

**The Quiet Stir of Circumstance**  
**MFA Thesis**  
**Alex Ferrante**  
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## Introduction

The desire to still time, at once enduring and momentary, is the concern of my thesis work entitled *The Quiet Stir of Circumstance*. I am interested in experiencing and capturing unmemorable objects and occurrences to contain and mark passing moments. It is in the everyday that the memory of a single instance - to touch, to hold, to release - becomes the tempo at which both making and living counter conclusiveness.

My choice of objects and material contain the impulse to be remembered. Clay is a material with this capacity, compressing process and time into a singular enduring moment. Objects that threaten to decay or go unnoticed, found in close relation to the table or sites associated with making, are constructed from clay through the attentive process of touching and seeing. The act of touching wet clay, so often connected to the memory of a singular moment, instead becomes the desire to retain clay's malleability, an act of suspending time. The overlooked become clear and present; reflecting the everyday back at us, although at a different pitch. These objects are playfully composed, as if scattered through a thinking mind, escaping clear beginnings or conclusions.

I am interested in creating sculptures that feel like they oppose the passage of time. It is through color, surface, craft and composition that I want the sculptures to slowly reveal and reward the act of looking and a feeling of stillness for a viewer; my initial feelings and experience in the cultivation of the piece itself.



## Context – Perpetual Viewership of the Familiar

A thread running through my work is the belief that objects, and sites become so familiar that they go unnoticed. Routine is the tempo in which we experience familiar objects, and it measures the abrasion of time. Familiarity intimates closeness, the kind of knowing that grows by common occurrence and shared experience. Yet, it is the inevitable future of the familiar as it enters the realm of routine to become invisible. This is demonstrated in the making of a meal that disappears through consumption and the washing of dishes, or the practiced making of a form whose process becomes unconscious through a deep understanding of material.

While having a conversation with a friend about how the visibility of process can become an entrance point for a viewer of an art work, the example of Rachel Whiteread's concrete sculpture *House* came up as an example of invisible process. The process of *House* exists within a vernacular, the trade of concreting. The friend then told a short story of a family member who was a concrete worker by profession, quoting the family member – if he did the work well no one would notice the work at all. I felt this was such a powerful statement about the condition of craft. Within the meaning of *House*, to make visible and permanent the interior space of a home and the historical space of craft, becomes embedded in the process of its making. The process of casting concrete is seemingly inaccessible and because of its specificity becomes invisible. It is literally supportive, bearing the weight of the structure that sits atop it. A relationship between supportive materials, processes and visibility informs my choice of objects and one of the conditions that I bring attention too.

In my work, the appearance of the erosion of time makes clear a perpetual viewership of the familiar, a viewership that is deeply embedded with notions of power in relationships between supportive materials, processes, and visibility.

## Still-life and Clay

In *Looking at the Overlooked*, Norman Bryson argues that still-life painting and the landscape of the table respectively are “a piece of our basic cultural furniture”. (Looking at the Overlooked pg8) Still-life painting, or what is now considered as still life, existed even prior to its art historical classification as such. Before the term still-life there was *xenia* -- a generous offering from host to guest, *still-stehende* -- meaning to stand still and *nature repose* -- meaning resting nature. (Looking at the overlooked pg17) I bring this up to say that still-life exists historically and culturally in a way that feels geological, and the things of the table form a cultural memory. Still-life encompasses many frameworks. They act as depictions of objects meant to accompany their owner into death, an eternal time. Or offered a way to grapple with tension between luxury and necessity that accompanied the expansion of cultural borders and describe the ephemeral qualities of material objects.

There is no doubt that the image of still-life is familiar, but what about the subject of still-life? I understand the subject of still-life as the life of materials, objects, and depictions that live for far longer than a lifetime. The representations of the objects of still-life are permanent. The concept that an object is not attached to the same register of time as we experience is not unfamiliar. Memorials, monuments and heirlooms are all examples of the way one can understand a relationship between objects, material and time. I understand an objects relation to time as something that remembers, and I am interested in objects that evade a clear beginning or end. Rather than an elevation in status of the objects the thesis work reflects the memory of the condition of less-than in which the objects exists to make a viewer conscious of the positioning of the status of the everyday. I want to confront a viewer with a history of overlooking, rather

than to evade it. Yet, the unchanging images of still-life have a peculiar relationship to time, in that they often depict the living. Food, flowers, flame -- all are abundantly present in still-life. These paintings are sometimes referred to as *nature morte*, meaning dead nature, in the sense that the living death represented in these images is eternal. The depictions in still-life are eternally living and blossoming. My interest in still-life is the persistence of life. It is as if the objects of still-life are moving slowly, revitalizing themselves in that register of time that we cannot see. When viewing still-life, I become still to try and match the slow pace of the objects and catch them in a moment of vulnerability, revealing the exhale of their breath. It is in the stillness of my body brought on by the permanence of still-life that the idea of time becomes present.

