

Some things or all the same Thing? A darkness that extends just beyond the bitumen-colored surface of the lake, the other side of a tree (*that* tree), a moon, the moment one forgets a name—say, can you hand me that . . . *that thing*, or something so nameable it becomes, you know, a *thing*—a latest thing, or, the anticipation of a (viscous?) interior just before its smooth surface is split, the inanimate animated or the animate made inanimate, or what suffers in the inanimate when animated, unsymbolizable chthonic presentation, tentacular, tar sands, Rosebud but not a rosebud, the unnamed, the unnamable, but not a novella titled *The Unnamable* nor the bookstore of the same name, the synaptic lag-time between operator and drone, a view from the pores of a sponge (all of them), a buried camera still running a live feed, rare earths, the world after us (but not imagined as “the world after us”),³ the exposing plate as it revealed a galloping horse suspended forever above the ground but not the exposed photograph, the empty cast, a solid without exterior surface.

Objects
What is an object? Among other definitions the philosopher Tristan Garcia gives in *Form and Object* are: “1) Objects are in things, 2) Objects accumulate because nothing ever ceases to be possible, and since new objects become possible.”⁴ The first statement materializes ‘the

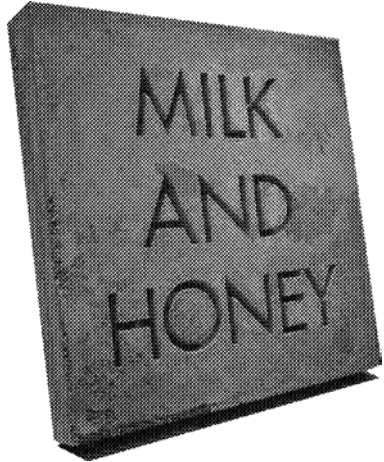
thing’ while retaining its difference. The second echoes the mounting ruin that accumulates before of Walter Benjamin’s Angelus Novus as it is blown backwards into the future. Accumulation as possibility—the statement appears to echo at once the techno-optimism of a software programmer and the pessimism of an eco-activist, the latest version of an app and the bottle caps found in the belly of a gull.

Let’s say that unlike a thing, an object can be readily named, whether a newly discovered species of translucent deep-water shrimp or a brand of face mapping software. It is the tree within the scenario, “the other side of the tree,” the lake, the organic particles that create the bitumen color, the bitumen color, the decomposition process, the darkness, the surface. The horse, the ground, the gallop.

But nothing is ever all this or all that; never all thing nor all object. There are degrees, strange gels, blobjects.⁵ Even if we have names for names, the thing insists itself through objects, through us: the shrimp’s alien gaze, the dead gaze of the remapped face.

Equipment?
Simply the object-for-us, the object whose form and materiality implies use. A fuse has its use. Even that which is often subtracted in the production of an artwork—the absent steel in a sculpted 6-foot-tall

basswood kitchen knife. Heidegger naturalizes and mythifies equipment for his choice non-reflexive subject, in this case peasant woman who doesn’t reflect on her dirty boots as she dons them for field labor.⁶ Likely story. Perhaps a more adequate (and less violent) representation is to say that equipment doesn’t necessarily imply knowledge of the objects that constitute it, that the objects that constitute a piece of equipment are very often opaque to us, perhaps even bringing them closer to the status of things. Few of us can comprehend how flakes of ytterium, scandium, cerium, europium, and neodymium are transformed from raw matter into the data pathways that make up a smartphone. Matter may be inanimate but it is hardly inert. Nor can we readily grasp the human suffering created in stripping these particles from the ground, though we can google it on the handy little thing in our grasp.



Brandon Bultman, *Milk and Honey*, 2015



Gail Dodge, *I’ve Been Gone*, 2015

- 1 Tristan Garcia, *Form and Object: A Treatise on Things*, trans. Mark Allan Ohm and Jon Cogburn, (Edinburgh University Press) 2014
- 2 Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Standard Edition, vols. IV & V, (Hogarth, London) 1900
- 3 Eugene Thacker, *In the Dust of This Planet: Horror of Philosophy* vol. 1, (Zero Books) 2011
- 4 Garcia
- 5 for more on blobjects read: Reza Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials*, (re:press) 2008
- 6 Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Art-work,” *Basic Writings*, (Harper Collins) 1977

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But placing the *thing* outside symbolization does not mean that it doesn’t make constant appearances in popular culture and philosophy alike as a radical, often horrifying presence-as-absence, something at the outer edges of sensation, some thing that really lacks. Nor should we discount the colloquial use of “the thing,” often preceded in speech by, “You know.” The thing in this sense is the entity which, due to its pervasive usage, you know, goes without saying. It’s the gentrification thing, or, it’s like, an affluent euro-guy hair thing. We have a rough sense of what this means even without context.

