

This journey has been one of exploring collaboration with my environment and those I share it with. My first and second shoots for this project started in the wild of the Mississippi River. Wadding out, and sinking myself a few feet down to the river bed I was immersed. I was being imaged by a dear friend, with whom exploring the wilderness is much of our shared experience base. In reviewing (examination) the images made from this place I noticed that the shots were reminiscent of ultrasound imaging. In reviewing my sensorial experience, the moment had felt much like I was in Mother Nature's Womb. A small, slimy mass held in a ceaseless circular tide. My oxygen, my life force, was being provided by the umbilical cord of experience. My closeness to breath. Often entering and exiting water can be a signifier of Re-Birth. I had stumbled into a feeling of Pre-Birth, and wrote:

Alone mitochondrial in the primordial soup floating, ceaselessly meandering, until around one bend a single cell becomes two and intertwined they dance on through eternity.

This was a feeling and space I desired to explore more. I felt this meant more time in that place. And thus began exploring ways to enable my breath. My third and fourth shoots were the first in a pool. A setting in which the water was calm in its controlled containment. In this space I was photographed by two fellow artists, one of which was my brother. This familiarity and comfort with my collaborators and the docility of the space allowed active time for thought and a present observational mind. Which directed me to questions like; who was I before I was born, was I anyone, I held DNA, like my affinity for Nicotine? Smoking serves as a clear line I can draw from the genetic history I have been witness to and the dispositions I display. I am the many expressions of the genes left by those who came before me, all of my wonder and pain. In this space I was most closely in tune with the expressions that built my respiratory system. The last question felt like a direct response to my need for breath in those moments and bodily knowledge of what is impacting it.

I could have broken these barriers to experience with breathwork, or alterations to my smoking habit. However I shifted from integration to a curiosity enabled by creating a physical space which allowed me to observe. This intuition feels like a response from my conditioning to the pervasive ideology humanity displays towards nature. From my being a creature of the built environment. In the context of my initial impulse, to integrate with nature as a collaborator, physically constructing a barrier for exploration also becomes a barrier to those feelings and perceptions. It was an unthought, indoctrinated response, flowing from a worn path. The thread I was compelled towards by what I feel is aptly outlined by Bruno Latour as the *modern constitution*:

He examines the idea of the modern constitution, which he defines as the collection of ideas and customs that form the basis of modernity. He contends that the fundamental separation between nature and society that underlies the modern constitution has resulted in a number of social and environmental issues, arguing that a number of binary oppositions, including nature and culture, subject and object, and fact and value, form the foundation of the modern constitution. These contrasts produce a hierarchy where science is viewed as universally true, and objective knowledge is viewed as superior to other types of knowledge, which are seen as subjective and inferior. Humans are also seen as being superior to nature.

He contends that we must acknowledge the close ties between humans and the natural world and that there are other legitimate forms of knowledge besides science. He contends that in order to better understand the complexity and interconnectedness of our world, we must cultivate new ways of thinking and behaving.

<https://www.thecollector.com/bruno-latour-we-have-never-been-modern/>

So, I began building. Cultivating new behavior in my creative process and interaction with Nature. During the time of the vessel's construction, I wrote:

I find myself contemplating large questions about my true nature, often they intersect with my identity as a biological creature on this earth which, by centuries of deprioritization, feels a dissonance between itself and the land it is made of. Finding spaces in which to interrogate this dissonance can be difficult. So I am building one. Throughout this process I have been reminded that in the way my vocal stings are molecularly mine, not chosen but inherited, their form existing and growing with me, my hands and their prints make only their mark.

