

**I n s t a n t s // I n t e r v a l s**

Valerie James





A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Fine Art in Jewelry and Metalsmithing  
in the Department of Jewelry and Metalsmithing at the  
Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island.

By Valerie James, 2019

Approved by Master's Examination Committee:

---

Tracy Steepy, Head  
Department of Jewelry and Metalsmithing  
Thesis Chair

---

Lori Talcott, Senior Critic  
Department of Jewelry and Metalsmithing  
Thesis Advisor

---

Sheri Wills, Head  
Department of Film, Animation and Video  
Thesis Advisor



**I n s t a n t s // I n t e r v a l s**

Valerie James



CONTENTS

001 Abstract

013 Introduction

015 Part I: Out / Separation

035 Part II: In / Liminal

67 Part III: Out / Re-Integration

091 The Work

153 Epilogue

157 Acknowledgements

159 Appendices



The structure of this thesis aligns directly with the ritual structure of the rites of passage as set forth by ethnographer Arnold van Gennep. I see myself as both a participant and purveyor of ritual, visualizing the liminal stages of my own life into tangible and intimate pieces of jewelry. According to Gennep, a participant progresses through a rite of passage in three stages: separation, liminality, and re-integration.<sup>01</sup> Each chapter is organized around these three categories, and on how the work and I pass in and out of the studio. *Out/Separation* describes the process of walking and the poetics of the moving body. *In/Liminal* details the specificity of the processes at my bench and how I transform material. Lastly, *Out/Re-Integration* investigates the mobile potential of jewelry and the effect it has on the wearer. I see this work as a never-ending sentence—a continuous ritual of making in which process is content. This work is both a mark of my artistic labor and witness to my existence.



























“At times all I need is a brief glimpse, an opening in the midst of an incongruous landscape, a glint of lights in the fog, the dialogue of two passersby meeting in a crowd, and I think that, setting out from there, I will put together, piece by piece, the perfect city, made of fragments mixed with the rest, of instants separated by intervals, of signals one sends out, not knowing who receives them.”<sup>02</sup>

—*Italo Calvino*

Like Calvino's character, Marco Polo, I wander between instants and intervals. I piece these moments together—in my case through jewelry—and send them into the world. This document is a glimpse, a fleeting description of the journey I have embarked upon during the past two years of graduate study. The experience has taught me to recognize the potential of agency within an object. In turn, the objects I make are intended to continue this type of bond and take their place in a new network of relationships.<sup>03</sup>

Human nature guides us back to familiar paths. Each time we retrace them, we are transformed in a way that teaches us about ourselves and the effect we have upon the world. In general, we know from ritual theory that a rite of passage is about transformation—a before and after—but more accurately, it is about a gentle transformation of being within and outside of one's community. It is a constant back and forth that ultimately must be translated to others. My jewelry acts as a translator, one that is used to reconnect with the body. I make jewelry for other people. My own experience is my gift to them—it inhabits the jewelry. I initiate these rituals and come back to the community to mirror my ritual experience, and the symbols from this time and space become the jewelry.

Making visible the idea of liminality has served as the departure point for this research. Contemplating both the physical and ephemeral forms of the liminal condition, I focus on the instants and intervals as thresholds. I trace specific doorframes, walkways, and surfaces that record the marks of the liminar; collecting scratches, fallen dust, and memories of a moment in time. Each project unfolds into a cinematic process that moves continuously from one frame to the next. The book is a portable object that reflects upon the performative actions which happen as I walk, as well as at my bench.





*walking*

stepping one two one two  
moving along the sidewalk  
I see green tan

there are things out in the distance  
noticed and unnoticed and I want to explore them  
how to get there over land

over the surface  
through the movement of body  
propelling forward forward in motion

thinking about steps sometimes  
moving my arms sometimes  
acknowledging others even if I am in solitude

looking for the paths that guide me  
looking for the marks cracks shapes pebbles  
structures bringing me around in a circle

always surrounded never completely alone

moving in a continuous line  
that builds on itself  
having an origin point yet discovering  
that the destination is something unstable

it is a mutable fugitive  
specific to the qualities of the person  
and the path that is generated





### *Ritual Walking*

Outside the studio, I walk. Walking allows me to clear my head, and to contemplate and alleviate stress. I slow down and breathe. An avid walker for most of my life, only recently have I seen the value of this activity for its meditative qualities, and as a rich resource for my work. There is a clear distinction between habitual and ritual walking. Daily, many of us walk, yet to devote attention to the act of walking as an intentional ritual is something else. I walk with the intent of collecting data. The information I collect comes from my observations of a path and my own state of mind when walking. Sometimes it is a deep contemplative state of mind and other times it is scattered and fleeting. In many ways the thinking that happens on these walks generates that path I take.

I began my practice in walking by wandering, intuitively letting my body guide me from sidewalk to street to field. My walks are now defined by a set of parameters, yet still enable me to enter a path in an open state of transformation: I begin at an origin point, observing my surroundings as I move, letting myself be guided by a specific landmark or destination—for instance, a pink house seen from several streets away. I explore several different paths to reach these particular points. By repeating these walks over and over again, I develop a special—and spatial—relationship with the path, and uncover its hidden qualities. These then lead to new walks. Both the experience, and the physical evidence of this experience, are then recorded or translated into jewelry.

020





021

Like my making, walking with the purpose of ritual requires solitude.<sup>04</sup> It is this element that enables me to interact with both interior and exterior space. This practice is my way of working sequentially, of slowing myself down so that I may discern the nuances that are observed in transitional moments. Through my work, I want to bring an awareness to the importance of observation. No matter which way one walks a path, it always offers something new—continuing a reciprocal relationship for those who listen and pay attention.

“A walk is just one more layer, a mark,  
laid upon the thousands of other layers of human and  
geographic history on the surface of the land...

... a walk traces the surface of the land,  
it follows an idea, it follows the day and night.”<sup>05</sup>

—*Richard Long*

023

### *Contemporary Walkers*

Richard Long is one of the first in a lineage of contemporary artists who uses walking as an art practice. His work is rooted in his affinity for nature, which is often realized on long, solitary walks that are then documented photographically. One of the first walking pieces recorded by Long was *A Line Made by Walking* (1967). The piece is known as a black and white photograph of a straight line made of repetitively trampled grass in a field outside of London. The work made following this piece continued this simple aesthetic, using existing natural elements to respond to a specific place while walking. Long never drastically changes the landscapes he encounters but rather, uses it as a way to place his mark on the land. I admire his willingness to pour himself into something that is so temporal in nature and still acknowledge the importance of these marks through documenting them in a tangible form that will last.



024



Katarina Weslien is another multi-media artist whose primary impulse in making is walking, but instead she focuses on the pilgrimage: “I pay attention to the unfamiliar. I gather specimen, photograph, interview and archive what I find along the way, and spend time scrutinizing what I have collected and where I have been.”<sup>06</sup> Her experiences of walking live on in such diverse formats as large-scale installations, intimate embroideries, collages, and photographs. In her most recent piece, *Walking Kailash*, Weslien invited twenty artists to participate in their own walks near bodies of water where they live, similar to her own journey around Mt. Kailash in Western Tibet ten years ago. Each had a unique interpretation of the journey, collecting a variety of specimen and meditating on various topics.

