RAW

CRAFT, COMMODITY, AND CAPITALISM

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RAW

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RAW: CRAFT, COMMODITY, AND CAPITALISM

Foreword

Suzanne Isken

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

RAW: CRAFT, COMMODITY, AND CAPITALISM has been a labor of love for curator Holly Jerger, who first conceived of this exhibition in 2015. The exhibition explores the artists' conscious use of material to create meaning and calls our attention to the hidden histories of everyday materials we often take for granted.

A special thank you to the Center for Craft and the international roster of artists who have graciously and generously agreed to share their work with all of us. Enormous thanks to exhibiting artists Charmaine Bee, Atul Bhalla, Sonya Clark, Amor Muñoz, Raksha Parekh, Ignacio Perez Meruane, Jovencio de la Paz, Juana Valdes, Ken + Julia Yonetani and to the catalog essayists Alicia Ory DeNicola, Risa Puleo, and Namita Gupta Wiggers, whose insight and scholarship contribute to the depth of thinking about this topic.

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Introduction

Holly Jerger

EXHIBITIONS CURATOR

RAW: CRAFT, COMMODITY, AND CAPITALISM

RAW: CRAFT, COMMODITY, AND CAPITALISM features nine contemporary artists who work with commodities including sugar, salt, copper, porcelain, and water to explore the historical and contemporary effects of global capitalism. The artists' deliberate use of these materials acknowledges the complex and enduring legacy of the capitalistic structures that produced these raw materials, such as slavery, colonialism, and industrialization, and their ongoing human and environmental impact.

The exhibition concept was sparked by an interview with historian Sven Beckert, author of *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (2014). In examining the rise and fall of the European-dominated cotton empire, Beckert writes, "Because of the centrality of cotton, its story is also the story of the making and remaking of global capitalism and with it of the modern world."[1] There is a tendency within the field to view craft as anti-industrial, and, therefore, anti-capitalistic, since craft celebrates the individual maker and the handmade. Beckert makes it apparent, however, that cotton—a material heavily utilized within craft processes—is also a material instrumental in the development of global capitalism. With this in mind, it becomes apparent that this view of craft's relationship to capitalism is too simplistic and short-sighted.

In discussions of both contemporary capitalism and contemporary craft in the United States, historians often mark their birth with the rise of the Industrial Revolution in the late 18th century. For capitalism, industrialization's systems of mechanized mass production spurred the corporate factory practices of today. For craft, the Industrial Revolution ignited the Arts and Crafts countermovement championing production that values the individual labor embedded in the handmade, quality in design, and a deep understanding of material. This thinking centralizes both capitalism and craft in the industrialized Western world, marking them

1 Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Vintage Books, 2014), xi.

as opposing forces. Although the scale and intent of craft and capitalist production differs, they are nevertheless created through shared materials and processes. How would a shift in thinking of these histories as conjoined, versus opposed, revise both historic and contemporary discussions of craft in the U.S.?

In his book, Beckert goes on to explain his definition of capitalism, or what he terms *war capitalism*, in which "slavery, the expropriation of indigenous peoples, imperial expansion, armed trade, and the assertion of sovereignty over people and land by entrepreneurs were at its core."[2] Beckert argues that the structures of war capitalism formed the foundation for contemporary Western capitalism and took hold in the 16th century with the rise of European colonial expansion around the world. It is thanks to these processes that the raw materials utilized in craft were able to be extracted, inextricably implicating craft in the history of capitalism. Furthermore, if the history of craft is indeed intertwined with that of capitalism, it means that its roots can be traced back, before the Industrial Revolution, to European models of colonialism and its systems of violence inflicted across the globe. These histories rest deep within the fibers of cotton and other commodities used in the products of daily life and craft. As the segment of the art world for which material and materiality are central concerns, what is craft's obligation to acknowledge this global legacy?

The artists in RAW have taken on that responsibility. Beckert notes that for most people "cotton is as familiar as it is unknown."[3] The artists in RAW make "known" the embedded yet unrecognized narratives encapsulated in the materials they use. Charmaine Bee, Sonya Clark, and Raksha Parekh examine global diasporas and their family histories by tracing the migration, trade routes, and goods

2 Ibid, xv.

3 Ibid, xii.

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that historically accompanied the transatlantic slave trade. Atul Bhalla, Ignacio Perez Meruane, Amor Muñoz, and Ken + Julia Yonetani investigate specific geological areas and the effects that industrial expansion has had on those regions' local environments and cultural practices. Jovencio de la Paz and Juana Valdes actively research the colonial enterprises that led to the global distribution of their chosen commodities. Their works acknowledge the laborers and lands that were exploited to produce these materials over the centuries. Brought together in this exhibition, these artists demonstrate the complex and multiple ways that capitalist structures resonate today in personal life and within larger political structures. The exhibition artists employ a type of exploration that art historian Julia Bryan-Wilson describes as "a kind of materialism that looks at what economic and social relations are required to bring those specific materials into visibility as artistic objects. What kinds of extractions, what kinds of manipulations, what kinds of procedures have to be undertaken to move something like copper from a mine to an art gallery? . . . Being attentive and careful with issues of materiality might lead us to ask different questions about how an artwork might function, politically and ideologically."[4]

The catalog essays that follow further contextualize the histories the exhibition artists are examining. Curator and critic Risa Puleo points out how the violence of colonialism is not only restricted to the physical extraction of labor and resources from indigenous peoples, but also applies to the intangible extraction of knowledge from indigenous culture. Anthropologist Alicia Ory DeNicola highlights craft's unique ability to complicate the narratives of labor and capitalism, by locating abstract, global systems in specific, local contexts. Curator, writer, and academic Namita Gupta Wiggers reflects on the field of craft and art history at large and explores

4 Steyn Bergs, "Material Relations: Interview with Julia Bryan-Wilson," *Open! Platform for Art, Culture & the Public Domain*, published May 29, 2018, accessed October 14, 2019. www.onlineopen.org/material-relations

what it means to acknowledge the raw matter and materials "forged in violence," as she phrases it, for both the art field and larger society.

Capitalism is always morphing and shifting, but its colonial foundation and the practices it established—the extraction of natural resources, theft of indigenous lands, and inhuman treatment of laborers—remain consistent. As economic inequality and environmental devastation continue to increase throughout the world, economists, scholars, and activists have called for a reimagining of capitalism—as former U.S. Secretary of Labor and political economist Robert Reich describes it, "The real issue is whether capitalism is organized for the benefit of the society as a whole or for the benefit of a small group at the top."[5] The craft field has the potential to lead these larger societal discussions. In her essay "Making and Naming: The Lexicon of Studio Craft" (2011), curator and professor M. Anna Fariello offers an extended definition of craft's utility, "the multiple functions of an object exist apart from its use and are made up of abstracted and layered intangible meaning, rather than physical properties alone."[6] In other words, craft's relevance lies beyond the use of its objects, and also extends to the meaning constructed around the object as well. As a field, we could decide to inhabit this extended definition for the function of craft, in this case using our work to fully illustrate the colonial legacy, meaning, and current ramifications of the resources we use. The artists in RAW are leading these conversations by recognizing the geopolitical associations embedded in the materials they employ, and they ask us to do the same.

5 Mike Konczal, "Robert Reich on Why Capitalism Needs Saving," *Rolling Stone*, published October 7, 2015, accessed October 14, 2019. https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/robert-reich-on-why-capitalism-needs-saving-59443/. For more on Robert Reich's philosophy, see Robert B. Reich, *Saving Capitalism: For the Many, Not the Few* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2015).

6 M. Anna Fariello, "Making and Naming: The Lexicon of Studio Craft," in *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*, ed. Maria Elena Buszek. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 38.

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I would like to extend a huge thank you to all the exhibition artists and catalog essayists for their contributions to this project. A very special thank you also goes to Koren Salajka and Brian Williams for their research assistance on this project. I would also like to thank the Center for Craft and the Pasadena Art Alliance for their generous support of the exhibition and its related research.

Risa Puleo

Surplus in our own land: Indigenous people, knowledge and resources under regimes of colonial extraction

Fig.1

Of the eighteen woodcut images that illustrate the two volumes of Girolamo Benzoni's 1565 *Historia del Mondo Nuovo*, three are catalogs that compile examples described in the text. The first is a catalog of inventive ways to kill one's aggressor; the next details ways to kill oneself; and the last, a compilation of trees. Seeming both disparate from each other and unrelated to the topic at hand—the then-recently occupied Spanish Americas—each image collapses the reality of violence with its mythology, and the spectacle of imagination with speculative prospecting. The text itself maintains a balance between demonizing the Spanish, crafting the indigenous in need of salvation from both their own savagery and that inflicted upon them by their conquerors, and relaying the resources of their lands.[1] When read together, these three images detail a process of removing indigenous people from the land to harvest the raw materials found there. The key to doing so are books like Benzoni's, which transcribe technologies needed to extract and process resources from the land in the absence of its original inhabitants.

In the first image, two natives, identifiable by their nudity, heat a vessel over a fire (Fig.1). Another transports a smaller vessel from that fire across the picture plane to a man in the left corner who holds a prone Spaniard by his throat while pouring heated liquid in the conquistador's mouth. The accompanying caption informs the reader of Benzoni's book that this liquid was gold, while the text describes a ritual-like process by which indigenous Mexicas retaliated

1 Benzoni's construction of indigenous America as a savage in need of salvation was consistent with papal debates about the ontological status of native people. The conquistador Hernan Cortez argued for Mexica savagery in order to justify his killing of Mexica King Montezuma in his third letter to Spanish King Charles V. However, if the indigenous people of "The New World" were found to be capable of salvation, Christian Spain would have had an obligation to convert them. Benzoni adds a new dimension to this argument by suggesting that the indigenous people were not only in need of Christian salvation but also of salvation from the Spanish themselves. See Angela Enders and Elizabeth Fraser, "An Italian in the New World: Girolamo Benzoni's '*Historia del Mondo Nuovo*' in *Dispositio 17* (42/43) 1992, 21-35.

against the invading Spanish explorers.[2] Benzoni reports that dismemberment, as seen in the image's background, was used against the general cavalry, while cannibalism and the act described in the foreground of the illustration were reserved for enemy leaders. Benzoni writes that the native people would decry, "Eat, eat gold, Christian," when they literalized the conquistador's "thirst" for gold by pouring the molten metal down his throat.[3] In addition to instilling fear and awe in those who would encounter these cultures constructed as brutal on the printed page, the texts succeeded in communicating the surplus of gold in the Americas. In fact, Benzoni arrived in New Spain in the early 1540s, too late to see the slaughters of the conquest twenty years before or any retaliation enacted against the invading Europeans by the indigenous people. Thus, the images that accompany his publication and perhaps even the text itself were fabulations, perpetuating mythologies of indigenous American savagery that justified the occupation of the land. The next image, printed only a few pages later, presented a grimmer form of resistance to the biopolitical order, making life more sustainable for Europeans at the expense of the native peoples of the Americas.

Fig.2

Because of its proximity to the first, the next image in the book would read as a lynching—perhaps the very first time this particular form of colonial violence was rendered as an image—if the text didn't qualify the death represented as self-imposed (Fig.2). Benzoni explains: "Wherefore many went to the woods and there hung themselves, after having

2 "Mexica" is the name used by the Nahuatl-speaking people indigenous to the Valley of Mexico who ruled the Empire popularly known as the "Aztec." I use it here because it was the name they used to refer to themselves. Alexander von Humboldt coined the term Aztec in the 19th century by combining the words "Aztlan," the mythic homeland of the Mexica with the Nahuatl word for people, "tec." The word "Mexico" (and also Chicano) derives from "Mexica."

