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The Weight of It All

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THE WEIGHT OF IT ALL

by

Amythest Hultman Warrington

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

Pete Pinnell

Lincoln, Nebraska

April, 2021

THE WEIGHT OF IT ALL

Amythest Hultman Warrington, M.F.A.

University of Nebraska, 2021

Advisor: Pete Pinnell

The impetus for this exhibition is to visualize the weight of loss and to focus attention on the need to recognize the inherent dichotomy between life's beauty and loss. My mobile upbringing taught me that details may differ from group to group, but the core experiences of loss, empathy and belonging are a universal language that connects us. I utilize clay's unique physical properties of malleability, recyclability and permanence once fired, to explore the dichotomy between strength and frailty associated with these universal connectors. The meticulously crafted beautiful objects draw one into serious and often taboo subjects. The work comforts those who need it, while challenging those who are comfortable.

Each piece in the exhibition was inspired by pivotal moments in my journey of healing after my husband committed suicide. They are not about the loss itself but rather the emotions that followed. Loss, depression, and isolation are universal experiences that the Covid19 pandemic and social distancing have magnified on a global scale. My intention, by visualizing the emotional weight of loss to help people and society develop greater understanding of empathy for those experiencing loss and isolation. I want people to recognize the beauty inherent in all human experiences.

What happens when we physically represent the emotional weight all humans carry around, when we make the invisible visible by physically weighing down into the clay, leaving the imprint of the

pressure visible, while removing the object? The focus becomes the impact of an experience, the emotional weight an experience leaves on a person, and it is all the more powerful when the only evidence of the lost object is the mark its absence left.

Porcelain hands, one 3-dimensional, and the other the imprint left by the other person, are displayed on opposite sides of the same wall as if they were touching through the wall. They are unable to connect through the physical and emotional distance. This space between people can speak louder than anything said or not said. I noticed similar feelings of disconnection and isolation while social distancing during quarantine as I did following the death of someone I loved. These experiences provide an opportunity for self-examination, to explore my connections to others and develop empathy.

My work explores the tragedy of loss but also the beauty in it. Love is required between people in order to feel the pain of losing them, as you would not feel the grief of a loss without first experiencing the love, and without the love you would not experience the grief. The pillow of roses, which is the embodiment of a labor of love, is comprised of row after row of roses, forming a pillow with an imprint of head of one who once laid on the pillow. The labor required to form this pillow mirrors the labor required to build and maintain a relationship while each flower physically represents the memories in that relationship.

Every flower, hand formed from clay, represents a memory memorialized, preserved forever, or slowly dissolving, put on display for all to see. Each petal begins as a small ball which repeatedly gets pressed into the palm of my hand to create a tapered shape, hiding a thicker middle that creates structure and strength in what seems to be very thin clay, due to the rim quality. My palm print is stamped on each petal with a final slap between both hands. The petals are then joined one by one,

growing from the central shape and formed pinch by pinch. Roses are my go-to flower because they are ubiquitous, used to celebrate birth, death, romance, healing, and everything in between. It allows the viewer to assign their own meaning to the flower.

I find comfort in the making of repetitive objects that can be combined to create something larger and different from the components. Like a rose made from individual petals that is then combined in a large quantity to make an object such as the pillow of roses or the bed of roses, creating a field of memories made visible for all. I find it incredibly fascinating that some cultures believe in hiding one's true self while others believe in putting one's true self on display. What happens when we expose our experiences or the mess of our life to all who interact with us? Would it impact how we treat one another?

Clay can be an incredibly strong and durable material, but I push it to its limits, creating visibly fragile flowers that defy gravity in a way that clay shouldn't. This frailty of a strong material mirrors the human experience. Like a person, my flowers have hidden strength. They are stronger than they appear, yet still fragile. Clay can be recycled in multiple ways, allowing one to edit and create again from the same material. This unique property is utilized in my work to allude to how we, like clay, can be reshaped and begin again anew, formed from the same material, yet different from our past.

