboo artist to attain that honor, abandoned his father's teaching that the finishing of the mouth was the most important feature of a bamboo work in his flexible piece titled *Illusion*, allowing vertical strands to float freely."
- American Craft Council. "Venture into the World of Bamboo Sculpture." Accessed December 9, 2022. https://www.craftcouncil.org/post/venture-world-bamboo-sculpture.

It was a long shelf, but not nearly enough room for all of the amphora to be on display. In this first iteration, an evenly-spaced pattern was unconsciously established until there was no free space, after which other viewers touched the amphora in the pile, admired those on the shelves, but did not change the positions of the objects. They decided not to give their favorite forms a place of honor over the hierarchy that had already been established. After several days, I started grouping and clustering the shelved objects, to establish a less orderly presentation, which others then riffed on after I was gone. It was a ceremony with no guidance, an experience of inheriting information unevenly, which mirrors the experience of gaining information about, and agency over, our bodies. It highlighted the role of community in access to ceremony and knowledge. Many of the amphora can be played as wind ornaments, which viewers discovered, collaborated over, and taught their children. Several women cried when explaining to me how the work made them feel, how it communicated ideas we don't have words for, how the color and forms were felt in their abdomens.

Engaging with the amphora was an exercise in individuation from a collective that evokes preciousness, ceremony, archive. The warmly stained wooden shelf references altars, museums, cabinets of curiosity. It is a colonial aesthetic with a tasteful this-side-of-hoarding domestic appeal, informed by the sense-making and ownership traditions that undergird modern capitalism. Colonial/capitalist culture teaches us that we are richer when we own collections, and anything is worth collecting, keeping, exalting, if we form attachment. I hope that the act of pulling one amphora from the pile and arranging it for display provided the participant the opportunity to consider this familiar habit in new ways. It is an experience of harvesting, discernment, favoritism, of making up a story to go along with the object, of taking the object away from its collective strength to stand as its own signifier.

This body of work questions whether longevity is an inherent function of a thing's value. Why is the death of something, the release, so very challenging for humans? The amphoras, made of blown glass, are the least fragile objects in this show. Their precarity is in the way they are used and handled, in our perception of their value.

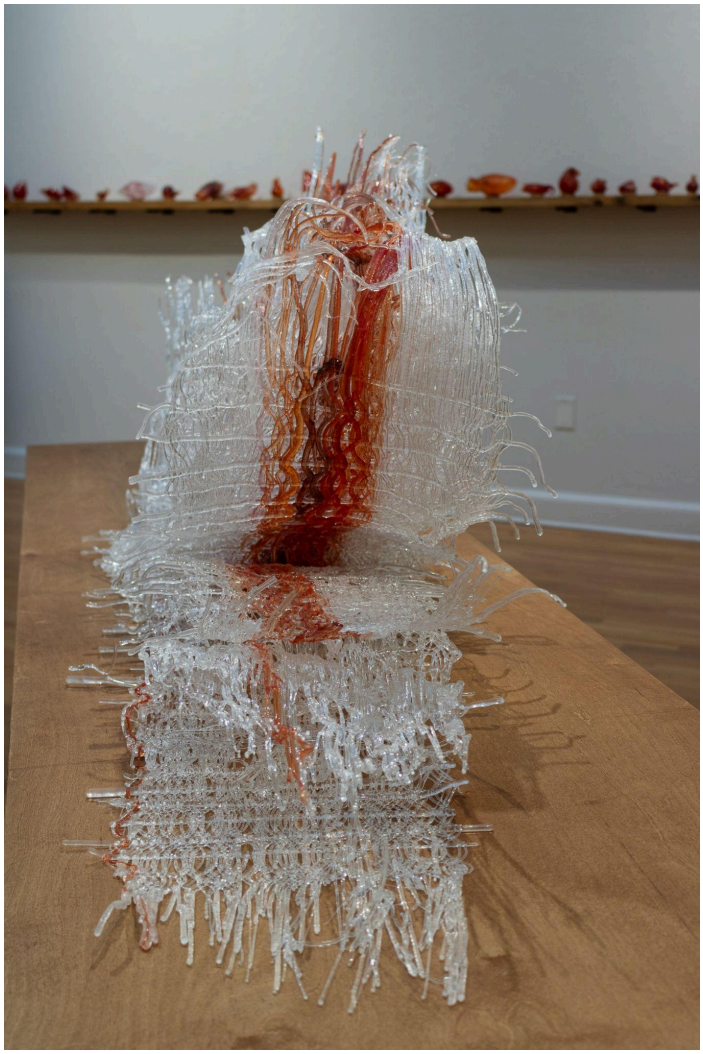
There are 156 amphora in the pile. The first legal regulation of abortion was passed in Connecticut in 1821, a trend that expanded to restrict all abortion in every state by 1910. In 1973, Roe vs. Wade was passed, which established legal precedent for the protection of the right to abortion in all 50 states. That precedent was overturned in 2022. For 156 years of United States history there have been regulations in some or all states; the line on the wall is currently growing longer.

