

Immortal Bodies:
Preserving Connections Through Objects and Rituals

by

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The human body is often treated as a temple, where even after death the treatment of the physical body displays its value and identity. Using inspiration from reliquaries, burials, and mourning jewelry, the objects that I create become a pathway to history as well as a manifestation of people's spirits. I create enameled urns that personify different characteristics of people by using color, form, and shape to convey the personality of whomever it would hold. In doing so I explore modern societal values surrounding death and the various mourning practices that those values encompass. The visual language I use to explore the abstract forms in my work is inspired by my long-held fascination with anatomical illustrations and human anatomy. I utilize traditional metal forming techniques and digital fabrication processes to produce these objects. The various methods serve to create a diverse lexicon of forms that would be impossible to create otherwise. I develop the surface of each object using vitreous enamel and patina to create a color, pattern, and imagery. Great care, intent, and labor is put into each vessel to make them unique and create a deep and meaningful connection between vessel and viewer.

Immortal Bodies:
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A Thesis

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by

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Dedication

For my grandmother, who raised me as a child and for who I leaned on for support and cherish
still as I walk the earth today.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my thesis committee for their support, guidance, and time without which this work would not have come to fruition. Their contribution to the development of this work was invaluable. Thank you, Tim, for always being willing to go out of your way to help with any project and always having a solution to the many problems I encountered. Thank you, Lisa Beth, for asking me the tough questions, and thought-provoking discussions. Thank you, Angela, for your constant reassurance and overall encouragement to pursue my goals. Thank you, Jim, for your thoughtful suggestions and guidance in formal elements of design.

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Introduction

The impetus for this body of work was the passing of my grandmother who raised me. She died about 7 years ago and I hold her ashes in a necklace I wear. Wearing it helps me to remember her and gives me a feeling that she is there with me through my experiences. The ability to be able to physically carry someone with you furthers that relationship to a loved one. It creates that bond for me which I want to share with others. I have always been drawn to memento mori, vanitas painting art, and Victorian mourning jewelry. I have always held a fondness for the classic skull as the traditionally iconographic symbol for death. However, as I developed this body of work, I shifted from making literal interpretations into abstract ones that contain a greater sense of ambiguity and interest.

I create enameled urns and jewelry that explore the emotional attachment human beings have to others and objects, and I am examining how we interact with what we hold sacred and how we choose to create and maintain those connections. The idea of human spirituality and a relation to something greater starts with the bonds we have to each other. We see this universally present in religion and other aspects of human society. While I do not hold strong religious beliefs, I have faith in the possibility of life after death, I do not think our ties to people are cut off when they die. There is a connection that remains in the physical remains left behind, hence why we treat the dead with such reverence and respect. The urns I create are meant for those who mourn the deceased, to honor those who past, and provide an avenue for remembrance.

These urns emphasize and recontextualize a way of connection through the embodiment of the soul within the objects I make. By enabling the ability to carry the physical “body” of someone with you, it allows for a closer, more intimate relationship to persist wherever you go. Acknowledging this relationship can give comfort to a grieving mind. I feel the importance we place in remembering our dead is something that is losing its value in the fast-paced society we live in. My desire to create these

urns stems from a need to keep this value from diminishing, as it has been so important to me over the last several years. Death is perceived as the great disconnection, while life, in contrast, is the experience of relationships; these two things are bridged by something that transcends them both.

1: The Relevant History of Burial Practices (Cremation) and Funerary Objects

Ash, bone, and memories are all that remains after cremation. Throughout history the act of cremation after death is highly symbolic, rich with complex meaning, touching on what it means to be human. In the process of transforming the dead, family, community, and society create and partake in cultural symbolism (Kuijt). Archaeologists have long been fascinated by cremation due to its inherent fiery transformation of the body; traces of past cremation practices are almost always incomplete. Cremation is a key area of archaeological research, but its complexity has been undervalued and undertheorized (Kuijt). However, recent advances in archaeological excavation and osteological analyses have enriched and developed the study of cremation in pre-historic and early historic societies. *The Routledge Companion to Death and Dying* by Christopher M. Moreman offers great insight into religious and socio-cultural practices concerning the handling of human remains, definitions of death, and what happens in the “afterlife.” It is important to recognize the different death traditions and beliefs of various religions and cultures to portray the importance and reverence that we have held for the dead for millennia.