Conceptualizations of ‘the thing’ can be roughly described though not limited to the following accounts. The and Duchamp’s *Female Fig Leaf* or *Wedge of Chastity* are instructive here.) In the Freudian schema, the thing resists symbolization in the unconscious and haunts the preconscious, mythic, sovereignty of the subject in the historically shifting forms of phantasms, shades, horrors, but also as the seductive object of our desires: ‘the thing’ seen ahistorical-ly in relation to ‘the work and a no-tion of ‘equipment’ (a useful object) in the Heideggerian approach; and more recently, through object-oriented ontology (the disparate positions formed under the name ‘speculation’ or multiplicity, its emergence, shifting status of the object, its singularity or multiplicity, toward discrete sculptural practice, particularly in objects with particular a focus on mobility, or decay. Over the course of a day, we might handle such a diver-entia (matter and concepts, the entities (material and conceptually existing and the fictitious) while attempting to avoid anthropomorphization at all cost. No doubt Neolithic sculptors understood the strange in-between status of the emergent object—consider the idol—and how it occupies the contradictory status of object/thing. We make names for the unnamable; we struggle to bond words to things.

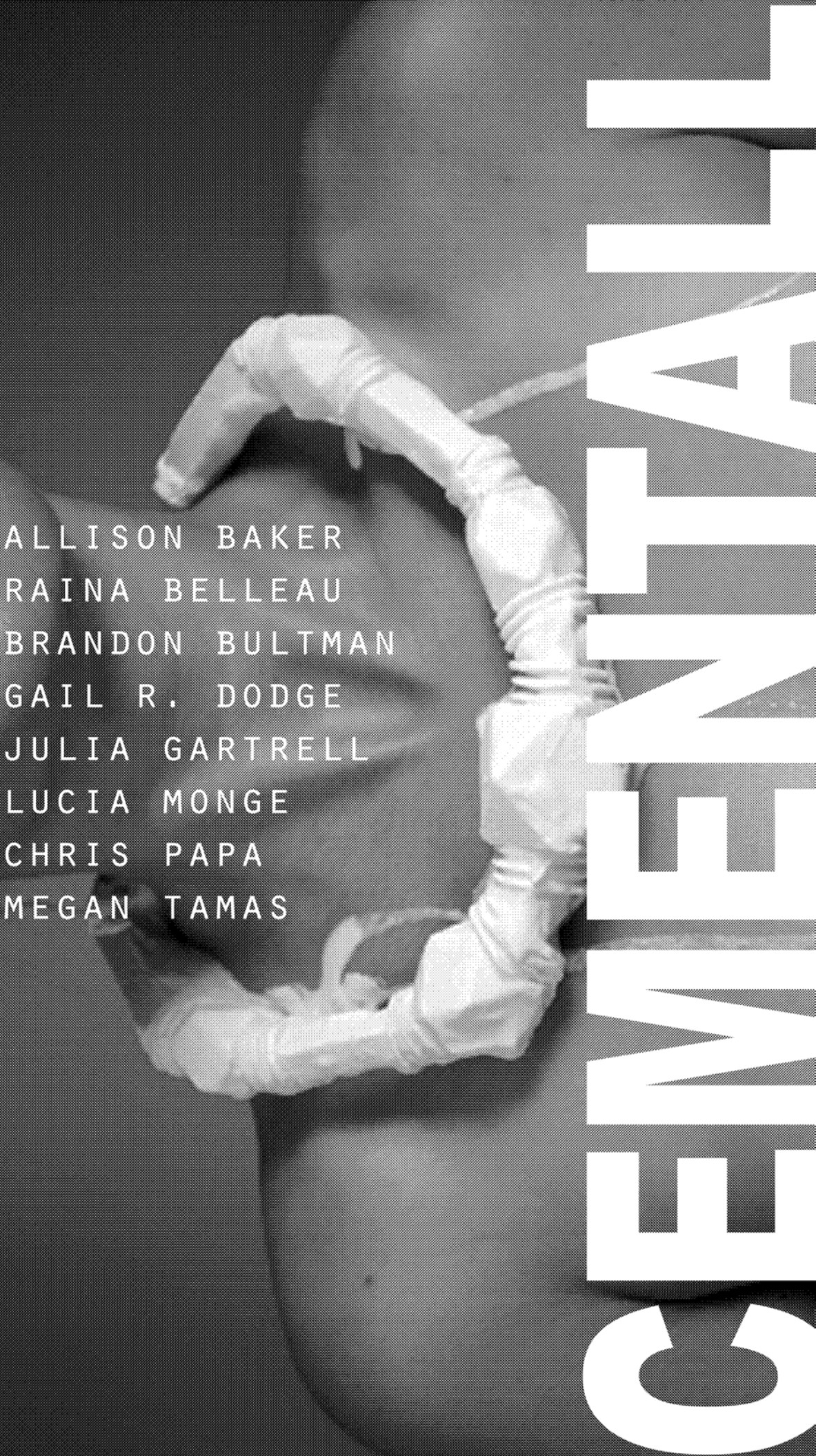
You’re Going To ...