Inherit | Book

Inherit (2024) glass, 24ft x 8ft x 24ft

In the center of the room, adjacent to the long amphora shelf, was an eight foot-long, thirty-three inch-wide birch table. The table referred to the same domestic space as the amphoras' shelf, stained a similar reddish early-American hue, chaste in design, long, only as wide as necessary. The table supports *Inherit,* a seven foot-long, three foot-tall open and active glass book. *Inherit* is composed of thirteen 'pages', a hidden reference to the thirteen moons in the cycle of one year, tangled together, uncountable. Not every reader sees the sculpture as a book, but it does convey the concept of a narrative, or collection of stories, as well as the largess of a monument, just as ornate korans, bibles, torahs, materia medica, or ancient scrolls do. Each page was constructed by weaving hundreds of glass strands together, loose at the ends, woven at the base where they were later fused together to create a binding. Pages one and thirteen each have one red strand. Between the beginning and the end of the book, the strip of red widens, moving from the left to the right margin and back to the middle. Installed together, the line of red amphora had a visual relationship to the book's red line; both conjure an unknown history. This same

event-horizon, or waterline, carried throughout the entire exhibition; all of the works read as a chest-level data arranged on a timeline. The color red symbolizes the bodily experience of human history, war, release, birth and death and menstruation. The book is the story of a relationship among people, or of a person's relationship with their own body, a moment in time, a year, all of human experience, cycles of personal and infinitesimal magnitude. It's a cacophonous narrative made of many voices woven together.



Inherit

I employed weave in the book, the pithos, the broom and basket forms in the exhibition, all of which intend to inform how the scrolls at the end of the installation are read by the viewer. Weave carries many connotations, including social and material aspects of humanity, human bodies, canvas and paper, oral history.[15] Weave connects to women's work, domesticity and tradition, as well as to the fragility and preciousness of the objects' role in stewarding information. Every viewer has a comfort-relationship with a woven object they love. We surround ourselves with weave and vessels as a means of domesticating spaces, and therefore our memories are built with the curves of containment and swaddled in matrices.

A book is a vessel, a box, if we'd like to directly link it to Pandora's agency. Books bring history, civilization, the church, allopathic medicine, and power. Books contain and steward information, preserve and gate-keep knowledge and connection to the past. Books, which manifest as many different kinds of record keeping, represent another form of biopower, as access to records determines and is determined by power.

Making the book was a vulnerable act—much of my labor was ultimately shrouded by binding the pages together into a radically fragile form. It was a devotional act that mirrored the visible and shadow work of trying to defend bodily autonomy; material was lost in the making, much like the cyclical effort put into legalizing abortion. Creating this work was an affirmation that it IS worth it to keep going, even if the results are fragile. It is a monument to unseen, hermeneutic labor, the labor of generations, to outcomes we fight for and don't live to see. At a particularly vulnerable moment, my committee member Blas Isasi Gutierrez told me to remember I'm not making objects, I'm making a poetic political gesture. The meaning is imbued with personal ceremonial labor.

[15] Gordon, B. *Textiles : the whole story : uses, meanings, significance*. Thames & Hudson. 2011

Inherit

As a sculpture, just like the pithos and the amphora, *Inherit* is perceived as both becoming and unbecoming. We are unable to tell which is the front and back. It is a book meant to be read/ understood/ translated in many ways, a reference to the impossibility of accurately tracking the passage of time as the grid sticks together, weighing and supporting the other measures of time and records of action. The weft of the weave fills a bit more than a third of the first page, and occupies more of the warp on each sequential page, adding density as the story is told. This density isn't clearly legible, but it nevertheless conveys an expanding volume of voices adding to the feedback loop of history, increasing the density of information as time passes. Or, if read the other way, an unraveling. It preserves and distorts memory. The object itself can not be preserved, saved, or restored. Its making is necessary, a part of history and culture, whether it is remembered or not. I made something so fragile and heavy it has become performative ephemera.

Before I began grad school I wondered where my twenty years of experience in historical glass restoration would come into the work. It has led me to make work that cannot be restored. Fragility is the entry to restoration. I am using restoration techniques to bring it into existence for the first time. *Inherit* keeps breaking, ting-ing and dropping small bits and large strands of glass. As it does, I collect the fallen information and tuck it back into the pages wherever I can get it to settle convincingly. In this way, the narrative continues to shift. The history remains intact, but the details shift. The form is incredibly forgiving— it is a cacophony of narration, a massive chorus

drowning the individual voices in the collective sound they create. Here, again, it mirrors the stewardship of history: we don't expect our collective memory to be organized and fully legible, there are too many voices, too many moments of loss and recovery. The best we can hope for is an emotionally striking tapestry of information crashing through the ages. 'Truth' in the telling makes room for the material to be rearranged for the sake of stability. *Inherit's* viewers don't have a 'truth' to believe about the story, besides, perhaps, that the red lines continue. The material and form embody the content, showing us how recorded history is retold and forgotten, or maimed, and sense is made of the evidence.