In the Catholic religion, death is a gateway to other abodes, an entry to heaven, hell, or purgatory; the soul of the deceased is believed to face judgement by God on where they go (Moreman 5). A Christian funeral is a service of worship offered to God on behalf of the deceased. The services usually consist of prayers and pronouncements made as the body of the deceased is entrusted to its final resting place, the grave, the fire, the sea, and so on. There has been a rise in cremation and personalized death rituals among the Christian community (Moreman 35). Furthermore, the Jewish community once held a shared view of the entire ancient world that the dead continue to exist in a shadowy realm where they live a dull, ghostly existence. “Sociologist Samuel Heilman has written that the Jewish funeral, in creating a separation between the dead and the living, “seeks to reflect the Jewish people's fundamental realization that, although they die and feel the precariousness of

their existence, they also continue and survive, that they have lost one connection but remain bonded to others”” (Moreman 55). Jewish funeral and mourning practices that reflect this idea have been passed down from one generation to another to this day (Moreman 55). The Islamic and Muslim religions hold similar beliefs about death, they both emphasize the idea that the deceased continue to exist in their graves or at least in some accessible form to the living, the Qur'an offers detailed descriptions of an eternal afterlife (Moreman 66). In the surviving Zoroastrian religion that originated in Persia, it is believed that human beings are comprised of a mortal body and an immortal soul. They believe that after a person has died, the soul leaves the body and remains within the material world for three days and three nights. Ceremonies are subsequently celebrated daily until the tenth day and then again on the thirtieth day after death, the first anniversary day, and annually for thirty years, or for roughly a generation (Moreman 91).

In more modern terms, popular culture has coined the term Spiritualism that conjures images of fortune tellers, seances, mediums, and spirits. While belief in spirit communication dates back from antiquity, the modern Spiritualist movement began in around 1948 (Moreman 218). Psychic phenomena and their value as evidence of survival are central to claims that Spiritualism is an evidence-based religion. The earliest scientific investigators of Spiritualistic phenomena sought to determine whether consciousness might survive death in recognizable form. Furthermore, healing is an important aspect of Spiritualist practice, either before, during, or after a service (Moreman 218). While many people hold these beliefs of the afterlife it doesn't prevent human beings from experiencing pain from the loss of people they care about.

Overcoming the pain of losing a loved one is never easy; the feeling of grief and mourning are slow processes of unfolding emotions. The experience is full of powerful feelings linked towards the deep connections we have between people past and present. According to the book *Experiential Action Methods and Tools for Healing Grief and Loss-Related Trauma: Life, Death, and*

Transformation by Lusijah S. Darrow and Janet Childs, people experience the same acute grief issues irrespective of whether they have a spiritual or religious practice. Those who do not have a religious or spiritual practice are additionally faced with an existential crisis about the meaning of their loved one's life and their own mortality. If death means ceasing to exist, what was the point of life? Cultural traditions around the world are almost always based upon acknowledging life changes, whether positive or challenging. When faced with traumatic change, like the loss of a loved one, it is important to create meaningful ceremonies and rituals to help guide the individual in the healing process. Ceremonies and rituals to say goodbye are a major component of acting upon beliefs, faith, and the challenges that come with confronting a major loss or change. Ceremonies can support the healing processes of change and loss. If commonly practiced rituals (such as funerals) have lost their meaning, grieving people have the power to create their own unique rituals that fulfill the need to say goodbye in a personally more meaningful way. Rituals can be an acknowledgment of loss and a vehicle for individual, family, and community healing. Human beings feel the need to say goodbye to people who have died or to situations that are no longer a part of their life. Across many cultures people have created individualized objects and ceremonies to process loss, people need to use what works from their traditions and develop individual acts that hold meaning for their specific needs. Examples of this can be seen in 17th -19th century Memento Mori Jewelry and Victorian Mourning Jewelry.

