

Psychic Garden

Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Fine Arts in the
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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Abstract

This collection of short stories and poems, accompanied by a glossary, is an ongoing diary about love, intimacy, domesticity, emotional maturation, and maternal inheritance, and is largely inspired by my Great Aunt Marge—major matriarch of the family, avid gardener, and hoarder. She had no children, but she was a mother. *Psychic Garden* considers the gut microbiome as one kind of garden and the gut as home to intuition. This writing is in close dialogue with, and perhaps in narration to, a body of work installed at Urban Arts Space from February 13th to March 16th, 2024, as part of The Ohio State University’s MFA Thesis Exhibition titled *Sun Spell*.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Vita	iv
List of Figures	vi
Introduction	1
Stories.....	13
Poems.....	29
A Brief Glossary.....	69
Bibliography.....	83

List of Figures

Figure 1. <i>Aunt Marge's Window</i>	1
Figure 2. <i>Tomb womb / Garden gate</i>	2
Figure 3. <i>Psychic Garden</i>	3
Figure 4. <i>Psychic Garden</i> (alternate view no. 1)	6
Figure 5. <i>Iron (for marking impressions)</i>	8
Figure 6. <i>Psychic Garden</i> , installation view of <i>Iron (for marking impressions)</i> , <i>Cat Door</i> , and <i>Flower / Pile of Us</i>	9
Figure 7. <i>Psychic Garden</i> (alternate view no. 2)	11
Figure 8. installation view of <i>Belly Button Window</i>	12
Figure 9. Ree Morton, <i>Signs of Love</i>	22
Figure 10. <i>Cat Door</i>	23
Figure 11. Ree Morton, <i>Untitled</i>	24
Figure 12. detail of <i>Psychic Garden</i>	25
Figure 13. installation view of <i>Spoonrest</i>	26
Figure 14. <i>Spoonrest</i>	27
Figure 15. Ree Morton, <i>The Plant That Heals May Also Poison</i>	28
Figure 16. detail from <i>Cat Door</i> (no.1)	29
Figure 17. <i>Is attention soul?</i>	32

Figure 18. detail from <i>Cat Door</i> (no.2)	35
Figure 19. detail from <i>Cat Door</i> (no.3)	37
Figure 20. <i>Garden gates, resting</i>	41
Figure 21. detail from <i>Cat Door</i> (no.4)	46
Figure 22. detail from <i>Cat Door</i> (no.5)	50
Figure 23. detail from <i>Cat Door</i> (no.6)	53
Figure 24. detail from <i>Cat Door</i> (no.7)	56
Figure 25. <i>Goose in the Garden</i> , study for <i>Cat Door</i>	58
Figure 26. Louise Bourgeois, <i>I See You!!!!</i>	60
Figure 27. detail from <i>Cat Door</i> (no.8)	63
Figure 28. <i>Ladder for Ree</i>	65
Figure 29. <i>Time's a revelator while our lamps hold hands</i>	68
Figure 30. detail of <i>Flower / Pile of Us</i>	75
Figure 31. Ree Morton, <i>Terminal Clusters</i>	76
Figure 32. details of <i>Psychic Garden</i> , <i>T-e-n-d-r-i-l-s</i> and <i>cl-us-ter</i>	77
Figure 33. <i>Brooches</i>	78
Figure 34. <i>Eleanor's Sweetest Corn on Earth</i>	79
Figure 35. <i>Psychic Garden</i> (alternate view no. 3)	80
Figure 36. <i>Maybe because we are, you are always, no.1</i>	81
Figure 37. <i>Maybe because we are, you are always, no.3</i>	82

Introduction



Figure 1. *Aunt Marge's Window*



Figure 2. *Tomb womb / Garden gate*, 2024. Risograph, 8.5x5.5 inches

I am curious about intimacy, love, domesticity, and maternal inheritance. In this text, I build a dialogue of short stories, draw with language, and riff on conventions of a glossary to explore the complexities of interpersonal and intrapersonal communication. For me, listening is essential to communication. I prioritize intuition and embrace the incidental, which aligns with listening. It is crucial for me to lean into gut feelings. My relationship to the stomach and the gut reminds and connects me to the women (real and imagined) in my life. I think that is where the psyche lives—in the gut—as embodied, maternal knowledge.



Figure 3. *Psychic Garden*, 2024. Papier-mâché, paper pulp, flour, salt, wallpaper paste, porcelain, glass, glazed ceramic, monotype, yarn, paint, soil, repurposed wrought iron, collected vines, and wood.

Intuition is marked by impressions, records, and absence, and the psychic gut is like a garden—a network and ecology where cycles, cultivation, and evolution occur. Gardens and guts need to be tended and listened to. Within my practice, I want to visualize the act of listening, which requires a practice of humility and suspension of ego. Humility is like the humus of the soil. Listening is to garden, to grow, and to tend. This gut has become a container for written language and taking inventory of my life and the women’s lives in my family.

Historically marked by “women’s work,” the site of the kitchen window is a stage for the garden. For me, this window is analogous with a cat door and belly button—the cat door is a threshold between the feral and the domestic, while the belly button is a threshold between the interior psyche and exterior body. Belly buttons are also records of umbilical cords, and therefore prints of mothers.

In this collection of experimental writing, I lead with inquiry about my compulsion for the domestic. Art-making tethers, hydrates, constipates, and churns my compulsion—like an eternal digestion. Sheila Heti’s book *Motherhood* means a lot to me. A silly, yet deeply existential conversation with the self about not only the capacity for being a mother, but what mothering can look like for artists. Heti asks a coin yes or no questions, which invites chance but also creates a conversation with a God-like, binary voice. Her sure-footedness, autobiographical approach, and informal writing style have become formative for me. Heti refers to “the call” as the ongoing urge to mother. I feel this book asks the questions that drive my making.

What can motherhood be?

How can I concretize the negative space of choice itself within these ideas of motherhood?

What parts of ourselves *do* we feel called to spread?

I remind myself that there is listening,

and knowing,

and feeling,

but there is also choosing.

For me, this digestion, this art-making, is a practice of imaginative speculation where the body thinks faster than the mind. A tending to. In the studio, I aspire to embody and honor intuition as a collective voice rather than a highly individual one. I call on my own familial history, maternal influences, and artist heroes. I pay homage and make gifts for my Great Aunt Marge, my mothers, my sisters, my aunts, Ree Morton, bell hooks, Louise Bourgeois, and Sheila Heti to listen, to learn, and to talk. I want to be in dialogue with this feminist legacy of honing domesticity, expressing radical sentiment as subject, embracing theatrical imagery, and resisting categorization.

