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Late Diamonds

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## Late Diamonds

I lived in Alaska as a child. Every summer my mother and I would travel to her hometown in Louisiana to spend time with my grandparents. My grandmother never wore long pants—always an appropriate skirt and blouse ensemble; she smelled like powder and perfume. I watched every morning as she pinned her long, dark hair into a tall bun atop her head. One Sunday morning following grandmother’s preparations, she took my hand as we headed down the sidewalk toward Sunday school. Louisiana was always sweltering, even in the early mornings before the sun had risen to make the ground too hot to touch. We approached a flowering Magnolia tree towering high above the sidewalk. Blue jays cackled overhead as we neared. In one brief moment our bodies passed beneath the tree as a blue jay bombed my grandmother’s inimitable dark bun with glistening white/black feces.

This is my first memory of bearing ironic witness to the unpredictability of reality and the power of causality.

Graham Harmon’s notion of vicarious causation posits the idea that “one object exerts force over another and changes its physical position or some of its features.” Alongside this obvious occurrence Harmon ushers in the ‘vicarious’ part “indicating that relations never directly encounter the autonomous reality of their components.” For Harmon to say that “formal cause operates vicariously means that forms do not touch one another directly, but somehow melt, fuse, and decompress into a common space from which all are partly absent.” I am interested in how one type of relation transforms into another, how “new real objects paradoxically arise from the interaction between real objects and sensual ones.” I am attracted to Harmon’s position that every relation or connection is itself an object. Any two vicariously linked objects give rise to a new one. For vicarious causation to occur two objects must somehow touch without touching.<sup>1</sup>

My belief must be suspended. Those aspects I cannot fully explain are what attract me to a work. It is the 'question' I am left with that fosters my continued development as an artist that collects stimuli and simultaneously works to project it. Looking to the emerging philosophical study of object oriented ontology, I find ways to think about the interaction of objects that usher in a multitude of slippery meanings and intentions that may float around, among, inside or adjacent to my aesthetic intentions.

The quiet metaphysical revolution of Object Oriented Ontology rejects the privileging of human cognitive existence over the existence of nonhuman objects.<sup>2</sup> More importantly, is the stance of opposition taken against Kantian anthropocentrism, whereby objects are said to conform to the mind of the subject and exist only as a construct of

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<sup>1</sup> Harmon, Graham. “On Vicarious Causation.” *Collapse Vol. II: Speculative Realism*. March 2007

<sup>2</sup> Harman, Graham. *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*. Peru, Illinois: Open Court, 2002. 2

human perception.<sup>3</sup> For Harman, Heideggerian *Zuhandenheit*, or readiness-to-hand, refers to the withdrawal of objects from human cognition into a fluid reality that cannot be understood by practical or theoretical probing.<sup>4</sup> Object oriented ontology seeks to dissolve the hierarchy of relations between objects. The symbolic cultural status that any object may possess is dissolved into a stratum of objects where hierarchy cannot be located. You, I, a fingernail, a tornado, a cast shadow, the space between your eyes, pollen, the sound of a hiccup, the color blue, a tooth ache, an alarm, a golden hue, a dog, the distance to your mailbox, a lightning strike, and this text all exist on an equal footing of object inquiry. The reduction of all knowable entities to mere things, allows me to broaden the scope of my conceptual inquiry. I am considering much more than the incorporated material elements and varying modes of production in my work, but am also paying close attention to the intersections of perceived actuality and liminal thresholds that exist within any ensemble of objects.



Untitled (2015) 26" x 2' x 2', fossilized inner ear bone of a whale, sound proof acrylic dome, rubber, plexiglass, bar clamps

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<sup>3</sup> Bryant, Levi. "Onticology—A Manifesto for Object-Oriented Ontology, Part 1". Larval Subjects. September 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Harman, Graham. Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects. Peru, Illinois: Open Court, 2002. 1

