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This work is about the treasure of us and the primordial elements of imagination and solution. Many of these works are pointing to our basic goodness, creativity, and zest as building blocks of our humanness. Archetypes of stool, raft, and jewel are woven together to represent being held and holding. The backbone of this body of work has to do with my journey to be able to hold myself with growing perspective and esteem. And as such, these drawings and sculptures become a tool, charting my exploration and relationship to the divine, to myself, and to others.

FINDING ANOTHER WAY TO HOLD

by

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## CHAPTER I

### OBJECTS TOGETHER

I am interested in our relationship to ideas, to our creative selves and the importance of sharing that creation with others. Combinations of basic objects are symbolic of the building blocks of our universe; these elements are generative meaning that they can combine and recombine to form new connections. I utilize objects to facilitate dialogue and exchange ideas. I first began thinking about my current practice by asking people to tell stories or memories using known objects, objects that I had made, or words that conjure an image in the mind. In asking, I trust that the other person has brilliant thinking and knows the answer—and that there are a multitude of answers and possibilities. This inquiry helps people to see their own brilliance. In the work of artist Richard Tuttle, objects, material and artist embody certain attributes; he states,

I want to shine light on the creative dimension that everybody has. I think everybody's born of two parents, but you have this creative dimension—a singularity that you can explain to yourself. You can work in a way where you show a value and create a value simultaneously, and with that you can create yourself. (Kerr, 2016)

There is something powerful about suddenly being aware of one's capacity to open up a world right there on the spot through the use of imagination and inner resource. I recently prompted someone to imagine “an inchworm,” “a rock,” and “a lampshade” and

asked them to use the objects together to tell a story. The person responded, saying that they would moisten the rock and place the inchworm on top to stay cool. Next, they situated the lampshade around the rock to protect the inchworm from the sun. This is a small exchange and yet the story provides a moment of beauty and solution found when we get good attention and can think relaxedly. With variation, I gave a woman named Lauren, three physical objects; she paused with them for a moment and then told the following story, “I was climbing a big shiny mountain that’s also a star. I was afraid of the big darkness ahead that was language-related and I knew that my heart was very small, but that I was shining like a light in the palm of my hand.” I include this story because it links the use of simple objects with the capacity to open up inner spaces of the unconscious. Surprised by her story she was able to link her freshly formed words to other aspects of her life. I’ve also asked to people to tell stories based on one of three objects, without mentioning the object they choose. A woman named Emily recalled the following:

I know what object is coming to mind and its nothing...it’s just about me being in my early twenties and moving to New York and having a job. It was the year my father passed away. And I loved it; and it’s the only job I ever had where I worked the night shift and got up at 11 o’clock and worked till the morning. And I don’t know, it was just a fun time in my life, where I felt like a grown up. Where my life was changing. I worked at Trader Joe’s. I was supper happy. I remember learning all about the really heavily populated Jewish community. And they wanted to know where the challah bread was all the time and I had never really eaten it or had it and that’s kind of all that there is to my story. That’s amazing that things really trigger a memory.

When prompted, Emily's world opened to recall a time and a place that was significant to her. Those listening accompanied her to that time and place and a world opened for them, too. While working in the studio, I make objects that translate my feelings, ideas, and memories; objects recombine to form scenes or spaces that reflect the shifting personal connections that I make in my life. The scenes may go through several iterations, helping to reflect the current situation or be rearranged so that new relationships are formed, and thus, new perspective. I focus on themes of support from the divine, myself and others which are addressed through a number of different ways including making in the studio, counseling work, writing and visualization.

While working in the studio, I make objects and let them exist together on walls, on tables and on the floor. I use play and intuition to arrange and rearrange these objects, allowing different relationships to accrue. There is a diversity of color, texture, and form that coexists without hierarchy in this storehouse of material resource. It is here where narratives develop and one can find an audience, even in solitude.

## CHAPTER II

### SUPPORT

The basis for much of my art practice stems from seeking out a relationship to the divine as a way to trust myself and reach for others. I began going to Alanon (a twelve-step program for family and friends of alcoholics) in the winter of 2013 and around the same time I joined a peer-counseling group that practices listening and feeling within the body to discharge and uncover old patterns of distress.

For me one of those old distress patterns was “I am all alone.” And yet through a growing relationship with the divine, I have learned tools that help me continue reaching for the support of others as well as find internal resource, so that with continued practice, I have a growing trust that I am connected.