You’re going to knock me over and you
Know how fragile I am
An uninsulated tank
Of molten salt, water, packets of charge
Flung up from filth
Defrauded by thousands of passing animals
Vegetal shreds within the animals’ blossom guts
Dry manure pulverized by the wheels of carts
Hollowing out the sun, loathsome with decay, a droopy fish
Wilted at the end of a harpoon—for I wasn’t a miracle, I was made
I got gifts, I had a few books, some things to play with
I capitalized on every clue in my baby brain

Jacqueline Waters



Cement All is an exhibition associated with the Sculpture Department at the Rhode Island School of Design and organized by the 2015 Sculpture MFAs. The exhibition is curated by Anthony Graves
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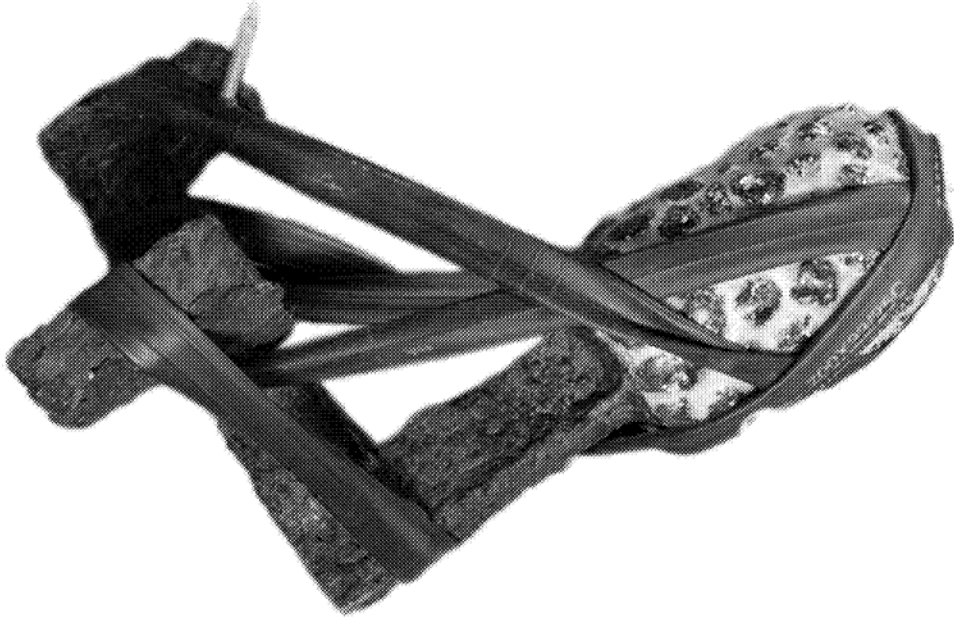
ALLISON BAKER
RAINA BELLEAU
BRANDON BULTMAN
GAIL R. DODGE
JULIA GARTRELL
LUCIA MONGE
CHRIS PAPA
MEGAN TAMAS

artists within a rigid thematic. I hope this exhibition has avoided that. I am confident that the works themselves resist being subsumed under any scheme that I might intend for them. An artwork should generate a certain resistance to approach such that in-terpretation is both rewarded and frustrated. Approaching an artwork is like walking along an asymptotic line—one will never fully meet it at any finite distance.
The interrelations between *thing(s)*, *objects*, and *equipment* are categorized more recently, through object-oriented ontology (the disparate positions formed under the name ‘speculation’ or multiplicity, its emergence, shifting status of the object, its singularity or multiplicity, toward discrete sculptural practice, particularly in objects with particular a focus on mobility, or decay. Over the course of a day, we might handle such a diver-entia (matter and concepts, the entities (material and conceptually existing and the fictitious) while attempting to avoid anthropomorphization at all cost. No doubt Neolithic sculptors understood the strange in-between status of the emergent object—consider the idol—and how it occupies the contradictory status of object/thing. We make names for the unnamable; we struggle to bond words to things.
Psychological notions of *the thing* from the cosmic to the somatic have haunted art and philosophy through-

