Tikvah Tevah

Senior Thesis Show by
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Tikvah (t-ee-k-v-uh) means Hope. Tevah (the-Vah) means Nature.

Both represent my artwork and myself. Both are Hebrew Words.

Both my artwork and my culture are something I am proud of.

I am a Jewish American woman living in a society that wasn't made for me. I do not always find an already made place for me in society, but I am determined to carve and find a place for myself. Using imagery from nature and natural materials helps me find and make this place.

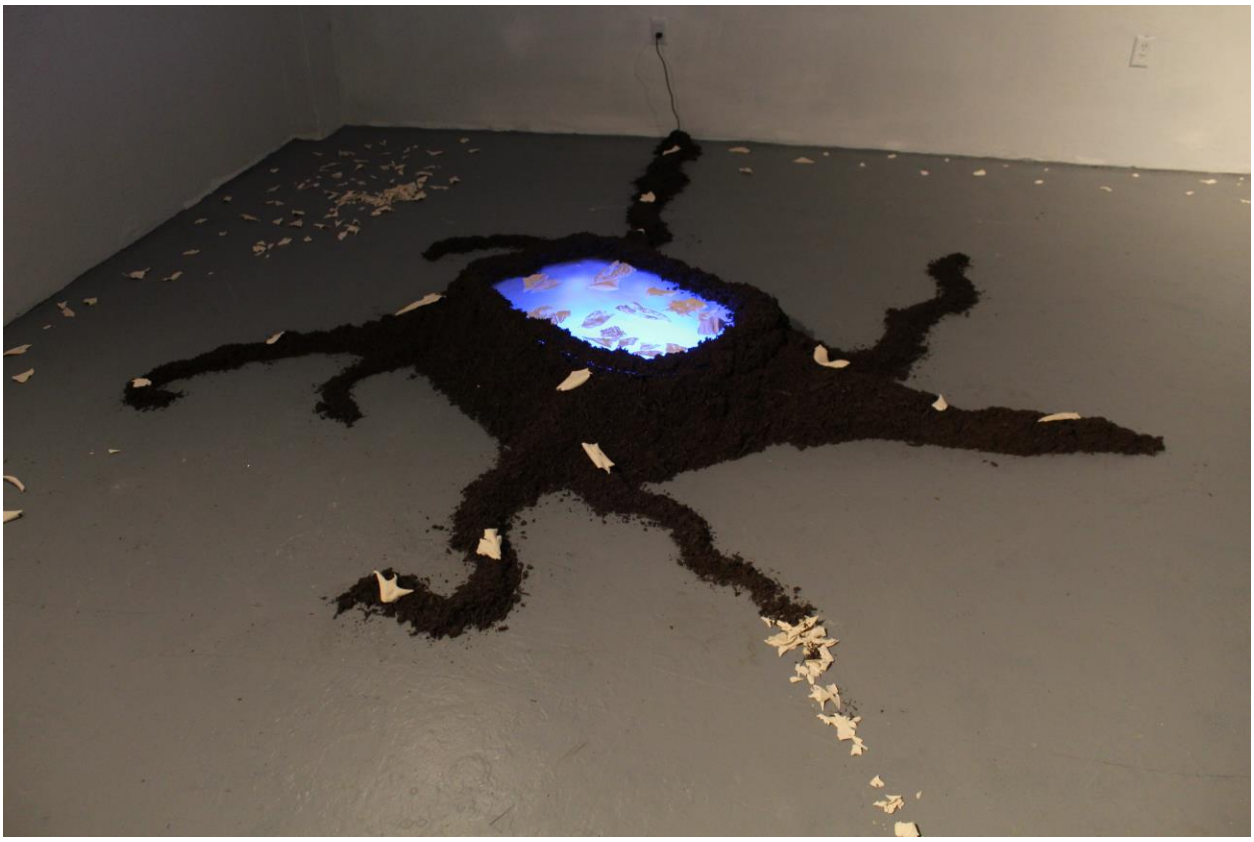
I have a spiritual connection to art and nature, but it wasn't until I started to work in ceramics as a pre-teen that I felt complete. One of the many things I love about clay is that it is a raw material that allows me to use it to create a window into myself. An imagery that is repeated in my work and that I identify with is the image of trees. Trees are something that has been a constant in my life; from living trees around me, to its symbolism in Judaism, to how it is used as a tool in art therapy, Trees have always been a part of my life. I admire their strength and fragility. There is incredible power within fragility. I suffer from different mental and physicals illnesses, including fibromyalgia. For me, this means sometimes it takes me a few extra steps and time to accomplish what I want to do, but that doesn't ever stop me. If I want to do or create something, nothing can stop me. I firmly believe that you are the one in charge of how you navigate what life throws at you. There are no problems, whether spiritually, physically, artistically, or psychologically that you cannot find the answers to if you are willing to take the time and work through them. Within my practice, whenever an issue arises from either the materials or concept, I take a step back and refocus on how to fix it instead of giving up. With my large-scale ceramics' installations, this skill is used often. I work closely with a piece; sitting with it for hours on end getting every little detail exactly right. I want the feeling I have inside to

come through my hand. Working in ceramics for most of my life has given me a deeper understanding and appreciation for the medium. But it has also given me a love working and pushing clay to its extremes. Even though ceramics is an extremely old medium, everyday there are new processes and techniques that evolve. Every time I work with ceramics, whether low fire clay or porcelain, I am also discovering new things and working through different problems.

