

# Symbiotic Sculpture: Making Art for a Posthuman Present

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## **Abstract**

The epoch of the Anthropocene signals a crisis where, political and economic systems of extractionist capitalism and colonialism have set the world on a course of climate disaster, in order for us to survive, we need to find better ways to inhabit the world, by decentring the human and adapting to our surrounds. This project asks if our posthuman responsibilities can be explored through new symbiotic relationships; an adapting of organic and inorganic materials that provide ways of rethinking our connection to and the value placed on the more than human world? Through practice led research I use sculpture as a method to explore relationships between the human and more than human world, by comingling materials in speculative hybrid forms.

The final installation work, Umwelt, is based on my encounters with place and critters (more than human inhabitants), in Australia and Aotearoa , challenging my own colonialised anthropocentrism. Across the artwork and thesis I investigate posthumanism, decolonialism, ecofeminism and an ethos of care to explore my relationship with the more than human world. I consider the way that artists have imagined new ways of becoming with or comingling as beautiful monsters, and sculptors who draw together materials in adaptable and contingent forms. The process I have devised uses discarded industrial waste in combination with living matter, mycelium and kombucha leather, to construct an interrelated, symbiotic environment. By making, unmaking and remaking materials, I have created abstract speculative creature forms that come together to form a newly imagined way we could be with our more than human kin, in a posthuman present and future.

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Genevieve Thornton 22 October 2021

practice-based component of thesis:

*Umwelt*, an exhibition of work produced for this research project.

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## Introduction

Inorganic waste and human created toxins permeate the planet, as gases leak outwards, inwards and upwards. Antibiotics spread through the waterways, plastic forms islands in the ocean, and surgical plastic mesh – transvaginal mesh – implanted in women to help with incontinence enmesh deeper into the surrounding organs and flesh – causing more harm and like the gases, the antibiotics and the plastic islands it cannot be expelled. The inorganic and organic of the world combine, infuse, and alter us, the land and the air. A shifting of relationships and the severing of threads caused by destruction, loss of habitat and species, languages and culture, disrupts and alters connections creating new symbioses. Mushrooms soak up toxins from rivers and the mice adapt to parklands, snails to overheated environments, and pigeon numbers grow despite ingesting heavy metals (Haraway 2016). These displaced critters have adapted to life as city dwellers amongst a swarm of humans and human-made places, like the flora and fauna of my homelands Australia and Aotearoa (New Zealand) adapted to introduced species over time. I wonder about the changes our species are undergoing as we eat fish from waters high in metals, some full of antibiotics, and we digest plastic regularly. The relationships we have to place are continually shifting in this rapidly changing world. We are continually adapting to environmental changes, encountering places and the more than human world as we experience shifting multispecies relationships, ecological, ethical, and political.

This project asks if our posthuman responsibilities can be explored through new symbiotic relationships; an adapting of organic and inorganic materials that provide ways of rethinking our connection to and the value placed on the more than human world? Through practice led research I use sculpture as a method to explore relationships between the human and more than human world, by comingling materials in speculative hybrid forms. My research project investigates encounters in place and relationships to the more than human world through experimental sculptural processes that comingle the inorganic and the organic, the human and the more than human. I draw on my experiences as a woman, as a mother, as a person with a complex relationship to my race – born in Aotearoa, with Māori and Settler heritage. I Draw on my innate curiosity about my Australian surroundings from materials



that I source on walks in bushland and industrial sites, I form sculptures, a co-creation, or symbioses of the in-organic and the organic as a way to process my thoughts and to speculate on posthuman futures. This research project has resulted in an installation of sculptural forms, produced through experimental processes that explore comingling through a posthuman methodology. I create forms from various materials of posthuman critters and kin working with materials to foster symbiotic relationships of the organic and inorganic. This process is a way to reimagine the relationships of a posthuman world through sculpture.

I frame my project through a feminist lens, investigating encounters in place to offer insight into new ways of living in a more than human world. The state of the climate emergency has been widely documented by scientists but a lack of leadership across the world has prevented real action. In this project, I question if it is possible to use artistic processes as a mechanism to consider a world beyond the colonialised induced Anthropocene<sup>1</sup>, colonialism, and extractionist capitalism to speculate on new futures that embrace the more than human world. Through research and studio practice, this project enables me to fully explore the materials on-hand that are organic and inorganic, working with these materials to create a response to how the human relates to the more than human world. The artworks I create investigate the relationship of human to the more than human and of ways in which comingling with material and the more than human world are present in my life and practice. Interspersed between the chapters of my thesis I have included passages of studio writing that document my encounters with place, materials and process through the project. These provide an insight into my thought process, discoveries, and demonstrate the entanglement of ideas, place, materials and process developed through research. The intention of this project is to respond to encounters in place with the more than human world through sculpture, speculating on posthuman relationships of the human to the more than human world.

In chapter one, 'Becoming posthuman: ways of thinking about decentring the human', I

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<sup>1</sup> The Anthropocene epoch as defined by Zoe Todd in 'Indigenizing the Anthropocene' (ed. Davis & Turpin E 2015, p. 245) refers to a human driven geologic change. Todd argues that this is euro centric and colonial in origin and continues to be in spaces where disasters are theorized and where responses are formulated).

explore and unpack the theoretical and textual framework underpinning the research. This chapter is where I will define key terms for this thesis such as post humanism. Investigating my relationship to place and encounters with the more than human, I examine Australian ecofeminists Val Plumwood and Deborah Bird Rose, with a focus on my experiences as a woman and my location. I explore how key ideas from the work of philosopher Rosi Braidotti and multispecies feminist theorist Donna Haraway (2016) provide a critical framework for my project drawing on ideas of decentring the human, and ways to imagine new relationships with the more than human world, to consider critters as kin or kinsfolk, and to remain present in these times of uncertainty, to 'stay with the trouble'. Braidotti (2019) questions our past and looks to posthuman futures that can be navigated by including marginalised peoples and the more than human world. The more than human world is defined as all that is not human (Abram 1997, ix). Haraway (2016) employs storytelling and invokes relationships of critters as kin in her imaginary sci-fi tales. Looking beyond colonialism, I draw on Māori theorist, Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (Ngāti-Awa, Ngāti-Porou) ideas on decolonialism, and of drawing on the knowledge of Indigenous peoples to enable shifts and the deconstruction of colonial constructs. This chapter sets up the critical and conceptual approach of both artwork and thesis.

In chapter two, 'Beautiful Monsters: creating symbiotic sculptures in the studio', I locate my project in relationship to the work of artists exploring ideas of comingling between the human and the more than human, and between sculptural materials. I do this within a framework of symbiotic relationships. These are close relationships between species and can be of benefit, reciprocal, or detrimental relationships (BiologyOnline 2021). Drawing on my studio research process that works through key ideas related to artists. I analyse the work of Australian artists Svenja Kratz and Patricia Piccinini with a focus on their process of imagining and making new critters as I draw on how these imaginative sculptures can affect the relationship of the viewer to the more than human world. To unpack the biomaterials of Australian artist Isadora Vaughan that run parallel to my practice I explore anthropologist Anna Tsing's narrative in *The Mushroom at the end of the world: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (2015), as she traces the matsutake mushroom in our capitalist time and finds they thrive in the most discarded landscapes, allowing for speculative imagining of posthuman symbiotic relationships.

In chapter three, 'Umwelt: comingling sculptural forms of critter and kin', I locate my final installation artwork in relationship to the key ideas introduced in chapters one and two, through a speculative sculptural process of making and unmaking of organic and inorganic materials to create an adaptable, symbiotic body of work. I locate my sculptural practice in relationship to the approaches of Eva Hesse and Phyllida Barlow. The work of artist Hesse is vital to my practice as she uses raw materials, traditionally for commercial use, to create experimental and untraditional art installations and forms. Hesse's use of non-traditional materials in contingent, of emergent assemblages provides a way for me to consider the relationships between the forms. Barlow's use of materials from desolate and abandoned sites and processes of making, unmaking and remaking, are vital to my studio process for the way they run parallel to an unbuilding of the Anthropocene and capitalism using a visual dialogue. I explore the installations of Vaughan in relation to my final exhibition, especially the combinations of her biomaterials and industrial equipment. In this chapter I unpack and connect key elements of my final composite installation, *Umwelt*. I demonstrate the importance of the encounter, studio process, and gallery installation for the outcome of this project.

Central to this project is a curiosity driven exploration of the process of making with or becoming to assemble a composite of works that will be encountered in the gallery. Through the process of creating sculptural forms, I gather the inorganic and the organic, create and unmake forms as a way to process and to deconstruct the current systems of the Anthropocene and to speculate on altered symbiotic relationships of the human to the more than human world in posthuman times.

Creative Passage:

December 2020

*I like how the creatures lie, they seem like docile, exhausted, flagellated beings. Beings that will continue to exist regardless of what occurs to or around them. They are ageless – looking at animals from ancient times, and those that exist in extreme alien like conditions – the tube worm and the shrimp. If the species that require the most resources are usually the predators, humans being at the top of this apex, then if they cannot survive the changes, adapt quickly enough, they like many of the predator species will vanish from this planet. Could we speculate that that could leave the species that until now are deemed weak, unproductive, un-useful, to become the dominant, far reaching species? The holes of the tube worms are interesting, imagine being alive with such little sustenance required, such little weight. Imagine how you would move through the waters, how your senses would guide you. A life of darkness, of floating or moving in a rhythm that propels you forward. Would this give a sense of freedom or rise to a constricting lump in your throat, envisaging endless days in darkness. The openings of the porcelain and tube worms allow components to be attached and those left hollow, allow thoughts to remain open. It was at this time in my studio practice that I was making these hollow forms, I came across the olm. My son was intrigued by their creature's strangeness. They are found in the caves of Slovenia- my husband's grandfather came to Australia from Slovenia after fighting as a Gorilla soldier for his country and was imprisoned in concentration camps twice, escaping each time, before coming to Australia where he assimilated effectively – never passing on his language or culture. This connection made the creature more interesting as they shared the same ancestral place. The tube worm interests me for reasons beyond its alien and unliveable habitat - it is a species that does not look as though it could survive much, a squishy unprotected body, no eyes - perhaps the only reason it survives is because of the uninhabitability of its surroundings. It does not have any predators, able to survive, adapt and thrive in troubled places. Rather than exhausted – perhaps they are merely surviving – in a process of becoming - ebbing back and forth in the throes of life.*

## **Chapter 1 Becoming posthuman: ways of thinking about decentring the human**

Staying with the trouble requires making oddkin; we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles. We become-with each other or not at all. (Haraway, 2016, p. 4)

Our contemporary existence is marked by loss - the entrenched dominance of humanity and the notions of humanist exceptionalism has not only established the destructive conditions for the mass loss of other species and the warming of the planet, but destruction is now happening at such an exacerbated rate that we have grown apathetic. I feel grief and regret over our inertia, our inability to act and find urgent solutions. There is an uncomfortably familiar feeling over the missing, the loss of animals, bees, trees, languages and cultures. These consistent reminders provide insights that provoke vital ethical questions about our relationship with the world around us. Moreover, these losses are also reminders of the missing voices, human and more than human, that continue to go unheard. The accumulation of waste – of discarded materials, should force us to face the greed and wastefulness of our society. The coexistence of the organic and the inorganic is intrinsically woven into the fabric of our society- and the impact of this interaction is huge. Philosopher Rosi Braidotti asks the question:

...both conceptual and ethical: what kind of subjects are 'we' – the human and inhuman inhabitants of this planet – positioned within a technologically driven 'second life', genetically modified foods, robotics, synthetic biology, the acidification of the seas and the desertification of the earth? (2020, p 394)

The ethical questions around how we continue to live with, or as multispecies feminist theorist Donna Haraway (2016) says, 'stay with the trouble', in our damaged world provides the context for this research project. I draw on Anthropologist Anna Tsing's work *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On The Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (2015), as she explores extractionist capitalism through the matsutake mushroom and its ability to

thrive in damaged landscapes. It is through a practice-based examination of these ideas I attempt to find new ways of thinking through our relationship with the world beyond anthropocentric models.

This chapter will explain and demonstrate how I have drawn together a series of critical encounters with texts and writers to form a theoretical framework, focused on an exploration of new ways to consider the relationship between human and the more than human world. As a literature review, it provides a framework of key critical and theoretical approaches. These connections are largely from a feminist perspective as I use my experiences as a foundation for engaging with key theorists. Braidotti and Haraway provide a rich source of material to imagine alternative relationships of the human and the more than human. Braidotti explores how we can articulate the human differently, altering our views, forming different relationships with the world. Haraway's wide-ranging interdisciplinary work explores how, in this anthropocentric era, human and the more than human can form new relationships and make new kin.

The use of the term 'posthuman' in this thesis draws on the work of Braidotti, to describe what we are in the process of becoming – a posthuman with a better relationship to the more than human world. This chapter also locates the project in relationship to the work of ecofeminists Val Plumwood and Deborah Bird Rose, and the decolonial theories of Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti -Awa, Ngāti-Porou), to interrogate the role of gender and colonialism in Anthropocentrism. These theorists provide rich ways of conceiving our relationship with the world differently that decentre the human and find new relationships with the more than human. These ideas are essential to the theoretical framework I will explore in this chapter, they relate to both the textual and practice-led research and bind this research project in lightly woven mesh, holding together my thoughts, processes, and arts practice.

Throughout this thesis moments of encounter with human and the more than human world are used to describe connection. This chapter draws on a series of encounters with key theorists, each of whom writes on encounter as a way to frame their own work. These are articulated as a point of connection that may be geological, theoretical, contextual, memory, touch, feeling. This is a form of entanglement and comingling– an encounter that

sticks, grows, and enmeshes, becoming entwined within the studio practice. The process of an entanglement describes the action or thought of 'becoming with' – altering relationships as the human and the more than human connect, becoming something else.

### **1.0 Posthuman encounters: posthuman as a place of becoming with the more than humanworld – the organic and the inorganic**

Through encounters with interdisciplinary theorists Braidotti and Haraway, whose works challenge binary constructs and actively decentre the human in an effort to propose new posthuman futures, I speculate on new ways of living and being, questioning Anthropocentric structures. Braidotti's focus is predominantly philosophical and political, emphasising the ways in which societies and capitalism can change. Haraway's writing is critical to this thesis, her interdisciplinary works emphasises the need for a multiple species approach to human and more than human experience by forming new relationships, unlikely bonds and becoming kin. Haraway's provocations offer a critique about ways of remaking, and of imagining futures. I have situated Braidotti and Haraway together because of their shared challenging of binaries, colonialism, capitalism, the Anthropocene, and their philosophical contribution to the crises the world faces. I also see the positivity and optimism for the future that both Braidotti and Haraway exude as they look to collaborate with others, human and more than human to reimagine ways of being. Braidotti and Haraway focus on using imagination, differing experiences, practices and knowledges and the innumerable technological resources at our disposal, to find new or alternative ways of living, of being in this world. This is integral to my practice as through my research and sculpture I look to imagining new ways of combining materials, traditional and non-traditional, organic and inorganic, in an attempt to think through my relationship with the world and search for alternatives to oppressive Anthropocentric and colonial models.

The posthuman as defined by Braidotti and used in this thesis is an explicit challenge to humanism but is also a challenge to speculative imaginings of its possibilities (Braidotti 2019, 2). When I invoke the term 'posthuman' I am drawing on the work of Braidotti (2019, pp. 6-7), she writes that where Humanism defines the human through negation, creating binaries of human /nonhuman animal, human/pre-programmed machine, human/inert matter; the posthuman "is a work in progress. It is a working hypothesis about the kind of subjects we

are becoming. Who that 'we' is, and how to keep that collectivity open, multiple and hierarchical" (2019, p. 2). She positions us as currently between two accelerations – advanced capitalism and accelerating climate change. Braidotti argues that posthumanism involves directly confronting dualities and Anthropocentrism:

it follows that we should approach our historical contradictions not as some bothersome burden, but rather as the building blocks of a sustainable present and an affirmative and hopeful future, even if this approach requires some drastic changes to our familiar mind-sets and established values. (2019, p. 3)

This generative process of posthumanism, its speculative and emergent forms of knowledge, is critical to this research project as it positions posthuman as a term to describe a process of becoming, which decentres the human, allowing a new speculative relationship to the more than human world to emerge. Haraway writes of Braidotti's work *Posthuman Knowledge*, that:

Posthuman knowing is crucial to posthuman becoming, i.e., becoming-with earth beings, those formerly known as human and those formerly known as nonhuman, in thick pasts, presents and futures for more than just and peaceful mortal living on a damaged Earth... [an] examination of critical possibilities for the needed subjectivities, collectivities, and knowledges. (2019)

The posthuman that Braidotti describes is one of ongoing changes and becoming, propagating new ways of being in this world, and as Haraway writes, it is essential to connect to multiple knowledges, in order to critically examine possibilities. Through my research and the theoretical frameworks of Braidotti and Haraway, the terms 'posthuman' and 'becoming with' are vital, as they form part of my process of making, thinking through theoretical frameworks, materials, and forms.