The book (and the broom) forced me to wrestle with the politics and emotions of preservation, with the discomfort of making ephemera. I want us to live in a society that reveres and embraces the process of death and loss as much as birth and accumulation. A friend suggested I have a responsibility to make work that is sturdy, that will last so people can see it. I don't think I do. Do I have a responsibility to document the work? Maybe. I am struck by the fragility of my work. I didn't set out to center fragility; fragility emerged as I endeavored to convey the idea of accepting transformation, endings, of concepts and forms, poetry, reverberation, experiences, objects, relationships, lives. Extending the longevity of these things is not the only way to value them.

Stewardship | Broom

Once the idea of a glass broom came to me I became obsessive about solving the form from a technical perspective without knowing how they fit into the larger theme of my work. At the same time, also for reasons I did not at first understand, I began asserting that a broom is a vessel. My work is heavily influenced by the rich tradition of Japanese weaving and broom making. Brooms are for cleansing; they relate to the earth, and to magic. They are about process and preparation and witches. Brooms remind us that everyday tasks are ceremonial, that the sacred and the mundane are one in the same.

Stewardship takes the form of an (abstract) classic western-civilization witch's broom. The handle is a trimmed and crooked crepe myrtle branch, the broom head and bristles are five feet of woven and flowing glass strands. I first wove the top of the glass body as a three-foot wide flat tapestry, then rolled it into a cylinder while it was hot in the kiln, which gave it an organic, gestural motion. In this exhibition, it was suspended in air by monofilament over a four foot square of worn, tongue and groove boards that evoke a domestic interior. The broom almost touched the floor boards, actively sweeping up broken bits of itself, engaged in self-stewardship.

Stewardship (2024) glass, 10ft x approx 2.5ft x 2.5ft

The broom handle is spliced into two pieces with a curving cut, held together with two pins made from the same branch, a nod to the Japanese joinery and the craftsmanship traditions that inspired it. I pulled the strands of glass, or cane, to make this broom with the help of others. 'Harvesting' cane is a slow, communal process that belies the moods we are in each work day. Sometimes it pulls thick and sometimes thin, a reflection of our conscious and subconscious gestures. Harvesting bamboo and other fibers, in Japan and around the world in every culture, functions the same way. Most of the effort is in growing, harvesting, and culling the fibers to prepare them to be sculpted into the final form. This was true in my process as well.

Stewardship is the size of my body. It taught me that I was striving to extend the definition of vessel to objects that clearly demonstrate action and agency. It took me months to realize that my obsession with calling a broom a vessel might be a metaphor for female self-stewardship/autonomy. The act of making a sculptural or ceremonial broom, particularly out of glass, prompts the consideration: what will this object cleanse? This broom aims to extend past recognition of its form, and into the spirit and action of the object. The delicate long undulating bristles are mid-sweep, static evidence of agency. The glass is clear, a glinting prism of all color; the fibrous tendrils both cast and cleanse its own woven shadows.

The shadows cast by *Stewardship* are striking– evidence of unseen labor. In Carroll gallery, the broom was hung by the entrance to the back room of the gallery, creating a threshold to the part of the exhibit where the sculpture's shadows are visually dominant. The broom, and the shadows, are indicators of witch's work, of cleansing-releasing-emptying work. The clear sightline and positioning between the pithos and the broom connects the two, an attempt to help the viewer see both of the objects as distinct historical symbols of woman.

Harvest | Basket

The sweep of the broom motioned the viewer into the back room of the gallery, where two glass baskets on wooden pedestals glistened under direct spotlights at the center of the room. The baskets are entitled *Harvest.* They were made with the same techniques as the book and the broom, kiln-formed over fiber frax molds at 1330 degrees fahrenheit into organic shapes that pay homage to plant and animal bodies.

Harvest (2024) Glass, each basket approx. 30in x 15in x 15in

In both creation and use, baskets are another vessel intimately linked with women's work. There is a long global tradition of weaving family motifs and stories into baskets. Baskets are about ancestor lines, symbolism, tribe, indigeneity and land stewardship. Woven baskets evoke the individual and societal body. The action/agency that they represent includes harvest, abundance and nourishment. Baskets contain the conversations that happen among the weavers and the spirit line that ensures that spirit doesn't get trapped in the object. Basket weaving and collecting has been part of my own practice since I was very young; I use hand woven baskets to harvest and dry the plants I work with. Baskets were present in this curation because they evoke abundance and the longstanding relationship between women and plants. Their placement meant to connect the cleansing action of the broom with the harvest of abortifacients.