In Latin, Memento Mori translates to "remember you must die." It serves as a reminder of death typically depicted through iconographic means. Victorian Mourning jewelry is another unique way that human beings have clung to the physical essence of a person in which hair, nails, or even tears of the deceased are utilized in jewelry. Memento Mori jewelry began to appear in the mid-17th century with the execution of King Charles I in England (Nehama). Royalists who were loyal to their late king wore rings or small lockets containing portraits of the king underneath their clothes (Nehama). During the late 17th century, it became common for memento mori iconography to be used as a commemorative motif

rather than a reminder of one's end. Gold rings depicting winged skull and crossbones began to be given out at funerals to honor the dead. The name, date of death, and age of the deceased were also engraved inside the band. Moving forward into the 18th century, mourning jewelry took on several forms including enameled pieces, scrolling forms, locket, and portrait miniatures which became very common (Nehama). By the early 19th century, the practice of mourning objects became widely accepted even though its form had gone through another transformation. Jewelers began stocking prefabricated pieces to be personalized with the insertion of hair and memorial inscriptions that would be purchased after a funeral service (Nehama). This practice is commonly referred to as Victorian Mourning Jewelry, as death was rampant during this time period due to disease. The production of jewelry continued to advance with the development of cheaper materials and industrial processes. Styles continued to evolve to the point where large brooches with black enamel and heavy gothic fonts became standard displays for mourning jewelry (Nehama). Moving forward into the mid-19th century, America had now been thrown into the Civil War where loss of life was common. Soldiers would often leave locks of hair with their loved ones before shipping off to the battlefield (Nehama). These locks of hair would then become mourning jewelry pieces in the event they did not return home. In England, Queen Victoria set the tone for a formalized mourning attire when her husband Prince Albert died in 1861. She proceeded to mourn for almost four whole decades, only wearing black and mourning jewelry. When Queen Victoria died in 1901, new attitudes towards mourning arose which inevitably led to the demise of the mourning jewelry tradition. (Nehama)

In a more modern context, the Spring 2023 issue of American Craft magazine featured a section on mourning artists who make vessels in pottery, glass, or jewelry to help the bereaved commemorate their loved ones. The author Elizabeth Foy Larsen describes a new breed of "mourning artists" that draw upon different craft traditions to help people memorialize their loved ones. Larsen exclaims that "there is no single tradition that marks how Americans mourn the passing of their loved ones, it's a general

truth that we often cope with the inevitability of death by denying it's going to happen" (Larsen 53). That can mean we do not think about the vessels that will contain the remains of our loved ones until we are faced with the shock of standing in a funeral home, staring at a wall of mass-produced coffins and urns. In many ways this experience can become impersonal and de-void of human connection, it lacks the beauty, care, and originality that can represent a life (Larsen 53). In this context, my work is also in conversation with other artists and makers about the same subject. Minhi England, a glass artist who works at Artful Ashes in Seattle, Washington helps create small meaningful keepsakes by incorporating a spoonful of cremains into glass sculptures. The company creates approximately 800 memorials a month using the cremains provided by their customers (Larsen 52). Across the country in New York, Jeweler Margret Cross creates mourning jewelry by including hair and ashes into wearable pieces. She uses a small quantity of ashes preserved behind hand-cut crystals for her Love and Loss collection (Larsen 53). Another jewelry artist, Teresa Kiplinger, does not use ashes but creates memento mori jewelry in a style keeping with Victorian era traditions. Kiplinger uses painted enameled skulls and imagery to "serve as a reminder that our time is brief, and in turn, to be more present in our lives and mindful of our moments" (Kiplinger). The desire to make unique handmade urns is also found at Vitriified Studio in Portland, Oregon. Studio Potter Shelley Martin creates intimate small-scale urns meant to hold a portion of a person's ashes and be placed on a shelf or tabletop. Martin offers her customers a hand in the design making process as she believes it helps in the grieving process (Larsen 54). Respectively, we have each found our own way of manifesting a personalized experience beyond the young burial traditions of American society.

Utilizing this historical knowledge of funerary traditions, mourning jewelry, and modern constituents as a focus for my work, I combine them into my own mourning practices. I found by creating my own urns and jewelry which can be used to carry the ashes of our loved ones, I can create a lasting linkage to others, past and present.

2: Process and Technique

Jewelry is one art form that is present in most cultures throughout history. The desire to adorn our bodies with precious gems or materials believed to be talismans that could empower the wearer is a long-held tradition. Furthermore, the idea of jewelry as a sacred object has existed just as long, if not longer. Over time jewelry and object making processes have evolved to incorporate advanced technologies as well as complement traditional techniques. I combine modern technologies using Computer Aided Design and Computer Aided Manufacturing (CAD/CAM) with traditional metalsmithing and enameling techniques to facilitate the construction of my urns and jewelry. In many ways I can bridge the past, present, and future by looking to historical traditions and contemporary techniques.