3 Girolamo Benzoni, *History of the New World*, trans. and ed. by Rear-Admiral W.H. Smyth (London: Elibron Classics, 1857), 73, 76.

4 Ibid., 77.

killed their children, saying it was far better to die than to live so miserably, serving such and so many ferocious tyrants and wicked thieves."[4] He continues by describing women who terminated their pregnancies, and others who chose drowning, deadly falls, and starvation over death by rope. All of these kinds of deaths are captured in the image as a catalog of possible ways to die by one's own hand, albeit a hand that had been turned against itself for lack of options other than endless oppression. Like the image that precedes it, this second illustration reveals itself as a contrivance, though not necessarily a fiction, in its arrangement as a compilation.

Images, like books, were expensive to print in the early modern era and required the distinct skills and expenses of the draftsman, the woodcarver, and the printer to create. These violent scenes were likely illustrated because of their intensity and the ideological appeal they made to the reader of Benzoni's book. Benzoni hailed from Milan and was an ardent critic of the Spanish and their modes of domination. In addition to being anti-Spanish propaganda, Benzoni's book also laid a claim on the New World for those better fit to Christianize the native people and exploit their labor and the land's resources. The author's method of persuasion blended genres that developed in response to European colonization of the Americas, Africa, and the Asian Pacific. Part-travelogue, Benzoni's tale presented Europeans on the continent with images of faraway places for those who could not travel. Part-natural history book, Benzoni's publication was also an advertisement for the types of resources that could be found in these places that would appeal to those who could travel—namely, classes of investors, merchants, settlers, and naturalists. Such books were also ethnographic studies that detailed the habits of the people who lived in the new lands, giving those who were considering an investment an account of who and what they might encounter. The other fifteen images in Benzoni's book relay "Indian methods" for cooking, housing, and healing. Benzoni's *Mondo Nuovo* was popular on all accounts. It was printed in thirty-two editions in Latin, French, Italian, Flemish, German, and English, before being republished in Theodor DeBry's *America* series and widely disseminated in four languages.[5]

In the final compilation image, all the bodies have been removed from the tree branches, but the image indirectly maintains its violence (Fig.3). Mamey, guava, guanábana, and plantain trees are distinguished by the shape of their

5 Ann Rosalind Jones, "Ethnographer's Sketch, Sensational Engraving, Full-Length Portrait: Print Genres for Spanish America in Girolamo Benzoni, the De Brys, and Cesare Vecellio" in *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies (Special Issue: Theodor De Bry's Voyages to the New and Old Worlds)*, 41(1) 2011, 144.

Fig.3

leaves and fruit. Each is also labeled in an image that sets the trees within a generalized landscape. Not pictured but described in the text are the banana, plum, and pine tree. The text also describes these foreign fruits relative to their European counterparts, such as the peach and walnut, for those imagining their exotic flavors and shapes from afar. In comparing this image to the previous one considered, the function of the tree shifts from a tool to rid the Americas of their native inhabitants to become a producer of commodifiable resources: fruit and timber.

It is within the space between these two uses for the tree that Benzoni's book begins to fill in the gap of knowledge left open by the absence of the indigenous Americans. It was not the resource alone that was coveted, but the indigenous technologies that supported the processing of materials such as gold, as well as the worldview that sustained the ecology and economy around it. Raw materials from the Americas were useless without the technologies of production, preparation, and manufacture. Such knowledge is ancestral, embodied, experiential, and gained from being *from* a place, not merely *in* it. The extraction of this knowledge from its indigenous carriers went hand-in-hand with the extraction of a resource from the land. Thus, the last function performed by Benzoni's book is a form of industrial espionage. Indeed, among its final images is one that details how the indigenous people prepared gold and silver in present-day Mexico and Peru.

Mexican gold, Peruvian silver,[6] Venezuelan copper,[7] Brazilian timber,[8] Columbian emeralds, Carribbean sugar,[9]

6 See Allison Bigelow, "Incorporating indigenous knowledge into extractive economies: The science of colonial silver" in *The Extractive Industries and Society*, 3(1) 2016, 117-123.

7 See Allison Bigelow, "Imperial Projecting in Virginia and Venezuela: Copper, Colonialism, and the Printing of Possibility" in *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 16(1) 2016, 91-123.

8 See Amy Buono, "Representing the Tupinambá and the Brazilwood Trade in Sixteenth-Century Rouen," in *Cultural Exchanges between Brazil and France*, eds. Regina R. Félix and Scott D. Juall (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2016), 19-34.

9 Hans Sloane's two-volume *A Voyage to the Islands Madera, Barbados, Nieves, S. Christophers and Jamaica* (1707 and 1725) is an eighteenth-century counterpart to Benzoni's *Historia del Mondo Nuovo*. In the late seventeenth century, Sloane traveled to Jamaica to serve as the physician to its British governor. In a little over a year, Sloan cataloged over 1,500 plants and animals, as well as the geography of the islands and the means by which its slaves were tortured to maintain their productivity in the sugar cane fields. Sloane's research translates the raw materials of the named Carribean islands into text and image, effectively easing their exploitation by British colonizers. In addition to collecting data, the materials Sloane would collect over his lifetime would form the foundations of the British Museum and London's Natural History Museum, the physical counterparts to his printed encyclopedia.

10 Macarena Gómez-Barris, *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2017), xvi.

11 Ibid., xvii.

12 The secrets of cochineal kept by indigenous people of Latin America and their Spanish colonizers is another example of this, that historian of art and science Daniela Bleichmar referred to as an "imperial secret, scientific mystery, and patriotic knowledge." An insect indigenous to the Americas, cochineal produced a red dye counterpoint to indigo's blue and campeche's black, when crushed and processed according to a specific protocol. Daniela Bleichmar in *Visual Voyages: Images of Latin America Nature from Columbus to Darwin* (New Haven: Yale University Press in association with The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, 2017), 67. Carlos Marichal explores the topic in greater depth in "Mexican Cochineal and the European Demand for American Dyes, 1550-1850 in *From Silver to Cocaine: Latin American Commodity Chains and the Building of the World Economy, 1500-2000*, eds. Stephen Topik, Carlos Marichal, and Zephyr Frank (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), 76-92.

13 See Micheal E. Yonan, "Veneers of Authority: Chinese Lacquers in Maria Theresa's Vienna" in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 37(4) 2004, 652-672.

14 See Allison Bigelow, "Gendered Language and the Science of Colonial Silk" in *Early American Literature*, 49 (2) 2014, 271-325.

Sub-Saharan ivory, dyes from India and the Americas such as indigo, cochineal, and campeche; the precious metal, stone, animal, and plant resources of the world fueled the Spanish empire of the fifteenth and sixteenth-centuries and filled European royal halls and marketplaces. The Spanish would be joined in time by British, French, Dutch, Belgian, and German colonial projects to turn the world beyond Europe into what cultural critic Macarena Gómez-Barris calls an "extractive zone": "the colonial paradigm [that] marks regions of 'high biodiversity' in order to reduce life to capitalist resource conversion."[10] *Extrativismo*, per Gómez-Barris, is "an economic system that engages in thefts, borrowings, and forced removals, violently reorganizing social life as well as the land by thieving resources from Indigenous and Afro-descendant territories."[11] Gómez-Barris's definition understands theft according to its legal meaning, as an act performed on a physical object. I include the example of Benzoni's *Historia del Mondo Nuovo* to suggest the simultaneous extraction of the intangible knowledge that leaves the native body as surplus in their own land as its own distinct form of colonial violence.

The fact that the inhabitants of a place managed to keep material extraction and manufacture secret indebted European markets to foreign agents.[12] Porcelain, a material whose techniques of manufacture were kept secret by the Chinese for centuries (the reason for its synonym: "China"), is an example of how possessing a raw material without its indigenous knowledge could yield limited results and spark industrial competition. Like lacquerware[13] and silk,[14] porcelain was imported from the East to the West overland through the Americas to Europe via the Manila Galleons, or else by ship around the tip of Africa via the Dutch East Indies Company. To save the cost of export, agents across Europe tried their hand at replicating foreign material technologies, either by attempting to grow imported plants on European soil or else by attempting to reproduce materials. As what was available to the European public in Asian ports was designed specifically for Western markets, engineering the production of these materials in Europe translated to the ability to determine prices and one's own designs. In 1708, the German royal ceramics factory in Meissen succeeded in devising a German formula for the production of porcelain. Soon after, the French, British, Spanish, and Italian porcelain factories would devise their own national formulas. Once equipped with local technology, European porcelain factories were freed from Asian monopolies to envision their own designs and tastes. One such specialty

of the Meissen manufacturers were "blackamoor" porcelain sugar bowls in which a black figure presented a basket of sugar to its user.[15] The whiteness of Meissen's hard-paste porcelain was offset by the blackness of the figure, who was dressed not as a slave but in an Arabian turban (hence the "Moor" in the blackamoor figure's name). This is due to the fact that, as art historian Adrienne Childs relates, Europeans encountered African slaves via Arab slavers in North Africa through the Trans-Saharan slave trade.[16] Objects like blackamoor figure sugar bowls consolidate colonial fantasies into a global hodgepodge: African slaves—who themselves were sold as commodities—working in Caribbean islands, represented as Middle Eastern Arabs and rendered in an Asian material as a container for an American product in a version of empire scaled for the European table.

Gold doesn't tarnish; no matter how much blood has been spilled upon it, or because of it, it will always maintain its gleam. Porcelain can always be wiped clean. The gleam of gold and gems and the luster of porcelain have often distracted art historians. As our primary concern is with the integrity of whole objects in the context of the moment of their creation, we seldom consider the past lives of their component parts. I'm fascinated that each quarter, all my students remember that the blue pigment used to paint the Virgin Mary's dress in Renaissance paintings was derived from lapis lazuli imported from Afghanistan, but to this date not one has asked about mining practices or the early modern stone industry. Our focus on the wholeness of the object reinforces the discipline's Eurocentricity through its failure to look at the "open veins of Latin America,"[17] and other places around the globe that were dismantled and fractured for their resources and raw materials to bolster European markets and decorate its spaces. How different would the history of art read if resource extraction was foregrounded as inextricable to art production, which is in turn linked to commodify chains of exploitation? The artists included in RAW: CRAFT, COMMODITY, AND CAPITALISM are beginning to write this history.

15 Adrienne L. Childs, "Sugar Boxes and Blackamoors: Ornamental Blackness in Early Meissen Porcelain" in *The Cultural Aesthetics of Eighteenth-Century Porcelain*, eds. Alden Cavanaugh and Michael Yonan (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 159-177.

16 Ibid., 160.

17 Eduardo Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent* (New York, London: Monthly Review Press), 1973.

Fig.1 – Fig.3 [Detail of] Girolamo Benzoni, *La historia del Mondo Nuovo* (Venetia: ad instatia di Pietro, & Francesco Tini, fratelli), 1572. Call Number 9329, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

Risa Puleo is an independent curator and critic. She is currently a doctoral candidate in Northwestern University's art history program, and has received master's degrees from the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College and Hunter College. In 2017, Puleo served as the Curator-in-Residence at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts in Omaha, NE, where she curated the exhibition *Monarchs: Brown and Native Artists in the Path of the Butterfly*, taking the migration path of the Monarch butterfly as a geographic range and a metaphor to reunite artists who are indigenous to the Americas. Her writing has been featured in *Art In America*, *Art Papers*, *Art 21*, *Asia Art Pacific*, *Hyperallergic.com*, and *Modern Painters*, alongside other art publications.

