THE THING THAT HAPPENS BETWEEN US IS NOT THEN: A HISTORY

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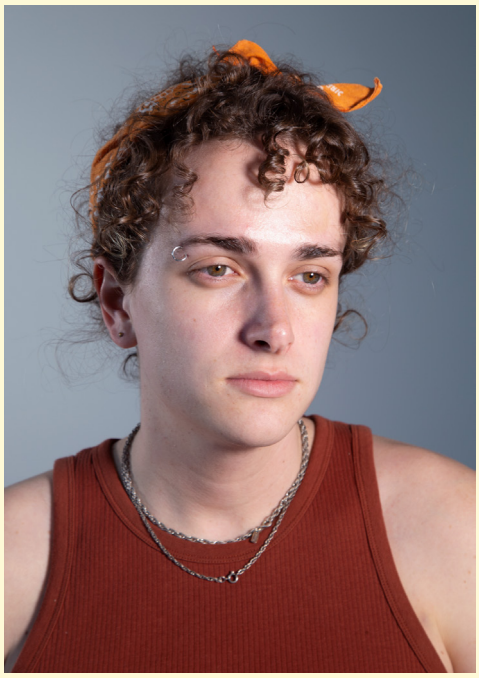


Photo by Margot Mictchell-Nockowitz

Aidan Huntington is an interdisciplinary artist working across sculpture, performance, video, and essay. They study Cultural Anthropology and Studio Art in the Combined Degree program at Tufts University and The School of the Museum of Fine Arts. Through investigating the affects and desires in trans memoir, multispecies relationships, and their own settler-colonial family history, they ask "what do queer and trans desires look like when the objects of those desires don't exist in a queer world?"

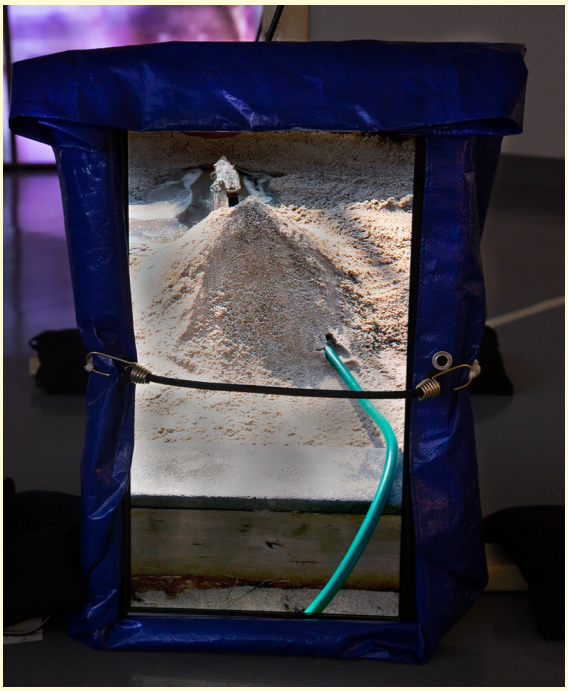
My thesis work, titled "the thing that happens between us is not then: a history," is comprised of video, sculpture, essay, and performance. This installation is part of my fascination with how the world makes us feel. I don't mean this just in terms of specific emotions at specific times, but rather the way that the structures around us, and our position within them, create the ways in which we even *can* be moved and affected by the world. Family histories, from census records, artifacts, oral history, and photo albums, form a specific kind of relationship to and understanding of the past, and how it was and is possible to form intimacy. This intimacy can range from legible and illegible sexual desires, to the color and feel of a specific throw pillow, to knowledge of foraged plants on family plots. Family history creates an orientation to the world. How though, as a queer child, do I find claims to this history, and how do I make sense of the continuous pull that family and home have on me as someone whose queer orientation to the world rubs up against its structure?

One place that I've found parallels to a connection to family history is through trans studies, and an understanding of the messy pulls that normative gender has on my own transition. Trans memoir, like family history, creates a very specific relationship to the past. Transitioning produces an orientation to the world felt deeply in one's body. Re-understanding transition as not necessarily a radical rejection of gender and its categories, but rather an othered way of relating to those categories, offers something different from the anti-normative politics of queer theory. The things we attach ourselves to aren't always good for us, or even good at all in the political sense, but they create the way we feel the world nonetheless.