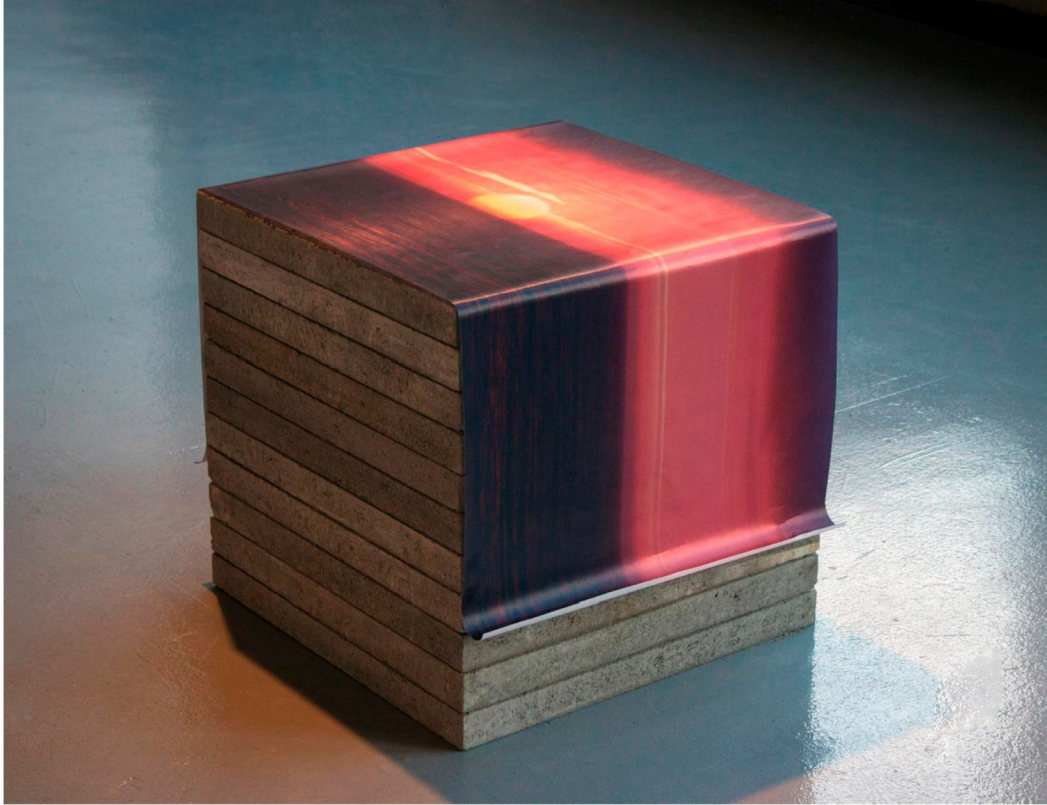
Humans construct object environments, we collect and surround ourselves with material objects to keep us in closer proximity to our memories, but these objects are steeped in failure; only reminding us of what we have lost. How and why these organizations within the inanimate object world fall short of our constructed intentions, and which things get lost in the scope of this melancholic phenomenon are what define Peter Schwenger's contribution to the emerging field of 'object studies'. Schwenger asserts that there is a melancholy associated with physical objects. This melancholy "differs from the traditional lament for the ephemeral object: the morning rose must fade alas, now you see it, now you don't". The melancholy he is speaking of underlies the very moment when "now you see it" is generated by the act of perception of the object by the subject. This perception, always falling short of full possession, gives rise to a melancholy that is felt by the subject and is ultimately for the subject."<sup>5</sup> This is similar to how I regard a sunset as a natural phenomenon that can only endure until the black, night sky envelopes and seems to compress its pinkish orange hue into the colorless sky. The sunset recedes into the landscape and is rendered a past experience of loss. For Merleau-Ponty, it is precisely this sunset/object that would become necessary "for the subject to be constituted as a conscious self that becomes aware of its consciousness" by contrast with an object entirely void of consciousness.<sup>6</sup>

Searcher, considerate scavenger and reverent re-presenter, I am interested in a flat ontology of objects. Rather than being interested in the repurposing of an object, which would assume the object comfortably transitions into some new function, I am interested in positioning these orphaned residuals of an unseen banal existence into a new subjunctive psychological space. From a crudely poetic vantage, I make restrained material decisions that foster this loss of function and elicit a new interpretation of the object. These residuals are chosen for their fragmented ambiguities, their encased histories, and their abilities to delineate hazy territories that may surround both the real and sensual object.

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<sup>5</sup> Schwenger, Peter. *The Tears of Things: Melancholy and Physical Objects*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006. 2

<sup>6</sup> Schwenger, Peter. *The Tears of Things: Melancholy and Physical Objects*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006. 6



Magic Hour (2014) 2' x 2' x 2', silk sunset poster and 953 lbs of concrete

In the foreword of Antonin Artaud's selected works, Susan Sontag refers to Artaud as one of great modernist literary failures when considering both his work and his life. She refers to Artaud's body of work as mainly fragments of intention, consisting of brief brushes with on screen fame—comprised of poetic verse and prose, a couple of unrealized theater projects, and hundreds of letters, which she refers to as his most accomplished dramatic form.<sup>7</sup> The title of the work in my thesis exhibition is Late Diamonds. I have augmented terminology located in Antonin Artaud's poem 'Black Garden' in which Artaud is commenting on vegetation that blossoms from the land of death. He refers to this burgeoning black garden's formation as 'slow diamonds' forming in a luminous, magical hour of transformation.<sup>8</sup> By replacing "slow" with "late", I am implying the notion of failed diamonds that were too late to form.