Still-life and clay both share a connection to the body. Clay is often experienced in relation to the body, such as in the case of a ceramic plate, the vehicle for the consumption of food, or the relation of a cup to the shape of the hand visible in the evolution of a vessel to a handled vessel. Clay always exists at arm's length, to be grabbed, held, poured and filled. Still-life painting pushes outward into our space signifying the meeting of our bodies and depicted objects. In contrast to the traditional notion of painting as a window receding into a fictionalized space, clay and still life both impress themselves upon us presenting us with questions about our relationship to the permanence of common objects around us. The belief that still-life is perpetually living, and the relation of this eternal life to the body and clay, precede the questions I have asked myself in this work. What does it mean to remember? How can betweenness contend with the persistence of time?

## **The Body**

Clay is connected to the body; both the body and clay are arguably defined by their relationship to interiority the ability to contain and be contained. In this context, I define body as the body of the maker, a thing that holds knowledge through making. Using the premise that clay is connected to the body, I want to link how the body has helped to define interiority, something so intrinsic to the material of clay.

In making this work I was asking how interiority can be a signifier of containment. What is it that interiority contains and why do I use the word contain? The language used to describe interiority as a container, implies utility even if it is meant metaphorically. Utility in the realm of the interior points at a user and often a particular use. In the realm of interiority these uses are often of the body - to sit in a chair, to drink from a cup, to stir with a wooden spoon. For me, interiority contains knowing with the body, through touching the material world.

It is with this thought of a relationship between interiority and the body that language such as container starts to become charged. In this context, containment, to exist in the interior, clearly separates and confines the private space from the world outside of it. The separation of interior and exterior becomes a separation between the particularity of use with the body, and the world beyond of more general ideas and uses. Interiority then becomes a site that contains traces of the body. The largest bouquet is a monument to interiority, the bouquet is an object that exists inside. On its surface is glazed with a dark copper glaze that breaks with small moments of bright blue. The form of the bouquet is architectural, it is a structure which gives visibility to interior form. The bouquet become column-esque monument made as a powerful support of the interior, taken from outside of itself and contained. The liquidity of the glazed surface feels as if it has been washed by weather and time, reclaiming its vibrancy.

## **Craft**

The role of craft in my practice concerns both the crafting of a thing and the theoretical perspective of the crafting of a thing. My feelings around craft are complex. I feel both critical and appreciative of it. Like many ideas, craft feels both expansive and limiting. It is expansive in its ability to reimagine the material world and contained by its historical position of less-than in relation to art making. I am most interested in the act of craft rather than the idea of craft. The idea of craft manifests itself in a way that prioritizes the makers perspective of craft on the material, the mark is contingent on the maker. Whereas the act of craft allows for the material to bring content and inform the work. The idea of craft tells, and the act of craft listens. The act of craft is concerned with intrinsic properties, material agency and is a reciprocal kind of making between artist and material.

In defining the act and the idea of craft I have created a binary that parallels dualistic tendencies of craft as a practice of the body and art as a practice of the mind, a dualism that has collapsed. Yet I feel that in the collapse of mind and body, craft and art have not become equal in the value of their meanings. Rather, the collapsing of mind and body has just forced craft to again reshape, and craft maintains its other-ness only in new form. Craft then becomes a gentrified version of itself. In this version one does not have to be concerned by thinking through, or with the history of craft. By ignoring the history of craft, it becomes further erased, and further displaced. In this gentrified version of craft, material becomes a transparent vehicle and loses its identity. So, while the collapsing of mind and body, a dualism used to shape and contain the value and viewership of craft as something that is less-than has come and gone, craft still exists at the margins. In defining two notions of craft, one that tells and one that listens, I am purposely recalling the dualism of mind and body as a way of calling attention to the shape

shifting power that still contain craft. When making my work I exist in a state of betweenness and move between the idea of craft and the act of craft. I move between telling and listening, but I try to do so in a way that recalls and accounts for the increasing invisibility of craft.

When experiencing spaces such as cathedrals, historical altarpieces and vessels I am taken by the varying notions of craft. I have felt guilty about this, that I wasn't bringing enough of a critical eye to the centralized and oppressive power that skill can signify and that the context of the museum has shifted my perspective of these objects and spaces.

However, I cannot help but feel power in craft. That the act of craft, as the intellect of making, can create something that is not contingent on its maker for agency, that it has its own identity in the world. Yet, craft has often been contextualized as the how-to rather than the how-so. My aspirations toward the action of craft in order to make an object that is not contingent on me, expresses itself in the work in various ways. It expresses itself through the concealing and revealing of the hand, the quick and often thin layers of glaze, the crafting of plinths, the choice of objects, and perhaps even in the arrangement of objects themselves. The class of objects in my work are of the everyday, related to still-life and are objects that exist of a collective consciousness. The idea of collective consciousness reaches throughout history and the objects have a grounding that reaches across my current experience in time. The act of craft is to try and know through the qualities of a material.

