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# A Language In Becoming

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*A Language In Becoming*

By

Camille Hawbaker

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

Major: Art

Under the Supervision of Professor Karen Kunc

Lincoln, Nebraska

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# *A Language In Becoming*

Camille Hawbaker, M.F.A.

University of Nebraska, 2014

Advisor: Karen Kunc

Words as I have known them are evolving concepts in the landscape of human language, where the meanings of words are interwoven with layers of history and culture. The boundaries of language are defined by words, and around the edges are instinctive sounds that precede and exceed meaning. These sounds are an interrupting force that unsettles the linguistic structure. We often use them for expression in the form of sobs, grunts, moans, murmurs, chants, obscenities and exclamations. They appear in times of spontaneous emotion that words cannot convey. They can also be used purposely, poetically, "...to shatter [one's] judging consciousness in order to grant passage through it to this rhythmic drive...and, once filtered by language and its meaning, experienced as *jouissance*."<sup>1</sup>

I think of *jouissance* as a subversively sensual, mental, emotional, physical experience that disrupts consciousness. It flows in waves, like sound. It carries one beyond meaning to a bodily experience that cannot be contained by words. For codified language holds constructed ideologies, and we use it to describe ourselves to one another – to construct an identity. Language becomes flat, rigid and predictable when it stays within the boundaries of established ideologies. Therefore, it is vital to keep it alive by allowing it to be unsettled, to allow room for meaning to change. I explore this concept of disruption through journals that transform into drawings evoking rhythmic sound, natural forms and decorative motifs.

I begin with words dissolving into matter in pages of personal journals. The paper is tattered through the process of writing with flammable liquids and then stitching the

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<sup>1</sup> Julia Kristeva. "From One Identity to An Other." *Desire in Language*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980. 142. Print

fragments together. As words fall away, lines of thread and color take their place. The threads consume the paper and ash, and it becomes a new material. The fibers of text dissolve, or they are trapped in the layers of thread, and they become palimpsests containing the history of what they were within the actuality of what they are. This physical history is embedded in the fibers, replacing the symbolic meaning of words with a material otherness.

The repetitive lines of thread form a new structure containing linear drawings. Now, the line of thought is visible as one image. The drawings were etched and printed on silk, and they reference the thread lines that emerge from the ashes of the pages. A single line loops in and around itself in a cyclical path that begins at one point and accretes layers of repetitive spirals and spikes. The line is driven by a rhythmic sense of disorder, unbalance, and asymmetry. As expressive energy, the lines resemble plants, birds, insects and fossils, although they are not any of these things. The organic forms reflect the inherent principles of design that govern natural growth, including ourselves: “We spin into life in the womb as a spiral embryo. We are conscious energy systems that whirl into configuration as other natural energies do along spiral lines of force, unfurling into life along an endless path of spiral transformation.”<sup>2</sup> There is a tension between order and disorder, creation and destruction in how the material shifts from woven to unraveling matter.

The process of making these drawings is a meditative one. I use a library of spiraling gestures in both deliberate and spontaneous formats. I react to intuition by intentionally drawing in one mode, but I also impulsively interrupt the designs by changing the rhythm or direction of the line. It is a dance between the hand and mind guided by inner sounds or vibrations; an emotive stream of consciousness manifest in a physical format. This process of drawing is analogous to the journaling from which it stems, for both practices make space for interior dialogue.

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<sup>2</sup> Schneider, Michael S. *A Beginner's Guide to Constructing the Universe*. New York: HarperCollins, 1994. 152. Print.

It is a dialogue with the influences in my life. I see the influence of nature and music, as well as the decorative patterns and methods of sewing that I inherit from my mother. Some of my earliest memories are of sewing cross-stitch with her. She would push the needle in and I would pull it through. This physical interaction between us made an image on the fabric. It was a conversation between two hands. I return to that conversation, and of finding a feminine perspective by sewing away the fragments of paper to construct a material of line and thread.

There is a long tradition in art history of turning inward for wordless expression. Wassily Kandinsky emphasized music in his non-objective art, the Abstract Expressionists sought interior psychological truths, and Surrealists employed automatic drawings to unveil the inner psyche. I want to link this idea to the thought of the body as a source of knowing – of “embodied knowledge,” as artist Ann Hamilton explains it. I also feel that many unnamed individuals draw from this inner source through “mere” decoration – I think of the women in India who daily paint patterns outside their homes in the earth as ephemeral rituals of time passed from day to day, as well as to mark milestones like birth, adolescence and marriage.<sup>3</sup> They reflect the passage of time, decay and regeneration, and the perpetual cycles of these processes.