In a search for how to combine my ideas with enameled urns and jewelry I began to look at others who utilize enamel, CAD/CAM, and metal forming in their works. The most influential metalsmiths/enamellists in my research were Amy Roper Lyons, Sarah Perkins, and Harlan W Butt. In terms of contemporary enamellists who are creating vessels, these are the few who stand out to me because of the similarities we share in form, color, and surface design. Lyons combines additive manufacturing processes to create plique-à-jour enameled cups. Butt and Perkins both create Cloisonné enameled vessels, but one uses metal spinning for their vessels, and one raises them. The difference in our vessels lies largely in terms of function as their work does not indicate one specific purpose whereas mine has one function, to hold the remains of someone. By labeling my vessels as urns, it directs their function rather than having an ambiguous purpose, thereby, changing the context in which the viewer receives them.

Over the last decade I have learned a variety of skills in both traditional and modern methods to construct my work. The creative works of this thesis utilize various metalsmithing, additive manufacturing, and enameling processes. The foundation for any metalsmith is hand fabrication, being able to manipulate metal into jewelry, and objects using various tools and techniques. One of the fundamental techniques I use in my practice is called raising. Raising is a technique used to hammer flat copper



Figure 1: Raised vessel being planished



Figure 2: Metal Spinning on Lathe

sheets into three-dimensional vessels or sculptural forms. Those forms are then planished using different metal stakes and hammers to smooth out the surface (Figure 1). Another process I use to form vessels is called metal spinning; it involves pushing metal against wood-turned blocks on a lathe to repeatedly create uniform shapes (Figure 2). This greatly benefits the production of multiples and is easier on the body than raising. Lastly, I use

welding techniques utilizing an oxygen and propane torch to weld steel together to build forms (Figure 3). Utilizing a combination of these techniques, I create the initial metal forms to be enameled for my urns.



Figure 3: Welding Steel

While hand fabrication is important to traditional practices, I also employ modern advancements in three-dimensional (3D) design technology to create the designs for my work. I sketch and model using a CAD/CAM software called Rhinoceros 7 from the McNeal company (Figure 4). I can design and manipulate forms in a 3D virtual space to get measurements, create schematics, and create

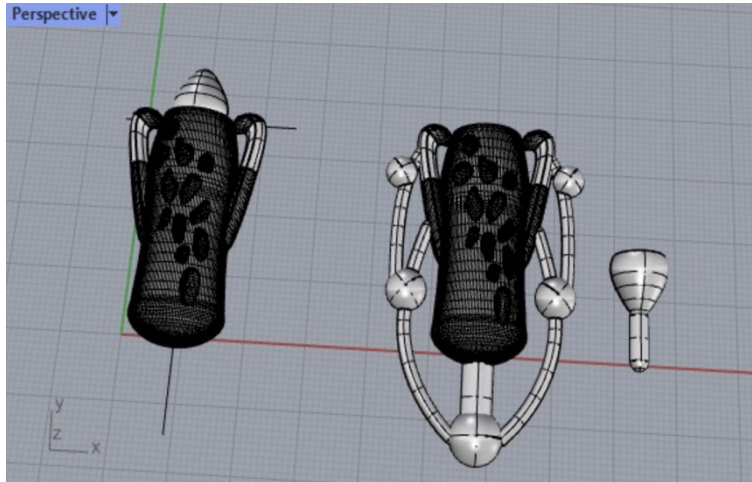


Figure 4: 3D model in Rhinoceros 7 software



Figure 5: 3D Rendering of an Urn Pendant

tangible objects using 3D printed castable materials. Often these designs are either almost impossible to accomplish by hand, or simply more efficient to create using a 3D modeling software. This software allows me to create photo realistic renderings so I can visualize the 3D models in tangible materials (Figure 5). I find the use of CAD/CAM to be integral to modern processes as it allows for more freedom in design and can go beyond what the hand can do.

The final and most crucial part of my process is vitreous enameling. This process consists of fusing powdered glass to the surface of metal, allowing me to apply the color and surface designs to my urns and jewelry. The powdered glass is applied to the metal and fired in a kiln at temperatures ranging from 1350-1500 °F (Figure 6). This step is repeated between 10 and 35 times



Figure 6: Kiln used for firing vitreous enamel

depending on the technique and desired thickness of the enamel. Vitreous enamel is a mixture of numerous inorganic oxides like cobalt or cadmium and ceramic pigments in measured proportions to create the desired color. Furthermore, this process is classified into several different techniques depending on how the enamel is applied. The techniques I utilize in my work are Sifting, Limoges Painting, Champlevé, Plique-à-jour, and Cloisonné.