The exploration of encounter between interconnected materials involves thinking beyond the division of human and the more than human world to a speculative world of posthuman becoming with the more than human world. Indigenous scholar, Zoe Todd writes in her essay 'Indigenizing the Anthropocene' (2015) that the 'critters as kin' that Haraway writes of, are and have always been this to many Indigenous cultures and communities. The knowledges systems of Indigenous peoples have been misappropriated and colonised without acknowledgement ((Davis & Turpin E 2015, p. 246). In the studio, I explore this idea



of thinking beyond the binaries<sup>2</sup> by using a process of artmaking that encompasses an exploration of creature languages, materials, process and speculation, as I draw on Braidotti and Haraway's posthuman interrogations of subjectivity. In *Posthuman Knowledge*, Braidotti writes:

the point of a posthuman position is that it envisages the subject as transversal, trans-individual, trans-species, trans-sexes. In short, it is a subject in movement. This kind of subjectivity obviously includes non-human others, of both the organic and the technological kind. (2019, p. 72)

To imagine posthuman relations with more than human kin, Haraway (2016) evokes provocative ways to rethink the relations we have to earth's critters. She substitutes the Anthropocene with 'Chthulucene' in an effort to describe human and more than human as thoroughly bound up, interconnected and in a state of constant change. I use the terms human and more than human or more than human world throughout this thesis to reinforce my embrace of Braidotti's and Haraway's call for anti-binary thinking. Braidotti's (2019) use of the posthuman is inclusive of the non-human, the organic and the technological. The term 'more than human' can be traced back to the work of philosopher, David Abram in *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (1997). Abram bonds environmental and ecological issues with the philosophical tradition of phenomenology. He uses the term 'more than human', 'sensuous surrounding', and 'more than human fields', to describe all that is not human. This sensuous world, Abram writes:

remains the sole solid touchstone for an experiential world now inundated with electronically-generated vistas and engineered pleasures; only in regular contact with the tangible ground and sky can we learn how to orient and to navigate in the multiple dimensions that now claim us. (1997, ix)

Abram writes that for the most part of human existence we have "negotiated relationships with every aspect of the sensuous surroundings, exchanging possibilities with every flapping form, with each textured surface and shivering entity that we happen to focus upon" (1997, ix). All that is more than human is everything that surrounds us, the mountains, sky,

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<sup>2</sup> Indigenous scholars argue that posthuman theorists (such as Haraway) have misappropriated ideas from Indigenous knowledge systems, cultures and communities; colonizing ideas and spiritual beliefs without acknowledgement (Davis & Turpin E 2015, p. 244 - 246).

thunder, iPhones, tables, cars, the fungus, flies, dogs and worms. Haraway (2016) uses the terms, more than human, inhuman and human-as-hummus, and companion species. For Haraway (2008) 'companion species' explores encounters/ interactions between humans, animals and plants in a plethora of places. The term more than human refuses human exceptionalism, and for Braidotti (2019) the term 'non-human' and 'earth beings' are a point of intersection, another convergence, vital to posthuman becoming. Haraway examines her companionship 'companion species' dogs in her work *When Species Meet* (2008) and writes that they are in a process of constant flux – of becoming-with. Companion species are relentlessly becoming-with, encompassing the oral, bacterial and relations that occur in encounters with the more than human. This process of becoming with plays a critical role in my practice-led research, indeed, the very nature of creative practice follows a reciprocal methodology of becoming with, always in continual flow and flux.

### **1.1 Encounter with place: challenging colonial ideas, by thinking of place through body, memory and encounter.**

The creative process for my practice begins with walking, being in place, thinking about place and the feelings that I associate with places that I encounter. I draw on decolonial feminism and ecofeminism, as both connect to the challenges of thinking beyond dualistic binaries through an understanding based around my body's relationship to place. Eco-feminist theory uses gender to examine the relationship of the human to the more than human world. In this thesis I will draw on the work of Plumwood, for her perspective on the importance of place, in combination with the work of Rose (2013) as they form a shared perspective on ecofeminism, 'creature languages', and a relationship of the human with the more than human.

Exploring encounters and entanglements with place plays a pivotal role in my studio practice as I draw on my encounters with the more than human world and gather materials to create artwork. Place is defined, according to sociologist Thomas F. Gieryn (2000), as a geographic location described as having boundaries that are phenomenologically and analytically elastic. Plumwood (2002, p. 231) writes of the richness of place. She looks at the "dullness and dislocation that is associated with placelessness", and at how places can

become interchangeable and irrelevant, used as instruments and resources. Plumwood (2002, p. 231) draws on a deep affiliation with place or places, in an effort to understand the language of the more than human world. In my practice, the places I focus my attention on are the places I have encountered and that I hold a connection to. These encounters are places I can recall from childhood, places I have felt a connection to and hold clear memories that provide stimulus for my studio practice. In these places I gather images and sounds, I imprint textures from surfaces onto clay in Australia 2020 and press ink covered leaves onto the pages of my sketchbook in Aotearoa 2017. The places that I am familiar with such as my childhood country of Aotearoa and the places I experienced there such as the ocean, farmland, songs, Māori sites – *Marae*<sup>3</sup> and *Pā's*<sup>4</sup>, the great Kauri trees, some so large that I have childhood memories of linking my hands with my siblings as we wrapped our arms around their trunks, and the tee-tree and gorse scrub that are pests to the farmlands and forests, the language, the sounds, the rivers, and the history and language embedded in communities. I draw on the places I now inhabit in Australia, the place I live, the bush I walk through, the river, sky, insects I encounter and the places I visit - only here the history and language is not yet embedded and for me I am in an unknown place.

A place can be the encounter, the more than human rocks, rivers, the sound of wind. A place can become an anchor or a stage for encounters with the more than human - a track in the sand, a song from a bird, an eel in a creek, the damp smell of earth. According to Plumwood (2002, p. 231), an encounter of place “requires a capacity to relate dialogically to the more-than-human world, since this is a very important source of narratives and narrative subjects defining the distinctiveness of place”. Aotearoa researchers Colin Goodrich and Kaylene Sampson (2008, p. 258), explore the relationship to place, with social and cultural semiotics. They maintain that “place is not only embodied within a physical locale, but is also imbued with symbolic meanings, emotional attachments and feelings that individuals hold about a given setting”. Considered more than just a geographical location,

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<sup>3</sup> **3. (noun)** From the *Te Aka Māori-English, English-Māori Dictionary and Index*, Moorfield, J C 2003, courtyard - the open area in front of the *wharehau*, where formal greetings and discussions take place. Often also used to include the complex of buildings around the *marae*.

<sup>4</sup> **2. (noun)** From the *Te Aka Māori-English, English-Māori Dictionary and Index*, Moorfield, J C 2003, fortified village, fort, stockade, screen, blockade, city (especially a fortified one).

place embodies activity, and social, cultural, and spiritual practices.

This idea of place challenges colonial ideas, by thinking of place through body, memory and encounter. This emotional connection that defines place is central to my research process, working both on site and through my memories to respond to encounters in place in many ways; making, thinking through forms and ideas, entangling these throughout the process of my practice-led research project. An example of this are the kombucha leather works that reference the shape of the sharp molluscs stuck fast to the oceans rocky edges and the textures of the slimy soft sea plants trodden under foot while exploring shorelines as a child, drawing on Haraway's texts of comingling and tentacular thinking, speculating on posthuman symbiotic relations. Part of my process acknowledges the role of anthropocentrism in colonial ideas of place, in constructing dualistic binaries of human/nature, male/female, active/passive that have allowed for domination over the environment (Rose 2013, p. 2). Ideas of decolonialisation, by contrast, open-up new conversations through critique, bringing to the fore knowledges and languages that colonial rule has oppressed. The challenge, as Smith (Ngāti -Awa, Ngāti-Porou) (2021) identifies in her work on decolonialism, is to concurrently decentre colonialism and centre Indigenous concepts of knowledge, allowing new epistemologies and insights to be heard. Smith (Ngāti -Awa, Ngāti-Porou) (2005, p. 83) states that "the efforts by Indigenous peoples to reclaim and protect their traditional knowledge now coincides and converges with scientific interests in discovering how that knowledge can offer new possibilities for discovery". The binaries of colonialism allow little room for movement, and a decentring of these binary structures that bind our society would allow for further critique. If we are to reimagine these constructs an anti-dualistic methodology would serve to widen possibilities, to reassess our current knowledges and practices.

I am located through my female body, through my birthplace, colour, culture all of which are defined through binary structures. Without dualism perhaps we could begin to exclude less, defining ourselves as continually growing, forming, shifting and not by current restrictive binaries. Decolonial feminism brings to light the uneven playing ground that Indigenous women found/find themselves on. As Aotearoa became colonialised Aotearoa, their place in society was dismissed, specifically as leaders and as those that sustained life.

Through oppressive means Indigenous people were colonised - by forcibly reshaping Indigenous knowledges, practices and their spiritual belief systems, to fit within the constructs of colonialism (Simmonds 2011). The loss of language, stories and knowledge is significant. My birthplace is Aotearoa , and I grew up with disjointed information about my heritage. My father and many of his siblings knew what it was like to be dark skinned in the world. They were seated in the back of the classroom, subjected to the cane frequently and looked down on as second-class citizens in schools run by nuns. My father and his siblings did not know much about the Māori side of their family, this is the side that carries the Cornwell name Stanaway, making it easier to separate Māori heritage from the family.

My older brother and I had connection to our culture through school and church and knew that we had Māori heritage and are very proud of it - but as we are light skinned, we were told not to mention it so that we could have an easier life at school. I moved to Australia aged 14 and this has widened the sense of disconnection I have to Māori culture. I feel I now have limited knowledge of my heritage leading to uncertainty about embracing it. I grew up on farmland with forests and creeks and I knew this place like nowhere else, always exploring, picking mushrooms, and playing games in the forest. Shifting countries was difficult, the flat surroundings of the Yorta Yorta land that I found myself on in Victoria, was in stark contrast to Aotearoa . The huge and sometimes poisonous spiders, and the snakes were intimidating, my curiosity and enjoyment of the outdoors became one of fear. This dislocation to place and to culture afford a sense of forfeiture. My work looks to my encounters in place – body, memory, and the more than human world and responds in sculptural forms comingling materials to evoke adaptations to symbiotic relations, drawing on the fractured state of decolonialism.

Decolonial approaches challenge the systems of domination across both place and bodies. Feminist philosopher and decolonial theorist Maria Lugones (2008) argues that the colonial binary structures that displaced the colonised prevented them from being recognised as fully human/ fully women, and positioned them along intersections of race and gender. Here the “long process of coloniality begins subjectively and intersubjectively in a tense encounter that both forms will not simply yield to capitalist, modern, normativity” (Lugones 2010, p. 747). I draw on the Indigenous methodologies of Naomi Simmonds (Ngāti

Raukawa) in her work *Mana Wahine: Decolonising politics* (2011, p. 15), she writes of how the colonial systems reduced the symbolic power and cosmology of Māori women to sustain future generations and *whakapapa*<sup>5</sup> (lineage), in a culture where the term *whare tangata*<sup>6</sup> translates to house of humanity and also womb, by turning reproductive pride in to shame. The entangled colonised and coloniser are positioned in this fractured state, whereby the encounter of Indigenous and colonialism was one of reductionism and dehumanisation and Lugones writes that the “crucial point about the encounter is that the subjective and the intersubjective construction of it informs the resistance offered to the ingredients of colonial domination” (2010, p. 747). The resistance that Lugones writes of begins with the knowledge that those dehumanised peoples that were encountered were:

complex cultural, political, economic, and religious being: selves in complex relations to the cosmos, to other selves, to generation, to the earth, to living beings, to the inorganic, in production; selves whose erotic, aesthetic, and linguistic expressivity, whose knowledges, senses of place, longings, practices, institutions, and forms of government were not simply replaced but met, understood, and entered into in tense, violent, risky crossings and dialogues and negotiations that never happened. (2010, p. 747)

Through my exploration of decolonial feminism and ecofeminism I interpret the alignment of women/nature in both an expansive and reductive manner. In the Māori stories I heard growing up and the words I find today as I relearn my culture, the relationship of men and women are bound up with this planet, the earth, the sky and all that is in between and underneath. I do not take offence to women being seen as nature in Indigenous cultures, however I do not agree with the colonial binary structure that aligns women and nature in a derogatory and oppressive way. By drawing on decolonialism, and thinking of place through body, memory and encounter, my relationship of human to the more than human can be surveyed and better understood.

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<sup>5</sup> Sourced from Rāwiri Taonui, 'Whakapapa – genealogy - What is whakapapa?', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, “Whakapapa is a taxonomic framework that links all animate and inanimate, known and unknown phenomena in the terrestrial and spiritual worlds. Whakapapa therefore binds all things. It maps relationships so that mythology, legend, history, knowledge, tikanga (custom), philosophies and spiritualities are organised, preserved and transmitted from one generation to the next. Whakapapa is the core of traditional mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge).”

<sup>6</sup> **1. (noun)** From the *Te Aka Māori-English, English-Māori Dictionary and Index*, Moorfield, J C 2003, house of humanity, womb, uterus.

## 1.2 Encounters with the more than human: exploration of Australian Ecofeminists on human to more than human world relationships.

Ecofeminism interrogates the way that patriarchal Western civilisation discriminates against marginalised groups including the more than human, are subjugated by the master human model - the white, reasoning, masculine domination of nature (Plumwood 1993). Plumwood developed the term hyperseparation in response to Eurocentric structures:

hyperseparation—the structure of dominance that drives western binaries, including nature/culture, female/male, matter/mind, savage/civilised. The hyperseparation structure accords value to one side of the binary, and relegates the other side to a position of oppositional subordination. (Rose 2013, p. 2)

The dualistic separation of nature/ culture allows humans to remain detached from nature, forming a sense of entitlement and an extractionist mentality to control and to use nature as a resource for humans. This minimises the rights of the more than human world (Plumwood 2002, p 4). Plumwood used the term *philosophical animism* to convey the relationship of all creature's human and non-human. This was once a term used in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to claim there were differences between civilised and non-civilised human species—an anthropocentric hierarchy. As Rose (2013, p. 2) writes, this hierarchy “equates recognition of hyperseparated boundaries within civilisation, and thus... uses hyperseparation ideology to denigrate and dismiss Indigenous knowledge”. Plumwood's philosophical animism was aimed toward a critical rethink - that life is always lived in relationship to others, human and more than human (Rose 2013). This relationship to others, human and more than human is critical in my practice-led research, it is embedded into my practice and the dialogue / relationship of the materials, form, human to more than human world is bound up in the work as it shifts, is remade, and repositioned into new combinations.

Ecofeminism's challenge to colonial dualism affords the possibility it could be more than women who are aligned with nature. Stories from my childhood, place women as mother earth, *Papatūānuku*, and the Māori word for land, *Whenua*, is also the word for placenta. Man is the sky father, *Rangi-nui*, whose tears fell over their forced separation by their children so that they could live in light, once flooded the earth so frequently that their children turned the earth mother over. Now, without the two lovers looking at one another and causing

incessant grieving, the flooding of the land has ceased and instead dew drops form each morning and in the valleys the *Papatūānuku*'s sighs are visible as mist. There are many versions of this story, however, in the mythology, women and men are symbols of the more than human world. The creation stories herald to times when nature was cared for akin to the care humans give to each other. This relationship of human with the more than human world demonstrates strong ties, with knowledge of humans interdependence on the more than human world. Through these stories a sense of culture, interdependence and connection to the land is demonstrated, rather than Western constructs like land ownership. Cultural connection is a deeply felt connection between ecological systems, the relations between soils, the sea, the forests, wind, birds – a knowledge that all that is human and more than human is continuous and connected. These stories were important to understand creatures that form my early clay sculptural studies of ocean plants and critters that evoke the *Taniwha*<sup>7</sup> – protector of the Māori as they journeyed from the pacific islands to Aotearoa . In other early works, an ethos of working with materials, provoking an embodied connection of human to the more than human as I gathered shell, claw, sticks from shorelines and combined these with other materials in the studio, creating dialogue and connecting disparate materials.

### **1.3 Creature Languages: encounters with the language of the more than human**

Through encounters and drawing on active listening (Rose 2013) I am aware of sounds of the bush, the calls of birds and wind through leaves. An important part of my practice-led research is the act of paying careful attention to these sounds, as I sometimes listen with an intent to record or, through sound, comingle the organic and inorganic - the sound of bird call and the rumbling of distant cars. I draw on Plumwood and Rose's (2013) shared term 'creature languages', as the voice of critters, alongside the term 'umwelt' as interpreted by Haraway and philosopher Vinciane Despret, as a process of unlearning and repositioning

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<sup>7</sup> **1. (noun)** water spirit, monster, dangerous water creature, powerful creature, chief, powerful leader, something or someone



human to the more than human world. Haraway and Despret believe that we need to unlearn already established human knowledge of other species and look to them as strangers in an effort to look at the world from their perspective, to offer the human a different viewpoint and, importantly, to try to see how the world is expressed and seen by them. From a multispecies perspective Despret states:

What is at play, then, in this multiple world is not the fact that a species learns how the other sees the world (as “subjectivism” would have it) but that it learns to discover which world is expressed by the other and from which world the other is the point of view. (2017, p. 4)

This renegotiating of world positioning and viewpoints of other species is vital if we are to challenge the anthropocentric model. I see attentive listening and observation as necessary to acknowledge the critical place of all critters and encounters to draw on the deep experiences of the land / place / country, in an effort to enable the more than human to be heard and to propagate new ways of moving forward. A form of dialogue of the more than human world, that Rose (2013) describes, as ‘creature-languages’ is central to my practice as it discusses the dialogue of the more than human world and between my sculptural forms. Attentive listening to creature languages, or the languages of others, imbues reciprocal connection: through my art making process I am looking for ways of making connections. In this approach I draw on ecofeminist methodologies, As Rose writes:

[I] focus on developing an enlarged account of active listening, considering it as the work participants engage in as they inter-act with other sentient creatures. I take a country or place based perspective, engaging with life on the inside of the webs and patterns of connection. (2013)

Rose (2013, p. 96) writes in homage to Plumwood that philosophical animism “opens the door to a world in which we can begin to negotiate life membership of an ecological community of kindred beings”. Thus, her animism, like Indigenous animisms, was not a doctrine or orthodoxy, but rather a path, a way of life, a mode of encounter. Creature language has become a conscious part of my connection to the more than human world while walking or sitting outside, the frogs, cicadas, birds flight and calls, the rustling of startled kangaroos. In Australia, this started when I walked alone and was attentive out of fear and has now become a more meditative or curious ‘active listening’ (Rose 2013) to that around me. Drawing on the term ‘active listening’ and ‘attentive presence’ that defines listening carefully as a part of the more than human world. Rose (Rose 2013, p. 94) writes an

account of active listening: “we saw before us the intentionality of other creatures—always mysterious, but never mindless—and we experienced ourselves as creatures who are attentive to others and who are participants in the life of the world”. I find materials on bush walks, record sounds of critters or collect industrial waste materials from building sites. Both the sounds from nature and the sounds of the more than human world of materials and making are bound together, documented and comingled into my arts practice in the form of video work and in the dialogue of my sculptural forms.