Alicia Ory DeNicola

The Labor of Art and the Process of Making Visible

Sweat is the corporeal body's product of labor—a trace of its physicality hidden amidst the warp and weft of woven cotton textiles. *Sweet-Sweat-Spots*, 2007-09, by artist Raksha Parekh, is a wall of brown-colored spots made from boiled sugar on cotton cloth and paper. Its title asks us to imagine the literality of the stain of sweet-sweat-spots upon the wall of our own psyche. Its instantiation makes up the design upon which the worker's body is made manifest, visible, and unable to ignore.

And what is labor but, of course, of the body: of sweat and toil and extraction. This may sound obvious, but it is important to remember that labor processes are always local. Even when laboring bodies must move across continents in order to be or remain laboring bodies, work must be done *by* people (or increasingly machines) *in* a place. Labor is then contextualized into a larger system involving both local workers and consumers, employed by methods of extractive production, controlled by laws and economic edifices, and given meaning by a macro discursive praxis. Such processes, then, may be hegemonic, but they are not opaque and behemoth, nor do they follow an unpeopled, depoliticized, evolutionary trajectory out of place. The social webs of history and politics have always been entangled with individual voices and collections of particular discourses. By grounding the global in local labor and its objects, we are better able to visualize the historical narratives of colonial and post-colonial relationships within which labor is understood.

Today, in an era in which much of the fundamental importance and present-day consequences of colonialism go unacknowledged, RAW: CRAFT, COMMODITY, AND CAPITALISM reminds us how the extractive labor processes of our histories remain embedded in the present moment and in the products of sweat and extraction. How does an exhibit of material things help us to reflect upon the labor

of colonization and the work of decolonization? How can it help us see capitalism in a global world as complicated and complex, but still peopled and approachable? What is the responsibility and the role of art? What might we count as "labor" or as "craft" in the artist's work of interpretation?

Artists have the power and can choose to carry the responsibility of illuminating complex issues in ways that can be uniquely visceral. If the labor of artists is to craft moments of reflexivity for their audiences, then this exhibit is doubly crafted. The subject matter here is labor and craft—the crafting and laboring bodies that provide the foundation for colonialism and for the contemporary global economy. Here, the artists in RAW: CRAFT, COMMODITY, AND CAPITALISM use unique objects of colonialism, extracted labor, and slavery, put together (or taken apart) in unusual ways. They call on images of craft and labor as symbolic visualizations of the body and the people who make, and toil and sweat. This is the work of reflection, often the work of UN-doing, deconstructing, noting, and outlining the pieces, rendering the anomalies, highlighting the contradictory as opposed to putting together or building. It is in this unmasking, the calling out and making visible that we make space and acknowledge that *taking apart* is a way of making visible.

Fig.1

Craft, the skilled work of the hands and the objects produced through such labor, is a central idea throughout the exhibition. Often set up as a foil for modernity, craft can be a valuable node of understanding and can work to

make visible contradictory ideas still steeped in legacies of colonialism. In the United States, craft is often thought of as old-fashioned, quaint, and non-modern, juxtaposed against technology, modernity, and capitalism. To cite a fieldwork study on the Arts and Crafts aesthetic by anthropologist Mascia-Lees, craft is seen as an artwork in which "the politics is central; [its] beauty is in the philosophy of non-exploitation."[1] Combined with the rise of Fair-Trade economics, which imports products specifically labeled handmade or craft and internationally designated to specific geographic areas, Western markets have positioned craft as anti-capitalist and as an antidote to middle class, capitalist, global angst.

Yet, we tend to forget in many parts of the world that "capitalism was in many ways a liberating force, the foundation of much contemporary life."[2] For artisans producing such products in other parts of the world—like the textile industry in India for instance—craft is often understood as a centrally capitalist endeavor. What may have once been the product of family or individual labor sold locally for local users, is now a global commodity—a craft because the value of the object depends quintessentially (though not wholly) on its role as a craft and all that entails for a western buyer.[3] Add the import-exporter, however, and exploitation once again—to differing degrees—becomes part of the equation. Designers and exporters become mediators between tradition and innovation, rural and urban, printer, and consumer.

Complicating things further is the fact that, in many places, craft can be seen as a traditionalizing process of extracted labor, and thus an extension of state power and hegemony. As anthropologist David Guss reminds us, "at the heart of all traditionalizing processes is the desire to mask over real issues of power and domination. By classifying popular forms as 'traditions,' they are effectively neutralized and removed from real time—or that is the hope of ruling elites who wish to manipulate them as part of a much larger legitimizing process."[4]

Craft and craft artists, then, reveal capitalism and labor to be more complex. Through craft, "we are reminded again and again that no state of capitalism is ever permanent or stable. Each new moment in capitalism's history produces new instabilities and even contradictions, prompting vast spatial, social and political arrangements," echoing the porous and equally contradictory nature of craft.[5] Craft, then, in marking the contradictions, also marks cultural ruptures,

1 Frances E. Mascia-Lees, "American Beauty: The Middle Class Arts and Crafts Revival in the United States" in *Critical Craft: Technology, Globalization, and Capitalism*, eds. Clare M. Wilkinson-Weber and Alicia Ory DeNicola (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 57–77. Mascia-Lees's analysis of the contemporary Arts and Crafts aesthetic today was based on three years of fieldwork studying consumers at the annual Grove Park Inn Arts and Crafts Conference in Asheville, North Carolina. This response was given by a human rights attorney attending this conference on the value of the beauty of the handmade.

2 Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Vintage Books, 2014), xx.

3 This example illustrates how, often, non-Western cultures are pitted against Western cultures that results in a tension between who can be contemporary and who must maintain tradition—a discourse of class and caste distinction in which ideas of craft and artisan play a significant role. As anthropologist Akil Gupta says about indigeneity, "Far from being a vantage point that is opposed to modernity because it is 'outside' it, 'the indigenous,' …. Is a position that is not merely anticipated by modernity but demanded by it as well…It is the desire for the indigenous that enables 'the West' to construct its own identity through alterity." See Alicia Ory DeNicola, "Creating Borders, Maintaining Boundaries: Traditional Work and Global Markets in Bagru's Handblock Textile Industry" (Syracuse: Syracuse University, 2004) and "Asymmetrical Indications: Negotiating Creativity through Geographical Indications in North India" in *SEA2 Economic Anthropology* 3 (2), 293–303, and Akhil Gupta, *Postcolonial Developments: Agriculture in the Making of Modern India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

4 David M. Guss, *The Festive State: Race, Ethnicity, and Nationalism as Cultural Performance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 15.

5 Beckert, xx.

highlights places of disruptive change, and allows us insight into our own construction and understanding of the local and global labor processes. The seams and stitches, juxtapositions, and questions that this body of art illuminates models in many ways the elastic and discordant meanings of craft in order to call forth a reexamination of current labor practices and changing capitalisms in a global world.

Fig.2

As an anthropologist, the point is not "what craft is." Instead, scholars have begun to ask why certain objects are labeled craft and others are not. For instance, cotton textiles once used for local women's skirts in Rajasthan are now exported all over the world as handmade craft textiles. Yet, the water pots that are made in the same small towns are rarely thought of as crafts—until they are taken out of their local context and used as a decorative item rather than an actual water pot. We ask how craft is used in different places, at different times, by different groups of people. Craft, it turns out, is an elastic term. How then, do we understand this dual and often contradictory place of craft? I would argue that craft provides us with a critical—and contemporary—node of tension. Its very elasticity in serving dual purposes as capitalist and non-capitalist symbols, points to a contradiction in thinking about craft. Its importance may lie in its chameleon-like ability to mark labor, labor extraction, and global processes in very local ways. If we understand how tea leaves are picked, how they travel from place to place, that there are certain bodies that pick the tea and certain other, different bodies that are allowed to drink the tea, then suddenly we are implicated in that history.

Fig.1 Raksha Parekh, *Sweet-Sweat-Spots* (detail), 2007-09, Sugar, cotton cloth and paper Dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Noel Bass

Fig.2 Charmaine Bee, *untitled indigo piece #3, portal series* (detail), 2017, 1,458 tea bags, fermented indigo, and gold thread, 192 x 144 in. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Noel Bass

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Namita Gupta Wiggers

Matter and Material, Matter *as* Material

RAW: CRAFT, COMMODITY, AND CAPITALISM

They say nothing lasts forever and
I'm writing to you in the voice of an
endangered species.
– Ocean Vuong [1]

"Tombstone" is the museum field's term for object labels. These labels offer bare-bones information: the artist's name, title of the work, date it was created, materials, and in some cases, the artist's nationality, place of birth, and birth and death dates. A partially compiled list of materials used by artists in RAW: CRAFT, COMMODITY, AND CAPITALISM includes many familiar items in craft exhibitions: cotton, indigo, porcelain, sugar, metal, and water. I am struck by how much this materials list mirrors encyclopedia entries. Open up *Britannica* or *World Book*, and a comparable list sits adjacent to historical and cultural narratives about a nation—not unlike the curatorial texts that may provide additional information next to works within an exhibition. One such entry from *World Book* 1987, is a clear example:

Chief Products: *Agriculture* – Cotton, jute, peanuts, pepper, rice, sugar cane, tea, tobacco, vegetables, wheat. *Manufacturing and Processing* – brassware and silverware, cement, chemicals, cotton and silk materials, drugs, electric motors, fertilizer, iron and steel, jute bags and rope, leather goods, paper, rayon, rugs, sugar, woodwork. *Mining* – bauxite, chromite, coal, copper, gold, iron, iron ore, lead, manganese ore, mica, salt, silver.[2]

Divided into three product categories – cultivated, fabricated, and extracted – the connections between materials and making, and the weight of industry in commodities grown, made, and mined reminds me of how abstract these lists

1 Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* (New York: Penguin Press, 2019), 176.

2 *The World Book Encyclopedia*. 1987 ed. (Chicago: World Book Inc., 1987), Volume 10, 93.

seemed when I read them as a child, and how heavily I feel the forces of capitalism and colonialism reading them in 2019. In a world where we click a button and Amazon Prime delivers items within a day or less, how can visitors to this exhibition understand the weight of the complex histories of these materials, let alone their connections to human movement across the planet and their impact on the planet itself?

There isn't an item on either the exhibition or encyclopedia lists that doesn't require human labor, resources, and further processing to push it – force it – into a humanly-usable form. Copper, clay, and sand must be extracted from the earth. Cotton, sugar, and indigo are grown, cultivated, harvested, and processed. Water is gathered, purified, contained, or rerouted by dams. For materials to be in a form that humans can use, the materials must be transformed. The extraction *from* the earth and the manipulation of plant life *on* the earth's surface connected to these materials – such as the mining of metals, or monoculture farming that changes landscapes to produce cotton and sugar – has been central in European Empire building for centuries and can no longer be overlooked in craft discourse. The way in which contemporary visual arts discourse prioritizes the finished object – with emphasis on the labor and transformative processes engaged by an artist in the production of that object – exacerbates the distance between craft materials and the earth itself.[3] What shifts when the conversation pivots to the overlap between the disciplinary systems of geography and how it considers matter, and the humanities and how it considers material? It becomes impossible, then, to take refuge from climate conditions, consumption, or history to claim craft's use of "natural materials" as superior. How does RAW: CRAFT, COMMODITY, AND CAPITALISM engage the extraction of materials and people as a violent history, in which the very materials associated with craft are at its core?

