Slippery Spaces

Master of Fine Arts Thesis: Metal

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What happens when your context for remembering is six thousand miles away? Immigrants experience this phenomenon everyday. We travel through time and space - like aliens in foreign land, we attempt to blend in. We live in the past while navigating the present, with a keen eye on the future. Our memories are the only tangible connectors to a lost past. We cling to ephemera if we have the luxury of bringing them on our journey. With or without, we rely on our senses to take us back. Objects hold power in our memories. When these objects are lost, we remember by way of the senses: texture, sound, smell. Our minds abstract forms and build them into foreign, half-remembered perceptions of the real thing.

There are many reasons that people leave their birth homes. A common thread in the immigrant experience is the desire to return to a place of belonging, and to feel comfortable in their new surroundings. If this does not happen, the desire to return to a time and place where that feeling of comfort was once felt becomes even stronger. If one cannot return to a place of comfort such as a childhood home, how does one solve this problem? Do we build a community of comfort? Or perhaps build new objects that help us understand our desire to return.

The overarching themes of my research are recollection and the inability to remember, imagination, and the surreal. I am interested in the human desire to return to the past and the need to relive comforting childhood memories. We escape to imagination to connect to our pasts, to rest and retreat from reality. In our daydreams, we travel through our imaginations and into these unseen spaces that can no longer be
touched. We build sanctuaries that make sense to us. As an immigrant from Lagos, Nigeria, I recall our family’s past in place and time, and I am drawn to construct spaces that connect me to these lost memories. Through objects, we are able to transport our minds to a specific place or time. Although this body of work is born from my personal experience, the concept of displacement, loss and longing is familiar to so many. This is the basis of my research for *Slippery Space|s|* - an installation of transportive objects that consider time travel, nostalgia, and what we rebuild in our minds when loss overwhelms. The viewer is invited to walk through this constructed space and engage these abstract objects.

I am interested in the idea of creating a personal myth, through narrative objects. As a means of repairing feelings of displacement as a result of immigration. Tiona Nekkia McClodden is an artist that adopts biomythography in her practice.

“Biomythography is a literary term; it is a style of composition that weaves myth, history, and biography in epic narrative ... Implementing biomythography as a studio practice provides a challenge to critical historical practices. Multi - mediated and interdisciplinary platforms are used to investigate historical facts, life experience, pop culture, and mythology; challenging, forming and informing, art history, display, anthropology, identity, and ritual as well as personal, universal, and institutional perspectives and histories.” - Chris Christion and Jessica Wimbley

I propose storytelling and world building through objects and immersion.

Through abstraction, these works evoke feelings of the familiar. My objects are wayfinders - tools of navigation that allow me to travel back into the recesses of my mind. The various textures are meditative and intuitive.

Texture is transportative, it guides our daydreams, and shapes our memories. When experiencing a textured object, we might brush our skin against it, or imagine
crisp, rough edges in our minds. It forms our understanding of tangible and palpable experiences. Using texture, we discern what was once lost - the shifting, slippery spaces in the vastness of our minds become realities. My objects are the results of these proposed realities.

The phenomena I am researching occur in the mind, whether through daydreaming or active meditation. They exist in the realm of memories, imagination and fantasy, and nostalgia. They live in objects that have been imbued with memory; in the heirlooms and treasures cherished by individuals for as long as we can remember. The materials I select are rooted in the tradition of Yoruba rituals. Metal and stone have been used to represent offerings and supplications to the vast pantheon of gods and ancestors. I am excited by the glint of textured metal, the smooth and luminescent quality of alabaster, the open spaces of hollow forms that recede into a vacuum. These otherworldly qualities are imperative to the aesthetics and content of my work.

I grew up spending most of my time with my family, telling Yoruba folktales and learning about Yoruba mythology. During numerous power outages, we bonded by candle light and connected with each other by sharing our interests. I have visceral emotional responses to these memories and the objects that trigger them. Although the objects in Slippery Space[s] are not direct representations of specific memories, they stand as monuments of my collective memories.
These words alone produce automatic, visceral responses. In the same way, I have created an index of textured objects.

*Abrasive, Blistered, Burnished…*

*Bubbly, Caked, Cottony…*

*Crisp, Crunchy, Cratered…*

*Dripping, Dry, Encrusted…*

This body of work started as an investigation of materials – meditative by nature of the monotonous and intensive processes such as carving, chiselling, braiding, hammering and fabricating. I approach making with the same curiosity I had as a child. My studio becomes a world of play and fantasy where the possibilities are limitless - this play is informed by traditional and non-traditional craft and metal smithing techniques. I combine research-based methodologies with intuitive making. I believe there is value in the meditative process of creating work. I find that working between these methods evokes the action of recalling memories and imagination. In the making of this work, I am transported to memories of playing with my brother in my mother’s garden.

…

*We are making food from plants, and drinks from the red soil. We are building cities and empires of mud.*

…
This approach to making allows me to work in response to my materials. When pouring wax or pewter into an open mould, I allow the material to flow where it wants, with minimal influence from the hand. By doing this, there is room for the materials to breathe their own life into the work. Accidents occur, and I embrace them: rips and tears become revelations, spills are celebrated and evolve into an assertive language within the work. Carved lines tell a story of where the hand has been. This carving is meditative, the casting results in a copy of a copy, much like a memory recalled over and over again.