My sculptural objects, engage with, among other things, a queer relationship to space, object, and body. They resemble domestic objects, as if from a house museum or attic hideaway, but through ambiguity of shape and design, these sculptures offer an open-ended, or perhaps queer, orientation to a domestic world where things are not "this" or "that" but are in constant negotiation instead. This constant negotiation that happens between bodies, that of the sculpture and that of the viewer, is always happening in the present. We don't, however, only negotiate physicality in real-time; we do the same with temporality. Crucial to this work is an examination of our relationship to time. Trans temporality and family temporality offer sites to examine relationships to past, present, and future; together, alongside feminist art history, multispecies studies, and a few other tangents, this body of work offers a theory of the affective present as one of intense personal stakes.

This is an experiment in understanding a politics rested in queer, trans, feminist, colonial, animal, etc relationships to time and place: our creation of histories, the potentials of our futures, and the messy, sometimes bad, uncontrollable forces that orient us in the present. Childhood memories, domestic objects, dead animals, yonic ceramics, anteater evolution, and family land (among other things) come together in my work through sculpture, video, and essay, in the hopes of articulating new ways of relating to the world.

In process sculpture.
Wood, paper, tape, plastic sheet, clothespin.



Video monitor sculpture.
4K video, monitor, tarp, rope, bungee cord.
(installed as part of seperate work)

Diagram of plywood cutout on wooden stand
Dead fish silhouette
Image projection screen

Diagram of plywood cutout on wooden stand
Hanging quilt silhouette
Image projection screen

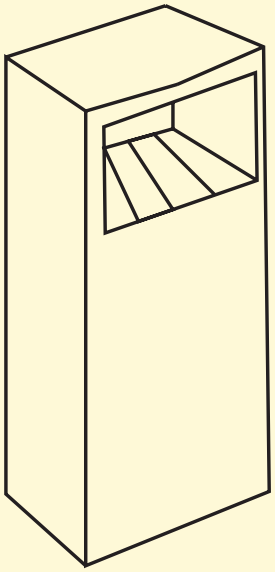


Diagram of wooden sculpture (1/2)
Housing for projector.

The following text is comprised of excerpts from a draft of the essay/performance script for this project.

This essay is comprsied of nine sections (not all of which are represented here): 1. An introduction to family history, settler history, and bad attachments 2. A timeline of sorts (with inserted stories) 3. Sewing, hunting, and continuity 4. On the trap of always having been 5. Judy Chicago's history 6. The risk of the present 7. The part about animals 8. The fable that Billy Foshay wrote 9. Why I'm up on this ladder.

This essay was originally intended to be read as a performance atop a ladder within the installation.

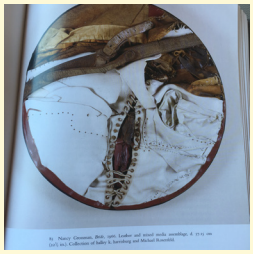
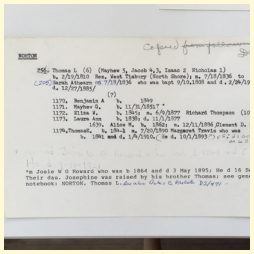
European settlers on their way to a known Massachusetts's colony developed scurvy on board their ship. They were lucky, to say the least, when they saw the pink speckled August shore of Noepe, soon to be Martha's Vineyard.
Rose hips! A known carrier of vitamin C, rose hips! Lining the island's shore, rose hips!

We're saved!
Saved and nourished by the land.

It's a lie. Maybe I should say myth, but that gives it too much reverence. As if it should be protected, remembered, and spread to learn of the world and how it came to be. This is a lie, not a myth.
Or just a myth created for myth's sake
A myth made to make a 'making' have happened
To make a communion between settler and land seem natural and fated.

I love rose hips, and their pink or white flowers the announce their soon to be ripeness in August heat. As markers of soon to be at the shore, soon to be at the water, soon to be on an edge of home secured by the island's edible boundary.
But, the beach rose came from the shores of Japan some 100 years after my great great great ,,, whatever was saved.
...