#### **1.4 Tsing’s Life in Capitalist Ruins**

Thinking through the more than human world is modelled in Tsing’s *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On The Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (2015), which explores the critical question of what can emerge in the ruins we leave in our wake. I am including Tsing in my thesis, as she explores the trails of life in places left destitute from extractionist capitalism, specifically focusing on the ecological system that supports the matsutake mushroom, a species that thrives in destitute places. Tsing explores how the emergence of the matsutake thrives in ruinous places, provoking an economy on the edges – one with very different rules, offering a precarious living that intersects ethnographic and economical boundaries.

The concept of the Anthropocene both evokes this bundle of aspirations, which one might call the modern human conceit, and raises the hope that we might muddle beyond it. Can we live inside this regime of the human and still exceed it? (Tsing 2015, P. 19)

Tsing (2015. p, 18) employs the terms encounter and entanglement when she writes about reimagining worlds, explaining that “if we end the story with decay, we abandon all hope-or turn our attention to other sites of promise and ruin”. Using storytelling, Tsing shows how economies, ethnographies and ecologies of human and more than human are a collaboration. That flourishing occurs in damaged landscapes, and apparent desolate places provokes stimulus for my project and is a generative force for pulling organic and inorganic materials together. The work is to be continually reimagined, reconfigured, mimicking the adaption of the human and the more than human to uninhabitable and desolate places. The work of Tsing prompts me to grow mycelium and kombucha scoby, to combine these organic

materials together, 'becoming with' inorganic materials to speculate on symbiotic forms. Haraway uses 'becoming with' in *When Species Meet* (2008), for her, becoming-with is grounded in connectivity and encounter rather than in difference and separation. She states "becoming is always becoming with, in a contact zone where the outcome, where who is in the world, is at stake" (2008, p. 244). Becoming describes a constant state of shifts and changes, and in this state of flux, Haraway (2016, p. 1) proposes we stay with the trouble, she suggests we "make trouble, to stir up potent response to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places". To stay with the trouble is not to fix future problems, but to remain present, "truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or Edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings" (2016, p. 1). This place or this process of becoming Haraway names *Chthulucene*, a word that combines Greek roots of *Khthon* = and *kainos* = The *Chthulucene* is full of remembering, inheritances and of now, of ongoingness, of comings and of what may still be, it is Haraway (2016, p. 2) writes, "a kind of timeplace for learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying in response-ability on a damaged earth". This corresponds with Tsing and Braidotti's endeavour's to stay aware of our current position whilst looking ahead to navigate multi-directional posthuman futures. It also speaks to what Tuhiwai – Smith (Ngāti -Awa, Ngāti-Porou) and Lugones propose is required to resist the colonial constructs, pushing back and outwards in multi-faceted ways to create new states of location, affording a continuation of knowledge and culture. Haraway, uses her imagination to create the Chthonic ones, the being of the earth that live in the *Chthulucene* timeplace. They are both new, up to the minute and ancient, they have:

tentacles, feelers, digits, cords, whiptails spider legs, and very unruly hair...Chthonic ones are monsters in the best sense; they demonstrate and perform the material meaningfulness of earth processes and critters. They also demonstrate and perform consequences. (Haraway 2016, p. 2)

In my practice-led research I draw on the tentacular practices of multi species symbiotic relations, I incorporate imagery and forms of tentacles in early works making connections of the *Taniwha* conducive to staying with the trouble. Haraway (2016, p. 3) uses SF as an ubiquitous all purpose acronym for science fact, speculative fabulation, speculative feminism, string figures and science fiction, it is a "practice and process; it is becoming-with each other in surprising relays; it is a figure for ongoingness in the Chthulucene". To stay in the timeplace of trouble, to be present, is to allow the process of becoming-with to be

observed. O'Neil (2010) describes this multispecies viewpoint of becoming-with as an *umwelt*, a combining of organism and environment to create a meaningful environment for each organism. Here the form of worlding creates the 'becoming-with' to that which is encountered by us and others. As philosopher Kate Wright (2014, pp. 279-280) has said of 'becoming with', "in becoming-dog one does not acquire fur or paws, but becomes attuned to a multiplicity of worlds through encounter with a new relational context – a doggish Umwelt". In terms of a posthuman subject, it is crucial to collectively think through what we are becoming and, as Braidotti (2019, p. 74) asks "how much transformation, pain, dis-identification or enhancement our embodied and embrained selves can take". Braidotti brings into the throes the need for collectivity, highlighting the 'we', and 'becoming with' or 'becoming-world-together' to propose new ways of living with the more than human present of devastating in Anthropocentric and advanced capitalist times. Braidotti indicates:

A multiple 'we' becoming-world-together amidst the painful contradictions of the Anthropocene, when the waves of world history – this time round – may be about to erase from the sandy shores of this planet the face of many other species. (2019 p. 74)

My practice-led research is a form of becoming-with and staying with the trouble, when I work in the studio, I contemplate Haraway's concept of timeplace as I comingle with more than human others to imagine Braidotti's (2019) 'becoming-world-together' through encounters, anticipating studio practices of bringing together the human with more than human sounds, critters, organic and inorganic matter.

As an extension of our care to the more than human world I draw on the companion species of Haraway and of making kin. Haraway and Adele E. Clarke in *Making Kin not Population* (2018, p. 3) raise concerns as they write of "major categories that signal trouble: feminism, reproduction, population, environment, kin" as they attempt to bring together ways of reimagining and speculating on futures by generating ideas toward developing environmental protections, reproductive justice and ways to stem the continuing loss of biodiversity and species to positively "diversify kinmaking" (2018, p. 3). The Care Collective, (2020) is a multidisciplinary group that aims to address and to understand the multiple crises of care. This collective opposes capitalism by bringing care to the forefront of politics, using care as an alternative model to neoliberal capitalism, in *The Care Manifesto: The*

*Politics of Interdependence* (2020) care is called for at a time when capitalism pushes aside social and community care. The manifesto argues for recognition that we live in a world alongside and in connection with the human and more than human. The aggression and ambivalence held for those different to ourselves is hugely problematic and results in a care-less world, as *The Care Collective* (Andreas Chatzidakis, Jamie Hakim, Jo Littler, Catherine Rottenberg, and Lynne Segal) write:

Such profound lack of care on a global scale has also created a world *that is itself in crisis*. Numerous economists and environmentalists have long argued that perpetual economic growth is completely incompatible with environmental limits and with preserving a habitable planet. ( 2020, p. 9)

We are in precarious times and according to *The Care Manifesto* (Chatzidakis et al. 2020, p. 96), “the current global calamity is clearly a moment of profound rupture”. This rupture could be a moment that brings renewed speculation of futures by imagining new models beyond the perpetual growth and extractionist characteristic of colonialism and the Anthropocene.

Only once we recognise our shared entanglement in conflict – along with its powerful corollary, an awareness of our shared vulnerability and interdependence – that we can begin to develop new caring imaginaries on a global scale. (Chatzidakis et al. 2020, p. 94)

We are entangled in these times of precarious uncertainty, as we sit in times of unrest and of unknown futures. Our entanglements with places, our choices, our way of living, our state of mind and our relationships. The precariousness of our current state exposes our epic need for change, one that “moves our caring imaginaries beyond kinship structures, communities and nation states to the furthest reaches of the ‘strangest’ parts of the planet” (Chatzidakis et al. 2020, p. 95). Feminist theorist Judith Butler argues, in *The Force of Nonviolence* (2020), that individualism, the use of ‘self’ in self-defence, as an excuse for violence is both ethically and politically problematic. As politically and ethically “nonviolence would have to account for this way that selves are implicated in each other’s lives, bound by a set of relations that can be as destructive as they can be sustaining” (2020, p.9). This nonviolent connection involves human relationships and “all living and inter-constitutive relations” (2020, p.9). This relationality and connectedness to the more than human world cannot defy destruction and as Butler (2020, p.10) writes, “relationality is a vexed and

ambivalent field in which the question of ethical obligation has to be worked out in light of a persistent and constitutive destructive potential". It is vital that the ethical should be thoroughly explored and the possibility that vulnerability and resistance could graft together ways for forms of resistance to emerge and demonstrate the supported persistence of life (Butler 2020, p.184). Drawing on Braidotti's (2019, p. 37) ideas of resistance as a shared and considered solidarity can be actuated this shared solidarity and resistance is necessary when trying to look beyond colonialism and capitalism to "work affirmatively and defend grounded locations, complexity and a praxis-orientated, differential vision of what binds us together".

### 1.5 Tying Threads of Encounters

As we are positioned in such a precarious time and the future offers uncertainty, this unknowing could hold space for new modes of thinking, of curiosity, of remaking, reimagining and adapting to the changing planet. In this state of uncertainty, we can draw on all knowledges and practices – human and more than human, and in an effort to look beyond colonialism - explore and speculate on the adaptability and possibilities of a reimagined world. The places we live, the encounters and entanglements we have with the human and more than human offer up a different knowledge base from which to navigate future encounters and afford the generation of possibilities. Our relationship to the more than human creates shared encounters and shared places, and it is from this vital shared point of connection that the relationship of human and more than human are constantly becoming with, altering and adapting. This shifting away from human as centre would enable a multiplicity of voices that to be heard. The solidarity and connections that Plumwood (Rose 2013) deems vital, includes gathering knowledges. The naturecultures of Braidotti (2019) incorporates a sense of connection to a collective, not necessarily united, world. Speculating how naturecultures could espouse interconnections in numerous alternate ways as we all look to subsist on this planet together Braidotti writes that:

Clearly 'we' are in *this* posthuman convergence together, but this does not necessarily spell out an ontological kind of Humanism that has unified all the humans and thus flattened out the structural differences that separate us. (2019, p.156)

This chapter has drawn together a group of thinkers who recast how we relate to all that is around us. Haraway, Braidotti, Plumwood, Rose and Smith each contribute to the development of a posthuman becoming. Their critical writing generates ideas about ways to move forward on this changing planet. As species around us do, the human also needs to adapt quickly and in multiple ways, to listening and valuing the varied knowledges and experiences of everyone – human and more than human earthly inhabitants to impel new ways of living on this planet. Drawing on encounters with key theorists I look to a tentacular and comingling studio practices to explore symbiotic relations of organic and inorganic materials, bringing these together and imagining the critters and *taniwha* that my encounters evoke. I draw on the imaginary forms of artists to explore their methods and to generate ideas of hybrid sculptures of critter and kin.

Creative Passage:

May 2020

*I have been looking to see what else I could use, an alternative to latex that is organic yet similar in appearance, this would be used in conjunction with carpet underlay, and other manmade materials. I have been investigating Kombucha leather after seeing masks made from cellulose during the COVID 19 pandemic. Materials derived from grown scoby are pliable and offer much to work with. I can experiment with the growing process and develop a method for working with cultures. I become familiar with the thickness, the varying drying and stretching techniques, perhaps changing the colour through dying, the pliability and flexibility is of use when shaping across and into forms. I pierce the moulded forms, joining it with other components of my work. The appearance of the 'leather' or 'fabric' as it is often called, is very similar to that of latex, the colour even deepens when exposed to sunlight as does latex. However, the reverse process is required as layers cannot be built up slowly with brushwork or dipping as is the process when working with latex. The kombucha's thickness is dictated by the time it spends growing, the thickness built from each bacterial woven layer. However, I do not see why layers cannot be overlapped and depending on the coating - mineral oil and beeswax would work to create a plastic wrap consistency which may then possibly be easily layered. The process is very simple, filtered water is boiled and black tea is added then cooled, kombucha and sugar are then added and is then poured into a glass container and left for 2-4 weeks. The Scoby (the thick bacteria woven layer) is removed and dried, an oily substance is then applied. This process, although very slow, does not require a lab or temperature control and is highly possible to do in the home or studio. The ability to experiment with mixtures, dyes, thicknesses, drying and especially with the last process of making it pliable means that adjustments and explorations can be suited to the end material.*



Creative Passage:

July 2020

*Through using these materials in this process of becoming with – I explore new relationships, which I hope will continue to alter as I head in new and unpredictable directions, and conditions that continually change and shift. It is vital that I continue to pay attention to potentialities as they transpire. We all have different and complex shared and individual relationships with that around us. My artistic process reflects upon relationships with my surroundings, with other humans, pets and wildlife, or as Haraway would say – all earthly critters. My immanent interactions include my response to the stuff of life, such as the milk I buy from the store – in particular the coconut milk that formed a skin after a prolonged stay in the fridge – the skin is still in my mind as a possible material to make work with - it was smooth and slimy like clay slip and it dried papery – similar to the scoby. The plaster and carpet underlay, clay, the mycelium grown at home but store brought ready to grow in plastic and boxes. Sounds that surround my senses on my walks through the bush, the sound of my breath, of my dogs breath and paws on the earth as they run, songs from my childhood of mythical water monsters, keys typing on a keyboard – the list is inexhaustible.*

## **Chapter 2 Beautiful Monsters: creating symbiotic creatures in the studio**

This transversal alliance today involves non-human agents, technologically mediated elements, Earth-others (land, waters, plants, animals) and non-human inorganic agents (plastic buckets, wires, software, algorithms, etc). (Braidotti 2019, p. 164)

This chapter contributes to my research project by locating my studio work in the context of key artists as I explore my interest in adaptability characterised by the idea of the monster. I employ the figure of the monster as a generative and productive entity. I do this through an exploration of critters, speculative symbiotic relationships and uninhabitable places and this is where I encounter the adaptability of the more than human world. In my sculptural work, the comingling of biomaterials and industrial waste products combine to demonstrate dialogue and symbiotic relationships. I produce experimental pieces that represent comingling of species. Critters become less obviously representational and extend to sculptural works that I think of as adapting, changing and creating relationships between the organic and inorganic as sculptural monsters. The critters I explore and that I create are not a frightening or threatening malevolent force as is so often the case in literature and much popular culture. The monstrous winged or bulging bodied forms of critters allow me to imagine in my work the multiple ways industrial waste materials could become with living creatures in our changing world.

In my research into adaptability in the Anthropocene, I have explored examples of organic and inorganic symbioses such as the water striders that now use plastic in oceans to lay eggs - vastly increasing their numbers (Marshall, 2012). The changes to our planet are occurring quickly - altering our relationships, changing how human and other species live, and creating new species and new forms of connection. I am interested in the various instances of give give, give and take, or take, that occurs in symbiotic relationships, the most ideal being that of mutualism whereby all critters, human and the more than human benefit from the interaction. Commensalism, another type of symbiotic connection is one of minimal intrusion, whereby the symbiont benefits with minimal or no impact to the host (BiologyOnline 2021). The waste, toxins and destruction by our species, positions our relationship to the natural world as one of parasitism, (the final category of symbiotic

relationships), where extractionist colonial and capitalist systems allow the human symbiont benefits to the detriment of the host, our planet and all that relies upon its balanced health. The inundation of waste products and destruction to ecosystems is affecting the ways in which adaptation occurs, creating new kinds of symbiotic relationships. The water striders symbiotic relationship to intrusive waste is one example, where plastic has been introduced to our oceans causing death and poor ocean health, and this waste now plays a key role in the life of the water strider. Donna Haraway (2016, p. 125) uses the term 'sympoiesis', to imply 'making with' when imagining multispecies collaboration, as a way of living together in troubled and changing times. This 'making with' is a collaboration of human with the more than human world and is vital to imagine new ways of living. The monsters of the posthuman world are not the dreaded, malignant monsters dreamed up by Frankenstein, rather they are framed in my research as the generative hub of my practice, providing me with forms from which I can break into fragments and rework to create speculative and nuanced biomes, drawing on the adaptability of critters and of the human to the more than human in new ways.

In this chapter I will draw on the work of Australian artists Svenja Kratz and Patricia Piccinini and their imaginary hybrid sculptures. They incorporate the monster into their practice, sculptural creatures connecting human and more than human in creative ways. Drawing on their artwork enables me to generate ideas of symbiotic relations and to speculate on posthuman critter and kin. I discuss the introduction of carpet underlay material to my studio work and the creatures I have created. And I explore the biomaterials used in my practice, alongside an exploration of the work of Australian artist Isadora Vaughan in relation to her biomaterial works. The combining of human and more than human in sculpture challenges the ideas of dualities between human / nature by weaving these together to evoke thinking beyond humanist relationships and human exceptionalism.

## 2.0 Beautiful Monsters: comingling hybrid creatures of Svenja Kratz, Patricia Piccinini, taniwha and my posthuman monsters.