Sifting is the most fundamental technique used in enameling as it is used to build up volume and depth onto objects and jewelry. Using a metal mesh sifter, and a bonding agent on the surface of the metal like a liquid gum arabic solution, in this case a substance called Klyr-fire, you can dust on the coats of enamel onto your piece without it falling off (Figure 7).



Figure 7: Sifting vitreous enamel onto copper vessel

Limoges Painting, commonly referred to as China Painting, stands out from the other techniques because it consists of pure pigment and does not contain glass in its composition. While it still uses a finely ground powder as the base for its application, you must apply vitreous enamel over top of it to



Figure 8: Mixing China Paint with oil medium

obtain a shiny finish if desired. This process can be very delicate and requires careful application of many layers to obtain the desired result. Additionally, this medium offers the ability to capture hand drawn lines in great detail using a quill pen or brush to apply the China Paint. A variety of oil mixtures are combined with the China Paints to allow for painting or drawing (Figure 8).

The following processes all use a wet application where the enamel is mixed directly with klyr-fire and water to adhere the enamel to the surface. Champlevé is a technique where cavities are either carved, etched, cast, or sawn out of the surface of a metal object and filled with vitreous enamel. The piece is fired repeatedly until the enamel is completely level with the surface of the object, then ground and polished smooth (Figure 9). In my work I



Figure 9: Example of finished Champlevé



Figure 10: Process of Saw and Solder Champlevé

primarily use the method of “saw and solder” Champlevé rather than using a subtractive method to dig out the enamel beds (Figure 10).

The cells to be filled with enamel are cut out of the metal using a jeweler’s hand saw, then pierced sheet of metal is then soldered to another sheet of metal to create the spaces where enamel will be filled. Plique-à-jour is a technique that translates to “letting in daylight” in French. As the name

implies, it is a technique that allows light to pass through transparent enamels without requiring a substrate. This process involves building



Figure 12: Example of finished Plique-à-jour

up enamel on the walls of the cells moving closer to the center with each subsequent firing (Figure 11). Similar to



Figure 11: Plique-à-jour process

the other processes once the cells are full, the enamel and metal are ground, sanded, and polished to a smooth finish (Figure 12).

Lastly, Cloisonné is another method of creating barriers for metal between different enamels. This is accomplished by bending flat fine silver wire into various cells which are fused to the enamel surface (Figure 13). Fine silver foil is often fused to the surface before adhering the Cloisonné wires to allow the transparent enamel to reflect clearly off its surface. These fine silver cells are then filled and surrounded with enamel to the height of the Cloisonné wires before finishing (Figure 14). This process is the most involved out of the forementioned techniques as sometimes it can take several layers of enamel to reach the height of the Cloisonné wires.



Figure 13: Example of silver Cloisonné cells over fine silver foil being filled with enamel



Figure 14: Vessel in process of layering enamel to height of Cloisonné cells

3: Work and Inspiration

The inspiration for this body of work begins with the central idea of “Death as Connection.” I like to take a spiritual interpretation to this in which death becomes not a loss, but an opportunity to strengthen the relationships that were made in life. Using this idea, I investigated ways in which I could relate the urns to the person they might hold. I found myself drawing inspiration from the microcosm of the living world: just as these things go unseen day to day, so do the souls and relationships we have with people. It is something we think of as intangible. However, it is very tangible, our bodies are filled with some of the most complex and beautiful structures on earth. Utilizing these cellular structures and forms from our bodies I am able to find a way to create subtle reference back to the mortal body in which they originate. Furthermore, by facilitating abstract shape, form, and color derived from human anatomy and burial practices into each vessel, I am able to give them their own personalities. There is beauty found within the human body, the brief immersion in it gives access to the revitalizing effects of beauty. Carl Jung states that “the human need for aesthetic sustenance is often underrated but as it can be observed we all need nourishment for our psyche, it is impossible to find such nourishment in urban tenements without nature” (Stuart-Smith 161). Life and death take on a new relationship, death may come at any moment yet in the meantime life must be lived; it is a relationship of mutual influence through which we are shaped (Stuart-Smith 210). We constantly struggle with being perfect in an imperfect world. Why we seek such perfection and beauty is similar to why we seek knowledge, some say the more knowledge we have the more beauty we can perceive. Death is the great test of our conviction about connectivity (Stuart-Smith 210).