The history of art and craft, which exist closer to a Venn diagram than opposing notions, is very much alive. The works exhibited at major art events feel as if it is a simplification of notions of craft. In that the works generally deal with the idea of craft rather than the act of craft. Whether a work has been made through the practice of the body or through those of the mind, becomes a dichotomy that has been used to position the value of makers and the meaning of

made things. This distinction contributes to the way artists working in craft materials position themselves.

Joshua Reynolds, of the Royal Academy, wrote disparagingly of still-life and its relation to material skill, a marking of craft, saying, “for these petty excellences (of colour) are here essential beauties; and without their merit the artist’s work will be more short lived than the object of his imitation”.<sup>1</sup> (illus.1) Reynolds is joking that skill and materiality are both the essence of flower paintings and their disqualification from artistic greatness. More than a century later, as Rosalind Krauss said, “Ceramics speaks to that branch of culture which is too homey, too functional, too archaic for the name of ‘sculpture’ to extend to it”.<sup>2</sup> These two quotes are not meant to be reflective of the contemporary state of clay, but part of the history of craft in which clay exists. Sensuous materiality, and a relation to the home, are aspects of both clay and still-life that connect to craft.

In my work I am restating, and reclaiming, craft as a rigorous way of considering how the consequence of relations between value assigned to the meaning of materials, histories and objects condition how and what we see. The thesis work made with sensuous detail, and the attentive construction of commonplace objects becomes the reclaiming of craft, and a subversion of crafts disappearance. The idea of craft as still visible, and in turn the endurance of craft is in the works powerful ability to stand in for the real.

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<sup>1</sup> Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting*, (London: Reaktion, 1990), 176.

<sup>2</sup> Glenn Adamson, *Thinking through Craft*, (London: Berg Publishers, 2007), 47.



Illustration 1. Bouquet washed of color from *The Quiet Stir of Circumstance*

Glazed ceramic and unprimed linen, 2018



## **Process -- Reciprocal Making**

In this section I will address the way made-ness embeds an artwork with meaning. It is important to me that my process remains tentative, sensitive and reciprocal, always talking back. I am always evaluating why and how I want to make. Made-ness can be thought of as the qualities of making that either reveal or conceal their process. An example is a tool mark left uncovered by the thinness of a glaze, or the seam of a coil-built pot scrapped away and smoothed over by a clay slip. In my work made-ness is the contemplation of time. Such as the way clay documents its process, the quotation of objects as timeless, and how made-ness can slow down the process of looking and compel a viewer to become conscious of how they see.

## **Character of the Material**

It is the character of clay's materiality to remember and record. This idea of memory is visible in many ways. In the literal sense, a fingerprint can be left on the surface of clay. However, the character of a material encompasses not only the physical qualities of the material but what those physical qualities might signify. For clay the physical qualities might signify the ability to form and be formed through a reciprocal touch. Or a ceramic vessel's memory of the size of the hands and body of the person who made it. What is it that we recognize? The process? The form? The material?

In my thesis work clay acts as a material that collapses the space between me and an object as something other than myself. I utilize process as a way of untangling the caste-off state of everyday objects and craft. By directing my looking at a class of the everyday and recording it in clay I am questioning and reflecting how these objects are seen. Tim Ingold writes in his book *Making, Anthropology, Archeology, Art and Architecture*, "the verb 'to tell' has two related senses. On one hand a person who can tell is able to recount the stories of the world. On the other

hand, to tell is to be able to recognize subtle cues in one's environment and to respond to them with judgement and precision.”<sup>3</sup> The objects I make go beyond the representation, capturing and questioning if when looking at an object we recognize the identity that the form holds. The objects in my thesis work are in a state of recollected beauty, between familiar and unfamiliar, rigorously cared for but hovering close to the ground and washed of color, fading into a present imperceptibility.

The material agency of clay exists in its ability to hold the memory of its making. In my process I want clay to remember its history in making. Examples of this are, the impression of a canvas topped work table in a slab of clay, the scored mark of a dull tool tearing wet clay, a chipped mark caused by the accidental drop of a tool onto a dried piece of clay, the struggle for symmetry in a piece made without the use of a pottery wheel, or a thinly mixed glaze applied to a piece of clay too slender to absorb it resulting in an uneven surface revealing the clay below. I want a subtle struggle in my that intense periods of looking denotes. This struggle secures the feeling of uncertainty, as what I thought I saw looking at the actual objects fades once I look again and realize it to be false.