The wall of bricks is comprised of hollow unglazed porcelain bricks made from a press mold of a special decaying brick from the turn of the previous century, saved by my grandmother. It was something used, worn, and discarded that someone found value in and used again. This cycle, discarded, saved and made anew, mirrors how someone who finds themselves broken down, running into a brick wall can start anew. The typical function of a brick cannot be performed by these bricks

as they are hollow, unable to bear weight, frozen in a state of decay yet still stable and beautiful. Their metaphorical function is enough, just like the person in front of the wall is enough.

I find inspiration in religious practices because they create a sense of community and belonging, while also creating spaces for healing and self-examination. I am inspired by religious symbols, like the Western Wall in Jerusalem, but I am not attempting to replicate nor replace these rituals and practices. Rather I look to them for inspiration and understanding because I strive for these same characteristics within my own work.

I intentionally use beauty to make my work approachable, even disarm the viewer before they realize the emotional weight of the work. We already have enough ugliness in the world, I do not need to create more, in order to ask the viewer to engage with serious subjects. It is hard to get someone to willingly approach topics such as suicide, but art provides a safe access point for tough subjects and can serve to examine and challenge our established beliefs. These objects are enough as beautiful objects, but if the viewer chooses to think about the implications of their content, the object points to a different conversation beyond physical beauty.

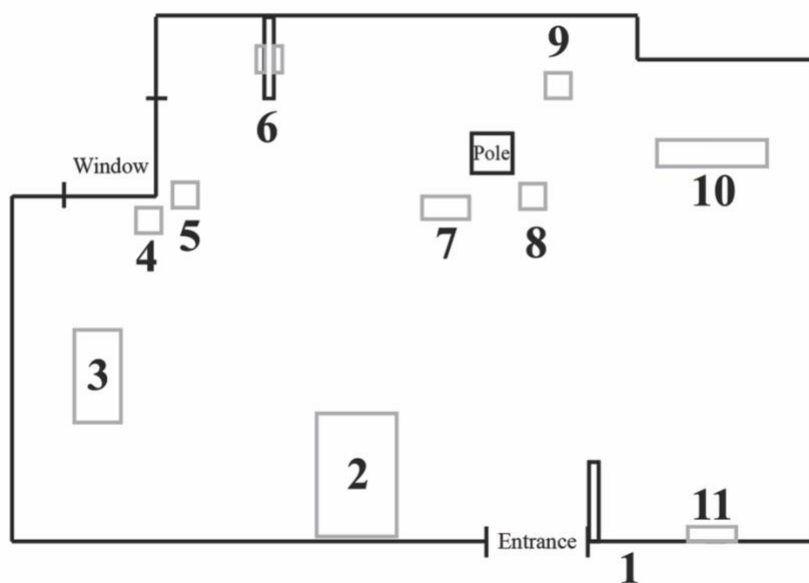
We are defined by empathy, love, loss. We choose what baggage to keep as we move forward. Our experiences make us into who we are, but we do not have to be defined by our past and the marks it has left on us. Like the bed of roses, where the memories represented by the unfired roses dissolve as water drips on them, breaking down the clay so it can be formed into something new, so too we can take things, recycle them, and create a new beginning from the used, broken and beautiful bits. It is an opportunity to examine ourselves and practice empathy as we move forward, embracing both life's beauty and pain through art, despite the weight of it all.

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The Weight of it All Exhibition Map