The compositions of Weslien’s work are a catalog of how we can potentially embody a place. I am driven by the same desire to discover place through the transient experience of walking, collecting souvenirs of that time, and archiving them in a variety of ways. Each part of Weslien’s project is carefully organized in a way that communicates to her audience.

025



Weslien, Long, and I each use walking as a way to engage with an experience in such a way that brings you to a specific time and place. Long manifests it through a subtle alteration and documentation of landscape, Weslien archives her participants' personal gatherings of their own walks as a public record, and I reify the experience I have on a walk through the format of jewelry. Each of us is unique in our recording and the way we choose to present it. Walking is a personal and specific exploration, and for me, it is a collection of ritual moments and liminalities. Like Walter Benjamin says in his essay, *Unpacking my Library: A Talk about Book Collecting*, "The most distinguished trait of a collection will always be its transmissibility."<sup>07</sup> My hope is that my own collection and records of movements will reach others, inviting them to experience and continue the perpetual sense of motion I have instilled in the work.



### *Archival Marks*

mark (n.1) “trace, impression,” old English *mearc*, “boundary, limit, sign, landmark.” *it is the hypothetical source of evidence for its existence*<sup>08</sup>

027

I am fascinated by our tendency to both gather and leave marks as we wander through our surroundings. I collect marks, which may have otherwise been overlooked, as transitional keepsakes. Marks can be nuances which go unnoticed, detected only by those who pay attention. They can be subtle, like a crack in the sidewalk, or deliberate, like a trail marker on a tree. These marks shape objects and our relationships to them. The first time a scuff appears on a brand-new pair of shoes, it is distressing. Whereas an inscribed ring, because it was purposefully engraved, might hold great significance to its owner. I believe that all forms of marking hold power. Perhaps it is in our nature to reciprocate what is given to us, a certain obligation to return the favor of gift-giving—the gift, in this case, being the mark. With every gift we leave in the world, there is an expected reciprocal action. What does it mean to give back to the mark?<sup>09</sup>

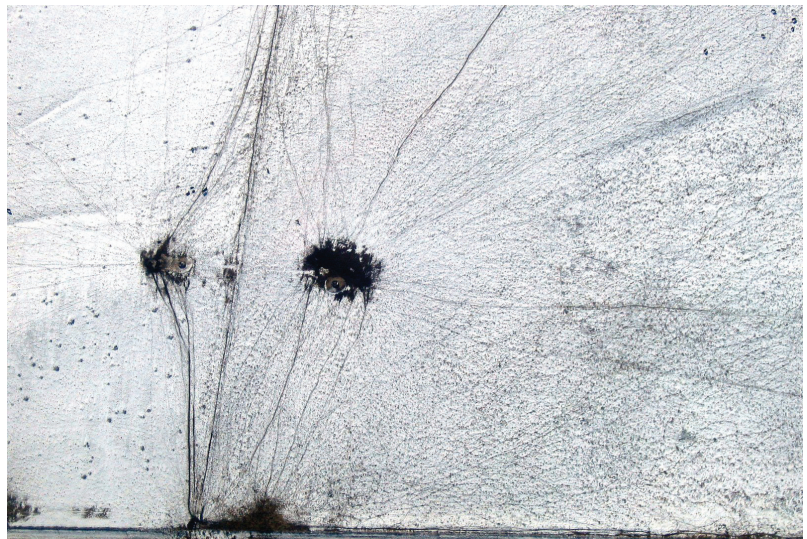
I collect marks, I observe marks, and I create marks. While walking, I often bring along tracing paper and stick of graphite, rubbing various sidewalks, streets, walls, and surfaces to record the marks

I pass. I find the rough and ambiguous nature of these marks inspiring—they serve as a point of departure for my own generative drawings. As a way to collect marks, rubbing has physically played a role in specific pieces as well: the necklace *Threshold I* was created by tracing paper-like sheets of fine silver over an existing doorframe and cutting at the point where my hand held each section in place. As time goes on, this piece will continue to burnish and deepen its historic surface. Whether rubbing a fine sheet of silver over a doorframe, dragging a block of graphite over the concrete sidewalk, or engraving a desired path into a sheet of metal, I am always paying homage to the mark.

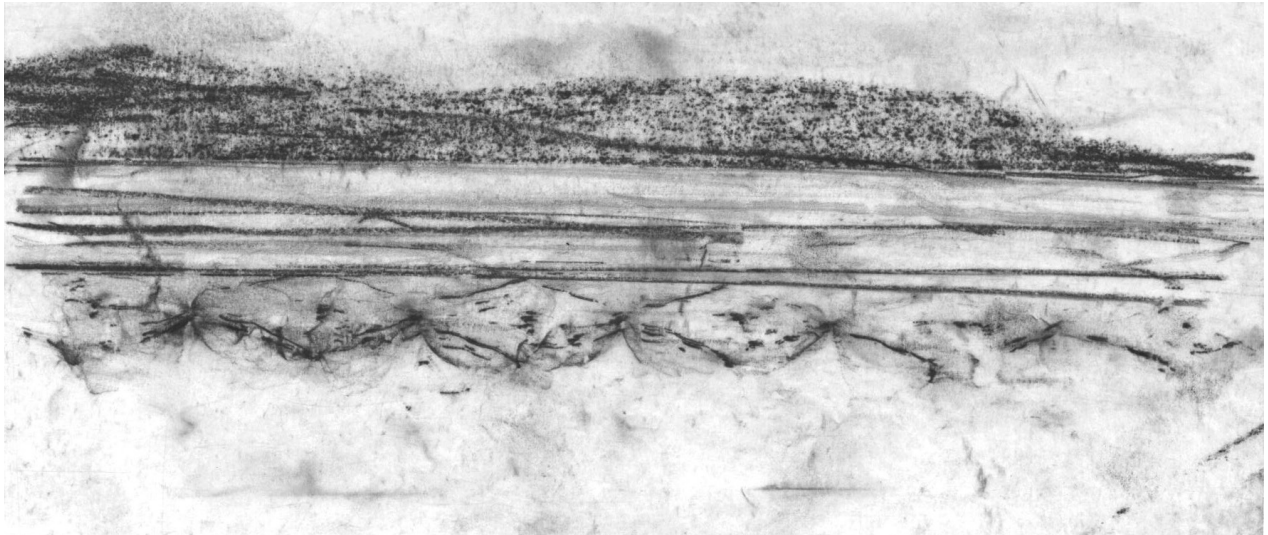


“Desire paths,” or “desire lines,” are trails created by human or animal traffic over a landscape. <sup>10</sup> Most commonly, they manifest as worn-down patches of grass that cut across the corner of a field to create a short-cut. My interest in these paths is not about finding a short-cut, but in an individual’s impulse to stray from what they are given and forge their own path or mark on the land—whether or not it is a conscious decision. This new path guides others, visually and physically leading people through space. Like the land, a sheet of silver accumulates marks and commemorates its own history and experience. These will remain in the piece even as the surface itself changes over time by getting scratched or building up a patina. Eventually, their life transitions to the landscape of a body—shifting and moving the more it is interacted with.

