

Claire Bridge

To rupture; to remain whole; to pour; to fill; to rebuild; to retain. One of my initial artistic encounters with the vessel was within the studio. The primary vessel for making, I hand-built a large hollow clay form. I built it slowly on my bedroom floor, as our home together was breaking. I let it dry. I took it to the studio. It was too late for firing. I filled it with water and held it on my lap. The water broke the clay and my legs became soaked. The form collapsed in soggy shards. [1] I captured the breaking on video. By the time I had finished making love, the relationship had broken down. Melted onto lap and disappeared into ground. I'm about to go to the Philippines with my new earthenware or stoneware jars found throughout Asia. They are often used for fermenting and storage. We'll bring some home and we'll continue to pickle. To preserve together through blunders and deep listening. To preserve is to keep alive or in existence; to make lasting.

The vessel can be at once the body, the external, the collective and the body politic. When together, We are emergent and transformative through change.* I am learning to carry you and myself while in development. (Art) work can be a vessel for collaborative progress. Work with multiple artists and you will swiftly realise that everyone needs different forms of care. We often have to bring disparate parts of ourselves together. The title of this exhibition was made in conjunction with two Latin origin words:

vas: a vessel or duct.

holos: derives from thoughts of whole.

A duct can hold both fluid and air. In botanical terms a duct is a vessel formed by elongated cells or by many cells. It is through the collective that one can hold the most sound. Conjunction; to utilise any other word or expression of similar function. The word suggests the act of conjoining and combination; coupling to reach towards continuation. To search for the origin of a word, you must travel towards the source. The word source has ties to fountainhead. A fountain; a spring from which a stream flows. An arts practice can be a vessel in which to navigate cultural heritages. Chinese porcelain was the first luxury globally traded consumer product, which entered many different continents and was imitated and adapted for local markets. A first as a global commodity, following seashells as currency.* We must always remember where the streams begin. In these weird corridors of space, one can create a fountain as a set piece to be destroyed in a minute.* Turn the corner and find a new cistern to drink from. Create work about your history and you'll return to the centre of the home.[3] Nostalgia is often born from a place of displacement. Build an arts practice as a holding device and the water will continue to flow.

Praxis is practice, as distinguished from theory; an accepted practice or custom. Talking to the artists I was met with the voice of a collective—a conversation for making. They had created their own container, with space for multiple thoughts. [4] The praxis of collaboration becomes a vessel; the vessel of the environment; the psyche; cultural origin; the mouth. The vessel is a form that I have inhabited, considered, been perplexed by and felt in awe of in practice and otherwise for some time. It started with thoughts of women and memory—filling bodies and minds with syncope and the muscle of memory became the vessel that preceded ubiquitous literary source. Do words have less staying power now that they are so available through written text? Were they stronger when their longevity was retained within the body of the listener? Often the most powerful cultures are those that rely on oral tradition. Oeuvre of genius retained in the soil of the mind until memory becomes obstructed by external pressures. Luckily a few scribes made notations to save Sappho's falling fruit. But is there magic to be found when thoughts are allowed to be lost in the wind?

Memory is a tricky thing. I began with thoughts of vessels in 2015. This led to creating work about my grandmother, as her memory swiftly slipped away. Her arms became a motif—limbs enacting the labour of memory loss. I allowed my mother to carry my arms with my mothers and a vessel. [5] In a restructuring of strike is to clench your fist... the arm is a revolutionary limb; a promise of what is to come. In the words of Ahmed, to go on done. [6] By connecting the photographs, I allow a meeting place. Both images create a sense of coupling: two vessels, two hands, two images. The vessel seeks to pour and my mother holds my grandmother's hand momentarily, time pulling my grandmother towards her last breath. Arms don't always help us get through. [7] but they can carry us in the lead up and lift us up in acts of momentary support. She carried the possibility of me in her blood before I was born.

The variability of the vessel relates to the multifarious nature of language—we can never fully define and we can never fully hold or fill—there is always room for leaking. Syncope allows one to place the accents on beats that are normally unaccented, it can also be defined as to treat (a passage or piece). In grammatical realms, the same word can be used to suggest contracting a word by omitting one or more sounds from the middle. Don't say more than you need to. Don't over pour. The maker ne'er makes enough. We can also use syncope, which translates to fainting caused by insufficient blood flow to the brain. It appears that volume is always a measure of permanency. How much can you hold? How much will you leak? The making is never complete. We are always at risk of a puncture and women have been marked as hysterical, prone to fold...