Eisentrager-Howard Gallery West



1. *Rose Pillow*
White Earthenware
24" x 19" x 8.5"
2020

2. *Bed of Roses*
Unfired porcelain, wood, water
54" x 84" x 36"
2021

3. *Brick Wall*
Porcelain, bisque fired
51" x 21" x 86"
2021

4. *Vase with Lilies and Roses*
White Earthenware
12.5" x 5.5" x 24"
2021

5. *Vase with Gladiolus*
White Earthenware
9.5" x 7.5" x 40"
2021

6. *The Distance Between*
Porcelain
16" x 10.5" x 16"
2021

7. *Vase with Tulips*
White Earthenware
17" x 3" x 17.5"
2021

8. *Vase with Peonies and Tulips*
White Earthenware
14" x 5.5" x 24"
2021

9. *Vase with Orchids and Roses*
White Earthenware
23" x 9" x 33"
2021

10. *Raining Petals*
Porcelain, Soda Fired
59.5" x 11" x 86"
2021

11. *Crying and Laughing Eyes*
looped MP4, displayed on iPad
2020

The Weight of It All

Amythest Hultman Warrington



Rose Pillow
White Earthenware
24" x 19" x 8.5"
2020



Photo by artist



Photo by Larry Gawel



Bed of Roses

Unfired porcelain, wood, water

54" x 84" x 36"

2021

Photo by Larry Gawel



Bed of Roses top view
Photo by artist



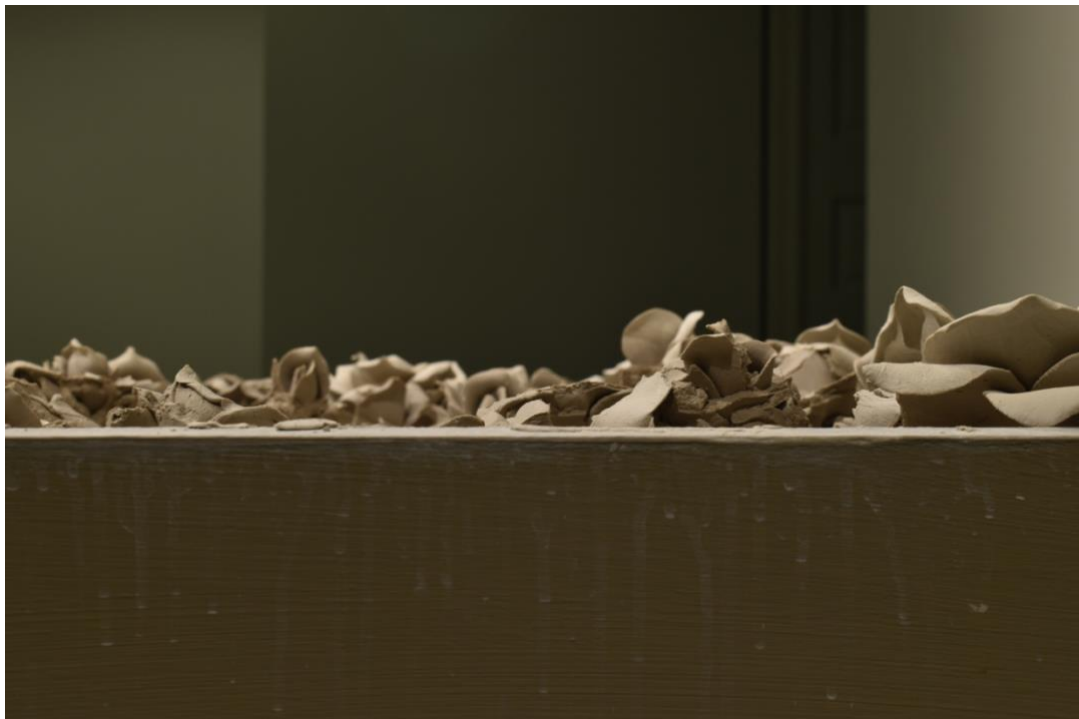
Bed of Roses detail, day 2
Photo by artist



Bed of Roses detail, day 3
Photo by artist



Bed of Roses, water detail
Photo by artist



Bed of Roses water splatter detail
Photo by artist



Brick Wall

Porcelain, bisque fired

2021

51" x 21" x 86"

Photo by Larry Gawel



Brick Wall, looking through into the light from the back detail
Photo by artist



Photo by artist



Photo by artist



Photo by artist



Vase with Gladiolus (left)

White Earthenware

9.5" x 7.5" x 40"

2021

Photo by Larry Gawel

Vase with Lilies and Roses (right)