029

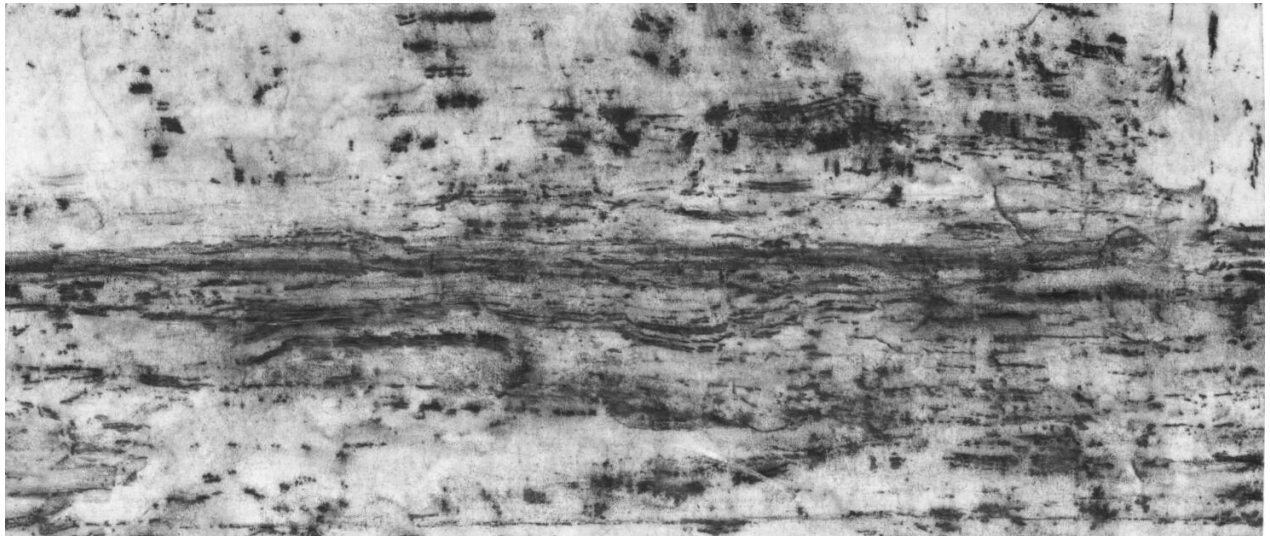


I want the paths I reveal in my work to guide the wearer through interaction, like the markings that guide me through my physical journeys. I am creating my own “desire paths” across these surfaces. By building the density of the mark, I deepen my own relationship to the material and add a lusciousness to it that otherwise would not be present. This process creates both symbolic and labor value. Mark-making is a language that is always becoming. It is a format that lives harmoniously within the confines of drawing-ness.<sup>11</sup> There is something inherently obsessive about mark-making, a need to repeat and perfect something so much that it begins to control of the process. It is where ritual and compulsiveness overlap. I am never satisfied with just one mark; it grows and multiplies into various iterations throughout the work—just as the source that inspired them does.

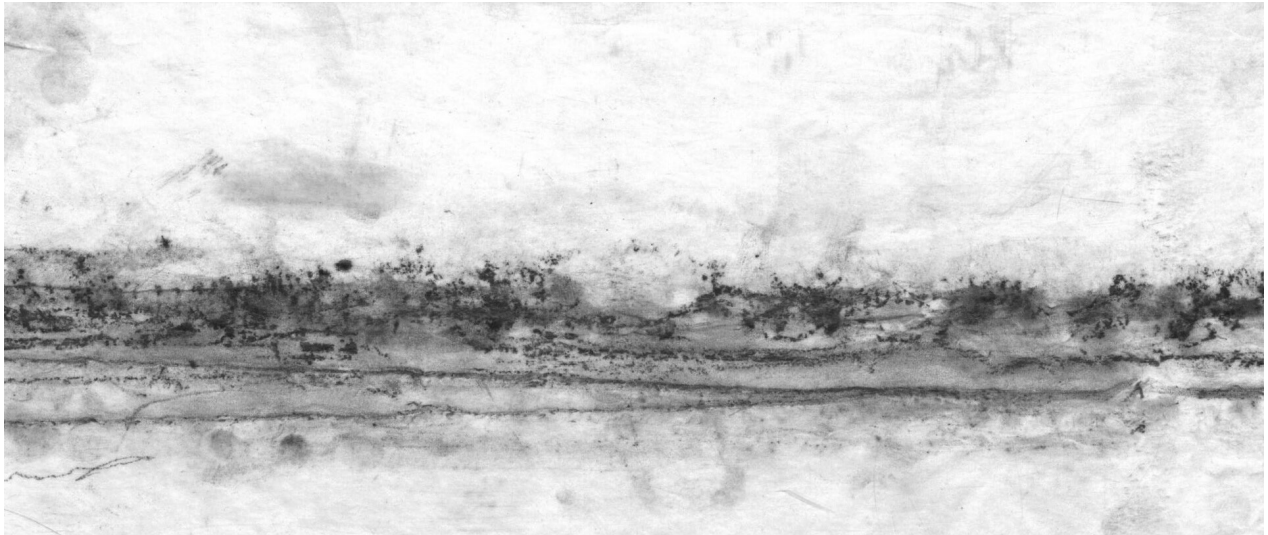


031

032

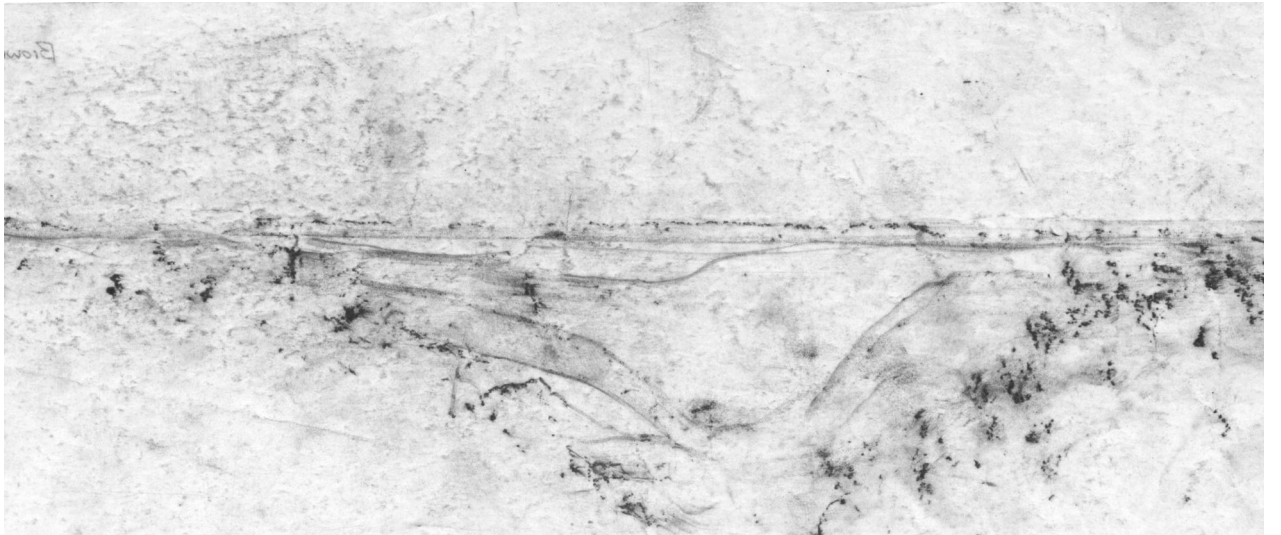






033

034









*working*

pausing in liminality moving  
while at the bench  
putting on the optivisor  
looking through the lens towards

materials digging deep carving engraving diving  
into surfaces as I become part of it myself

