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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is a pleasure to publicly thank all those who have been here for me through this time and over the years. A career in the arts is not always an easy or traditional pursuit, but my creative interests and accomplishments are what have made my life so rich. I am grateful to those who are close to me, who have been so supportive of my decisions, and understand that they have been determined by a fundamental part of who I am. I extend this gratitude to my family, who has been unwavering in their support: to my mother, the most dependable woman I know, whose love is undying and stronger than us all; to my father, whom I am indebted to for passing along his modest stoicism, legendary work ethic and reflective nature; to my step-mother, who has been equally steadfast with her support and love; to my brother, and his partner Kathryn, who have helped so much over many years with my professional endeavors; and to my one and only sister, who has a strong and beautiful soul. I can always find myself in you, which is much more than it seems, and brings me great comfort.

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A huge thank you goes out to my peers, contemporaries, and artists both current and historical. My fellow graduate students in the School of Art have been amazing to work with, and even more amazing to get to know. You have become family, and the opportunity to work together again would be a blessing. To the artists who have been so influential: thank you for committing all of your energies to
making incredible objects and experiences that respond to and speak of our uncontrollable urges to unravel the mystery that shrouds who we are and the nature of our existence. May our purposes and intentions never be for naught.

Finally, I extend a superior thank you to Jonathan David Schwarz, my most invaluable peer, mentor, companion, and partner. You are an excellent listener and your thoughtfulness is unmatched. You have shared, taught, and sacrificed so much for the sake of my success in making this body of work true to my visions and goals. Your knowledge granted me with methods and materials that made this work outstanding; I will forever argue that without you, it would not have become what it is. And thank you for the “little things”: making breakfast and the bed, packing lunches, checking in on me, and staying later than you planned…you took days out of your life to help me, without complaint or expectations. Your generosity, encouragement, compassion, and love are unflinching. I love you, and thank you.
The rhythm of walking generates a kind of rhythm of thinking, and the passage through a landscape echoes or stimulates the passage through a series of thoughts. This creates an odd consonance between internal and external passage, one that suggests that the mind is also a landscape of sorts and that walking is one way to traverse it. A new thought often seems like a feature of the landscape that was there all along, as though thinking were traveling rather than making.¹

The initial starting point for portraying a thought as a form in the landscape of the mind was Meditation Point [Fig. 1], which I built as a demo project for my students in Ceramics I. Very simple in form, this conical piece was coil-built of clay, which I blended and smoothed before applying a white slip, which was burnished to also make smooth. This conical form came from a visualization tool I use during meditation. While meditating, it is easy for your mind to wander. As a way of refocusing, I imagine a point: a sort of white peak in front of me, on my forehead between my eyes, where one’s third eye is. During this practice, I imagine a stable, unwavering thought as a tangible form, and the gesture of this form and its peak carried over into numerous sketches, templates, and ideas on how the qualities of different thoughts could be translated into various sculptural objects.

There are specific occurrences in the mind when new ideas come to one in the form of visualization. These occurrences can be abrupt, unexpected, rewarding, and sought out. As Solnit suggests, these thoughts and visualizations can seem like features in the landscape of the mind that were there all along, perhaps recently or unexpectedly discovered. In order to translate this experience for

Body of the Landscape of the Mind, I imagined how thoughts might look as natural features, and as objects with qualities that simulated the behavior and characteristics of differing thoughts.

One other notable sculpture, and one specific guideline, also directed my approach to the works in Body in the Landscape of the Mind. A piece that was part of my candidacy review, Encounter in the Landscape [Fig. 2], served as a wellspring for several of my thesis sculptures. The mound/rock form in this piece was initially built as a base or “pedestal alternative” for the ceramic sculpture. Through numerous arrangements, observations, rearrangements, and conversations, this mound came to sit in front of the ceramic piece, which had an extremity or limb of sorts that slightly emerged out from behind the rock. While determining how to approach the surface, I conjured lasting interests in camouflage, landscape, and creature + environment. On one side of the mound, I painted the floor, floorboard and wall, thereby camouflaging it with its environment – the room. On the other side, I painted a natural landscape of a green hill, horizon and sky.

Viewers are initially confronted with a room-painted rock and only a glimpse of the curious object behind it; as one moves around to the back, the natural side becomes the background for the ceramic piece, which can then be viewed in full [Fig. 3]. Ultimately, this piece embodied my interests in discovering curious objects in nature, the environment or landscape, internal versus external, and the encounter with things that are unexpected, unpredictable, surprising and intriguing.