This text is a playful attempt to narrate the whimsy and honesty of my studio practice. The glossary defines my own artistic lexicon and symbols, including words like softness, play, brooches, place, partnership, and collection. The poems perform like sounds and drawing. They use word play, repetition, and composition to invite how ineffable language is—the ways it stretches and contains our relationships. These stories are simultaneously fictional and

autobiographical—they are inherited from the women in my family. Each of the characters in these stories are essentially the same woman—voicing dancing collectively within the psychic gut. Fragments of these definitions, poems, and stories appear as cursive language within my images and objects—pinched paper pulp, looped yarn, pressed ink, carved wood, spiral vines, translucent monotype layers, suspended ceramics, and relief surfaces of clay and papier-mâché. I constantly repeat phrases throughout my work—to intensify the question, like a reminder, a mantra, or a love letter to myself.



Figure 4. *Psychic Garden* (alternate view no. 1), 2024.

Voices manifest as papier-mâché, ceramic, and glass objects to constitute a garden, a theater, and a cemetery of sorts. These voices and forms of the Psychic Garden are sun-bleached, croaked, burnt-out, and in decay, but they continue to stretch, grow, and embrace one another. Their roots tickle one another deep underground. Gardens require regeneration, entropy, and death for renewal. Like drip castles on the beach, eroded by waves, permeated by salt, and drunk up by the underbelly of the ocean, they digest, they compost, and they permeate.

Printmaking is at the root of my practice and provides a lens for engaging with each material. Color, shape, and line of paper, clay, wood, and glass each mirror, kiss, and press against one another. Impressions are revealed and image-making happens indirectly. A call and a response—a print and its matrix—are essential, therefore printmaking is inherently a dialogue. I am drawn to clay for its sensitivity, slowness, and desire to be pressed. The meticulous processing of earth to make, mix, and fire clay is another act of digestion. Clay holds memory, has capacity for impressions, becomes visual record and implies the negative space of the hands and their intimate hug. Raw clay and paper pulp can each be soaked in water and reconstitute, an indication of their aliveness.



Figure 5. *Iron (for marking impressions)*, 2024. Papier-mâché, paper pulp, and rice paper.

I build ecologies of a wide range of materials and develop hybridized forms to evoke personal symbolism and describe multiple meanings. For example, the vines and drawn spiral line can be a garden hose, telephone line, umbilical cord, intestine, or cursive language. Within the compression and stretching of that longing, continuous, cursive line, text becomes illegible—a reminder of the many limitations of language. The frame and negative space of a window can be a view from the kitchen, a mirror to the self, a stage for the garden, or a portal. The iron can be a stamp and a tool for printmaking, but once enlarged, a rock or a tombstone.



Figure 6. *Psychic Garden*, installation view of *Iron (for marking impressions)*, *Cat Door*, and *Flower / Pile of Us*, 2024.

I accumulate these collections of material objects—ephemeral, extant, discarded, documented, and archived. Through constant collection, translation, and transformation of materials, the work often composts or self-cannibalizes itself. Images become records, premonitions, and patterns; objects become tools and archive; and written language becomes drawing. Engaging, manipulating, and rearranging materials serves as an analog for navigating these interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships—a collection of iterations and a tactile dialogue between hands and material. Through listening, I can respond meaningfully, dig at insatiable material consumption, and call attention to overlooked detritus, smallness and softness. I resist “mastery” and clear categorization of any one specific medium and insist upon the clumsy spaces of unknowing and play, and the constant transformative nature of material.

Listening is one way that I love, and the studio is a place I open toward love through my material practice. When I talk or write or reference *love*, I’m not alluding to a romantic connotation of the word. I’m invested in bell hooks’ definition of love as “the will to extend one’s self for the purpose of nurturing one’s own or another’s spiritual growth.” Through spiritual growth, one gets closer to self-actualization and this balance between mind, body, and soul. For me, loving is evidence of us arriving closer to that place. Loving begs the question of what parts of ourselves we feel called to spread. I endeavor to listen deeply to this call and tend to the psychic gut.



Figure 7. *Psychic Garden* (alternate view no. 2), 2024.



Figure 8. installation view of *Belly Button Window*, 2024. Papier-mâché, paper pulp, acrylic, soil, vermiculite, and glazed ceramic. Approx. 52x78x15 inches

Stories

Marjorie knows her gut well. She is proud of her gut. She has a house and she has husband and she has a garden and she has zucchini bread in her freezer and she has strawberry preserves in her basement refrigerator. She has no children, but she is a mother.

I have never worn a costume and a mask. Not until now and I am 13 and I am trick-or-treating and I am a witch. It is the first Halloween I don't spend on Washington Road with my family. Kids under 12 eat free at Shangri-La Buffet. Dad got super Catholic after I was born, but mom hates Mass; she's still a devout Lutheran. Or at least I think. Mom and I never talk about God.

Dee likes to fix things. As quickly as possible. Dee doesn't try to explain about how they broke or why they broke, but Dee always fixes things for the people she loves.

People tell me I am still a kid and I have a silly habit of tickling my belly button. I have an innie where my pointer finger likes to sit when I get worried. In public my siblings and mom and dad tell me to quit it. They're all old and embarrassed how it looks like I'm sticking my hand down my pants. Having my finger feel around the insides of my belly button calms me down. One day I'll know what this is and how it is self-sown.

Dom and Betty have the kind of love that grows bigger every day. Their love has gotten so big that you can hear it behind the corners of your mouth when you put your ear on the fence of the

above-ground pool. Along the side facing the shed. First, your corners will tingle. Then you'll hear it. Their love has gotten so strong that they must have been born for it.¹

Lots of songwriters make me cry. I listen to Joni Mitchell sing and I think of my mom. I love the crying. I just swell up so big, so turgid. To feel so intimate with such a faraway voice is aliveness. Sometimes I wish those songwriters could tell me everything I need to know so I can get going. But knowing everything would be boring and probably so much worse than missing someone.

Dee's armpits chafe when she runs. First she gets cold, then she burns. Dee tries to remember the first time she felt her tendons go numb. Dee tries to remember while she runs. When she runs, she waves or smiles at everyone because this is important. And sometimes Dee gets angry when she runs. Angry like when she loses to Debbie and everyone in Rummy. But Dom says don't get mad, get even, pumpkin.

Yesterday mom told me she's a little annoyed because dad is sad again. He's acting so needy. She says women don't have time to get sad like that.

Debbie lays out all her jewelry on the kitchen counter. Each piece has its place. She has to polish these rings every day, otherwise they'll be filthy. Why put all the jewelry back in the bedroom when she needs to polish her rings at the kitchen counter every day. If the rings get filthy, Debbie

¹ Every summer I reread a book of short stories by Raymond Carver called *What we talk about when we talk about love*. My gut nudges me to emulate Carver's succinct tone. It says little and holds a lot.

can't sleep. If she doesn't sleep, the cat gets fussy and she'll skip work again and then everything will go to shit.

I am PMSing because I can cry on command, but I look into the mirror for long pauses. I try to conure what it might mean to truly see myself in its reflection. I look really hard for you.

Betty weeds the tomato plants and adds another row of chicken wire to protect her garden, but mostly she sits and waits and thinks about leaving. She sees the tiny red glow coming from the kitchen window and realizes she left the iron on.

I see my dad about two or three times a year now. Every time I see him, I don't think he knows what to say so he tells me wow, I've gotten so much taller than the last time. I am 27 years old and dad says I am still growing taller. But there are better ways of knowing than being told.