I want to take this opportunity to consider three notions that might allow us to approach the divers works in the exhibition: *Thing(s)*, *Objects*, and *Equipment*.
I owe much in these reflections to conversations with the artists during their final semester at RISD. This is indeed a thesis show, though some of the works chosen for the exhibition were not considered theis material, with a few generated or modified for this exhibition. I prefer to think of this as the first post-thesis exhibition. These provisional notes also owe something to a tendency I see in artistic practice, particularly in sculpture, toward discrete shifting status of the object, its singularity or multiplicity, its emergence, shifting status of the object, its singularity or multiplicity, toward discrete sculptural practice, particularly in objects with particular a focus on mobility, or decay. Over the course of a day, we might handle such a diver-entia (matter and concepts, the entities (material and conceptually existing and the fictitious) while attempting to avoid anthropomorphization at all cost. No doubt Neolithic sculptors understood the strange in-between status of the emergent object—consider the idol—and how it occupies the contradictory status of object/thing. We make names for the unnamable; we struggle to bond words to things.
One of many risks in curating a group exhibition is the risk of homogenizing singular practices by enframing the over product.
times found myself at sea when encountering their works. Our conversion- stations ranged from plant empathy and interspecies communication, to constitutive shame in an object, to the spectral on the limits of ‘the natural,’ to what formal attributes might specifications on the limits of ‘the natural,’ to what formal attributes might constitute shame in an object, to the performative gestures of process over product.
exhibition is the risk of homogenizing singular practices by enframing the

Thing(s)–Objects–Equipment
Anthony Graves

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Chris Papa, *Unutility*, 2015

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Artists and art objects in and around the exhibition

Allison Baker’s video *Party Girl* enacts a frantic, Sisyphean attempt to get at the thing even as it inventories a series of surfaces to be breached. The female figures in her work are often encountering objects whose materiality is unclear. What is clear is that the Laura Ashley pillow is concrete only when it first crushes the cherry pie in *Smother* and doubly clear when the out of breath performer strains to lift it for the 10th time. In Baker’s work, allegories of gender and sexuality encounter the physics of raw materiality.

Chris Papa’s objects rest uneasily between object and equipment, their forms barely gesturing to a use. Their constructions link them to the grotesque and awkward sculptural language Rachel Harrison or Franz West while his employment of a diverse multiplicity of materials congealed, accreted, and bound with pulpy and resinous binders point towards accumulations of found objects, shredded, digested, and re-formed into arrangements that verge on narrative. Through their human scale and a strange materiality that seems to relate to the human body, Papa’s sculptures suggest the status of ritual objects. Though, the what is connoted is more likely to refer to teenagers hanging out in a gully behind Walmart than Uyghur shamans.



Julia Gartrell, *Whelm*, 2015

Everybody seems to be enjoying themselves. The premise is that traditions stay behind to document their forgotten people. It’s kind of like they peaked in high school. Nevermind we can get what we want again better. We can simply acquire enough massive cochlea to fill the warehouses of Soviet Constructivism with sound. Ode to Joy remains anthemic

but we signed away the good in it by speaking out of turn.

= = =

Regenerative marrow grows into a self-regulating colt emerging slightly less new gestated in balloons not unlike the older wombs on behalf of desire for a smaller horse not entirely unbeautiful. Positively charge what is to be if it is a to ttoo ttwo skin grafts. Thirsty and mismanaged they’re Real Beautiful Females. The fillets are 100% cod served on premium crystalware

they came with. To stimulate. Love you you you you duck duck goose.

Spencer Everett

tem of trees, Monge’s practice insists on an ethics of interspecies communication and cooperation.

Megan Tamas’ works combine the human and mineral in the fictional scenario of kind of shell company called Valence Inc. The company offers the services of combining the human and the mineral in a parody of body modification for elites, willing to reify themselves for lasting beauty. The mineral and human interface in what appears to be painful infections of crystal growths. *MODEL 117 : Specimen with Pygmaea Lichen and Red Wisteria* combines the Chthonic blobule with the organic, forming a piece of wall décor one might find in the office of a human with a garnet chest inclusion.