White Earthenware

12.5" x 5.5" x 24"

2021



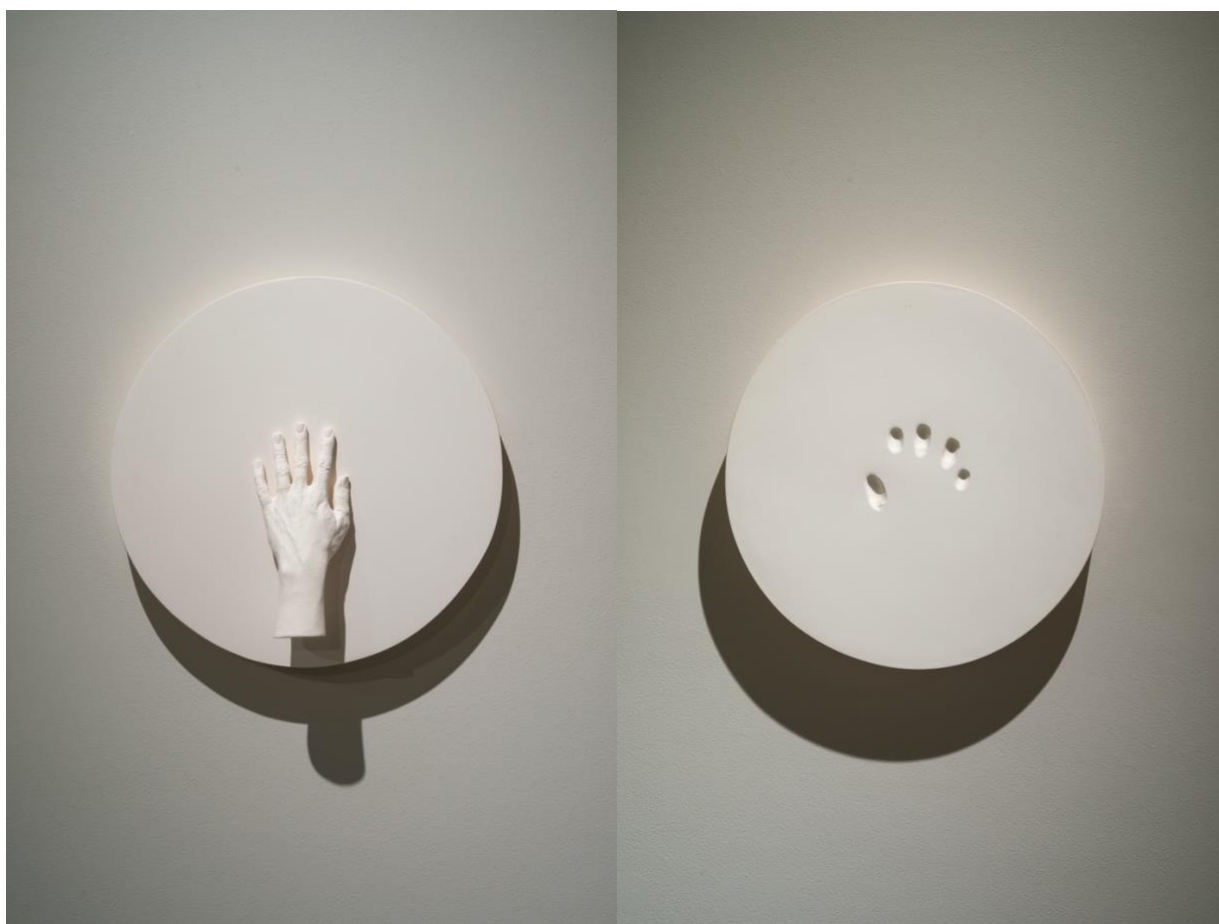
The Distance Between

Porcelain

16" x 10.5" x 16"