Images from research and life
Top left: photograph of myself in a family photo album
Top right: deer carcass mid-butcher at Bread and Puppet Theater
Bottom left: from David Getsy's book Abstract Bodies
Bottom right: index card from the Martha's Vineyard Historical Museum's geneological archive

DRAFT

Sally Norton and Sarah Athearn were 3rd cousins. One of them married Thomas L. Norton but the archive doesn't agree on which one. One of them had a great granddaughter named Natalie who lived in a small cottage with no foundation, with an outhouse out back, and a well pump with a view out towards the 700-acre pond. Her and her husband Willie Huntington had two sons. Peter and Simon were born in the poorest county in Massachusetts.
Willie hunted and fished for food: deer, geese, ducks, striped bass, bluefish, perch. The boys in town would bring their shotguns to the schoolhouse on every hunting season's opening day. Natalie foraged mushrooms and edible beach plants. Peter married Susan and had a daughter then a son. They always said how lucky they were that my sister and I came in that order: they couldn't agree on a boy's name when she was born, and they couldn't agree on a girl's name when I was born.
Sarah's great-grandmother Mary and Sally's great-grandmother Bethiah were sisters born in the first decades of the 18th century. They were daughters of Paine and Mary Mayhew.
No matter who Thomas L. Norton married, we end up in the same place far enough back. Paine Mayhew. Four generations away, four fathers away from another Thomas Mayhew: the missionary who first purchased land on the island from the Wampanoag people. Noepe was renamed Martha's Vineyard for either his daughter or wife, and the wild grape vines that still form the underbrush for the scrub oaks that line the island and are browned by the salt air.

Quansoo is a home for me. It's a two-mile dirt road that ends with a fork. It's the privately plotted beach that you end up at if you take the right. It's the left that brings you to a spread out cluster of 5 houses or so: one of which was a family home. We had a few names for it: the Quansoo house, Grandma's house, the Cottage, the Camp. My grandparents were dead by the time I was counting the fish in the green textile curtains in the living room. The house and beach plot were now in my father's name, and his brother's name.
Eventually in mine and my sisters
On August 20th 1681, Thomas Mayhew and John Mayhew sign a land deed for Quia-naimes and Quanissoowog. The names progress through land deeds until they become the names and spellings I grew up with: Quanaimes stayed the same lest for a hyphen and Quanissoowog became Quansoo. Grandma's house was right on the eastern border of the land that the Mayhew's purchased.
...

DRAFT

Transitioning is a way of being based in wanting. It is a force of optimism that clings onto your body, and it is a force of change and of constant shifts that never feel like they reach a conclusion. "Trans" might not be a state of actually being, but rather constantly wanting to be. A wanting so strong that you will pump your body full of hormones, shave bones down, and slice open flesh just to try and break the continuity of *being* to hopefully, at some point, become.

When I was little, toddler or child age, I loved dress up. I loved princess dresses and glittery painted nails. I loved my baby dolls too: I loved my bitty baby, and its eyes that would close when you lay it back to sleep or rock it in your arms.
The adults around me loved it too: "what a good dad he'll make" "he'll be such a caring father" – it wasn't a girl thing it was preparation for fatherhood- the good kind, the kind that will let his son play with dolls too.

In elementary school I was always "the only boy"
The only boy in my friend group, or the only boy allowed to stay over for the all-girl sleepovers.
Of course all the parents thought I was gay, and all the girls would tease me for probably loving that one scene in The Devil Wears Prada where you see Anne Hathaway in a bra. Not one of the girls, always the only boy.
But my type of boyhood didn't leave me wanting enough.
In middle school and high school I learned to swing dance for my schools annual formal fundraiser, and my friends and I would contra dance at the local community hall throughout the year.
I only know how to lead. I got good at the basics: I was a chubby boy too unconvinced of my own ability or appeal to try anything fancy.
I liked leading.
I haven't danced like that in a long time. I don't know how to follow, or turn, or twirl.
…

DRAFT DRAFT

Judy Chicago's Dinner Party, a 48-foot triangular table with 39 place settings dedicated to the women of Western "Herstory," is one of the most famous pieces of feminist art to date. Chicago's work aims to create a universal woman's history- tied together by a history of underappreciated women's crafts, and told through flesh. Each seat at the table is set with a ceramic dish, adorned with abstracted vulvic imagery. This is the symbol that Chicago uses to form her salvaged feminist history.

Chicago and her team had to flip through the pages of whatever archives existed of the stories they wanted to share: these pages were sparse. Included in the research was the six-volume Female Biography, or Memoirs of Illustrious and Celebrated Women of All Ages and Countries by Mary Hays, which had apparently not been checked out of the UCLA library in 65 years. These stories were forgotten, abandoned, and disregarded. Wanting to make sure they weren't lost forever, Chicago brought their stories into the feminist cause of the 1970's. She was forming a universal and timeless category of 'woman,' a historical category formed not by a natural affinity, but rather as the category left in the margins of history proper.