## **Touch and Factura**

Touch is not just the process by which an artwork gets made but it is also embedded with meaning and conceptual intentions. Touch is to tell with the hand. Each of us find the way we are best suited to hold a pen and the writing of a word not only describes our thoughts, but the script of our handwriting describes each of us. The reading of a handwritten passage can change our

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<sup>3</sup> Timothy Ingold, *Making, Anthropology, Archeology, Art and Architecture*, (London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2013), 109-110).

perspective through both its linguistic and material meanings. Thus, the writing of a word not only describes what it is in our mind but the flow and process of our body. Reading a handwritten passage has the ability to change our perspective beyond the meaning that exists in its language. The relationship between the hand's ability to make what it is in our mind, and the made's ability to influence the hand describes an intimate linking of mind and body. The collapsing of the mind and body is the circumstance of betweenness in which craft exists and the circumstance that my thesis work depicts. In my work, touch extends to describe the narrative of an objects history and meaning in the objects is found in their material qualities. For example, a leaf made from unglazed terracotta, brittle, porous and dried on the surface. The use of iron, a material that melts, describes the burnt wick of candles. Bones are covered in a calcium glaze. A ceramic rolling pin is made and used while wet, picking up dry pieces of debris left on a table. Touch becomes the desire to see, to know an object through the qualities of clay and to be attentive to the things unnoticed – to find and make them beautiful and meaningful.

In the making of a thing, *factura* “reveals both the material and the maker simultaneously”.<sup>4</sup> While *factura* is always present in things made, whether it is explicitly considered or not, it guides my technique. In making a slab out of clay the application of downward pressure, embeds the imprint of my canvas work table and the lower part of my palm on opposing sides of the clay. The slab simultaneously reveals itself and clay's intrinsic ability to document touch. The rolling of a slab of clay and the compression of its surface results in a less explicitly revealed notion of *factura*. One that implies absence in the direct application of the

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<sup>4</sup> Glenn Adamson, 95.

hand to material. There are many ways the material of clay can be imbued with different meanings and made-ness.

I use factura as a structure to reflect on the everyday condition of objects. Touch is a way of attending to these objects that moves between elevation and erasure. An example from my work is the handling of vessels. The coil-built vessel, pinched and moved upward in its shaping, is scraped down until the seams of its construction are no longer visible. It is then covered in a thin layer of clay slip that has been sieved of any varying sized particles. Leaving the surface of the vessel closer to that of pot thrown on the wheel or a pot that has been cast. The vessel becomes one of many, achieving the status of commonplace. Yet, often emerging from these vessels are bouquets of individually crafted flowers, made to show their making. They are heavy handed in their mimicry of nature, shaped to make the viewer conscious of the creative act.

(illus. 2)



Illustration 2. Bouquet in the form of a sphere, making the natural unnatural from *The Quiet Stir of Circumstance*

Glazed ceramic and unprimed linen, 2018

Factura is a way for struggle to reveal itself in the work. It reveals both my struggle in crafting a work and the struggle of mimicry. It is a conversation between myself and the material. In the previous example, the surface of a ceramic pot smoothed with a slip signifies a pot thrown or cast. Yet, because it is constructed by hand, it will never fully mimic the rounded form of a thrown or cast vessel. I am purposefully making this object without a pottery wheel, to imbue it with the sense of struggle that speaks of its making. It is the result of the hand and material agency, as much as, skill and instrument. One side of the vessel does not follow the contour of the other. This subtle tension between surface and form creates endlessly producible replicas and unrepeatable mishaps. Through the lenses of factura, I move between skill, technique, and the desire to create something that in the end retains its own power.

This power has the ability to hold our gaze as objects made fluctuate in a state between representation, and real. The objects are real in the sense that a made object contains the observation of the viewing of the object. The objects then hold an identity transcribed into another material through the observation of process, and a consciousness of the affects of circumstance on seeing. The power of factura is in the evidence of human struggle in understanding one's own relation to the world beyond them.

Factura is making as a conversation between an object, myself, and material. In this conversation I want to feel an object's place in the world, to know how and where it comes from. I want to know an object so well that something unexpected appears in it. Something that I cannot reveal through endless questioning, but only through close attention. I want to give these objects the opportunity to become something more expansive than my own intentions. To learn something new through what the work reveals.

## Objects

Still-life, the landscape of the table, and clay objects all share a relationship to the body. They have a familiar existence in routine and common occurrence. However, when observing I am always looking, or more accurately feeling, for the moment in which I can locate the unfamiliar in the objects and pictures of the everyday. For example, bouquet paintings with the blooms and foliage stacked high upon a meticulously crafted vessel. These bouquets are simultaneously tethered and floating away, only contained by the encroaching edge of a canvas. Depictions of nutritional and abundant vegetables, isolated from the world, in a place where “food enters through the eye but must not pass through touch or taste” (looking at the overlooked pg.89).