*One day a taniwha was swimming in the moana*<sup>8</sup> (sea and lakes)... is the opening song line of a Aotearoa mythological water creature (Aunty Bea (Piatarahi Tui Yates) 1974). When I was growing up, I interpreted the song of the *taniwha* as a playful and friendly song about a child who wanted to go swimming in the sea with a monster that would show them the wonders beneath the water. *He whispered in my taringa*<sup>9</sup> (ear) *won't you come and swim with me underneath the deep blue sea...* This provocative invitation gave way for the imagination to day dream about what could possibly be found under the waters. Some say that the *taniwha* is dangerous, that it will lure you into the waters from which you will not return - used by some as a warning song to remind children not to speak with strangers or to stray too far from their parents' side. However, the *taniwha* is seen as both a monster to be feared and the protector of waters, and of the Māori people whose vessel originally made safe passage to Aotearoa<sup>10</sup>. This song conjures up the mystical and imaginary - the wonderful and the dangerous. This song also points to vessels and water and this became increasingly important for my research project as I looked into processes of adaptability amongst water creatures. I investigated tube worms, olms and other water dwelling creatures for their monstrous likeness, their strangeness and their ability to survive and adapt in uninhabitable places. Using different clay types and air dry clay (Figure 1) I created tubes and small imaginary reefs or gardens of animal and plants, using textures and form to create detailed works. Whilst researching these creatures, I encountered carpet underlay left on a building site in summer 2020. I collected this material and played with its

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<sup>8</sup> **1. (noun)** sea, ocean, large lake. From the *Te Aka Māori-English, English-Māori Dictionary and Index*, Moorfield, J C 2003

<sup>9</sup> **2. (noun)** ear. From the *Te Aka Māori-English, English-Māori Dictionary and Index*, Moorfield, J C 2003

<sup>10</sup> **Taniwha** definition expanded on from 'Taniwha', *Te Ara – the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, Keane, B (2007) pp 1-2 are supernatural creatures in Māori tradition, similar to serpents and dragons in other cultures. They were said to hide in the ocean, rivers, lakes or caves. Some taniwha would eat and kill people, or kidnap women. Others were believed to be guardians for a tribe, and people would offer them gifts and say a karakia (spell). Many taniwha were associated with the sea. A large number were said to have come with the voyaging canoes that brought the Polynesian ancestors of the Māori people to Aotearoa (New Zealand).

Tuhirangi

Kupe was the great navigator who is reputed to have discovered New Zealand while travelling in the Matawhaorua canoe. He placed one of his guardian taniwha, Tugirangi, in Cook Strait. Tuhirangi guided a protected canoes, and was later believed to have reappeared in the form of a well-known dolphin named Pelorus Jack, which accompanied ships in this stretch of water.

malleability, the ease of which it was folded into forms and the softness of the outer colours – speckled pastels and the vibrancy of the industrial colours on the inside. In 2020, Victoria was in the midst of multiple lockdowns and I collected more carpet underlay material from site bins. I worked with this material to create creature forms, vessels with tails and fins, that have been readapted into sculptural forms for my final body of work.

The monstrous *taniwha* brings up the wild - the untamed and unknown. Monsters of myth and story, of large water creatures that may have roamed the waters and interacted with humans as indicated in cultural stories and song stir up the imagination and bring connection to the more than human world. Through my investigation of artists that explicitly reference the idea of hybridity and the monstrous, I have drawn parallels with my own work as I focus on shaping creatures out of various materials. A photographic series from 2020 (Figure 2) features the underlay felt forms as fellow creatures coexisting with my children. In these photographs, the grass ripples like the ocean, and in one of the photographs, the vessels are small dots. The forms themselves are monster-like, resembling catfish and olm with whisker trails and paddle-like legs. The soft underlay bodies of pastel flecks, folding and opening into vessels - containers. As discussed in chapter 3, the carpet underlay creatures in these photographs were later reconfigured differently, combined with new materials for my final body of work, but they began as recognisably hybrid animals, in relationship to landscape and children.

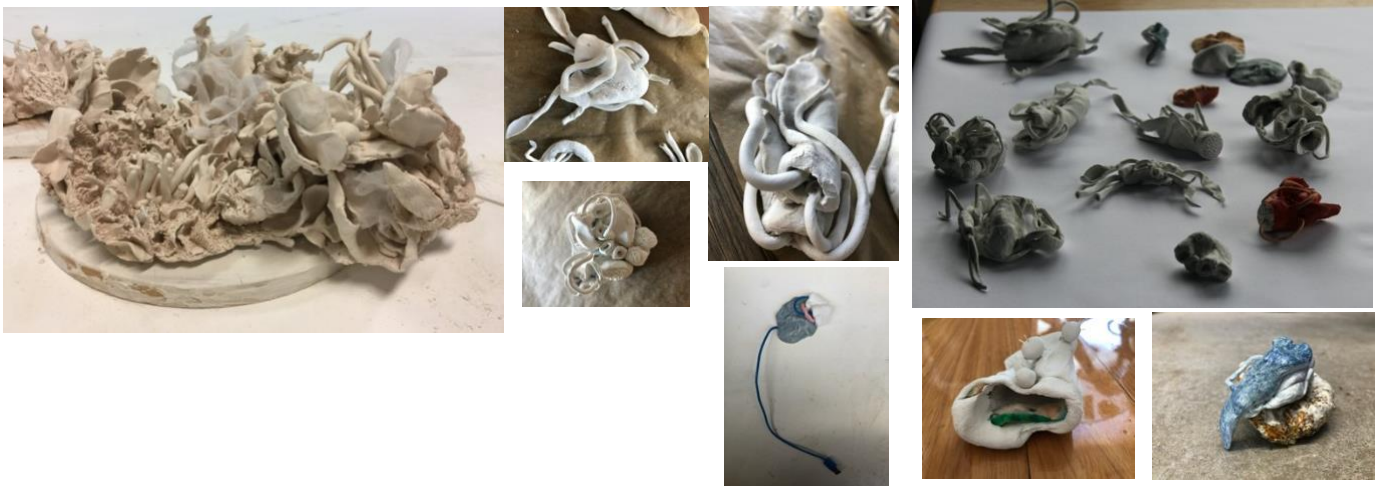


Figure 1: Genevieve Thornton, *ceramic study (left)*, 2018, unglazed stoneware and fabric, claw, 30cm x 42cm x 38cm, *airdry clay studies (right)*, 2020, 3cm x 3cm x 4cm – 4cm x 4cm x 12cm, experiments with materials, airdry clay and mycelium, airdryclay and underlay.



Figure 2 Genevieve Thornton, *Untitled*, 2019, Photographs of carpet underlay works

Kratz and Piccinini are creators of imaginary forms that could be described as monstrous. These anthropomorphic creature forms are strange new hybrids proposing new ways to think through our ideas about the future. Piccinini creates sculptures that evoke empathy for other species. Haraway (2008, p. 288) explores Piccinini's hybrid sculptures as "living beings in knotted and dynamic ecologies", acknowledging how her artwork explores ways that native species flourish in both new and old places. As resources alter they adapt, such as introduced pest snails and slugs becoming the main components of the kookaburra's diet after their displacement from their former habitat (2008). Haraway (2008, p. 288), referencing Piccinini's work, writes that "introducing species (from another watershed, another continent, or another imagination) is often a world-destroying cut, as well as sometimes an opening to healing or even to new kinds of flourishing". Rosi Braidotti and Piccinini (Piccinini 2019) "share a life-long interest in issues of embodiment, difference, the politics of diversity, feminism and anti-racism human". Piccinini (2019) attributes her experience of being an outsider in a new country to her way of seeing how dichotomies of the human/ nature impact our world negatively. Her work looks to science and our DNA to explain the similarities of humans to other species. I relate to this view of the world that alsois shared with Braidotti, as a need to find new ways of being human and new ways of living in this more than human world, bringing in to question whether Piccinini's imaginary hybridsare our speculative futures. The strength of our future is in our difference and the politics of diversity. The work of Haraway and Piccinini encompass 'kin'. Piccinini (2019) in her work *Kindred* (2018) (Figure 3), carefully uses the word 'kindred' to express 'kin' both as a family unit and as human to other species, just as Haraway calls for critters to be thought of as Kin to humankind particularly important for culminative relationships necessary for the survival of all species. Using the term kin Haraway investigates these relationships through fiction in her writing of *The Camille Stories* (2016). She looks at interesting configurations where human and animal are combined, such as hybrid human and butterflyed creatures with a tentacular beard. Haraway's stories are an imaginative way of interconnecting species, and of implying intermingling and multispecies practices of critters as kin. Her stories allow ideasto flow about what relationships with kin of all species could look like. Piccinini also does this with her hybrid sculptures, creating a narrative that invites empathy and familiarity. Transdisciplinary artist Kratz creates work that connects her experience to the more than human in her works. She uses human cells

in her work, comingling these with other matter as she combines critter parts to create speculative creatures that evoke monstrous beings. Haraway, Braidotti, Piccinini and Kratz look to science and technology as one way humankind might forge forward in posthuman times, however, they hold reservations as to how much we rely on technology and science to save our future



Figure 3 Patricia Piccinini, *Kindred*, 2018, silicone, fibreglass and hair, 103x 95 x 128 cm, Roslyn Oxley Gallery



The possibilities of a posthuman relationship of science and arts collaborating is essential to Kratz's practice as she incorporates Saos2 cell experimentation works and hybrid taxidermy insects. During a residency with the Tissue Repair and Regeneration (TRR) Group at the Queensland University of Technology, Kratz (2012, p. 264-265) explored biotechnologies, with a focus on emphasising interconnections of organisms and the environment. Using the cells of an 11-year-old girl to culture she conducted co-culture experimentations and environmental variant experimentations. These human cells distanced her from the idea of the human and she discovered that the engagement produced complex responses, stating: "The more time I spent working with and observing the Saos-2 cells under the microscope, the more they seemed like strange and alien creatures, with little connection to their original human donor" (2012, p. 265). This perception- the distancing of cell to human - may have enabled her to imagine more unfamiliar- alien imagery. The work of Kratz combines the curiosity of visual arts and the exploration of science as she amalgamates cells in an impractical and nonsensical experimental manner- purely to see what will happen. Of relevance to my project is how she grows her materials and how she combines materials to create sculptural works. In her collaborations the variability of so many factors contribute to the outcome of Kratz's artworks and the scientific processes. Of significance to my research is a series of seven untitled assemblages of imagined hybrid insects, *Untitled (Hybrid) Insects*, (2008) (Figure 4), constructed from animal, insect, and human (skin and hair). In these she has comingled human co-culture and insect cells by printing images of human and insect cell co-cultures onto the wings. She continues multiple species comingling by applying white pigment dots to the insects of corresponding samples of cells mixed with pigment (Kratz 2015). The works are exhibited in a suitably scientific circular petri dish within an enclosed perspex casing with empty metal labels. The decision to leave the labels blank and the work untitled suggests Kratz may have left the viewer to grapple with suitable titles for her subjects. Or perhaps this open-endedness demonstrates how humans do not possess all the answers, and do not have the ability to classify all species - especially future species that have not yet come into existence. Kratz's works allow me to imagine future critters that adapt and forge symbiotic relationships with enduring waste products that flourish in destructed landscapes and uninhabitable places. I am also interested in the way Kratz uses

biomaterials by comingling unconventional combinations of materials to form sculptural works of hybridised critters.



Figure 4 Svenja Kratz, *Untitled (Hybrid) Insects*, detail of taxidermy insects, 2008  
<<https://www.svenjakratz.com/portfolios/hybrid-insects/>>

Piccinini is similarly imaginative in her approach to her life-like multispecies sculptures; made from silicone and human hair layered over fibreglass forms to create the skin of hybrid creatures. These fleshy works are appealing, the bloated belly and soft shoulders and cheeks of *Surrogate (for the Northern Hairynosed Wombat)* (2004) (Figure 5), for example, draw an affectionate gaze from the viewer; the sculptures possess a familiarity, vulnerability and empathy. The Northern Hairynosed Wombat is an endangered species and this sculpture explores ideas concerning how biotechnology could help species in such close proximity to extinction (Haraway 2008, p. 289). This work is one of a series of *Nature's Little Helpers* (2004), where Australian animals were re-imagined. *Surrogate* is designed to produce wombat babies and its many pouches can be readily seen on its body with babies at various stages of development. Piccinini's work imagines what is almost possible, by drawing the viewer into an empathetic exchange with creatures, especially as they comprise of vulnerable traits and sit in the gallery, an environment where they look out of place. Crossing paths in 2019, Braidotti questioned Piccinini about her works positing, "to a certain extent the hybrid creatures you create are more humane than most humans. They move us beyond the consumeristic objectification of their otherness and evoke empathy and understanding" (Piccinini 2019). In response to this understanding of her work by Braidotti, Piccinini (2019) replied that she sees her work as 'animal-pomorphic', as it is not "about attributing human characteristics to animals as much as recognising our shared 'animalness' in a 'new alliance'".

Piccinini's creatures appear soft and fleshy and hold our gaze with sorrow or strength in their eyes. In *The Young Family* (Figure 6) (2002-2003), the sow with the adorable babies appeals with her forlorn gaze, to all those who have been a caretaker to the young. The figure is a combination of creature types - pig, human and even unknown other. This work looks deeply into the possibilities of scientific creations and experimentations of symbiotic relations, exploring the ethical ramifications, scientific pursuits, and advancements, specifically in the breeding of creatures for organ harvesting. Central to this is the 'mother', Piccinini's work examines the need to create creatures for organ harvesting and the subsequent consequences of this - the creation of another creature that will possibly be able to populate, a creature mother that is caring and whole. In relation to caring, Piccinini (2002) sates "a side-effect beyond our control, as there will always be". She questions the

right-ness of organ farming but is honest in not omitting that although she shares empathy with the creature she would take one of their organs if it would save the life of one of her children (Piccinini, 2002). Such is a mother's love. There is a fierceness and monstrous side to the mother. This idea of the mother as monster shares a resonance with my sculptures, as I create works and components that I often refer to as mothers and children or babies. The mother as monster is one of fierce protection, like that of artist Louise Bourgeois' large scale *Maman (Ama)* (1999) (Figure 7) spider sculpture, and Braidotti's (1994) explorations concerning mothers, monsters and machines. A further example is the view Piccinini takes on the classic gothic novel of Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1817). Whilst Shelly is concerned with the ethics surrounding perfecting a human/ meddling in god's work - like Kratz's experimentations with cells and combining critters – Piccinini is concerned with the lack of understanding and poor parenting of Dr Frankenstein, "his refusal to accept and care for the monster he has created" (McDonald 2012, p. 39). The ethics of care, fused with the idea of the mother, and of mothers as ferocious protectors, is one that could possibly extend beyond the human to all critters and kin.



Figure 5 Patricia Piccinini, *Surrogate (for the Northern Hairynosed Wombat)*, 2004, Silicon, fibreglass, leather, plywood, human hair 120 × 350 × 350cm, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery.



Figure 6 Patricia Piccinini, *The Young Family*, 2002, silicone, polyurethane, leather, human hair, dimensions variable, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery.





Figure 7 Louise Bourgeois, *Maman (Ama)*, 1999, Bronze, marble, stainless steel, 895 x 980 x 1160 cm, Guggenheim Bilbao Museoa.

Like Kratz I grow organic materials as part of my research in the form of biomaterials that I am able to grow at home. I grow the materials with my children's help, as we do this together I think about posthuman parenting, relating with materials in the posthuman world. I also draw on the imagery of Kratz and Piccinini of hybrid multispecies to cultivate my own sculptural critters. Over time, however, my work has evolved to become less interested in anthropomorphic aspects and detailed representational sculptural works and has instead unfolded into a breaking down of recognisable forms. Moving away from representations of organic life to working with organic materials themselves. As the biomaterials of kombucha scoby and mycelium grow (Figure 8) they are formed into parts of sculptural anthropomorphic monsters. As I create the forms (Figure 9) I mould them around other works and in containers in an effort to create a symbiotic relationship between the materials and the forms. The rawness, colour and texture of the mycelium is unpleasant and the way they can grow in vast networks underground and in water are quite repellent and monstrous. The anthropomorphic monsters and biomaterials connect through the ideas of symbiosis and to adaptability applicable to materials.

To create reduced and adaptable forms I pull the creatures apart to reconfigure as fragments and combine grown materials with industrial waste materials. By working with materials to create parts in relation to each other, I apply ideas of symbiosis and adaptability to materials in more abstract forms. Biomaterials form a small but important part of my practice, allowing me to explore new artforms and processes with mycelium and scoby. My interest in mycelium is developed further through research into Anna Tsing's account of the matsutake mushrooms growth and its ability to thrive in disrupted landscapes and is reflected in the biomaterial sculptures of Australian artist Isadora Vaughan.





Figure 8 Genevieve Thornton, *documenting growth of mycelium work*, 2020, mycelium in plastic, 23 x 18 x 15 cm.



Figure 9 Genevieve Thornton, *documenting growth of mycelium work - using another work to shape the form*, 2020, mycelium in plastic, 33 x 31 x 12 cm.

## 2.1 Biomaterials: Isadora Vaughan and organic materials – biomaterials as sculptural forms

Isadora Vaughan recently exhibited works that incorporate mycelium and other biomaterials in interesting ways to emanate expression. In *OLGIVES 2020 Overlapping Magisteria* (2020) (Figure 10), and *Organs of transition* (2021) (Figure 11), Vaughan exhibits multiple organic forms. In *Overlapping Magisteria* her mycelium works are bulbous organic forms that slump and hang from steel racks. These gritty, earthy forms evoke a feeling of connection to the earth, the mycelium flourishing even after it is pulled from the earth or spawned in a laboratory and bagged is in plastic. The symbiotic relationship of human to more than human is embodied in the crude forms as they grow inside the plastic and continues as the works are exhibited in the gallery space under artificial lights. In Vaughan's exhibition *Organs of transition*, she has incorporated multiple forms of organic matter. In the gallery, the transition, flowform of changing light highlights the flux of her biomaterials. The seeping of jelly and wax visibly demonstrates constant flow and flux, and as curator Amanda Saker (2021) notes "throughout the day we can see the work constantly shifting and resettling – the wax, the cracking of the latex, the shifting of the plastic transparencies, the glass resettling". Saker (2021) writes that Vaughan has placed a "large flabby, bladder-like form, that appears as a bodily organ made of latex. It's bloated and interesting to look at. The work oozes and seeps with jelly and wax" (2021). This work draws on the inherent intelligence of the more than human world and the continual activity, ebbs and flows that is part of our everyday lives; considering the relationship of sculptural encounters to the more than human world. I work with biomaterial as it grows and adapts, molding or stretching over an edge and through this process I consider the forms carefully – taking essential contour and rounded forms or paddle-like parts and adapting these into my work somewhat repetitively. As I work with these living materials and shape them into new homes within my sculptures, I think back to the simplistic forms of the olm and the tubeworm – those critters that can live in uninhabitable spaces, and the matsutake that grow in damaged landscapes. Tsing (2015) shows how destruction caused by humans can provide room for species like matsutake to flourish. Through looking at how human and more than human adapt to destruction and to contaminated diversity can enable an exploration of these stories to understand the world around us in new ways.