Abortifacients

Abortifacients are plants used by humans and animals to induce miscarriage. The basket works refer to the abundance of allyship offered by these plants. A wall of wood-framed glass prints of common abortifacients flanked the baskets to the left. The prints were made by first pressing the plants into clay, from which I made wax molds. I then made a plaster-silica negatives from the wax imprint, peeled the wax away, sifted colored and clear glass powder over the plaster molds and fired them in a kiln. The result is a thin glass 'print' of the plant, a process referred to as *frit de verre.*[16]

Cotton Root, Mugwort, Pennyroyal and Parsley (2024)

In *We Inherit The Fire*, I included prints of cotton root, ginger leaves and root, pennyroyal, parsley, black cohosh and mugwort. The plant prints represent the plants themselves and the marks they make. I chose to frame them in sturdy pine shadow boxes stained the same color as the other wood in the show. The shadow boxes protect the glass and evoke entomological pinning. They were hung closely together, to appear as a wall of support and give the viewer the sense that they are seeing only part of a much larger catalog, representing an abundant harvest of support.

---

[16] The term *frit de verre* is used here, as opposed to *pate de verre*, which uses a liquid binder in the powdered glass.

Scrolls

Concurrent with my graduate studies, I am a Community-Engaged Research Mellon Fellow. The fellowship has afforded me an opportunity to expand my engagement with others who are fighting for reproductive justice. It also served as an experimental modality for blending academic research, studio arts practice and grassroots responses to the social challenge of living in a state with no legal access to abortion. The partnership I developed through the Mellon program resulted in collaboration with the authors of the recently published, and first-of-its-kind paper, *Supported at-home abortion: community-led abortion care in North America.* As part of our work together, I kiln-sculpted glass into ephemeral forms to bring body to their research.

During medieval times, women used to tie birthing scrolls with written prayers to their bodies while they gave birth, as a hail mary to not die in childbirth. If a scroll worked for one woman, it was passed to the next, so the material would get repeatedly splattered with sweat and blood and herbal potions and goat's milk. Scrolls were also used for property and material wealth accounting, and to record life events, to store and collect data.

For my exhibition, I 'illustrated' three formulas used in their research, turning each uterine herbal action into symbol-forms I use as building blocks to depict each abortion story. The back room of *We Inherit The Fire* is my first attempt at disseminating this research sculpturally, in the form of fragile glass 'scrolls' of data. Contextualized among vessels that reference the history of biopower and stewardship of care and knowledge, the scrolls can be seen as timelines that don't fit a clinical model, as vessels processing information, as wombs.

All of the sculptures in this exhibition were arranged to inform the legibility of the scrolls for the viewer. The thin, hollow glass tunnels were suspended horizontally off three walls, resting on eighteen-inch hand-carved oak dowels. Materially, the translucent, fabric-like texture of the glass in the scrolls is most like the frit de verre body of the pithos and of the glass prints, a marriage of the original womb and abortifacients.

The scrolls in *We Inherit The Fire* represent the timelines of abortifacient use that three women followed to successfully induce miscarriage.[17] Herbal formulas are created for individual pregnancies, they are NOT recipes to be selected at whim. The differences between the timelines we chose helps illustrate this; they represent a range of herbs used in experiences that took two, six and twelve days to complete. Every herbal formula is designed to herbs that produce each of these four actions:

> **oxytocic actions,** to increase prostaglandins which promote uterine contractions
> **emmenagogic actions,** to stimulate blood flow
> **progesterone blockers,** to stop the effective organization of tissue
> **cervical softeners,** to open the cervix to allow for passage of tissue out of the body.

These are the actions that need to occur to induce miscarriage and birth. Many herbs produce more than one of these actions. I've come to think of herbal actions like a list of formal devices— the form isn't complete without, for example, composition, texture, color and light. This led me to experiment with language and gesture, relating verbs to the herbal actions, and then attempting to embody that action with glass. This has manifested as casting, blowing, and kiln-forming glass into forms that bind, block, induce, flow, disorganize, soften, allow, constrict, contract, stimulate, interrupt, intervene, rupture. This experimentation can be seen in all of the sculptures in the show, and are the foundation of my process in creating the scrolls.

Once I decided that the formulas would be translated into frit de verre scrolls, my community partner and I created rules of engagement. The length of the time the herbs were taken is represented by a sheet of glass frit (powder) first fused and then rolled up in kilns. One hour is represented as one horizontal centimeter. The walls of the scroll are thicker at the beginning and thinner towards release. Each plant has a different 'symbol', or shape, made of glass, which I added to the interior or exterior of the glass sheets along the ascribed timeline, before rolling into the scroll.