When I started creating ceramic trees on a large scale, such as the 6-foot tree in my thesis show, I realized that I connect to them physically as well as spiritually. My soul and identity are strong like a trunk, but my body is fragile like the leaves. And just like leaves, they are extremely important. You need to survive and thrive. Art has always allowed me to survive the fragility of my mind and body. No matter how hard I try, my trees continue to physically represent my body. They slump and bend as if mirroring myself as I create it. The same thing happens when I am forming my stalagmites and stalactites. Created in nature through time and the movement of sedimentation via water drops in caves, I see myself in them as it takes time and movement to create who I am in this world and to grow through the physical and mental illnesses I carry with me. It takes time to make a stalagmite or stalactite, as it takes time to heal. I feel the energy from different natural forms, like trees and rocks, and I recreate that through other materials and with my own touch. No matter how much I learn and see, I will always find something new and beautiful in nature.

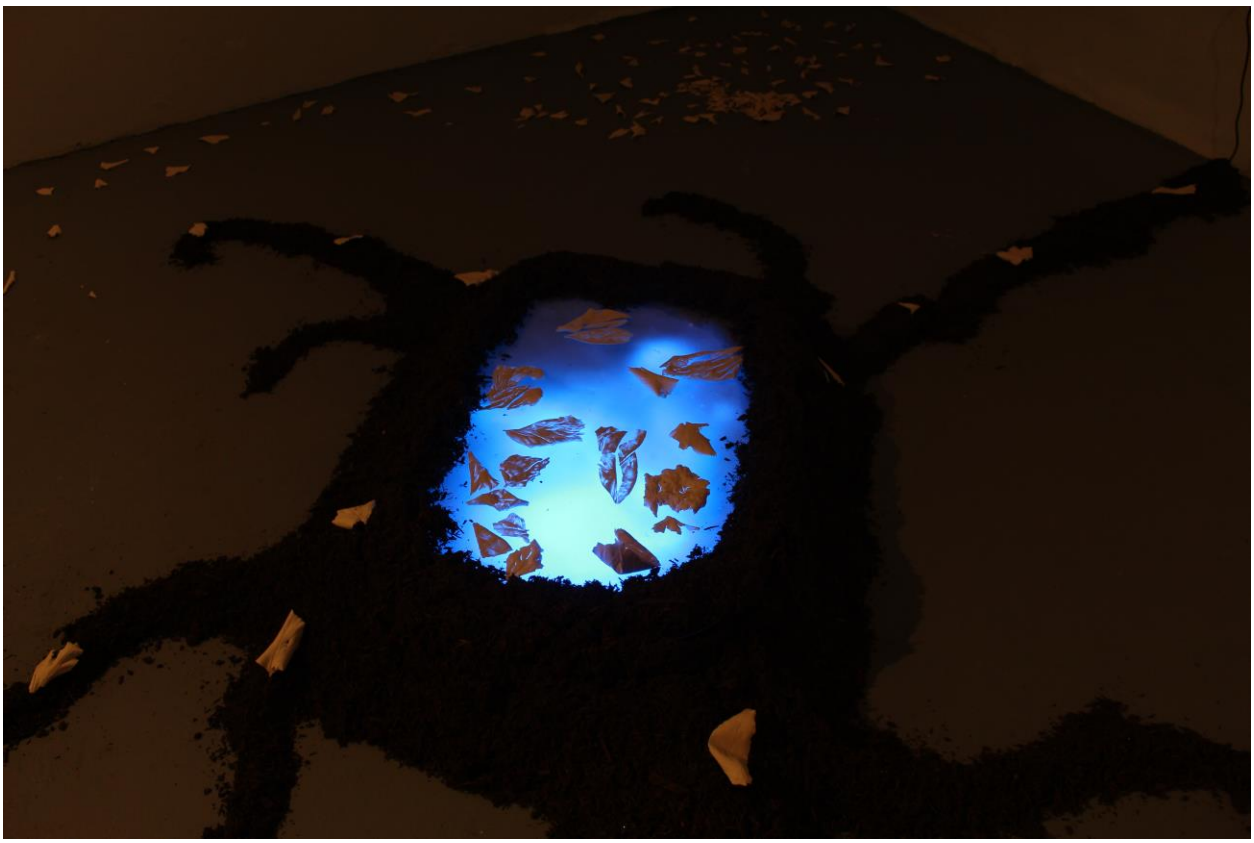
All of these spiritual and physical imagery can be seen in my senior thesis show. The viewer is transported into a different environment where different pieces of nature are seen together, such as a tree and stalactites, while constructing the ambiguous narrative of strength and fragility of both nature and humanity. Despite being in its own environment, the installation could be divided into three different sections. The first section is a 6-foot ceramic tree, covered in thorns and lives; it spreads and takes up the space in the room. This tree resembles my body as it is the same width as me. The thorns represent a desire to protect myself while still being open and in the world. Throughout the tree you can see cracks and lines that show you how it is put together. Rather than hiding the flaws, I embrace them. The moments of fragility of the large tree allows the viewer to see and feel the strength of the tree, the light source behind the tree illuminates the cracks and breaks. Across the floor and around the tree are other thorns and fallen