037

the most intimate space of process  
something that is just for me for  
translating the outer experiences  
onto the compact wooden surface of the bench

encountering risk in a way that can only  
be experienced through doing

inscribing a language of myself  
a mark into each segment  
slowing down paying close attention to details  
finding space deep within materials

removing

but also becoming

a part of the piece a part of the bench  
remembering what happened  
and looking towards experiences  
that continue to occur







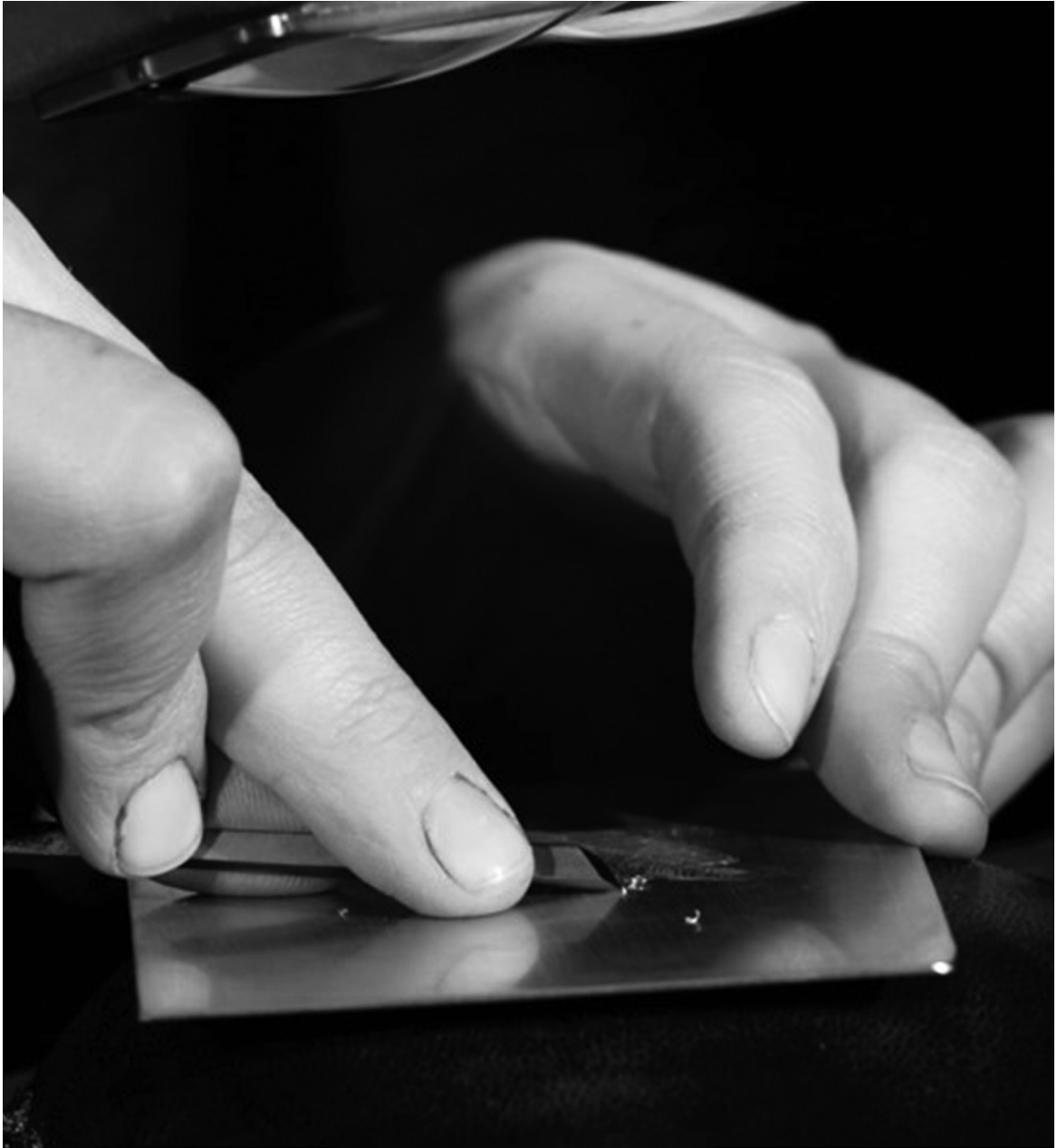
























*The Line Between Drawing and Form*

I have come to understand that I work consciously on the line between drawing and form as I explore what it means to make a gestural mark rather than a defined volume. This dichotomy works its way into my practice as a set of momentary, temporal decisions. My pieces begin after several trial paper models are cut precisely to the “blank page” that best suits the needs of the piece. I cut the squares, blocks, or rectangles of each piece, holding onto its flatness like a sheet of paper. While I use a pencil to sketch and plan marks, I physically draw through engraving, using a graver or burin to mark a sheet of metal. The delicate lines grow automatically onto the surface, and I embrace this fluidity. The drawings on these pieces are intuitive and transformative. I am intrigued by the endless possibilities these blank pages have to offer, and both walking and drawing continue this metaphor.

Enamellist and metalsmith, Helen Carnac equally values the relationship that occurs between the second and third dimension through drawing. In her body of work, *Each Other*, Carnac presents a series of enameled steel vessels in response to each other. The base of each form is strewn with repetitive patterns that blend into the surface they rest upon. For the last decade, Carnac has developed this project through the intersection of drawing and the continually recurring landscape.<sup>12</sup> Her aim is centered around developing pieces in which drawing serves as the focal point of form in addition to highlighting the rhythmic nature of her processes.

A drawing does not need to be confined to the object, but can influence it outside of the context of the piece. Drawing's function as an inspirational and situational tool is equally as important as its illustrative use. In my own practice I use drawing as a device for situating my pieces in the lineage of the marks that they came from. There is no end to a drawing, it is constantly being born, feeding off piece and leading to the next.

052







*Subtractive Process*

Artist, thinker, and walker Ernesto Pujol describes walking as a “movement informed by stillness [which] has the quality of considered gesture, regardless of pace. The gesture may be very slow, and thus, prolonged.” In my case, the slowness of gesture that he refers to is rooted in the art of carving and engraving. When engraving, the body moves as if performing a choreographed dance. The specific spins and gestures your hand makes over a piece of metal influence the outcome of the line. The same can be said in regards to carving: it is a technical process that changes the life of a material indelibly.

055

Because they require close attention, my methods in making embody these intimate processes. A type of canoe-board carved by the indigenous tribes of the Trobriand Islands, the “Kula Canoe,” is made in a similar way. Anthropologist, Alfred Gell describes the magical efficacy of these canoes in his essay, *The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology*:

“...the canoe-board is not dazzling as a physical object, but as a display of artistry explicable only in magical terms, something which has been produced by magical means. It is the way an art object is constructed as having come into the world which is the source of its power such objects have over us—their becoming rather than their being.”<sup>13</sup>

Gell confirmed my own interest in carving as magic, which envelops the viewer, as opposed to the object itself. While an object can

also convey the feeling of magic, Gell is specifically talking about the Western notion of aesthetic and the tendency towards the end of the twentieth century to only value an object for its physical appearance. The technical skill displayed through the object is that which “entraps” a viewer to be mesmerized by the Kula canoes. Like Gell says, the canoe is by no means a “dazzling object,”; its enchantment comes from the sacred ritual through which it was made. It is the tenderness and magical care taken in making these canoes that flows across to the viewer. I, too, want to evidence skill and closeness to process as a way of enchanting the viewer. As Westerners, we can never truly possess the magic of Kula canoe making, but we have the potential to possess our own kind of magic in making, nonetheless.