Making rules for the formulas was at times challenging to decipher. For instance, 80 drops every three hours but not at night... How many times is that? Does this person wake at 8am, and go to sleep at midnight? Herbalism

---

[17] Examples from data that was gathered from community providers about herbal abortion provision in the United States and Canada since 2018. 'A place for Herbal Abortion in Clinical Herbalism'. *Journal of the American Herbalist Guild,* Fall 2022.

isn't allopathic medicine. Trying to record herbal formulas includes finding a place on the chart for meditation, ceremony, flower essences, orgasm, intuition, rest. The imperative for record keeping does not result in orderly clinical notes. There is a tension between 'preserving' knowledge and information, and allowing it to slip away or be undocumented. Sometimes it's safer, legally and domestically, to leave no trace.[18] Sometimes it's just not possible for the person to record their own process, as that is not not how it is practiced. The sculptures are abstractions, but in making them I first attempt to create a logical visual framework, and let the data drive the formal decisions. The data makes marks on the glass forms, illegible, hieroglyphic.

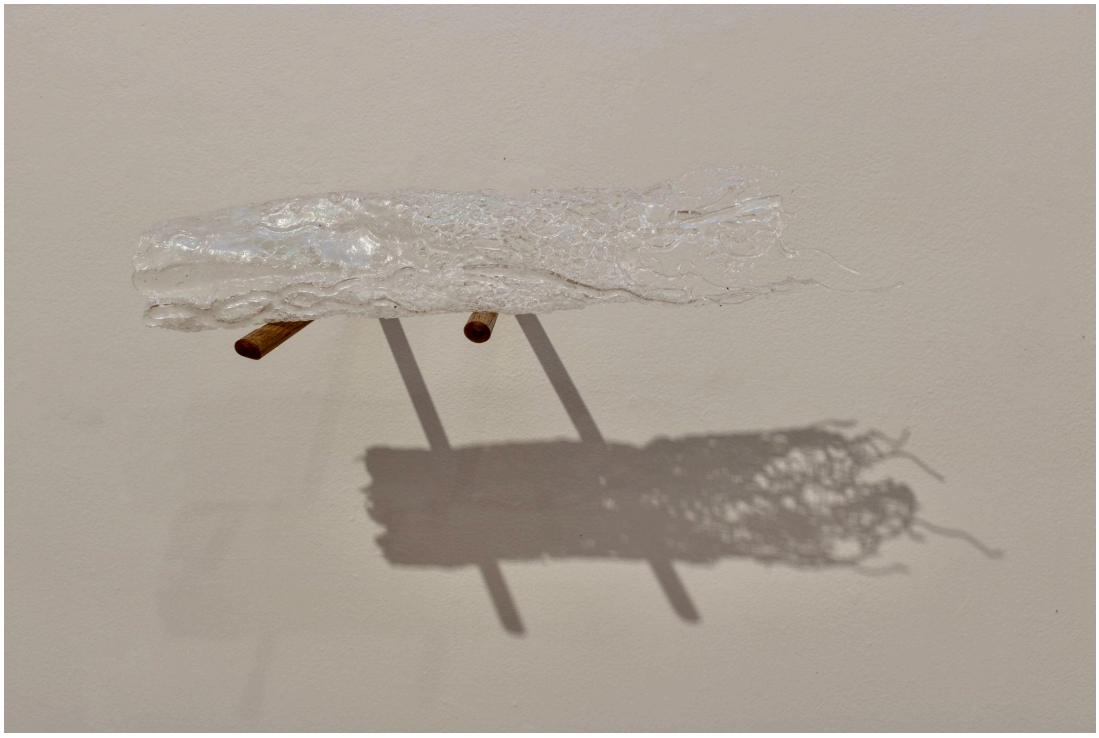
Below is a table that shows the decisions we made and language we used to describe the herbal actions:

Plant	Herbal Action	Our notes on plant's energetics	Glass interpretation
Angelica spp.	emmenagogue, estrogenic	thinning, moistening, induce, rupture, stimulate, contract, flow,	cane thick to thin, flowing out at the end, runs the length of the scroll, inside scroll
Black Cohosh	blocks hormones leading to disorganization and softening of cervix	blocker, some softening, interrupt, intervene, stimulate, inducing, a sentry, showy on top, medicine underneath/inside, snakeroot rhizomey	rhizome gathers (like their roots) stacked like beaver dams that then release with more strands of thin cane after each dam, added to the interior of the scroll
Cotton Root Bark	emmenagogue, estrogenic, oxytocic	flow, induce, allow, soften, contraction, stimulate, interrupt, open (getting bigger, broader, more ample), potent oxytocin (love), allow feeling, presence, being in body, nurture, grandmother, grounding, safe, network of mycelium, starburst	forms that look like cohosh root bursts, made of tails that don't break when I make frit; expansion; on exterior of scroll, unblocking and shifting structure
Ginger	emmenagogue, estrogenic	warming, circulatory stimulant, expansive, drank as tea with ginger root	add to the mugwort wrap, more open than ginger, round ends of cane with little tails
Mugwort	emmenagogue, teratogenic	spirit, induce, circulatory stimulant, of ceremony, ally of intention, communicator, flow, magnetic, induces vivid dreams, magnetic, drawing blood	wraps of frit on the exterior of the scroll over daytimes on the days when the tea was being continuously sipped
Parsley Pessary	cervical softener, oxytocic	bundles induce/stimulates softening and flow, increase, allow, open, unlocking (a key to the cervix),	encased bundles inside the larger flow/timeline that allows us to interpret the pessaries as *interior,* vaginally inserted
Vitamin C	hormone disruptor: likely increases estrogen	block, disorganizing, (a sharpness), interrupt, jarring	disorganizes the grid, jabbing, sharp, straight, linear lengths of cane perpendicular inside the scroll, creates grid and then increasingly disrupts it, jabbing through the frit body