While I found that incorporating elements from the human body indeed linked the vessel to whom might be within, I also drew from various cultural elements and symbology. Cultural references aided me in making informed decisions on how to represent the historical importance of funerary traditions and practices. Additionally, it is important to note that from an American standpoint where

many of these traditions are still young and superficial, it is unlikely to be aware of said historic traditions. The organic forms my work takes directly relate to amorphous forms of the body while the geometric forms relate to the science or “architecture” of the body. Often, people will associate shape and color with people’s personalities. Portraying that association through the form and colors also aids in the link between the vessel, the person it contains, and the viewer.

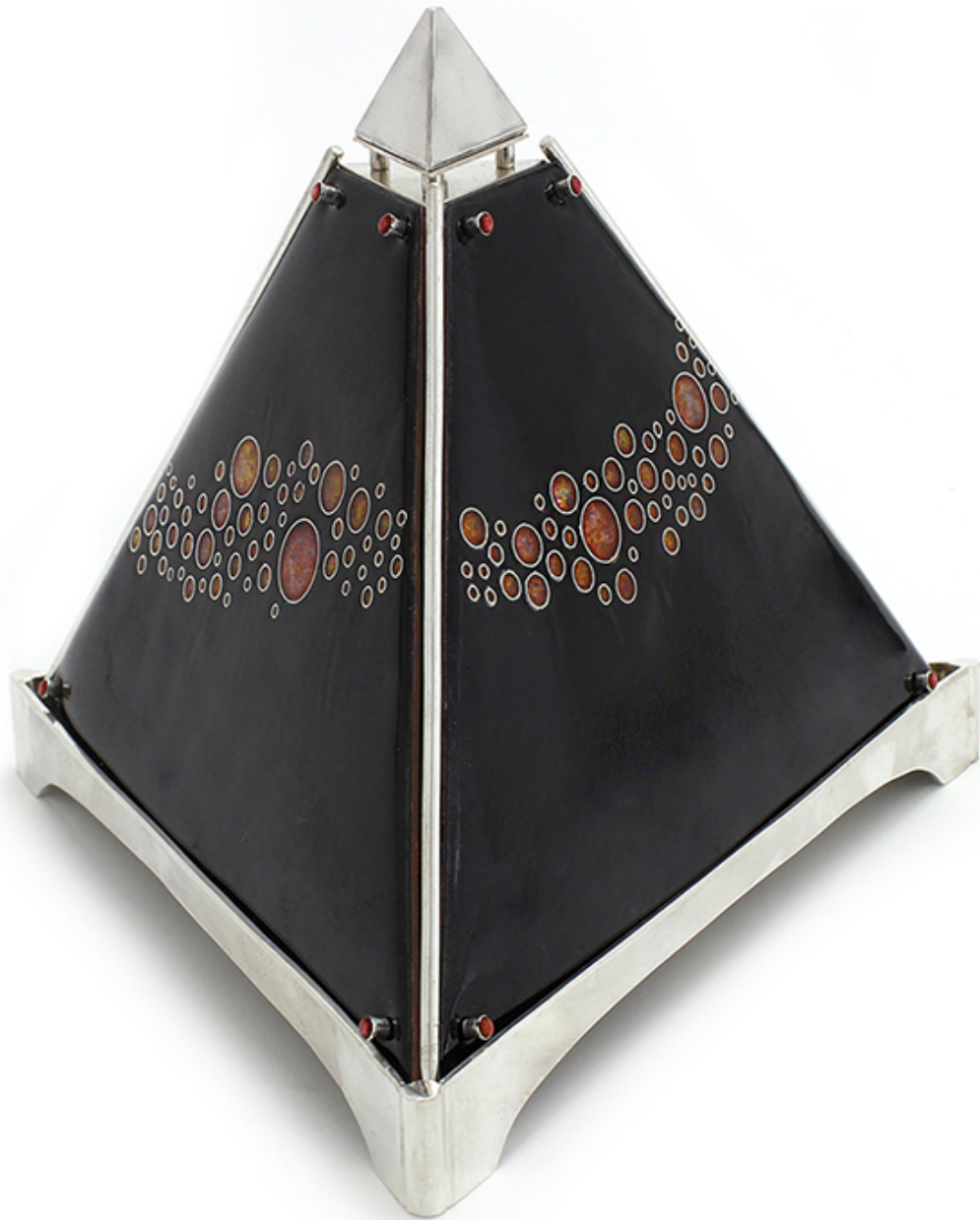


Plate 1: *Transcendence*

Vitreous Enamel, Sterling Silver, Fine Silver, Stainless Steel.