The radio is humming and Eleanor is doing dishes. She thinks how ashamed her mother would be that she's doing this to herself. A divorced mother of three. She followed Raymond all around the country for 11 loyal years, but now she knows². They want her back in Philly by the end of the week. Eleanor smears suds on the radio notch because the country is losing their shit over this Roe and Wade and she needs to hear. The suitcases are stacked on the driveway, but Eleanor will ring out her sponge and finish these dishes first.

² Parts of this character are loosely based on the speculative gaps within artist Ree Morton's life. Morton didn't start making art until she was in her 30's and a mother of three. Her prolific career only lasted nine years and many historians cite her emotional maturity as fuel. Morton liked to rescue ladybugs from ants on anthills as a young child. Her parents assumed her curiosity for the world was simply an affinity for science—Morton dropped out of nursing school and married in 1956.

My brothers are on the same little league team this year because they are 13 months apart. I want to know what real pain feels like so I jump off the top bleacher when no one is looking. I break my right wrist and screw up Daniel's batting average. I tell everyone I fell but mom stays looking at me the longest. I lock my eye and I know this look is her knowing and her warning. I will never break another bone in my body. Later that week I win the first grade drawing contest because I'm ambidextrous like mom and can damn-well draw pink flamingos with my left hand. I'm sitting on Miss Abate's lap in front of the class blushing with my ribbon and I'm proud of myself because did you know that I'm the artist in my family.

Today is Dee's birthday and there is an earring stuck in the cartilage of her ear and she and Dom are waiting in the emergency room. Getting older is learning. Dee likes learning so she likes getting older. Getting older feels like getting farther and closer at the same time. It feels like being pulled apart in two different directions and holding both at once. In one hand Dee holds the Barbie they gave her because Dom works there and with the other she pushes around the outline of the pearl on her insides. She wonders if she can glide along the lining of her stomach too.

When I teach, I am closer to you³. I want my students to be in water safely.

³ I know now that there is something deeply maternal about teaching. I taught a printmaking course for the first time and was compelled to set up non-toxic facilities for my students. As a form of care. To keep their bodies safe. I am sure of this necessity. I reconnected with etching through teaching it. I then learned that Louise Bourgeois made etchings during the beginning of her career. She reworked the plates upwards of 30 times. She kept a printmaking press at home, so that she could tend to her children.

Marjorie makes a fruit salad, a chocolate cake, an apple pie, and four stacks of pizelles for each and every occasion because making is thinking and sharing is love.

Pap Pap and I are eating junior banana splits in the Sonic parking lot and it's July. He still has hairsprayed curls and painted nails because we played makeovers and I'm Pap Pap's pumpkin. He doesn't talk about her much but when he does his body turns real soft and he clutches the ring around his neck, the one with Betty Jane's initials etched in cursive, the one that lays next to his crucifix, tucked in to his sternum. Grandma went to high school with Mr. Rogers and Latrobe is the birthplace of the banana split.

Every morning around 3am the cat wakes up Marjorie with his scratching at the bottom right corner of the apartment door. But it's not summer anymore and there's no cat door on this door. See there's an apartment building outside this door. And a street with cars right outside that. The cat can't be an indoor-outdoor when they're here. Only when they're there in the summer. So the cat wakes her up and jumps on her chest and wants to sink and be held hard and soft for the longest. This is their ritual. He starts to purr and her chest vibrates and he wants to be so close and so felt that his claws step along her throat. Right inside the U of her collarbone. She can't breathe a couple of times for a couple of seconds in between all that nestling.

Sometimes I hear you when I listen. Once all the noise quiets down and everyone else hops off the line, I can hear you. Sometimes I only think I hear you. Then I feel stupid when the imposter is revealed. Sometimes people parrot you, they disguise themselves as you. The word radical

originates from root or the ground. I want to originate from the root or the ground, away from all the noise. So that I can listen to you all the time. But I don't want you to worry—I do know that I've already been sown.

Eleanor sits and waits a lot. She waits for her son. She sits in her rocking chair in her yellow room next to her mother's trunk. Her mother carried all that she owned and all that she needed in this trunk on her way from Norway. But now Eleanor waits by this trunk and she knits for her son and his family. They'll be here soon. She needs to know if they stopped for corn. Her nurse reminds her that Eleanor's teeth gave out a few years back, but it's corn season and we're in Amish country so her baby better have stopped for corn.

Maybe someday we will talk about all the things we don't talk about. I wonder where all those things sit to wait. Or maybe they lay to wait. Resting on their sides. I hope they sleep.

Dee made a home and a family to care for deeply together. This is very special and this is what Dee wanted.

I get my ears pierced in second grade while we are at the mall. Dad says too young. It is Pap Pap's idea. I have very small ears and the holes in my ears are now stretched out long. The edge of the hole is about to touch the edge of my ear. Close to its breaking point. Sometimes when I wear small studs they immediately fall out the other side. Dangly earrings are heavy and might snap my ears. I will remember stretched holes almost as long as I will remember pierced ears.

When we visit Grandma in her rocker in the nursing home, I see her holes are stretched. Her lobes too. They might even kiss her collarbone someday.

Debbie never loved him but felt like she was supposed to. Being polite is more important than remembering that you feel your tendons growing weak. He loved her but he hated her gut and her gut knew, but she didn't know. Not yet. So she hurt him before her gut caught up.

My lamp shines pink light in my room. Wherever I move, I make my lamp sit at a window on the blue table mom built for me so that pink glows outside at night. My lamp is an antique, formerly kerosine, now turned electric. It's fragile, bulbous, and beautiful. The glass of my lamp is hand-painted with bold, curvy roses and its edges are gold leaf. My lamp is my great aunt's lamp.

Dee and Betty don't understand each other when they talk. Or when they write. What gets lost in language. They upset one another with their language and with their lack of language. They keep a tight grip. But there are these moments when Dee is all alone and everything is the most quiet and suddenly she hears Betty. And for a brief glimpse, Dee understands her mother. And in that moment, through being, she knows that her mother understands her too.

If my belly button can be a compass, I will continue to fold in on myself so that I can let it guide me. I lay in child's pose tracing the negative space that my groin and my toes make. The shape reminds me of a pie that could burst open at any second.

Betty gets angry when Pat moves in. Pat didn't come from her so she doesn't need to be seeing him every day like this. Less time to dote on Debbie. Debbie needs Betty; she never says it but Betty just knows. So what if she doesn't want to cook dinner tonight or tomorrow or the day afterwards. Dee and Kim will be fine; they've got Dom to dote on them once he gets home from work. They don't need Betty anyways—too smart for her. Dee won't stop talking about college and Pittsburgh, and frankly, Betty is tired of feeling like she isn't enough. So she smokes her menthols out on the front porch, hoping the squeak of the vinyl pillow drowns out Pat's fiddling around in the basement.