One of my first in-depth carving expeditions was with the series, *Coffins*. The project began as a way to explore the quality and properties of graphite as a material, but as I carved, I instinctively gathered and saved the powder from each individual object. This turned into a series wherein the finished objects or pieces of jewelry were paired with their remains in an acrylic box, which became the documentation of their becoming.

056



Revealing can make clear what is normally feared. It is, in a sense, a way of conquering these fears through risk. <sup>15</sup> A subtractive process takes the chance of failure or fault in an object. This risk, or failure, expands our understanding of process, material, and the agency of an object that Gell speaks to. Each line that is engraved into a surface, every shaving that is carved away, is done so with great intention. There is no going back, only moving through. In each of these processes I am present. I am in my body and aware of each and every gesture it makes as it moves through space. I take on these laborious tasks as a means to eliminate time, repeating the same ritualistic motions over and over. The actions are ritualistic as opposed to habitualistic. Because of their motivation, they point to something beyond themselves. Their becoming rather than their being is what makes these pieces bewildering and potentially seductive. It is my intent to recreate for the viewer the same intimate experience I have while making.



058



Out / Separation Subtractive Process







### *Materiality*

My material choices are as important as my process. These decisions are motivated by my interest in engaging in an interaction with my audience. I work primarily with silver and graphite: both are materials mined from the earth. Silver, a more traditional metal in the jewelry lexicon, provides the particular reflective quality that plays an important part in the work. By treating the surface of a sheet of silver, it can be transformed from a dull white or dark grey, which in turn enhances the shimmering effect of the engraved lines. There is beauty in the purity of a fresh sheet of silver. In many pieces, I try to keep this earnest quality of the sheet by embracing the flatness of the material.

My use of graphite began with my interest in drawing and its history as a drawing material. Graphite is the most stable form of carbon—over time, even diamonds at or near the earth's surface slowly transform into graphite.<sup>16</sup> While carving this material, I become completely immersed in a fine layer of luminous black powder, merging with the material, fully engaged with the process. The material leaves its mark on me just as I leave my mark on it—it is a reciprocal gift giving. This immersion does not stop when the piece is finished. Because of its material properties, the graphite will leave marks on the bodies it encounters—continuing its legacy and my dedication to tracing movement.

“When we touch a surface, we experience immersion and inversion fully, and reciprocity is a quality of this touch. There is a haptic rule of thumb: when we touch something or someone, we are inevitably touched in return. When we look, we are not necessarily being looked at, but when we touch, by the very nature of our hand or any part of our body on a subject or object, we cannot escape the contact. Touch is never unidirectional, a one-way street. It always enables an affective return.”<sup>17</sup>  
As jewelry, my materials embody this reciprocity—inviting the viewer in through its sense of mystery, perpetuating the process through wearing.

### *Surface & Sequence*

The surface is the boundary or threshold that enables contact to an object itself. It only reveals certain aspects of its presence to us, hiding other aspects for further exploration.<sup>18</sup> This is the curiosity I strive for in the surfaces of my work—a continual investigation of the object itself through the intricate pattern reflecting over the surface. How can a line trailing the surface of my work lead the viewer through multiple planes? How can the planes of each piece subtly change from section to section like a sidewalk does? I use these motifs in pieces like *Desired Paths I* where each segment alternates between a rectangle and a parallelogram, shifting like the engraving does over its surface.

064







When I walk, I take comfort in following pre-determined paths and sidewalks, but also in creating my own trails. I treat the patterns I make over the surfaces of my work as the paths I walk in the world—constantly revealing themselves to me. I think this sentiment was most clear to me when making the necklace, *Pink House*. The piece required a significant amount of time at the bench, but every stage in making it forced me to align each piece with its adjacent neighbor and continue the path through it. *Pink House* unveiled its topography to me over time, as I cut down the block, carved out a channel, navigated the landscape, and eventually engraved over its surface.

One of the most exciting moments at the bench happens when each of the individual segments are complete and begin to transform into jewelry. This moment cannot be repeated, and it is the moment I relish the most. The stillness of working has ended, and the piece itself is literally activated by being pierced through with silk, thread, or ribbons. Each piece is placed in the order in which it was made, representing the lineage of its life at the bench. It is in this final moment that I personally experience the completion of the path before it is worn by another.

066









*wearing*

back out from in  
approaching interacting visualizing  
the act of wearing a necklace

jewelry moving from bench to body  
taking note of the traces  
its past witnessing where it travels lingering  
in spaces living amongst new ones

following the trails and  
tracing them over the body  
revealing the paths  
that entice one to discover

engaging in an experience  
with object and body  
that grow a sense of sentimentality

a personal relationship  
between jewelry and wearer  
remembering the moment it began  
making a statement of the time it exists in

now as a place for the body to move  
though moving around  
the neck chest back hands  
as the body moves through space

taking into consideration  
each bend break and fold on the piece  
and the body wearing it





071













*Perceiving Virtuosity*

Our senses stem from the body—it is where our perceptions come from. It is my hope that the sensorial perception and engagement with my work begins visually with the beauty that is found within it. The initial reaction to a work of art has always been important to me. Emphasizing this value sparks the enticement, and the tactile and mutable qualities of the work invite an even closer understanding of it.

One object in particular that wields this type of interaction for me is a “prayer nut”. These wooden spheres, usually two to three inches in diameter, are extraordinary examples of late medieval carving. The exterior shell typically presents carved openwork and hinges open to reveal an intricate detailed religious scene. Prayer nuts were intended first as a personal, meditative device for the medieval citizen to carry on their person. The intricacy and mastery exhibited in these orbs made them mysterious and enticing to their wearer.<sup>19</sup>

078



The magic of my work comes from the ability to manifest and translate the in-between. As the maker, I have the power to choose what is inscribed. The wearer then has the power to choose what is revealed. This is the type of interaction I intend in the series, *Desired Paths*. Like the prayer nuts, these engraved pendants have the ability to open and close, allowing the wearer to choose to conceal or reveal the intricate work imposed on each panel. When closed, the pendants only hint at the trails that lay between the sheets of metal, and when opened, their true intricacy revealed. I want to draw the viewer into the space of the necklace through the details that are presented and seen within a piece. These marks have sentimental connotations that allow for this kind of physical and empathetic interaction. Through the dedication of my labor, I intend for my work to act as a heuristic device, one that enables the wearer to discover something for themselves—or about themselves.













Engraving is a dying art in the field of jewelry, having been replaced by more “efficient” ways of marking metal. I value the labor of this process, and its relative scarcity in the field renders it mysterious and intriguing. Graphite functions in a similar fashion, not because of its material lineage, but because it is a material not commonly used to fabricate jewelry. My goal is not to deceive or trick the viewer, but rather to entice them through the mystifying and beautiful qualities of my techniques and materials. I cannot control the afterlife of a piece of work, but I can embed marks into the surface of the material which will continue its legacy. After a piece leaves my workbench, I desire the affective response of the viewer to guide the trajectory of its life.