Figure 10 Isadora Vaughan, *OGIVES 2020 Overlapping Magisteria*, installation view, 2020, ACCA Australian Centre for Contemporary Art.





Figure 11 Isadora Vaughan, *Organs of Cognition (detail)*, 2021 ceramic, *Meleleuca alternifolia*, steel fixings, beeswax, pig collagen, acrylic, latex, jelly wax, water, beef geletine, vegetable oils, The National: New Australian Art.

Tsing refers to the wake of devastated landscapes and to the possibility of life in these uninhabitable places, in *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (2015). Tsing shows the connections between human and more than human in surprising ways – economical, cultural, historical and through encounter. Some of my works are living and others non-living as I continue to discover new processes and art making methods. Tsing investigates the matsutake that grow beneath the white Oregon fur tree, an unusual host, that produces an unusual combination. This, Tsing (2015, p 52) writes “is an intriguing nature-culture knot in such indeterminacies. Different ways of smelling and different qualities of smell are wrapped up together”. The smell demonstrates a way of storytelling or of linking culture, and history to nature. I liken this to the seed bags Haraway (2016) writes of – the mute bags that propel a story forwards, and embraces an encounter between many. The smell of the matsutake brings with it, past memories and creates future memories through its discovery. Tsing writes that:

The smell of matsutake wraps and tangles memory and history-and not just for humans. It assembles many ways of being in an affect-laden knot that packs its own punch. Emerging from encounter, it shows us history-in-the-making. Smell it. (Tsing 2015, p 52)

This term encounter-based collaborations holds a connection to my practice whereby the materials and process - encounter and entanglement are combined, reconfigured with the intention of them comingling together. “Contaminated diversity is not only particular and historical, ever changing, but also relational. It has no self-contained units; its units are encounter-based collaborations” (Tsing 2015, p 33-34). And with these troubled stories can use our knowledge practices to encounter new ways forward (Tsing 2015). In *The Force of Nonviolence* (2020), Butler (2020, p. 184) binds the human destruction of the planet to violence. The “I” of the human and the “you” of the more than human world “can be exemplified by the encounter” as they need to flourish in order that the human be sustained. In my practice the more than human is combined with the industrial products and the makers hand to demonstrate a comingling of species and the adaption to environment. My combining of biomaterials with industrial waste materials builds symbiotic relationships and an ecosystem of sculptures that are at once at odds with each other and deeply intimate in their proximity. Drawing on ideas of comingling I develop multiple

hybrids to evoke symbiotic relationships of human to more than human, bringing together my sculptural forms to create an umwelt of posthuman critter and kin.

*Creative Passage:*

*June 2019*

*Along my walks in the bush I find the hollows, crevices and soft forms interesting. The fungi's soft bulbous form speaks of weightlessness, of growth and of adaptation and inhabitation of spaces. The stumps of trees, holes not punctuated but gradually formed over a long time. The area around the hole is often rounded, bevelled, drawing the eye in slowly. It is not so much the hole that I find beautiful but the way it has been constructed and the sense of long time - the long days and nights of slowly forming around an obstacle. The roundness of the wood gives the appearance of softness, of folds of skin or fabric. The stumps are simple forms yet intricate on close inspection, lines, crevices, peeling bark, holes. I am drawn to the effect and soft appearance of hard forms. Clay can suggest this same softness- even after it is hardened after firing. The carpet underlay is a soft material, it is rigid enough that small details, bends and intricate folds are not possible, but it creates wonderful larger sweeping folds that hold similar scale and roundness to trunks and stumps.. One interconnecting component of the more than human world – the voice of the earth that Plumwood describes- the rolling hills, the curve of rivers, of time, adaptation - the more than human world.*

Creative Passage:

November 2020

Lake Tyers – FLOAT residency

*I encounter web - it catches my arm as I walk along a sandy path at midday, the sun beating down causing me to perspire, droplets running down the sides of forehead, falling to the dry sand amidst the running insects. The tracks of a snake left in the sand – a perfect diamond shaped head with a scaly texture on a winding body- prompting me to stop and discontinue down the path – I turn back and alter my course, just as my presence, footsteps and sweat droplets, tearing of web – has altered the projectory of the more than human. Later, I interact with materials and the more than human as I press clay onto old disused web that lies temporarily on its flight path on the deck in the sunny afternoon, stuck unconvincingly to a protruding nail head. An earlier encounter with the Cambropachycope, an animal with one of the oldest compound eyes, while I searched google – thinking at first glance that I am looking at a technological piece of equipment or a toy – a microphone - not eyes staring back at me. Perhaps it could be mistaken as a new drone with greater flight ease, lightweight with powerful video and recording abilities. From the thin body of this minute 1.5 mm animal protrude 10 limbs, 2 approximating fins or paddles and 6 limbs covered in tiny hairs. The head of this animal draws into a point at the back and its solitary compound eye consists of numerous lenses. From my encounter with this animal I imagine future species, human and more than human, and as I listen to Ursula Le Guin's stories, *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *Earthsea*, I am reminded that the unimaginable is never out of reach and is perhaps already here. I look to encounters and to the ways of becoming with as paths cross, insights are shared, human and more than human stories are told, and knowledge is practiced and shared. The experiences of others is vital in gathering up information on how we relate to others as we live in this world at present and speculate on futures of alternative pathways.*



### **Chapter Three Umwelt: comingling sculptural forms of critter and kin**

Global landscapes today are strewn with this kind of ruin. Still, these places can be lively despite announcements of their death; abandoned asset fields sometimes yield new multispecies and multicultural life. In a global state of precarity, we don't have the choices other than looking for life in this ruin. Our first step is to bring back curiosity. (Tsing 2015, p. 16)

My practice encounters the ruins of the Anthropocene and draws on Anna Tsing's (2015) idea of making things lively again through a sculptural process, exploring my relationship to the more than human in the Anthropocentric present: a colonial and capitalist place of precarity and uncertainty. In chapter one I established an account of my understanding of our current epoch and the multiple crises and challenges of our times. I explained the way I have approached creating artworks while reflecting on the works of key philosophers and theorists who grapple with these issue. I have reflected on their proposals for ways to rethink our ways of being in the world. Here I have found a way to think through their ideas on relationships between the human and the more than human world through my experiences of encounter while walking, reading, making artwork, collecting materials and writing. I use my entanglements with these theoretical frameworks as I create artworks, as a way of thinking and working through ideas, speculating on posthuman worlds and becoming with. The artworks begin as encounters with materials and ideas and they are created as parts in a process of becoming with materials to produce art forms. As I draw on key theorists, I create forms that are a physical and visual enactment of remaking, decentring, and reworlding – perhaps a resistance through an altering of the materials original course as a discarded product. Through my process I engage with the term 'umwelt' in an effort to form multispecies relationships and a way of being in and with the more than human world (2017, p. 4). This chapter will be divided into three parts to unpack my final body of my practice led research project. The first part offers an account of my experimental studio methodology and process based decision making. It positions my approach to artmaking alongside artists Eva Hesse and Phyllida Barlow in relation to materials and process and bringing disparate forms and materials together. I then unpack my video works, connecting explicitly to ideas of place, interactions with the more than human and creature languages through recorded images and sounds. Finally I speak directly

to the final exhibition, pulling ideas and practice together in a gallery space, explaining my decision to create a sculptural community that echoes Donna Haraway's ideas of making 'oddkin'. The approach to my final exhibition draws on the way Barlow and Isadora Vaughan exhibit their work, where the gallery space becomes vital to the installation of work. The final body of work consists of two interrelated parts, a sculptural installation and a video work. These artworks are the reworked elements of materials, organic and inorganic that come together to investigate speculative adaptability as my response to the critical questions of how to stay with the trouble in times of global precarity.

### **3.0 Eva Hesse and Phyllida Barlow: studio practice, materials and process.**

Close examination of the work of artists Eva Hesse and Phyllida Barlow has been valuable in developing new non-anthropomorphising relationships. These play out in the way I build creatures and then pull them apart, joining them into reconfigured communities where new combinations of materials and forms touch and sit against each other. I have investigated the approaches to sculptural assemblages of Hesse and Barlow to form ideas about comingling with an emphasis on the relationship between materials.

I have re-examined the work of Hesse while in lockdown during the pandemic and comingled her work with my questions about our moments of crisis and encounters with the more the human world. Hesse used non-traditional materials, often industrial materials, not made to withstand light and time like traditional sculptural marble, metal or wood. These materials were pulled together, strung up or protruded from floors and walls in unwieldy ways. Hesse's art produced a new way of thinking about the material world of late capitalism and our relationship to it. Art historian Rosalind Krauss (2002, p. 27-28) locates Hesse's work as a response to the post war boom, where the ability for industrialised material goods to be readily produced created a new consumer dynamic. Materials for Hesse were extremely important in that they allowed her to further express her

experiences, and of the process of making art. In reference to *Contingent* (1969) (Figure 15), Krauss describes how Hesse demonstrated a moving mastery, where:

[the]...voice of authority that spoke through the image of *Contingent* was delivering the message of privacy, of a retreat from language, of a withdrawal into those extremely personal reaches of experience that are beyond, or beneath speech. (Krauss 2002, p. 28)

*Contingent* is a work which has long resonated with me. The translucency, the light, the weight and materials and the way the work is hung creates an ethereal yet simultaneously grounded work. It has the appearance of raw silk, perhaps of inferior quality to those who dismiss texture and depth and prefer the sheen of a finer material. Krauss (2002, p. 28) likens Hesse's work to pre-linguistic language as glottal sounds or "raw acoustical matter, at what is practically the condition of noise", where the material of *Contingent* is a "declaration about the expressive power of matter itself, of matter held down to a level of the sub-articulate". By delving into inert matter, Krauss (2002, p. 28) suggests an experience of the self is stamped into the matter's core (2002, p. 28). These far-reaching personal experiences that are beyond speech could be likened to the creature languages of Val Plumwood and to Haraway's mute seed bag, they are expressive in an alternate way. The creature languages offer a different viewpoint and an altered expression of the world, and the seed bag is swept up in stories, stamped into and forming new stories. The expression is beyond speech.

The luminosity of *Contingent* prompted my desire to experiment with latex, the formal possibilities of layering and coating manmade latex over organic matter is conducive to the conceptual aims of my research. I have experimented with using latex over ceramic forms and with scoby over airdrying clay, by layering multiple materials and bringing component parts of unmade works together to create forms (Figures 12-14).



Figure 12 Genevieve Thornton, *Experimentation work*, 2020, latex layerover bisque ceramic, 14 x 46 x 14.5 cm.

Figure 13 Genevieve Thornton, *Experimentation work*, 2020, latex layer over bisque airdry clay, 1.2 x 1.2 x 13 cm.

Figure 14 Genevieve Thornton, *Experimentation work*, 2020, kombucha scoby layer over airdry clay, 4.5 x 5.2 x 11 cm

The texture and appearance of the biomaterials that I grow and work with can be felt with the viewers eyes, and this is part of the haptic appeal of Hesse's works, seen in *Stratum* (1967-1968) (Figure 16), with holes, tubing and dripping latex. Hesse experimented to see what could be done with materials, in particular their surface and texture to see how far they could be pushed, stretched, layered, and she then brought them back together in unexpected combinations. Of primary focus to Hesse was the immediacy and responsiveness of materials. While creating works Hesse did not concern herself with their durability and unknown longevity (Molesworth 2019, p.9). The works that I produced for this project embrace the disintegration of materials as vulnerability and reliance on others or of components that together create a whole. Although Hesse used mostly inorganic materials the work still possesses an earthy quality - it is raw and honest, laying bare marks left behind from the making process. It is often constructed in a way that appears at times crude, what Briony Fer (2014) refers to in her lecture: 'Abstraction and abjection: Eva Hesse and conditions of making, States of Abstraction' as "artifactual, to describe a kind of art that shows itself to be made, if not necessarily handmade, but that highlights...the problem of make-ability under the conditions of advanced capital". The works are often rounded and bulbous and this too grounds the work. Her bodily works can be seen as sensual and sexual; however, they are at their core, forms, and the body is one of many 'absurd' organisms or machines that are composed of ins and outs and connections. I find the curves and the shape to hold prominence as a pull to nature as biomorphic forms.



Figure 15 Eva Hesse, *Contingent*, 1969, Reinforced fiberglass, latex over cheesecloth, National Gallery of Australia.



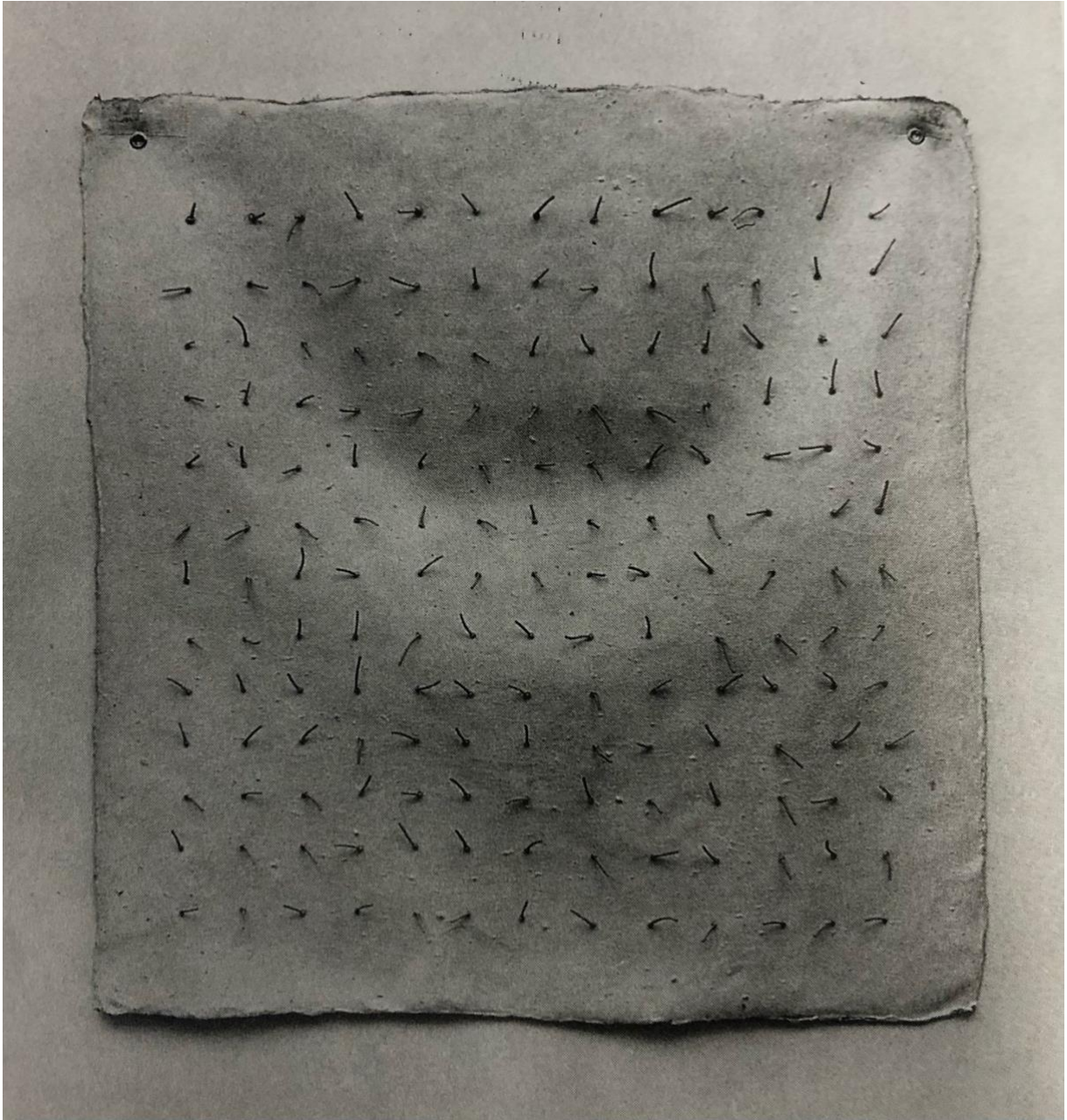


Figure 16 Eva Hesse, *Stratum*, 1967-1968, Pigmented latex, rubber tubing, and grommets, 106.7 x 106.7 cm, Washington State University Museum of Art, Pullman.

The terms method and process were not often used by Hesse, as they tend to imply there is an end. Her work and process should be viewed as a continuity, perhaps as becoming-with. The body, with its curves and lack of edges save the one where flesh meets air – although this as an edge could be contested. Her drawings became ever more sculptural as time progressed and Hesse began to use a vast array of materials, experimenting with scale and unconventional approaches to installation within gallery spaces – hanging and protruding works from walls and ceilings. Hesse states: “I varied the materials further. And then it just grew. And they came from the floor, the ceiling, or the walls. Then it just became whatever it became” (Molesworth 2019, p. 3). I explored a range of processes to create specific pieces in response to the work of Hesse (Figure 17). These artworks were created with disused industrial products of cable and plastic coated copper. The fabric components I incorporate are recycled from old blinds. I have entangled industrial and biomaterials to create a clear correlation between the work of Hesse and my own practice, with the intention of creating a dialogue and sense of connection between my forms.