Consciousness of the parallel life’s objects can lead within still-life and the everyday brings forth a feeling of unfamiliarity. I hope to embed my work with this sense of unfamiliarity and communicate this feeling in my artwork, to ask the question how the conditions of the everyday relate to unfamiliarity and affect how we remember? Objects of the everyday, often take hold of my thinking because they appear unmemorable through commonality. I desire to create a space where the unmemorable can become remembered as a way to give voice to objects unheard. To know forgettable objects through the process of looking and listening. These objects are linked by both visibility and placement, I often find myself looking down to varying degrees when encountering them. The spatial positioning of downward looking is something that informs the composition of my work which sits low to the ground and is another example of how the observation of viewership in the process of making informs my work. In my thesis work, the landscape of the table maps the interior and exterior life of objects in relation to their identity and how their identity shifts a viewing of them. The made objects sit beneath a viewer in a literal act of overlooking. By lovingly attending to the made objects, and simultaneously exhibiting them

beneath a viewer, the largest table work becomes a reverberation of the way constructed status can make a thing invisible. The horizon of the table sits low and in terms of perspectival distance singles a closeness of the landscape to the viewer, reiterating my belief that it is the things closest to us that we see, and know, the least.

During my process a narrative is formed. In making the thesis work the narrative evolved into the preparation, presentation, and consuming of a meal. This narrative directs the choice of objects and takes on my relationship to the objects in the process of making them in the form of factura. The narrative of making parallels the life of everyday objects, in the sense that the psychology of the process of making must be attended to in order to be made visible. One narrative that can be drawn from the objects in the largest piece in my thesis work is the feeling of urgency that signifies a hurried exit. The book is left open atop the table, the cloth thrown and wrinkled, and a melon is cut but still ripe. (illus. 3) (illus. 4) The urgent exit recalls a narrative of expulsion and the loss of innocence, a realization of difference. This notion of difference in the work is defined by the value of histories such as, still-life and the everyday, and in meanings such as, domestic, formal beauty, and utility that have contained and excluded craft. The hurried exit demonstrated in the largest work points toward the works on the shelves all of which claim, and in doing so subvert, these notions as detrimental to the meaning of craft.

In the process of making a specific thing, for example a rolling pin, the object begins to signify other objects. What does a rolling pin do? What does it make? How is it used? How is it held? This experience of thinking through each object becomes intuitive, and my questions surrounding one object leads to the making of the next one.



*Illustration 3. Open book from The Quiet Stir of Circumstance*

Glazed ceramic and unprimed linen, 2018



Illustration 4. Winkled and thrown cloth from *The Quiet Stir of Circumstance*

Glazed ceramic and unprimed linen, 2018



## **Description of Works – Urgency, the Infinite and the Momentary**

Betweenness is the enveloping feeling that stimulates my thinking and work. I believe betweenness is a virtue. Betweenness could be defined in my practice as being conscious of my decision-making process and trusting in the work and in my hands. To be able to work with your hands and with your mind. To feel critical and compelled. Betweenness is an embodiment of division. It is the desire to inhabit a space of both-and rather than either-or. This is embodied in the site of the table, and in the composition, which has the status of one interrelation among many. In the fashion of betweenness, I believe uncertainty is a powerful and generative position that allows for subtle shifts of experience to be more present. What stems from uncertainty is curiosity, desire, open-endedness and a perpetual brawl with finality. This apprehensiveness of finality is something that the site of the table inhabits and investigates.

While the object of the table is permanent, the table-top is a site of impermanence. As a site, the table encounters meals being prepared, presented and consumed. As a material, food is transformed from parts, to whole, to parts. Conversations start at the table, ideas shift, and conversations continue elsewhere. Objects are sat down atop the table but do not have a permanent place. Even in the most formal of dinner arrangements, the composition of objects may shift according to circumstance. The topology of the table is always in motion, in opposition to the object of the table. The table is a metaphor for my experiences of making and being made, the process of crafting an artwork. In a larger sense, this extends to the reality of momentary experience in a lasting world. In my thesis work the table becomes the frame, a stand in for the construction of narrative and unadulterated experience.

The largest of all the works in my thesis exhibition is situated at fifteen inches, floating between the viewer, the height of a table, and the ground. (illus. 5) The viewer must hover over

the work, in the same way the work hovers over the ground. Atop the work the objects are composed as if they have been scattered through a thinking mind. A mind, and composition that balances foundness and the creation of new relationships between objects. For example, a plate of oysters fixed permanently in clay becomes surrounded by bones, shells and lemon peels, the evidence of an event that has passed. Objects whole and taken apart, the index of consumption. Positioning these objects close to one another is an act of doing and undoing which points at the transitory state of the table-top.