Encounter in the Landscape also initiated my goals to make sculptures that didn’t require pedestals. Because I restricted myself from using pedestals, I had to create spaces or environments in which my ceramic sculptures existed, using various media. As things progressed in the studio, my ceramic sculptures began to highly reference the human body. When conceptualizing the environment for these pieces, I realized they existed in the landscape of my mind, and in turn, the mindscape was what I set to create.
Statement of Recent Encounters

Works in Body in the Landscape of the Mind [Figs. 4 & 5] came to result from two primary objectives bound by one cohesive goal. The first objective was my attempt to make clay sculptures that referenced or responded to the human body. Not wanting to be overtly literal, these sculptures are abstractions and hybridizations of appendages, organs, skin, and bones. Initially a response to physical intimacy, they came to result in a more general preoccupation portraying the human body, using minimal components belonging to it.

My second objective was to turn thoughts regarding the body into tangible art objects. If thoughts and memories could take form, what would they be? How could I express them through material, scale, and technique? What would they look like, how would they feel? These ideas and memories about the body resided in my mind, which came to be their environment – and in turn, resulted in my goal to portray the body in the landscape of the mind. In perceiving the mind like a landscape, the natural world guided these manifestations of thoughts and memories, because growth, decay, and regeneration are inherent qualities of both. For some mental landscapes/environments, the forms, colors, and textures mimic those found in nature; in others, an object was removed from my actual environment, repurposed, appropriated, altered, and renewed, just as our thoughts often are or can be.

These two objectives established two components to integrate into the work: body sculptures made of clay, and landscape or environment sculptures made from other media. The gesture and peak of the conical Meditation Point was a model for how a stable and balanced thought might look in the mind: it might swell, rise, and taper off or descend; a cycle that would presumably repeat itself. This notion and gesture is consistent among the environment sculptures, which universally came to represent forming and un-forming, growth and decay, deterioration and regeneration, containment and non-containment, and states of being in flux and fluid or rigid and fixed.

Also because of my approach, many pairs, couplings, or sets resulted; this was also likely due to the recent onset of a relationship, from which many thoughts of two stemmed from, as I often reflected on eros and the interaction and relationship between entities. There was a partial long-distance component,
and I was compelled to create sculptures that served as external limbs and organs (many of which were “wearable” or embracing), or abstract fragments of a body. Physical intimacy was also at the forefront of my experiences, and there is evident sexuality in select sculptures.

The ceramic counterparts came to enhance the dualistic qualities of the environment sculptures, such as growth, decay, rebirth, containment, and fluidity. The environment sculptures are also integral to the body sculptures, in that they serve as the space in which each particular body component lives. The two are interdependent, residing and interacting as one, and contributing to the others’ interpretation, understanding, and existence. The pairs became evident, and so necessary, that one could not exist with the same meaning and understanding without the other.

Making the Body and Mental Landscape

I sourced materials that I could use to create environments that were large, relatively simple, evocative, and diverse. I wanted to uphold a certain aesthetic and retain sensitivity to the materials, so I didn’t overwork any one too much. This approach was also guided by my vision to have the environments be more unrefined, colorful, chaotic, and varied than the ceramic sculptures. I strived to make said characteristics synchronize with a sensibility that could be considered a personal aesthetic. Several postwar sculptural artists, such as Louise Bourgeois, Magdalena Abakanowicz, and Lee Bontecou also influenced my approach and goals. These artists used a diversity of materials, integrated objects from their environment, and imbued their works with both human and natural qualities. I too included found objects as a result of their existence in my environment, which aided in representing a personal

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2 In the first variation Fillette [French for ‘little girl’, by Louise Bourgeois], it hangs from the tip on a hook, which makes the castrating force of the woman’s fear and hostility explicit. In the second, the piece is held in the arms like a parcel (as the artist does in the Robert Mapplethorpe’s famous photograph), or cradled at the chest as one would a baby. In the latter orientation it achieves its fullest symbolic or existential polyvalence. Depending on whether one is male or female, child or adult, gay or straight, the danger or appeal of Fillette will be perceived differently, as will its subversive humor. Embraced in this fashion, Fillette becomes a kind of compass of gender difference for which there is no ‘true North’, a site-specific sculpture whose intended location is not a pedestal or suspended wire but another responsive body, with still others after that.
landscape and embracing the objects’ materiality. The metal structure in *Fabric Form* [Fig. 6] was a construction site remnant that I found in an outdoor work area, the original purpose for which is unknown to me. This object has two connected metal arches, one of which is underneath the fabric form. After contemplating this object for some time, I imagined one end covered with a vertical structure that rose up like a peak, mimicking its opposing form, *Meditation Point*, and a natural feature. Reconfigured, this piece strongly evokes feelings of growth, decay, renewal, and opposing forces, mirroring cycles of human thoughts and bodies, as well as the natural world.