*The Necklace as Threshold*

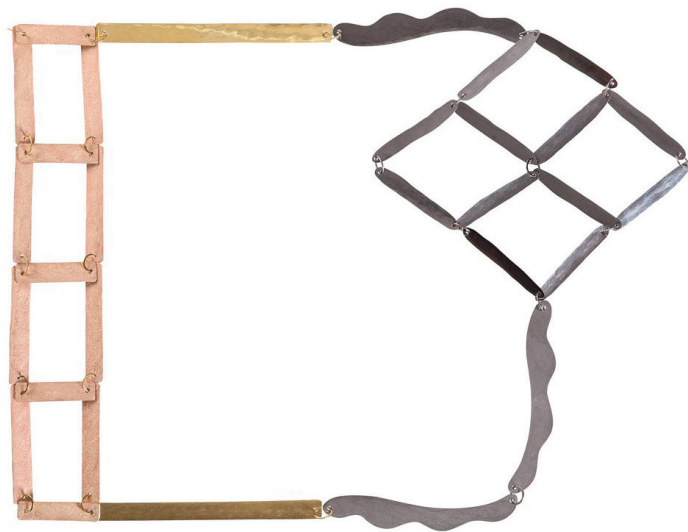
As we move, we begin to understand the spaces we encounter. I want to know the space of the body as it moves through specific environments and connect these to my research and inquiries.<sup>20</sup> Walking is a way of knowing the body: the subtle gestures it makes while progressing through space, how it moves—how it interacts with its surrounding landscape. It is a collection of movements that live parallel to the interaction that happens with a piece of jewelry. The body is a dwelling for jewelry, and how we move affects its life. I am intrigued by the symbiotic relationship of body to jewelry, both on and off the body.

Both intimate and tactile, jewelry has a special kind of power. It is one of the few creative formats that encourages transmissibility, and a means of presentation both on and off the body. The tactile, interactive nature of jewelry engenders intimacy, a response that is not always found in a painting or sculpture. Additionally, jewelry has the potential to change the way we consider the body. It has the power to re-orient our understanding of the work as it relates to ourselves and the people who wear it. The necklace is an intriguing format to me because of the mobility it allows. It is a continuous line that moves and changes as it is worn. When you put a necklace on, you cross a threshold; it places you in an in-between space, and when it is taken off, it brings you to somewhere else entirely.



In the on-going series *Beautiful City*, Dutch jeweler Annelies Planteijdt focuses her attention on the transition between the dimensions both on and off of the body. The work acts as a map of the cities she inhabits. By interacting with each piece, she invites the wearer to move through these dimensions. “By wearing the necklace, you make it your own, but you don’t lose its basic structure, you can restore it whenever you want to. Time goes on repeating itself differently.”<sup>21</sup> The continuous line unearths itself in most of my pieces; it is a metaphor for my continuous ritual in making. Like Planteijdt, my pieces often exist as necklaces—a form that encircles the human body. The wearer completes this action by closing the line of the necklace and stepping into its form.

087



Working with a necklace affords a certain scale that is both evident and wearable. By making a piece of jewelry at a certain scale you are heightening a transient experience that can only be achieved through a spatial relationship to the body. You are no longer bare, but aware of your body in a way that is made evident by the necklace itself. It not only changes the way that you encounter the object, but how you interact with your surroundings—further intensifying your bond to the object.

088



*No End...*

The most consistent inquiry at the bench is how I can continue the life of the work once it leaves the studio. Yet, it is not my responsibility to continue the life of the work, but the wearer's. I've used drawing, installation, and occasionally printmaking as a way to continue the paths from a piece of jewelry onto a different surface. However, none of these techniques embody the original function of what jewelry is supposed to do: *be worn*.

Because of the call-and-response nature of my creative practice, I allow myself to revisit certain pieces, continuing to work on them, relishing the instants of creation until I am satisfied. The pieces continue their life even after they are deemed “finished” through the act of wearing. They are integrated out into the world and their function as jewelry permits them to pass from person to person—enveloping different bodies and tracing new spaces.

“Orientation is always in relation to our bodies. Maps, charts, or cardinal directions are useless unless they be oriented with respect to the individuals' body.”<sup>22</sup> A sentiment beautifully articulated by religious historian, Jonathan Smith. My jewelry is a map of the body, a map of the places it has been and the places it will go. The spaces I inhabit are generators of ritual. They provide instructions for the marks and materials I participate in, and I am the translator. These pieces are not simply placed on the body, but bring body into place. There is always a sense of mobility within them—whether it is my body's movement in making, or the participatory movement of others following. Mobility provides a sharpened awareness of oneself as it is situated within

a greater context.<sup>23</sup> Whether I am focused on the separation, the liminal, or the re-integration of ritual, the entire process serves as a greater context for how the work lives in the world and how the wearer continues the process.







*Coffins*

Each object in this series is carved and presented with its remains, capturing the time and labor of the carving process. The objects are displayed with the powder that came from these gestures in an acrylic box—presenting process and outcome as equal.

*graphite, graphite powder, acrylic box, 2017*





095





097









*Un-Becoming*

Two pendants: one silver and one graphite, each dragged along the ground when walking, continually changing their form. The silver picks up scratches while leaving behind its preciousness, whereas the graphite leaves marks while picking them up at the same time.

*sterling silver, graphite, silk, 2018*



















*Threshold I*

A threshold marks a boundary: an in-between existence of two places. Doorways, gates and entrances are all manifestations of these spaces.

This piece is both a physical representation of a doorframe and at the same time acts as one for the body. Each strip of fine silver was rubbed and marked over a doorframe, then stitched together into a necklace. When wearing it one gains a heightened sense of awareness of their body moving through space.

*fine silver, thread, 2018*















*Threshold II*

In this second rendition of the *Threshold* series, ten thinly sliced sheets of graphite were placed over the bottom portion of a doorframe and walked over—creating a fracture in each segment. Each piece was reconstructed in the order it was stepped on, remembering its previous life upon a threshold and simultaneously creating a new one for the body.

*graphite, sterling silver, thread, 2018*











*Desired Paths*

Based off of the notion of a desire line, these pendants reveal their own engraved paths. The marks were made intuitively without instructions, just like a desire path or desire line is made over a field of grass.

*sterling silver or oxidized silver, silk ribbon, 2018*































*Pink House*

*named for a particular pink house seen while walking*

This necklace was the first made after a series of ritual walks. Each section has a unique topography and pattern—moving seamlessly from one piece to the next. Because it is made of graphite, over time the piece will continue to wear down as it is physically worn, leaving its mark on the wearer.

*graphite, silk, 2019*















*Bridgeway*

*named in response to a specific bridgeway frequently crossed on walks.*

This pendant is intended to be more contemplative than other works. The piece is adjusted to the body in a way that makes the engraving personal to the wearer. The marks shift in density over each plane pulling the eye in and out of the work, just as my gaze shifts in and out of spaces when walking.