How do craft materials factor into the Anthropocene? Environmentalists and geologists debate the parameters of this period in which human impact on the planet is irreparably evident; some locate it at the end of World War II, others with the Industrial Revolution.[4] Kathryn Yusoff, author of *A Billion Black Anthropocenes* or *None*, locates an earlier start to the age of humans—in 1441, when the desire to extract gold from what is now the Americas required a new source of labor after the Spanish and Portuguese had decimated indigenous communities through violence and disease.[5]

3 Speaking in broad generalities, contemporary art discourse tends to focus on an individual's transformation of any materials into a unique object, while contemporary craft discourse tends to locate its community as those working within a pantheon of nature-based materials: clay, fiber, glass, metal, and wood. Creativity in craft, too, is valued based on how the individual transforms matter extracted from nature, without recognition of how that matter is connected to and extracted from the earth. For a discussion about craft beginning with the cultivation of a seed rather than the purchase of ready-made dye as a way to consider labor, material transformation, and the creative process, see Namita Wiggers, "A Conversation with Rowland Ricketts," *Surface Design Journal*, Summer/Fall 2015, 28-31.

4 Joseph Stromberg, "What is the Anthropocene and Are We in It?" *Smithsonian Magazine*, published January 2013, accessed August 31, 2019. https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/what-is-the-anthropocene-and-are-we-in-it-164801414/

5 Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 14.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid., 108.

8 Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Vintage Books, 2014), cvii-xviii.

9 Yusoff, 15.

10 For more information on the overlap between slavery and indentured labor, see Gaiutra Bahadur, *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013).

11 Yusoff, 3.

This "need" led to one of the first sales of slaves in Lisbon, Portugal, who were extracted from what is now called Africa. In that moment, bodies were turned into inhuman commodities and a labor force to extract materials from the earth.[6] The Anthropocene is not new; it is a condition under which brown and black bodies have survived for centuries. Now that climate change and its impact on nature is visible beyond the places in which brown and black bodies are the majority, and beyond the places where the matter that fuels commodity and capitalism is located, the "world" is awake.

Craft materials are not neutral. On the contrary, if we take Yusoff's point that "no geology is neutral,"[7] we must also accept that agricultural cultivation is not neutral, either. Of the numerous commodities that built the British Empire – sugar, rice, rubber, and indigo, to name a few – historian Sven Beckert notes that it is only cotton that changed labor itself – and, by extension, the modern city by weaving together multiple continents through "two labor-intensive stages – one in the fields, the other in factories."[8] Transforming cotton from a plant to a product connected the forced labor of slavery in the Americas with the newly emerging industrial labor of factory wage earners in Britain in the late 1800s. In other words, raw matter, one commodity form of cotton, traveled to a second continent to be transformed into other commodity forms also called cotton – a big shift from pre-capitalist times when the commodity exchange involved trading finished goods for other finished goods. Cotton was an accelerant of the Industrial Revolution, but again, I would argue that this is one of a number of pivotal moments in the Anthropocene. Before "the sugar in the bowl and the cotton that needed picking," explains Yusoff, "there was the gold, silver, and copper mining that mobilized the *hunger* for slavery, and later, the sugar."[9] When the American Civil War affected the cotton trade, the British turned to Egypt and India to ensure that the industrial state could meet supply and demand for wage work, through the processing of raw materials, and for clothing to sell, wear, and export.[10]

"Geology," writes Yusoff, is "a mode of accumulation, on one hand, and of dispossession on the other, depending on which side of the geologic color line you end up on."[11] Geology and the humanities are conjoined in the depletion of resources in the name of Empire through dichotomies solidified during the Enlightenment such as center/periphery, primitive/civilized, illiterate/knowledgeable, as well as an attitude that the earth is filled with raw matter lying in

wait to be used. In addressing geosocial conditions, Yusoff writes:

> Racialization belongs to a material categorization of the division of matter (corporeal and mineralogical) into active and inert. Extractable matter must be both passive (awaiting extraction and possessing of properties) and able to be activated through the mastery of white men.[12]

Linda Tuhiwai Smith's examination of embedded views at the core of the discipline of history in *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* further reveals the overlapping and problematic racial divisions:

> The racialization of the human subject and the social order enabled comparisons to be made between the 'us' of the West and the 'them' of the Other. History was the story of people who were regarded as *fully human*. Others who were not regarded as human (that is, capable of self-actualization) were prehistoric.[13]

This is a limited exploration of matter and bodies, and matter *as* bodies. I want to expand attention here to the ways that the divisiveness and hierarchization of matter, materials, bodies, and kinds of labor persists today. Despite a shared reliance on the same matter and the same materials made from that matter, craft with a capital "C" is located in Eurocentric art discourse, while craft with a small "c" is relegated to the marketplace, tourism, folk, and anthropology discourses. Tuhiwai Smith notes that "connection to the industrial state is significant because it highlights what was regarded as being worthy of history."[14] By extension, if production is located in a dominant industrial state (i.e. made through art in the United States or Europe), rather than the place from which matter originates (i.e. made through craft in a number of other places in the world), the location of production and how the work is produced continues to perpetuate hierarchies of value at a material level. Perhaps the works in RAW offer a space to revise and reconsider these hierarchies to re-center craft discourse through the acknowledgement of shared matter, alongside diverse ways in which that matter is transformed into materials and objects.

Consider the impact of Kathryn Yusoff's thinking: "If we abandon the absurd notion that geology is somehow immune from the violence and dispossession enacted through extraction of mineral resources, then geology in its full geosocial registers come to the fore as a force of transformation."[15] The extraction of matter turned into craft materials is not just neutral, it is a violent part of colonialist

12 Ibid., 2-3.

13 Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 2012), 33.

14 Ibid.

15 Yusoff, 13

expansion, Empire-building, and modernity. RAW brings these histories to light where they can be considered in public view. Forced movements of people through slavery and indentured servitude is violent. The extraction of materials from *within* the earth and the controlled cultivation of crops *on* the earth is violent. In the exhibition *State of Indigo* (London Design Biennale, 2018), curator Priya Khanchandani wrote, "It is once said that no indigo box dispatched to England was without a smear of blood."[16] The destruction of cultural objects to make other objects is part of this history of violence. Artist Teresita Fernández brings this into view on a walk through of the collection of Pre-Columbian gold at the Metropolitan Museum of Art; what is left intact, she points out, is the gold that was not melted down and re-made into jewels for Spanish and Portuguese royalty.[17] These are stories of survival — stories which do not appear on tombstone labels or in lists of national products. Can RAW amplify, as writer Ocean Vuong phrases it, "survival as a result of active self-knowledge, and even more so, a creative force?"[18]

To expand further on questions posed by Vuong in his writing and interviews, what does it do to our understanding of contemporary craft to understand histories of matter and materials forged in violence and still seek hope, joy, and a future?[19] "Why can't the language for creativity be the language of regeneration?"[20] This exhibition takes place in a contemporary art space — the White Cube.[21] Exhibitions in such spaces are clean and tidy; everything has its place. Within this, however, much can be questioned, and thinking can shift. Consider how artist Fred Wilson's co-location of slave shackles next to a number of elaborate silver pitchers and goblets revealed the complex histories of labor and commerce and capitalism's inextricable connection to slavery in his exhibition *Mining the Museum* (Maryland Historical Society, 1992-3).[22] The silver vessels exist *because* of slavery. This juxtaposition showed — in museum fashion — contingent relationships between human labor and economic success, bodies and power, and more. The pairing revealed how objects convey narratives and histories, and how those histories reveal themselves even in tidy museum spaces. What interests me in Wilson's juxtaposition are the histories and narratives embedded in the material of these two types of containers, the forged shackles and the repoussé pitcher: one to hold a body, the other liquid. Both are made of metal — one iron, perhaps even made by a slave to contain a slave, and the other silver, paid for through the labor of slaves, polished and maintained by slaves. Wilson reveals

16 "India: State of Indigo," *London Design Biennale*, accessed August 6, 2019. https://www.londondesignbiennale.com/participant/india-0

17 "Teresita Fernández on Precolumbian Gold," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, Season 2 of The Artist Project, accessed August 16, 2019. http://artistproject.metmuseum.org/2/teresita-fernandez/

18 Spencer Quong, "Survival as a Creative Force: An Interview with Ocean Vuong," *The Paris Review*, June 5, 2019, accessed July 8, 2019, https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2019/06/05/survival-as-a-creative-force-an-interview-with-ocean-vuong/

19 I am drawing here on Ocean Vuong's comments about American identity in his interview with Scott Simon, "Start With Truth and End With Art': Poet Ocean Vuong On His Debut Novel," *National Public Radio, Inc.*, published June 1, 2019, accessed August 13, 2019. https://www.npr.org/2019/06/01/728722925/start-with-truth-and-end-with-art-poet-ocean-vuong-on-his-debut-novel

20 Vuong, 179.

21 The "White Cube" refers to the pristine, white-walled spaces typically housing artworks in museum environments. For a historical and critical discussion of the Eurocentric origins of this format, see Elena Filipovic, "The Global White Cube," *On Curating*, Issue 22, April 2014, accessed September 8, 2019. http://www.on-curating.org/files/oc/dateiverwaltung/issue22/PDF_to_Download/ONCURATING_Issue22_USLetter.pdf

22 See Lisa G. Corrin, ed. *Mining the Museum: An Installation Confronting History* (Baltimore: The Contemporary Museum and Maryland Historical Society, 1994) to understand how Fred Wilson challenged what is accepted and understood as history and the ways museums tell stories through objects in his role as artist/curator.

an object's capacity to spatially convey context through allusions to its use. Likewise, what interests me about RAW: CRAFT, COMMODITY, AND CAPITALISM is how the artists co-located in the exhibition reveal the depth of the histories of matter and material layers, both through the way in which the works are made and the finished works themselves.

I believe there is a critical issue underlying this exhibition: people do not know where things come from, where *materials* come from, and haven't for a very long time. The way we discuss craft pivots on the connection between labor and materials – between *recognized* labor and how that labor *transforms* materials. For example, fashion designer Natalie Chanin once said that we have generations that don't know how to grow their own food, make their own clothes, or build their own homes.[23] This speaks to the power of transformation of materials from one state to another. RAW, however, has the potential to expose the histories of materials, to be about labor and materials connected to a hierarchy of basic needs and the conceptual and metaphorical potential of history-laden materials themselves.

The present moment is steeped in immediate gratification. Anything you want, from food to craft supplies to books to electronics, is available with the push of a button on your smartphone; use Amazon and the items may show up in less than a day. Retailer names are listed, but the shopping experience is funneled into a single commodity channel that masks nearly all levels of production and distribution of most items. When I worked at The Children's Museum of Houston in the late 1980s, the need to teach children that milk came from cows, not cartons, surfaced frequently as a critique of the popular experiential supermarket exhibitions in most museums of this kind. Shifting to the 1940s, a different example comes to mind: "cargo cults." This term describes groups that emerged during and immediately following U.S. and Japanese occupation of various islands in the South Pacific during World War II. The source of the goods was mysterious to local people; products seemed simply to appear, rather than require transformation from raw to finished goods. Locals with the ability to obtain such finished goods via cargo ships in this capitalist-based model gained additional power within existing social structures and religious beliefs. Power, it appeared, lay in the ability to conjure finished goods with a note on a clipboard or call into a phone.[24] Here, factories and manufacturing sites making goods were located elsewhere and as invisible as

23 Natalie Chanin, conversation with the author during a workshop at Pacific Northwest College of Art, April 20, 2010.

24 See artist Stephanie Syjuco's *Cargo Cults* photograph series, 2016, and its accompanying review by Gayle Clemans, "Review: 'Everything has been material for scissors to shape' is a flow of textiles, interrupted," *The Seattle Times*, published March 21, 2017, accessed September 1, 2019, https://www.seattletimes.com/entertainment/visual-arts/review-everything-has-been-material-for-scissors-to-shape-is-a-flow-of-textiles-interrupted/

25 Beckert, xvii.

26 See Carolyn Steel, *Hungry City: How Food Shapes Our Lives* (London: Vintage, 2009).

27 Beckert, 46.

28 Miwa Messer, "Ocean Vuong," <B&N Podcast>, published June 11, 2019, accessed August 13, 2019.

29 *Global Forest Watch Fires*, accessed August 24, 2019. https://fires.globalforestwatch.org

the human and inhuman materials extracting and harvesting raw matter were to those living in Europe. In the two centuries prior to this, populations shifted to the center of London during the Industrial Revolution, geographically powered in that place by coal mining.[25] This growth pushed the messiest parts of food production further and further out, making the process and labor involved in growing and preparing food to be cooked, let alone consumed, increasingly less visible to urban dwellers.[26] Long before this, goods were exchanged along the Silk Road and via trade winds, where porcelain from China, as well as silk, cotton, and spices from India, introduced one part of the world to things transformed from resources that were unavailable or impossible to grow in Europe. My point is that humans have been trading for centuries. It is in these shifts – from barter to the triangulation of "cotton from India, slaves from Africa, and sugar from the Caribbean flowing across the planet in a complex commercial dance"[27] during the Industrial Revolution, to capitalism today – that humans have grown increasingly separated from the source of matter, the stuff of which materials are made.