leaves that represent growth and embrace change and time. This tree has allowed me to push the limits of what I know clay can do while also pushing the limits of what I thought I could make.



The next section of my show is a pond covered in porcelain leaves. When I first started experimenting with porcelain clay, I wanted to be able to slip cast it so thin so that light could transfer through it. I found that casting leaves allowed me to work thinner than paper while still being just sturdy enough to not completely crumble. When I first started to show these leaves, I made lightboxes using LED lights. For my thesis show, I incorporated natural materials. The pond is formed from natural topsoil in the shape that resembles a cut tree stump with roots growing out of it. The LED lights are blue and hidden inside the hole at the top of the stump covered by frosted Plexi glass and covered in different porcelain slip cast leaves. I take inspiration from Andy Goldsworthy's work. I have always been inspired by his use of natural material, especially trees/leaves and rocks. Goldsworthy allows the natural material to take the forefront, with the artist's hand in the background. I will continue to explore these natural

materials in addition to ceramics. My pond suggests that this occurred naturally. I use ambiguity as a tool in my work to both allow the viewer to figure out how this piece relates to themselves and to create naturally unnatural environments. Another part of Andy Goldsworthy's practice that inspired this piece was how this was not a permanent piece, rather a piece for the moment. Ceramics is a permanent material. Once it is made it cannot be unmade. However, dirt is the opposite. This dirt pond was made for this show and that is it. It can be recreated but it will never be the original. Time is a funny thing. Something might be here one moment and gone the next. When talking about fragility, there are moments where it is a strength and moments when it isn't. Capturing these moments in work is something I strive for.



The last section of my show is my cave. Using painted black wood, I created a structure to hang my stalactites from. I placed this wood at my shoulder length so that the viewer is forced to move in order to see the work. I hung 4 stalactites from this cave with 4 stalagmites on the floor directly below them to create the sense that they are making each other. Each of these stalactites and stalagmites are constructed with the coil method. The details and movement of them are created via hand dripping slip. When creating these I have a conversation with the clay and allow it to tell me how it wants to drip and flow. I work with these ceramic stalactites and stalagmites to create their own movement and environment. I have taken inspiration from Valerie Hegarty in allowing the work to transform itself and the space it takes up. Valerie Hegarty's work creates its own environment when it is displayed. It doesn't feel as if it is placed in the installation, rather it grows from it naturally. This is most evidential in how many of her paintings move from beyond their frames, demanding more space to grow. Another area of Valerie Hegarty's work that I take inspiration from is her ceramic work. She continually pushes

the known physical and conceptual limits of clay in order to transform while also still keeping focus on the incredible details in the work that allow the viewer to recognize what they are looking at but also creating a sense of ambiguity that doesn't fully allow the viewer to understand what they are seeing. On top of my cave, I placed three small raku clay trees. Each tree is inspired by different types of trees. One is a Ceiba tree, one is an Oak tree, and one is a Baobab tree. The Baobab tree actually broke in the kiln. I wanted to celebrate the cracks in the tree, so I used the Japanese tradition of Kintsugi by using gold paint on top on the cracks. There is a beauty in seeing something that is considered broken be transformed into something new. The way I created and glazed these trees was inspired again by Valerie Hegarty. These raku trees are the only glazed ceramic work in my show. They are glazed in a more organic way than traditionally seen. The colors of the glaze are not something that are seen in nature, but rather, like Valerie Hegarty's ceramics, is used to empathize the detail and show of the clay. I have always had a love for Raku fires. Being allowed to be so involved in the glazing process while still giving up all control to it allows me to create work that represents the control and lack of control that I have with my own body. In raku you are pushing the clay to its limits while also pushing your body to its limits to create work that you have no control over.

Art has always given me the opportunity to carve my place in the world and to allow others to see how I see the world. In my thesis exhibition, I transported my viewer away from the environment of campus and into an environment where anything is possible. I chose to title my show with Hebrew because I am a proud Jewish woman. Judaism has always been the backbone of my life and my practice. Life is not an easy road. Their ups and downs, moments of strength and moments of fragility. Art allows me to recreate the beauty and strength of nature by giving my viewers hope through the strength and fragility of both the human body and humanity.