[18] Taylor, J. S. (2008). *The public life of the fetal sonogram technology, consumption, and the politics of reproduction* (1st ed.). Rutgers University Press. https://doi.org/10.36019/9780813545608

I included the following tables from my partner's research on the walls of the gallery, next to their corresponding scrolls:

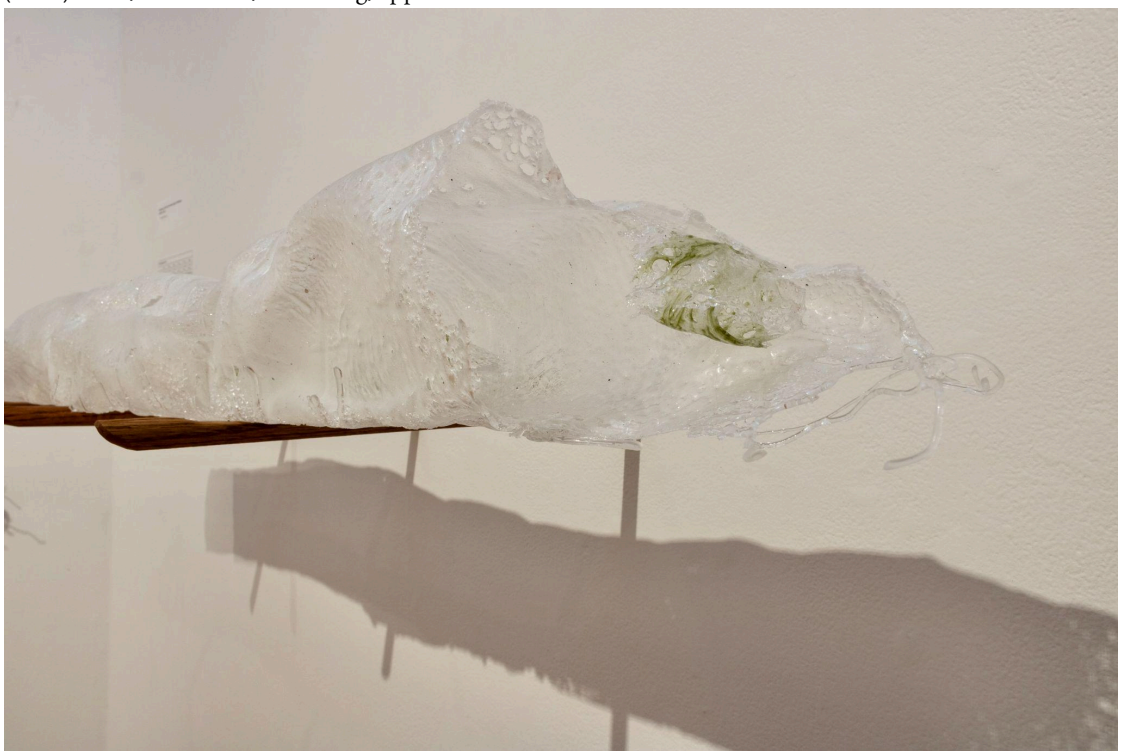
***Angelica spp. & Gossypium herbaceum* over 2 days**
(2024) glass, oak dowels, 2.5ft long, approx 10 in diameter



At 5 weeks gestation, client 23		
	Day 1	**Day 2**
Angelica spp.	60-70 gtts q4hrs	60-70 gtts q4hrs
Cotton Root Bark		60-70 gtts q2-3 hrs
		Results: Complete

Data from: A place for Herbal Abortion in Clinical Herbalism:
***Journal of the American Herbalist Guild,* Fall 2022**

***Angelica spp., Ascorbic Acid, Artemesia vulgaris, Petroselinum crispum* over 6 days**
(2024) Glass, oak dowels, 6.6 ft long, approx. 1 ft diameter



At 4 weeks gestation, client 15						
	Day 1	**Day 2**	**Day 3**	**Day 4**	**Day 5**	**Day 6**
Mugwort	½ c: 1 L H20. Drink ½	½ c: 1 L H20. Drink ½	½ c: 1 L H20. Drink ½	½ c: 1 L H20. Drink ½	½ c: 1 L H20. Drink ½	½ c: 1 L H20. Drink ½
Vitamin C	1500 mg 6x/day	1500 mg 6x/day	1500 mg 6x/day	1500 mg 6x/day	1500 mg 6x/day	1500 mg 6x/day
Parsley				Pessary at night	Pessary at night	Pessary at night
Angelica spp.					20 gtts TID	20 gtts TID
						Results: Complete