This summer I learn that both of my grandmothers had a lot of suicidal thoughts. Somewhere in me I already knew. I'm scared of being another sad woman in a house, but I know they feel so deeply. In my gut, I feel them deeply. In my gut, I learn how to listen.

Marjorie keeps everything. She can't throw a thing away. Her garage fits everything except the car and the mower. The dining room table is piles. The space between each bed frame and the floor is piles. There's one big pile next to the stack of tomato cages that has toppled over out back. Marjorie won't buy Tupperware from her neighbor Martha. She has her records of Cool Whip and Country Crock. Nothing is waste and everything is leftover. After Marjorie is gone, Dee will take a few trips every year to Cherry Street to sift and sort. Then Dee will re-pile⁴ and re-stack and share and spread. Then Dee will sift and sort again and learn that inheriting lamps is how to communicate.

⁴ This language is inspired by a poem included in *At the Still Point of the Turning World*.

In my twenties I have a lot of anger. A lot of rage. I know I've always had this anger. Leftover anger, residual anger. Not all mine, but ours.⁵ I just learned to store it in my gut for a lot of years. But anger feels honest and maybe sacred too. Screaming is described as guttural for a reason. When this much anger leaks out, I don't know where to put it. The leftovers pile up.

The garden is croaked and everything outside is dying a little bit or maybe a lot of bit, but this time it's a lot more noticeable than it has been. It's late summer so Dee plants a row of squash and row of pumpkins then goes bass fishing. Watching the surface of the pond makes Dee second-guess how much to reveal. But she can't look away. She might miss a jump.

I worry I can never be where I am because we are always thinking about where we came from. But maybe I should start tickling my belly button again so that I can listen. Where I came from tells me where I am. We are the soft soul of time. I feel the call⁶ often. Sometimes a few times a month or maybe just a couple times a year, but sometimes a few times in a week. Somewhere in the time between those feelings, I try to concretize all that negative space. Choice lives in the negative space.

⁵ All of the characters in these stories, including I, are the same woman. Know this.

⁶ A nod towards and an embrace of the "call" and compulsion that Sheila Heti writes about in *Motherhood*.



Figure 9. Ree Morton, *Signs of Love*, 1976. Acrylic, oil, colored pencil, watercolor and pastel on nitrocellulose-impregnated canvas, wood and canvas with felt.



Figure 10. *Cat Door*⁷, 2024. Glass, ceramic, and wood tiles with acrylic, glaze, and soil. 7x4 feet

⁷ Tiles are reminiscent of interior and exterior domestic spaces like the kitchen and the bathroom. Imagery includes casts of my navel, recipes, fragments of poems, details from familial stories, seeds, collarbones, guts, cats, and various ephemera of my 2023 summer garden using painted and carved wood, sculpted clay, and layers of powder-printed silkscreen glass panels.



Figure 11. Ree Morton, *Untitled*, 1971-1973. Wood painted with pastel and acrylic, drawing on canvas. included in *Be a Place, Place an Image, Imagine a Poem* at Museo Reina Sofia, 2015.



Figure 12. detail of *Psychic Garden*, 2024. Cast glass⁸ with glazed ceramic and papier-mâché.

⁸ Cast glass from a used kitchen sponge with cursive text that spells “be.” I have been collecting, repurposing, and collaging with sponges from print shops for the last several years. Sponges are symbols of the domestic and typically grow turgid with water, but this glass sponge is impermeable. A reminder to actively be.



Figure 13. installation view of *Spoonrest*, 2024.



Figure 14. *Spoonrest*⁹, 2024. Papier-mâché, paper pulp, repurposed wrought iron, collected vines, soil, vermiculite, and glazed ceramic. 28x68x15 inches

⁹ A spoon, a shovel, a worm, a cavity, a pregnant pile of compost. But mostly, a tool for rest, pause, and listening. Stiffened layers of recycled newspaper pulp build a relief surface of cursive text that spells “tell me”.



Figure 15. Ree Morton, *The Plant That Heals May Also Poison*, 1974. Five lightbulbs, enamel, and glitter on wood and celtastic. 46x64 inches

Poems



Figure 16. detail from *Cat Door* (no.1), 2024. Acrylic on carved wood tile. 6x6 inches

What parts

of ourselves

do we feel called to s
p r e a
d ?