History is an erotic discipline, typically homoerotic: Great men studying great men. It's a sort of separatist politics all of its own.

Lesbianism (or maybe cunnilingus specifically) as historical methodology is what Chicago offers us. She reminds us too that continuity feels good.
…

I want to start with the pig, and I'll veer away from the pig, and talk about other animals for a while, like bugs, and then about transsexuals. At that point I talk about myself and Agnes. After that I'll talk about anteaters and hopefully find my way back to pigs. Throughout this I am presenting you with part of a theory. One that I won't totally spell out in this right here because I think it contradicts itself somewhere and doesn't logically conclude anywhere.

So the pig.
I want to talk specifically about the industrialized pig. Born with one logical conclusion.
The industrialized pigs body is oriented towards death, and an industrialized and often capitalist future: this means that it is only ever a young pig, and then forever product: dinner, loaded into guns, and sealed behind wallpaper.

Next I said bugs.
Bugs not so much because of what they do, but rather what they might want, and who wants to be them. There was a legal case that unfolded in the late 90's surrounding videos of a woman crushing bugs with her high heels, talking about how horrible and worthless her exes were. And of course there were men who paid good money to get off to the idea that they were those worthless bugs, tiny men, being crushed and killed like the scum of the earth they were. They wanted something bad for them. Could the bugs want something that's bad for them too? Not necessarily this, but do other-than-human creatures want in the ways we do, fiercely against our own self-interest?

There is no clear project in desire- just messy affects that seem to offer us something.

In the 1960's a young woman named Agnes lied to sexologists and said she was intersex instead of years on over the counter puberty blocker and estrogen alternatives. She undermined medical systems to get what she wanted. Sex reassignment surgery. She wanted to be a woman: and wanted everything that she knew came with it including a new vagina.

There's no clear political project here, it doesn't transgress gender categories like the queer theorists want it to. It does the opposite. It is not necessarily liberating, But it is a new way to relate to these categories.

This opens up a world to follow desires through, and find embodiment by how we want the categories with which we must orient.

Now Anteaters.
In his ethnography of life, entitled "How Forests Think" Eduardo Kohn proposes that the anteater's nose and tongue, are in fact descriptions of the world: a response to a centuries long semiotic conversation between the anteater, the ant, and the ant's home. The nose, tells us something about the ant. The nose is also a form, molded by wants and needs, changing and static categories that the anteater has embodied for itself. To think through this evolution as purely need based, is boring. And I would assume also inaccurate.

Of course the anteater's desires are also coerced out of it… by its world and the categories of said world. But it is perhaps more free in its ability to respond to those desires. I could be wrong here.

Pigs, born into industrializing futures, are offered one alternative on farm sanctuaries. There, they grow old and die without slaughter. Our current systems don't let pigs grow old and live other bodies. The aging, dying pig, with all of its new ways of wanting unseen by the slaughterhouse: this is somewhere we can find new responses to the world.

I want to make it clear this is not a vegan politics, nor a post-gender politics. I'm not interested in idolizing new worlds void of violent relating. Rather this is an attempt to understand desire as not a human exception, but instead a universal way in which we find our lives and bodies in this world. Something that is always shifting, and that has the constant potential to one day be completely different.

DRAFT

When I think about what it has felt like to transition, I think about what it feels like to have ever-changing desires, even in the face of totalizing, coercive gender. Let it shift. We are always wanting. The pig is always wanting. The bugs want too.
…

The fable that Billy Foshay wrote:

One day, an individual that has since long moved away returns to place a stake in the ground of the barrier beach they have inherited from their parents. Upon arrival, the inheritor cannot reconcile the deed's map with the place. The land formation looks nothing like it is laid out on the map. Puzzled, they look for the tall flagpole that was said to denote the start of the property. They see the tip of flagpole about 100 yards out in the sea. They begin walking out into the water toward the flagpole. The water grows deeper and deeper, but the inheritor refuses to yield. Waves crash over them with the deed sopping wet and deteriorating in their clenched hand. Before the inheritor can reach the pole, the tide has grown so rough that it knocks them underwater. They fight with the ocean to continue but the water is too strong and drowns the inheritor. They and the deed are swept out to sea.

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