The arched metal form that opposes the fabric one has a structural purity and references stability, yet also resembles a gravestone, mouth or doorway. The fabric form is attached to or seems to emerge from the metal arch, and mimics it as an elongated, pillar-like version. True to the landscape of the mind, the fabric form very much exudes qualities of nature: its has a stature, texture and openings like a tree trunk might, with the fabric resembling a soft bark that is peeling away from its core. The fabric pillar is tattered, with torn openings and sagging or shedding skin [Fig. 7]. The openings reveal and expose its wire structure or skeleton, as well as other openings, pins, and even a spot of blood. Influenced by the material and aesthetic choices of Magdalena Abakanowicz [Fig. 8], who revolutionized textiles from a decorative art form to a sculptural one, this piece has an eternal quality. The approach and resulting qualities can also be likened to what has been said of the wall relief sculptures of Lee Bontecou, who “reveal[s] the trace of a skeleton underneath. The effect is one of suturing, a poor woman’s sewing, a rudimentary form of attachment, devoid of inherent skill but diligently achieved nonetheless.”

The body sculptures at the base of this environment are made of white stoneware and resemble arms, bones, tusks, or some other dismembered part of the body. These conical forms also replicate the fabric form, making them appear as casts of the larger structure. This piece has an extremely feminine presence, and the notion that these white clay objects might have generated from the darker form

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3 Helen Molesworth, *Part Object Part Sculpture* (Columbus and University Park: The Wexner Center for the Arts, The Ohio State University, and The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 45.
enhances its matriarchal quality. The clay cones at its base could be interpreted as its offspring – re-born versions of their decaying yet stoic mother.

*Mound* [Figs. 9 & 10] also encompasses growth, deterioration, and mutability of form. Essentially a mound built of clay and left unfired, this environment sculpture is stable in form and substantial in weight; yet, because of the material, it was constantly in a fluid state. The form references earth and growth, and for the material, erosion was inherent. Leaving the clay mound unfired signified its eventual deterioration, just as thoughts and features in the landscape will inevitably do as well. As the clay dried in the gallery, the mound shrunk and cracked, making it a rather precarious structure in spite of its substantiality. Yet, this shrinking also led to the reparation of some stress cracks that occurred early on in the drying process. As water evaporated, the color and quality of the clay changed, just as soil would. The mound was (and has been) in a transient state of being workable, pliable, malleable, and wet; to one that was solid, dry, rigid, and fixed – all the while able to dissolve to dust or turn back into a fluid material, depending on the external elements that it encountered. The mound is simultaneously spiritual and natural, subtle and substantial, and quiet yet active. The red sand that encircled the mound was manipulated by hand to release a sense of movement, as though the feature was radiating color and energy. A metaphor for the mind and landscape, the mound is referenced in both past and present tense because its structure and existence have been altered and will continue to change, but many of its qualities remain intact.

The ceramic sculpture on top of the mound is an abstraction of the human body, equipped with what could be interpreted as three legs with three knees, two legs and a phallus, or a torso from which two arms extend outward from and down. The body sculpture is intended to mirror the lasting quality and tangibility of our physical bodies, and contrast the ever-changing cycles, stages, and manifestations that are our thoughts and minds. The aesthetic qualities of this piece were largely influenced by the work of Louise Bourgeois in her *Spider* series, as well as one of her versions of *The Blind Leading the Blind* [Fig. 11] – the latter especially regarding color and application. Bourgeois took to materials that could withstand the force and friction of her surface treatment, because “the cathartic release of Bourgeois’
pent-up imaginative drive requires physical resistance. That is why, despite her prolonged study of it, painting never really gave her what she wanted.⁴