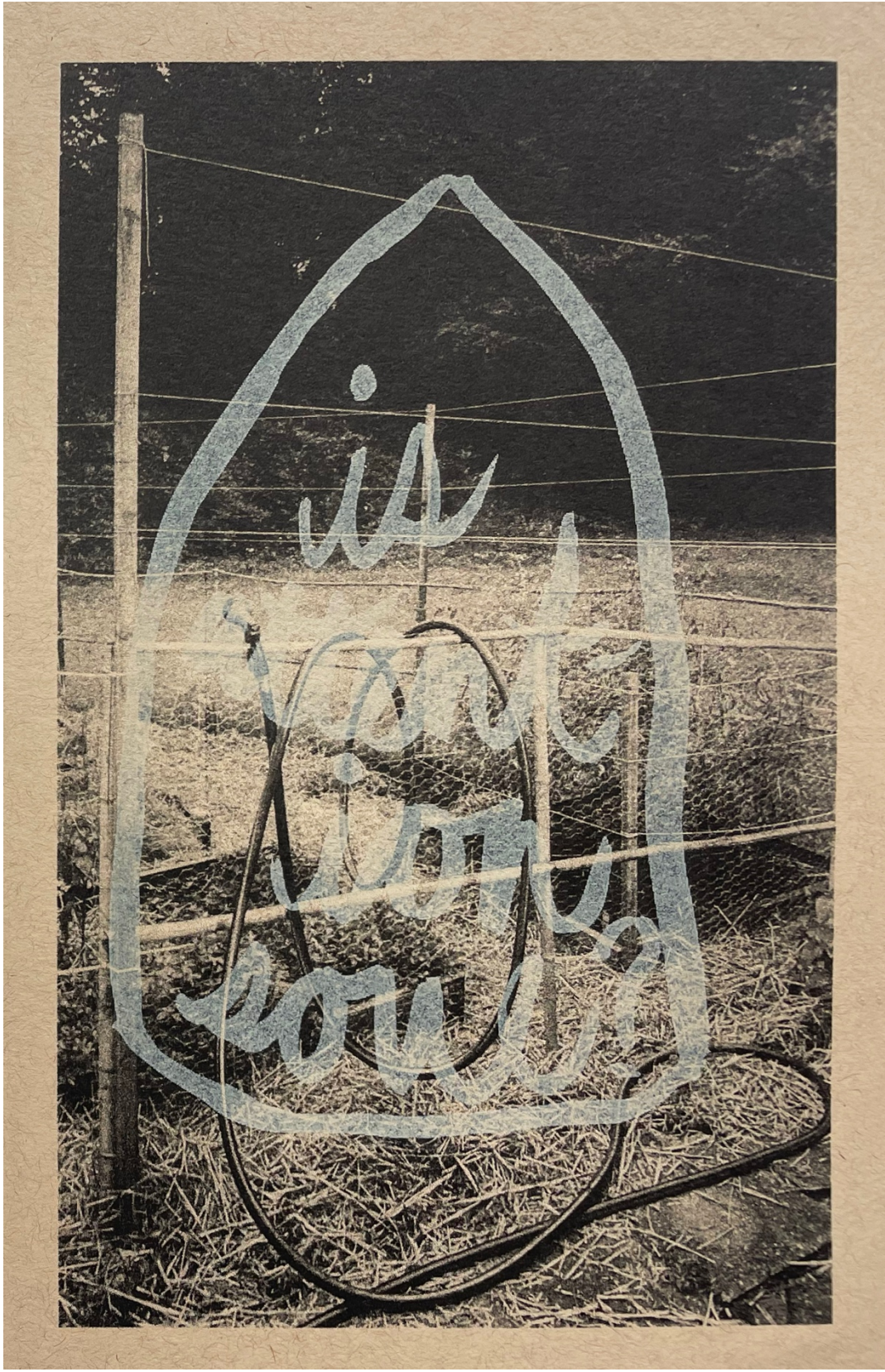


Figure 17. *Is attention soul?*, 2024. Risograph. 8.5x5.5 inches

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Till tell tale

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Un till the garden

Un till the soil

Until the soil

Gently eager
Gently growing
Gently near
Gently ear

Quietly expanding, permeating

Growing
gradually, all while

Remaining quiet,
observant

Gently here

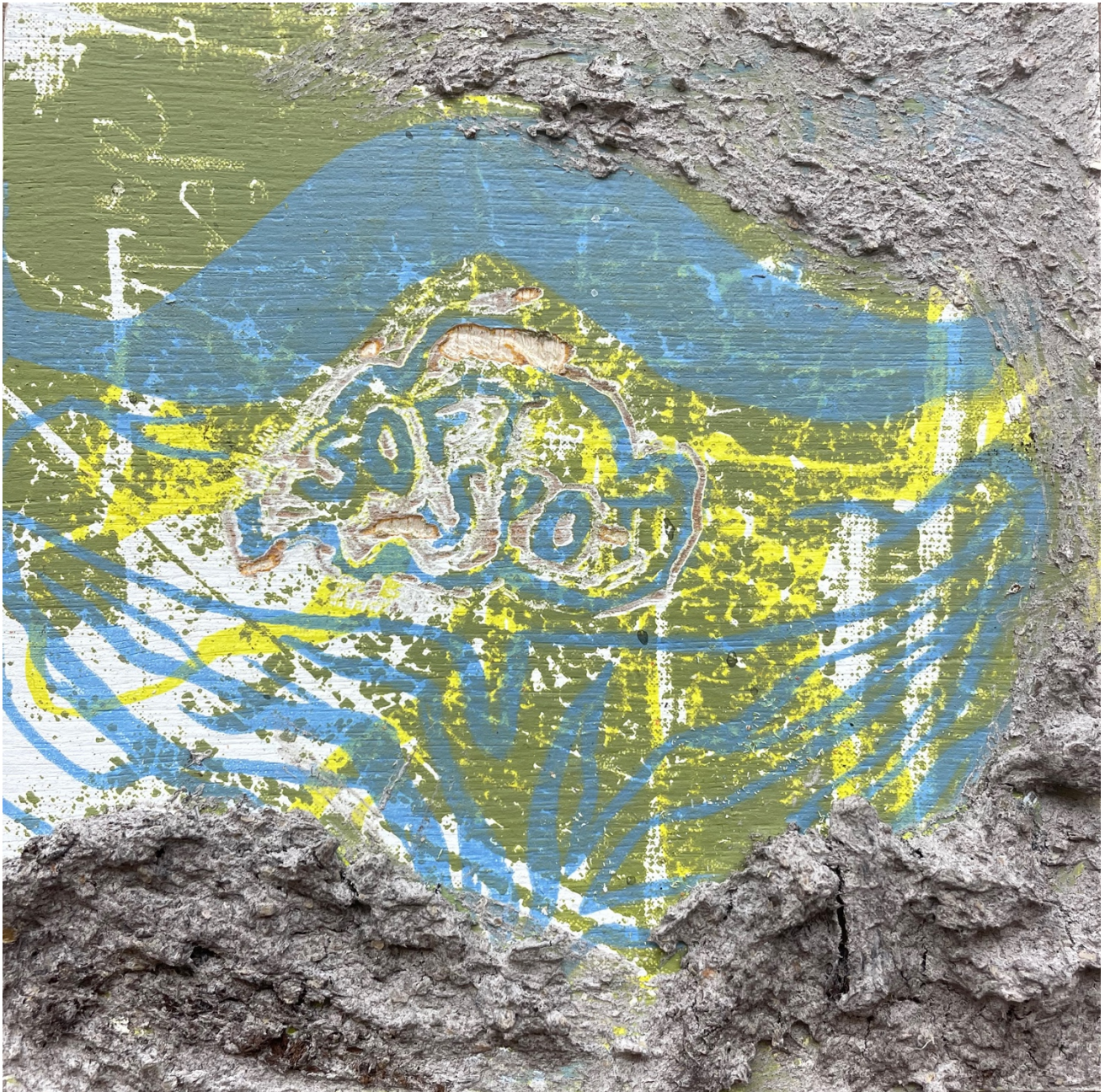


Figure 18. detail from *Cat Door* (no.2), 2024. Silkscreen and soil on carved wood tile. 6x6 inches

Maybe because we are us,
this *here* and that *there* are arbitrary.

Maybe because we are us,
you are always here.



Figure 19. detail from *Cat Door* (no.3), 2024. Ink on carved wood tiles. 12x6 inches

Chicken wire
1 part flour
2 parts water
Salt (generously sprinkle)
4 parts newspaper

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broach

brooch

brooch

broach

brooch



Figure 20. *Garden gates, resting*, 2024. Risograph. 5.5x8.5 inches

I will be here and you will be there
but we will be us

Maybe us is a place and maybe time is a distance, and as we travel this distance,
you will be here and I will be there and we will continue to arrive closer to this place,
this place of us

Becoming more us
arriving

In the space between here and there is time and us

Here and there,
there and here,
are moments of sheer, uncanny happenstance
where I am both reminded of uncommon affection
and stupefied by its undying novelty

Between here and there,
we become more closer to us

If distance is time and place is us,
moments are objects that pile, stack, and flow abundantly in a heap

Here and there
these heaps build and grow,
embracing, sheltering, tethering you and me,
me to you,
you to me,
me with you,
you with me,
me and you

Objects are found,
recognized, drawn, sewn, adorned, forgotten, repeated, and held
In the place of us,
these collections of moments as objects are boundlessly flowing,
from here to there
along this distance of time

We accumulate these piles through our act of collection,
compositions arranged, elevated, located, spoken, and written

If the space between you and me is time,
then these compositions reside everywhere

And in between there and here,
we arrive at these piles;
these piles are us

We arrive closer to everywhere

I hear you here when you are there
and when I am there, but you are here,
I still hear you here