As a way for me to continue building these core relationships it is important for me to incorporate a daily practice of quiet time into my life. I decided to circle back to a visualization method called the Silva Method of Mind Control that I had practiced as a young person after being diagnosed with attention deficit disorder. My parents didn’t want to put me on medication and so instead, I took a weekend course in the Silva Method to learn mental techniques that would help me relax, focus and do well in school. I was taught a certain technique that had me imagine getting on an elevator that would take me down to the center of the earth where doors opened up into my very own

laboratory space. I was asked to create a laboratory that had things that I might need to be able to find resources and solutions. I began incorporating meditation and visualization into my art practice; sitting for 15 to 20 minutes before making in the studio, I visualize receiving support, being generous, and making with a real joy. Through this practice I am able to focus, enjoy making, let go of the outcome, and in some cases, am able to imagine what direction to take a particular piece. This practice is a tool for self-care and becomes like the laboratory where I find what I need; the time spent in this inner space allows me to feel held by the divine with better access my internal resource and zest.

Socially engaged performance artist Renee Sills includes therapeutic practices as one of her many mediums; she presents workshops and gatherings that incorporate self-care and mindfulness practices. She often combines different therapeutic modalities with areas of study such as the science or movement, finding that intersections allow for new discoveries. “When we understand the process of evolution then we also understand the key to resolving habitual patterns that aren’t helpful: we can go back to the pattern before the habit developed and rebuild from there with support and mindfulness” (Harvey 2013).

## CHAPTER III

### ARCHETYPES

I am archiving my process throughout this time of internal discovery by creating objects that become symbols of creativity and closeness. In the summer between the first and second year of the graduate program our group traveled to Mexico City. I saw vendors who were up early each morning to build their displays and organize their wares. And each night they tied down, wrapped and packed up to make ready for the next day. I began to see this construction as a daily act, a routine, and a ritual.

Integral to these stalls were the stools being used for setting up. It was here that I started to see the stool as a universal, humble object representing the support needed to reach for something that I couldn't get to on my own. Found in variation all over the world a stool is a humble object, usually low to the earth and tucked away. Through sitting or climbing, a stool allows for new perspective. Stools are portable, and can be taken along easily. They allow us to sit and reflect alone or together. Stools help get the job done!

I began creating variations of human sized stools—a rocking stool, a dovetailed orange step stool, a circular cushioned stool that appears as if coming directly out the wall, a woven stool of wrapped braids, a folding canvas stool, a golden stool, a repaired

stool (see Figure 1). This family of stools lives together holding a place for ancestors and creating a reminder to sit, visualize and go into that inner space for support.



Figure 1. Weatherspoon Installation with Variety of Stools.

Unlike the low step stools or sitting stools, I created a large 6ft by 6ft emerald green canopied stool, open on all sides and standing on softly hewn, strong but strangely

angled wooden legs. Stepping in, those interacting with the work needed to bend slightly and get close in order to fill the space, bringing them together to look up and through to see a green kinked woven top that bowed upward and buoyant. This stool is an energetic shelter, an open yet contained space that signifies both a destination and a passage.

Laying on the floor and almost touching this structure was a canvas 9ft by 6ft weaving drawn in colorful vertical and horizontal lines of burnt sienna, turquoise, mauve, cherry red, canary yellow, gray, royal blue, dusty pink, white, brown, and aqua. The woven qualities embedded within these two pieces symbolize the intersectionality and connection that I have to the divine and to others. The woven quality of this piece is also incorporated into other sculptures and drawings as a way to speak to the unified creativity present in my relationships to the divine, myself, and others. There is a warp and a weft that holds all of these pieces together.

In her show “Simone Leigh’s Majestic and Towering Black Figures,” artist Simone Leigh uses ceramic sculpted bodies to represent archetypes of home, vessel, and family. She is “...drawn in by an abundance of syncretic forms, with their transformative [recombinations] of mythic and foundational iconography” (Henderson). Leigh works with themes of

...womanhood, black feminism, theories of intersectionality, her connection to the African diaspora and many more. Leigh conveys these concepts through her use of simply put, elegant ceramic based forms that recount cultural histories and archetypal narratives surrounding Black Feminism and the black woman’s experience.

Although our themes vary, similarly to Leigh, am interested in using object-based archetypes to recount my experience of an inner space where narratives of holding, lineage, childhood and internal resource are exposed and explored. I am creating a scene for these themes to exist together.

In adding to the abundance of symbolic objects that I am working with, I continued by thinking of rafts as a symbol for buoyant support that originates from the unconscious and is connected to water and to feeling. I built a light-weight rectangular, stuffed fabric raft; resting on this raft was another stuffed form, an oval with two soft rounded points at each end, seed like and closed except for an open doorway in the center. The forms were separate entities and yet were connected and held each other. I enjoyed thinking about the idea of parent and child as one form in the same. I also consider this a union of forms that represent the connection that I have with the divine.