It is the presentation of this mark, in each seam and bend of the vessel, even beginning as an intuitive approach to separate, that I was reminded how natural I am. Shown the ways the individual and collective forces are expressing and experiencing the same. In this vessel I designed with clarity and observation in mind, I can barely see or be seen, hear, or be heard. I am isolated in my verbal and physical communication with my human

collaborators and yet I am on display. Art making is imperative to my mediation of the world. As is blooming for the life cycle of the flower. This display felt natural, in the way that it was a part of the cycle of creation this project offered. I felt like the flower. I was a sliver of the natural world caught at a vulnerable moment along its path. Not the director of a photo shoot encased in a vessel displaying with clarity his ironic and blurred separation from nature. These fleeting moments of unfolded openness are indicative of larger cycles and systems, roots you can not see. Rain, the clouds you can not touch. I relate to that as well. These acts of presentation and performance took time and a concentration of resources, only representative of a fraction of the whole. I thought it could be the exhibitionary presentation of my form that made me feel this connection to nature as object, yet it was a shielded presentation of a portion of a larger creative cycle that put me in touch with the line between myself and nature. I anticipated interrogating this connection would be enabled by the “clear observational” space I intended to provide myself, not the one I had actually made and would experience within. Reviewing the images revealed that separation and obscuration of my form had shifted the communication of representational visual emphasis to a more even playing field with the natural

objects I had come to emulate. My body's rendering that of the leaves on a tree a few feet ahead of you in the forest. The individual stream of a shower head as it hits the tub and becomes one.

I had felt that this intuitive response to separate would offer a perspective into my conditioning to experience my existence apart from nature. In contrast the resulting images and embodied experiences reminded me that even *apart* from the body I am *a part*.

I returned to the pool and wrote:

Spend enough time by a lake or river, stand under the thunder of a waterfall, and a pool feels clinical. I've spent enough time in hospitals being "treated" to know that the water flowing through the closed chlorinated system probably feels bare, exposed and alone. I wondered if it remembered being the river.

I feel like that pool water often. Separate from the body. I watch as everything breathes around me, but feel it stifled within myself. How do I breathe deeper?

Neither myself or the planet do well in a dense atmosphere of CO₂. Sitting in my own emissions felt sickening after a while, I wondered how the planet feels, inhaling humanities fumes which are its own byproduct.

I stood in the rain: Standing in the vessel in the pouring rain, as a sunset peers from behind reminded me of the deep contradictions present in nature and

myself. I brought a cigarette with me, to fill the vessel and then allow some smoke to escape. Visualizing my process of sitting with and learning from my history as well as proactively making room for fresh air.

I AM A CONTRADICTION

I FIND IT HARD TO SPEAK PLAINLY
I THINK I LIKE TO COMPLICATE MOST THINGS
IN MY LIFE
I THINK IT CAN BE A DISTRACTION FROM
HARD TRUTHS

I ALSO JUST THINK IM CURIOUS, AND

I THINK SOMETIMES IT MAKES FEELING
FEEL LIKE TRAVELING HARD ENOUGH

I ACCEPT THE PACE OF LIFE I LIVE
BECAUSE OF THIS

I ALSO ACCEPT AND SEEK THE PEACE FOUND IN
THE BEAUTIFULLY PLAIN FABRIC OF REALITY
AN INFINITE REPRESENTATION OF THE SAME VIBRATION

CLOSENESS WITH MYSELF DOES NOT HAVE TO BE BOUNDLESS EXPLORATION
OF THE CAPACITIES OF THOUGHT

FINITE PLANES REST AT MY FEET
EMBARKEING ACROSS THEM REMINDS ME
OF THE PATTERN I MAKE IN THE WIND

the wise [MEND]

I was humbled by the falls: Occupying the vessel under the power of the waterfall, being in constant opposition to the gravity of the water, holding and displacing the weight reminded me that I am a disruptive force. More importantly however, that Nature is the most. My disruption has an eventual limit, a boundary the falls and water cycle at large do not know. In the lovely words of Toni Morrison, “all water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was.” This faith water shows in continual flow gives me great hope. The white of the clothes I swaddled myself in, helped complete the flow of the falls by matching the highlights of the water. Telling me that even though I may be unsure of the direction, I am part of a flow.

I’ve come to hope it is a bit egotistical to believe that humanities interventions in the processes of life which enable the “modern constitution” are more imprinted and powerful than the expressions of our primordial cells. In coming to a place of rest and reflection on this entire cycle of creation, I was brought back to the poem I had written after the first shoot. All organisms living on Earth descended from a single, common ancestral population of cells, known as LUCA—the last universal common ancestor.

I know they are still dancing

I hope their rhythm is strong enough to find root in

So that Humanity can fall in time and find harmony

Rather than continue stumbling without a beat