Within my practice the edges have cropped up in conversation with my peers and supervisors in a similar way to the way edges are spoken of in the work of Hesse. The edges are few in my work – rather there are folds becoming internal hollows. The edges of Hesse are mulled over by writer William S. Wilson, arguing that Hesse did not commit to existing systems of procedures, mathematical or other, but rather situated herself towards an edge - a place where:

she could contemplate the transitions from separate parts to any wholeness. She could see how separate pieces could become parts of a system, as in the interdependencies of parts in an organic wholeness, and she could see that the pieces lost their separateness when they functioned within such a system. (Wilson 1996. p, 430)

Hesse did not want the work be a full illusion but rather illusionary – on the periphery of the illusion. The distance from the edges, the separation of the work from the space, other works and other systems is integral to the individuality of Hesse’s work, she was radical for her time, and enjoyed pushing against the dominant thinking about the processes of artistic practice.



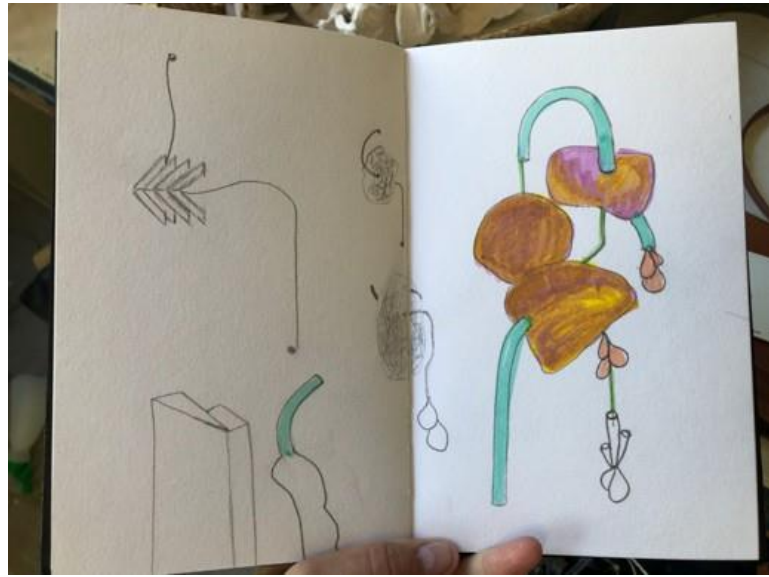


Figure 17 Genevieve Thornton, *Experimental artworks created in response to the work of Hesse*, 2019-2020, mycelium, airdry clay, disused waste - cable, plastic covered wire, polystyrene noodle, blinds & sketchbook page.

In my practice I do not see the edges or a true separateness - but a partial one that holds a dialogue, by drawing the pieces together. They are situated within a shared space and the conversation they hold, it is this dialogue between the edges that fills the space. This is in part the forms, their textural qualities and materials but also the arrangement of the works within the space. I am intrigued by the idea of this dialogue – like an invisible language that draws the works together. Barlow considers the gallery space to be part of her installation when she creates her works, working with the parameters of the space in a way that expands it. In *Peninsula* (2004) (Figure 18) Barlow installed industrial scaled sculptures that seem unrelated and out of place in the gallery space, however, the careful placement of artworks running diagonally across the floor, smaller works either side of a larger, intricately wrapped steel construction, provide a connection and unity. Barlow allows for varying space between the sculptures, close enough to provide a dialogue and apart enough to remain singular forms. The middle form is the largest in the room, however, its bulk is minimised by the open weave of the red tape that wraps its steel framed skeleton. This interconnection between distinct forms to create an environment is also seen in her work monumental work, *Untitled: dock: crushed tower* (2014) (Figure 19), exhibited at Duveen Galleries at Tate Britain, where Barlow says, “the space itself became an encounter, like a walk or a hill that has to be climbed—just a fact of life” (Cole 2016). This work is comprised of seven pieces, and Carmen Julia writes in her curatorial essay that this work:

offers an antagonistic counterpart to the austere neoclassical vessel housing it, abounding in formal irony to represent everything the Duveen Galleries are not – excess, chaos, disproportion, dissonance, malleability and ephemerality. (Julia 2014)

The viewer looks from one sculpture to another and other elements of architecture, connecting these disparate works and the space in an absurd manner and disputing the traditional values and forms of architecture (Cole 2016, Julia 2014). In *5stockade crates, stacked objects* (2014) (Figure 20) everyday materials are reimagined as Barlow places them into new contexts.



Figure 18 Phyllida Barlow, *Peninsula* (Installation view), 2004, industrial sculptural objects, Tate





Figure 19 Phyllida Barlow, *Untitled: dock: crushedtower* 2014, timber cylinder, cardboard wrapped with colour tape, twelve-metres-tall, Tate.



Figure 20 Phyllida Barlow, *Untitled: dock: 5stockadebrates*, 2014, stacked objects, Tate.

Like Hesse, Barlow leaves her marks on her works as she layers them with cement, plaster and paint in an untraditional manner. In my artworks I work with plaster, rock and paint pigment, applying the plaster by hand and leaving marks behind (Figure 21). Barlow's sculptures are static with the precarity of movement that is held in their positioning and stance, her work, like that of Hesse is carefully arranged and installed in groups. I draw on the installations of Hesse and Barlow as I create sculptures and stands that give a sense of movement, of connected dialogue through careful placement of forms and the composition of materials and presence in the space. In Barlow's installations, in the Spindly stilt leg-like stands, and solid girths of her constructions, the works perch just beyond the boundaries of anthropomorphism. As Barlow says, "I want the work to have a sense of animation, yet the minute that happens there's anthropomorphism, because it starts to take on character" (Cole 2016). I avoid creating works that are anthropomorphic, even as I describe my works as mothers, babies, critters and kin, and as I attach spindly leg-like structures to sculptures – I want them to reflect a hybrid part of the more than human world. All Barlow's constructions are, according to Noemi Smolik (2011, p. 1) in her article 'Phyllida Barlow: KUNSTHALLE NURNBERG', "characterized by their hybridity, a state of rupture that we are only now learning to value". This hybridity draws on shifts and altering states and the crudeness of Barlow's works allows for vulnerability through a sense of the incompleteness, "unfinished, provisional, subject to change at any moment" (Smolik 2011, p. 1).





Figure 21 Genevieve Thornton, *Detail*, 2021, underlay coated with plaster and completed sculpture coated in plaster and painted with rock and commercial pigment.

The decay of the work of Barlow, like that of Hesse, is tied to the impermanence of materials, and is in opposition to the stability of architecture. She deliberately exploits the instability of materials, this can be seen in a video of making the work, *Peninsula* (2004). In her process she can be seen breaking a sculptural form of polystyrene, expandable foam and a mix of plaster crudely applied by hand and as it nears completion, to allow her to re look and re think the form and all its textural fragments, before she re assembles it in a new way. Of her process Barlow (2020) states that the, “relationship with making sculpture, has to be adventurous, almost on the edge of being beyond my control” For Barlow, this breaking, where she allows a sculpture to roll off a bench and the destruction and re assembling of the form, allows for unpredictability, playfulness and a way to re imagine form. In this process she is also enacting the building, breaking and remaking that runs parallel to the impermanence of materials and the rupture of destruction necessary to remake her artworks as a response to her lived experiences and of the world around her (2020). Barlow’s process is one of unmaking, of unbuilding worlds – she builds and deconstructs as a process of creation. She allows the process with the materials to take on an alternate form. She adapts her practice to the process and material, allowing the outcome to present itself.

In my works the forms are often pulled apart, altered and connected to other forms, existing or new. Many of my artworks are combinations of multiple forms. In this way the process of unmaking, and of instability is present in my practice and it is this unpredictability and lack of control over outcomes is what philosopher Jack Halberstam (2020, p. 3) uses the term Wildness to convey – to become wild through the unmaking – the rejection of colonialist social regulations – to unbuild worlds. The terms unmaking and unbuilding are rich sources for the imagination and for my practice. Thinking of how things, forms, relationships, capitalism, binaries can be shifted, altered through a process of unmaking. Hesse unmakes the art world through her works ability to counter traditional methods and ideas of art by the use of materials and subject. Barlow, does this through her process of using materials from abandoned sites and through her process of making, deconstructing and then reconfiguring the forms to create a sculptural landscape withing a gallery setting.



The work of both Hesse and Barlow allow a rewilding through the process of unmaking and repositioning, demonstrating a rejection of colonialist social regulations – an unbuilding of worlds (Halberstam 2020, p. 3). Halberstam's term becoming wild is embracing the unpredictability of the wild (2020, p. 180), and in an effort to re-imagine our relationship to the more than human world in my art practice, I comingle the organic inorganic, thus, I am reimagining materials through the art making process and for me, this is a key driving force in the process of becoming with the more than human world. My sculptural work is a bringing together of disparate parts, pulling works apart and making discoveries, through the process of remaking as I endeavour to - through this process of unmaking and unbuilding propagate new possibilities. My studio process is a form of decolonising as I work with discarded materials, signifiers of colonial and capitalist life; I unmake and remake these, often combining them with biomaterials (Figures 22 - 24). This process draws on the ideas of Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti -Awa, Ngāti-Porou) and is a form decentring through a comingling of colonialist constructs with decolonial resolves, bringing together separate forms in to one space or one artwork. As Hesse was unable to separate the parts from the whole, and as Barlow re-worksher sculptural pieces, and groups materials together en masse to sit and become part of the gallery space, I imagine that my work will come together in the space as a cohesive cluster of works where each separate entity becomes part of something bigger a collective of multispecies and dialogue. The sculptural work will be brought together in the gallery space as a community or ecosystem of various entities, critter and kin, habitants of the more than human world. A link to the unmaking, rewilding that may aid in the regeneration and the imagination to speculate on new worldings.



Figure 22 Genevieve Thornton, *Studio study: bringing together different materials and forms*, 2019, melted plastic, clay, underlay, claw, 26 x 52 x 27 cm.

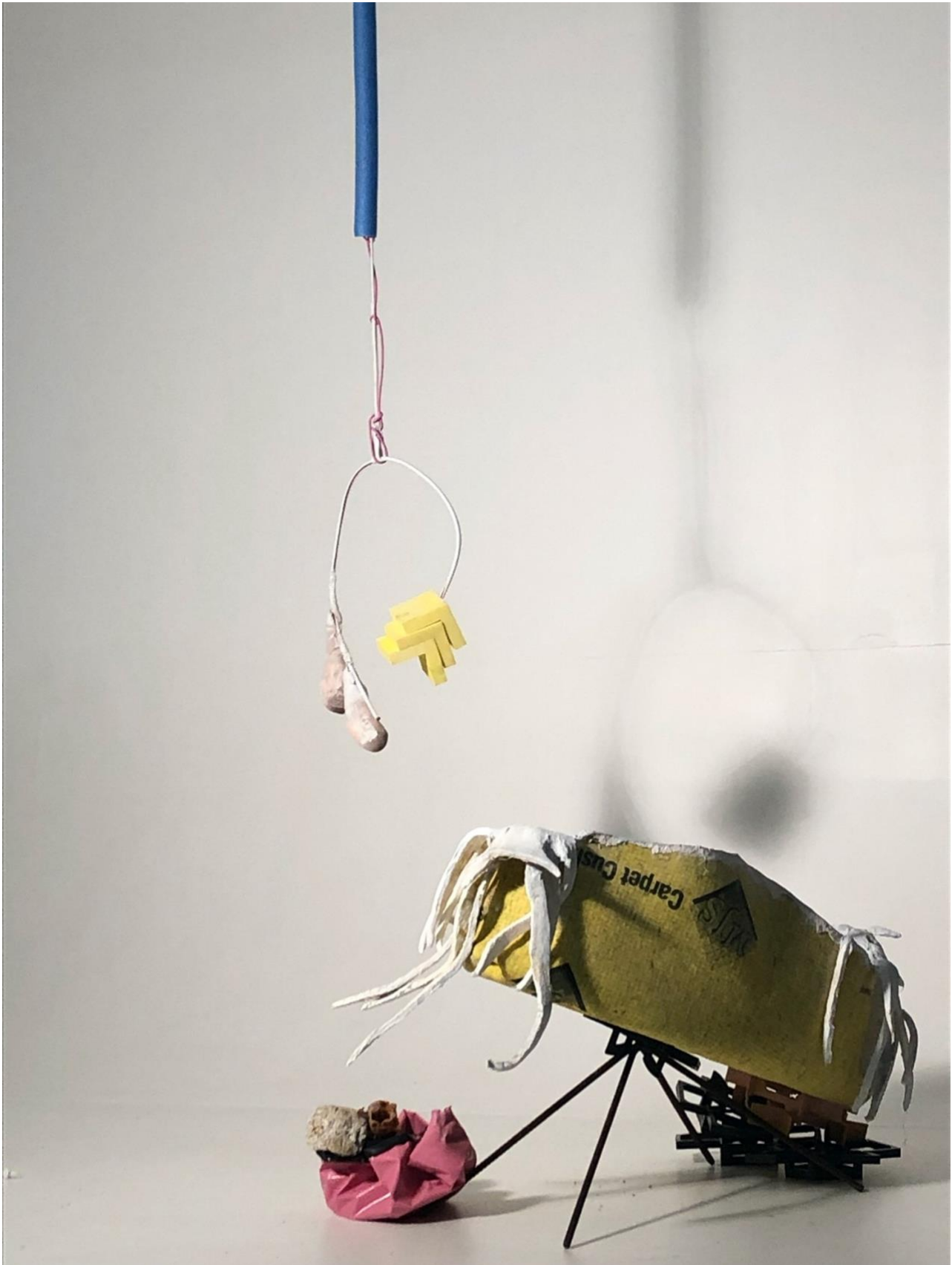


Figure 23 Genevieve Thornton, *Documentation shot*, 2021, collection of works, suspended work, baby sculpture and vessel work on steel stand and pod spacers.



Figure 24 Genevieve Thornton, *Documentation shot*, 2021, Suspended work and silage plastic baby sculpture on treated timber, steel and pod spacers.



### 3.1 Comingling materials: plastic urchins and plaster covered underlay

An approach to my comingling of materials can be seen in the suspended works which form part of my final exhibition *Umwelt*. These works responded directly to the work of Hesse, specifically her artworks that shows her transition from drawing and painting to sculptural works like *Hang Up* (1966), (Figure 25). In this artwork a frame made from acrylic paint on cloth over wood from which a steel tube, covered in cord and painted in acrylic protrudes outwards from the top left of the frame circling out and re-entering the frame on bottom right. In *Long Life* (1965) (Figure 26) a hose wrapped in cord appears to come out of the gallery wall, dropping to the floor it begins to arc around the papier-mâché beach ball before winding up and in to the top and centre of the form. Hesse's drawing and painting developed into sculptural works as she worked with a shift of geographical location to Europe and in a new studio space. This studio was an old warehouse and it was here that she collected discarded industrial materials, a locus of consumer capitalism. The lines of her drawings became cords and the shapes became forms, bulbous arrangements (Nemser 2002, p. 6). As part of my studio research I drew models (Figure 17) for sculptural works using a mix of colours, subdued oranges, pinks, blues, purples and green. I incorporated fabric stuffed forms from a much earlier wall hanging work that were similar shapes to that of which I had drawn, and I used foam noodles, wire and plaster from my studio to begin to create ceiling hung works by connecting these sculptural pieces with the foam, wire and other materials (Figures 27 - 29). The process involves multiple materials, colours, textures and joins; this work is not fixed permanently at any juncture unless necessary. I do not like to close off options of remaking, altering components for future works. The sculptural works provide height within the gallery setting and they open up the space and the sculptural shapes, lifting these parallel to the viewers eye – and higher still.

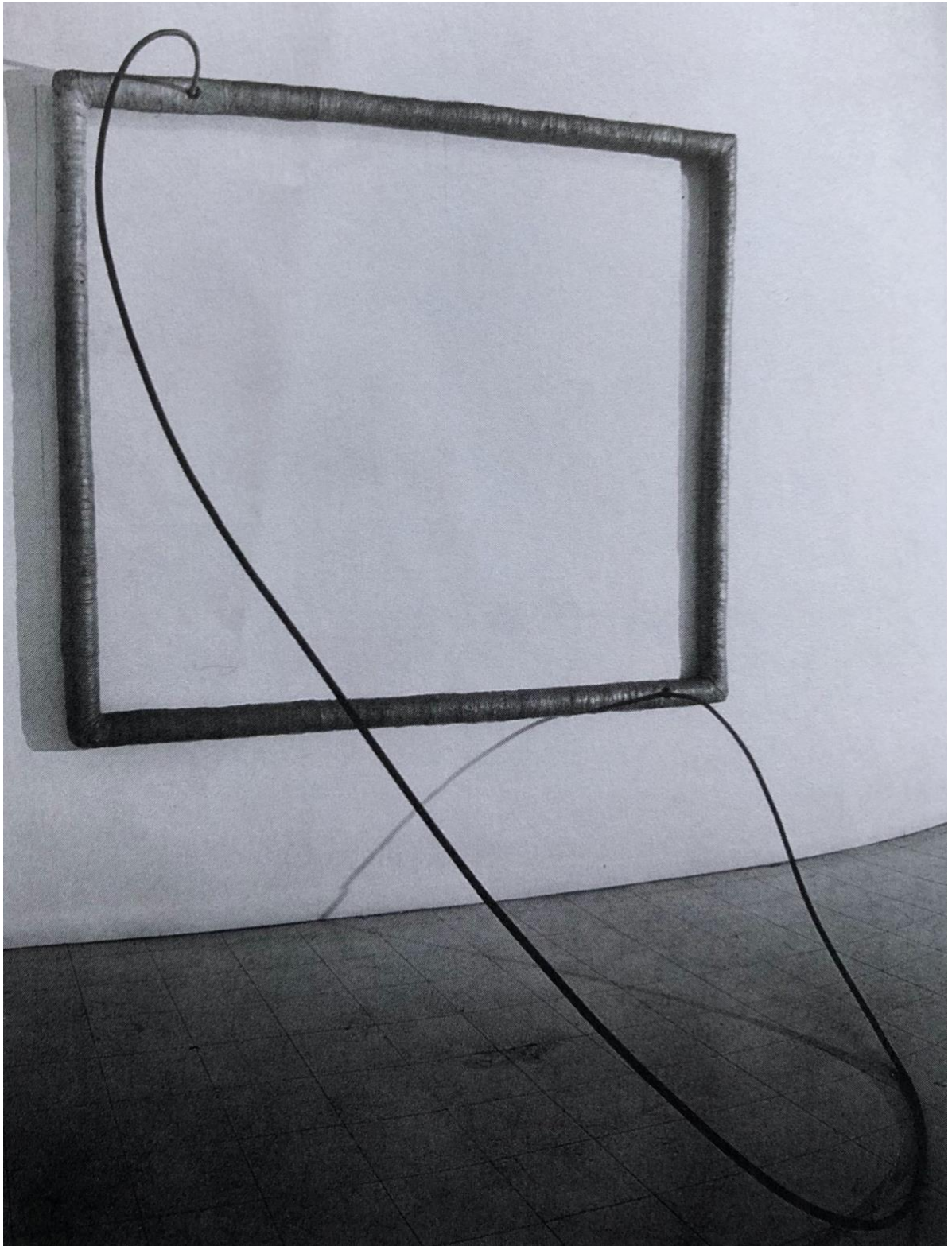


Figure 25 Eva Hesse, *Hang Up*, 1966, Acrylic paint on cloth over wood; acrylic paint on cord over steel tube, 182.9 x 213.4 x 198.1 cm, The Art Institute of Chicago.