In a 1937 correspondence to his lover and fiancé Cécile Schramme, Artaud acknowledges a psychological chasm preventing their relationship from ever achieving autonomy. He refers to her as a "Double Being", possessing the most desirable aspects of humanity but also possessing the worst. He is commenting on the dark depths of one's nature that are kept concealed and unseen.<sup>9</sup> A frantic fever of love and fear of loss consume his writing, he expresses that he can not love or care for her if she continues to

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<sup>7</sup> Sontag, Susan, ed. *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1976. xx

<sup>8</sup> Sontag, Susan, ed. *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1976. 4

<sup>9</sup> Sontag, Susan, ed. *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1976.

conceal these undesirable depths of mood and emotion from him. He acknowledges a melancholic, fettered perspective that exists in aesthetic opposition to, and has no choice but to exist alongside those desirable aspects of humanity. He regards this duality as present within us all. The sweet, swelling heart of closeness and an optimistic vantage of a hopeful tomorrow are only as present as the dark, leaden depths of the psyche that we often seek to conceal. There is a similar sentiment expressed in Will Oldham's 'I see Darkness' recorded under the Bonnie Prince Billy moniker in 1999:

Well you're my friend (It's what you told me),  
And can you see (What's inside of me?),  
Many times we've been out drinking, and many times we've shared out thoughts,  
But did you ever notice, the kind of thoughts I got?  
Well you know I have a love, a love for everyone I know,  
And you know I have a drive, to live I won't let go,  
But can you see its opposition, comes a-rising up sometimes?  
That it's dreadful and position, comes blacking in my mind,  
And that I see a darkness,  
And that I see a darkness,  
And that I see a darkness,  
And that I see a darkness,  
And did you know how much I love you, is a hope that somehow you can,  
Save me from this darkness.

Oldham swiftly switches from his proclamation of warmth for his loved ones, to an acknowledgment of the black, murky recesses of psychological opposition that he regards as "blacking in his mind."<sup>10</sup> Oldham seems to be casting himself as a double being, referencing two opposing psychological territories. I recall a memory from an interview that was conducted just after the release of this album; Oldham recalls a memory from a painting class in high school where there was a girl that told him that there were two ways of painting, or seeing oneself. One was as an essentially good person who tries to do evil in the world, the other as an essentially evil person who tries to do good in the world. She asked him which one he thought he was. Oldham claimed he thought the latter—an essentially evil person who tries to do good in the world. This memory alone was inspiration for this recording. While I am not assuming Oldham was directly referencing Artaud's notion of the 'double being' here, the adjacency that exists between these two distinctly conflicting works is what becomes compelling to me. I want to position adjacency above absolute identity in attaining a visual work. Just as we understand music played in a minor key as a sensual bridge toward melancholia, I have begun to consider a key of adjacency that the work of art may exist in. Any absolute regarding what the work is directly about, instead become subjunctive territories which emerge as relationships of multiplicity and adjacency.

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<sup>10</sup> Bonnie Prince Billy. I See a Darkness. Drag City, 1999.





Drape (one good eye) (2014) 28" x 18", meteorite fragment (campo del cielo 4.5 grams), 20 lb  
bronze ingot, pvc welding partitions

I regard my practice as building a relatable lineage of objects between works that may resonate collectively. I feel there cannot be any hierarchy amongst objects; in my work, the lump of gold is the same as the dirt clod. The symbolic cultural status of the object is dismantled, perceived relationships are abstracted and established hierarchies are interrupted. Seeking to unveil the omen in the ordinary, I am searching to locate meaning within the otherwise meaningless. Value is cast as a cultural fabrication that considers both the authentic origin of the object as well as its sensual allure.

The work in my thesis exhibition exists as a sculpture of fragments. This work is a fluid definition of sculpture that understands itself not as a self-enclosed complete form, but as a flat ontology of object relationships that prevent any clear autonomy from

emerging. I am interested in reclaiming the lost object and using discarded residuals of a lived experience to comment on the encased memory of that object. A sense of fictive permanence is enacted as space is deflated into an anachronistic grouping that culls a subjunctive mood from the expansive relations of these elemental objects. Concerned with a strict democracy of objects, all components are delineated the same physical space and deserve the same level of object inquiry. Time is flattened, autonomy is removed, and my practice is dissolved onto the concrete gallery floor as a matter field of fragmented ambiguity.