There was one particular occasion that I needed support unfolding a large piece of canvas and asked my classmates to help me. I could have physically unfolded the material and yet needed their attention to get it done. Once outside and unfurled, I asked my classmates to draw on the surface with chalk pastels. Our bodies overlapped, bodies were traced, a map was made, and abstract forms accrued as we navigated each other. I found great joy in the physical closeness of stretching over and around my classmates.

I later took this marked canvas and with other fabrics I incorporated it into a large 8ft by 8ft floor raft stuffed with cut foam. This large raft came to represent our deep need for one another. This was a raft big enough for multiple people, symbolic of the idea that

we are in this world together and need each other in what ever unknown we are venturing into. As part of my thesis show “Finding Another Way to Hold,” I asked participants to “Find a place on the raft. And find someone to trace around your body with a marker.” This prompted people to get physically close to one another. The evidence of their interaction lasts in the visible network of tracings where bodies overlapped (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Greensboro Project Space Installation—People Tracing Each Other on Raft.

In the object language that I am developing, jewels are treasures, used to symbolize the basic zest, goodness, and creativity that are the building blocks of our humanness. The resin jewels I have created are shaped as circle/cone, rectangle/cube,

and triangle/pyramid. They are symbols of some of the basic building blocks that shape our natural world (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. Greensboro Project Space Installation—Treasures and Stool.

Jewels also appear as primary shapes in the drawings and build off of one another to form complex structures. I am using these sculptural treasures to symbolize the ideas

that we have, much like asking people how they might imagine using three objects together to tell a story; they are building a complex world with their creative imaginations. Through visualization, I have discovered by own resource and have been more able to see other people as treasures through time spent in the inner space of meditation/visualization, which allows me to better reach for them and stay connected. I am using the stool, raft, and jewel as a metaphor for the often-unseen daily support from the divine, from myself, and from others through the practice of visualization.

## CHAPTER IV

### MATERIAL PROCESS

Kinks in the wiring, worn, humble, layered, built; these sculptures embody a sense of touch and a worked care that speaks to my interest in building and repair as metaphor for self-care, closeness, and healing places of emotional distress. The work is not perfect and not always precisely crafted because there is an innate beauty in our imperfections. From another time, a primordial place, straddling the past and present, this work invites us to recount a time of deep connection and closeness.

I value time spent working alone and with others. I've asked for help in making various wooden stools that have required technical skills. I've learned to draw and talk out ideas with others, which becomes a kind of story telling and exchange of ideas. The studio becomes an extension of this inner space of imagination. I am usually alone in the studio and surrounded by handmade objects that can be used to represent the exploration of my unconscious. In installations made outside of the studio, groups of objects are also used to mimic the inner space found in meditation, taking the form of stations or areas of a home where one finds exactly what they need. This inner space has been a place of self care and repair where I find and visualize support from the divine, self, or others.

I place stools in different locations around the room, representing the varied forms of support that we encounter along our path. I place items high up and low to the ground

as a way to encourage the viewer to search and view with new perspective. I use color as a symbol for life force energy, infusing the work with both neutrals and saturated colors that let the dynamic quality of colors shine. I use colors from my childhood, colors found in my travels to Cape Town, South Africa and Mexico City, Mexico and colors that mimic the natural world.

When I first began practicing meditation for 20 minutes before working in the studio, I made automatic drawings with my non-dominant hand and found a joy here, which I do not fully understand. The drawings are often bilaterally symmetrical and depict two or more forms interacting from the center moving outward. Although symmetrical there are variations and slight differences between the forms that again point back to the beauty of imperfection and the idea of being part of something like you but not exactly you. Previous drawings include symmetrical abstracted forms and yet the recent body of work has evolved with the addition of color from materials such as gouache, parker, graphite, acrylic, and pigment (see Figure 4). The drawings fit together, each piece has a place, and yet the image looks like it is capable of change.

While painting the wooden frame of the large woven stool, I also worked with my non-dominant hand. I took up the bowl of bright emerald green paint and held it in my right hand while picking up the brush with my left non-dominant hand. There was something so thrilling about filling in gaps and touching up with the green paint—similarly to the drawings, there is something about holding the brush and making marks with the left hand, a certain kind of giddy joy that is so odd. Is there a connection

between this lack of dominance or control and pleasure? Is this joy in some way related to the primordial? This kind of touch is embedded into all of the work and reveals a sacred space, one that mirrors the time spent in meditation and the joy found with other people. This work creates space where there is delight, comfort, discovery, and healing.



Figure 4. Non-dominant Hand Drawing.

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