While my original intention was not to write this type of an essay, the socio-cultural climate of 2019 compelled me to spell out a prehistory for the works on view in a way that would not have felt as urgent a few years ago. I am thinking, too, of Ocean Vuong's remarks that an American bomb falling anywhere in the world immediately brings that place into American history. American identity, he argues, begins with American foreign policy. "Americanness," he says, "began when bombs fell in Vietnam."[28] Considering material histories connected to craft feels as connected to commodity, identity, and nation building as Vuong's links between Vietnam and the United States. Craft, brought into a museum, brings colonial histories into a space. Material histories begin with how matter becomes material. This exhibition could catalyze future thinking about what we mean when we use any materials. It is my hope that this, too, will not rest on brown and black bodies.

The world is on fire as I write this essay in August 2019. One map, tracking reported forest fires, shows red dots stretching diagonally from the tip of South America to the edges of the East Siberian Sea, from Alaska to New Zealand.[29] Places on this same map are visually illegible, as large swathes south of the equator—such as the Amazon Rainforest—burns across Brazil and Bolivia, and across Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique,

and Zambia. Red and orange dots mark fires burning far past the edges of the Arctic Circle to the northernmost areas of Russia. Some of these fires are part of summer burn cycles. Many, though, are deliberately set to claim the land on which the forest lives, in which indigenous people live, in which animals and plants live. If craft is connected to nature and natural materials, as the field is so often positioned, then nature's crisis is craft's crisis, too.

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My thinking in this essay is impacted by: *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* by Sven Beckert; *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* by Linda Tuhiwai Smith; *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* by Ocean Vuong, and *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* by Kathryn Yusoff. Thank you to Matt Lambert for introducing me to Yusoff's work. Thanks, too, to Dani Burke, Holly Jerger, Lisa Jarrett, Ben Lignel, Caroline Ellen Liou, Caitrin Lynch, and Scott Wiggers for feedback on drafts of this essay.

RAW:
CRAFT, COMMODITY, AND CAPITALISM

CHARMAINE BEE
ATUL BHALLA
SONYA CLARK
RAKSHA PAREKH
JOVENCIO DE LA PAZ
IGNACIO PEREZ MERUANE
AMOR MUÑOZ
JUANA VALDES
KEN + JULIA YONETANI

CHARMAINE BEE

BORN IN BRONX, NEW YORK
LIVES AND WORKS IN LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

Through installation, textiles, and performance, Charmaine Bee explores African diasporic spiritual practices and histories of the Southeastern United States. Raised in Beaufort, South Carolina, much of Bee's practice explores their Gullah heritage. The Gullah are a distinct group of Black Americans living in small communities along the Atlantic coast and Sea Islands of South Carolina and Georgia who, due to various circumstances, have been able to retain much of their African cultural heritage including a creolized language.[1] Their work places an emphasis on memory and ritual through the intersection of colonial commodities with their family memories and the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade. They are also concerned with the effects these food commodities have had on the diet of their family and friends, which led to their study of herbalism and the establishment of their loose-leaf tea company, Gullah Girl Tea, in 2009.

Through their works in this exhibition, Bee connects to their ancestors via the processes they utilize. For *untitled indigo piece #3*, *portal series*, 2017, Bee sewed together 1458 unbleached tea bags into a large, patchwork structure. Their hours of stitching joined the tea bags into one cellular body that they

immersed in indigo. As they were standing over the dye vat, they recount how their thoughts were "of the dark blue indigo dyed hands of the Black women in the Sea Islands who harvested and processed the indigo that was grown there until the storm of 1863."[2] Bee installs the veil of transparent blue color as a U-shaped column that engulfs viewers as they enter its interior and step into a space that could have been made in the past or the present.

why can't we be friends, 2016-19, is part of an ongoing series of Bee's sugar pours and dust. In this series, Bee boils down the sweet granules of sugar into dark syrup that they pour onto oiled craft paper. Once cooled, the pours become amorphous shapes that resemble tectonic plates. These "plates" are often presented with mounds of sugar dust that Bee creates by pulverizing the granules in a blender. The once recognizable form of sugar is reduced and abstracted to take on images of the land and soil where it was grown. This work is also an extension of memories of their grandmother, who would routinely gather her family together for backyard crab boils. Bee's works serve as a form of muscle memory reflecting their grandmother's work to feed her family and all the laborers who toiled to grow and harvest these materials throughout history.

[1] Because of their geographical isolation and strong community life, the Gullah have been able to successfully retain much of their African cultural heritage. Joseph A. Opala, "The Gullah: Rice, Slavery, and the Sierra Leone-American Connection", Yale, accessed August 27, 2019. https://glc.yale.edu/gullah-rice-slavery-and-sierra-leone-american-connection

[2] Charmaine Bee, "Artist statement," email, August 30, 2019. During the 18th century, indigo was one of South Carolina's most exported products, second only to rice. It could be grown on land unsuitable for other crops, with field slaves planting and harvesting the crop and skilled "indigo slaves" converting the plant into dried dye cakes. Production dramatically declined after the American Revolutionary War and the severing of colonial trade with Britain. For more on the history of indigo production in South Carolina, see Virginia Jelatis, "Indigo," *South Carolina Encyclopedia, University of South Carolina, Institute for Southern Studies*, published June 8, 2016, last updated January 8, 2019, accessed September 1, 2019. http://www.scencyclopedia.org/sce/entries/indigo/

Charmaine Bee received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in 2007 from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a Master of Fine Arts in 2017 from California Institute of the Arts. Bee has been awarded numerous artist residencies and grants including grants from the Brooklyn Arts Council Community Arts Foundation and the Puffin Foundation. In addition, they have worked as a teaching artist and shown in solo and group exhibitions throughout the United States.

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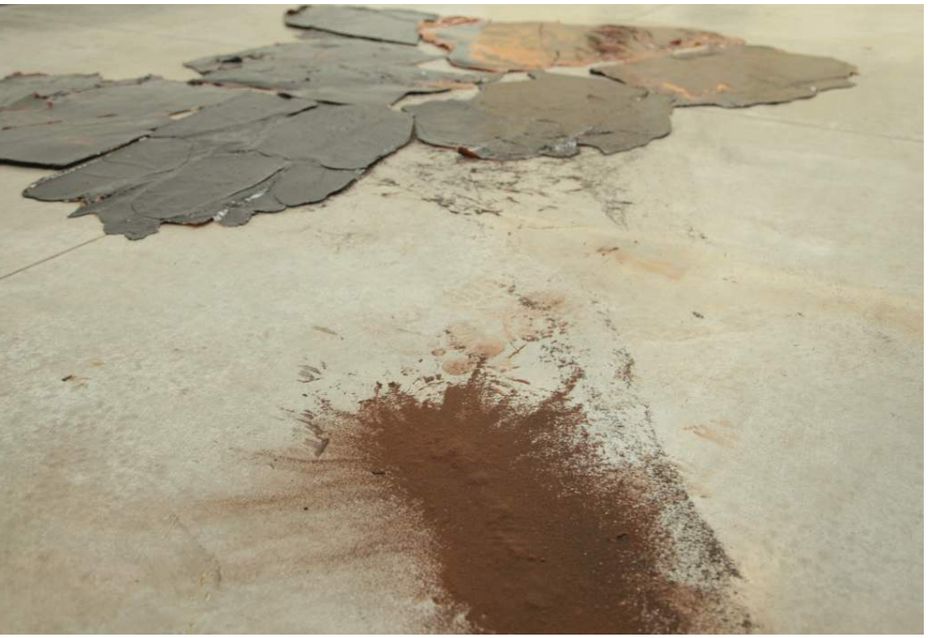

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1 – 2

Full view + detail of
untitled indigo piece #3, portal series 2017

1,458 tea bags, fermented indigo, and gold thread
192 x 144 in.
Courtesy of the artist
Photos: Noel Bass

3 – 4

Details of
why can't we be friends 2016-19

Burnt sugar pours and burnt sugar dust
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist
Photos: Charmaine Bee

ATUL BHALLA

BORN 1964, NEW DELHI, INDIA
LIVES AND WORKS IN NEW DELHI, INDIA

For more than two decades, Atul Bhalla has explored the spiritual, physical, and political significance of water through a range of multimedia works, performances, and interventions. Much of his work has focused on the fraught relationship between New Delhi and the Yamuna River, one of India's largest and most sacred rivers. As it travels south from the Himalayas into the Delhi region, the Yamuna's clear waters are channeled off for farming irrigation or into drinking water reservoirs, leaving the river's flow near-stagnant. Combined with the city's unbridled urbanization and lack of infrastructure, the initially vibrant river crawls out of New Delhi as one of the most polluted rivers in world.[1]

"The only access to the river today becomes an access of death. . . . where the ashes of the cremated are immersed in the waters. Mystically, the Yamuna is supposed to be the sister of Yama, the god of death, and was supposed to keep the Yama away if you bathed in her waters. But today I think she [the Yamuna] contemplates her own death," Bhalla explains.[2] The artist has executed immersive projects in various sites and communities along the Yamuna, deepening his own emotional and physical ties to

the river and exploring how other people interact with the Yamuna. In his *Immersion* series, Bhalla places a series of cast sand forms representing water-carrying vessels in water-filled vitrines. The sand used to create the forms was gathered from the banks of the Yamuna. These vessels are now relics and inaccessible— reminders of how people used to depend on a river that no longer functions as a source of life.