Data from: A place for Herbal Abortion in Clinical Herbalism: *Journal of the American Herbalist Guild,* Fall 2022

***Actaea racemosa, Ascorbic Acid, Artemesia vulgaris, Gossypium herbaceum, Petroselinum crispum, Zingiber officinalis* over 12 days** (2024) Glass, oak dowels, 10 ft long, approx. 1 ft diameter

At 4 weeks gestation, client 31												
	Day 1	**Day 2**	**Day 3**	**Day 4**	**Day 5**	**Day 6**	**Day 7**	**Day 8**	**Day 9**	**Day 10**	**Day 11**	**Day 12**
Black Cohosh	80 gtts q3hrs	80 gtts q3hrs	80 gtts q3hrs	80 gtts q3hrs	80 gtts q3hrs	80 gtts q3hrs			80 gtts q3hrs	80 gtts q3hrs	80 gtts q3hrs	80 gtts q3hrs
Cotton Root Bark	80 gtts q2-3hrs	80 gtts q2-3hrs	80 gtts q2-3hrs	80 gtts q2-3hrs	80 gtts q2-3hrs	80 gtts q2-3hrs			80 gtts q2-3hrs	80 gtts q2-3hrs	80 gtts q2-3hrs	80 gtts q2-3hrs
Vitamin C	6000-8000 mg/ day	6000-8000 mg/ day	6000-8000 mg/ day	6000-8000 mg/ day	6000-8000 mg/ day	6000-8000 mg/ day						
Parsley	Pessary at night	Pessary at night	Pessary at night	Pessary at night	Pessary at night	Pessary at night	*break*	*break*				
Ginger	1 cup Ginger tea 3x/day	1 cup Ginger tea 3x/day	1 cup Ginger tea 3x/day									
Mugwort	1 Tbsp in the 1 cup Ginger Tea, 3x/day	1 Tbsp in the 1 cup Ginger Tea, 3x/day	1 Tbsp in the 1 cup Ginger Tea, 3x/day									
												Results: Complete

Data from: A place for Herbal Abortion in Clinical Herbalism: *Journal of the American Herbalist Guild,* Fall 2022

The womb as vessel, and the shared actions it undergoes in abortion, miscarriage and birth are visually shrouded subjects. In my work I have shifted abortion from subject matter to content. Just as most domestic and hermeneutic labor goes unseen, the evidence of abortifacient plants and ceremony is present, but the actors and their actions are veiled. It is clear that the material has undergone intervention, but the process, or history, is unclear. This visual polysemy is a form of protection. It's often safer when we can't tell whether the vessel is full or empty, or if it has ever contained something.

When lighting the show, I found myself looking at the shadows more than the glass. Shadows are an entry point into my work. Everyone who perceives light shares the experience of seeing something more fully through its shadow. The content, as well as the forms, in my work rely on highlights and shadow; the viewer is invited to investigate what can, and can't, be seen through the casting of shadow and color through the glass. While I hope questions arise from the shadows my sculptures cast, the idea of shadows as symbol/reference to shrouded narrative is not intended to be obscured.

These scrolls are the first public monuments made of the private acts that make up this data set; my Mellon partner and I intend to continue this work. I curated *We Inherit the Fire* as another point of access to my partner's research and to help re-normalize the ancient practice of exercising body autonomy with the support of abortifacients.

Coda

I am a contemporary pro-abortion artist. I hope my practice directly impacts abortion policy globally and especially here in the state of Louisiana. I hope to become a more effective civil artist by visually contributing to the perception of abortion. Every day I work to normalize abortion as safe and easy to access. While I want abortion to be normalized, I am increasingly interested in how to get at the content through quiet signifiers, to use shrouding as a tool towards conceptual clarity. When I make art about abortion, I'm experimenting with a softer, more nuanced tone. I turn the content into form and movement, it's a different language, or code, to talk about the thing; less overt, sparser, subject matter allows for the content to come through more clearly and helps the viewer stay with the work. Magdalena Abakanowicz spoke of her desire to "determine the minimal amount necessary to express the whole," and I share her desire.[19] *We Inherit The Fire* is about agency and the female body. I chose to minimize my use of the word abortion in the exhibition because I am curious what nuances of understanding can be obtained outside of the direct reproductive-rights framework. What appears in the gallery is the mark-makings of scholarship and collective care.

I want the viewer to guess at what happened to that material, and infer stories about the interventions that it underwent. The mystery of how a thing is made, and the tension of not being able to figure it out, is part of my content. Polysemy and ambiguity are central to my work; I'm particularly interested in blurring the binary of full versus empty. I'm fascinated by static forms whose meanings oscillate, making them difficult to define. They evoke time, the present, because we sense the objects haven't always been like that, and presume they won't always be, which allows us to take them for what they are right now. This fragility, vulnerability, is also strength, flexibility.