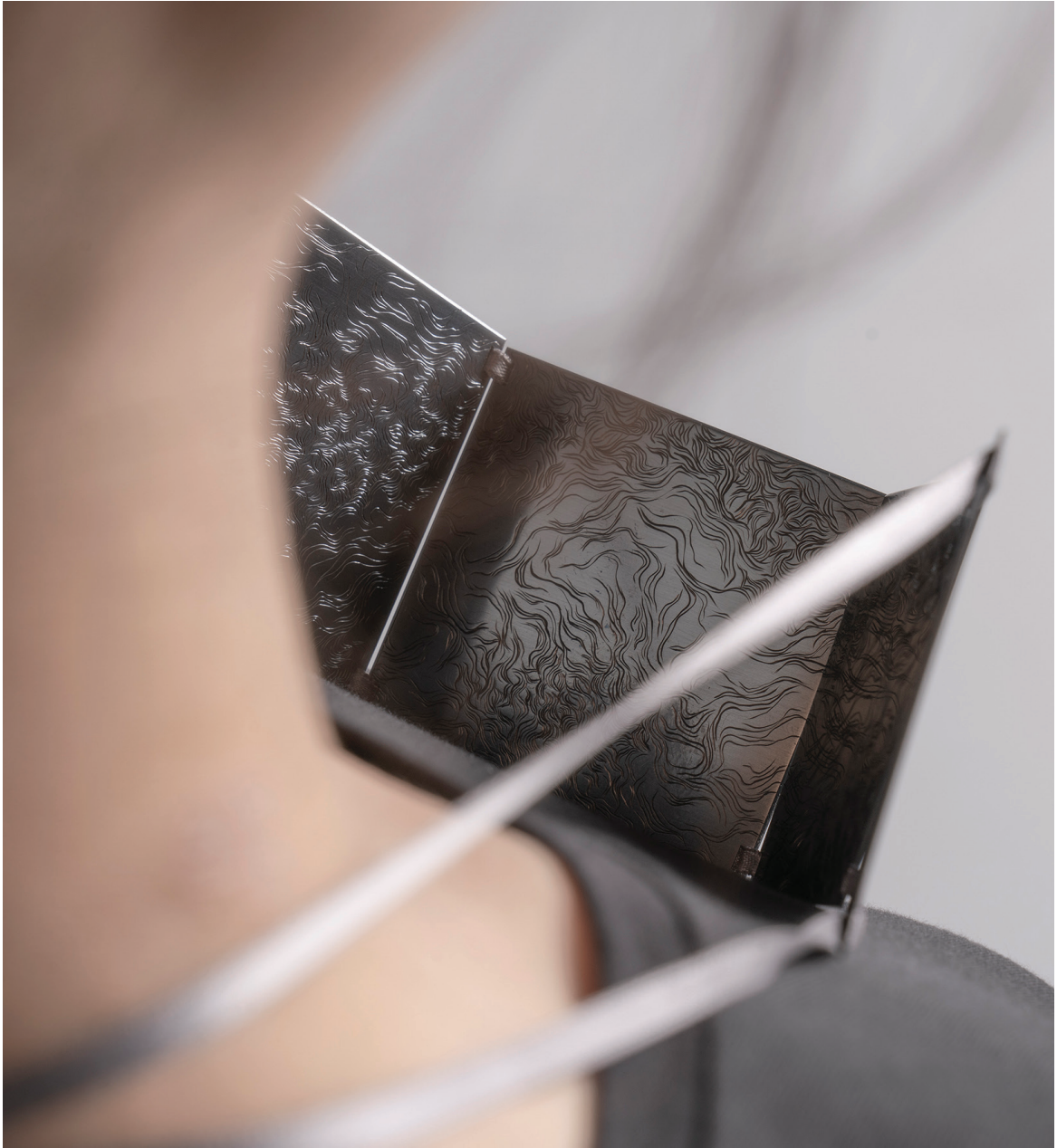
*oxidized sterling silver, silk ribbon, 2019*



















*Weird Pass Beneath Congdon*

*named for an almost hidden path  
stumbled upon in a walk beneath congdon street*

This necklace was created as an embodiment of a more fleeting state of mind during my walks. The pattern weaves through the piece, responding to each break and fold. The marks are scattered and lead the viewer around each sheet while the form itself moves and responds to the body.

*sterling silver, silk ribbon, 2019*









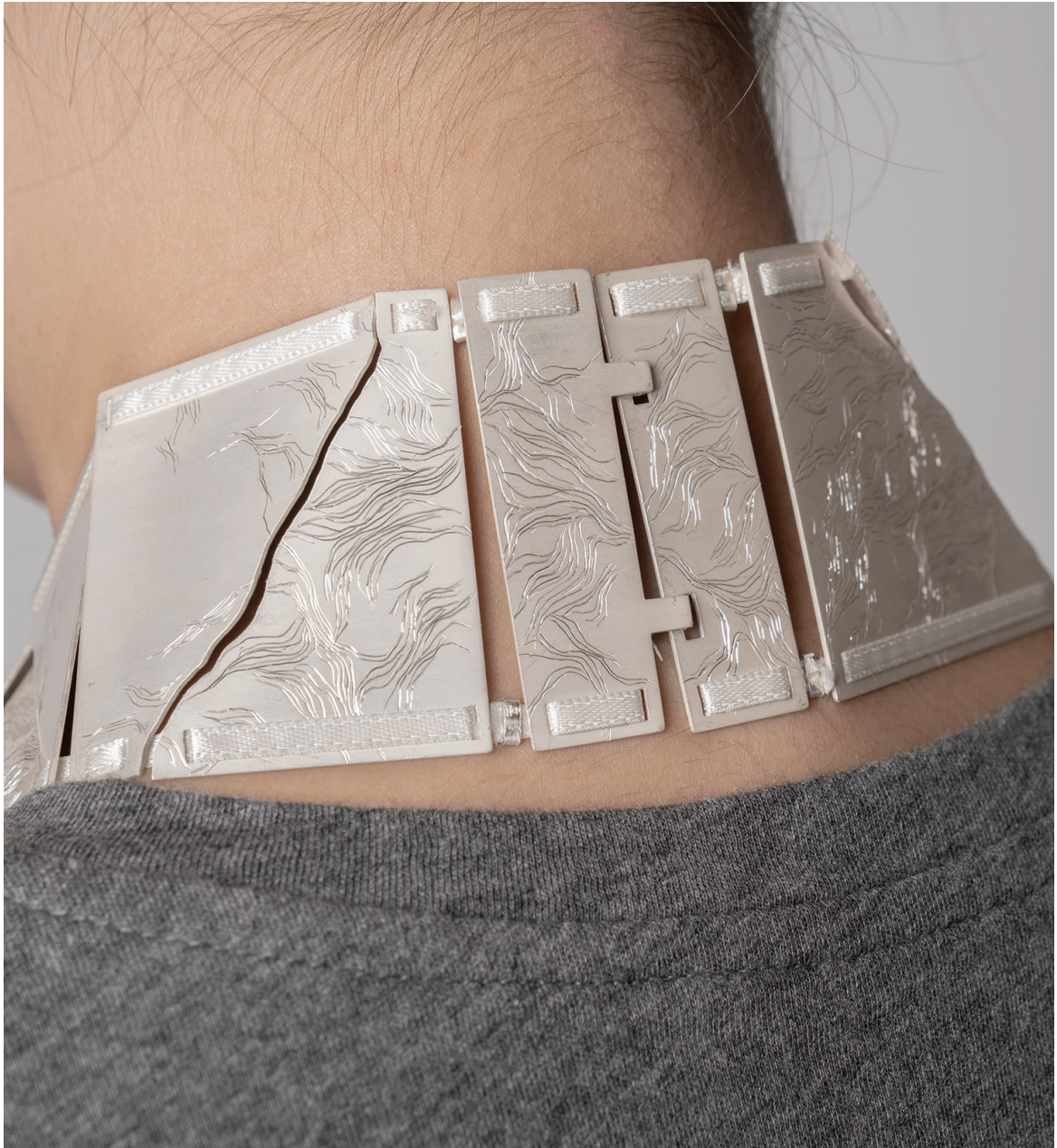




















An epilogue is traditionally defined as the end of a passage, but in many ways, it should be considered as the work presented within these pages—objects of contemplation and information that the reader can synthesize and bring into the wanderings of their own lives.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my RISD Professors, Tracy Steepy, Timothy Veske-McMahon,  
Lori Talcott, Noam Elyashiv, Sheri Wills, Andrew Raftery & Anne West