Illustration 5. Table top installation from *The Quiet Stir of Circumstance*

Glazed ceramic and unprimed linen, 2018

The works on the wall are confined icons of still-life. They are contained by an historical dichotomy that positions them as things concerned with “low plane reality”. (illus. 6) (illus. 7) The works on the wall are separated from the objects next to them and defined by the borders of the shelf they sit on. The shelves are both anchored to the wall and protrude outward in another

act of hovering, existing in the space of flatness and the space of sculpture. They are meant to be singular autonomous moments depicting the shared space of the commonplace, somehow removed from its site.



Illustration 6. Shelf installation from *The Quiet Stir of Circumstance*

Glazed ceramic and unprimed linen, 2018



Illustration 7. Detail of peaches from shelf installation of *The Quiet Stir of Circumstance*

Glazed ceramic and unprimed linen, 2018

The difference in presentation proposes different notions of viewing. The viewer must move around the large floor work, looking over and underneath it. Objects are hidden behind and inside of others. The floor work's composition depicts a space that is comprised of many moments. We can imagine these objects having their own private lives, rearranging and reanimating themselves into endless narrative formations. The lights are turned on and each cease to move fearful of letting the audience know that they are very much alive. The works on the wall are subtler, more constrained in their making. These icons of still-life are forced to live out the remainder of their life alone, isolated in their own elevation. Their relationship to the wall embeds the viewer with the possibility of long periods of looking and contemplating. They have

the feeling of inevitable finality, not of the object but of the viewer, by asking one to be still while looking.

## **Time**

The permanence of still-life is a constant marker in which time can be measured against. The everyday object becomes the actor that enters and exits a circular stage of consciousness. It is a constant reminder that time is conclusive. Time holds tension between the infinite and the moment, it is this sense of openness and finality that I find so compelling about still-life and the act of making. As the water leaves a piece of wet clay I must imprint with more force and cut the clay using less pressure, to avoid breaking the edge of clay. I spray and wet clay with slip and water to extend its workable life. Each time a piece dries and its workability evaporates, I must contend with the finality of the material. The ability to imprint and to mark lets me know the piece is still living, that there is still a chance for change. If the clay is wet I do not have to know the piece as a fixed thing. Touch is getting to know an object and is a way to suspend time.

Working in clay, time is persistently apparent. Clay is a material that documents and compresses the time of making. From the mixing of powdered materials to form clay, to the making and molding of a form, to the application of glaze – these moments become fixed as clay is fired to become ceramic. Time also exists in clay through the process of touch, to try and know a thing through the hand. When I observe objects in order to make them, my vision moves over the form's surface. This act of looking is akin to touch. Touch translates observation into material, arresting it to allow for a reciprocal conversation between the act of looking and the act of making to unfold.

In my thesis work the suspension of time is imbedded in the addition of flowers in the bouquets as an act of touch, and long periods of looking and forming leading to the creation of

my clay objects with a feeling of human struggle. Another example is apples literally suspended in the act of falling, and the feeling of floating in both the largest work and in the floating shelves. (illus. 8.) The color palate, and historical objects, become the erosion of time and bring forth a perpetual, and repetitive notion of viewership conditioned by the unchanging yet shapeshifting status of common place.