There is power to be found in the role of the monstrous femme; a carrying and breaking form. There is nothing more persuasive than a woman full of language. When Medusa was beheaded, raped in the temple of Athena by Zeus, Athena was said to have punished her or awarded her with serpentine hair and the ability to petrify people. Aspects of the monstrous feminine are often subjugated and buried.* Jane Ellen Harrison argues that her potency only begins when her head is severed, and that potency resides in the head. [8] The corals of the Red Sea were said to have been formed of Medusa's blood spilled onto seaweed. We shouldn't always shy away from anger. Venomous vipers as in *Metamorphoses*, an 8 AD Latin narrative poem by the Roman poet Ovid and *Pharsalia*, a Roman epic poem written by the poet Lucan begun around 61 AD, were said to have grown from spilt drops of her blood. She wrote her actions through her body. We continue the story of Medusa and language and history beat as one.

Speak directly to the cell and the soma. The soma; the body of the organism. Soma was borrowed into English from Sanskrit in around 1820-30. We are always borrowing (taking). Our vessels never full. We must remain aware of the origins of what we are appropriating; never forget the mother. There are many overlaps, confusions, connections and disjunctures between etymology and understanding. To borrow translates us to take or obtain with the promise to return the same or an equivalent. Soma has ties to haoma, a leafless vine. *Sarcostemma acidum*, of eastern India. It yields a sour, milky juice. Language leads me back to thoughts of breast milk, the most powerful ritual. We spoke of blistered and A deflating and engorging entity that can sustain and hinder and remains as a measure of a woman's worth, even though many women don't have functioning breasts. Martyred in c.251, Agatha of Sicily had her breasts brutally cut off. Sarah Goodridge painted her own bare breasts in 1828 [9]—an act of brazen self-defiance at the time. Be ready for fluid like spillages; the most powerful ritual. We spoke of blistered and broken surfaces*; that of the mother. We are always filling (receiving) and letting go (dispelling). My breasts may soon fill with milk (maybe). To cognate is to descend from the same language or form. The power of the vessel relates directly to acts of language. Fill with words to pour forth.

To sail close to the shore; I return often to fluvial notions when thinking of my sailor girl. Shipbuilders are also named shipwrights. To write the body of a ship into being. Is this my role as one with the body of a woman? Shipbuilders are also named shipwrights. To write the maintenance is carried out while at sea or in port by the crew. The work started with whispers of the wind acting as bodies in the forest; and morphed into bodies as bodies in the water.[10] There will be ongoing reverberations in the helm. The role of the artist is to carry and coordinate. I spoke to a boat maker in Indonesia and he told me about making twine from coconuts. We are striving towards a long marriage, not a perfect wedding. There is a synergy in how we relate to the vessel and come together [...] by coming together we are demonstrating a philosophy of collaborative approach.* The subsequent placement of the election booths was within the water- Within grips of climate crisis and buoyed by ethical dissidents defining policy, we are all lost at sea. There are still new moments to be found through bathing with kin; to sail close to the wind...

To soothe, calm and settle a disrupted nervous system one can administer vocal toning as somatic vagal repair.* What kind of mother will I be? Will I sing sweetly? We learn to self-regulate and co-regulate with others. Coming back to modes of conjunction. I think of the performativity of the month as a vessel. The month encases the voice and unseen reverberations are felt throughout the body. She built singing devices to call her daughter into being. [11] Allow room for voicing so possibility can spring forth. Singing leads our speech into poetry, into powers of collective transformation. [12] The points that came were rendered in bronze. Imagine being birthed through sculptural invocation. Patination can be seen as a process of beautification or decay. The cervix can be seen as a portal to many worlds. The artist casts ceremony in order to activate the work. I ask, who is a vessel unto herself? We are all singing deep, defining our self worth.

Nina Sanadze

Josephine Mead, when a failure is determined it becomes an act, 2017

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[1] Josephine Mead, when a failure is determined it becomes an act, 2017 video.
[2] *Tapayan": <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tapayan>.
[3] Chinese courtyard houses are one of the most common housing typologies spanning all the way from the northern capital of Beijing to the poetic southern cities Hangzhou and back to the picturesque regions of Yunnan. Typically referred as *heyuan*, these courtyard houses are simply a "yard enclosed on four sides."
[4] Conversation between the artist and Josephine Mead, 28th March 2022.
[5] Josephine Mead, Act. a circular lesson in stationary care, 2017, inkjet print on archival paper.
[6] Sarah Ahmed, Living a Feminist Life, 2017, Duke University Press, p.85.
[7] Sarah Ahmed, Living a Feminist Life, 2017, Duke University Press, p.233.
[8] Jane Ellen Harrison, June 5, 1991 [1908], *Prolegomena: To The Study Of Greek Religion*, Princeton University Press, pp.187-188.
[9] Sarah Goodridge, Beauty Revealed, 1828, watercolor on ivory.
[10] Nina Sanadze, Re election Day, 2022, video.
[11] Katie Stackhouse, Song Vessel, 2021, bronze sculpture.
[12] Brandon LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth: Poetics and Politics of the Voice and the Oral Imaginary*, 2014, Bloomsbury Press, p.50.

This text was written by Josephine Mead on Wurundjeri woi-wurrung Country. She would like to acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded. www.josephinemead.com