Figure 26 Eva Hesse, *Long Life*, 1965, Cord, papier-mâché, epoxy, and enamel over a beach ball and hose, Hose: 213.4 cm long; ball diameter: 50.8 cm, destroyed at the request of the Artist 1070.





Figure 27 Genevieve Thornton, *Studio shot - suspended work* 2021, copper wire, plaster coated trampoline foam guard, plastered polystyrene and fabric form - recycled blind, paint.



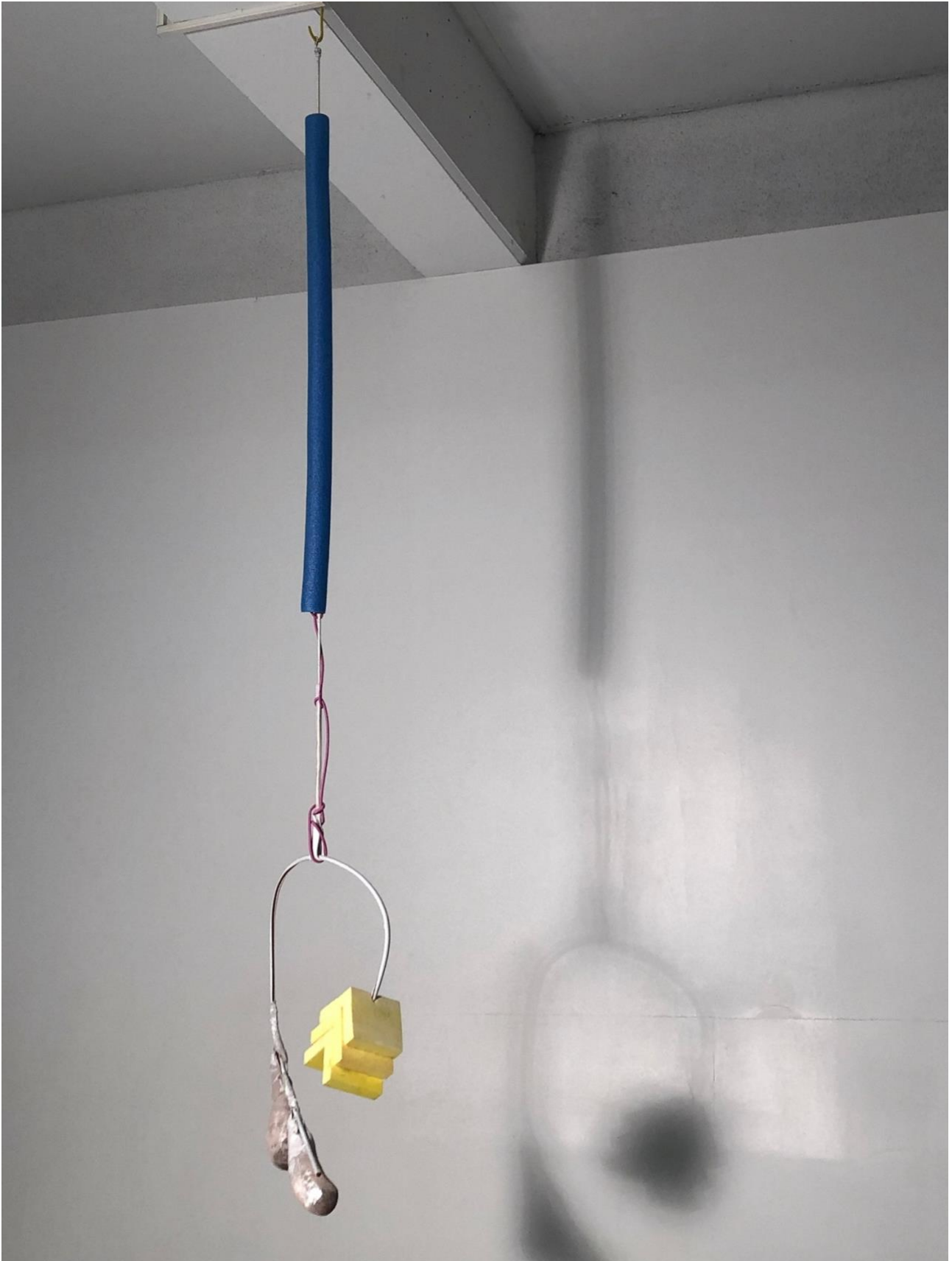


Figure 28 Genevieve Thornton, *Suspended work 1*, 2021, pool noodle, cable, stocking, fabric, steel, plastic hanger.



Figure 29 Genevieve Thornton, *Suspended work 2*, 2021, cable, cord, wire, mycelium, pool noodle covered in plaster and rock pigment.

My unmaking and remaking as a form of comingling is exemplified by the carpet underlay works. On encountering the discarded carpet underlay this material became entangled in my practice as it is a strange material to work with. The speckled pastel colours that sit on one side and the bright yellow or green on the other is what first caught my attention, along with the spongy malleable texture that invites touch (Figure 30). The underlay works sat to the side of my studio space and as I introduced plaster to my work I brought them back into the central space and in to process of remaking as I applied the plaster to the yellowing speckled lining. I applied this with my hands, applying commercial and ground rock pigment to the plasters surface. These works are bulbous, and creature like with folds, holes and provide a soft surface texture juxtaposed with the hardened plaster surface. The plaster covered work (Figure 31) sits on an underbelly of soft carpet underlay, its front is like a horse's nose, with widened nostrils. These works are critical because of the relationship of the materials and the painterly and expressive marks. The plaster hard and brittle against the soft surface is fragile as the flexibility of the underlay allows for movement and cracking of the plaster and this in combination with spindly legs portrays a sense of vulnerability, of shifts and stilted movement. The materials combined are industrial and natural, however, they are both materials that are used mostly as an *in between* material – something that is put down or used before another surface is placed over it – they are a becoming with material as they are always part of a process never the finished product. The process of creating the work is physical, I roll, fold, and press the underlay into place, holding it fast while the hot glue dries and secures it into its new form. The process takes a long time and is immensely satisfying as the material is thick, soft and the forms are somewhat unpredictable. Applying the cold wet plaster to the underlay with my hands is an enjoyable and meditative process. I took footage of part of this process, and this, overlaid with sounds and video footage of silk moths beating their wings on plastic forms part of the exhibition as it provides a key insight into my studio process – a processual becoming with material to form new work, interconnecting materials.





Figure 30 Genevieve Thornton, *Studio shot - underlay sculpture*, 2021, carpet underlay, rubber.

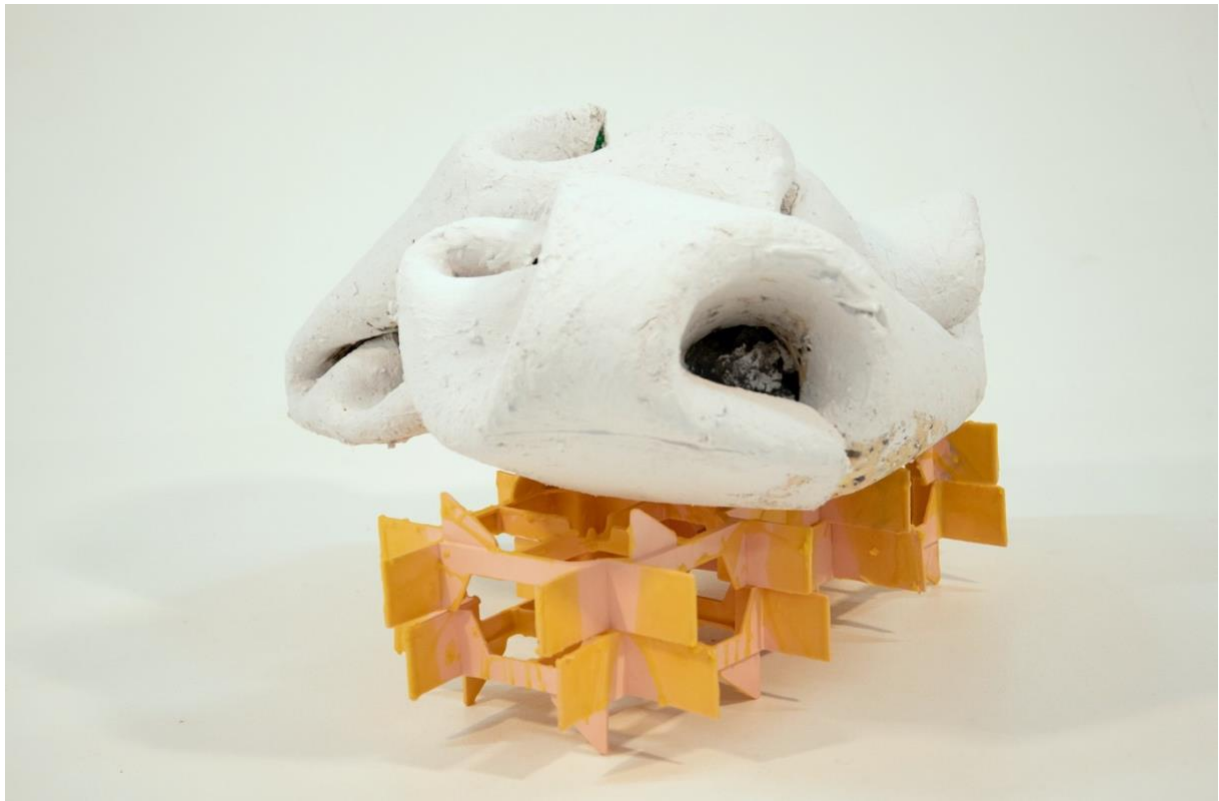


Figure 31 *Untitled*, 2020-2021 underlay form partly coated in plaster and pigment on plastic pod spacers covered in beeswax.

### 3.2 Attentiveness to industrial materials as a connection to place and care

I am attentive to the places I encounter and I am alert to the materials and forms I see, feel and hear. The shapes of industrial waste products, the colours and the textures, and the sounds of the frogs and cicadas. The industrial materials are waste products collected from building sites, industrial bins, and farm rubbish heaps – they are chosen with consideration to their qualities, colour, and texture. I work with organic and inorganic materials, unmaking, remaking, and re positioning the work in countless ways with other sculptural forms and within studio and gallery spaces, I do this as I think through the work and possible outcomes, my process is a continual becoming with the more than human world. I collect materials from site bins, photograph, or collect interesting forms in nature. At times, I make an impression of these forms on to clay or paper or I record sounds and activity in nature via photography or video footage. The collection of materials is an ongoing process, and the selection of material comes about through encounter. The surface, composition of the material, the ability for the material to be manipulated or covered, pushed, or twisted into shape or form is essential. The colours are often left – the industrial bright yellows, pinks and greens are prominent in the works, and I enjoy the almost clinical aesthetic they provide the work.

In an earlier phase of this research project an exploration of plastic was incorporated into my practice. For *Tentaculum* (2019) (Figure 32) I drew on Haraway's imagined Chthonic ones in *Staying with the trouble* (2016) with tentacles, feelers, digits, cords, and whiptails spider legs, these critters are speculative monsters that demonstrate and perform consequences that tell of the practice and process of staying with the trouble. These artworks were formed from an accumulation of plastic melted into crude, curved plates. Individual plates of heated plastic were flattened and rolled with a rolling pin, slightly curved to fit the form and layered on to a fabric undercarriage.





Figure 32 Genevieve Thornton, *Tentaculum*, 2019, melted plastic covered over wire and fabric.

The pink plastic works in *Umwelt* (Figure 33) have been created using the bones of existing structures of artworks. The larger work *mother* has been created using silage plastic wrap, collected from a farm tip, secured together using hot glue and industrial tape. This work is wrapped around an older sculpture consisting of stuffed fabric over a steel frame, and has tubes placed within larger tubes, with the black under side of the plastic visible. The form is reminiscent of plants – sea anemone and the tubular sections suggestive of the tube worms found in the depths of the ocean – places deemed uninhabitable. The smaller work, *baby* is constructed using a broken umbrella as the internal structure. These silage plastic works, *mother and baby*, do not have edges, instead the folds and openings have the potential to have wire or cords placed in them providing umbilical connection to the other works.





Figure 33 Genevieve Thornton, *Mother & baby*, 2020-2021 plastic covered over wire and fabric.

These industrial materials play a vital role as they form a critique on our time of colonialism, capitalism, and the Anthropocene – demonstrating our lack of care and concern toward the more than human world. Rather than the destructive violence of colonial practices and using the more than human world as a resource, humans could extend broader global obligations of nonviolence (Butler 2020, p. 184). By acknowledging care as a more central focus of our culture, Plumwood (2002, p. 233) writes that “a place-sensitive society would do more than minimally tolerate a taste for place in those who can afford to indulge it; it would nurture relationships to place structurally as the normal case, not the exception of privilege”. The waste we leave behind us may be the marker of our time in the form of plastic islands in the Pacific Ocean, toxins permeating the planet and the destruction of vast ecosystems. Collecting these industrial materials and repurposing them demonstrates a level of care; seeing the value in the discarded, and with considered movements, re shaping and altering forms and materials.

### **3.3 Place and Creature Languages of the more than human world**

Encounters in place is critical to this project and my video works *Creature Languages – Kookaburra* (2020) and *Taniwha* (2021) highlight how my practice embodies human relationship to the more than human world, drawing together place, narrative and encounter. In an earlier exhibition for this research project (Figure 34) I created a small works that were displayed in the Phyllis Palmer Gallery, under the lip of the wall, in the corner and on top of the wall. These works were a collection of shell, claw, and plant matter. This gathering of materials from place was the beginning of direct interconnection of disparate things to create artworks. From recordings of encounters in place I have produced video work that draws together a narrative of the embodied encounters, memories of the childhood song of the Taniwha and of NZ and encounters of Australian bushland, materials and my sculptural practice. The video works *Taniwha* and *Creature Languages - Kookaburra* are spaces that I have created by recording and layering interactions with the more than human world. In these videos I draw on Plumwood’s deep affiliation with place and active listening to process, gathering insight into and to create a dialogue of creature language connections. In *Taniwha* the sound of silk moth wings on

plastic is overlayed with song, bird calls and images of underlay vessels and of plaster covering an underlay form, hand visible and leaving traces of the interaction. The work looks to the critical element of encounters in place in my project as it encompasses bodily recordings, memories in the form of the Taniwha and song; it is a studio response that processes my understanding of creature languages and it is through this practice that I gather insight into the sounds, movements and comingle critter and kin through interconnections. The silk moth is the most direct creature language of the works, but on a methodological level the forms of the sculptural works also respond to close listening. In *Creature Languages – Kookaburra* I slow the sound of Kookaburra calls and it produces a deep rumbling language. This creature language overlays images of my children in underlay vessels, images of the bush, and ants crawling over latex.

In *Taniwha*, the sound of silk moths' wings beating on biodegradable bags can be heard, creating a rhythmic, at times frenzied beat, a creature language of communication beyond human comprehension. These frames of the video document the moths in a new environment<sup>11</sup> (Figure 35), a constructed environment whereby the sound of moth wings can be heard as they beat on the plastic. The moths are in the final cycle of their life- as after they have laid their eggs they die shortly afterward. It is in this final cycle that they behave erratically, some sit quietly until their life ends, some flap their wings in a frenzy, and others are able to spin more silk, spinning themselves a silken cocoon. They retain the ability to continue to weave webbing of sorts, working together. That they continue on even when this is not a part of the cycle, when their environment has been altered so significantly is amazing. And I wonder at how these creatures communicate. Is it with the beating of their wings, through their touch? This leaves me wondering, could humankind also do more than imaginable when faced with such an altered environment?

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<sup>11</sup> The moths were sourced from a primary school over the holiday period. They were kept at home. The altered plastic environment of the moth was one such environment only. They were also provided with alternative environments that they could freely move to at all times and the process was ethical concerning their treatment at all times. Some were taken back to the school for the students to observe and the others were placed outdoors.