The wall used for *Floor and Skin* [Fig. 12] had this quality of resistance. Active and expressive in style, one component of *Floor and Skin* was a site-specific painting, which was inevitably painted over. Similar to *Mound*, it is unable to return to its original state. In *Floor and Skin*, the painting was intended to be an extension and interpretation of the stripe on the floor – or an extension and interpretation of the environment, as it was for *Encounter in the Landscape*. The painted continuation extended the physical space of the floor underneath to the vertical space of the wall, which we confront in a more personal and bodily way. This extension caused the viewer to look down, up, and back down again; the viewer was also likely to be standing on the stripe (or within the environment) when they viewed its vertical counterpart. This awareness of what is beneath the body and around the body is typical of experiences in the natural world. The stripe also played with notions of space: it began in occupy-able, three-dimensional space, and emerged into two-dimensional, inaccessible space. The blurred spots on the painted stripe’s edges mimicked the floor stripe’s inconsistencies, making it contained but also without bounds. Within that un/contained environment were stoneware body sculptures, resembling internal and external components of the body: flesh, bones, spine, and genitalia, with wax rubbed into the crevices that is reminiscent of the oils of our skin [Fig. 13].

Finding the Mind in the Landscape

In the spirit of many influential postwar sculptural artists, I scavenged and repurposed detritus for the materials for the environments of *Green Limb and Bulges* [Fig. 14], *Purple Tower*, and several others. For *Green Limb and Bulges*, my intention was to portray a chaotic thought, so I deliberately used repurposed wooden scraps so as to create an untidy and imperfect structure. The jaggedness of the wooden base contrasts the very curvilinear lines of the ceramic form, which is a hyper-abstraction of the

body, with a limb that looks like a leg with two knees or heels, connecting two bulges that resemble feet, hands, testicles, or breasts. Although highly refined, it has a cartoonish, balloon-ish quality, which is underscored by a very rigid and architectural, yet precarious-looking structure. The red tape that surrounds this environment references its containment by establishing a boundary. Altogether, the environment iterates thoughts that may be wild, confused, horny, or crude beneath a very idealized form.

Found objects were also the basis for both *Cage* [Fig. 15] and *White Synapse*. For the former, the found object is a cage of sorts, equipped with a lock, but also with an open side, simultaneously iterating containment and penetrability. The cage – which is the shape of a cube – is a contained thing, and an obvious metaphor for the mind. But this particular cube also has one evident opening (the missing side), as well as many small openings, alluding to the potentially infinite space that the mind can occupy, or the ability to impose on that contained space. The white painted shape on the cage mimics the smaller openings, adding to notions of both concealment and visibility or non-containment. The painted shape also resembles light – a term often used when referencing how an idea comes to us in our minds. The lock affixed to the cage is also highly metaphorical, implying safeguarding, which we can do with cages, locks and thoughts.

The suspended body sculpture in the cage is contained and partially concealed but primarily revealed, with a smaller body sculpture that sits on top of the structure that is outside of that containment. Together, these objects speak to the internal versus external or interior versus exterior self. The pairing and placement of the two ceramic objects emphasizes their relationship, whether that relationship is one of mother and child, opposing forces, or a coupling that balances one another [Fig. 16].

For *White Synapse* [Fig. 17], the sawhorses are objects that were also discovered in my environment. I introduced and positioned painted wire to connect these objects, and appear as though transmitting an electric signal or pulse. The sawhorses and wire are intended to resemble neurons, signaling to one another in the brain, resulting in the formation of memory. The gap between the wires is like a synapse, and their tips are painted yellow to symbolize electricity or light. The body sculptures mirror the triangular structures by which they rest: one is upright, triangular, and unbroken, whereas the
other is open and non-continuous, implying the ability for thoughts to break, redirect, or expand without specific boundaries. In regards to the ceramic materials, the cohesive triangular sculpture is made of stoneware, which is much more rigid, less brittle, and less porous than the earthenware used in the non-continuous and therefore penetrable body sculpture.

The polystyrene foam pillar on Purple Tower [Fig. 18] emerges from a flat, puddle-like shape. This environment sculpture resembles natural features, but also has bodily qualities, in that it resembles a foot and leg or phallus. This environment’s body sculpture resembles a buttocks with a leg and foot, or a buttocks with a torso and head [Fig. 19]. Interpreted as the latter, the gesture and position of the ceramic form resembles a sexual position, with a large phallus towering behind it, enhancing the sexuality and coupling of this piece. Interpreted as a natural feature, one might perceive this environment as a tree trunk and puddle. The burnt edges that resulted from the process of cutting the foam give this piece the quality of bark, and the vertically arranged circles of foam resemble stacked splices of wood.