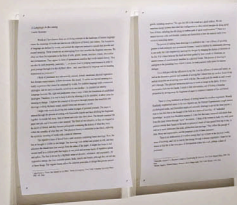
There is an undercurrent of wordless energy that I try to know in the physical, bodily sense of knowing, and I try to convey that energy through a sensory experience. I hope for the viewer to find his or her own introspection within this work, perhaps a wave of *jouissance*.

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<sup>3</sup> Huyler, Stephen. *Painted Prayers: Women's Art in Village India*. New York: Rizzoli, 1994. Print.

# *A Language In Becoming*

*Camille Hawbaker*



Entrance, middle gallery



Inside east gallery, North & west walls





North & east walls





North wall



Phoenix





South wall with east & west on sides



West wall



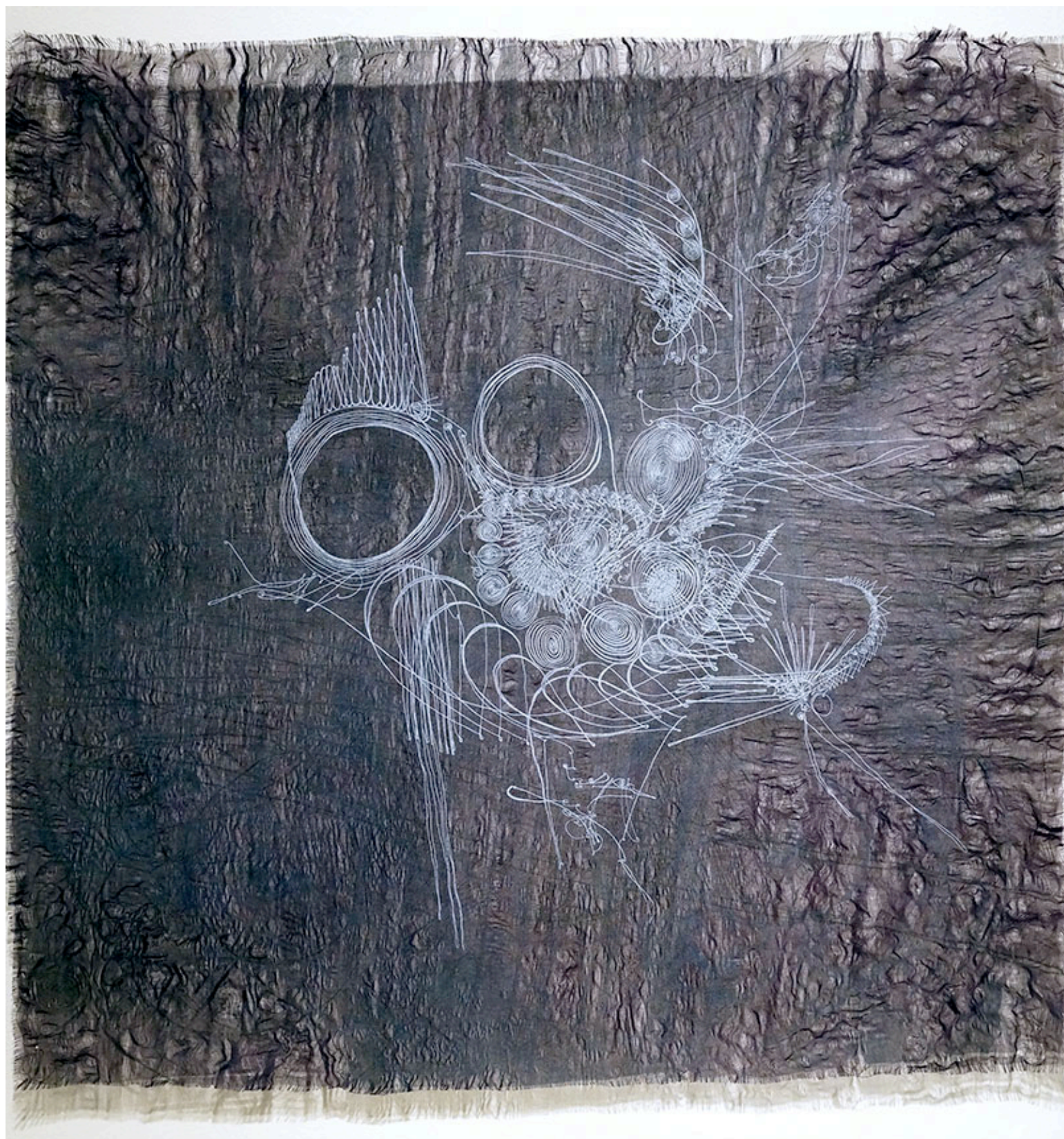


West wall



Middle gallery, west wall





Breathe





The Center Cannot Hold





Centrifuge





Unfurl





Bass Murmur





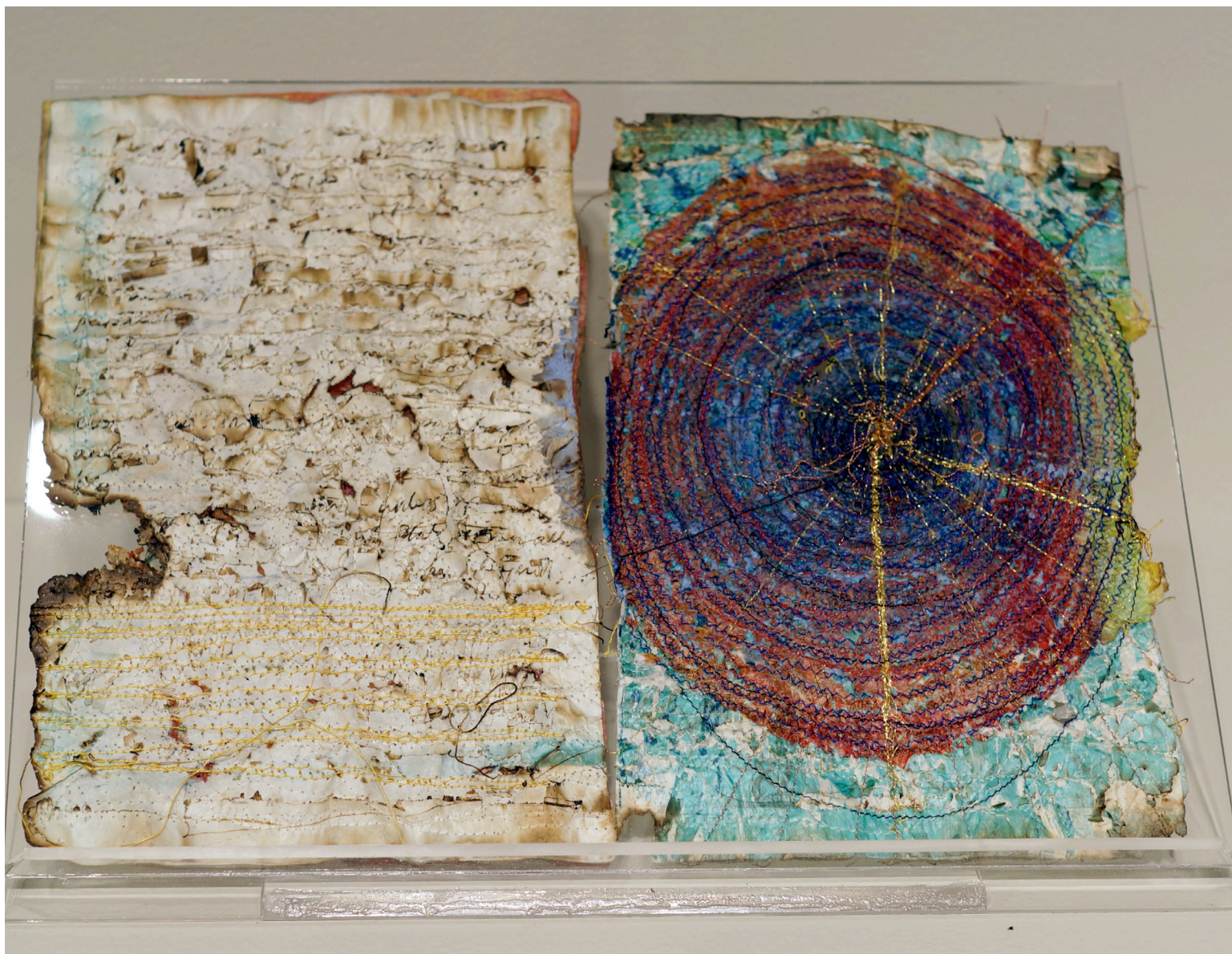
April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2003