Bhalla's work reflects an increasing human detachment from water sources due to pollution and the worldwide movement to privatize and commodify drinking water.[3] His body of work also takes on a new relevancy as India faces "its 'worst' water crisis in history" caused by hyper-urbanization, poor water management, and global climate change.[4] One study estimates that by 2020, twenty-one cities in the country will run out of groundwater, affecting 100 million people.[5]

1 Julie McCarthy, "Can India's Sacred But 'Dead' Yamuna River Be Saved?" *NPR*, published May 11, 2016, accessed August 27, 2019. https://www.npr.org/2016/05/11/477415686/can-indias-sacred-but-dead-yamuna-river-be-saved

2 Artist talk and panel discussion "Ecoaesthetics - Water in an Expanded Field: A talk by New Delhi-based contemporary artist, Atul Bhalla followed by a conversation on the politics and aesthetics of water," *Institute for South Asian Studies at University of California Berkeley*, presented March 3, 2016, accessed August 30, 2019. https://southasia.berkeley.edu/atul-bhalla

3 For more on the corporate commodification of water, see Gustavo Lermen Silva, "How the Commodification of Water for Profit Fuels a Global Crisis," *The Inertia*, published April 19, 2018, accessed August 27, 2019. https://www.theinertia.com/environment/how-the-commodification-of-water-for-profit-fuels-a-global-crisis/

4 Jacob Koshy, "India faces worst water crisis: NITI Aayog," *The Hindu*, published June 14, 2018, accessed August 27, 2019. https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/energy-and-environment/india-faces-worst-water-crisis-niti-aayog/article24165708.ece

5 Ibid.

Atul Bhalla earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Delhi University in 1987 and a Master of Fine Arts from the School of Art of Northern Illinois University in 1990. His work has been presented internationally in several solo and group exhibitions, including The Newark Museum, Fotographie Forum Frankfurt, and the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum Triennial. He currently teaches in the School of Art and Performance Arts at Shiv Nadar University.

1

2

ATUL BHALLA

1

Immersions 2008

Installation view of Course (2008) at Sepia International & The Alkazi Collection, New York.
Photo: Manuel Shmettau

2

Immersions 2008 & Piaus 2006

Installation view of Water (2010-2011), an exhibition at the Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers.
Photo: Peter Jacobs

SONYA CLARK

BORN 1967, WASHINGTON, D.C.
LIVES AND WORKS IN AMHERST, MASSACHUSETTS

Throughout her career, Sonya Clark has remained dedicated to craft processes, craft materials, and the belief that there is a transference of knowledge and narrative through the act of making things by hand. Clark has stated, "Objects have personal and cultural meaning because they absorb our stories and reflect our humanity back to us. My stories, your stories, our stories are held in the object."[1] She uses symbolic materials such as sugar, human hair, combs, copper, and beads to create a range of works that examine the Black experience and the institutional racism and inequality ingrained in the everyday.

The exhibition includes three of Clark's works featuring sugar. Clark utilizes sugar to communicate its complex history within the transatlantic slave trade, as well as reflect upon the diasporic triangle of her own family narrative rooted in Africa, the Americas, and the United Kingdom.

Encrusted (Blinded + Drowning), 2015, consists of two five-dollar bills covered in sugar crystals. It is no accident that the artist chose the five-dollar bill, since it depicts Abraham Lincoln, one of the most revered presidents in U.S. history. The sugar crystals

that coat the currency draw attention to the stickiness of the narrative surrounding Lincoln as an advocate for Black freedom; though he is remembered and celebrated for issuing the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, less memorable are the political and economic factors surrounding the president's historic decision. Slaves, like sugar, were considered to be a commodity, whose value was determined solely on monetary terms; freeing them, therefore, was an economic decision as well as a moral one.

Sugar Freed, 2019, features a different leader of Black emancipation: that of Nanny, who led the Jamaican Maroons to freedom and establishing an independent settlement of escaped slaves during the late 17th and 18th centuries. In the piece, Clark incorporates Uruguayan novelist Eduardo Galeano's poem memorializing Nanny, titled "Queen of the Free":

It happens in the first half of the eighteenth century.

The international division of labor
decides that Jamaica exists to sweeten Europe's table.
The land produces sugar, sugar, and more sugar.

In Jamaica, as in Brazil,
diversity of diet is a privilege of those who escape.
Although fertile land is hard to find high in the mountains,
the Maroons figure out how to grow everything,
and even raise pigs and chickens.

Hidden here, they see without being seen,
they sting, and then they vanish.

In these windward Blue Mountains,
Nanny has her temple and her throne.
She is queen of the free.
Once a machine for birthing slaves,
now she wears necklaces
made of the teeth of English soldiers.

Alongside the poem, Clark recreates Nanny's necklace of British soldiers' teeth by hand sculpting a ring of teeth from sugarpaste, thus conjuring the metaphorical rot caused by the violence and death begat by the sugar trade.

In *McHardy Tartan*, 2012, Clark intertwines sugar's larger global history with her family lineage. Using sugarcane fiber, Clark wove the 15-foot cloth in the tartan pattern of her maternal side of the family, who is descended from the union of her Jamaican great-grandmother and a man of Scottish descent during the 1870s. Here, Clark's work functions as both an artwork and family heirloom. Indeed, *McHardy Tartan* has been taken to family funerals and wrapped around family members for photographic portraits. "My family totally understood that this cloth was representing who we are and the complexity of our histories. They understood it had to do with the complexity of human trafficking, people as commodities, a global economy in which almost everyone was involved, and yet we refer to this so simply as the 'Triangle Trade.'"[2]

1 "Sonya Clark," *National Museum of Women in the Arts*, accessed September 19, 2019. https://nmwa.org/explore/artist-profiles/sonya-clark

2 Sonya Clark, "A Legacy: Hair, Language, and Textiles," *American Craft Inquiry*, Volume 1, Issue 1 (2017).

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CRAFT, COMMODITY, AND CAPITALISM

Sonya Clark earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1993 and a Master of Fine Arts from Cranbrook Academy of Art in 1995, where she also was honored with their Distinguished Alumni Award in 2011. She is the recipient of numerous awards and grants including a United States Artist Fellowship, a Pollock Krasner Award, Art Prize Grand Jurors Award, and an Anonymous Was a Woman Award. Clark is currently Professor of Art at Amherst College in Massachusetts. Previously, she was a Distinguished Research Fellow in the School of the Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University, where she served as chair for the Craft and Material Studies Department from 2006 until 2017.


QUEEN OF THE FREE
It happens in the first half of the eighteenth century.
The international division of labor
decides that Jamaica exists to sweeten Europe's table.
The land produces sugar, sugar, and more sugar.
In Jamaica, as in Brazil,
diversity of diet is a privilege of those who escape.
Although fertile land is hard to find in the high mountains,
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and even raise pigs and chickens.
Hidden here, they see without being seen,
they sting and then they vanish.
In the windward Blue Mountains,
Nanny has her temple and her throne.
She is the queen of the free.
Once a machine for birthing slaves,
now she wears necklaces
made of the teeth of English soldiers.
-Eduardo Galeano

1

2

3

SONYA CLARK

1

Sugar Freed 2019

Sugar paste (pastillage) and laser cut leather
12 x 12 x 1 in.
Courtesy of the artist
Photo: Sonya Clark

2

McHardy Tartan 2012

Handwoven sugarcane fiber, earth from Jamaica, indigo cotton from Ivory Coast, and ceramic from Ivory Coast
5 in. x 20 in. x 5 ft. (as shown)
Courtesy of the artist
Photo: Taylor Dabney

3

Encrusted (Blinded + Drowning) 2015

Currency and sugar crystals
4 x 6 in. each
Courtesy of the artist
Photo: Taylor Dabney

RAKSHA PAREKH

BORN IN KABWE, ZAMBIA
LIVES AND WORKS IN LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

Raksha Parekh creates textured visual metaphors that reflect upon the experiences of both the Indian and African diaspora. In her large-scale sculptures and installations, Parekh uses a range of commodities, such as sugar and cotton, to create an emotional and conceptual space where viewers are immersed in the somatic qualities of her materials. By emphasizing the physicality of these materials, Parekh renders the abstract histories of these commodities—and the racial hierarchies and economic stratification built by their trade—tangible. Her work also acknowledges the cultural transformation that occurs through the migration of people, ideas, and materials.

Her earlier work, *Sweet-Sweat-Spots*, 2007 - 09, references her own diasporic roots, tracing her family history of migration from India, to Zambia and Zimbabwe, and finally, to the U.K. and U.S. This specific route echoes the larger migration pattern of Indian workers. In 1652, long before abolition of slavery in the Americas, Indian slaves were some of the first taken by the Dutch explorer Jan Van Reibeeck to the Cape in South Africa. After the abolition of slavery in the British colonies in 1834, Indian indentured laborers were brought to

provide cheap labor across British dependencies, including throughout the Caribbean, West Indies, Mauritius, Fiji Islands, and south and east Africa.[1] In *Sweet-Sweat-Spots*, each sheet of cotton paper and fabric could be read as unearthing an invisible chapter of this history, detailing the intertwining of Indian and African diasporas created by British colonial rule. In the work, Parekh references a bird's-eye view of a sugar cane field, looking down on the tops of the canes or the bodies working in the fields—filling dozens of cotton and paper "scrolls" with painted dots of burnt sugar. Using burnt sugar to mark the stain of forced human labor in her piece, Parekh seeks to recognize this important and crucial history of Indian labor and migration which enriched the colonial powers, and gives it the importance it deserves.

In recent years, Parekh's work has focused more specifically on the spiritual transformation and perseverance she views as integral to the migrant experience. Her new hanging sculpture, *No. 2*, 2019, is from Parekh's ongoing series, *Existence is Intrinsic*. In the artwork, dense layers of cotton fibers, some infused with burnt sugar, cascade over a large gourd. Butterflies formed from handmade cotton and sugarcane paper rest atop the mounds of fibers. Like cotton and sugar, the gourds and butterflies trace their origins to Asia and Africa, but their histories of migration exist outside the violent structures of colonialism.[2] For Parekh, they become signifiers of the spiritual resilience necessary for one to survive the physical and psychological trauma of forced migration.

[1] Linda Mbeki and Matthias van Rossum, "Private slave trade in the Dutch Indian Ocean world: a study into the networks and background of the slavers and the enslaved in South Asia and South Africa," *Slavery & Abolition,* 38:1 (2017), 95-116.

[2] Research indicates that gourds were domesticated globally roughly 10,000 years ago. For more information, see Schlumbaum, Angela, and Patricia Vandorpe. "A Short History of Lagenaria Siceraria (bottle Gourd) in the Roman Provinces: Morphotypes and Archaeogenetics," *Vegetation History and Archaeobotany* 21, no. 6 (2012), 499-509. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43554379

Raksha Parekh is an active member of the Los Angeles arts community, exhibiting in numerous local solo and group exhibitions. Her solo exhibitions include presentations at LA Artcore and the Jose Drudis-Biada Gallery at Mount Saint Mary's University. Her numerous group exhibitions include shows at the California African American Museum; University Gallery, Cal State Dominguez Hills; Quotidian Gallery; Watts Towers Arts Center; and William Grant Still Arts Center.

1

2

4

RAKSHA PAREKH

1 – 2

Front and back of
No. 2 (from the Existence is Intrinsic series) 2019

Various cotton threads and ropes dipped in burnt sugar, cotton fabrics, gourd, glue, cotton paper, and sugarcane paper.
8 ft. x 2.5 ft. x 2.5 ft.
Courtesy of the artist
Photos: Noel Bass

3 – 5

Details of
Sweet-Sweat-Spots 2007-09

Sugar, cotton cloth and paper
Variable dimensions
Courtesy of the artist
Photos: Noel Bass

5

JOVENCIO DE LA PAZ

BORN 1986, SINGAPORE, REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE
CURRENTLY LIVES AND WORKS IN EUGENE, OREGON

Jovencio de la Paz's works in fiber examine how formal issues in material culture, such as color, pattern, and form, are fundamentally tied to histories of colonialism, globalization, and immigration. Much of his work has been centered around the exploration of indigo. As he explains, "My interest in indigo is very rooted in my lineage in southeast Asia, Indonesia, and Singapore. It is a cash crop that is [connected to] colonialism. The Dutch colonized Indonesia and southeast Asia because they were obsessed with the color blue. When indigo was brought to Europe, it caused an explosion of interest. It was a cash crop of the slave trade in the American south[, and] a huge cash crop of India. It's a very fascinating and troubled history."[1]

Indigo is one of the oldest and most commonly used dyes in the world. As art historian Andrea Feeser notes, "Blue was everywhere: in flowering indigo shrubs that covered swathes of the Caribbean and the American South and in the homes, the workplaces, and the dress of everyone from the most privileged to the least regarded."[2] Evidence of its earliest recorded use has been found in a 6,200-year-old cotton fragment in Peru.[3] Today, indigo-dyed products are still ubiquitous. De la

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Paz's work demonstrates that the present-day iterations used in daily life are part of a long legacy, built by the forced labor of people around the world.