Late Diamonds (2015) 18' x 18' x variable dimensions, miscellaneous objects

quilt made by my grandmother 1977, photomicrograph of an enlarged apollo 11 moon rock 1969, fossilized vertebrae section of a whale, ivory glove stretchers (victorian era), inomata plastic tissue box cover, celluloid "sunset glow" guitar veneer section, roman iron crucifixion nail (1<sup>st</sup> century a.d.), 4 tubes of magnesium shavings, bolsey filter factors, meteorite fragment (campo del cielo 4.5 grams), unknown pvc object, handmade trench art horse stamp, tremolo arm from teisco ep11-t hollow body guitar 1968, communicator from star trek action figure, blue cotton bank bag, partially melted 10lb bronze ingot, coprolite specimens, gone with the wind hardcover with bullet hole, petrified log section in petrified forest postcard k-128 (chrome era), "sweet thing" sugar substitute packet, 2 lbs of pure glycerin, industrial roll of super duty gaffer tape, piece of candy from felix gonzalez-torres' untitled (portrait of ross in l.a.), tektite (20.3 grams), walker ice cap 1940's, unopened pack of leave it to beaver trading cards, handmade buffalo bone guitar pick, candle found in guler ice caves, moon photograph, candelabra plastic candle cover, standard black rubber cane tip, sun shade, holiday clamshell portrait



photo-frame, steel railroad spike with a split tip, turquoise plastic bag, antonin artaud's the theatre and its double, first pressing, french 1938, cotton handkerchief fragment, leather fragment from boxing glove, unknown brass rod, lantern wick, die cast cap rocket, unknown melted acrylic object, panasonic square dynamic microphone, hape plastic yellow pyramid, pear percussion shaker, sealed plastic tablecloth, tuning fork, steel water basin from vintage christmas tree stand, unknown steel fragment, porcelain saki set purchased by my father in okinawa, japan 1982, velvet ring box, caesars palace cut ink pen section used as smoking cessation device, steel bolt covers, melted smoke detector for the home, wade boggs 1986 red sox mlb coin, ladle cast pewter ingot, mahogany fragment, 5lb steel wood wedge, pvc welding partition, rusted steel bolt sections, custom guitar effect pedal with bias, level, action and voltage knobs, unknown tarp fragment, pink bubble wrap section, manhattan tobacco humidifier disc, screw stopper from hot water bottle, ¼" input jack, rusted bottle cap, crutch pad, red cinch bag, two pence copper coin, great britain 1797, uhaul 12' x 16' tarp cover, leather blackjack cover, daisy duke, dukes of hazzard playing card 1981, red uv protective film section, brumberger darkroom safe light, found polaroid photograph of a model plane, half concrete/half asphalt specimen, pewter tennis shoe pendant, steel drive pin punch, plastic napkin holder, scaffolding bolt covers from manhattan, handmade cutting tool with wooden handle and sharpened jig saw blade, the cramp's concert ticket stub 2-27-1998, acrylic slab section, buffalo bone blank for luthier repair, wool overalls purchased by my father in 1980, steel pill/powder capsule, glass bottle fragment, wooden coin #9, teal plastic bag, unknown section of recycled plastic, battery powered candle, blessed candles for the home, wyler felt bag, slicker hat from popeye action figure, grandfather's brass knuckles, u.s. mint issued 1 ounce silver american eagle 20 coin shipping container, unknown fungus found growing on concrete, section of microphone windscreen, oven mit with burn, brass "la maison" badge, nokia flip phone, unknown stone, uv safety glasses, petrified wood specimen, used buffalo hide chamois cloth, brass water hose spout, buckeye given to me by my grandfather, military issued wool blanket, andre dawson 1984 expos mlb badge, security barcode from a thomas hirschorn book, standard roll of 3m gaffer tape, unused white cotton gloves in clear bag, cast pewter candle, fragment of a quilt made by my grandma 1980, raw turquoise specimen, lake bloomington, il 2008, hand phaser from star trek action figure, opera glasses 25x, .243 winchester rifle shell 1988, fossilized inner ear bone of a whale, handmade porcelain marble (victorian era), campfire/full moon postcard, 14144 (chrome era), sunset poster, 24" x 36", 2 whiskers from an orange tabby found on the streets of brooklyn, blue light bulb, glass vial of iron ore meteorite shavings, vladimir komarov commemorative soviet space program badge, dufex "eternal paradise" silk print, single-eye grand canyon view finder, floral pattern cardboard fragment

*It is only the things that people actually maintain and salvage that become permanent. That which is "lost" does not remain in the living aspect of our histories, but only when it is found again. - Ian Pedigo<sup>11</sup>*

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<sup>11</sup> Sharp, Chris. Ian Pedigo: Works 2007-2010. Montreal, Southern Alberta Art Gallery, 2011.

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