Maybe because we are us,
this *here* and that *there* are arbitrary.
Maybe because we are us,
you are always here

If here and there is arbitrary,
and really,
you are always here because we are us,
then time is a distance that is here all of the moments

And if these moments are collections of objects to be found
and to be held,
then we are surrounded and embraced by time

You and me,
me and you,
you and me,
we become and arrive at us here,
all of the time
in every object

Even though I will talk about God off-hand
maybe cynically
or maybe ironically,
finding you and me and us
everywhere all the time is no appendage to this hobby or habit

Maybe this habit is an intolerance
or maybe this habit is residual Lutheran guilt

Maybe all of this is an agnostic love letter
Love letter to you and me,
to me and you

And if I am reminded of you in everything,
you really can be there,
but still,
always here

These piles of us,
they hug and embrace me in radical,
innate truth
But a truth that is always evolving,
stacking and restacking up in piles ¹⁰

I draw on and reflect upon these growing collections of objects,
each imbued with humanity or a lack thereof,
each impressed by its matrix,
each serving leftovers,
reminders of what once was,
is,
or will be

Fragments of a whole,
reminders of entropy at work,
time as a distance,
and us

So now
if you are always here because we are us,
then maybe,
I tether you and you tether me
We tether one another at the same time,
all along this time

¹⁰ Lucy Lippard wrote an essay about Ree Morton in 1973 that was re-published in *At the Still Point of the Turning World*. This publication accompanied an exhibition of Morton's drawings at the Drawing Center in New York in 2009. Morton died tragically before her 41st birthday in 1977. Within the essay, there is a poem. In the 2009 interview, Lippard couldn't remember whether she or Morton had originally authored the poem, or, she remarks, they may have cowrote it. That fact is one of my favorite parts of that poem. The words "at the still point of the turning world" come from a T. S. Elliot poem, which Morton kept above her desk. The phrase refers to a place of neither body or spirit, or flesh nor fleshless. The still point is a quiet pause for the soul.



Figure 21. detail from *Cat Door* (no.4), 2024. Fused glass tile. 6x6 inches

P A I N S

W W

I I

N N

D D

O O

W W

P A N E S

Window panes
Window pains



Figure 22. detail from *Cat Door* (no.5), 2024. Acrylic on wood tile. 6x6 inches

Crypt

Cryptic

Cryptic tic

tic

tic

tic tic tic tic

Crypt

ic

Cryp

tic

Cry ptic

Cry cry cry

Crypt
Crib

Aunt Marge's Apple Pie

2 tbs tapioca
1 cup sugar
1 tsp cinnamon
>7 cups Golden Delicious apples
2 Pillsbury pie crusts
Butter (not margarine!) cut into chunks
Brush top with egg or milk
Sprinkle extra sugar

360 10-15 min

350 at least 45 min



Figure 23. detail from *Cat Door* (no.6), 2024. Fused glass tile. 6x6 inches

Our
 Pink Lamp
 Glows so so so so so so bright
 Outside to the deep of the night, signaling
 its fullness, inside to the heart of the home, and all
 of its many desires and fears, and to all the places we
 long to be and long to go to talk about all the things we need
 to talk about, or have yet to talk about. Our lamp illuminates our
 misguided care that turns to protection, that turns to projection, that
 turns to lack of acceptance. Sometimes we mix up love and care and we
 see and feel ourselves in one another so much that we forget the capacity
 of our respective tendrils. We drown a little bit in a lot of nutrients or we
 croak and bleach in the intensity of the sun. We ground our roots and vines
 so tightly that we mistrust and mislabel. We forget that we can tickle one
 another underground. We label cats and birds and wind and frost as the
 enemy. But they are not the enemy. They entangle, complicate, diffuse,
 inspire, facilitate and share. We ought to be patient here in our dirt.
 I see you I see you I see you You see me You see me You see me
 I hear you I hear you You hear me You hear me You hear me
 I listen I listen I listen You listen You listen You listen
 I know you I know you You know me You know me
 We see each other and We hear each other
 We both listen and We both know
 Our Lamp calls us closely
 Our Lamp, Our Lamp
 Our Lamp
 I C us¹¹
 I C us
 I C my Aunt Marge
 I C my Aunt Debbie
 I C my Aunt Kim
 I C my mother Diane
 I C my Grandma Betty
 I C my Grandma Eleanor
 I C my sister Lisa. I C us.
 All our parts entangled. All of us.
 We aren't good at anticipating because anticipating
 isn't listening. Anticipating is assuming.
 We do all the chores at once. Always.
 Otherwise they will never get done.
 You leave the light on for me. I leave
 the light on for you. We illuminate
 each other. Our pink lamp glows so
 so so so bright. Outside to the deep
 of the night, signaling our
 fullness. Inside to the
 heart of our home,
 and all of our
 many desires and fears,
 and to all the place we long to be and
 long to go to keep talking about all these things

¹¹ The bulbous, bust-like shape of this concrete poem is also an homage to a Louise Bourgeois print titled “I see you!!!”.



Figure 24. detail from *Cat Door* (no.7), 2024. Acrylic and pastel on wood tile. 6x6 inches

soft spot

to be
so
so

turgid



Figure 25. *Goose in the Garden*, study for *Cat Door*, 2023. Glass. 8x10 inches

map
of
my
y
d l u
b o
d y ,
e r e
h w
I
u o
w
e
r
d
m a
p
o
f
m
y
y
d l u
b o
d y ,
e r e
h w
i f
? e v i l