His large indigo and batik installation, *Bluets (for Maggie Nelson)*, 2014, was inspired by Maggie Nelson's 2009 book, *Bluets*, a compilation of 240 short chapters about the author's diverse interpretations of and relationship to the color blue. Following the structure of Nelson's book, de la Paz created small indigo batiks on 240 cotton panels, which serve as visual essays articulating his own investigations of the color. His panels range from solid blue fields to ones featuring abstracted figures and designs—together, they form a personal symbolic history of indigo and its related color. De la Paz developed his imagery through the lost-wax process of batik, which causes the fabric to resist the indigo dye wherever the wax is applied. De la Paz uses the areas of white fabric to articulate "places of absence," often the absence of one's homeland or loved ones. Those spaces also remind us of the human histories erased in the pursuit of this valuable commodity.

1 Tempestt Hazel, "An Interview with Jovencio de la Paz," *Sixty Inches From Center*, published July 26, 2016, accessed September 13, 2019. http://sixtyinchesfromcenter.org/interview-with-jovencio-de-la-paz/

2 Andrea Feeser, *Red, White, and Black Make Blue: Indigo in the Fabric of Colonial South Carolina Life* (Athens, Georgia and London, UK: University of Georgia Press, 2013), 1-2.

3 David and Sue Richardson, "Indigo," *AsianTextileStudies*, published January 24, 2016, accessed September 1, 2019. http://www.asiantextilestudies.com/indigo.html

Jovencio de la Paz received a Master of Fine Arts in Fibers from the Cranbrook Academy of Art in 2012 and a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Fiber and Material Studies from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2008. His work has been exhibited in solo and group exhibitions both nationally and internationally, including at The Museum of Contemporary Art in Denver, Colorado; ThreeWalls in Chicago, Illinois; and The Museum of Contemporary Craft in Portland, Oregon. He is a co-founder of the collaborative group Craft Mystery Cult, established in 2010, and is also Assistant Professor and Curricular Head of Fibers at the University of Oregon in Eugene, Oregon.

1

2

JOVENCIO DE LA PAZ

1

Bluets (for Maggie Nelson) 2014

Natural indigo batik on cotton
8 x 5 in. each; 48 x 200 in. total
Collection of Alexis Koran
Photo: Jovencio de la Paz

2 – 3

Details of
Bluets (for Maggie Nelson) 2014

Natural indigo batik on cotton
8 x 5 in. each; 48 x 200 in. total
Collection of Alexis Koran
Photos: Jovencio de la Paz

3

IGNACIO PEREZ MERUANE

BORN 1983 IN CARACAS, VENEZUELA
LIVES AND WORKS IN LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

Ignacio Perez Meruane combines extensive research with a rich range of materials to investigate the ties between local cultural production and corporate industrial practices. The artist states, "My practice is focused on exploring overlapping histories—geological, political, social, and personal—and thinking through their connections through a sculptural process. Many of my projects have focused on the connection between resource extraction and our built environment, and the process by which raw materials become commodities and circulate globally. I am interested in how capitalism and globalization intersect with and impress upon culture, people, and our environment."[1]

Perez Meruane was raised in Santiago, Chile, and has been conducting ongoing research into the country's copper mining industry, looking at its impact on both the environment and local communities, as well as the entanglement of large multi-national corporations with government and cultural institutions. His installation, *remove (copper art in the andean world)*, 2018-19, focuses on the 2004 exhibition *Copper Art in the Andean World* at the Museo Chileno de Arte Precolombino in Santiago and its accompanying catalogue. Through his research,

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Perez Meruane discovered that both the museum and exhibition were underwritten by Minera Escondida, a privately-owned, multi-national mining corporation that operates Chile's largest copper mine and is currently the world's single largest producer of copper. In 1996, the corporation formed the nonprofit Minera Escondida Foundation to create social and cultural programs throughout the county, raising questions about how the state benefits from Minera Escondida's exploitation of the country's non-renewable natural resources.

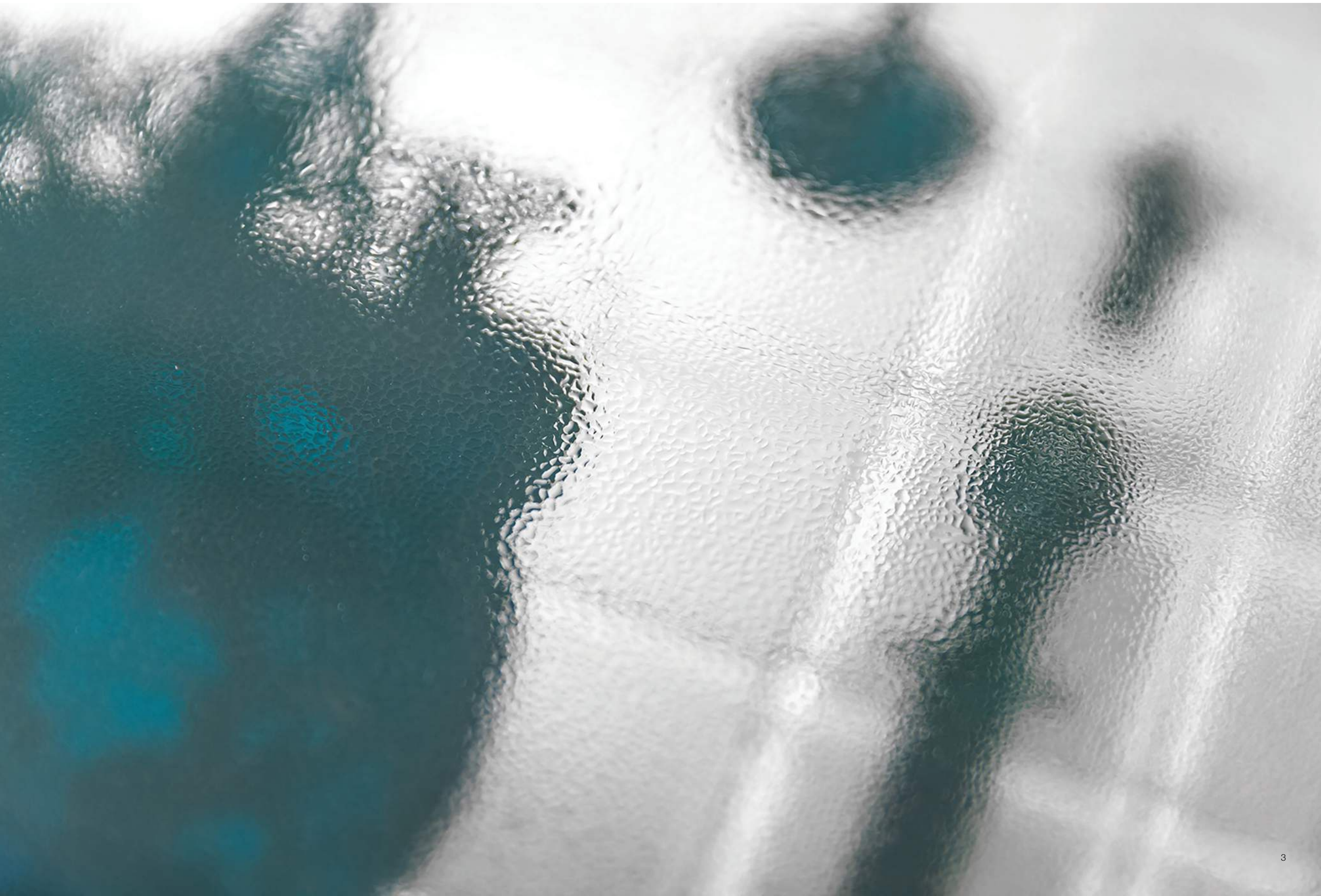
In the work, Perez Meruane places various copper forms, comprised of silhouettes of the exhibition objects to-scale, into glass tanks filled with acetic acid. The acid accelerates the natural oxidizing process of the copper, forming a thick crust of verdigris, or green patina, on the objects' surfaces. Perez Meruane also creates prints made from the verdigris that has built up on the copper surfaces. In addition to these pieces, his installation includes a polished copper shelf displaying an image of the Minera Escondida mine, sourced from the company's website, with copper electrical wire and copper ore. Displayed together, these components form a visual record of copper extraction and use in Chile—beginning with indigenous technologies and moving to industrial manufacturing and Perez Meruane's own production as an artist. The installation also directly inserts corporate interests within this chain of cultural transference.

1 "Ignacio Perez Meruane," *Rema Hort Mann Foundation*, accessed August 31, 2019. http://www.remahortmannfoundation.org/project/ignacio-perez-meruane-2/

Ignacio Perez Meruane received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in General Sculptural Studies from the Maryland Institute College of Art in 2006 and a Master of Fine Arts from the California Institute of the Arts in 2009. His work has been exhibited in several exhibitions around Los Angeles including solo exhibitions at Rogers and Los Angeles Contemporary Archive (LACA).

1

2



4

IGNACIO PEREZ MERUANE

1 – 5

Details of
remove (copper art in the andean world) 2018-19

Kiln-formed glass, waterjet cut copper, wood, copper ore, and monoprints
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist
Photos: Noel Bass

5

AMOR MUÑOZ

BORN 1979, MEXICO CITY, MEXICO
LIVES AND WORKS IN MEXICO CITY, MEXICO

Amor Muñoz creates interdisciplinary projects that explore the hybridization of old and new technologies. Originally trained as a lawyer, Muñoz turned to art as a vehicle for social change after she grew frustrated with what she observed as the failure of equitable justice within the legal system. Many of her projects combine traditional craft techniques such as embroidery and weaving with electronics, as a way to train people in new technologies. Through these projects, the artist seeks to recognize the contributions of laborers within structures of capitalism, noting in an interview that "you never think of the worker" in capitalism.[1] Muñoz challenges the class-oriented divide in accessing both new technologies and skill-based training, to make projects people can utilize in their daily lives with the goal of creating "a work of art that works in life."[2]

One of her projects, *Yuca_Tech*, 2014-15, is a laboratory based in the state of Yucatán, Mexico. Muñoz worked with a group of indigenous Maya weavers to develop textile products that utilize traditional henequen (agave) fiber with solar cells and photovoltaic thread (a conductive material that converts light into energy) to produce electricity for the community to use in a variety of ways. Henequen

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is an incredibly durable fiber and has a long history of use in Maya society, for items ranging from rope to shoes to household wares. The industrial production of henequen developed under Spanish colonial rule and eventually led to the rise and fall of Yucatán's economy after Mexican Independence in 1821. At the height of henequen production during the end of the 19th century, Yucatán became the wealthiest state in Mexico, which further exasperated the wealth disparity between the hacienda owners and laborers who already worked in impoverished conditions. When henequen demand declined after World War II, it devastated the local economy and Yucatán became the poorest state in the country.[3]