Transcendence Urn was the first piece I created in this series of vessels. This form was constructed by welding a stainless-steel support structure and hand fabricating cold connections to connect the enamel to the substructure. Each side of the pyramid structure is a separate panel of enamel and metal. These panels are held onto the welded steel structure by using enameled, hand fabricated silver bolts and screws. They sit within a hand fabricated sterling silver base. The silver pyramid that lies on top of the vessel can be detached from the main body and becomes a wearable urn of its own when removed.

The inspiration for the form of this vessel should be clear; it refers to the great pyramids of Egypt. They are the oldest and largest remaining funeral monuments known in the modern world. The history surrounding the pyramids is under constant speculation with new discoveries being made. Despite the dark history that encompasses the pyramids, they are still considered one of the wonders of the world. I found this to be a good starting point for investigating the various funerary traditions throughout the world.

At this point, I had not begun incorporating the abstract cellular structures of the human body. The design for this work is largely focused on using geometry and color as a visual strategy for design. I was using the repetition of shape to create an undulating effect as you move around the work, giving a sense of weightlessness and movement. To me this piece stands out from the rest because of its rigidity when compared to the other forms. Additionally, one of the first questions I received about this piece was regarding its scale, being that it might be too small to fit an entire person. This conversation inspired me to vary the size and quantity of the urns to accommodate the different volumes of cremains and places they might go. This led to the creation of my first set of companion urns.



Plate 2: *Concrete Sentiments*

Vitreous Enamel, Sterling Silver, Fine Silver, Stainless Steel.

Concrete Sentiments continues to explore various funerary traditions and practices. This piece is inspired by headstones and marble monuments commonly used as grave markers for the deceased. This is also where I began to incorporate amorphic forms from the human body into the surface design of the vessels. The shapes are derived from the red blood cells we find flowing within our bodies. Much like the *Transcendence Urn* I wanted to instill a sense of movement and fluidity by wrapping the designs asymmetrically around the vessel. Integrating these concepts into the vessels helped provide more agency to the urn as it relates to the person it would hold, as well as the viewer.

Constructed differently than the first vessel, these pieces were made using a combination of raising and metal spinning, creating the copper forms to be enameled. It is important to note that without incredibly expensive modular metal blocks for spinning, you cannot create forms with any kind of undercut or curve that might lock the metal onto the forming block. Thus, these pieces started as four parts which were soldered together to complete the two forms you see.

Referencing what was successful in the style of the first vessel, I wanted to identify design elements that I could incorporate into every vessel. This comes to fruition in the abstract cellular designs, the sterling silver bases, rims, and lids of the vessels. These bases serve to elevate the perceived value and importance of the object by physically raising it off a surface, and by adding an element of implied preciousness in the material. Additionally, to supply even more intent to the urns, I began to design them with various professions and characteristics of people in mind. These descriptions related to people I imagine being contained within the urn.



Plate 3: *Terra*

Vitreous Enamel, Sterling Silver, Fine Silver, Stainless Steel.

Terra is an urn inspired by the earth, working with the earth, and cycles of life. I imagine a botanist or gardener who loves the vibrancy of the land, the dirt, the plants, and the animals, rooted in the connections we feel to our environments. In this instance, I have incorporated fine silver foil and transparent enamel to create the vibrancy seen within the small green cellular forms on the vessel. Furthermore, color became a more prevalent feature in this urn as I was associating color with personality and emotions.

Color is one of the fundamental building blocks of visual symbols. Color serves as a means of communication, a critical element not only in my work but in most art. Colors are often derived from specific plants or mineral substances to create various shades and hues. Some people hold a belief that color shares the transformative powers associated with the substance from which it originates and possesses an energy of its own. This idea permeated early religious, political, and social thought and practices (Dusenbury 11). It is also closely associated with mental and emotional states and can affect people profoundly. Most fundamental color symbolism was drawn from nature, the primary colors frequently being associated with divinities, the elements, and the directions (Hui-Chih 50).