Figure 34 Genevieve Thornton, *Untitled*, 2018-2019, shell, Claw, Plant, fabric works, max size 2 cm x 11cm x 1.5cm.



Figure 35 Genevieve Thornton, *Documentation*, 2019, photograph documenting the altered environment of the moths.



I respond to Plumwood and Deborah Bird Rose's term 'creature languages' as the voice of critters. When creating the video works and sculptural forms I locate and with their component forms I adopt a decolonialising approach by drawing on the idea of monsters as a generative entity, exploring interconnections and the evaluating the missing voices of the human and the more than human. I discovered through this project that I did not want the sculptural or video works to be representative of any specific species but rather to speculate on possible hybrid critters, relationships, and spaces. Tuhiwai – Smith (Ngāti -Awa, Ngāti-Porou) (2021, p. 33) states that "decolonization must offer a language of possibility, a way out of colonialism". This language could centre on care, life, and relationality. The comingling of multispecies in the video works look to shared understandings and collective care shown to human and to the more than human world. Haraway and Adele E. Clarke, in *Making Kin not population* (2018, p. 30) write of making kin and rebraiding threads of feminist activism, that are concerned with an enduring concern of feminism calling for new "vocabularies for futurities", thrusting care in the spotlight, believing it necessary for developing a "shared understanding across multiple and varied worlds, including feminist worlds". My work interconnects multiple critters, materials and my body as I process an understanding of shared vulnerability through creature language. Here decolonialism is also drawn on and the necessity of replenishing culture, languages and places through policies, planet wide in an effort of making kin in non-natalist ways – in collectivities (Haraway & Clarke 2018, p. 30). The speculative notion of these videos alludes to the Taniwha and Haraway's Camille stories, as imaginative methods of storytelling invoking curiosity and posthuman possibilities. Just like the seedbag and the monsters, the work is a visual form of generative storytelling.

On active listening and making kin in a multispecies world I draw on artist Vaughan's exhibition *Organs of Cognition* (2021) (Figure 36) her work directly connects to my video and sculptural works as it opposes the dichotomies of subject / matter and instead looks to knowledge an active interaction with the more than human world, part of a larger narrative with bodies as "collaborative producers, manifestations of all things that flow" (Saker 2021). Vaughan considers the minute shifts of materials as generative to new ways of being. I compared and considered the approach to installation in two works by Vaughan when resolving my final Masters exhibition installation, *Organs of Cognition* (2021) (Figure 36) and *Overlapping Magisteria* (2020) (Figure 37). *Organs of Cognition* comprises of nine ceramic

objects held up by Indigenous traditional medicinal *Melaleuca alternifolia* branches constructed like stools, too fragile to sit upon, and the ceramic forms on a slippery downward angle, and several stretching above door height. The spindly legs provide space between and beneath forms allowing for other forms to be seen through the struts of another. Vital to this installation is to re-contextualise the design as a Flowform, a “vortice that energises and creates dynamism in water that mimics that which exists in nature” (Saker 2021) The activity of the visceral materials of fluids - beeswax, beef gelatin, pig collagen and oils comingling in the gallery space speaks directly to my decision to include a collection of materials to create an installation of multispecies and a hub of activity. The sculptural works, some lifted high on spindly, angular and insect like legs of steel allow a space and an expanded view to other critters. In my work, the biomaterials of mycelium (Figures 38 - 39) and scoby, some living and non-living, produce a gradual activity of growth and decay. They sit flagellated and vulnerable as kin in amongst the other critters, drawing on the social relationship required for multispecies living and dying in a constant state of becoming. Vaughan’s *Overlapping Magisteria* (2020) (Figure 37) is an installation of sculptural pieces that Vaughan connects the natural environment to machines and infrastructure to evoke the conflict of the Anthropos to the more than human world. Of this work Vaughan speaks of her need to collect and to gather different materials, selecting a key work to aid each part connecting to the next. She brings materials that are:

evocative from the natural environment and that are from my natural environment but also machines and infrastructure that could speak to ....the problematics with how we both engage with nature through a desire to control it, or to consume it, while also needing to be reverent and in awe and in absolute honest exchange. (Vaughan 2021)

The sculptures resembling relics of hay rakes mark productivity and Vaughan speaks of these machines as poetic dials of time and momentum (Vaughan 2021). Her process enables a connection as she creates one piece after another to enable a continuity to the thematic approach. She has created a sense of closure and intensity in this installation with the green house structure that is seen as you enter into the space. The installation was designed to have elements of detail contrasted with a shift in scale and simplification of form seen in the central form of the hay rake. In the creation of my final installation of works I made the decision to my sculptural pieces *mother* and the *babies* as the key works. They provide a key scale for the gallery space and reflect my thematic approach with form and material. They

provide a block of intense colour in a rounded, bulbous forms. These and many of the sculptural pieces sit on discarded materials of treated wood, polystyrene covered partly in plaster with rock pigment washes, plastic waffle pod spaces and beeswax. Vaughan describes *Overlapping Magisteria* as embracing a disjointed and awkward feeling for the audience as disparate pieces are brought together, she says: “I want there to be a level of discomfort as well as .... moments of mercurial swamp in the work” (2021). In my final exhibition I anticipate an unease felt by the viewer with the intense hues of the plastics, the hybrid critter forms against the stark white of the gallery and the sound of creature languages emanating the space.





Figure 36 Isadora Vaughan, *Organs of Cognition*, 2021 ceramic, *Meleleuca alternifolia*, steel fixings, beeswax, pig collagen, acrylic, latex, jelly wax, water, beef geletine, vegetable oils, The National: New Australian Art.





Figure 37 Isadora Vaughan, OGIVES 2020 *Overlapping Magisteria*, (installation view) 2020, ACCA (Australian Centre for Creative Art).



Figure 38 Genevieve Thornton, *Experimentation works*, 2020, non-living mycelium forms, cable cord.



Figure 39 Genevieve Thornton, *Experimentation work*, 2020, plaster covered polystyrene, living mycelium.

### 3.4 Umwelt of posthuman multispecies

*Umwelt* is the title of my final exhibition and aims to speak for a realignment or a shift in how we relate to the more than human world, speculating on future monsters and engaging in drawing together a multispecies of kin. In the studio I imagine the flow of changes possible through coexistence – both human and more than human, and, like Haraway’s SF method of tracking, I speculate on the many divergent threads of how that might be concerning survival and multispecies justice (2016, p. 36). The works that have been selected as part of *Umwelt* are made from a variety of materials, they represent the wide array of organic and in-organic materials I have worked with throughout this project. The biomaterials I have used include dried Kombucha scoby, beeswax and mycelium – living and non-living. I have also coated materials such as polystyrene and cardboard, cable, wire, foam, fabrics, pigment, plastic, carpet underlay, and clay with layers of plaster. The sculptural forms are often remade and conjoined with other forms. One example is a mycelium fragment combined with other materials in multiple ways (Figure 40). In *Umwelt* this mycelium is combined with cord, latex on plastic pod spaces coated in beeswax, and plaster coated polystyrene (Figure 41). Another example is the underlay vessels, used in photographs as props, plastered over in part and then hoisted onto stilt-like struts for the final installation (Figures 42 - 45). The platforms, stands and other structures that hold or balance the work in position have been made with consideration to material connection to my thematic approach. The stilt-like struts that hold the vessels are steel welded into shape and topped with the yellow plastic guard of construction pegs. These spindly leg-like structures draw on the water strider critter and the insect creature languages I record. When creating sculptural artwork I draw on forms of critters and the more than human world as a strategy for expansive thinking, beyond the visual elements and materials in front of me. The multi-directional way that mycelium grows in the earth shares a resonance with Haraway’s (2018, p.47) thinking about all that is happening under the earth, she states the “tunnels and other lines of flight to new worlds, where alternative forms of kinship have room to grow and to nourish other life forms and ways of living”. When the network of mycelium is brought to the surface, displaced, brought together with inorganic and organic materials to create hybrid sculptures, evoking a comingling of oddkin. The aim is to work with these materials and forms to alter and to think through the ideas of decentring

anthropomorphic experience by imagining other ways that materials can connect as a response to exploring how we relate to the world.



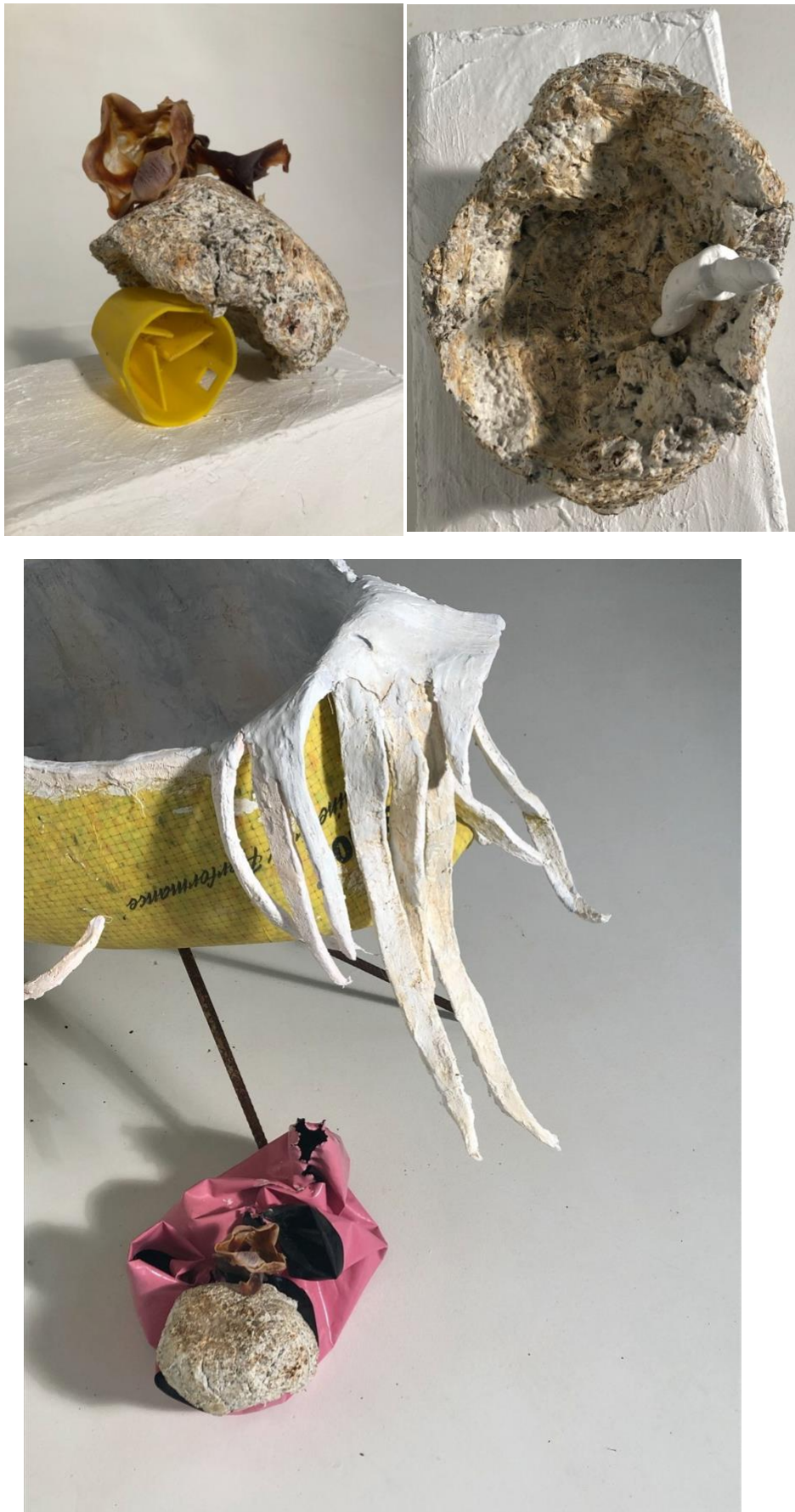


Figure 40 Genevieve Thornton, *Examples of reconfigurations with one mycelium form* 2021, mycelium and latex with disused and biomaterials.



Figure 41 Genevieve Thornton, *Untitled* 2021, Mycelium and latex work configuration in final exhibition Umwelt.



Figure 42 Genevieve Thornton, *Underlay vessel seen here as photo prop*, 2019, photograph of son in underlay vessel.



Figure 43 Genevieve Thornton, *Documentation photograph of underlay vessel*. 2021, underlay coated in plaster and on beeswax covered pod spacers.





Figure 44 Genevieve Thornton, Documentation photograph of underlay vessel. 2021, underlay coated in plaster with commercial and rock pigments.



Figure 45 Genevieve Thornton. *Stilt Critter* 2021, underlay coated in plaster with commercial and rock pigments, plastic peg covers, steel, 211 x 100 x 80 cm

By combining organic and inorganic forms *Umwelt* gestures towards anti-binary relationality between the human and the more than human world. I have drawn on a range of artistic and theoretical models when considering the complexities of the installation, ensuring scale, colour, texture, and content, all graft together to form a larger work made up of smaller components. The vital role visceral materials play in the work of Hesse is echoed in my organic and inorganic assemblages, so too are the ideas of pre-linguistic language and dialogue that her work evokes. I have drawn on the installation of Barlow, incorporating props and stands that form part of the work. Both Hesse and Barlow provided ideas on ways to create non-anthropomorphising sculptural forms. In drawing dialogue between various materials, I draw on the work of Vaughan and her installation of works of organic and inorganic materials assembled within a gallery setting. A key factor is of *Umwelt* as an installation is to allow each component to play a role and to expand points of connection. Barlow's structures are built to house her works and they protrude from the walls, ceilings and floor. In *Umwelt*, I do this by constructing connecting structures from the floor, walls and ceiling to my work in an effort to open up the space and to provide an expansion of dialogue between materials, components and the viewer.

In this way the studio work and the exhibition showcasing the work created during this project explores a myriad or multi-directional ways of which to make changes to our planet, a co-existence, a tension, a connection between these *things*. In creating this *umwelt* of critters, I draw on and demonstrate connection between oddkin, where unpredictable new worldings allow for new symbiotic relationships to emerge and to shape the future.

By creating a place of posthuman speculations with sculptural forms of critters as kin that speak through material origins, texture, language and form. As Anna Tsing (2015) points out, the thriving places that were once thought of as ruins demonstrates the ability of continuity, of processual growth – a break from the dominant path of Anthropocentrism, capitalism, and colonialism. The industrial materials of *Umwelt* in the gallery space are like these ruins, providing the site for new speculative creatures to adapt, grow and make lively the dead spaces of the Anthropocene.

## **Conclusion Re compositions – critter as kin**

What is true for humans is true for all living creatures who require non-toxic soil and clean water for the continuation of life. If any of us are to survive, to flourish, even to attempt to lead a good life, it will be a life lived with others – a life that is no life without those others (Butler 2020, p. 184)

By bringing together a comingling of experience, organic and inorganic materials and form, my project of symbiotic sculptures is demonstrative of ‘staying with the trouble’ in posthuman times. The work of Rosi Braidotti in *Posthuman Knowledge* (2019) calls for a change of approach, working and building futures together. Before this can happen we need to know what it means to be in this together “...before we can agree on what we want to build together as an alternative, we have to confront the question: to what extent can ‘we’ say that ‘we’ are in this together?” (Braidotti 2019, p. 37) In this thesis I have explored what it means to be connected to the more than human world. I have examined the mess humans have created and speculated on ways we could imagine it differently. In my studio work I have endeavoured to show the interconnectedness of the human and more than human world, through forms rising from the strangeness and resilience of tube worms and the olm, to the water striders as critters that adapt to new worlds of rising plastic islands, and the matsutake mushroom thriving in the ruins. I have drawn on the monster, the *taniwha*, to generate ideas of posthuman creatures and embraced the cultural stories of my childhood. I speculate on ways in which symbiotic adaptability may occur in places in the aftermath of anthropocentrism. Bringing together materials and forms I have created an umwelt of kin within a gallery space, comingling materials to foster relationships and to create multiple speculative species of critter. My symbiotic sculptures share embodied, multiple, symbiotic relations with human and more than human. Key to this work are the biomaterials that I have grown and are interconnected with other sculptural forms and industrial waste materials. The speculative adaptations of materials and lifeforms comingle together as multiple species oddkin.

The contemporary context of this research runs parallel to the recent exhibition and work of Isadora Vaughan in *Organs of Cognition* (2021) (Figure 36) interconnecting the binaries of

subject and matter, and responding to these with biomaterials to demonstrate the continual flow and flux of the more than human world. I draw on the work of Donna Haraway and her ideas of tentacular practices, of symposium and critters as kin. Her ideas generate imagery and evoke the comingling of materials into creatures. To stir up ways to view worlds differently, I have drawn on decolonial calls for an replenishment of culture, languages and places (Haraway et al 2018, p. 30), responding to this with my works of strange creatures, generated from the *taniwha*. My project connects with the more than human world through multiple encounters, and the stories of the sky father, *Rangi-nui* and the earth mother, *Papatūānuku*, to evoke a response to ways in which species can adapt to place, and like the seed bag of Haraway, to propagate new ways forwards. My works of strange creatures, composed of organic and inorganic materials and situated together or apart are a cluster of critters as kin. These critters run parallel to the kin that Haraway writes of when she nods to oddkin and multispecies mingling as they are embedded in my imagination as I create works composed of experiences, imagery of ancient and alien animals, my relationships to place, and toward future imaginings of posthuman worldings.

I will not loose the “I” who I am under such conditions; rather, if I am lucky, and the world is right, whoever I am will be steadily sustained and transformed by my connections with others, the forms of contact by which I am altered and sustained. (Butler 2020, p. 184)

I have created posthuman symbiotic sculptures, bringing together my experiences, my connection to the more than human world and through the expanse of the gallery setting my exhibition *Umwelt* aims to propel imaginative ways forward in our posthuman present.

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