Yuca_Tech enables a local indigenous community to reclaim henequen for their use and benefit, merging their traditional commodity with new technology to create a third commodity: electricity. Among their many products, *Yuca_Tech* produces solar bags designed to store electricity so that street vendors can sell energy to passersby who need to charge their cellular phones. Other products include woven hats and shoes with LED lights that harness sunlight during the day and are illuminated at night. Muñoz and the weavers developed these products with people in another village who often walked to gather together at night but did not have access to electricity. The hats become lamps and the shoes become safety lights for walking. The weavers and Muñoz are joint owners of the products; the weavers own the pieces but cannot sell them. In turn, Muñoz can only sell the pieces if the women agree to the sale.[4]

1 Eyeo Festival, "Eyeo 2015 – Amor Muñoz," *Vimeo*, published July 28, 2015, accessed August 29, 2019. https://vimeo.com/134734732

2 Ibid.

3 For more on the history of henequen in Mexico, see Nyle Lucien Rioux, "The Reign of 'King Henequen': The Rise and Fall of Yucatán's Export Crop from the Pre-Columbian Era through 1930," *Department of History, Bates College*, 2014, 5-7, accessed August 29, 2019. http://scarab.bates.edu/honorstheses/106

4 Betsy Greer, "Embroidery, Weaving, and the Craftivism of Amor Muñoz," *Creativelive*, published 2015, accessed August 30, 2019. https://www.creativelive.com/blog/embroidery-knitting-and-the-craftivism-of-amor-munoz/

Amor Muñoz studied law at the National Autonomous University of Mexico and drawing and painting at the New Orleans Academy of Fine Arts. She is a two-time fellow at the FONCA Young Creative Program and is currently a member of the National System of Art Creators. Her work has been exhibited internationally in various museums, galleries, and festivals. She received an Honorable Mention in the category of Hybrid Art in the Prix Ars Electronica in 2012 and received the New Face Award of the Japan Media Arts Festival in 2013.

1

AMOR MUÑOZ

1

Yuca_Tech 2014-15

Textiles with electronics and video documentation
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist
Photo: Amor Muñoz Studio

2

Documentation of
Yuca_Tech 2014-15

Photograph
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist
Photo: Amor Muñoz Studio

2

JUANA VALDES

BORN 1963, CABAÑAS, CUBA
CURRENTLY WORKS IN AMHERST, MASSACHUSETTS
AND LIVES IN NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK AND MIAMI, FLORIDA

Juana Valdes examines the ongoing ramifications of globalization and migration in postcolonial history by highlighting the history of objects and the materials from which they are made. She states, "I sustain a multi-disciplinary practice that explores matters of race, transnationalism, gender, labor, and class. My work functions as an archive that analyzes and decodes the intersectionality of objects by investigating their history of origin."[1] Valdes often utilizes porcelain in her work for its history as one of the earliest globalized commodities and objects of transcultural exchange.

Starting in the 10th century, Chinese porcelain centers began exporting their products, and porcelain played a central role in cross-cultural exchange between Asia, Africa, and Europe. Chinese porcelain was often referred to as "white gold" and was renown for its smooth texture, bright white color, and translucency. Chinese porcelain wares were disseminated globally and influenced virtually all ceramic traditions they touched. Simultaneously, Chinese porcelain production was influenced by the tastes of the varied markets under its reach.[2] China maintained its hold on the global exchange of the material until European factories started

producing their own versions of porcelain wares in the 18th century.

Through her porcelain works, Valdes questions how systems of economic and aesthetic value are embedded within domestic objects. For her work, *SED (-to thirst)*, 2017, Valdes casts a set of plastic water bottles in porcelain. The water brand, Sei, is a particularly expensive "artisanal" water. The disposable plastic bottles are now rendered in clay, equating them to the status of traditional porcelain vessels. Valdes seems to ask if that prestige is due to the water bottles' actual value, or the perceived status they impart on those who can afford to buy them.

In *RedBone Colored China Rags*, 2012, Valdes utilizes bone china, a particular form of porcelain developed in Britain in 1794, in which bone ash was added to the clay body to better imitate the high level of whiteness and translucency found in Chinese porcelain. Valdes upends those key properties of the porcelain by adding pigment to create a range of opaque skin tones in the form of cleaning rags. Valdes subverts the traditional aesthetic expectations for bone china objects in order to recognize the domestic workers, typically women of color, who have been responsible for caring for these ceramic objects over the centuries. Valdes's forms directly reference these women's bodies and labor, asserting their contributions to the historical preservation of these objects. She also seeks to dismantle racialized Eurocentric standards of beauty in which whiteness is prioritized and its connection to the lasting impact of colonialization.

1 "Juana Valdes," *Joan Mitchell Foundation Artist Programs*, accessed August 26, 2019. https://joanmitchellfoundation.org/artist-programs/artist-grants/painter-sculptors/2018/juana-valdes

2 Robert Finlay, "The Pilgrim Art: The Culture of Porcelain in World History," *Journal of World History*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Fall, 1998), 141-187. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20078727

Juana Valdes completed her Master of Fine Arts at the School of Visual Arts in 1993 and her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Sculpture at Parsons School of Design in 1991. Her work has been exhibited internationally, including at the Museum of Latin American Art, Long Beach, California; Perez Art Museum, Miami, Florida; and Galerie Verein Berliner Künstler, Berlin, Germany. She has received numerous grants and fellowships including the Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant, Cuban Artist Fund Grant, and the Joan Mitchell Foundation 2018 Painters & Sculptors Grant. She currently teaches at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

1

JUANA VALDES

1

RedBone Colored China Rags 2012

Ceramic and bone china
12 x 6 x 4 in. each; 180 x 12 in. total
Courtesy of the artist and Spinello Projects, Miami
Photo: Diana Larrea

2

SED (-to thirst) 2017

Ceramic and porcelain
8 x 4 x 2 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Spinello Projects, Miami
Photo: Juana Valdes

2

KEN + JULIA YONETANI

BORN 1971 IN TOKYO, JAPAN (KEN YONETANI)
BORN 1972 IN TOKYO, JAPAN (JULIA YONETANI)
CURRENTLY LIVE AND WORK IN KYOTO, JAPAN AND BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA

Ken + Julia Yonetani create complex, large-scale installations that address the impacts of human activity and industrialization on the environment. The Yonetanis began their artistic collaboration in 2008 and have created a wide range of works utilizing salt, rice, uranium, and other natural resources to illustrate the ramifications of environmental catastrophes such as the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster in Japan and the bleaching of Australia's Great Barrier Reef. The Yonetanis frequently work on-site and with scientists studying these events as a part of their research and artistic production. Often, their installations are monumental, immersive experiences that reference items of luxury such as banquet tables, foodstuffs, and chandeliers, which serve as cautionary tales for the devastation wreaked by the overconsumption of natural resources.

Their sculpture *Grape Chandelier*, 2011, is one of several works the Yonetanis have made from groundwater salt collected from the Murray–Darling River basin, a large geographical area in the interior of southeastern Australia. The artists note that "along the Murray-Darling basin, known as Australia's 'food bowl' as it produces up to 90 per cent of Australia's fresh food, 550,000 tons of salt is pumped out of the ground every year to try and

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CRAFT, COMMODITY, AND CAPITALISM

stem the increasing rise of highly saline groundwater."[1] Though salt has always been naturally present in the groundwater of the region, its levels have increased in the past decades due to the state's allowance of increased agricultural enterprises and the unsustainable water extraction needed for their irrigation.[2] For their pieces, the artists sourced their salt from the Murray River Salt company, which harvests salt from groundwater pumped out by stations along the river basin.

The Yonetanis constructed their chandelier from 5,000 salt beads that were handcast from molds of grapes produced in the same region. The grapes reference the fact that wine is also part of the area's agricultural production, and that grape irrigation contributes to the increased salinity levels. In their work, the artists contrast salt's ability to preserve food with its destructive effect on Australia's most important food producing region. The piece also serves as a metaphor for larger, global environmental decline and food insecurity.

1 "The Last Supper, *kenandjuliayonetani*, accessed September 2, 2019. http://kenandjuliayonetani.com/en/works/thelastsupper/

2 Bryan Keogh, "The Murray-Darling Basin scandal: economists have seen it coming for decades," *TheConversation*, published July 8, 2019, accessed September 2, 2019. https://theconversation.com/the-murray-darling-basin-scandal-economists-have-seen-it-coming-for-decades-119989

Ken Yonetani holds a Master of Arts in Visual Arts from the School of Art, Australian National University, and a PhD in Visual Arts from the Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney. Julia Yonetani holds a Master of Arts from the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, University of Tokyo, and holds a PhD in History from the Australian National University. The couple's work has been exhibited widely throughout Australia and has appeared in both solo and group shows in Berlin, France, London, Tel Aviv, and Tokyo, including the 53rd Venice Biennale in 2009, the Singapore Biennale in 2013, and The Armory Show, New York in 2018.

1

2

3

Details + full view of
Grape Chandelier 2011

1 – 3

Murray River salt and metal
90.5 x 55.1 x 55.1 in.
Courtesy of Ken + Julia Yonetani and
Mizuma Gallery, Singapore
Photos: Catherine Brossais

Charmaine Bee
untitled indigo piece #3, portal series
2017
1,458 tea bags, fermented indigo, and gold thread
192 x 144 in.
Courtesy of the artist

Charmaine Bee
why can't we be friends
2016-19
Burnt sugar pours and burnt sugar dust
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

Atul Bhalla
Immersions
2008
Glass vitrines filled with water and sculptures (made of sand from the Yamuna river and cement)
on wood pedestals, unique
18 x 12 x 12 in. (each glass vitrine)
Courtesy of the artist and sepiaEYE, New York

Sonya Clark
McHardy Tartan
2012
Handwoven sugarcane fiber, earth from Jamaica,
indigo cotton from Ivory Coast, and ceramic from Ivory Coast
5 in. x 20 in. x 5 ft. (as shown)
Courtesy of the artist

Sonya Clark
Sugar Freed
2019
Sugar paste (pastillage) and laser cut leather
12 x 12 x 1 in.
Courtesy of the artist

Sonya Clark
Encrusted (Blinded + Drowning)
2015
Currency and sugar crystals
4 x 6 in. each
Courtesy of the artist

Raksha Parekh
Sweet-Sweat-Spots
2007-09
Sugar, cotton cloth and paper
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

Raksha Parekh
No. 2 (from the *Existence is Intrinsic* series)
2019
Various cotton threads and ropes dipped in burnt sugar, cotton fabrics, gourd, glue, cotton paper, and sugarcane paper
8 x 2.5 x 2.5 ft.
Courtesy of the artist

Jovencio de la Paz
Bluets (for Maggie Nelson)
2014
Natural indigo batik on cotton
8 x 5 in. each; 48 x 200 in. total
Collection of Alexis Koran

Ignacio Perez Meruane
remove (copper art in the andean world)
2018-19
Kiln-formed glass, waterjet cut copper, wood, copper ore, and monoprints
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

Amor Muñoz
Yuca_Tech
2014-15
Textiles with electronics and video documentation
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

Juana Valdes
SED (-to thirst)
2017
Ceramic and porcelain
8 x 4 x 2 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Spinello Projects, Miami

Juana Valdes
RedBone Colored China Rags
2012
Ceramic and bone china
12 x 6 x 4 in. each; 180 x 12 in. total
Courtesy of the artist and Spinello Projects, Miami

Ken + Julia Yonetani
Grape Chandelier
2011
Murray River salt and metal
90.5 x 55.1 x 55.1 in.
Courtesy of Ken + Julia Yonetani and Mizuma Gallery, Singapore