I acknowledge nature and cycles of life in this vessel and carry these ideas up through design and color. The abstract shapes, color, and form give the urns a greater sense of individuality and personality. This individuality enables a greater sense of agency to be given to the mourner, creating a more intimate experience.



Plate 4: *Lean on Me*

Vitreous Enamel, 24kt Gold, Sterling Silver, Steel.

Lean On Me mimics the curvature of a human spine as the vessel's "backs" rest upon one another, supporting one another as they come together. This is a couples urn, bringing two people's ashes into one form and location. "Till death do us part" means nothing in this sense, just like partners who are buried next to each other, the cremains can remain together.

This vessel, along with the other steel vessels, required a different approach to the surface design because enameling on steel requires the use of liquid enamel unlike the copper and silver forms. The liquid enamel allows for different surface textures and details to be applied. In this case, an application of enamel China Paint and liquid gold is fused to the surface. The design is abstracted imagery from the various nervous system dendrites and axons found within the human body. I activate the area where the vessels engage by using the surface's visual language to connect the forms. On the surface of each vessel there is a hand drawn pattern that acts as a path leading from one side to the other creating a sense of continuity.

Moving forward with this design I had to step back a moment and think about something that I felt was missing in the previous urns. I concluded that I had overlooked the wearable component that was the initial spark for this body of work. I incorporated a wearable element into the first urn that can be removed. It can be seen again in this urn. The tops of this urn unscrew from the lid and can be attached to a separate mechanism to become a wearable piece of jewelry, each side of the pendant containing the ashes of the respective couple. The physical closeness enabled by these wearable urns enables a greater sense of connection and kinship with the person who resides within them.



Plate 5: *Lean on Me* – Pendant (Detail)

Sterling Silver



Plate 6: *Urn Pendant*

24kt Gold, Sterling Silver



Plate 7: *See Me Ring*

Vitreous Enamel, Fine Silver, Sterling Silver

Urn Pendant and *See Me Ring*, are examples of wearable urns that can be worn to keep loved ones nearby. The tangibility of a wearable piece of jewelry containing part of a loved one provides comfort and helps maintain connection. Having an object of remembrance to wear and hold onto keeps me present and makes me feel connected to my loved ones. Much like the aforementioned mourning jewelry, these can be a reminder of death but also a signifier for the amazing relationships made in life.

These urns are designed using 3D modeling software and 3D printed in a castable material so they can be cast in sterling silver. *Urn Pendant* uses the technique of fused gold onto the surface to create contrast between the “vessel” part of the pendant and the detailed bail and cap. This design choice was meant to emphasize the importance to what it might hold within. *See Me Ring* is made in the same fashion, but instead of fusing gold to the surface, Plique-à-jour enameling is applied to add color and transparency to the piece. The red transparent enamel allows one to see through the object and witness the ashes held within.

I believe that through the use of these wearable objects and objects that may exist on a mantle, one can maintain their relationships with the dead to the fullest extent. Not only can one find comfort in the home but can continue to be comforted as they walk out their door. It is something that becomes a shareable experience with others.

Conclusion

Immortal Bodies has been an investigation into history, an avenue for remembrance, and an evaluation of societal values. It explores the sentimental attachment to the physical form and how we choose to represent, remember, and memorialize those who have passed. The value we place upon these physical objects is solely up to the individual. Researcher Marsha Richins states “the private or personal meanings of an object are the sum of the subjective meanings that object holds for a particular individual” (Gibson 48). Objects and memory play a crucial role in human society and its development. An object can accrue value over time as it comes to represent and recall a relationship, experiences, and memories (Gibson 48). Objects serve to document history, and collected objects relate to the sense of being and give a sense of personal identity leading to cultural and historical identities. Whether those objects are the remains of a person, or a memento connected to said person, they provide a feeling needed when that deceased person is absent. I pay tribute to our legacies and connections that we leave behind in our deeds, memories, and work.

I intend to continue this body of work, collaborating directly with people who would like an urn or jewelry made for their loved ones. By doing this, I believe I will be able to further refine the techniques and designs to manifest an even stronger bond between the viewer, artist, and the deceased.

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