This cut foam technique was duplicated for Heart Ropes [Fig. 20], the environment of which is a trunk of sorts, surrounded by painted rope that resemble vines. The rope has been painted the same color as the foam to enhance its relationship to the structure, but its materiality and placement signify its otherness. This monochromatic approach is reminiscent of the sculptures of Cy Twombly and Piero Manzoni’s Achromes. The rope is a very metaphorical material: it can represent bondage, continuousness, interweaving, entanglement, etc. Because of this metaphorical component, it was appropriate to use to surround, encase and uphold the ceramic sculpture of a human heart with fingers emerging from where its ventricles would be – a hybridization of the internal and external body [Fig. 21]. The combination of the heart and fingers also alludes to empathy, or “feeling with your heart”, so to speak, which is the merging of the internal and external self. Along with this, we touch using our fingers, and can also, metaphorically, touch or be touched through the use of our hearts. The height and stature of the piece lends a sense of intimacy with the viewer, and overall is symbolic of love as bondage, and permanent togetherness.
On Postwar Sculpture and Circling Truths

Many postwar sculptural artists prompted existentially driven artistic quests using objects found in both the natural world and space of daily life. They used man-made and natural materials as means of understanding, interpreting, and redefining the world and their existence in it. The use of readymade, appropriated, found, scavenged or cheaply bought objects was implemented not only for the sake of economy, but also as a means of addressing the aesthetics of their surroundings. The effects of the war led many artists to analyze humanity as a collective against individuality, express human emotions by imbuing inanimate objects with human feelings, and use industrial materials for corporeal surrogates.

You can liken the early monochromatic sculptures of Cy Twombly [Fig. 22] to the Personages of Louise Bourgeois [Fig. 23] through method and material alone. Like Bourgeois’ Personages, Twombly’s sculptures retain a rough-hewn quality of the wood, so much so that individual pieces appear as scraps, discards, or found objects put together in the tradition of assemblages, although the sculptures are hand crafted. Although inanimate, these sculptures are imbued with the feeling of life. Lee Bontecou, Eva Hesse, and Robert Rauschenberg also scavenged and used detritus, factory and studio remnants, cheap materials, and found industrial and natural objects in ways that were both minimally manipulative and thoroughly transforming, creating objects that exuded the presence of the body although it was never imaged. Postwar artist Magdalena Abakanowicz has predominately and consistently used the natural world as a guiding force; having spent copious amounts of time alone outdoors as a child, isolated with the energies of nature, she sought to understand humanity through it, and vice versa. Her method is one that circles around the same truths, creates ambiguous forms of a complex structure, and out of them a certain type of space:

\[\text{The objective was then and is now to individualize an area that shelters and isolates from the undesirable...[i]t is a temple for contemplation, an area supplying new energy, provoking to}\]

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5 Molesworth, Part Object Part Sculpture, 39.
future activities. Hence the multiplying of always new beings by Abakanowicz; hence the metamorphosis of shapes, the fading away and the rebirth of forms...[t]hey belong to one family, to one biological genre – as it happens in nature – they have mimetic properties.⁷

Works in Body of the Landscape of the Mind are overall a result of deliberating the human condition and our existence. Envisioning, dissecting and relating our most fundamental sources – the body, the mind, and nature – is my way of attempting to find commonality and interrelatedness among their features and capabilities. What I have found is that physical and cerebral experiences – be it love and touch, meditation, making art, or walking in search of ideas – behave and overlap in ways uncannily reflective of natural cycles of emergence, growth, existence, erosion, and reemergence in new but recognizable form.

⁷ Hermansdorfer, Magdalena Abakanowicz, 49.
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*Fabric Form*

7’6” x 5’8” x 1’10”

Found object, ceramic, chicken wire, dyed batting, pins
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7'6” x 5’8” x 1’10”
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33” x 60” x 60”

Ceramic, clay, sand, painted sand
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10’ x 3’ x .5’

Ceramic, wax, acrylic paint
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10’ x 3’ x .5’
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47” x 24” x 18”
Ceramic, wood scraps, electrical tape
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*Cage*

27” x 23” x 15”

Found object, ceramic, acrylic paint
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*Cage*, detail
27” x 23” x 15”
Found object, ceramic, acrylic paint
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*White Synapse*

Approx. 3.5’ x 7’ x 4’

Found objects and wooden scraps, ceramic, wire, acrylic paint
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*Purple Tower*

60” x 44” x 24”

Scavenged polystyrene foam, ceramic
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*Purple Tower*, detail
60” x 44” x 24”
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40” x 20” x 18”
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