The aesthetics are influenced by the science fiction TV shows from my childhood. These objects have bled into reality, they are awkward, otherworldly, but familiar. To exist in space as I imagine them, they require non-traditional modes of presentation. They are mounted as monuments on bizarre structures that resemble ethereal architectural and bodily forms. I reference aesthetics of science fiction because of the parallels that can be drawn between the immigrant experience and alien life. My pedestals are modelled after the termite mounds and anthills in Nigeria. As a child I imagined whole worlds that existed in these mounds. My forms appear earth-like, as though they are sculpted from clay. They are not simply pedestals or supports, they work in concert with each object, and breathe life into them. I chose to build these structures using stacked insulation foam, foam coat, sand and paint. This material choice adds to the fictional quality of the work. They are created to look like, but can never be the real thing.
ÁILÓPIN mound detail - Foam, Foam Coat, Sand

Etched, Feathery, Flaky...

Fuzzy, Gooey, Grainy...

IGBÁ mound detail - Foam, Foam Coat, Sand
I have been experimenting with pewter and casting it into textured moulds. Pewter can appear slippery, soft, and retains its liquid-like qualities when poured without too much restriction. Because of this quality, pewter is the ideal material to represent disappearing memories. In *ÉÉMI (Breath)*, pewter is haphazardly poured into an open textured mould that is pulled from a sheet of carved linoleum. The imperfect pour is left with holes in which more pewter is poured and layered, resulting in a unique topographical surface. Sheet pewter is then fabricated around it to create a puffed and slightly deflated form that appears stressed from the weight of the textured top.

*ÉÉMI* detail, 2022
ÉÉMİ - Pewter, Foam, Foam Coat, Sand, 2022

It is nestled securely in its mound - cradled and at rest. The glint in the textured pewter is meditative, like a reflection pool or a topographical map.
ÉÉMI detail, 2022

Hairy, Jagged, Lumpy...

Matte, Mushy, Pitted...

Prickly, Puffy, Ragged...

LÁTI RÁNTÍ (Recollection) presents a set of textured pewter tablets set into a table-like form. The piece sits low to the ground, inviting the viewer to come closer and inspect. It also suggests a space of gathering and recollection, or where one might sit and mark memories.
LÁTI RÁNTÍ - Pewter, Foam, Foam Coat, 2022

LÁTI RÁNTÍ detail, 2022
I employ electroforming as a technique because it allows me to sculpt in an additive and subtractive fashion and show evidence of the hand. I can alter the electroformed skin through metal fabrication. It is a blend of the crisp, clean nature of metal and a trace of the hand. The electroformed skin is the memory of the original object—produced over and over again. The skins are made substantial by deckling—enclosing the open textures into hollow forms. Like a reproduced memory, they morph and degrade. This idea comes to life in **BAJE (Deteriorate)**. It holds forms that appear shrivelled and crunchy, curling in on themselves. You can perceive what it feels like without actually touching it. These forms are fixed onto a bodily plinth.
AŞĀN (Flow) is a sculpture with a substantial base. It is rough and handle-like, inviting you to hold it. A milky white alabaster protrusion grows from the top - disjointed and spilling. It sits atop a mound that elevates its presence. Here its copper section is produced only once, using electroforming. This particular electroformed skin is simultaneously a support and a part of the alabaster, one cannot function without the other.
Ribbed, Rough, Runny...

Scarred, Scorched, Smooth...

AŞAN detail, 2022

Slippery, Stodgy, Thorny...

Velvety, Wavy, Withered...
In ÁILÓPIN (*Infinity*), a snake-like coil sits low on its earthen platform. Its continuous form is connected by a section of copper braids, connecting the missing segment of stone. The selective refining and smoothing of the stone reveals the magic of the material. The rest of the stone is left in its rough chiselled state. It appears to be a touchstone of sorts - one can imagine a place that is often visited and touched, in ritual.
ÁILÓPIN - Alabaster, Copper, Foam, Foam Coat, Sand, 2022
**IGBÁ** *(Calabash)* is the last piece that came together in this body of work. This combination of copper and alabaster is seen again, however, the alabaster is the anchor for the copper. This glowing heavy section of stone supports the copper braids that sit on top of it, as if in motion. As the viewer moves around the object, they will notice moments where they are invited to gaze deeper; the undulating texture of the braids, the rigid marks of the chisel in the alabaster, and the gritty form of the plinth that it sits on.

*IGBÁ* - Copper, Alabaster, Foam, Foam Coat, Sand, 2022
IGBÁ - Copper, Alabaster, Foam, Foam Coat, Sand, 2022
The void of memory is a hungry place. It is never sated, yet our desire to dive deeper is constant. I am unsure of where this work will take me, and what objects will come to be, but the excitement lies in the questions and continued research within the theme of memory and the threads that emerge in the making of the work. I will continue to investigate how my objects, selected craft processes and studies of texture can serve as wayfinders and connectors to my past.

“[...]texture produces shadow and tone, and light and rhythm, and provokes us to look longer at something.” - Wangechi Mutu
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SLIPPERY SPACE(S)

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