Gail R. Dodge’s objects solicit our sympathy on a somatic level. *Most of Us Balk* is at once the skinned hide of a synthetic party animal and substrate that carries traces of phallic pressures recalling the friendly but flaccid pokes of facebook. The title points out this impotence of “most of us” to fully perform, but the content and context of this performance is left a mystery. Perhaps it is alluded to in the smaller sculpture *I’ve Been Gone*, which bears toothy impressions in its ossified form. The hard gesture and the soft both point to the human body as a vehicle of expression. It leaves its impressions on objects with an affect all the more pathetic, embarrassing, and mortal because of them.

The sculptures Julia Gartrell creates share some formal affinities with Papa’s work. Apparently static and fixed, found objects are bound together with clay and allowed to dry in situ. Yet, her process thwarts the notion of sculpture as a lasting object. Shifting our attention from the work of art to the laborious process of construction and reconstruction, Gartrell draws upon finite set of materials gleaned from her home county in North Carolina, along with materials collected in her studio. Each arrangement is an iteration in form of the same materials, that are then broken down and collected to await their next iteration. Her refusal to establish a fixed form for these materials resists notions of a stable and thus collectable objet d’art, but also insists on processes of construction and re-construction that resonate with the troubled history of the South, to emancipation, economic collapse, circulation, migration, hard times and temporary stabilities.

Lucia Monge’s practice draws on our assumptions about the agency of inanimate things. Plants, soil, stones, these we barely think of as mobile entities but Monge draws our attention to them as potential companion species. *[Nos]-otros* recalls movement as both popular social movement and movement as a less perceptible form of inhuman mobility, an organic mobility that operates perhaps on different scales from species to species. Through works that propose to create a sign language sys-



Lucia Monge, *Finger*, 2015

Biodiversity

Zoological status retains its importance in kaleidoscopic self-imitation, sir.

Your raster graphics on biodiversity, sir, although cognitive science is attempting to demystify this, visions too frequently press in the subject of appetite and believe me I’ve tried to walk into the ocean to dissolve the contents of my wallet *harmless as I am* left a wad of the inedible.

A stork said, while choking, or was that a pelican, he said “The problem with you is the difference between your silk wood arms and your balsa wood arms.” His statement is about more than just “the many many” or a desire for such-- there it already launches from the platform’s shape among other topographical objects.

If these objects were like my libido they’d be sneaky and remote, questionably libidinal good-for-nothing’s aerial impermanence holding every appetite by its neck.

Cat eat rat and what else?

Christine Kelly



Raina Belleau, *Tenderfoot*, 2014

Raina Belleau’s *Tenderfoot* is a video that uses an impressionistic narrative to explore conceptions of nature and the roles we play in it that are innocent-romantic as well as jaded, harsh and disaffected. The artist performs the roles of Campfire Girl and alienated, behooded teen in the video, occupying the same wooded scene in two parallel narrative temporalities. The non-coincident action culminates in a small gesture of solidarity that crosses the narrative divide. Included in the exhibition is the “good-girl’s” costume, whose cyclopean neckerchief slide gazes lidlessly from the apparently harmless ensemble, a reminder that Daddy is always watching.

The works in the exhibition by Brandon Bultman represent only one facet of his practice that encompasses both the hard materiality of built forms as well as digital objects and linguistic structures that he generate using 3-d modeling software. Words are fixed, glued into digital renders of prospective objects whose materiality is somewhere between solid and liquid, blob-gels or crude oils. Like the digital renders in this exhibition, his work *Mad as the Sea and Wind* straddles the propositional and the factual-concrete. Three slabs of poured concrete located on a beach within the tidal range bear the words that mark the entrance and exit of Hamlet’s dead father, ENTER GHOST/EXIT GHOST. The words emerge and are submerged under the waves announcing the arrival and departure of the thingly apparition that inaugurates the plot.

Many thanks to all of the artists whose works have gone into the making of this publication and the exhibition: Allison Baker, Raina Belleau, Brandon Bultman, Gail R. Dodge, Julia Gartrell, Lucia Monge, Chris Papa, and Megan Tamas. Thanks as well to the poets who have generously contributed to this publication: Christine Kelly, Spencer Everett, and Jacqueline Waters.

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