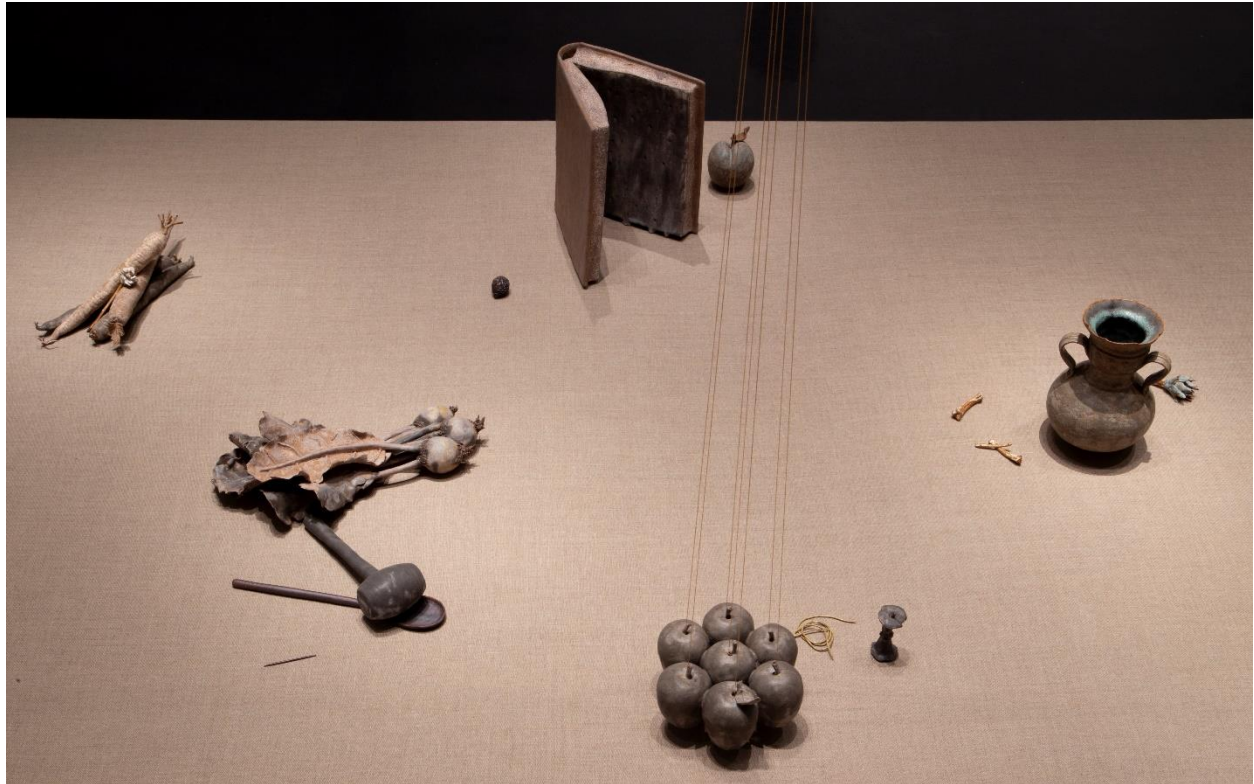


Illustration 8. Suspended apples from *The Quiet Stir of Circumstance*

Glazed ceramic and unprimed linen, 2018

## Color

Color functions in the work as a reflection of circumstance. A moment I like to consider is from a book called *One, None and a Hundred Thousand* by Luigi Pirandello where the text describes a character who has recently become aware that his nose appears to others in a way that he had never considered it, crooked to the left. While walking downtown he quickly catches a reflection

out of the corner of his eye in which he sees others passing by him. “This impression had not lasted more than a second when that lull promptly occurred, spontaneity disappeared, and self-consciousness set in. I did not recognize myself at first. The impression was that of a stranger walking down the street engaged in conversation. I came to a halt.”<sup>5</sup>

In my work color becomes a way to mask and slow the visual moment of recognizing and understanding relationships between objects. Viewing the thesis work from a distance the color scheme first appears to be monochromatic, beige and grey objects sitting atop a beige plinth and shelves. (illus. 9.) It is easily consumable, easy to overlook. The objects are contained in a space that is unseen, lacking the visibility which light provides and is so necessary to perceiving color. When the work is approached, the monochromatic scheme becomes skewed with warm and cool tones. The relationships between foreground and background, living and dead, become complicated and the overall feeling is one of slow and constant veiling and unveiling of color

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<sup>5</sup> Luigi Pirandello, *One, None and a Hundred Thousand*, (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1933), 28.

through the rhythm of seeing.



Illustration 9. Installation of *The Quiet Stir of Circumstance*

Glazed ceramic and unprimed linen, 2018

The color pallet of my thesis work expresses a sense of frozen time by referencing sepia photography. The ceramic objects are embedded with a grainy and dotted surface through the inclusion of granular materials in the glaze. (illus. 10) This grainy surface alludes to the mark of a charcoal, graphite, or chalk drawing instrument being pulled across a heavy weight paper. The marks made by these materials are often dotted with moments of vividness as the surface of the paper is subtly uneven, causing the high points of the paper to receive more pigment. In relation to painting, the notion of drawing becomes structure on which the painting is built up upon. The

objects in my thesis work then sit in a state of betweenness, as the skeletal remains of a painting fading, and as the promise of a picture to come. The work becomes fixed in an unfinished circumstance. This unfinished circumstance becomes the endless state of displacement in which craft as clay, still-life, and the everyday exist.