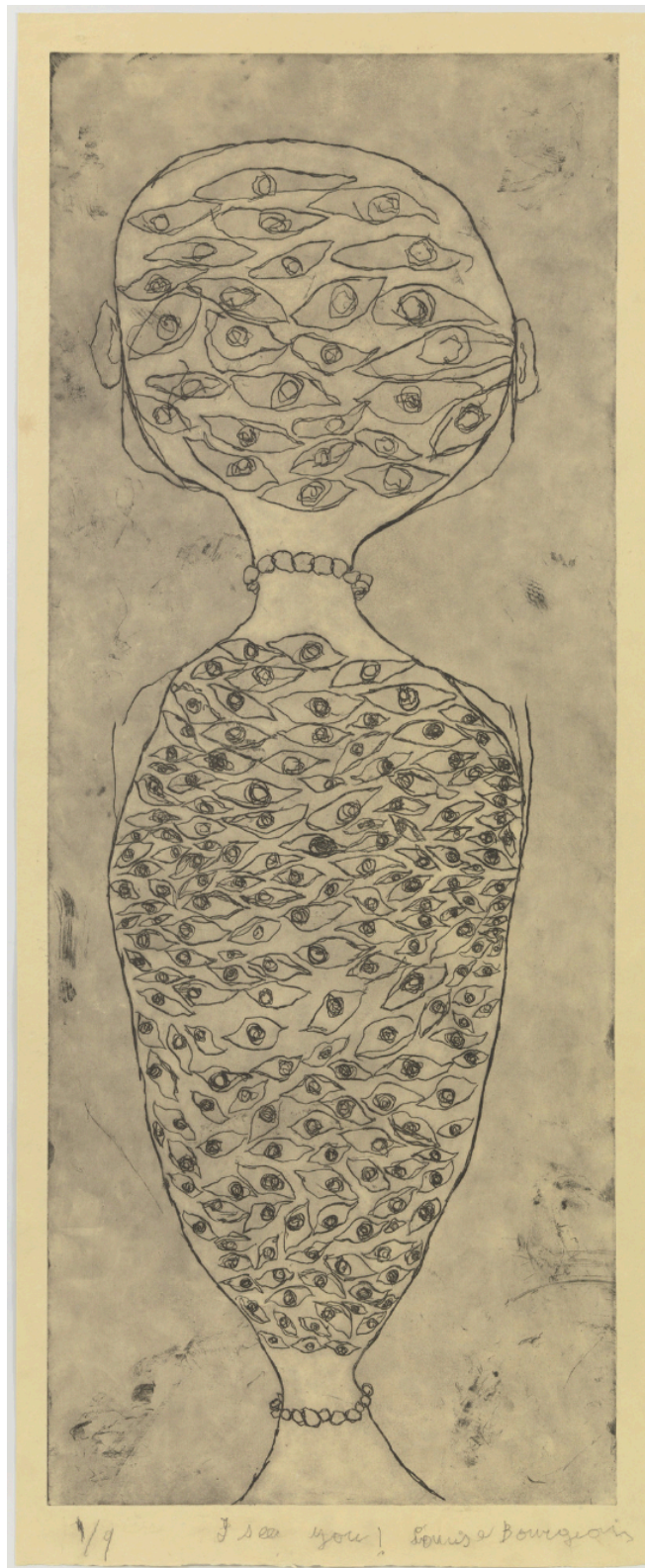


Figure 26. Louise Bourgeois, *I See You!!!!*, 2008. Soft ground etching with selective wiping. 59x24 inches

Two parts
Pressed

A diptych,

hinged shut

To be split open

Parts
Of a whole

tendrils
cluster



terminal
clusters



Figure 27. detail from *Cat Door* (no.8), 2024. Acrylic on wood tile. 6x6 inches

4 log ledges
4 trunk corners
2 taut blankets

stretched across our insides,

making a home for all the tiny tantrums and grotesque entrails to live and to rest

Taking inventory of a life

Tucking our gut into bed



Figure 28. *Ladder for Ree*, 2024. Risograph. 8.5x5.5 inches

being here
being there
gently near

still,

going here

we are the soft soul of time

Dually tethered.
Like an eternal embrace,
a never-ending hug,
locked in orbit,
me to you
and you to me.

You surround me and I surround you.
We talk to, with, and past one another.
We both listen.
Locked in your orbit,
locked in our orbit.



Figure 29. *Time's a revelator while our lamps hold hands*, 2023. Monotype on rice paper. 24x18 inches

A Brief Glossary

Art: Synonym for dialogue. Art-making is a dialogue about dialogue, wherein there is a tactile relationship between hands and material.

Attention: Possibly soul.

Belly Button: A threshold. There are innies and there are outties. A trace of direct connection and a print of a mother.

Tendons: Strong, fibrous tissue between a collective body of muscles and bones. Highly flexible, yet inelastic. Grow weak and blue. Cyclical and always there.

Brooch: For broaching the parts that are hard to say.

Call, The: Compulsion for the domestic. Wears disguises. Fleeting, ongoing, but sometimes deafening.

Cat: Domesticated apex predator. Disrupts ecologies. Highly feral and highly affectionate.

Compost: One type of pile that is deeply fertile. Though it often gets forgotten, compost needs to be routinely turned. Compost also needs tending, like the garden. In fact, the compost is a part of the garden and buried in time¹².

Doing Dishes: A return to the flow and work. Typically at the kitchen sink and the kitchen window, looking outward and inward simultaneously. Site of reflection and introspection.

Ecology: All of our parts entangled. Each part talks, each part listens. We both talk, we both listen.

Garden: Where the rambunctious¹³ is embraced and seeds are sown, sometimes self-sown. The gut microbiome is one type of garden.

Gut: Psyche and soul live in the gut. Synonymous with *intuition* and *second brain*.

Hose: Line of communication. Often appears as a vine, tendril, or umbilical cord. Connects telephones and maps the space between you and me.

Impression: The residue, trace, and print of an object, but more widely recognized as the record of a particular thing. Sometimes the thing marks absence and absence implies an impression.

¹²The words *buried in time* come from a song by Jeff Mangum. He sang this song during a set at Jittery Joes in Athens, Georgia in 2001. When I am in my studio in Ohio and feel homesick, I listen to the entirety of this live recording. I know it by heart. Graduate school sometimes makes me feel like I am losing track of my sense of self. Musicians ground me when I feel disarmed.

¹³ *The Rambunctious Garden* is a book by Emma Marris that frequently floats about within permaculture and forest garden circles.

Iron: Makes impressions when given time and left alone. Seemingly dense and rigid, but actually quite soft.

Introspection: Reminder of the necessity for hindsight. Active observation and meaning making. Happens at the thresholds, like windows, cat doors, and belly buttons.

Kitchen Window: A threshold, like a cat door or a belly button. Kitchen Windows also function as mirrors and stages. A mirror to the inner self, which of course is a reflection of the outer self. A stage for the garden.

Leftovers: Within a practice of resourcefulness, leftovers are collected. Sometimes perceived as an afterthought, waste, or scraps, but mostly incidental. Leftovers need to be listened to. Leftovers can be letters. Leftovers need to be shared; they nourish.

Listening: Like a sponge; the key to communication. The practice of humility and suspension of ego. Humility like humus of the soil. As in, listening is to garden, to grow, to cultivate.

Love: The will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth.¹⁴

¹⁴ I'm invested in bell hooks' definition of love as "the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth" as she writes in *all about love*. bell hooks insists on *love* as a verb rather than an automatic noun or feeling. Also, *spiritual* not in a religious sense, but as this idea of an animated part of the self—a soul or a spirit.

Love letters: Appear naturally unspoken and easily forgotten. Reminders of uncommon affection. Reminders of cherished opportunities. Love letters need to be written. Love letters need to be shared. They solidify temporary moments of appreciation, admiration, and understanding as temporary monuments. Love letters can be found everywhere.¹⁵

Logs: Live near gardens and rest dead on their sides. They grow hollow but turgid with protection. Fungi can be found here.

Net: Tool for collection; specifically for collecting the parts of ourselves we feel called to spread. The net is porous, imperfect, and woven. Like a handmade crochet blanket. Or curtain. Often manifests as an arrangement of clutter or comfort clutter. Catch and release, always. The net is constantly saving in preparation for what might be needed later. The net holds the discarded¹⁶ and the leftovers.

Partnership: The constant desire to share.

Pile(s): Record, history, and an ongoing collection.