2021

Photo by Larry Gawel



The Distance Between, side detail shots
Photos by Larry Gawel



Photo by artist



Photo by artist



Vase with Tulips
White Earthenware
17" x 3" x 17.5"
2021
Photo by Larry Gawel



Vase with Peonies and Tulips

White Earthenware

14" x 5.5" x 24"

2021

Photo by Larry Gawel



Vase with Orchids and Roses

White Earthenware

23" x 9" x 33"

2021

Photo by Larry Gawel



Photo by Larry Gawel

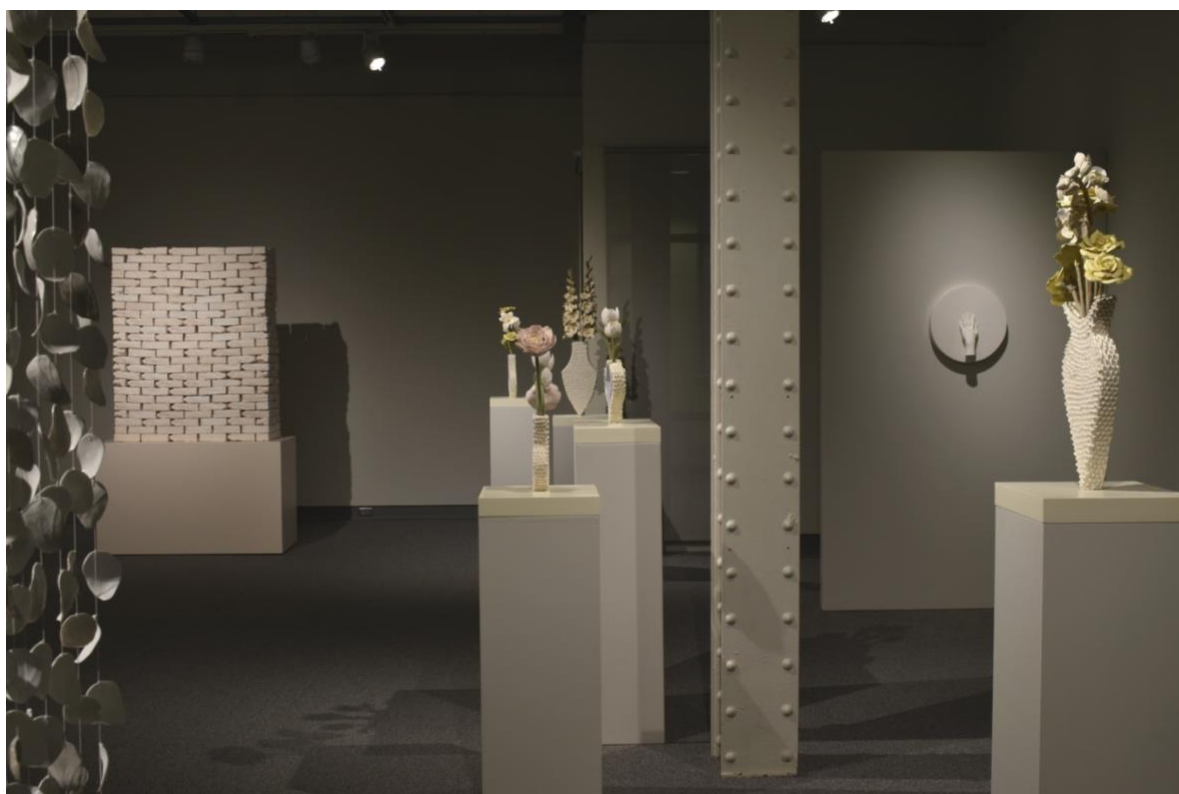


Photo by artist



Raining Petals
Porcelain, Soda Fired
59.5" x 11" x 86"
2021
Photo by Larry Gawel



Back view looking through *Raining Petals* into *Crying and Laughing Eyes*
Photo by Larry Gawel



Raining Petals, detail
Photo by Larry Gawel



Crying and Laughing Eyes
Looped MP4, displayed on iPad
2020
Photo by Larry Gawel



Photo by artist



Photo by artist