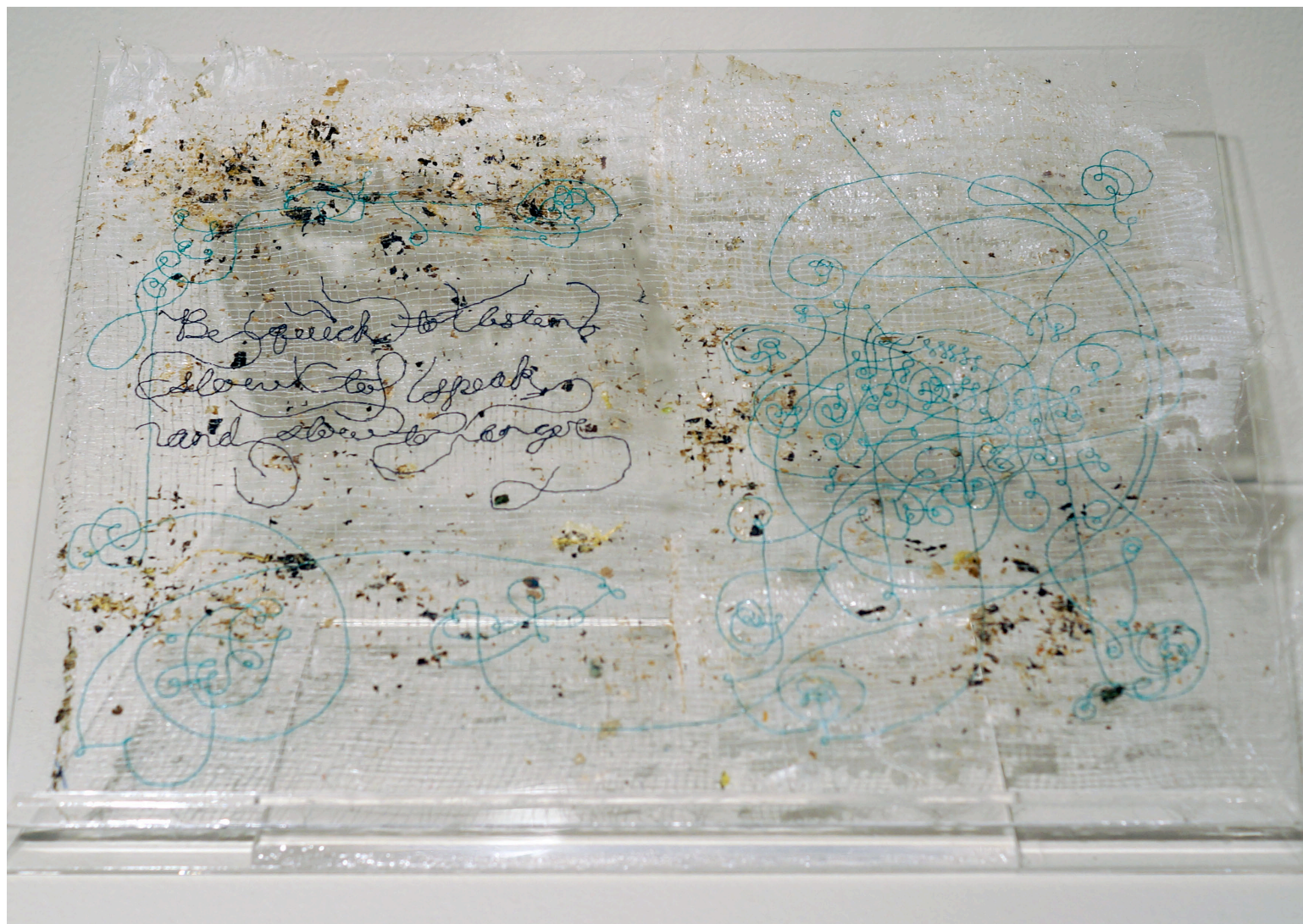
Date Unknown, green





March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2006





November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2006