To my cohort, Cathryn Jasterbzski, Jiayi Lao, Zhiqing Guo, Iris Han,  
Molly Palecek, Chubai Liu, Yue Tan, Hannah Oatman, Steven KP, Meiqi  
Luo, Xiaoran Liu & Yuxin Long

To my designer and photographer, Eury Kim & Stephen Foster

To Mom, Dad, Kirsten & Diana

And to Cole Johnston

Thank you for your persistent support and encouragement—  
without it this thesis would not have been possible.





*Endnotes*

01 Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, The Lewis Henry Morgan Lectures 1966 (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1995), 94.

02 Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, 1st Harvest/HBJ ed, A Harvest/HBJ Book (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 164.

03 Alfred Gell, “The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology,” in *The Object Reader*, ed. Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins, In-Sight (London; New York: Routledge, 2009).

04 This requirement is specific to my own practice. In general, ritual does not require solitude.

05 Richard Long and Clarrie Wallis, *Richard Long: Heaven and Earth* (London: Tate, 2009), 143.

06 Katarina Weslien, Collecting Water: The Work of Katarina Weslien, Fall 2016, <https://thechart.me/collecting-water-katarina-weslien/>.

07 Walter Benjamin, “Unpacking My Library: A Talk About Book Collecting,” in *The Object Reader*, ed. Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins, In-Sight (London; New York: Routledge, 2009), 261.

08 “Mark,” Online Etymological Dictionary, accessed February 15, 2019, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/mark>.

<sup>09</sup> Marcel Mauss, “Gifts and the Obligation to Return Gifts,” in *The Object Reader*, ed. Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins, In-Sight (London; New York: Routledge, 2009), 23.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Moor, “Tracing (and Erasing) New York’s Lines of Desire,” *The New Yorker*, 2017, <https://www.newyorker.com/tech/annals-of-technology/tracing-and-erasing-new-yorks-lines-of-desire>.

<sup>11</sup> Hélène Cixous, “Without End, No, State of Drawingness No, rather: The Executioner’s Taking Off,” *New Literary History* 24, no. 1 (1993): 91–103.

<sup>12</sup> Marjorie Simon, “Helen Carnac: Liminal Landscapes,” *Metalsmith Magazine* 35, no. 1 (2015): 36–43.

<sup>13</sup> Ernesto Pujol, *Walking Art Practice: Reflections on Socially Engaged Paths*, First edition (Axminster, England: Triarchy Press, 2018), 35.

<sup>14</sup> Gell, “The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology,” 24.

<sup>15</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 25.

<sup>16</sup> University of Waterloo, “Graphite,” Earth Sciences Museum, accessed April 7, 2019, <https://uwaterloo.ca/earth-sciences-museum/resources/detailed-rocks-and-minerals-articles/graphite>.

<sup>17</sup> Giuliana Bruno, *Surface: Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality, and Media* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 19. In her research, Giuliana Bruno presents the importance of materiality and surface as it relates to today’s media engagement.

<sup>18</sup> David Abram, “Philosophy on the Way to Ecology,” in *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 50. In his essay, “Philosophy on the Way to Ecology”, David Abrams describes a specific ceramic bowl of his. The bowl sits on his table, yet he is only privy the information that he can see in his direct vision. As he handles the piece, more information is revealed about the object through its surface—yet, the object maintains a sense of mystery and intrigue in what is not seen.

<sup>19</sup> Frits Scholten, “A Prayer Nut in a Silver Housing by ‘Adam Dirckz,’” *The Rijksmuseum Bulletin* 59, no. 4 (2011): 323.

<sup>20</sup> Ann Hamilton, “Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art,” ed. Jacquelynn Baas and Mary Jane Jacob (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 181.

<sup>21</sup> “Annelies Planteydt,” Forum, Klimt02, May 25, 2017, <https://klimt02.net/jewellers/annelies-planteydt>.

<sup>22</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual*, Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism (Chicago, Ill.: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1992), 27.

<sup>23</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 13.



### *Bibliography*

Abram, David. "Philosophy on the Way to Ecology." In *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*. New York: Vintage Books, 1997.

Bruno, Giuliana. *Surface: Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality, and Media*. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2014.

Calvino, Italo. *Invisible Cities*. 1st Harvest/HBJ ed. A Harvest/HBJ Book. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978.

Candlin, Fiona, and Raiford Guins, eds. *The Object Reader*. In-Sight. London; New York: Routledge, 2009.

Cixous, Helene. "Without End, No, State of Drawingness No, Rather: The Executioner's Taking Off." *New Literary History* 24, no. 1 (1993): 91-103.

Gell, Alfred. "The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology." In *The Object Reader*, edited by Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins. In-Sight. London; New York: Routledge, 2009.

Hamilton, Ann. "Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art." edited by Jacquelynn Baas and Mary Jane Jacob, 179-85. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.

Lin, Maya Ying. *Boundaries*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000.

Pujol, Ernesto. *Walking Art Practice: Reflections on Socially Engaged Paths*. First edition. Axminster, England: Triarchy Press, 2018.

Scholten, Frits. "A Prayer Nut in a Silver Housing by 'Adam Dirckz.'" *The Rijksmuseum Bulletin* 59, no. 4 (2011): 322–47.

Smith, Jonathan Z. *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual*. Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism. Chicago, Ill.: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1992.

Turner, Victor W. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. The Lewis Henry Morgan Lectures 1966. New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1995.

Werts, Julia. *Visualizing Rituals: Critical Analysis of Art and Ritual Practice*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2008.

*Artworks*

Photographs of *Instants//Intervals* courtesy of Stephen Foster, Rob Chron and the RISD Museum.

P024 Richard Long, *A Line Made by Walking*, 1967.

P025 Katarina Weslien, *Walking Kailash*, on-going archival project.

P029 Desire line image courtesy of Nathan Abels, 2007.

P052 – 053 Helen Carnac, *Each Other*, 2009, vitreous enamel on steel.

P078, P080, P082 Photo of Prayer Nut courtesy of MET Museum.

P086 Annelies Planteydt, *Purple Green Quarters*, 2008. Necklace, gold, tantalum, pigment. Photo courtesy of Jean Beining.

P087 Annelies Planteydt, *Beautiful City – Pink Stairs Black Crystal*, 2016. Necklace, gold, tantalum, pigment. Photo courtesy of Klimt02.





Type

Avenir by Adrian Frutiger, Akira Kobayashi  
Linotype 1988, 2004

Bulmer by William Martin, Monotype Design Studio  
Monotype 1790, 1939

©2019 Valerie James

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced  
without written permission from the author.