Place: Colloquially known as *us*. There are 3 that are known, but mostly felt, (so far) and they include the following:

¹⁵ This particular language is adapted from a letter that my partner wrote me four years ago.

¹⁶ *Found Objects in Art Therapy* is a collection of writings by art therapists. They each posit “found” and discarded material as a tool for contending with personal narratives and the emotional landscape within a visual art practice.

Exterior: Exterior domestic space like the garden, the clothesline or the yard. Also extends to the neighborhood, the park, the sidewalk, the playground, and public sports fields and courts. Exterior is colloquially known as *you* and *there*.

Interior: Interior domestic space like the bathroom, kitchen or bedroom. More generally, the home. Interior is colloquially known as *me* and *here*.

Threshold: Kitchen window, cat door, or belly button. Threshold is colloquially known as *time* and *distance*.

Play: Very essential always. An invitation for humor, celebration, the corny, and the clunky.

Psychic Garden: The collective soul. Psychic Garden is a state of mind; a state of being. An ecology of you, me, and us; where cultivation, cycles, and evolution occur. Psychic Garden needs to be tended and listened to.

Softness: Colloquially known as *strength*.

Sponge: Symbol of the domestic and active listener. Grows turgid with water, but some sponges are glass and impermeable.

Spread, To: In active relation, but not limited to: The potential for maternity. The possibility of what mothering can be. The desire to procreate. The negotiation of how much or how little of the self to reveal and give. The ongoing predicament of how much space to take up once one does choose to share. And the absolute choice one always, always has over their own body and only their body.

Studio: Learning to trust myself.

Time: A revelator and a distance. Two overflowing cups flipped, stacked and pressed together, hinged like a diptych.



Figure 30. detail of *Flower / Pile of Us*, 2024.



Figure 31. Ree Morton, *Terminal Clusters*¹⁷, 1974. Oil on wood, enamel on celastic, light-bulbs. 48x58.5x8 inches

¹⁷ The phrase or term “terminal clusters” is not always clearly defined. One possible meaning refers to flowers that cluster at the end or tip of a branch. I think that for Ree, the phrase also alludes to a diagnosis. I riff on the language of this archway, with my own sculpted porcelain and paper pulp objects, repeating the phrase “tendrils cluster.” Cluster as a verb and as a movement, rather than a landing. Tendrils of plants and flowers constantly climb, unfurl, grip, reach, congregate, and embrace.



Figure 32. details of *Psychic Garden*, *T-e-n-d-r-i-l-s* and *cl-us-ter*, 2024. Porcelain with paper pulp.



Figure 33. *Brooches*, 2022. Found and discarded materials with caulking and self.



Figure 34. *Eleanor's Sweetest Corn on Earth*, 2023. Glazed ceramic¹⁸.

¹⁸ Resting on a shelf in the shape of an ironing board. Wrapped and stretched taut in fabric with a printed image of a blanket crocheted by my Great Grandmother.



Figure 35. *Psychic Garden* (alternate view no. 3), 2024.

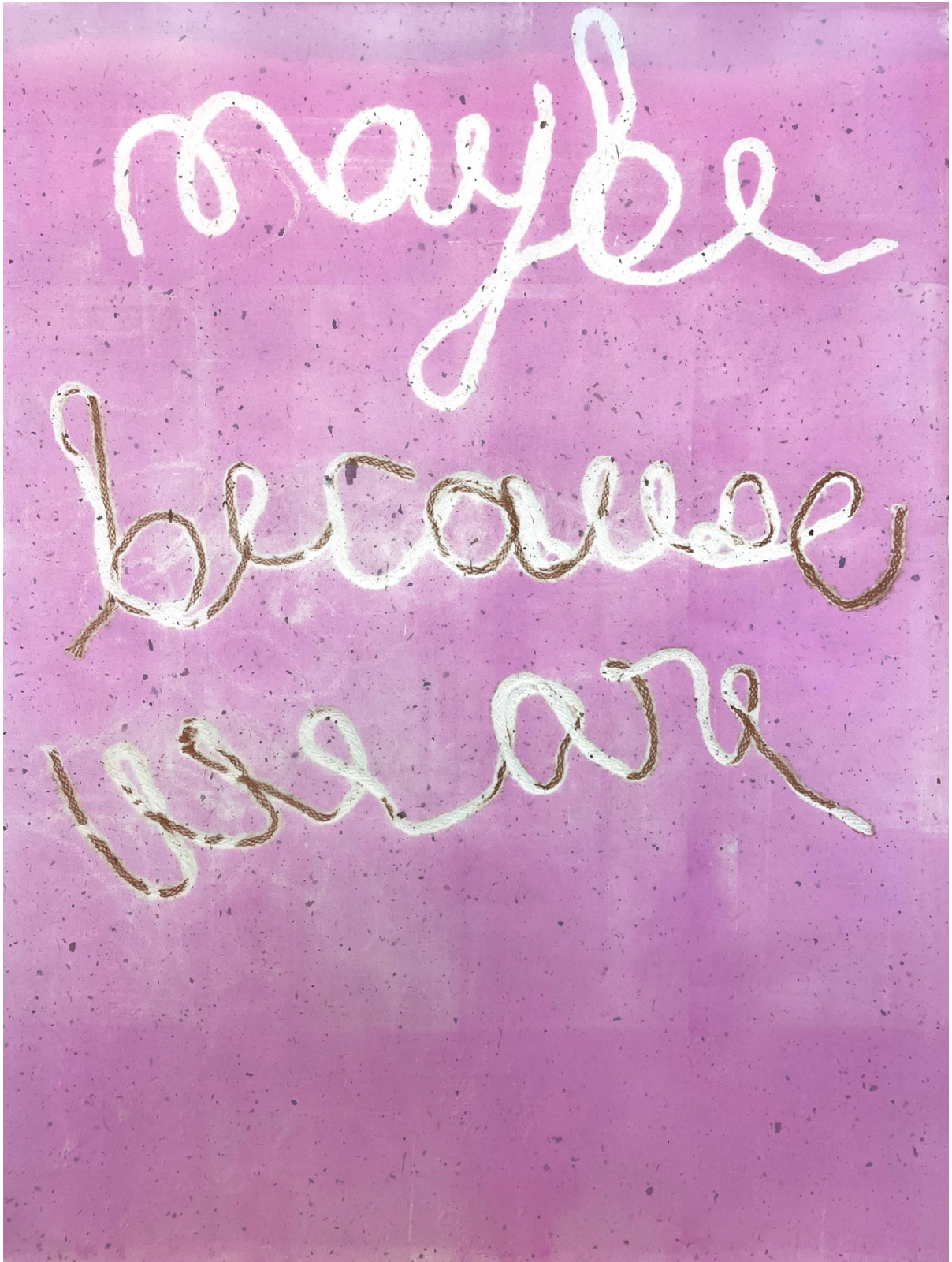


Figure 36. *Maybe because we are, you are always, no.1*, 2024. Monotype on rice paper. 24x18 inches



Figure 37. *Maybe because we are, you are always, no.3*, 2024. Monotype on rice paper. 18x24 inches

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