There has long been a perception of vessels as separate from and lesser than sculpture – vestiges of the craft versus art dichotomy remain. This is one reason to expand the definition of vessel—how must an object function in

[19] *Abakanowicz in Cracow*, Warsaw Voice, 3 May 1998.

order to be considered a vessel? The link between vessel and the feminine is also about function; vessels have been used throughout human history to symbolize the womb, earth, creation, potential, emergence, containment. Does every vessel now inherently carry this symbolism? Should we refer to all objects that convey this set of themes as vessels? Has the making of vessels been considered a lesser art because of its association with the home, and with women? If a vessel isn't a sculpture, is a person also reduced to being defined by the category of their function? The titles of the vessel-sculptures in this show are verbs, actions that point to the breadth of self-actualization every person possesses. If I am a sculptor, am I not making work to serve a function? I make forms that carry, contain, convey. My body is a vessel. And a landscape. I am mundane and I am sacred. I will continue to be an object of ceremony at every empty and full and expectant and spent stage. And so will you.

Bibliography

'A place for Herbal Abortion in Clinical Herbalism.' *Journal of the American Herbalist Guild,* Fall 2022.

Abakanowicz in Cracow, Warsaw Voice, May 3 1998.

Blundell, Sue, and Sorkin Rabinowitz, Nancy. "WOMEN'S BONDS, WOMEN'S POTS: ADORNMENT SCENES IN ATTIC VASE-PAINTING." *Phoenix* 62, no. 1/2 (2008): 115–44.

Buckley, W. (1926). *European glass : a brief outline of the history of glass making / with notes on various methods of glass decoration, illustrated examples in the collection of the author, by Wilfred Buckley, C.B.E ; with a foreword by Bernard Rackham ; and with an essay on Dutch glass engravers by Dr. Ferrand Hudig*. Benn, 1926.

Duncan, Carol. *The Aesthetics of Power in Modern Erotic Art,* in Arlene Raven, Cassandra L. Langer and Joanna Frueh (eds.), *Feminist Art Criticism: An Anthology.* Ann Arbor and London: UMI Research Press (1988), 59.

"Enchanting Edo: Without Sweeping Away Tradition, Tokyo Shop's Brooms Suit Modern Lifestyles." *The Mainichi*, November 16, 2021.

Foucault, Michel. *The Will to Knowledge: History of Sexuality Volume 1,* 1976.

G. Arnason, *Encyclopedia of Applied Ethics (Second Edition)*, 2012.

Gantz, Timothy. *Early Greek Myth : A Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.

Gordon, B. *Textiles : the whole story : uses, meanings, significance*. Thames & Hudson, 2011.

Harrison, Jane, 'Pandora's Box', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Vol. 20, 1900.

Hesiod. *Works and Days,* lines 89-106. Translated by Cooke, Thomas, *The Works of Hesiod.* 2nd Edition. London. 1740.

Hesiod. *Works and Days,* lines 53-105. Translated by MacLennan, Bruce. Diotima, 1995.

Jain, Shanna. "Abortions, the Woman's Body, and the Disciplinary Power of the State." *THE BASTION* (blog), August 6, 2021.

Kinney, Anne Behnke. *Exemplary Women of Early China.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.

Mattick, Paul. "Beautiful and Sublime: Gender Totemism in the Constitution of Art." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 48, no. 4, 1990.

Nealon, J. T. *Plant theory : biopower & vegetable life*. Stanford University Press, 2016.

Pressly, William L. "James Barry's Syncretic Vision: The Fusion of Classical and Christian in His 'Birth of Pandora.'" *The British Art Journal* 14, no. 3, 2013.

Taylor, J. S. *The public life of the fetal sonogram technology, consumption, and the politics of reproduction* (1st ed.). Rutgers University Press, 2008.

"The Woven History of Japanese Bamboo Basketry." *TLmagazine*, February 13, 2019.

"Venture into the World of Bamboo Sculpture." *American Craft Council*, Accessed December 9, 2022.

Zerwick, Chloe. *A Short History of Glass*. Corning Museum of Glass, 1980.

Biography

Caitlin Ezell Waugh is a sculptor, preserver, and historical restoration artist. She explores decay, vulnerability, growth and time through the treatment of glass, found objects, light, and plant material. Waugh received her Bachelor of Arts from Hampshire College with an intersectional focus on sculpture and literary journalism.

Waugh, a native of Maine, moved her life and her glass studio, Paraph, to New Orleans in 2008. As curator and a primary resident-artist she co-created and co-operated the art space Potence Collective from 2017 to 2020. Waugh returned to academia in 2022 to get her MFA in glass sculpture at Tulane University. Concurrent with the Studio Art graduate program she was awarded a community-engaged Mellon fellowship, which offered an opportunity to more fully integrate her studio practice with her social justice commitments. Waugh's dream job is to be a sculptural journalist, and she is diligently working to forge that path.