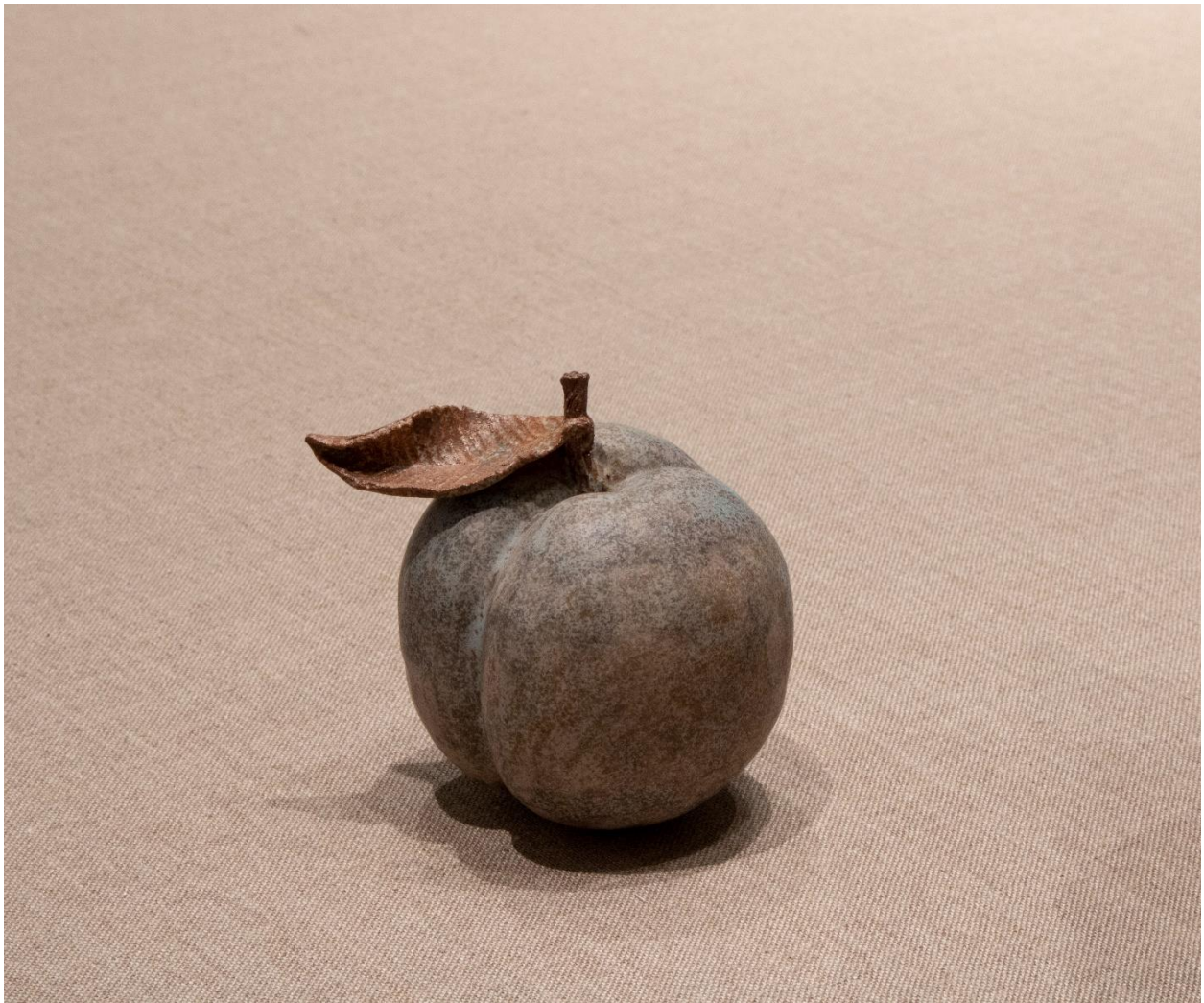


Illustration 10. Example of the grainy surface of the glaze from *The Quiet Stir of Circumstance*

Glazed ceramic and unprimed linen, 2018

## **To Know**

I desire to know myself in relation to the history of craft through the making of everyday objects. When clay is fired, and the water is removed, it no longer has the volume it had while wet. The clay feels flat, without the depth of surface that the wet clay contains. It feels as if it is between materials, hiding from its identity masked in a loud, even shade of orange. The material will never contain volume in the same way as it did. Once glazed ceramic, the qualities make it new again.

The ceramic work feels thin, evaporated and shrunk. It makes me feel tension in my own body, a sense of tightness. The ceramic object feels somehow more transparent than before it was glazed. I can feel that what existed between the front surface and back surface of a piece of clay has gone. I know the glaze is squeezing the ceramic from all sides and holding tension. The changing of an object brought on by the ceramic process is simultaneously the desire to understand my everyday relation to objects, as both structural and constructed through the lens of craft in a concrete way, and the varying pace of attending to this that brings forth the feeling of uncertainty and placeless-ness.

Ceramic confronts me with complex feelings. Once fired, the glazed work is so distant from wet clay, something that is familiar through the connection of touch, that I must reacquaint myself with it. I must try and know it, not only because it is something I have made but because it is something with a new being and the power to shift my understanding of my relation to a constructed world.

In my work, the skill of seeing as a reciprocal process is my trying to know a realness about even the most mundane, and foundational objects in the world. This is a reality which

inevitably collapses, shifts and fractures, after the reveal of exhaustive looking, becoming a confirmation of variance and a unifying experience.

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